

The influence environment

A survey of Chinese-language media in Australia

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What's the problem?

In the past two decades, Australia's Chinese-language media landscape has undergone fundamental changes that have come at a cost to quality, freedom of speech, privacy and community representation. The diversity of Australia's Chinese communities, which often trace their roots to Hong Kong, Southeast Asia and Taiwan as well as the People's Republic of China, isn't well reflected in the media sector.

Persistent efforts by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to engage with and influence Chinese-language media in Australia far outmatch the Australian Government's work in the same space. A handful of outlets generally offer high-quality coverage of a range of issues. However, CCP influence affects all media. It targets individual outlets while also manipulating market incentives through advertising, coercion and WeChat. Four of the 24 Australian media companies studied in this report show evidence of CCP ownership or financial support.

WeChat, a Chinese social media app created by Tencent, may be driving the most substantial and harmful changes ever observed in Australia's Chinese-language media sector. On the one hand, the app is particularly important to Chinese Australians and helps people stay connected to friends and family in China. It's used by as many as 3 million users in Australia for a range of purposes including instant messaging.¹ It's also the most popular platform used by Chinese Australians to access news.² However, WeChat raises concerns because of its record of censorship, information control and surveillance, which align with Beijing's objectives. Media outlets on WeChat face tight restrictions that facilitate CCP influence by pushing the vast majority of news accounts targeting Australian audiences to register in China. Networks and information sharing within the app are opaque, contributing to the spread of disinformation.

Australian regulations are still evolving to meet the challenges identified in this report, which often mirror problems in the media industry more generally. They haven't introduced sufficient transparency to the Chinese-language media sector and influence from the CCP. Few Australian Government policies effectively support Chinese-language media and balance or restrict CCP influence in it.

What's the solution?

The Australian Government should protect Chinese-language media from foreign interference while introducing measures to support the growth of an independent and professional media sector. WeChat is a serious challenge to the health of the sector and to free and open public discourse in Chinese communities, and addressing it must be a core part of the solution.

The government should encourage the establishment and growth of independent media. It should consider expanding Chinese-language services through the *ABC* and *SBS*, while also reviewing conflicts of interest and foreign interference risks in each. Greater funding should be allocated to multicultural media, including for the creation of scholarships and training programs for Chinese-language journalists and editors. The government should subsidise syndication from professional, non-CCP-controlled media outlets.

On WeChat, the government should hold all social media companies to the same set of rules, standards and norms, regardless of their country of origin or ownership. As it does with platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, the government should increase engagement with WeChat through relevant bodies such as the Department of Home Affairs, the Australian Cyber Security Centre, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, the Australian Communications and Media Authority, the eSafety Commissioner, the Australian Electoral Commission and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications. The aim should be to ensure that WeChat is taking clear and measurable steps in 2021 to address concerns and meet the same sets of rules, standards and norms that US social media platforms are held to. This effort should be done in tandem with outreach to like-minded countries. If companies refuse to meet those standards, they shouldn't be allowed to operate in Australia.³

The government should explore ways to amend or improve the enforcement of legislation such as the *Broadcasting Services Act 1995* and the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018* to increase the transparency of foreign ownership of media in any language, regardless of platform.

Introduction

Australia’s Chinese-language media sector is an important part of our democracy, yet its contours and its challenges are poorly understood.⁴ Australia is home to large and diverse Chinese communities. According to the 2016 Census, nearly 600,000 Australians spoke Mandarin at home, and more than 280,000 spoke Cantonese.⁵ Only a minority of Australians with Chinese heritage were born in mainland China—many were born in Australia, Taiwan, Hong Kong or Southeast Asia.⁶ However, individuals born in mainland China are probably the largest group of WeChat users. Migration from mainland China is likely to remain high, and Australia has been home to large numbers of visiting Chinese students and businesspeople.

It’s been claimed that most Chinese-language media in Australia are controlled or influenced by Beijing.⁷ While that’s broadly accurate, past research hasn’t systematically examined the extent and mechanisms of CCP influence over Australian media.⁸ In particular, the pervasive effects of WeChat on the Chinese media sector haven’t been widely appreciated. Our research identified no significant influence in Australian Chinese-language media from governments other than China’s.

Growing concerns about the lack of Chinese-Australian representation in Australian politics, CCP interference in Australia and Australia–China relations highlight the need for policymakers to understand the Chinese-language media environment. For example, Australian politicians and scholars have questioned WeChat’s role in elections, called out disinformation on the app and complained about the past absence of relevant security advice from the government.⁹ Marginal seats such as Chisholm and Reid have large Chinese communities, among which Chinese-language media, particularly through WeChat, have been an important factor in some elections.¹⁰



Project scope and limitations

This report is based on detailed research into 24 Chinese-language media organisations operating in Australia, analysis of their coverage of events, and investigations into CCP efforts to influence media (see the appendix for detail on each outlet). The 24 companies cover a broad spectrum of political alignments and include the major mastheads in capital cities, the most popular WeChat accounts and leading news websites. TV and radio weren't a focus of this study.

There are significant hurdles to studying Chinese-language media in Australia:

- The ownership of some media outlets is unclear.¹¹
- Reach is difficult to measure accurately. Circulation figures for newspapers aren't audited and are often highly inaccurate, with few exceptions. WeChat follower data isn't public and, as with most social media, public page-view data doesn't distinguish between users' locations (meaning that page views could be inflated by users outside of Australia).
- Many outlets publish different content on WeChat compared to other platforms, making it more difficult to analyse and compare content.
- The closed-off nature of chat groups on WeChat, like closed Facebook groups, makes it hard to track the dissemination of information through chat groups as opposed to official accounts.
- Some outlets appear to republish content without attribution, making it difficult to determine the extent of original content creation and sources for republished content. In general, original content creation, and original reporting in particular, are rare. Many outlets primarily translate content from English-language media—sometimes introducing censorship in the process—or repackage articles from other Chinese-language outlets, including from CCP-owned media.
- Content analysis was difficult to carry out within this project's time and resourcing constraints.
- Some Chinese-language media outlets may have downsized because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which shrank the newspaper market and halted Chinese migration to Australia. The recovery from the pandemic is likely to accelerate change in the media environment by forcing outlets to downsize or shut down and increasing the importance of online media.¹²
- Travel restrictions and precautions introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic limited our ability to carry out field work and interviews for this project.

In advance of publication we contacted some media outlets listed in this report to confirm details and seek their comments. The authors are grateful to those outlets that responded and provided information in advance of publication. ASPI would be pleased to receive further comments from media outlets and the report's wider readership and we will address any matters arising on the publication's online page.

The situation in Australia

The CCP's persistent efforts to influence Australian Chinese-language media, in combination with the rise of social media and changes in Australia's Chinese communities, have fundamentally changed the sector. In the 1980s, three of the largest Chinese-language newspapers were owned and operated by Chinese-speaking migrants from regions such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, rather than the People's Republic of China (PRC).¹³ They represented diverse and critical views, and after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre helped students gather support for their campaign to be allowed to settle in Australia.¹⁴

Today, the sector is dominated by media outlets that are friendly towards the CCP, are active on WeChat, are run by migrants from mainland China and produce content in simplified Chinese characters. Such outlets started to emerge in the early 1990s and have mushroomed since early 2000s.¹⁵ This has been driven in part by incentives from and coercion by the CCP, which offers support to some outlets and may have covertly set up media companies in Australia while threatening the advertising revenue of outlets critical of the Chinese party-state. Older outlets have in many cases developed strong relationships with the CCP and shifted to using more content from Chinese state media.¹⁶

WeChat has accelerated the growth of CCP-aligned media. Its account registration restrictions and unclear censorship process have discouraged political content, contributing to a lack of political awareness among Chinese communities and leaving them vulnerable to manipulation.¹⁷ The platform encourages media to register their accounts in China rather than through the app's international version, which limits outlets to just four posts a month, making them subject to greater controls and censorship.

The increase in Chinese student numbers, in particular, appears to have expanded the market for WeChat-based outlets that focus on viral, sensational and occasionally nationalistic content. Those outlets often identify themselves as marketing agencies rather than media companies and have low professional media standards. Many of them were established recently and have few overt ties to the CCP, but they avoid crossing 'political red lines' set by Beijing and exploit nationalistic sentiment for views.¹⁸

CCP-aligned media in Australia have been involved in a range of concerning activity, including suspected political interference. That reflects the broad scope of 'united front' work, which includes promoting Chinese culture, facilitating espionage, encouraging technology transfer and carrying out political mobilisation. Executives from half of the 24 media groups studied in this report, including many of the country's most influential outlets, have been or are members of united front groups such as the Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC).

In 2018, the united front system's role in overseas propaganda work was strengthened when the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO), which is a specialised agency for united front work in Chinese diaspora communities (referred to as 'overseas Chinese' by the CCP), was subsumed into the UFWD. That move placed the OCAO's *China News Service* (CNS, 中国新闻社), the country's second largest news agency and the primary state media outlet targeting overseas Chinese audiences, directly under the UFWD.¹⁹

While *CNS* isn't as well known as its Propaganda Department counterparts, it actively seeks to influence Chinese-language media in Australia. Every two years, *CNS* brings hundreds of overseas Chinese media representatives to its Global Chinese Language Media Forum (GCLMF, 世界华文传媒论坛), where attendees listen to talks on CCP policy, promote the party's narratives and discuss collaboration with *CNS*. Since 2006, *CNS* has held 20 training seminars for overseas Chinese-language media executives, including many from Australia. In 2009, it established the Global Chinese Media Cooperation Union (世界华文传媒合作联盟), which includes at least 13 Australian media outlets.²⁰ Members of the union are given access to a content-sharing platform so they can freely syndicate *CNS* reports as well as articles uploaded by other members.²¹

With dual roles as journalists and united front officials, *CNS* personnel in Australia seek to build relationships with local media outlets and united front networks. Their reporting offers consistent coverage and promotion of united front groups.²² In February 2017, *CNS* organised a roundtable between Australian Chinese-language media and a deputy head of the OCAO.²³ *CNS* officials frequently work with the agency's foreign correspondents to build partnerships with overseas media outlets.²⁴

Covert united front work is harder to identify by its very nature, but *CNS* has a history of covert efforts, and this report identifies some Australian examples.

There are at least two previously known indications of covert work by *CNS*. A 2018 Hoover Institution report claimed that the US's Asian Culture and Media Group (亚洲文化传媒集团), which commands an expansive Chinese-language media portfolio, was covertly set up and funded by the OCAO and *CNS* in 1990 in response to the negative coverage brought about by the Tiananmen massacre.²⁵ In June 2020, Australian authorities searched the home of *CNS*'s Australian bureau chief, Tao Shelan (陶社兰), as part of a foreign interference investigation related to former NSW political staffer John Zhang (张智森).²⁶ *CNS* condemned the raid in a statement and denied that its staff had been involved in illegal activity.²⁷

This report details evidence that two Australian media outlets—Australia Pacific Media Group and Nan Hai Culture and Media Group—are supported by *CNS* or the UFWD (see the case study and the appendix to the report). Both companies have a large reach and have been active in united front networks and encouraging pro-CCP political mobilisation. The owners of both companies separately own stakes in joint ventures with subsidiaries of *CNS* or the UFWD. The joint ventures may have been established to fund Australian media, such as through valuable property holdings that could generate rent and provide office space to media. Both media groups have content-sharing agreements and partnerships with *CNS*. Their WeChat accounts are registered to a *CNS* subsidiary in Beijing. Pacific Media's editor-in-chief, who criticised the Australian Government's counter-foreign-interference efforts as 'doubting the loyalty and belongingness of the Chinese community', may have held positions as a board member and general manager in a *CNS* subsidiary up until December 2016.²⁸ Nan Hai's founder and owner was previously an executive at a newspaper owned by Asian Culture and Media Group, which is a US media company established by *CNS*.²⁹

The kinds of CCP media influence work observed in Australia can be seen across much of the globe. Previous research by ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre identified 26 WeChat accounts that were registered to a *CNS* subsidiary targeting audiences in Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Japan, Europe, Brazil and North America.³⁰ *CNS* has developed news apps targeting those regions, as well as the Pacific and Central Asia.³¹ The *CNS* subsidiary that has a joint venture with Nan Hai's owner is also linked to companies in Brazil, France and New York (see Nan Hai case study, page 22).

United front work and propaganda: influencing people to influence content

The CCP has long sought to control and manipulate overseas media coverage of itself and China, particularly in ethnic Chinese communities. From its inception, the party has seen winning allies and building a united front as vital to its survival and success.³² Creating a sympathetic international media environment is critical to winning friends, marginalising enemies and controlling perceptions of China and the CCP.

In the words of a senior united front official in 2015, China must ‘concentrate its advantages and carve out a bloody path through the West’s [media] monopoly and public opinion hegemony’.³³ Breaking through perceived Western dominance to control coverage of and public opinion about China is a major component of the CCP’s ‘Grand Overseas Propaganda Campaign’, which was first promoted by the administration of President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao.³⁴ According to an internal party document circulated in the early years of Xi Jinping’s leadership, the CCP won’t accept media in China as ‘society’s public instrument’ or the ‘fourth estate’; media in China must always be subject to strict party discipline.³⁵

Over the past decade, CCP media workers have been directed to improve the way they deliver the party’s message by emphasising both China’s economic hard power and Chinese cultural soft power.³⁶ In August 2013, Xi Jinping urged his colleagues to ‘tell China’s story well and transmit China’s voice effectively’.³⁷ His remarks have since become a key directive in CCP propaganda work.³⁸ In 2017, the policy was written into the party’s report to the 19th National Congress.³⁹ The following year, major state-owned media organs were amalgamated into the ‘Voice of China’ (中国之音, also known as China Media Group 中央广播电视总台) to further centralise propaganda work.⁴⁰

In 2019, Xi Jinping emphasised that an important task for the party was ‘guiding people to a more comprehensive and objective understanding of contemporary China’.⁴¹ The CCP has proactively expanded its media influence overseas by establishing more external propaganda outlets to make China’s voice heard. This has involved using both modern methods, such as social media, and traditional methods, such as newspapers, radio and television.⁴²

One traditional method has been *China Radio International (CRI)*, which is a state-owned radio broadcaster used to promote CCP-produced content in 44 languages to nearly 70 affiliate radio stations globally.⁴³ *CRI* has had strong partnerships with several overseas businessmen, such as Australia’s Tommy Jiang, whose stations broadcast *CRI* content in countries such as Finland, the US, Hungary and Nepal.⁴⁴

While prominent Chinese media outlets such as *Xinhua*, *CRI* and *China Daily* are subordinate to the Propaganda Department, the united front system is a central but overlooked player in the CCP’s overseas propaganda work.⁴⁵ Arguably, it has the greatest role in influencing Australian Chinese-language media, particularly through *CNS*, its media wing.

The united front system’s approach to engagement with media, which could be described as ‘influencing people to influence content’, differs from the Propaganda Department’s approach in important ways. In broad terms, united front work seeks to guide and expand networks of influential

individuals and groups whose efforts are aligned with the CCP's objectives. When applied to media, united front work focuses on building relationships with publishers, editors and journalists from friendly overseas Chinese-language media outlets. Those ties help the CCP launder its narratives through media that isn't overtly affiliated with it by partnering with overseas outlets, encouraging them to promote CCP policies and messages, and covertly supporting them in some cases. Media targeted by united front work can eventually take a role in other aspects of that work, including political influence and intelligence gathering.

Rather than being wedded to particular platforms (in contrast to *CRI*, which focuses on radio), the united front system has quickly adapted to new forms of media such as WeChat. At the 2015 Central United Front Work Conference, Xi Jinping instructed united front officials to 'strengthen and improve work on representative individuals from new media'.⁴⁶ In November 2019, the UFWD and the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission held an 'online figures united front work meeting' attended by party officials from across the country.⁴⁷ According to the UFWD, united front work on new media and online figures seeks to provide 'ideological and political leadership', organise representative bodies through which work can be carried out, and encourage the responsible guidance of public opinion.⁴⁸

More and more Australian 'new media figures' are engaging with the united front system, but the party's efforts in this space have much ground to cover. For example, we found few examples of engagement between the CCP and *Auwe News*, *New Impressions Media* and *Melbourne WeLife Media*, which each run accounts in the top 10 most popular WeChat accounts. Nonetheless, there are many other popular WeChat outlets closely engaged with the CCP, such as *WeSydney*, demonstrating that the CCP is effectively capitalising on these new platforms.

Table 1 lists the main Chinese-language media organisations active in Australia's capital cities. The appendix to this report includes profiles of the organisations.

Table 1: Major media organisations and outlets in capital cities

Organisation	Geographical reach / focus	Main platforms	Evidence of CCP funding or ownership	Known state media partnership	Attended united front media forum	WeChat account registered in China	Known involvement in united front groups
1688 Media Group	National	Website, WeChat, newspapers	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<i>ABC Chinese</i>	National	Website	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<i>ABC World</i> (unrelated to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation)	National	WeChat	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>ACB News</i>	National	Website, WeChat	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Australian Chinese Daily</i>	National	Website, newspaper	No	Yes	Yes	n.a.	No
Australian Chinese Newspaper Group	Adelaide, Canberra	Newspapers, WeChat	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australia Pacific Media Group	Melbourne	Newspapers (<i>Pacific Daily</i> , <i>Pacific Times</i>), WeChat, website (au123.com)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Australian Red Scarf</i>	National	WeChat	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<i>Auwe News</i>	National	WeChat, website	No	No	No	Yes	No
<i>CBRLife</i>	Canberra	Magazine, WeChat	No	No	No	Yes	No
<i>ChinaNet</i>	Perth	Website, magazine	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Chinese News Tasmania</i>	Tasmania	Newspaper, WeChat	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Epoch Times</i>	National	Newspapers, website	No	No	No	n.a.	No
Media Today Group	National	Websites (<i>Sydney Today</i> , <i>Melbourne Today</i> etc), WeChat	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Melbourne WeLife</i>	Melbourne	WeChat	No	No	No	Yes	No
Nan Hai Culture and Media Group	Sydney	WeChat (WeSydney), magazines	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Impressions Media	Sydney	WeChat, Weibo	No	No	No	Yes	No

Organisation	Geographical reach / focus	Main platforms	Evidence of CCP funding or ownership	Known state media partnership	Attended united front media forum	WeChat account registered in China	Known involvement in united front groups
Ostar and Global CAMG	National	Radio, newspapers, WeChat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>SBS Mandarin and Cantonese</i>	National	Websites, WeChat	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
<i>Southeast Net</i>	National	Website, WeChat	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<i>Sydney Post</i>	NSW, Victoria and Queensland	Website, WeChat	No	No	No	Yes	No
<i>TasChinese Media</i>	Tasmania	Newspaper, WeChat	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
VAC International Media Group	Queensland	Newspaper, radio, WeChat	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vision Times Media Australia	National	Newspaper, website	No	No	No	n.a.	No

n.a. = not applicable.

Channels for CCP influence

CCP influence over Chinese-language media in Australia is widespread and complex. Few outlets are directly controlled by the CCP, but none are insulated from the party's ability to manipulate incentives, leverage WeChat and use coercive pressure. Only two outlets—Vision Times Media and the Falun Gong-linked *Epoch Times*—have none of the five kinds of connections to China and the CCP identified in Table 1. With those tools, the CCP has influenced the media environment itself, creating a playing field that's distorted in its favour.

The CCP's channels for influencing media are often integrated with its broader united front work and political influence efforts. Importantly, our research has found that united front ties are common among individuals who control media companies and are a key marker of CCP influence over the media environment. Influenced outlets feed into a cycle that promotes and amplifies pro-CCP messages, groups and individuals while shutting out dissenting figures.⁴⁹

Ten enabling factors for CCP influence over Chinese-language media in Australia are described below. The descriptions draw on examples from the profiles of outlets contained in the appendix.

WeChat

The PRC's ability to censor and monitor WeChat is perhaps the single most effective and concerning factor in the CCP's influence over Chinese-language media in Australia. WeChat has approximately 690,000 daily active users in Australia, according to WeChat's September 2020 submission to the Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media.⁵⁰ However, Australia-based users of WeChat who downloaded the app in China might not be included in that count, and other reports have claimed that WeChat has more than 3 million users in Australia.⁵¹ *Sydney Today*, which was ranked Australia's most popular WeChat account in 2019, claimed to have 670,000 followers (some of whom might not be in Australia).⁵²

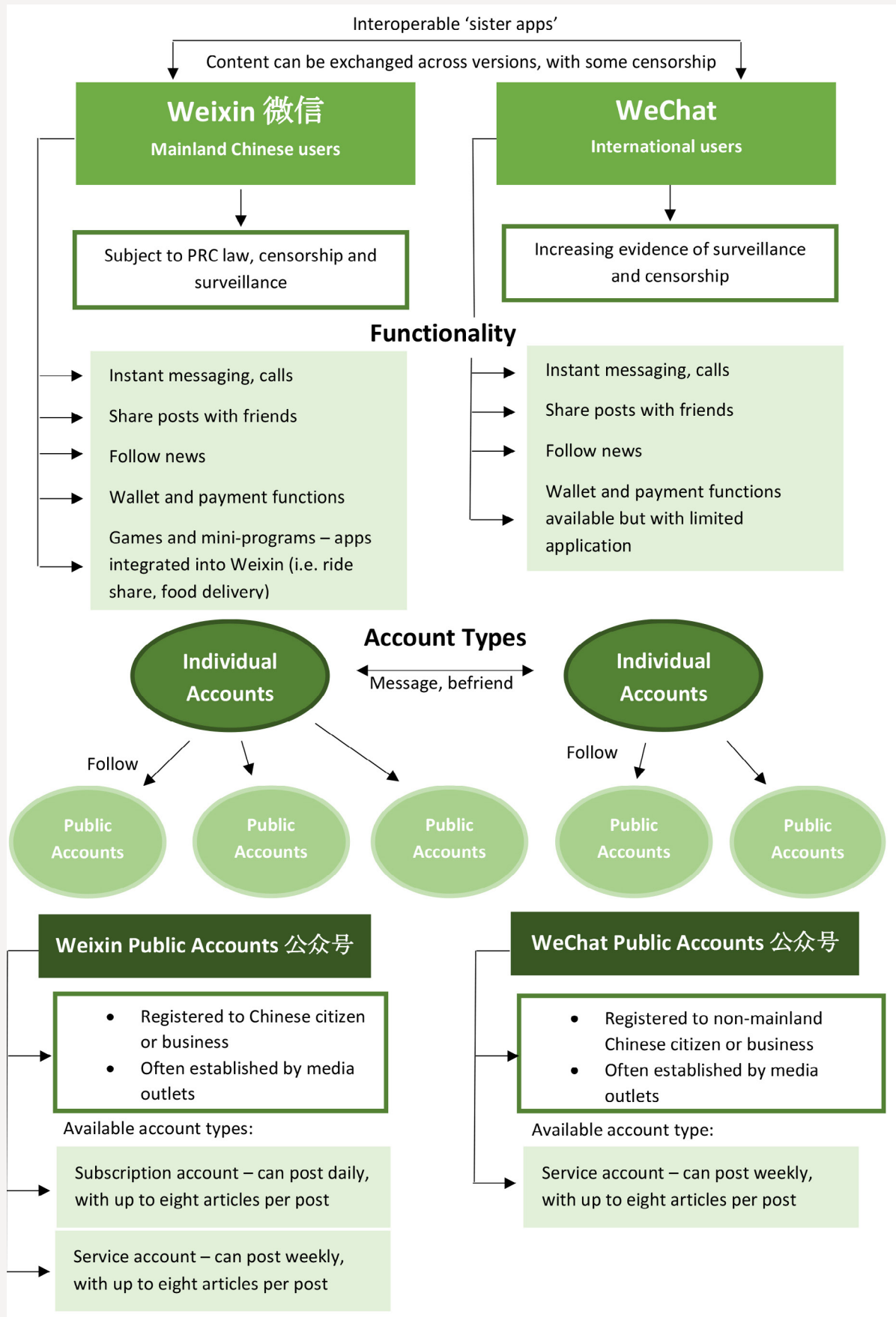
The app's widespread use among Chinese-speaking Australians has made it the most important medium for Chinese news in the country. This has driven an explosion in WeChat-based media outlets that often target an audience of young Chinese-Australians and Chinese international students.

WeChat has two versions that the company describes as 'sister apps'—Weixin (微信) for mainland Chinese users and WeChat for international users.⁵³ Weixin is governed by PRC law, is subject to more censorship and includes more functions that allow it to be used for ordering food, making payments and ridesharing, for example. However, the two versions are interoperable. WeChat users can communicate with Weixin users and access content produced by Weixin news accounts and vice versa.

Several features of WeChat enable influence and censorship from the PRC. Individuals such as international students who download Weixin in China but continue to use it in Australia will still face censorship as if they were in the PRC. Messages between users, including images, URLs and documents, can be censored by the platform. Posts by public accounts are censored on the basis of topic and keywords such as 'June 4' (the date of the Tiananmen massacre) and 'Falun Gong'.⁵⁴

Figure 1 shows the relationship between WeChat and Weixin, using information adapted and simplified from Tencent sources.

Figure 1: What is WeChat?



WeChat monitors its international version for political content.⁵⁵ In May 2020, experiments by the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto found that communications between non-PRC users are monitored and analysed for politically sensitive content. Even though messages between WeChat International users might not be censored, they're monitored to 'improve' censorship of Weixin users and may help to establish a barrier of censorship between WeChat and Weixin. For example, politically sensitive images sent between WeChat International users appear to be flagged by WeChat so that they are blocked if they are sent to Weixin users. According to the Citizen Lab report's authors, 'non-China-based users who send sensitive content over WeChat may be unwittingly contributing to political censorship in China.'⁵⁶

Political activists have complained that their WeChat accounts, which were registered outside of China, have been blocked from sending messages and temporarily suspended. According to *NPR*, four WeChat users, including Zhou Fengsuo, a former Tiananmen protest leader, claimed that their WeChat accounts, which were registered to US phone numbers, had been suspended several times.⁵⁷

WeChat's surveillance of non-PRC users should raise concerns about other applications for such monitoring aside from censorship. Those applications could include intelligence gathering, sentiment analysis, influence operations and harassment of dissidents. At least a dozen Australian federal politicians have public WeChat accounts, and the app is often used to organise volunteering and for campaigning in marginal electorates with large Chinese-speaking communities. The large amount of valuable political information on WeChat means that the platform should be assumed to present an irresistible target for China's intelligence agencies.⁵⁸ China's National Intelligence Law means that such applications might not be up to Tencent's discretion, as the law states:

Any organisation and citizen shall, in accordance with the law, support, provide assistance, and cooperate in national intelligence work, and guard the secrecy of any national intelligence work that they are aware of.⁵⁹

Instead of using individual user accounts, media outlets create public accounts—called 'official' accounts (公众号)—to push content out to their followers on WeChat. Those accounts are similar to pages on Facebook. Until 2018, Weixin users couldn't access public accounts registered through WeChat International.⁶⁰ Public accounts across the two versions of the app are now integrated.

However, different restrictions apply to public accounts registered through Weixin and WeChat International. WeChat International public accounts are only allowed to post four times per month, with each post containing a maximum of eight articles.⁶¹ On the other hand, Weixin public accounts can post daily but must be registered to an individual or organisation in China.⁶² Public accounts on both versions are unable to include hyperlinks in posts, contributing to a self-contained media environment on WeChat.

Those restrictions push media organisations in Australia to instead register through Weixin, placing them under greater censorship and CCP influence. The Chinese companies that their Weixin accounts are registered to are often linked to the owners of the Australian media outlets and gain administrative control over the accounts. This presence in China through the entity an account is registered to expands the CCP's ability to leverage inducements to or coercion of Australian media.

However, censorship rules aren't explicit, which encourages outlets to proactively self-censor and follow the lead of PRC state media or risk having their accounts suspended. In 2020, an editor for one of Australia's largest WeChat public accounts told *Quartz* that she avoided crossing 'political red lines' and looked to the *People's Daily* and *Xinhua* to guide her reporting.⁶³ Cross-platform media groups such as the 1688 Media Group often publish content on their WeChat accounts that's different from the content on their websites and in their newspapers, possibly to avoid censorship.

At least four WeChat accounts targeting Australian audiences are registered to Beijing Zhongxin Chinese Technology Development (北京中新唐印科技发展有限公司), which is a company controlled by the UFWD's *China News Service*.⁶⁴ WeSydney (微悉尼), Australia's third most popular WeChat account, is one of them. The account's operator, Nan Hai Culture and Media Group, also has financial links to the UFWD (see the case study below). *Aozhouwang* (澳洲网), the country's 32nd most popular WeChat account, is registered to the same company in Beijing. The account is managed by Australia Pacific Media Group, which similarly has financial ties to the UFWD (see the appendix). Both outlets have strong links to united front networks and were active in encouraging pro-CCP political mobilisation on issues such as the 2016 Hague tribunal ruling on the South China Sea and the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests in 2019.⁶⁵

Outlets that refuse to take the risk of having a China-based affiliate that could be targeted for harassment are unable to establish public accounts through Weixin. Neither *Vision Times* nor *Epoch Times*—outlets known for dissenting from CCP positions on political issues—has a public account under its name.

This means that all influential WeChat accounts for Australian audiences are registered to Chinese entities. The top 10 most popular news-focused public accounts in Australia, ranked by media aggregator *Aoweibang* in 2019, are all registered to Chinese companies or individuals. *Sydney Today* (今日悉尼), the top-ranked account, is registered to a company in China's Jiangxi Province and received a total of 34 million views of its articles in that year.⁶⁶ As these WeChat accounts are technically PRC-based media outlets, this could pose significant challenges for accountability and policymaking in Australia.

Of the dozens of accounts examined for this report, only one, belonging to *SBS Radio*, appeared to be registered through WeChat International. Despite that, the *ABC* has reported that some of *SBS*'s WeChat posts have been removed because of keyword censorship. *SBS Radio*'s Chinese-language WeChat account received an average of only 578 views per day from 6 to 13 September 2020. Evidence of censorship has also been observed on *The Australian*'s WeChat account, which cut out a reference to political interference from China in a post.⁶⁷

Many popular WeChat public accounts are run by self-identified marketing and consulting companies, which may be lowering the quality of content and contributing to the prevalence of sensationalist stories. Advertising revenue is the largest funding source for most media, but the self-identification of account owners as marketing agencies rather than media outlets is significant. It suggests that outlets are focused on growing their reach through viral content, without a foundation in professional media principles. For example, Australian Red Scarf (澳洲红领君, formerly 澳洲红领巾) is run by marketing agency Fancy Media Consulting.⁶⁸ The account was ranked Australia's ninth most popular WeChat public account in 2019.⁶⁹ Its growth has been driven by sensationalist and pro-CCP nationalistic posts. In the past, it has driven campaigns against university lecturers who used maps or made statements

that contradicted the party line.⁷⁰ The outlet's name references the red scarves worn by members of the Young Pioneers, which is a CCP youth organisation.

The factors outlined above (account registration restrictions, censorship, low transparency and poor professional standards) mean that most popular WeChat accounts raise similar concerns. Generally, they focus on sensationalist and viral content while avoiding criticism of the CCP. In some cases, they've been accused of spreading misinformation and have been active in mobilising their followers behind pro-CCP causes.⁷¹ Their articles are rich with animated images, slang, memes and short, snappy text that appeals to an audience of young adults and students. Several of the accounts, such as WeSydney and Australian Red Scarf, frequently post stories with sexual themes.

This report doesn't examine chat groups and activity by personal accounts on WeChat. They're difficult to study and analyse, but nonetheless are an important channel for information sharing. The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology's Associate Professor Yu Haiqing noted that Australian users have been privately debunking Chinese Government claims about the extent of anti-Chinese racism.⁷²

Censorship

Censorship to meet the CCP's expectations appears to be widespread in Australia's Chinese-language media sector. As discussed above, Chinese-language media's reliance on WeChat has probably worsened this problem, affecting even *SBS* and *The Australian*.

A handful of outlets have admitted that they avoid criticism of the CCP. For example, the *Australian Chinese Times*, a Chinese-language newspaper and website in Perth, censors its reporting. The outlet's owner, Edward Zhang, wrote in 2015 that it has 'four unprintables': content on Falun Gong, information on Taiwanese independence, 'splittist speech' and criticism of the Chinese Government. However, Zhang also complained that the CCP's expanding list of 'sensitive words' meant that even 'patriotic websites' like his are blocked in China.⁷³ As of 23 October 2020, the *Australian Chinese Times* website was still inaccessible within China.

Similarly, Tang Yongbei, publisher of the *Chinese News Tasmania* magazine, told the *Hobart Mercury* in 2018 that she would never write anything critical of the CCP.⁷⁴ Tang's candidacy in the 2018 Hobart Council elections attracted controversy because of her links to united front groups. As of August 2020, she was recorded as the treasurer of the Australian Tasmania Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China.⁷⁵ In September 2018, Tang was appointed to the committee of the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, which is a body run by the UFWD.⁷⁶

We identified possible evidence of censorship on the *Sydney Today* website, which may be the country's most popular Chinese news site. At least four news articles on the website containing the term '法轮功' (Falun Gong) or '法x功' (Fa x Gong) appeared to have been taken down after publication.⁷⁷ However, pro-Hong Kong democracy comments that may attract scrutiny under the extraterritorial provisions of China's National Security Law don't appear to have been removed from the website.

Sydney Today primarily republishes or translates content from other outlets, but sensitive terms, opinions or facts are occasionally cut out in the process. For example, when the residences of NSW Labor politician Shaoquett Moselmane and his staffer John Zhang were searched by police as part of

a foreign interference investigation, *Sydney Today* published translations of *Sydney Morning Herald* and *ABC* articles,⁷⁸ but the translations omitted paragraphs that explained why foreign interference has come under scrutiny in Australia, referred to Huang Xiangmo, or mentioned John Zhang's links to the UFWD.⁷⁹ Evidence of similar omissions was observed on the news website of 1688 Group.⁸⁰

The *ABC* obtained directives from the management of a Melbourne Chinese-language radio station, *3CW*, instructing popular host Xiao Lu to not let callers say anything negative about the Chinese Government, the Belt and Road Initiative or constitutional changes making Xi Jinping president for life. Xiao Lu's program was later cancelled.⁸¹ *3CW* is owned by Ostar International Media Group, which is connected to the CCP Propaganda Department and united front system.

Financial ties to the CCP

Aside from Chinese state-media outlets, only one media company in Australia is overtly owned by the CCP. Global CAMG Media, which is one wing of a media empire built by businessman Tommy Jiang, is 60% owned by state-owned *CRI* through two intermediaries. *CRI* is a media company subordinate to the CCP Central Committee's Propaganda Department that was amalgamated with other state-owned media outlets into China Media Group (also known as Voice of China) in 2018.⁸²

Two media companies identified in this report had indirect financial ties to the CCP. Both Melbourne's Pacific Media Group and Sydney's Nan Hai Culture and Media are entirely owned by Australia-based individuals. However, their owners separately run joint ventures with companies that are ultimately subordinate to the UFWD. Property holdings by one of the joint ventures may be used to fund or subsidise Nan Hai Culture and Media. WeChat accounts run by both outlets are registered to a company subordinate to the UFWD, giving the UFWD company administrator control over the accounts. Both outlets have been active in political mobilisation for pro-CCP causes, such as counter-protests against Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters and protests against the Hague tribunal ruling on the South China Sea.

Presence in China

Several media outlets, such as the influential Media Today Group, have offices in China that are involved in editing and content creation.⁸³ This may be driven by thrift and personnel shortages in Australia, but it makes outlets more vulnerable to CCP influence. Outlets with offices in China would be under greater pressure to follow PRC guidance on censorship and framing of political topics.

Many Australian media outlets have related companies and offices in China, but it's often difficult to determine their role in editing and content creation. Melbourne's Australia Pacific Media Group describes itself as having editorial offices in Beijing and Hong Kong, which may be linked to a partnership it has with *CNS*.⁸⁴ *ACB News*, an online media outlet focused on financial news, is closely linked to a China-based company that has put out several job advertisements for editors.⁸⁵

Similarly, many Australian Chinese-language media companies have shareholders who are based in China and list Chinese addresses in business records. However, this isn't reported under existing Australian Communications and Media Authority foreign ownership disclosure requirements, which use a narrow definition of 'Australian media company' that appears to exclude online media and all outlets studied in this report, apart from the *ABC* and *SBS*.

Business interests in China

Chinese-language media companies are often owned by individuals with business interests in China. They include Ostar Media, *ACB News*, Queensland's VAC International Media and Australia Pacific Media Group. There's no evidence that this directly affects the outlets' reporting, but it contributes to the CCP's ability to induce or coerce Australian media.

WeChat account registration restrictions, which encourage registration through Chinese individuals or companies, mean that nearly all Australian Chinese-language media are now linked to Chinese businesses.

United front system ties

Executives from at least 12 of the 24 outlets studied in this report were members of united front groups, and 17 have been represented in the united front's global Chinese-language media forum (discussed below). Past employees of many other outlets, such as *SBS Mandarin*, have been active in united front groups.

United front ties may be reflected in outlets' reporting on united front groups and CCP interference in Australia. For example, *Sydney Today* co-founder and chairman Stan Chen was listed as a vice president of the ACPPRC until late 2018.⁸⁶ The outlet has previously removed references to united front work and foreign interference from its articles. It has also featured united front figures such as Huang Xiangmo, who had a column on its website and used it to publish statements.⁸⁷ John Zhang, the former Shaoquett Moselmane staffer whose residence was raided by Australian authorities as part of a foreign interference investigation, had a column on *Sydney Today* until recently.⁸⁸

The central role played by some united front groups in CCP influence work abroad means that these links represent conflicts of interest. United front links may not be disclosed, both by outlets about themselves and in their reporting on united front figures and foreign interference. Misleading reporting that frames responses to interference as unjustified or unfairly targeting Chinese communities is a substantial obstacle to successfully countering foreign interference and educating affected groups.

Media conferences and junkets

CCP-run forums and tours for friendly overseas Chinese-language media are a key marker of the party's efforts to engage with and influence Australian media. Those activities have occurred at high levels for roughly two decades.

The GCLMF, which has met every two years since 2001, is the party's premier forum for interacting with overseas Chinese-language media. It's organised by two agencies subordinate to the UFWD—the OCAO and *CNS*.⁸⁹ Hundreds of overseas media representatives meet with senior party officials from the united front and propaganda systems at the event.⁹⁰ Approximately 93 different Australian Chinese-language media organisations—including all but seven of the 24 organisations studied in this report—have been represented at the forum.⁹¹

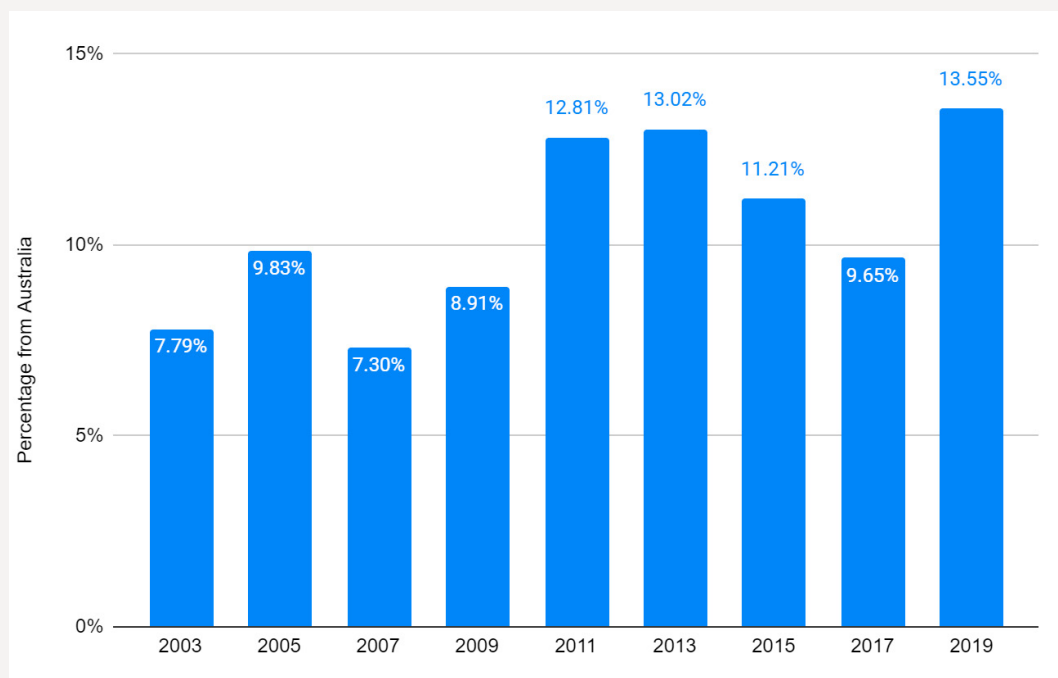
CNS uses the forum to expand its influence over Chinese-language media around the world, encouraging overseas media to use *CNS* content and familiarise themselves with the official line.

In his speech at the forum's first meeting, the then head of *CNS* said that the outlet was seeking to expand its relationships with emerging Chinese-language media to extend its overseas market share.⁹² In 2002, *CNS* established a centre dedicated to cooperating with overseas Chinese-language media, including some in Australia, through content sharing and design and editorial support.⁹³ The forum lasts between two and five days. Its activities include speeches by party and state-media officials, discussions, workshops and sightseeing.⁹⁴

The forum has met 10 times since 2001, and its scale has grown over that period. More than 427 overseas media representatives attended the 2019 forum, compared to more than 160 in 2001.⁹⁵ Media viewed as critical of the CCP, such as the *Epoch Times*, *Apple Daily* or *Vision Times*, haven't participated in the forums.

In 2019, Australia was the third largest source of attendees after the US and Canada (Figure 2).⁹⁶ Roughly 10% of attendees at the forum between 2003 and 2019 came from Australian outlets—a high number compared to the size of Australia's Chinese community. The relatively high proportion of Australian attendees and the forum's history of nearly two decades point to sustained and large-scale efforts by the united front system to build ties with Australian media.

Figure 2: Percentage of attendees to the Global Chinese Language Media Forum who came from Australian outlets, 2003 to 2019



Capitalising on the forum's success, *CNS* established the Advanced Seminar for the Overseas Chinese Language Media in 2006 to provide focused guidance and training to hundreds of overseas media workers.⁹⁷ Since then, at least 20 sessions of the multi-day seminar have been organised.⁹⁸ In 2018, the seminar's more than 90 participants received training and toured China over four days. The group listened to lectures by a UFWD vice minister and Chinese academics on topics such as the Belt and Road Initiative and Xi Jinping's 'new era'. They were also taken on a tour of the headquarters of Tencent, WeChat's parent company.⁹⁹ Previous seminars have focused on guiding reporting on sensitive issues such as Tibet and Xinjiang.¹⁰⁰

Coercion and advertising

The CCP has used advertising to support friendly media and pressure Chinese-language media that are critical of the CCP or connected to Falun Gong. Advertising is the main revenue stream for most Australian Chinese-language media, and their advertisers are usually Chinese-owned firms or businesses. In 2016, an editor at a ‘pro-CCP’ publication in Australia told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that Chinese consular officials had instructed businesses to divert funding away from non-CCP-aligned media and towards those that toe the party line.¹⁰¹

Some Chinese-language media in Australia have been subjected to coercive pressure:

- In 2016, the president of the Australian National University Chinese Students and Scholars Association pressured the university pharmacy to stop distributing the *Epoch Times*, threatening a boycott of the store. The association’s executives have close ties to Ostar Media Group and the CRI-backed Global CAMG, which have hired many of them.¹⁰²
- In 2018, Sydney’s Georges River Council was approached by officials from the Chinese Consulate and told to abandon a sponsorship deal with Vision Times Media Australia for Lunar New Year, or risk harming relations between NSW and Beijing. A council administrative officer emailed the Chinese Consulate on January 18, confirming that *Vision Times* had been banned.¹⁰³
- In 2019, Vision Times Media Australia general manager Maree Ma claimed that two businesses withdrew advertisements after being instructed to do so by Chinese Government authorities. This was allegedly in response to the publication’s coverage of the Hong Kong protests and the crackdown by authorities.¹⁰⁴
- In 2006, University of Technology Sydney scholar Feng Chongyi established *Sydney Times*, a Chinese-language newspaper. However, Feng told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that businesses pulled advertisements from the newspaper amid pressure from Chinese officials, leading to the outlet’s closure.¹⁰⁵

Content-sharing agreements and other partnerships

The UFWD’s CNS and other state-owned media have partnerships with numerous Australian Chinese-language media, providing content and other forms of support to them. This reduces operating costs for CCP-friendly media, encourages the spread of CCP narratives and leads to a lack of investment in original and local content creation.

Poor professional standards and PRC media culture

While many Chinese students are now studying journalism in Australia, professionally trained journalists appear to be relatively uncommon in Australian Chinese-language media companies. Those with training or professional experience generally gained it by studying at Chinese universities or working for state-owned media. Many of them are accustomed to censoring certain topics and framing sensitive issues in a way that aligns with CCP narratives.

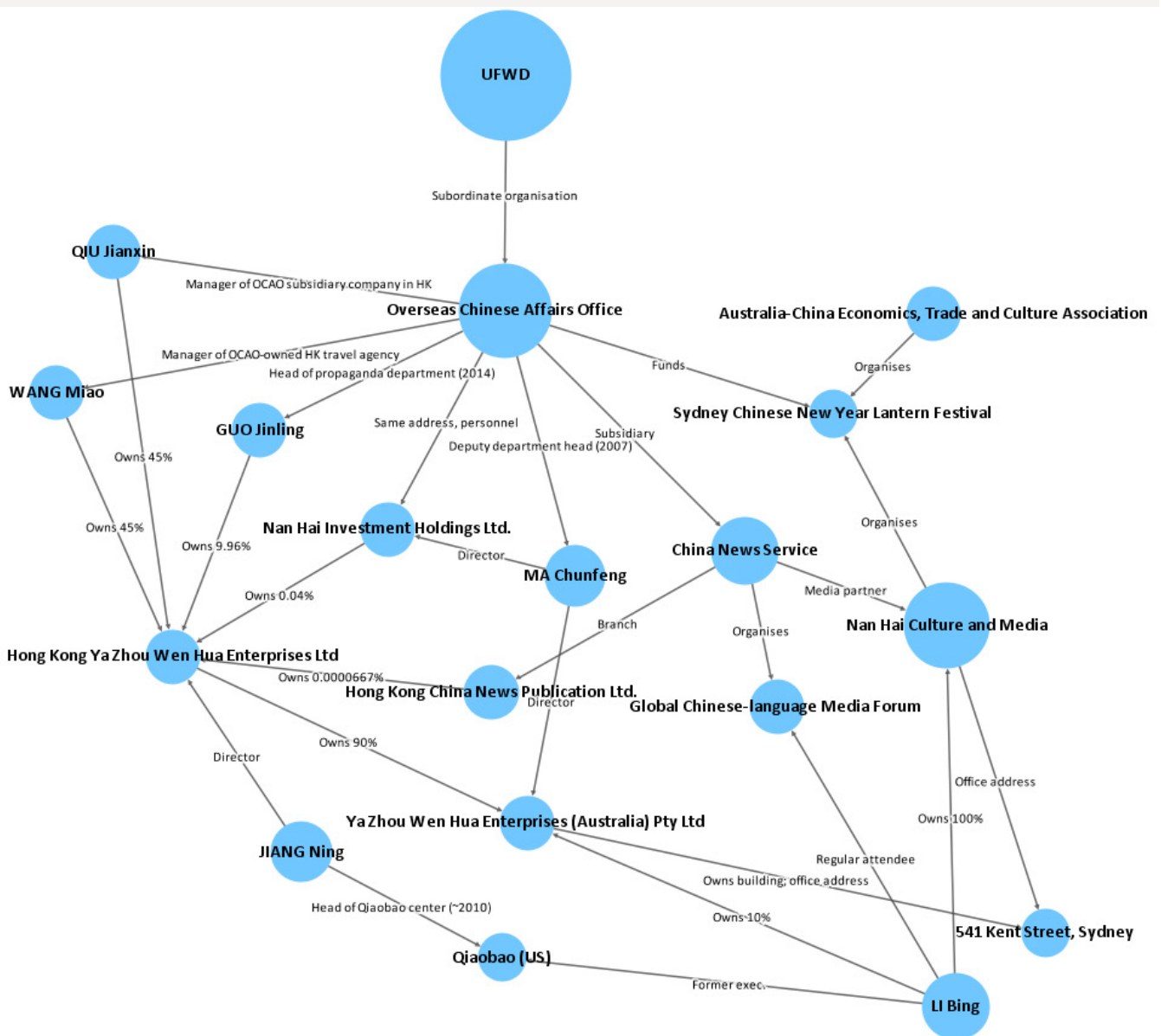
A lack of professional standards in some outlets facilitates censorship or unbalanced reporting in the CCP’s favour. It also biases outlets towards low-quality or viral content instead of balanced commentary and in-depth investigative reporting, which is rare in the Australian Chinese-language media landscape.

Case study: Nan Hai Culture and Media Group

Nan Hai Culture and Media Group (澳大利亚南海文化传媒集团) is a Sydney-based media company with close ties to the UFWD (Figure 3).¹⁰⁶ Founded in 2011, it operates Australia’s third most popular WeChat account, WeSydney, and organises cultural events, including a popular lunar new year festival in Sydney.¹⁰⁷ It also produces the Chinese editions of the *Qantas* magazine and *Vogue Australia* and has an account on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok.¹⁰⁸

Business records show that Nan Hai Group was established in June 2011 and is wholly owned by Li Bing. However, the company has reportedly received funding from the OCAO (which was subsumed by the UFWD in 2018) and partnered with the UFWD’s media wing—CNS.¹⁰⁹

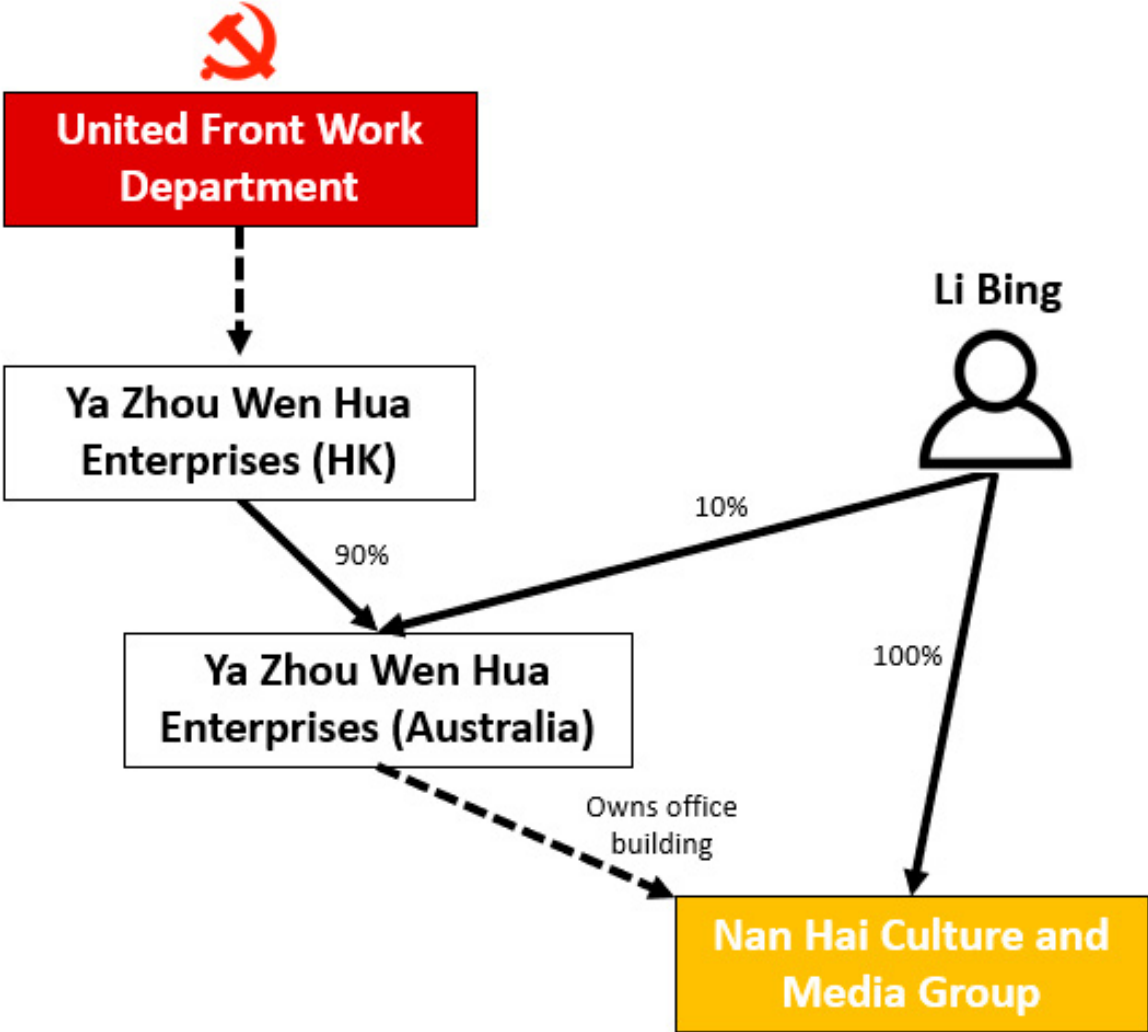
Figure 3: Nan Hai Culture and Media Group’s connections with the UFWD



Nan Hai founder and CEO Li Bing (李冰) previously worked as a senior executive at *Qiaobao*, which is a US-based newspaper. According to a report by the Hoover Institution, *Qiaobao* was established in the wake of the Tiananmen massacre by personnel dispatched by the OCAO. However, the Chinese Government's role in the newspaper and several related US media outlets is covert.¹¹⁰

Li Bing has also invested in Ya Zhou Wen Hua Enterprises (Australia) Pty Ltd, a joint venture established two months after Nan Hai Media with a UFWD-controlled company (Figure 4). It's 10% owned by Li and 90% owned by Ya Zhou Wen Hua Enterprises Ltd, which is a Hong Kong company. Soon after its establishment, the joint company purchased 541 Kent Street, an eight-storey office building in Sydney's CBD, for A\$15.1 million.¹¹¹ Ya Zhou Wen Hua Enterprises (Australia) and Nan Hai share an office in the building.

Figure 4: Ya Zhou Wen Hua Enterprises (Australia) Pty Ltd's connections to the UFWD and Nan Hai



Hong Kong's Ya Zhou Wen Hua Enterprises is a front company established by the OCAO before the 1997 handover.¹¹² All its five shareholders can be linked to the UFWD or OCAO. They include subsidiaries of the UFWD and OCAO (including one called Nan Hai Investment Holdings) and individuals who can be identified as OCAO officials.¹¹³

The Hong Kong company also has links to media organisations in the US and Brazil. One of its directors has been described as the head of *Qiaobao*'s Chinese Cultural Development Center and the Nanhai Arts Center (南海艺术中心) in California.¹¹⁴ Another director is the head of *Nanmei qiaobao* (南美侨报), a Brazilian newspaper; director of a Confucius Classroom; and a former Chinese diplomat in Brazil.¹¹⁵ The CEO of Ya Zhou Wen Hua Enterprises Ltd (NY) has also been described as the chairman of *Qiaobao*'s parent company, Asian Culture and Media Group.¹¹⁶

Nan Hai has a close relationship with *CNS*, the UFWD's media company. Nan Hai's website states that it's been a 'partner' of *CNS* for many years.¹¹⁷ Since its establishment in 2011, Nan Hai representatives have attended all five GCLMF gatherings organised by *CNS* and other united front agencies.¹¹⁸ *CNS* is listed as the 'media partner' for Nan Hai's *Citywalker* magazine, and a deputy editor-in-chief of *CNS* claimed that he and Li Bing discussed the magazine's establishment over a four-hour banquet in Beijing.¹¹⁹ In 2019, *CNS* organised a meeting between Nan Hai and the UFWD vice minister responsible for overseas united front work.¹²⁰

WeSydney, a WeChat account run by Nan Hai Media, is registered to a company controlled by the UFWD.¹²¹ WeSydney is one of Australia's most popular WeChat accounts and claims to have more than 365,000 followers.¹²² According to *Aoweibang*, WeSydney's posts received a total of 27 million views in 2019.

Nan Hai's activities also include a nascent trans-Tasman presence. Its branch in New Zealand, New K Media Group (新西兰新奇传媒), has published a local edition of Nan Hai's *Citywalker* magazine since 2018.¹²³ It also runs a WeChat account for New Zealand audiences that, like other Nan Hai Media accounts, is registered to a subsidiary of the UFWD.¹²⁴

One of Nan Hai's most visible efforts is an annual lantern festival at Sydney's Darling Harbour. A 2016 investigation by the *Sydney Morning Herald* found that the company received millions of renminbi from the OCAO to run the festival.¹²⁵ The popular event is jointly organised with the Australia–China Economics, Trade and Culture Association (澳洲中华经贸文化交流促进会) and has drawn in both politicians and united front figures such as Huang Xiangmo (Figure 5). This indicates how CCP influence over media outlets complements and could integrate with political influence efforts.

Figure 5: Above: (left to right) Li Bing, Malcolm Turnbull and Huang Xiangmo at the 2016 lantern festival. Next page: Labor MP Matt Thistlethwaite speaking at the 2017 festival.



Source: Nan Hai Media, [online](#); Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Sydney, [online](#).



Nan Hai previously claimed in a job advertisement that its WeSydney account was 'Tencent WeChat's official WeChat platform in Oceania'. Its website also stated that it's 'WeChat's official cooperative partner in Oceania'. However, references to that partnership were removed from its website in June 2020 and the nature of the arrangement is unclear.¹²⁶

Content analysis

Below, we set out two qualitative case studies of coverage of key events by a range of outlets. Australian Chinese-language media outlets generally publish little original content, instead drawing on translations and summaries of material produced by other outlets. However, there's often alignment between what they do publish and CCP narratives, as well as non-coverage of sensitive events. Some outlets frequently republish Chinese state-media articles. Those issues are particularly pronounced on WeChat.

Future research could take advantage of data scraping and content analysis tools to better study how CCP influence might be reflected in outlets' content.

The Shaoquett Moselmane and John Zhang raids

In the early hours of 26 June 2020, Australian authorities raided the office and properties of NSW MP Shaoquett Moselmane and John Zhang, a part-time staffer in Moselmane's office.¹²⁷ The raids were reportedly carried out as part of an investigation by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and the Australian Federal Police into political interference by the CCP.¹²⁸

Moselmane had previously attracted media attention for his statements about China. In 2018, he said that 'the only way for China to reach its potential is for China to force a change to the rules and create a new world order.'¹²⁹ In early 2020, he praised Xi Jinping's 'unswerving leadership' in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.¹³⁰ Zhang, his staffer, has been a member of united front groups and participated in a united front training course in 2013.¹³¹ He also attended CNS's GCLMF in 2017 and 2019.¹³² At the 2017 forum, he won a second-place prize for his essay analysing 'western media's negative reports on Chinese'.¹³³

Chinese-language media outlets often drew on reporting from major English-language in their coverage of the incident.¹³⁴ A handful of outlets republished Chinese state media articles on the event. Several leading outlets either published one-sided reports on the event, in some cases removing important information from their articles, or didn't cover it at all. Coverage of the raid on WeChat was patchy and more one-sided.

Some of the articles were translations of English-language media articles, such as a piece on the *1688* website republished from the *Wall Street Journal*.¹³⁵ However, the translation left out the second half of the article, which went into John Zhang's united front links.¹³⁶

Similarly, *Sydney Today* published translated articles from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *ABC*.¹³⁷ Those translations omitted parts of the original pieces that explained why foreign interference has come under increased scrutiny in Australia, referred to Huang Xiangmo, or mentioned John Zhang's links to the UFWD.¹³⁸ They were posted with the disclaimer that the article 'only represents the Australian media's views on this matter ... and does not represent this website's position'.¹³⁹ *Sydney Today* doesn't always post a disclaimer with translated articles, appearing to include one only on politically sensitive issues. This could have the effect of diminishing the readers' sense of the reliability of the article.

One of the most strident defences of Moselmane came in a piece by Stuart Rees, an emeritus professor at the University of Sydney. *Sydney Today* translated and republished the article from John Menadue's *Pearls and Irritations* blog. It stated that Moselmane has been a victim of character assassination because he questioned anti-Chinese sentiment in Australia.¹⁴⁰

Sydney Today previously published op-eds written by Moselmane and Zhang. However, following the raids, it posted a statement saying that it had removed articles by Moselmane and Zhang in order to minimise any potential 'negative impact on Australian society'.¹⁴¹

On the other hand, Pacific Media, which has a close relationship with *CNS*, didn't immediately cover the searches of Moselmane's residence and office. On the week of the raid, Pacific Media's website published two articles mentioning Moselmane. The first,¹⁴² from three days after the event, focused on Moselmane's denials of any wrongdoing and only included comments from Moselmane and East China Normal University's Chen Hong, a close associate of Moselmane who was named in a search warrant executed as part of the investigation.¹⁴³ The article didn't describe the raids, mention John Zhang or provide any background on foreign interference and the CCP. The next day, Pacific Media's website republished an article from *CNS* on responses from Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, who accused Australia of demonising normal exchanges between Australia and China and urged Australia to reject its 'cold-war mentality'.¹⁴⁴ The same day, *Pacific Daily's* front page ran an opinion piece about declining Australia–China relations that mentioned the raid without describing united front links to Moselmane and Zhang.¹⁴⁵

The coverage from *SBS Mandarin* and *ABC Chinese* detailed the raid and investigation while also providing context on John Zhang's united front links and Australia's efforts to counter foreign interference.¹⁴⁶

Vision China Times referenced an investigative report into Moselmane and Zhang by Nick McKenzie but provided further detail on Zhang's united front links, emphasising his positions in the Shanghai Overseas Friendship Association and the Australia–China Economics, Trade and Culture Association.¹⁴⁷

Coverage of the raid on WeChat was scarce. WeSydney, the WeChat account of Sydney's Nan Hai Media Group, didn't report on the raid. Neither did *Sydney Today's* nor *1688's* WeChat accounts, even though their websites had articles about it. Pacific Media's WeChat account covered the raid but implied that it was politically motivated because of Moselmane's pro-China stances. Australian Red Scarf's report on the event opened by asking, 'An Australian senior official's been suddenly investigated, simply for praising China?'¹⁴⁸

The passing of the Hong Kong National Security Law

The Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was passed by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on 30 June 2020. The law came into immediate effect at 11:00 pm, one hour before the 23rd anniversary of Hong Kong's handover from the UK to China.

The Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) criminalises acts of succession, subversion, terrorism or collusion with foreign forces.¹⁴⁹ The law allows security and intelligence officers from mainland China to operate in Hong Kong.¹⁵⁰ It also contains extraterritorial provisions that target overseas individuals.¹⁵¹

On 1 July, *Sydney Today* and *1688* provided the most coverage of the NSL. Of 40 articles published by *Sydney Today*, three were republished from Chinese state media. Of 15 articles published by *1688*, three were republished from Chinese state media.

On the Pacific Media website, *au123.com*, eight articles were published on 1 July, all of which were republished from state media. One article included statements from Zhang Xiaoming, Deputy Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, saying that the NSL doesn't paint the opposition or pan-democratic camp in Hong as the 'imaginary enemy', doesn't exceed the framework of 'one country, two systems', and will stabilise Hong Kong.¹⁵² Another piece featured statements from Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam expressing the view that the NSL is the most important development in Hong Kong since the handover, protecting the lives and property of Hong Kong citizens, ending violent activities and restoring Hong Kong's stability.¹⁵³ Another article included statements from Zhao Lijian emphasising the Chinese Government's unwavering determination to 'safeguard national sovereignty and security' and 'oppose any external forces interfering in Hong Kong affairs'.¹⁵⁴

Posts by WeChat accounts Australian Red Scarf and WeSydney on 1 July didn't cover the law's passing. However, later in the month, Australian Red Scarf republished an article from the *Global Times*.¹⁵⁵ The article used the response of Western countries to the passing of the NSL as an entry point to examine Australia's opposition to China's foreign interference and espionage. It went on to highlight Australia's supposed hypocrisy in conducting its own spying and espionage in China. An article on the WeSydney account, published on 8 June before the law's passage, gave Chinese Government narratives in its statements on Hong Kong, describing the violence of the protesters and conscientious policemen protecting the safety of Hong Kong, and claiming that the NSL would maintain Hong Kong's stability and has been endorsed and supported by all sectors of Hong Kong society.¹⁵⁶

A number of articles on *1688* also came from Taiwanese news outlets. Of 15 articles published on 1 July, seven came from Taiwanese sources. Two of the articles came from the pro-Kuomintang *United Daily News* and didn't appear to overtly support the NSL but went into substantial detail about the law and referred to reporting from *Xinhua* and the *Global Times*.¹⁵⁷ Five articles were from the *Liberty Times*, which is considered to take a more Pan-Green Coalition, pro-independence political stance. They didn't appear to take a clear position on the NSL but focused on the expanded powers of the Hong Kong police and the vote at the UN Human Rights Council, where 27 countries called on China to withdraw the legislation.¹⁵⁸

Another section of the coverage included republished articles from Western media outlets. On 1 July, 14 out of 40 articles from *Sydney Today* were republished from Western media outlets. As we've seen in other reporting from *Sydney Today*, republished pieces from Western media are usually posted with disclaimers distancing the outlet from any views contained in the articles. That was the case with a *Sydney Today* article republished from the *New York Times*, titled 'New York Times: Under the new National Security Law, Hong moves from an oasis for the rule of law to a "police state"'.¹⁵⁹ Another article, which focused on the rebound in the Hong Kong stock market following the new law's implementation, was republished from the *Wall Street Journal* and didn't include a disclaimer.¹⁶⁰

However, the disclaimer also appears to be used as a cover when publishing reports that could leave the outlet subject to claims of pro-CCP bias. An article on *Sydney Today* republished from *Duowei News*, a Chinese-language news outlet in the US, was also published with the disclaimer.¹⁶¹

It took a supportive stance to the NSL, stating that Beijing and the Hong Kong Government are the biggest winners from the new law, allowing them to consolidate the relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland, prevent and combat external forces, and ensure that ‘the lawless and severe separatist riots can no longer affect the development of Hong Kong’s economy and people’s livelihoods.’

The *Australian Chinese Daily*, *SBS Mandarin*, *ABC Chinese* and *Vision Times* published their own content on the passing of the NSL on 1 July. The *Australian Chinese Daily* reported on Marise Payne’s statements, Australia’s consideration of offering visa and naturalisation channels for Hong Kong residents, Australia’s changed travel advice for Hong Kong, and responses from the Chinese Government.¹⁶² *SBS Mandarin* covered responses from Western countries, views on the erosion of Hong Kong’s autonomy and the independence of its legal system, and statements from Carrie Lam denying the effect of the new law on freedoms in Hong Kong.¹⁶³ *SBS Mandarin* also published an article featuring a number of responses provided on a talk-back radio segment.¹⁶⁴ The piece outlined views ranging from ardent support for to overt criticism of the NSL.

ABC Chinese featured more critical reporting on the passing of the NSL. It published an article in both Chinese and English that conveyed views from Hong Kong migrants who felt that the people of Hong Kong’s rights have been taken away.¹⁶⁵ *Vision Times* was similarly critical in its reporting, stating that ‘one country, two systems’ is no longer, outlining how security and law enforcement from the mainland can operate in Hong Kong, and emphasising the extraterritoriality inherent in the new law, which could see anyone in the world who is critical of the situation in Hong Kong or advocating for Hong Kong independence arrested, should they enter the jurisdiction.¹⁶⁶

Current regulations

Several pieces of Australian legislation regulate aspects of the media sector.¹⁶⁷ However, the legislation generally was not designed with CCP interference in mind, hasn't been updated to account for online media or hasn't yet been enforced.

The *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (BSA) includes limits on the control of TV, radio and English-language newspapers. Those restrictions are designed to ensure media diversity within geographical areas.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority, which is an independent Commonwealth statutory authority, maintains the Register of Foreign Owners of Media Assets under the BSA. Foreign persons owning 2.5% of an Australian media company are required to register. However, the BSA's definition of an Australian media company is limited to companies holding commercial TV or radio licences, or English-language newspapers within the area of a commercial TV or radio licence. Therefore, it doesn't cover non-English-language newspapers or any form of online media. None of the media companies described in this report, despite many having foreign owners, is included in the register. The BSA's focus only on English-language media is clearly anachronistic, fails to take into account our multicultural society and is badly in need of updating

Australian foreign investment legislation requires foreign entities to seek approval for investments of at least 5% into an Australian media business.¹⁶⁸ Associates of foreign persons, such as entities obliged to act under the direction of a foreign person, can also be considered foreign persons. That requirement applies regardless of the value of the investment and uses a broad definition of 'Australian media business' that includes a limited amount of online media.¹⁶⁹ However, it was only recently introduced into legislation through the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Regulation 2015, so most examples of foreign investment in Australian Chinese-language media (such as CRI's 2009 investment in Global CAMG) predate it.

The Australian Government has been considering amending the *Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act 1975* to update the definition of 'Australian media business' so that it includes digital media.¹⁷⁰

Some foreign ownership of Chinese-language media in Australia may slip through foreign investment legislation. For example, Australia Southeast Net Media Pty Ltd, which runs the Australian website of a Chinese state-owned media outlet and functions as its Australian branch, is owned by individuals who appear to be resident in Australia (see appendix). The company's owners could be considered associates of foreign persons and therefore require approval for their investment, but further research would be needed to demonstrate that.

As described above, Nan Hai Media and Australia Pacific Media Group may be supported by joint ventures between their owners and UFWD-controlled companies. However, it's unclear whether the joint ventures can be shown to meet the definition of 'Australian media business'. As with Australia Southeast Net Media, the companies' owners could be associates of foreign persons.

Finally, Australian foreign influence and interference legislation includes:

- the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018* (FITS), which includes a public register of individuals carrying out certain activities on behalf of foreign principals
- the *National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018*, which criminalises foreign political interference.

While some exemptions apply, media companies that are working to influence Australian federal politics on behalf of the CCP would have to declare that on the FITS register. However, only two Chinese-language media entities are on the register: Global CAMG, which broadcasts content from the state-owned *CRI*, and Decode China, which is a US Department of State-funded outlet that never went online. According to the register, both relationships have ceased.¹⁷¹

This implies that if any outlets are engaged in political influence for the CCP they are doing so covertly. Media seeking to carry out political influence work for or to support intelligence activity by the CCP risk punishment under the *Espionage and Foreign Interference Act 2018*, which includes penalties of up to 20 years for intentional foreign interference. To date, only one person—Di Sanh Duong (杨怡生), a member of the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification—has been charged under the act, in a case that doesn't appear to involve Chinese-language media.¹⁷² Chinese state-media journalists were named on search warrants for the Australian Federal Police investigation into John Zhang.¹⁷³

Recommendations

Mirroring trends in the broader media industry, the growth of digital media could heighten the risk of foreign interference in Chinese-language media unless it is responsibly managed. WeChat, with its settings that have the effect of expanding CCP media influence, is likely to grow in importance. That will further lower the barrier for the establishment of media outlets in a way that risks lowering the quality of Australian Chinese-language media.

The emergence of new media outlets through WeChat comes with opportunities but also challenges for the CCP. Many traditional media that the CCP has built strong relationships with over decades are declining. Two of them, *New Express Daily* and *Singtao Daily*, shuttered their Australian newspaper editions in the past two years.¹⁷⁴ Many of Ostar Media's and Global CAMG's radio stations appear to have ceased or downsized their broadcasts.

Newly established outlets on WeChat avoid content that the CCP might view as politically sensitive and often promote sensationalist and nationalistic content. However, their owners, editors and writers may have a shallow understanding of CCP policy and propaganda narratives. We expect that the CCP will expand its outreach to those organisations, using more rapid and flexible methods than those embodied in CNS's GCLMF, which is held only every two years.

Few Chinese-language media outlets in Australia reach the standards generally practised by mainstream media. The *ABC* and *SBS* may be the only outlets occupying the middle ground in Chinese-language media, but even they have faced criticism for editorial practices in the past. Efforts to counter foreign interference will struggle to be accurately communicated to Australians who primarily consume Chinese-language media until the sector is strengthened and protected from CCP influence. Greater tension within Australian Chinese communities driven by declining Australia–China relations, the CCP's behaviour, and concerns about racism should highlight the urgency with which these issues must be addressed.

The Australian Government has an important role to play in increasing transparency in the sector, supporting the health and growth of independent media, and updating regulations to better manage foreign ownership and social media. Transparency efforts should take the form of both positive measures to encourage transparency and the enforcement of foreign interference legislation.

We recommend that the Australian Government pursues the following measures:

1. Issue declaratory policy statements on multicultural media and social media (including WeChat). Those statements should cover standards and expectations for social media platforms and foreign interference and support for multicultural media.
2. The Department of Home Affairs should carry out continued analysis of WeChat to better understand risks associated with the app. The analysis should cover both Weixin and WeChat International and seek to understand surveillance, misinformation, account restrictions and censorship on the platforms. It should seek to determine compliance with existing policies, gaps in policy, and what changes need to be made to the app to address concerns.

3. Federal, state and local politicians should be briefed on WeChat and Chinese-language media in Australia. The briefings should help inform how politicians engage with the app and Chinese-language media. They should educate politicians on security and privacy concerns about WeChat and the implications for their accounts and political activity on WeChat.
4. Encourage consumers of Chinese-language media to use platforms other than WeChat, or to migrate from Weixin to WeChat International, including by releasing information on concerns about WeChat.
5. Engage with like-minded nations to jointly pressure WeChat to address concerns about censorship, surveillance, misinformation and influence from the CCP.
6. Relevant agencies, such as the Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, the Australian Cyber Security Centre, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, the Australian Communications and Media Authority, the eSafety Commissioner and the Australian Electoral Commission should expand their engagement with Tencent (WeChat's parent company). Throughout 2021 and before the next federal election, those interactions should be used to raise concerns about WeChat, discuss remedies and communicate Australian Government policies and expectations.
 - The government should present Tencent a clear timeline for meeting relevant regulations and addressing other concerns.¹⁷⁵
 - The government should update the Australian Parliament on its engagement with Tencent.
 - That engagement, together with actions by like-minded nations, should seek to end excessive restrictions on WeChat International public accounts, ensure that WeChat accounts targeting Australian audiences are registered to Australian companies, end monitoring of communications on WeChat outside of China, and end the censorship of posts and accounts.
 - If concerns are not addressed, the Australian Government should work with like-minded nations to explore penalties such as a ban on WeChat.
7. Expand funding for Chinese-language media through greater funding for the National Foundation for Australia–China Relations and media grant schemes.
8. Subsidise or facilitate the syndication of articles from selected Chinese-language media outlets, such as *ABC Chinese*, *SBS Mandarin*, *BBC Chinese*, Taiwan's Central News Agency, Hong Kong's *Apple Daily*, *China Digital Times*, Hong Kong's *Stand News* and *Initium Media*.
9. Explore ways to encourage selected overseas Chinese-language media outlets such as *Apple Daily* or *BBC Chinese*, to expand their presence in Australia, whether through correspondents or bureaus.
10. Establish scholarships for Chinese students or fluent Chinese speakers to study journalism in Australia.
11. Improve public reporting of foreign ownership of media to ensure that ownership of Chinese-language media, including websites and WeChat public accounts, is transparent. This could involve expansions to the scope of the Australian Communications and Media Authority's Register of Foreign Owners of Media Assets, which falls under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, or the introduction of new legislation.

12. Ensure that foreign ownership and investment in media are reported to and adequately covered by the Foreign Investment Review Board. This could involve updating the definition of 'Australian media business' in the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Regulation 2015.
13. Ensure that foreign influence over media is reported under the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme when appropriate.
14. When foreign control or influence over media isn't transparent, the Counter Foreign Interference Taskforce should investigate and intervene in those activities.
15. Review the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* or explore new legislation to expand the spirit of existing media regulation to online and social media.
16. The Department of Home Affairs and other relevant departments and agencies should work closely with state governments to expand outreach to Chinese communities to stay informed about the Chinese-language media sector and communicate government policy.
17. SBS should cease sourcing Cantonese and Mandarin television broadcasts from Chinese government-linked media.
18. The Australian Government should ensure that foreign interference risks are adequately managed at *ABC Chinese*, *SBS Mandarin* and *SBS Cantonese* and consider expanding funding for them.
19. Re-establish ABC Radio Australia's Mandarin and Cantonese services, which were respectively shut down in 1997 and 2014.

Appendix: Major Chinese-language media entities

1688 Media Group (1688 传媒集团)

1688 Media Group (1688传媒集团) is one of Australia's largest Chinese-language media networks. It publishes newspapers in three states and has a large online presence through its website and WeChat account.¹⁷⁶ It targets a broad audience, publishing reports on the Tiananmen Square massacre and Taiwanese news articles while also republishing Chinese state media and regularly participating in united front media events.

Business records indicate the group consists of three separate companies. These three companies—Chinese Newspaper Group, Melbourne Chinese Media and Chinese Herald—are respectively responsible for the group's operations in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.¹⁷⁷

Roger Huang (Huang Fong-yee, 黄丰裕) is the current director and the sole shareholder of Chinese Newspaper Group.¹⁷⁸ Huang studied media in the United States before moving to Australia in 1990.¹⁷⁹ He acquired a Sydney newspaper and renamed it the *Daily Chinese Herald*.¹⁸⁰ His wife, Emily Su-Cheng Huang (黄素珍), is a director and sole shareholder of Chinese Herald, which oversees the group's operations in Queensland.¹⁸¹ Cecil Huang (Huang Hsu, 黄旭) is director, secretary and sole shareholder of Melbourne Chinese Media Pty Ltd (墨尔本日报报业集团).¹⁸² All three Huangs are originally from Taiwan.

1688 Media Group's main online outlets are its *1688.com.au* website, 'Ausliving' (澳洲新鲜事) WeChat account and 1688 Australia app.¹⁸³ The media Group claims that its website receives 200,000 viewers a day.¹⁸⁴ Its stable of newspapers covers NSW, Victoria and Queensland:

- Chinese Newspaper Group publishes the *Daily Chinese Herald* (澳洲日报), *Sydney Chinese Daily* (澳洲日报悉尼版), and *Herald Property Sydney* (华声地产).¹⁸⁵ The company's flagship newspaper is the *Daily Chinese Herald*, one of the oldest Chinese language newspapers currently operating in Australia.¹⁸⁶ *Sydney Chinese Daily* is freely distributed on weekends with a claimed circulation of 25,000–30,000.¹⁸⁷
- Chinese Herald Pty Ltd publishes *Queensland Chinese Times* (昆士兰日报) and *Queensland Property Weekly* (昆士兰地产). *Queensland Chinese Times* is distributed free every Thursday and Saturday and claims a weekly circulation of 30,000 copies.¹⁸⁸
- Melbourne Chinese Media Pty Ltd produces *Chinese Melbourne Daily* (墨尔本日报), *Melbourne Chinese Property Weekly* (澳华地产) and real estate website *ozhome.com.au*.¹⁸⁹

Since 2005, 1688 Media Group's three owners and two of its managers have regularly attended the UFWD-run GCLMF.¹⁹⁰ Roger Huang, Cecil Huang and Huynh Huy (黄惠元), the former deputy chief of *Chinese Melbourne Daily*, have attended sessions of the OCAO's 'Advanced Seminar for the Overseas Chinese Language Media'.¹⁹¹ Roger and Cecil Huang have also participated in united front-run tours to China for overseas journalists.¹⁹²

Despite having ties to the CCP's united front system, 1688 Media Group publishes both pro-Beijing content as well as content that Beijing might find objectionable. For example, in February 2019, the *Daily Chinese Herald* was one of three major Chinese-language newspapers that published a full page declaration by Chinese community groups condemning the Australian government's decision to cancel Huang Xiangmo's permanent residency.¹⁹³ In August 2019, 1688 republished a feature article from Beijing's *Global Times* denouncing Hong Kong pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai.¹⁹⁴ A year later, it republished coverage of Jimmy Lai's arrest from the *Apple Daily*, Lai's newspaper.¹⁹⁵

1688 Media Group's coverage of Beijing–Taipei relations reflects views from both sides of the strait, as well as Hong Kong and overseas Chinese communities. Its newspapers have dedicated sections for Taiwan news.¹⁹⁶ For example, in December 2019, 1688's website republished an article from Taiwan's *Liberty Times* about CCP political interference in Taiwan.¹⁹⁷ In January 2020, it republished a YouTube video interview uploaded by the Falun Gong-linked *New Tang Dynasty Television* that showed Hong Kong residents warning Taiwanese voters to beware of CCP infiltration.¹⁹⁸ In the same month, it also published an op-ed by Australian-Taiwanese commentator Huang Ruo in which he predicted that the CCP's biggest future threat is young people standing up to authoritarianism rather than Taiwanese independence.¹⁹⁹ A few months later, the 1688 website republished a *Global Times* article about the PLA's drills as a warning against Taiwanese independence.

However, the 1688 Media Group's official WeChat account, 'Ausliving', doesn't have some of the content available on the 1688 website. For example, on 26 and 27 August 2020, the website republished two *Liberty Times* articles about President Tsai Ing-wen's participation in the Indo-Pacific Leaders Dialogue – an online event hosted by ASPI.²⁰⁰ These articles did not appear on the 'Ausliving' WeChat page.

ABC World (ABC 环球集团)

ABC World (ABC 环球集团) is a Sydney-based company founded by Richard Yuan (袁祖文) in 2000.²⁰¹ It has no association with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The company offers services in the areas of migration, education, events, and media. Its media section, ABC iMedia (ABC 传媒) was established in 2008.²⁰² Its WeChat platforms include ABC Media (华人瞰世界), Only Australia (这里是澳洲), WeAustralia (微澳洲), and the Australia China Entrepreneurs Club (澳中企业家俱乐部).²⁰³

The ABC Media WeChat account began operating in 2013.²⁰⁴ According to *Aoweibang*, an Australian WeChat aggregator website, this account was the second most popular WeChat public account in Australia in 2019, receiving more than 27 million article views and more than 153,000 'likes'.²⁰⁵

The account posts 7–8 articles a day and focuses on Australian and international news stories. Founder Richard Yuan attributes the popularity of the account to its Australian news and lifestyle content which seems targeted at Chinese investors and business people, migrants, and students.²⁰⁶ Yuan has said that in his outlets' reporting, they 'focus on respecting facts' and 'creating a good public opinion environment for the development of bilateral relations' between Australia and China.²⁰⁷

Yuan has received a heightened level of attention this year due to some of his activities during the Covid-19 pandemic. Yuan and Kuang Yuanping (旷远平), a former Chinese military officer and a prominent united front figure in Australia, formed the Australia China Goodwill Association (澳中慈善协会) to 'mobilise Chinese businessmen to donate money and materials' for Australia.²⁰⁸ The association organised a shipment of 70 tonnes of medical supplies and PPE from Wuhan to Sydney.²⁰⁹

Kuang has reportedly been working with a Chinese government body, the Wuhan Emergency Support and Commodity Reserve Group, and his activities during the pandemic have been ‘fully affirmed by relevant national ministries and commissions, provincial and municipal leaders’ and the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese.²¹⁰

Richard Yuan also has a number of links to the united front system. Yuan attended the GCLMF in 2017 in his capacity as CEO of ABC iMedia.²¹¹ In 2017, Yuan was also made an overseas adviser for the Hunan Provincial Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).²¹² He received praise from the head of the Hunan CPPCC for his success in helping to promote Hunan’s economic and social development.²¹³ Yuan was also appointed as a consultant for the Hunan Federation for Returned Overseas Chinese.²¹⁴

Yuan has organised a number of events involving the Hunan CPPCC, the provincial Department of Commerce, the provincial Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese and the provincial Council for the Promotion of International Trade.²¹⁵

ACB News (澳华财经在线)

ACB News (Australia China Business News, 澳华财经在线), operated by Pacific Financial News Pty Ltd, aims to serve as a bridge connecting Australian businesses with Chinese customers and investors. The news outlet does so by providing coverage of topics including IPO, market watch, funds and wealth management, quality brands, and culture.²¹⁶ Registered under the WeChat ID ‘acbnews’,²¹⁷ the outlet provides its services via WeChat and other social media platforms across China.²¹⁸

ACB News has close ties with several PRC media outlets. It has a partnership with People’s Daily Overseas Chinese Network (人民日报海外版), the overseas edition of *People’s Daily*. *ACB News* also maintains relationships with more than 40 PRC financial media outlets, including 163.com, East Money, and China Finance Online. *ACB News* claims to have 30,000–50,000 daily readers.²¹⁹

David Niu, aka Niu Jianming (牛建明), was appointed Director of Pacific Financial News in 2012.²²⁰ Niu serves as Founder, Chief Financial Commentator, and Director of Website Operations for *ACB News*.²²¹ He previously served as the Director of ‘Zheng Zhou Subsidiary GangAo Securities Co Ltd China’ from 2000–02.²²² He was also appointed as Director of AC Capital Holdings Pty Ltd in February 2015, which remains a current position.²²³ Niu owns 15% of shares in the company, Hong Yong owns 50%, Song Huaqiang owns 30%, and Niu Jinchun owns 5%. All shareholders, as well as Hong Tao, are directors.

Niu has participated in events linked to the UFWD’s *China News Service (CNS)*. He spoke at the Australian Chinese Language Media ‘One Belt, One Road’ Forum (澳大利亚华文媒体‘一带一路’座谈会), which was hosted by *China News Service Australia* in 2017.²²⁴ He also participated in the 2013 GCLMF.²²⁵ Niu also attended the 2017 China–Australia Themed Investment Forum (2017中澳主题投资论坛),²²⁶ a forum jointly hosted by *ACB News* and the Zhongguancun Private Equity & Venture Capital Association in Beijing, attracting individuals from the political and business realms of both Australia and China.²²⁷

Niu also has personal ties to the Zhongguancun Private Equity & Venture Capital Association (ZVCA, 中关村股权投资协会澳洲分会). He served²²⁸ as the vice chairman of the ZVCA as recently as 2018 and is currently registered as a director.²²⁹ ZVCA is registered under the Beijing Ministry of Civil Affairs²³⁰ and

has led investments and funding activities between the United States, Canada, Israel, Italy, the United Kingdom, France, and other countries with Beijing and local governments.²³¹

Niu has connections with other Chinese media through the Overseas Chinese-Language Media Association (海外华文传媒协会), an international association of global Chinese media outlets registered in Canada.²³² The Association hosted the event ‘Hundreds of Chinese-Language Media Outlets Select Hundreds of International Tourist Destination Activities’ (百家华文媒体推选百家国际旅游目的地活动), which was presided over by several prominent figures, including Niu.²³³ In 2018, the Chinese International Media Association held a meeting for its executive council in Hefei, China, where Niu participated as the Vice-Chairman of the Association.²³⁴

Niu owns 50% of Henan Yueda Information Technology Ltd and sits on its board.²³⁵ Yong Hong,²³⁶ another registered director with Pacific Financial News Pty Ltd and deputy editor-in-chief of *ACB News*, serves as Henan Yueda’s legal representative, executive director, and a 50% shareholder of Henan Yueda Information Technology is Yong Hong.²³⁷ Three job advertisements list the company Henan Yueda Information Technology Co. Ltd as the hiring company associated with *ACB News*.²³⁸ The published positions are largely for English-language editors in Beijing and Shenzhen.²³⁹

Beyond Niu and Yong Hong’s affiliations with the CCP, *ACB News* also has an active presence in China. It was one of the first media outlets to sign up for the ‘Overseas Chinese New Media Content Sharing Platform’ (‘海外华文新媒体内容共享平台’), which is part of the People’s Daily Overseas Chinese Network ‘Haiju Platform’ project that aims to cooperate with overseas Chinese media to create an integrated platform for resource sharing.²⁴⁰ *ACB News* also runs Investor Relations events in Australia and China.²⁴¹ In 2017, it jointly hosted the ‘Australia Project Roadshow’ (澳洲项目路演) in Beijing with the Zhongguancun Private Equity & Venture Capital Association and Beijing-based RichLink Capital.²⁴²

Australia Pacific Media Group (澳大利亚大洋传媒集团)

Australia Pacific Media Group is one of Australia’s oldest Chinese-language media companies. Headquartered in Melbourne, its flagship publication is *Pacific Times* (大洋时报), a weekly newspaper that has a claimed circulation of 22,500 copies.²⁴³ According to *Aoweibang*, an Australian WeChat aggregator website, Pacific Media’s WeChat account was the 32nd most popular official account in Australia in 2019, receiving almost 3 million article views and more than 8,000 likes.²⁴⁴ The group also has a website (*au123.com*) and WeChat account.

Pacific Media has a close relationship with the CCP and Chinese state media. In 2011, after signing a partnership with *CNS*, Pacific Media added *Pacific Daily* (大洋日报) to its portfolio.²⁴⁵

Feng Tuanbin (冯团彬) or Sam Feng is the president of Australia Pacific Media Group.²⁴⁶ He owns 25% of the company, Zhang Chunmiao owns 35% and Feng Yicong owns 40%. We found little information about Zhang and Feng.

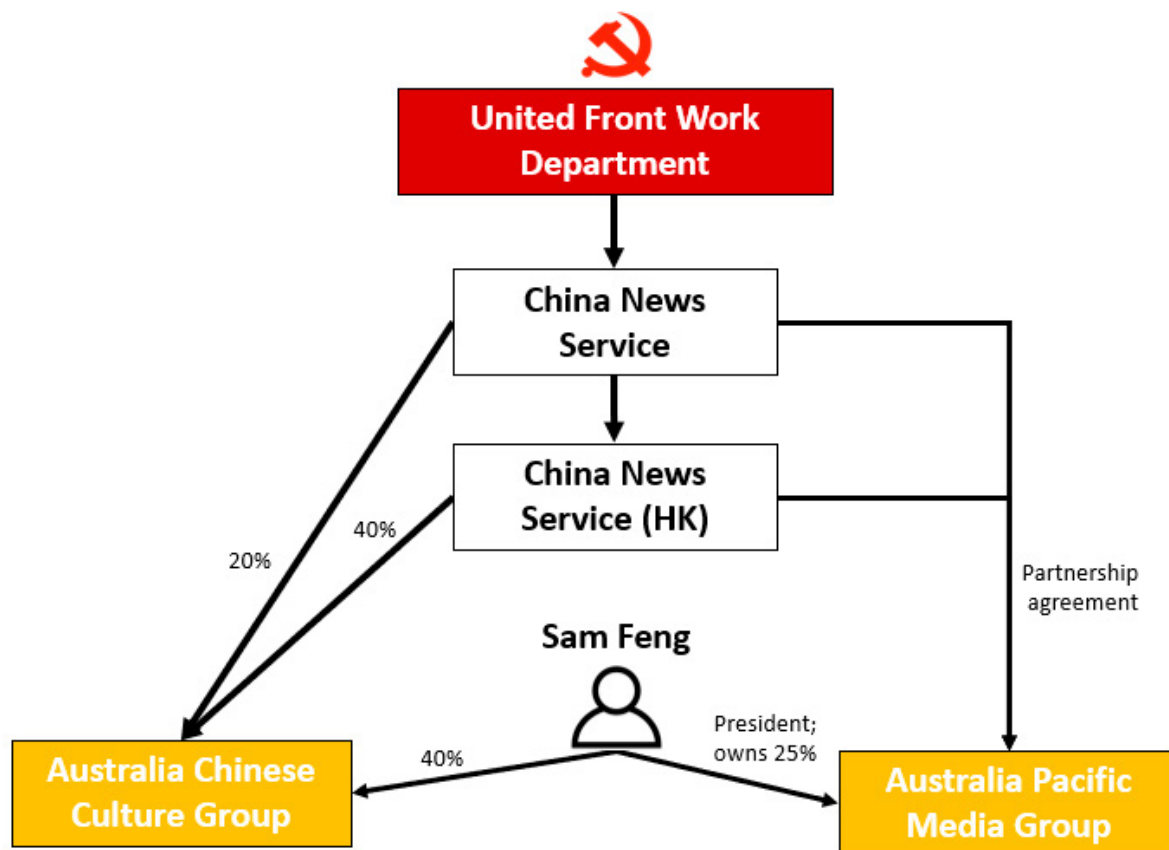
Dr Feng Chongyi, a China scholar at the University of Technology Sydney, described *Pacific Times* as ‘one of several Australian Chinese-language media outlets that have forgone any semblance of editorial independence in exchange for deals offered by the Communist Party’s propaganda apparatus.’²⁴⁷ The media group has also been involved in political activism. A *Four Corners* report from 2017 discovered that Pacific Media handed out placards to hundreds of people participating in protests against the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling on the South China Sea.²⁴⁸

Pacific Media Group has close ties to the UFWD's CNS. Representatives from Pacific Media Group have regularly attended the GCLMF run every two years by CNS and the UFWD.²⁴⁹

In October 2010, Pacific Media signed a partnership with CNS and CNS's Hong Kong branch.²⁵⁰ These may correspond to the 'editorial department and offices in Beijing and Hong Kong' that Pacific Media claims to have.²⁵¹ The agreement was signed at a ceremony in October 2010 in the Victorian Parliament and covered content-sharing and exchanges on editing, management, and training.²⁵² Pacific Media Group's outlets now republish substantial amounts of content from CNS.

While CNS doesn't own a direct stake in Pacific Media, it owns 60% of Australia Chinese Culture Group Pty Ltd, while Pacific Media's Sam Feng owns the remaining 40% (Figure 6).²⁵³ There is little information on Australia Chinese Culture Group's activities, but it shares an address with *Pacific Times* and was formed in April 2010, shortly before Pacific Media's partnership with CNS was signed.²⁵⁴ Apart from Feng, Zhang Xinxin (章新新), who was CNS president until 2019, and CNS Hong Kong bureau chief Wang Jiabin (王佳斌) are also directors of the company.²⁵⁵ The company's two former directors were Liu Beixian (刘北宪) and Zhang Yu (张渝), respectively president of CNS and chief of its Hong Kong bureau at the time.²⁵⁶ Liu was expelled from the CCP in November 2017 for disciplinary violations, including corruption.²⁵⁷

Figure 6: Australia Chinese Culture Group's connections to the UFWD and Australia Pacific Media Group



Pacific Media's Aozhouwang (澳洲网) WeChat account is also linked to CNS. It is registered to Beijing Zhongxin Chinese Technology Development Co. Ltd (北京中新唐印科技发展有限公司), a wholly owned subsidiary of CNS.²⁵⁸ Beijing Pacific Chinese Culture and Media Co. Ltd (北京大洋华文文化传媒

有限公司), a Chinese company wholly owned by Australia Pacific Media Group that was deregistered in 2017, listed CNS's Beijing compound as its address.²⁵⁹

Pacific Media Editor in Chief Peter Yu (禹志超) may have been a CNS employee. Until December 2016, he was a board member and general manager of a CNS subsidiary, Beijing Zhongxin Tangwen Advertising Media Co. Ltd (北京中新唐文广告传媒有限公司). Yu had bylines in *China News Service* (CNS) articles until as recently as 2018.²⁶⁰ His involvement with CNS seems to overlap with his editorship at Pacific Media, which may have begun in 2015.²⁶¹

Pacific Media has also participated in a number of media exchange platforms with Chinese counterparts. These include the Tianwei.com and CNS-established 'information service platform' which provides Chinese-language reporting and information services on Covid-19.²⁶² Pacific Media is also involved in the Overseas Chinese-language Media Assistance Beijing Innovation, Development, Cooperation Mechanism (海外华文媒体助力北京创新发展合作机构), a conference for domestic and overseas Chinese media established by Beijing New Media Group (北京新媒体集团).²⁶³ Its aim is to promote close contact and cooperation between Beijing media and overseas Chinese-language media in order to promote 'contemporary Chinese values ... and guide the broad masses of overseas Chinese to support and participate in Beijing's economic and social development'.²⁶⁴

Pacific Media's Sam Feng is a member of several united front groups. He was named as a vice-president of the Henan Overseas Exchange Association (河南省海外交流协会) in 2014.²⁶⁵ He is also chairman of the Oceania Federation of Literary and Art Circles (大洋洲文联), a regional branch of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (中国文学艺术界联合会), which is an official constituent of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.²⁶⁶ Feng is also a member of the Global Commercial Newspapers Union (全球商报联盟) established in 2007, a non-profit organisation connected to the UFWD and Chinese state-media.²⁶⁷

Feng has financial interests in China through the wine industry. In 2011 he established a wine import company with a Chinese state-owned enterprise.²⁶⁸

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC Chinese)

The ABC is one of two publicly funded media outlets in Australia that provide Chinese-language content. The ABC produces Chinese content, including original articles and translations, on a section of its website launched in 2017.²⁶⁹ It also publishes Chinese versions of digital content produced at the ABC News Asia Pacific newsroom, as well as original Chinese-language reporting and video interviews conducted in Mandarin.²⁷⁰ Some of the ABC's English TV programs are available with simplified Chinese subtitles on ABC iview.²⁷¹ ABC Chinese generally produces high-quality coverage for Australia's Chinese-speaking communities.

ABC Chinese has its own social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook.²⁷² Separately, ABC International manages a WeChat account, ABCAustralia (ABC 澳洲), which is registered to a China-based company Shanghai Ao Pa Si Cultural Development Co. Ltd (上海澳帕斯文化发展有限公司) that is solely owned by the ABC. The account is not operated by the ABC Chinese news team.²⁷³ The ABC used to provide Mandarin and Cantonese content through Radio Australia. Its short-wave radio programs served the Chinese diaspora in Asia and provided a window to the outside world as well as a source of reliable news to listeners in the PRC where media was tightly controlled by the

CCP.²⁷⁴ Due to budget cuts, however, Radio Australia's Cantonese program was shut down in 1997 and its Mandarin program was terminated in 2014.²⁷⁵

The ABC has struggled to establish a presence in China. In 2015, the ABC, in partnership with the state-owned Shanghai Media Group, launched a Chinese-language portal, AustraliaPlus.cn (澳洲佳). However, the arrangement drew criticism for not publishing content that might be deemed sensitive by the CCP.²⁷⁶ In an April 2016 statement, the ABC affirmed that it had never entered into an agreement with any country that requires self-censorship.²⁷⁷ However, a month later, the broadcaster admitted its China-based portal failed to follow its own editorial policies after ABC's Media Watch program found that an ABC Chinese journalist, Fang Teng (方腾, aka Jason Fang), had removed important segments from translations of news articles.²⁷⁸ In 2018, the ABC confirmed the closure of AustraliaPlus.cn.²⁷⁹

As of October 2020, the WeChat account associated with AustraliaPlus is still being updated.²⁸⁰ However, it is not listed on the website of ABC Chinese and does not contain important news stories such as the ABC's own China correspondent fleeing the PRC in September 2020.²⁸¹

Former and current members of the ABC's Chinese team have attended the GCLMF.²⁸² Fang Teng, a former member of SBS Mandarin and now executive producer of the ABC's Chinese program, reportedly attended the forum in 2011, 2013 and 2015.²⁸³

At times, the ABC has given a platform to united front figures without mentioning their connections to the CCP. For example, a 2018 feature article about Henry Nan Hung Pan (潘南弘),²⁸⁴ Honorary Executive Director of the Sydney Chinese Australian Services Society (CASS, 华人服务社), did not mention Pan's role as an honorary adviser to the ACPPRC, nor that CASS is an Overseas Chinese Service Centre (华助中心) accredited by the UFWD's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in 2015.²⁸⁵

Cooperation between ABC's Chinese-language and English-language journalists means these omissions can affect ABC's English-language coverage too.²⁸⁶ For instance, a 2019 ABC Chinese article covered Chinese community attitudes towards the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme. It quoted Peter Yu (禹志超), editor of Pacific Media Group's *Pacific Times*, who said it seemed like the Australian Government was 'doubting the loyalty and belongingness of the Chinese community'.²⁸⁷ Later, the material was included in an English-language ABC News article. However, it didn't mention that Yu has also been a senior member of the media professionals committee of the United Front's Jiangsu Overseas Exchange Association, his newspaper is closely connected to the UFWD and that he himself may have been a Chinese state media employee.²⁸⁸

Australian Chinese Daily (澳洲新报)

Australian Chinese Daily is a Chinese-language newspaper headquartered in Sydney. It is a paid newspaper published every Thursday. In 2009, it reportedly had a circulation of 25,000 copies.²⁸⁹ The outlet's website says the newspaper was founded in 1987 by Sandra Lau (刘美伶), an entrepreneur who immigrated from Hong Kong, who is currently the newspaper's president.²⁹⁰ However, other sources state that it was established by Luo Bin (罗斌), the founder of the *Hong Kong Daily News* (香港新报).²⁹¹ The *Australian Chinese Daily* initially operated as the Australian edition of the *Hong Kong Daily News*,²⁹² but now produces its own content for its website and nationally-distributed newspaper.²⁹³

Australian Chinese Daily is owned by a company called EJW No. 1 Pty Ltd.²⁹⁴ EJW No. 1 is owned by Hong Kong immigrants Hei Ying Elizabeth Law, Joseph Kam Ming Law and Wharton Wah Ming Law, who each own a third of the company.²⁹⁵

The outlet appears to have long established links with media outlets in Hong Kong and mainland China. During an interview in 2009, then Editor-in-Chief Wu Huiquan (吴惠权)²⁹⁶ stated that the outlet maintained a good, cooperative relationship with *Hong Kong Daily News* and *Ta Kung Pao* (大公报).²⁹⁷ He also said the newspaper uses sources tailor-made by *CNS* and *Xinhua News Agency*.²⁹⁸

Articles on the *Australian Chinese Daily* website often do not diligently indicate whether they are republished from external outlets. The outlet's articles often state that they are based on a mix of sources when they are primarily copied from a single outlet. For example, an *Australian Chinese Daily* article on Shenzhen being the first city to achieve full 5G coverage appears to be primarily adapted from Hong Kong's *Wen Wei Po*.²⁹⁹ Some articles are directly republished from Hong Kong or Taiwanese outlets, but without attribution.³⁰⁰

Some articles appear to have been edited to remove politically sensitive content. For example, a report on the Beidaihe Meeting—China's annual informal leaders meeting held in the seaside town of Beidaihe—was republished from the *Epoch Times*, but with text criticising the Hong Kong National Security Law and the Chinese government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic removed.³⁰¹

The outlet has also published a number of articles in 2020 promoting the work of the Chinese government and United Front organisations in Australia. These include:

- A piece featuring statements from the Chinese Consulate on the Chinese government's successful response to Covid-19.³⁰²
- A message from the Chinese Consul-General addressing overseas Chinese and Chinese international students, outlining the support available from the Consulate during the pandemic.³⁰³
- An article on United Front groups raising money for the epidemic response in Wuhan.³⁰⁴
- A statement from the ACPPRC condemning a speech made by Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, reiterating the 'one China principle' and expressing support for the passing of the National Security Law in Hong Kong.³⁰⁵

Representatives from *Australian Chinese Daily* attended the UFWD-run GCLMF four times over the period from 2003 to 2009, and once more in 2013.³⁰⁶ They have not attended since 2013. It is also a member of the Global Chinese Media Cooperation Union (世界华文传媒合作联盟) established by *CNS* in order to promote collaboration between overseas Chinese-language media and mainland Chinese media to enhance the overall influence of overseas Chinese-language media.³⁰⁷

Australian Chinese Newspaper Group (澳大利亚报业集团)

Australian Chinese Newspaper Group (ACNG) is a media company headquartered in Adelaide. It was founded in 2008 and focuses on the Chinese-speaking audiences of South Australia and Canberra. It is solely owned and directed by Liu Yu (刘聿), a property developer from Tianjin.³⁰⁸

ACNG publishes the newspaper *Adelaide Chinese News* (阿德莱德新报), which was founded in 2007 predating ACNG's establishment and *Australia Canberra Chinese Weekly* (澳大利亚新报).³⁰⁹ The first

issue of *Australia Canberra Chinese Weekly* coincided with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Australia in May 2017.³¹⁰ Both newspapers are free publications that are issued weekly each Friday. *Adelaide Chinese News* has claimed a circulation of 4,000 copies per week, distributed from more than 40 channels, while *Australia Canberra Chinese Weekly* has a claimed circulation of 6,000 copies per week distributed from more than 50 channels.³¹¹

ACNG has also expanded into new media offerings, including the XinAdelaide (新阿德莱德) WeChat account.³¹² The account posts six days per week. In 2017, it claimed a reach of more than 12,000 people.³¹³ The WeChat account is registered to Tianjin Information Port Broadband Internet Joint-Stock Ltd (天津信息港宽带网络股份有限公司).³¹⁴ Liu Yu is the Tianjin company's general manager and a board director.³¹⁵

In 2018 under a cooperation agreement with Australian Golden Sail Investment Group, a property development company based in Perth, ACNG also created the XinMelbourne (新墨尔本) and XinSydney (新悉尼) WeChat accounts.³¹⁶ ACNG has also claimed that it signed an agreement with WeChat parent company Tencent to become the app's 'exclusive agent' in South Australia.³¹⁷

ACNG also owned Adelaide Chinese Radio (阿德莱德中文电台), a guide for Chinese visitors to South Australia, which has since closed down. They also own *Stay in Australia*, a real estate magazine (置业南澳).³¹⁸

ACNG has several links to Chinese state media. In 2017, ACNG reported that it was cooperating closely with Chinese media outlets *Xinhua News Agency*, *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, CCTV, China Radio International and Phoenix TV.³¹⁹ Its XinAdelaide WeChat account has republished content from the People's Daily Overseas Chinese Network (人民日报海外网).³²⁰ This could be the result of a cooperation agreement signed by ACNG and the People's Daily Overseas Chinese Network in 2017.³²¹

ACNG also cooperates with Chinese state media in the advertising services it offers for Australian businesses wishing to connect to businesses and consumers in China.³²²

Representatives from ACNG also attended the CNS GCLMF in 2011, 2013, 2017 and 2019.³²³ It is also a member of the 'Global Chinese Media Cooperation Union' (世界华文传媒合作联盟) established by CNS.³²⁴ Additionally, in 2019, Chief Operations Officer at ACNG, Zhou Qingmei (周庆梅), took part in the 'Advanced Seminar for the Overseas Chinese Language Media' (海外华文媒体高级研修班) also sponsored by CNS.³²⁵

Further links to state media can be seen in the number of visits by representatives from the above-mentioned outlets. In March 2018, the group was visited by representatives from CNS. Discussions centred on 'further strengthening cooperation, improving news quality, and enhancing the influence of Chinese media overseas'.³²⁶ In July the same year, ACNG was visited by representatives from CCTV. They discussed 'strengthening news cooperation, plans to jointly carry out economic activities ... and expand[ing] China's influence in Australia'.³²⁷

ACNG also has a number of links to the CCP's united front system. Liu Yu was a member of the Tianjin Hebei District People's Political Consultative Conference in 2010.³²⁸ In 2017, Liu Yu met with a deputy director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in South Australia.³²⁹ In 2019, ACNG held an event for the Mid-Autumn Festival together with CCP-linked organisations, including the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese.³³⁰

Australian Red Scarf (澳洲红领君)

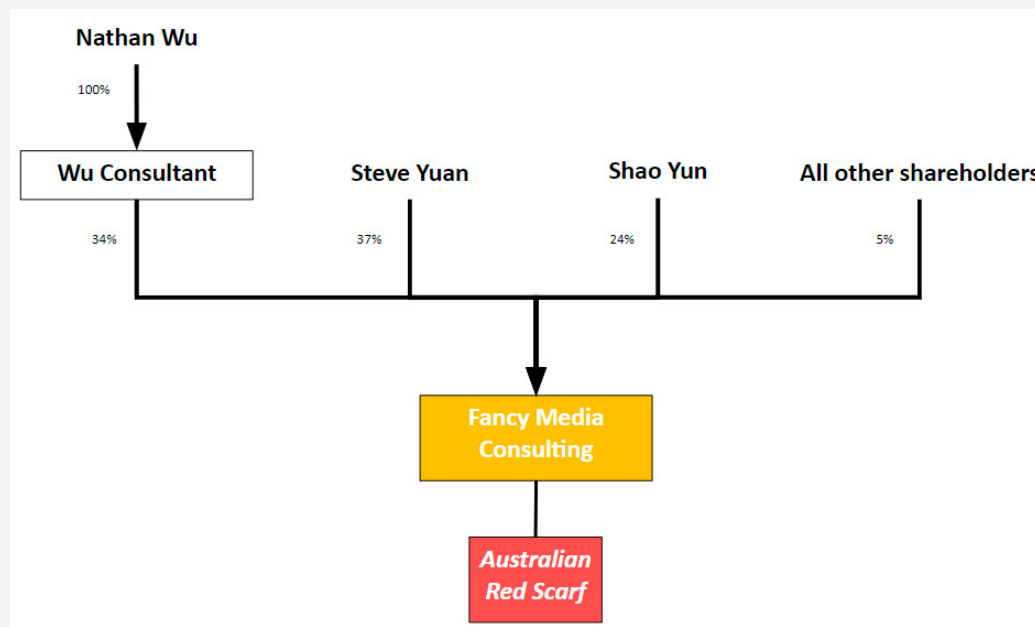
Australian Red Scarf (澳洲红领君) is a popular WeChat news account targeting Chinese students and young professionals in Australia. It is owned and operated by Fancy Media Pty Ltd (繁星传媒), a social media marketing company.³³¹ The outlet was founded in April 2016 and claimed to have accumulated more than 200,000 followers within three years.³³²

Fancy Media also manages an informational website with the same English name (Australian Red Scarf) but slightly different Chinese name (澳洲红领巾). This website provides Chinese international students with practical information on coming to and living in Australia such as registering for a TFN number and local property listings.³³³

The Australian Red Scarf WeChat account's style is provocative, using click-bait headlines and topics geared towards its young adult audience. Articles are often punctuated by funny gifs and internet memes. Many articles from Australian Red Scarf have been subsequently re-posted by Chinese online portals such as Sohu. It has also been accused by a senior media lecturer at the University of Adelaide of using sensationalist headlines, spreading nationalist rhetoric, and being a disseminator of fake news.³³⁴

Nathan Wu³³⁵ is the managing director of Fancy Media and one of the company's co-founders (Figure 7).³³⁶ He is a graduate of the University of Sydney and has been a trainee journalist and editor for two months at *Caijing Magazine*.³³⁷ Wu is also the sole director of Wu Consultant Pty Ltd, which owns a 34% stake in the company—Wu previously held these shares in his own name.³³⁸ He has been invited to speak at conferences and events, including the '2018 Conference on International Exchange of Professionals' run by China's State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (国家外国专家局).³³⁹

Figure 7: The ownership structure of Australian Red Scarf



Steve Yuan³⁴⁰ is a 'senior strategy director' and another co-founder of Fancy Media Consulting.³⁴¹ He is a graduate of Monash University and the University of Sydney.³⁴² Yuan has a 37% stake in the company.³⁴³ Australian Red Scarf's WeChat news account is registered to a China-based company

called Shanghai Youpan Asset Management Co. Ltd (上海优盘资产管理有限公司) of which Yuan holds a 20% stake.³⁴⁴ Yuan was a non-executive director from July 2015 to February 2017 of Dynasty Resources Ltd, a mining resource exploration company.³⁴⁵ Prior to his role at Fancy Media, Yuan was a 'social media consultant/partnership developer' for Tencent's Australian and New Zealand WeChat team for over a year and is also currently a management consultant for EY in Hong Kong.³⁴⁶

Fancy Media has a third director, Shao Yun, who holds a 24% stake in the company.³⁴⁷ Yun and other shareholders are not featured on the company website.³⁴⁸

Based on the sourcing of its news articles and information from Fancy Media Consulting, the platform bears all the hallmarks of a social media content marketing company rather than a news media organisation. The company claims to specialise in 'Chinese marketing analysis, social media management and comprehensive online marketing planning',³⁴⁹ they provide services including 'digital media experts ranging from Design, Copywriting & Editing, IT to Translation'.³⁵⁰ Brands partner with Fancy Media to have their products integrated into the content and advertising of the Australian Red Scarf platform. Their website claims to have partnered with more than 200 brands.³⁵¹ Job ads claim Australian Red Scarf has worked with major Australian and international entities, including Westpac, Westfield, UGG, Bank of China, Taobao and the Australian Treasury.³⁵²

News articles on Australian Red Scarf are often sourced from news sites both in English and Chinese and then packaged into a style likely to attract more views. This click-bait style has become a major component of Australian Red Scarf's popularity, but has also drawn increased scrutiny as the platform has been used to spread fake news and publish private or identifying information about individuals on the internet. Cases of 'doxxing' by or unreliable reporting on Australian Red Scarf include the following:

- In 2017, an IT lecturer at the University of Sydney used an image of a map in a PowerPoint presentation showing China's claimed territory as part of India, this was then posted on Australian Red Scarf with imagery from the popular Chinese movie *Wolf Warrior 2*.³⁵³ The lecturer subsequently issued an apology for the mistake, and for any offence that might have been caused.³⁵⁴
- In 2016, a 26-year-old tutor at the University of Sydney's business school had his social media history, photos, personal email and LinkedIn profile posted on Australian Red Scarf after business school students in a WeChat group found videos of him burning his Chinese passport and extinguishing the flames in a toilet bowl.³⁵⁵ This prompted an official university investigation, after which the tutor subsequently resigned.³⁵⁶
- In 2016, Australian Red Scarf published an article sourced primarily from Chinese-language sources making claims of Islamic State (IS) terrorist threats on Australian cities.³⁵⁷ No comments from Australian police were included in the article despite Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton describing the threats as 'propaganda'.³⁵⁸

Auwe News (澳洲微报)

Auwe News is a WeChat account and website that publishes Australian news, real estate, investment information, celebrity news, and health-related articles for Chinese-Australians. The Auwe News account claims to have more than 250,000 followers.³⁵⁹ According to *Aoweibang*, an Australian WeChat aggregator website, this account was the sixth most popular WeChat Official Account in Australia in 2019. It received more than 16 million article views and 37,000 likes.³⁶⁰

Auwe News appears to be run by Newpoint Migration and Education, an immigration and education consultancy.³⁶¹ Newpoint was established in 2003 and is headquartered in Melbourne, sharing an address with Auwe News.³⁶² Auwe News was founded and run by Michelle Zhang, Newpoint's marketing manager.

The Auwe News WeChat account is registered to Qingdao Newpoint Information Consulting Co. Ltd (青岛新起点信息咨询有限公司), the Qingdao branch of Newpoint.³⁶³ The Newpoint Australia website describes this business as providing immigration and study abroad consultations for mainland clients.³⁶⁴ However, an online business listing for Qingdao Newpoint Information Consulting states that it is responsible for the media business of Newpoint Migration and Education.³⁶⁵ According to this listing, Qingdao Newpoint reportedly carries out 'media services of cooperative partners in mainland China, connecting them with Australian resources, in order to provide customers with the highest quality and quick overseas media services ... [and] has established long term, stable media cooperation relationships with many large multinational companies in mainland China and Australia'.³⁶⁶

Content on the Auwe News website and WeChat account is primarily local Australian news and information related to immigration and studying in Australia. There is also a section dedicated to China-related news which features articles mainly republished from Chinese state media.³⁶⁷ However, these articles do not appear to feature on the Auwe News WeChat account.

CBRLife (堪生活)

CBRLife is a media outlet that produces bilingual news about Canberra through its magazine and WeChat account. A product of CBR Inforport Pty Ltd, CBRLife was founded in 2016 by its current president Joe Yan.³⁶⁸ Its primary audience is Canberra's Chinese-speaking community, but its bilingual content means it is also accessible to English-speaking audiences. CBRLife claims their platform provides information to more than 100,000 followers in 2020.³⁶⁹ CBRLife also launched an app in August 2020 which claimed to have received 1.2 million views in a month.³⁷⁰

Joe Yan is the current director and secretary of the company and its sole shareholder.³⁷¹ He moved to Australia in 2010 and studied at the University of Canberra. According to a profile about Yan, he began posting car-related news on WeChat to the Chinese speaking community in Canberra while working as a car salesman. The popularity of these posts led to the development of CBRLife.³⁷²

CBRLife covers local Canberra issues, including politics. Ahead of the 2020 ACT legislative assembly election, it produced cover stories on ACT Liberals leader Alistair Coe,³⁷³ ACT Labor's Deepak-Raj Gupta³⁷⁴ and independent candidate Dr Fuxin Li (李复新).³⁷⁵

CBRLife's WeChat account (CBRLife堪生活) is registered to China-based company Guizhou Zhongjian Xingda Construction Consulting Management (贵州中建兴达建筑咨询管理有限公司).³⁷⁶ This company is 99% owned by 'Guizhou Zhongjian Xingda Construction Group' (贵州中建兴达建设(集团)有限公司) and 1% owned by its executive director, Liu Xiaoqing (刘小青).³⁷⁷ The exact nature of the relationship between CBRLife and the China-based company is unclear.

ChinaNet (华网传媒集团)

Founded in 1998, ChinaNet (Australia) Pty Ltd (华网传媒集团) is the publisher of *Australian Chinese Times* (澳大利亚时报), the oldest Chinese-language newspaper in Western Australia, according to the 2014 *Yearbook of Chinese in Australia*.³⁷⁸ The newspaper is distributed free and published twice a week. It has a claimed circulation of more than 12,000 per issue.³⁷⁹

Australian Chinese Times is also available online at www.myactimes.com.au (澳奇网), one of the earliest overseas Chinese language media websites, launched in 1999.³⁸⁰ The outlet's content includes local, national, and international news, migration advice, as well as classified advertising. In addition, ChinaNet operates WeChat accounts *actimes* and *sisterliao123* (西澳料姐), a Youtube channel *ACT Media* (ACT 澳洲), a Facebook account, and *ACT Times* magazine (ACT时代).³⁸¹

ChinaNet's founder, Edward Zhang (Zhang Ye 张野), arrived in Perth 1994 as a PhD student at Curtin University.³⁸² According to business registration records, he is a director, secretary and the sole shareholder of the company.³⁸³ Another director of the company is Zhang's daughter, Zhang Jiankai (张鉴开).³⁸⁴

Before coming to Australia, Edward Zhang lectured at Shenzhen University and was the director of the university's foreign affairs office.³⁸⁵ In 2019, he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) 'for service to the Chinese community of Western Australia', including running *ACT*.³⁸⁶ He has been a member of the Multicultural Advisory Group of the Western Australian Government.³⁸⁷

Zhang has extensive links to the CCP's united front system. He is an honorary chairman of the WA branch of the ACPPRC and a member of at least five China-based United Front groups, according to *The Australian*.³⁸⁸ Since 2005, Zhang has attended most sessions of CNS's GCLMF. 'I can't hide my excitement whenever I receive an invitation,' he wrote in a 2016 article about the forum.³⁸⁹ *Australian Chinese Times* is also a member of the United Front system's Global Chinese Media Cooperation Union.³⁹⁰

ChinaNet outlets censor content that might be frowned on by the CCP. According to Edward Zhang, its outlets have 'four unprintables' they do not publish: content on Falun Gong, information on Taiwanese independence, 'splittist' language, and any criticism of the Chinese government. However, ChinaNet's website is inaccessible in China, even after Zhang complained in a 2015 article for *CNS* that PRC-based viewers can't access 'patriotic websites' like his due to China's restrictions of 'sensitive words'.³⁹¹

ChinaNet outlets frequently republish articles from CCP-owned media such as *CNS* and the *Global Times*. For example, in January 2019, ChinaNet's website republished a *CNS* article that quotes prominent united front-linked figures who praised Xi Jinping's speech about Taiwan.³⁹² In February, the website republished a *Global Times* article attacking the Australian government's decision to cancel a visa for United Front-linked Chinese political donor Huang Xiangmo.³⁹³ In July, it republished

another article from the *Global Times* that supported the PRC consulate's response to pro-Beijing students after they assaulted a group of University of Queensland students who were protesting the Chinese government's suppression of democracy and the university's ties to the CCP.³⁹⁴

ChinaNet has a prominent presence in the Chinese community in Perth and has been involved in political advocacy and organising community events:

- In 2013, when ChinaNet owner Edward Zhang's close associate Pierre Yang, now a WA Labor MP, ran in a city council election, the *Australian Chinese Times* praised Yang, writing, 'Hot Chinese blood courses through the veins of this refined and cultured-looking, handsome man.'³⁹⁵
- In 2015, when Zhang himself stood for a city council election, the *Australian Chinese Times* published a statement in which he urged people to vote for him.³⁹⁶
- In July 2016, just before the ICC International Court of Arbitration ruling on the South China Sea dispute was announced, ChinaNet's website published a declaration 'resolutely' supporting Beijing's territorial claims was signed by more than 30 community organisations, including *ChinaNets* newspaper.³⁹⁷
- In October 2020, *WA Today* reported that the *Australian Chinese Times* was promoting two candidates in the city of Perth elections, including the paper's own marketing and public relations manager.³⁹⁸

Chinese News Tasmania (塔州华人报)

Founded in 2009, *Chinese News Tasmania* (塔州华人报), is a monthly Chinese-language magazine based in Hobart. Its publisher and editor-in-chief is Tang Yongbei (唐咏北), who worked as a journalist in China before migrating to Australia in 1996.³⁹⁹ In 2014, most members of the *Chinese News Tasmania* production team were Chinese students at the University of Tasmania.⁴⁰⁰

The magazine's WeChat account of the same name was launched in 2014, and, according Tang, received more than 250,000 hits a month in China that year.⁴⁰¹ Free copies of *Chinese News Tasmania* are distributed locally but circulation numbers are unknown.⁴⁰²

A prominent Chinese community figure, Tang transformed herself from a housewife to a well-known member of the local Chinese community, according to a *CNS* article about her.⁴⁰³ She has also been a correspondent for SBS Radio Mandarin, president of the Chinese Cultural Society of Tasmania (塔州文华会) and a board member of the Multicultural Council of Tasmania.⁴⁰⁴

Chinese News Tasmania was among the first member organisations of the Tasmanian branch of the ACPPRC, established in 2017.⁴⁰⁵ Tang Yongbei was appointed treasurer of the group that year.⁴⁰⁶ Her appointment was current as of 11 August 2020, even though she told the *Hobart Mercury* in 2018 that she had quit the position in late 2017.⁴⁰⁷ In 2018, she was appointed an overseas council member of the United Front's All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese.⁴⁰⁸ Tang denied being linked to the CCP.⁴⁰⁹

Since 2011, Tang Yongbei has attended four sessions of *CNS*'s GCLMF,⁴¹⁰ which she described in an essay as 'life changing'.⁴¹¹ Her magazine is listed as a member of the *CNS*-affiliated Global Chinese Media Cooperation Union (世界华文传媒合作联盟), which supports sharing of *CNS* content and reports produced by other members.⁴¹²

Tang told the *Hobart Mercury* in 2018 that she would never write anything critical of the CCP, stating: 'I'm not a critical person, I never criticise'.⁴¹³ *Chinese News Tasmania*'s articles posted to WeChat include local, national and international news, as well as classified ads. It does not seem to cover 'sensitive' topics such as pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong or the Chinese government's human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

Chinese News Tasmania was involved in Tang's 2018 political campaign. In 2018, she used the magazine as well as the Tasmanian Chinese Network website (塔州华人网) to attract votes from Chinese students.⁴¹⁴ The relationship between the website and Tang's magazine is unclear. When Tang was criticised for encouraging Chinese international students to register and vote for her, the website published a response from *Chinese News Tasmania* defending her.⁴¹⁵ In September 2018, the *Mercury* reported that the Tasmanian Chinese Network republished a *Chinese News Tasmania* article urging ethnic Chinese people to vote for Tang.⁴¹⁶ Tang did not win a seat in the 2018 Hobart City Council election.⁴¹⁷

Epoch Times (大纪元时报)

The *Epoch Times* is a Falun Gong-linked Chinese-language news outlet, founded in the year 2000 in the United States. The outlet was initially comprised of a free printed Chinese-language newspaper and website.⁴¹⁸ In 2003, it launched an English website and an English-language print edition. *Epoch Times* is one outlet under what is now named the Epoch Media Group, which also includes New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV, 新唐人电视台).⁴¹⁹

The *Epoch Times* was launched in Australia in 2001 in Sydney where it publishes a daily Chinese-language newspaper.⁴²⁰ A Melbourne branch was established in 2003, a Brisbane branch in 2009, a Perth branch in 2010, and an Adelaide branch in 2012. A Chinese-language newspaper is published weekly in these capital cities, as well as in Tasmania, Canberra, and other areas in Queensland. Each paper publishes local news as well as national and some international news stories. An English version of the *Epoch Times* was first published in Australia in 2004.

Epoch Times has branches in 35 countries and content published in 21 languages.⁴²¹ Publishing content in Chinese, English and other languages appears to be driven by a desire to reach both Chinese diaspora communities, to expand the reach of the outlet to non-Chinese speaking audiences and enhance the international profile of the outlet.⁴²²

The Australian edition of *Epoch Times* is one of the only Chinese-language media outlets whose weekly publication's distribution figures have been audited by the Audited Media Association of Australia.⁴²³ The outlet states that it has a weekly circulation of more than 95,000.

Epoch Times is registered as a not-for-profit organisation in Australia. Australian Epoch Times Ltd, the parent company of the Australian edition, is listed on the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) website which states that over 96% of the organisation's income comes from goods and services (which can include the sale of items, subscription fees, or corporate sponsorship or partnership revenue).⁴²⁴

At least three directors of the Australian *Epoch Times* or its branch offices are known to be directly associated with Falun Gong.⁴²⁵ In an interview with the *ABC*, the editor at the *Epoch Times* in Perth, Wade Zhong, stated he also practices and became involved with the *Epoch Times* in order to ‘counter the anti-Falun Gong narrative being pushed in other Chinese media’.⁴²⁶ Representatives from *Epoch Times* and NTDTV often attend Falun Gong rallies and events.⁴²⁷

Ben Hurley, a former Falun Gong practitioner involved in the establishment of the English version of the *Epoch Times* in Australia, said that they have ‘a few token non-Falun Gong practitioners that they point to every time, but those people are outside the fortress. They’re not a part of the organisation’.⁴²⁸

With regard to content published by the *Epoch Times*, Hurley has also said the editorial code was informed by a conference call with the head office of the *Epoch Times* in New York.⁴²⁹ It outlined that staff ‘should report positively on public figures who had spoken positively of Falun Gong’, and ‘avoid positive coverage of people who had spoken badly of Falun Gong or were seen as too close to the Chinese government’.⁴³⁰

While the outlet’s coverage in Australia encompasses a broad range of mostly local and national news, there is a strong anti-CCP line in reporting; for instance, references to ‘the CCP threat’ and descriptions of Covid-19 as ‘the CCP virus’.⁴³¹ Coverage of Falun Gong is positive, including articles on the success of Falun Gong rallies in exposing the ‘truth’ about the CCP, expressions of support for Falun Dafa from Australian politicians, and calls to the Australian government to stop the persecution of practitioners by the Chinese government.⁴³²

According to reporting in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, CCP authorities have sought to put pressure on outlets such as *Epoch Times* in Australia by threatening their advertisers. John Xiao at *Epoch Times* in Melbourne has said that ‘major Australian companies in the pharmaceutical and tourism sectors’ have withdrawn from advertising agreements out of concern that the content produced by the *Epoch Times* is ‘too political’.⁴³³

The original *Epoch Times* was established by John Tang (唐忠) and a number of other Falun Gong practitioners who fled to the US. The *Epoch Times* states that it continues to ‘speak out for all disadvantaged people in mainland China’ and that it ‘speaks for Falun Gong practitioners who are suffering from the most insidious and cruel persecution in human history’.⁴³⁴ Falun Gong founder Li Hongzi visited the New York office of the *Epoch Times* in 2009 and encouraged the organisation to ‘become a regular enterprise’, ‘cement its position in ordinary society’, and ‘increase the credibility of the outlet’.⁴³⁵ The outlet has come under increased scrutiny in the United States following its rising profile in right-wing, conservative media and its active ad buying on social media platforms promoting conspiracy theories and praising US President Donald Trump.⁴³⁶

Despite the alignment of *Epoch Times* with the objectives of Falun Gong, and its numerous links to the group, the outlet has denied that it is directly linked to Falun Gong.⁴³⁷

Media Today Group (今日传媒集团)

Media Today Group (今日传媒集团) is one of Australia's most influential Chinese-language media companies. The company was officially registered in 2012 by Chinese international students, Zhang Dapeng (Roc Zhang) and Chen Ming (Stan Chen).⁴³⁸ It is best known for its website *Sydney Today* (今日悉尼), which was originally set up as a Weibo account in April 2010 by Zhang, an undergraduate in data mining at UTS at the time.⁴³⁹ The website now claims an audience in the hundreds of thousands.⁴⁴⁰

According to the company's website, it received a first round of investment in 2011 and launched its website *Sydney Today* that year.⁴⁴¹ Between 2014 and 2016, the company expanded rapidly, launching regional outlets, as well as its Australia Today news app.⁴⁴² Both *Sydney Today*'s WeChat account and Australia Today app are registered to a China-based company Nanchang Pandacheer Technology Co. Ltd (南昌市潘达奇科技有限责任公司).⁴⁴³ Several sources describe *Sydney Today* as a subsidiary of China-based company Nanchang Pandacheer Technology Co. Ltd (南昌市潘达奇科技有限责任公司). Stan Chen is listed as a shareholder and executive director of the company.⁴⁴⁴ In 2018, Chinese state media ranked *Sydney Today* 8th on its list of the 30 most influential overseas Chinese-language new media outlets.⁴⁴⁵

Media Today has three directors—founders Roc Zhang and Stan Chen, as well as CEO Yu Tianchen. There are six shareholders apart from the founders: Yu Tianchen and editor-in-chief Ma Xiaolong also have shares in the company. Business records show that a Texas-based company 'Selene Holding Inc' is also a shareholder.⁴⁴⁶

Stan Chen and at least one former shareholder of the company have been members of United Front organisations. Stan Chen was a vice-president of the ACPPRC between 2016 and late 2018.⁴⁴⁷ This organisation is closely linked to the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (中国和平统一促进会), which is run by the UFWD.⁴⁴⁸

Zhang Sanqiang (张三强), a former shareholder and a director of the company between 2012 and 2014, has been a delegate to two China-based organisations run by the UFWD.⁴⁴⁹ Media Today's editor-in-chief Ma Xiaolong (Martin Ma, 马小龙) was previously a Sydney-based correspondent for the *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party.⁴⁵⁰

As the company's reach and audience have grown, so have its ties to the Chinese Government. The company once required applicants for its China-based positions to 'love China' and be loyal to the party, according to *The Australian*.⁴⁵¹ Stan Chen and Chen Limiao (陈丽苗), Media Today's editor-in-chief, have attended the GCLMF and, in 2016, Stan Chen attended a 'high-level training course' for overseas Chinese-language media run by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office.⁴⁵² At a banquet celebrating *Sydney Today*'s 5th birthday that same year, Stan Chen said that '*Sydney Today* will do its best to tell the China Story well, and to tell the story of Chinese in Australia well.'⁴⁵³

Figure 8: (R-L) Stan Chen, Huang Xiangmo and Ernest Wong in 2016 at Sydney Today's 5th anniversary banquet



Source: '今日悉尼5周年感恩宴 中澳政要高层云集到贺' [Sydney Today 5th anniversary celebration banquet: Chinese and Australian politicians and elites attended to congratulate], *Sydney Today*, 17 March 2016, [online](#).

Under the motto 'speaking for 1.2 million Chinese in Australia,' *Sydney Today* and its outlets have published articles and interviews about individuals and organisations linked to the PRC's United Front system, thereby amplifying their voices and raising their profiles.⁴⁵⁴ For example, in 2011, *Melbourne Today*, republished a *CNS* interview of William Chiu, the founding chairman of the ACPPRC, about the organisation's role in Australia.⁴⁵⁵ A 2016 article praised the ACPPRC president Huang Xiangmo for building an influential connections in Australia's political and social upper class.⁴⁵⁶ The property developing Yuhu Group, once chaired by Huang Xiangmo, has been an important advertiser for Media Today Group.⁴⁵⁷ *Sydney Today* also publishes regular columns by the Chinese embassy in Australia.⁴⁵⁸

Media Today Group outlets at times blur the line between reporting and advocacy. In 2014, the company's outlets published an open letter from John Zhang to Chinese community leaders and ethnic Chinese living in Australia, calling on them to join a petition to influence the Australian government foreign policies regarding China and Japan. 'We will have dignity and face only when China is strong,' wrote John Zhang in the letter, 'your participation and support will further increase the Chinese community's power and influence.'⁴⁵⁹ In February 2019, Media Today Group outlets extensively covered the case of Huang Xiangmo's permanent residency being cancelled and exclusively published Huang's statement.⁴⁶⁰ In September 2019, *Sydney Today* published Huang's statement in response to an inquiry by the Independent Commission Against Corruption about improper political donations.⁴⁶¹

Media Today Group's reaction to another Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) investigation changed noticeably in June 2020. After learning Shaoquett Moselmane's staffer John Zhang was under investigation by ASIO, Media Today Group issued a statement saying it removed all of their columns in order to 'minimise their potential negative impact on Australian society,' according to a statement posted on Media Today Group's website. It also declared that 'column writers for Media Today, an Australia-based media organisation, must first safeguard Australia's core values.'⁴⁶²

Media Today Group is an effective mobilising force within Australia’s Chinese diaspora. In early January 2020, through its Australia Today app, the company claimed to have raised thousands of dollars for bushfire recovery efforts.⁴⁶³ In late January, Media Today Group played a role in the establishment of the Wuhan Anti-epidemic Preparatory Committee, alongside United Front groups such as the Australia China Economics Trade and Culture Association and the ACPPRC.⁴⁶⁴ Through this committee, a large quantity of PPE was sourced and exported to China.⁴⁶⁵

Media Today Group has organised or co-organised events attended by Australian politicians and Chinese officials. At a 2015 investment forum, the Australian chief representative of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, a United Front organisation, was invited to give closing remarks on the bright future of Australia–China trade relations.⁴⁶⁶

Melbourne WeLife (墨尔本微生活)

Melbourne WeLife is a WeChat account run by Lion Media Group, a Chinese-language digital and marketing agency. Lion Media Group’s website claims that Melbourne WeLife has more than 210,000 followers.⁴⁶⁷ Aoweibang, an Australian WeChat aggregator website, ranked Melbourne WeLife the sixth most popular Australian WeChat account in 2019, having received more than 17 million article reads and 30,000 likes on its posts that year.⁴⁶⁸

Lion Media Group was founded in 2010 by brothers Leo Lian and Vincent Lian in Melbourne.⁴⁶⁹ Aside from Melbourne WeLife, the group runs WeLife.com.au—which both publish news content—as well as a number of WeChat and Weibo accounts, including New Perth (珀斯微生活), MelFun and 51oz.⁴⁷⁰

Melbourne WeLife mainly publishes lifestyle and local news content aimed at the Chinese community in Melbourne. Articles published are usually compiled using sources from Australian news outlets.⁴⁷¹ While Melbourne WeLife does not appear to toe any overtly party-political line with regard to Australian politics, the outlet drew attention during the 2019 Australian federal election campaign for posting misleading content. An article critical of the Australian Labor Party’s ‘medevac’ policy—which allowed asylum seekers and refugees held in offshore detention to be transferred to Australia for medical care—was accompanied by a photo of then Labor leader, Bill Shorten, with a made-up quote saying ‘green cards for all refugees’.⁴⁷²

Lion Media Group claims to have an office in Beijing and was connected to Chinese company n+media (北京恩家壹传媒科技有限公司). Its Melbourne WeLife account is still registered to n+media, but the Beijing-based company was deregistered in 2019 and was reportedly ‘responsible for building new media communication channels based on the Australian head office’.⁴⁷³ A Chinese business information website listed several recruitment ads for roles at the company, including a new media English-to-Chinese translation, a new media operations editor, and a WeChat operation editor.⁴⁷⁴ This could indicate that n+media was involved in operating and preparing content for the Melbourne WeLife and other Lion Media Group accounts. However, no link between the owners of n+media and Lion Media Group could be identified.

Managing Director Leo Lian holds a 54% share in Lion Media Group. Melbourne-based company Edu Pathways Group holds a 36% share.⁴⁷⁵ EPS Edu Pathways Group (博瑞教育移民集团) consists of EPS Education Consulting, EPS Migration and EPS Media, and has offices in Melbourne and Nanjing.

The EPS website states that Lion Media Group is ‘a brand that belongs to the EPS group’ and lists Melbourne WeLife as its WeChat account.⁴⁷⁶

Lion Media Group also has commercial dealings with several Chinese companies. According to the EPS website, Lion Media Group is the official digital media partner of AirMedia (航美传媒), ‘the largest Chinese air travel digital media group’.⁴⁷⁷ The company claims to have run marketing campaigns for prominent Chinese companies such as Huawei, Alibaba, DiDi Chuxing, and Union Pay.⁴⁷⁸

Nan Hai Culture and Media Group (澳大利亚南海文化传媒集团)

See case study on page 22.

New Impressions Media (新印象传媒)

New Impressions Media is a Chinese-language media and marketing agency founded in 2011 by Elvis Lin.⁴⁷⁹ It is headquartered in Sydney, Australia. It offers WeChat and Weibo account operation and management services, content creation services, event planning, and leverages its local media resources and relationships with media partners, to help clients ‘reach specific Chinese communities across Australia’.⁴⁸⁰

The company operates the Sydney Impression (悉尼印象) WeChat and Weibo accounts. Sydney Impression began operating in 2014 and publishes local and lifestyle news targeted at the Chinese community in Sydney, appearing to focus on recent Chinese migrants and younger Chinese people in Australia. The Sydney Impression WeChat account, along with New Impressions Media’s other account, Melbourne Youth Club (墨尔本青年俱乐部), reportedly has more than 500,000 followers.⁴⁸¹ New Impressions Media also has a website and a news app called Australian Impression (澳洲印象) with a claimed 40,000+ active daily users.⁴⁸²

New Impressions Media appears to be closely linked to a company in China called Shenzhen Longton Network Technology Co. Ltd (深圳朗盾网络科技有限公司).⁴⁸³ The majority shareholder in New Impressions Media, Zheng Yuancong (郑源聪), is an executive at this firm.⁴⁸⁴ Zheng Yuancong holds a 60% share in the company, a Cong Benliang holds a 20% share, and New Impressions Media CEO and founder Lin Feng owns the remaining 20% share.⁴⁸⁵

In 2018, a number of Chinese language media outlets in Sydney, including the New Impressions CEO Lin Feng, were invited by the Sydney branch of Xinhua News Agency to meet with the head of the Propaganda Department of the Zhuhai Municipal Committee of the CCP, Long Guangyan (龙广艳).⁴⁸⁶

Business information records list the address of Zheng Yuancong and Cong Benliang as a law firm in Sydney called Longton Legal, which is located in the same building as New Impressions Media. Longton Legal—and its Shanghai branch, Shanghai Longton Business Consulting Co. Ltd (上海朗盾商务咨询有限公司)⁴⁸⁷—appears to fall within the same group under Shenzhen Longton Network Technology Co., as indicated by the high degree of overlap between the firms and New Impressions Media.⁴⁸⁸

Shenzhen Longton’s website states that it owns New Impressions Media, but it is not the direct owner.⁴⁸⁹ Still, the close links between New Impressions Media and Shenzhen Longton plus affiliates, could indicate that these companies are involved in operating and preparing content for New Impressions Media.

The Sydney Impression WeChat account has previously drawn the attention of Australia's English-language media due to the notably nationalist tone of an article published on the platform. Following a report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* covering clashes between pro-Beijing and pro-Hong Kong democracy protestors in Sydney in 2019, Sydney Impression published an article attacking one of the authors of the article for 'slandering China'.⁴⁹⁰ The article also criticised Western media for being 'biased against China'.⁴⁹¹

Sydney Impressions articles draw on content from both Australian and Chinese media, including a number of Chinese state media outlets, such as *People's Daily*, Xinhua, and CCTV.⁴⁹² The Australian Impression website also republishes articles from Chinese state media. An old version of the New Impressions Media website also refers to a 'cooperation section' between People's Daily Online and Australian Impression.⁴⁹³ This section appears on the Australia page of the People's Daily website where articles provided by New Impressions are posted.⁴⁹⁴

The current version of the New Impressions Media website no longer includes this information, and the Chinese version of the site no longer exists. The Sydney Impression website is also currently inaccessible.

Ostar (澳星国际传媒集团) and Global CAMG (环球凯歌国际传媒集团)

Ostar Media Group (澳星国际传媒集团) and Global CAMG Media Group (环球凯歌国际传媒集团) are two Australian companies which control a variety of Chinese-language newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and produce content for television. Founder Tommy Jiang (姜兆庆) is a member of several organisation run by the UFWD and has been active in Australian politics.

Jiang and Global CAMG Media Group were critical in helping bring PRC state-owned *China Radio International (CRI)* to Australia as part of Beijing's 'going out' initiative to increase its soft power globally.⁴⁹⁵ *CRI* partnering with local Chinese expatriate businessmen is a common method of establishing the network in foreign media markets.⁴⁹⁶ In February 2020, the US Department of State designated *CRI* as a 'Chinese government functionary', making it subject to similar rules as diplomats stationed in the United States.⁴⁹⁷

Formerly known as *Radio Peking*, *CRI* is a Chinese state-owned international radio broadcaster based in Beijing. *CRI* broadcasts in 44 languages with a daily total of 2,700-plus programming hours. According to its website, *CRI* has nearly 70 overseas affiliate radio stations and 18 global internet radio services, and receives 3 million pieces of audience feedback every year.⁴⁹⁸ According to *Reuters*, *CRI* tries to appeal to three distinct audiences: first-generation Chinese immigrants with limited English skills; second-generation Chinese curious about their ancestral homeland; and non-Chinese listeners whom Beijing hopes to influence.⁴⁹⁹

In a 2011 interview with *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Jiang revealed that he shares broadcast time on his radio channels with *CRI* and they help to train his staff.⁵⁰⁰ *CRI* took over some of the shortwave radio frequencies once used by the *ABC* in the Pacific region, following the broadcaster's decision to end shortwave services in January 2017.⁵⁰¹ *CRI* works directly with Chinese officials to vet guests invited to appear on its radio programs in order to assess whether they are acceptable to Beijing. Australians not approved by the consulate-general are denied access to the Australian networks' airwaves.⁵⁰²

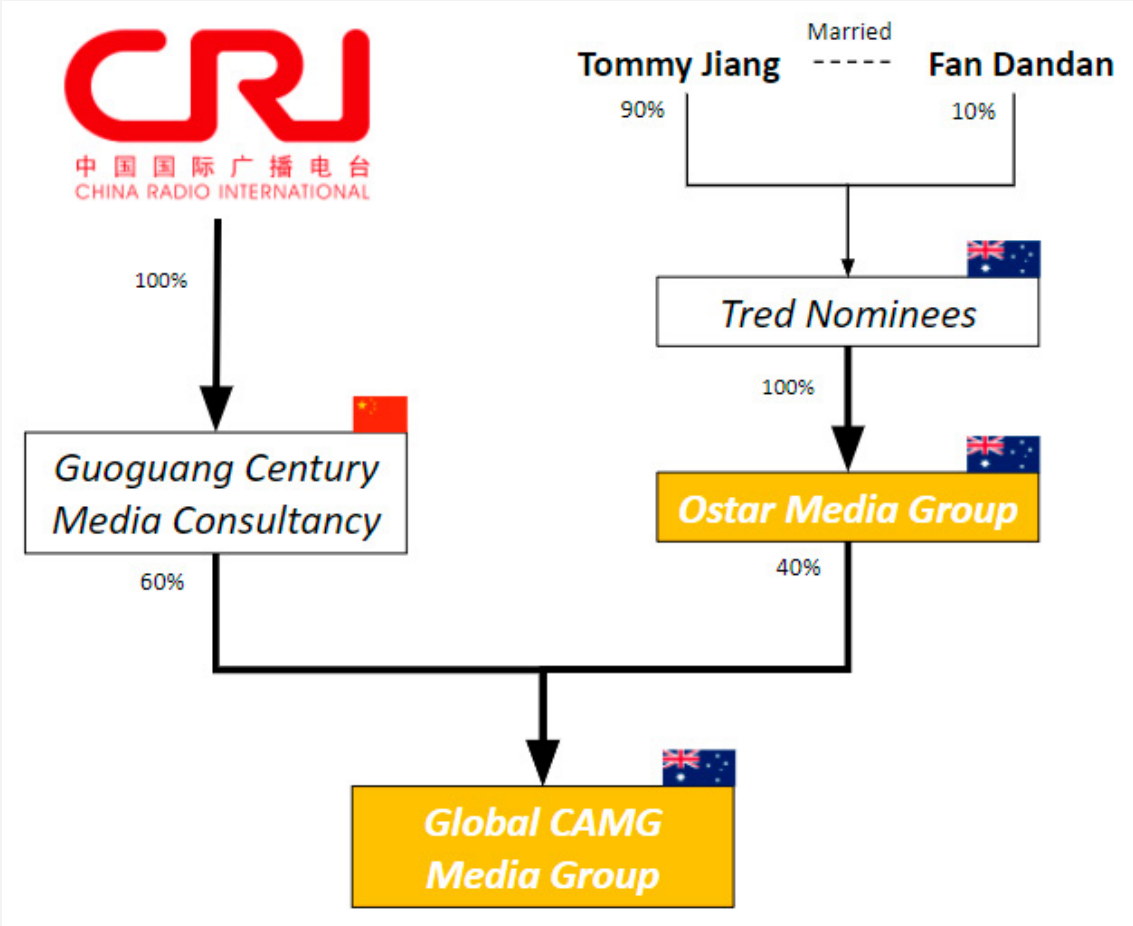
According to *The Australian*, CRI Australian Bureau Chief Li Dayong was among four Chinese journalists who had their properties raided by ASIO on 26 June 2020.⁵⁰³

Tommy Jiang has financial links to CRI through his Australian media companies (Figure 9). Global CAMG Media provides Chinese-language content to Oceania, Asia and ‘countries along the Belt and Road’ through radio, television, print media, the internet, while also offering public relations consulting, brand marketing and other services.⁵⁰⁴ Global CAMG Media Group is owned by two entities: the Chinese company Guoguang Century Media Consultancy (60%), and the Australian company Ostar Media Group (40%).⁵⁰⁵

- Guoguang Century Media Consultancy Co. Ltd (国广世纪传媒咨询(北京)有限公司) is a Beijing-based company and a wholly owned subsidiary of China Radio International.⁵⁰⁶ Because of this, Global CAMG Media registered its relationship with CRI, which formally lasted from July 2013 to December 2018 but ceased in June 2020, on the Australian Government’s Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme register.⁵⁰⁷
- Ostar Media Group Pty Ltd is an Australian media company also founded and owned by Tommy Jiang through Tred Nominees Pty Ltd.

Global CAMG Media Group was previously owned by AIMG Holdings Pty Ltd (formerly ‘Austar International Media Group Pty Ltd’). AIMG Holdings is itself owned by another Australian company, Tred Nominees Pty Ltd with two shareholders, Tommy Jiang (90%) and his wife Fan Dandan (范丹丹) (10%).⁵⁰⁸ Guoguang Century Media Consultancy was previously a shareholder of AIMG Holdings.

Figure 9: Global CAMG Media Group’s ownership structure



Jiang has been the director of AIMG Holdings since 2008; however, previous directors include:⁵⁰⁹

- Pan Bangzhao aka ‘Ben Pan’ (潘邦焯 or sometimes 潘邦照), the president of the Western Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China,⁵¹⁰ and an executive vice-president for its parent body, the ACPPRC.⁵¹¹ He is also an ‘honorary president’⁵¹² and former president of the Western Australia Fujian Association (西澳福建同乡会).⁵¹³
- Hong Quanlong (洪泉龙), a WA businessman, an ‘honorary president’ of the Western Australian Business Association,⁵¹⁴ and the chairman of the Association for the Promotion of Australia-China Trade (澳中贸易促进会).⁵¹⁵ Hong was also previously executive vice-president of the Western Australian Fujian Association under Pan Bangzhao.⁵¹⁶
- Ma Xibo (马西波), a prominent iron and steel magnate in China.⁵¹⁷

Global CAMG has been accused of presenting itself as a genuine Australian media outlet despite its close ties to the Chinese Government. In 2012 at the National People’s Congress press conference for foreign media, government officials repeatedly invited ‘assiduously softball’ questions from a young Australian woman, Andrea Yu,⁵¹⁸ who became ‘the face of the foreign correspondent who says favorable things about China’.⁵¹⁹ Andrea Yu was in fact accredited to Jiang’s Global CAMG Media Group and ‘not an independent foreign correspondent’ according to ABC China correspondent Stephen McDonnell.⁵²⁰ Two years later another Global CAMG Media employee did the same at an official press conference.⁵²¹

Ostar Media Group Pty Ltd was established in 1994 by Tommy Jiang, and claims to be located in more than 19 countries and to produce ‘more than 100 hours of daily programming, with a broadcast coverage of about 100 million people and an effective audience of about 30 million’.⁵²² Ostar Media owns Chinese language radio networks, weekly newspapers, lifestyle magazines, produces television, translation and post-production services, and mobile apps.⁵²³ Many of these media outlets have their own associated WeChat account. The current director of Ostar Media is Liu Fei who was appointed to that role in October 2019—Liu is also a director at Global CAMG Media Group.⁵²⁴ Previous directors of Ostar Media have included Jiang Han, Rebecca Xue Jiang, Lu Yusi, and Tommy Jiang himself.⁵²⁵ The company has one radiocommunications licence,⁵²⁶ while Tommy Jiang holds 10 radiocommunications licences in his own name, according to the Australian Government’s Register of Radiocommunications Licences.⁵²⁷

The company claims to cover metropolitan areas across New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.⁵²⁸ The company’s only shareholder is Tred Nominees Pty Ltd, but was previously owned by Tommy Jiang personally.⁵²⁹ Ostar Media Group’s Chinese-language radio stations cover many Australian cities, but many may no longer be broadcasting or broadcast on parts of the spectrum that many radios would be unable to pick up:⁵³⁰

- *3CW Australian Chinese Radio Station* in Victoria (墨尔本3CW澳大利亚中文广播电台), which has two channels: AM1341 and AM1620.⁵³¹
- *Muse Radio* (迷尚文台广播), based in Sydney on FM77.43.⁵³²
- *C Radio FM88* (堪城之声) and Canberra Chinese Radio Station AM1620 (堪培拉中文广播电台) in the Australian Capital Territory.
- *Perth Chinese Radio FM104.9* (西澳大利亚广播电台) and Perth Chinese Radio FM90.5 (西澳大利亚广播电台) in Western Australia.

- *Adelaide Chinese Radio AM1701* (阿德莱德中文广播电台) in South Australia.
- *Hobart Chinese Radio AM1674* (霍巴特中文广播电台) in Tasmania.
- *Brisbane Chinese Radio AM1629* (布里斯班中文广播电台) in Queensland.
- *Darwin Chinese Radio AM1701* (达尔文中文广播电台) in the Northern Territory.

Ostar Media Group has published at least two Chinese-language newspapers in Australia:

- *Oriental Post* (东方邮报) in Western Australia, founded in 2001, is a weekly newspaper which claims to ‘spread the positive energy of Chinese culture and patriotism’.⁵³³
- *Oriental City News* (东方都市报) in Canberra which has claimed a weekly distribution of ‘8,000 to 10,000’ copies.⁵³⁴ However, *Oriental City News* may no longer be active.

The company also publishes a magazine called *BQ Weekly*⁵³⁵ in a joint venture with Beijing Youth Daily Group, an organisation directly under the control of the Communist Youth League of China. *BQ Weekly* is the in-flight magazine of China Southern Airlines.⁵³⁶ Ostar Media Group with Starlight Culture Entertainment Group Ltd co-founded ‘Ostar International Entertainment’ which brands itself as a global entertainment company involved in concerts, sports, special events and performance, movie and TV drama production and investment.⁵³⁷

In recent years, Tommy Jiang’s business activities and political connections have received greater scrutiny from the Australian media as he has been linked to Australian politicians and political advisers.⁵³⁸ Jiang is president of the Victoria Chinese Golf Association and honorary chairman of the Australian International Golf Federation.⁵³⁹ A senior adviser to Victorian Premier Daniel Andrew was presented with membership to one of Jiang’s golfing associations by Wang Zhenhai (王振海),⁵⁴⁰ a businessman with ties to a suspected Chinese military intelligence operative.⁵⁴¹ Jiang, along with casino magnate and alleged fugitive Jack Lam,⁵⁴² helped develop ‘Twin Creeks’, a golf and country club in Luddenham NSW.⁵⁴³ Jiang was featured heavily in a 2019 ABC *Four Corners* episode ‘Interference’ which described his rise in Australia as having been directly ‘propelled by the Chinese government’.⁵⁴⁴

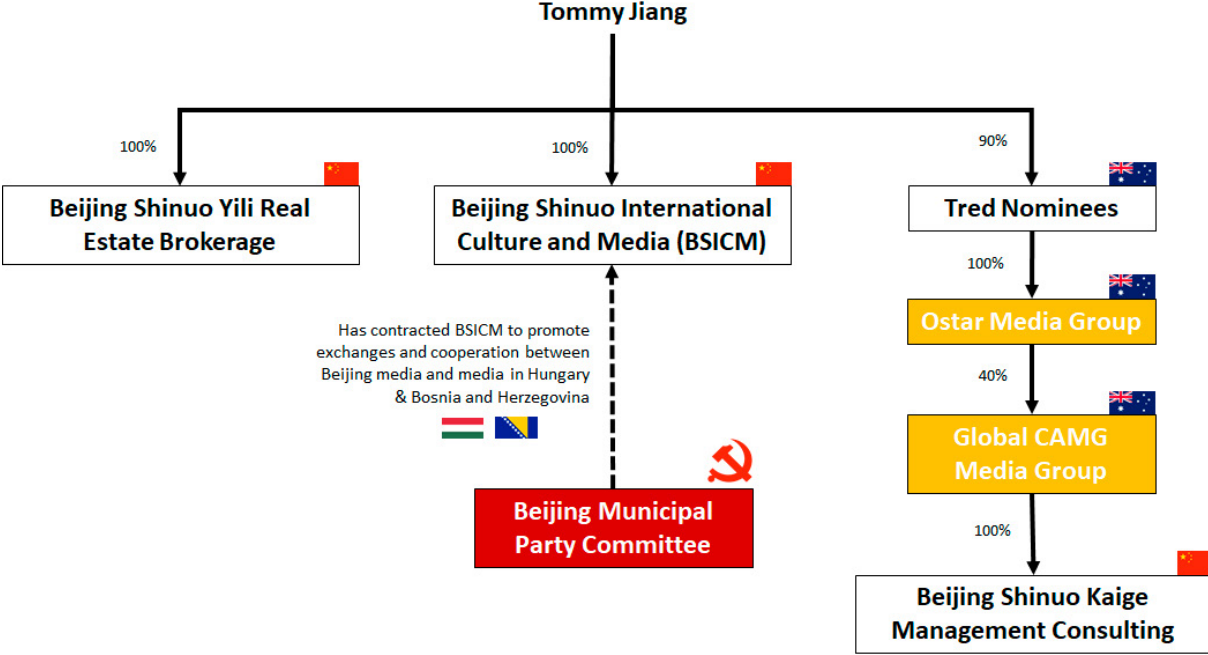
Born in Liaoning, Tommy Jiang is a former soccer player who immigrated to Melbourne in the 1980s. Before moving to Australia he was an organiser at the departmental branch of the Communist Youth League of China at Beijing Institute of Sport (now known as Beijing Sport University).⁵⁴⁵ Since the late 1990s, he has been a major figure in Chinese-language radio in Australia. In 1999, his company AC Media Group bought 3CW in Geelong, converting it into a Chinese-language radio station.⁵⁴⁶ Jiang also has historic business ties to Xiang Xiang (项翔) the founder and president of Australia’s Huaxia Media Group (澳大利亚华夏传媒集团).⁵⁴⁷ Jiang received a ‘Multicultural Award for Excellence’ from the Victoria State Government in 2007.⁵⁴⁸

Tommy Jiang has several links to the UFWD. In 2019, he was listed as a member of the China Overseas Friendship Association (中华海外联谊会), an organisation run by the UFWD.⁵⁴⁹ In 2011, he attended the opening meeting of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, the peak united front forum.⁵⁵⁰ Jiang is listed as a member of the honorary board of advisers at the Western Australian chapter of the ACPPRC in 2011,⁵⁵¹ and is also the current president of the ‘Northeast China Association of Australia’ (澳洲中国东北同乡会).⁵⁵² He was also listed as a member of the UFWD’s China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture (中国西藏文化保护与发展协会) in 2019.⁵⁵³

Tommy Jiang also has business interests in China (Figure 10). He is the sole director and owner of Beijing Shinuo International Culture and Media Company Ltd (北京世诺国际文化传媒有限公司).⁵⁵⁴ According to a job advertisement from 2007, the company seeks to ‘become a link between China and Australia for economic and cultural exchange’.⁵⁵⁵ It has been contracted by the Beijing Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Department to promote exchanges and cooperation between Beijing media and mainstream media in Hungary⁵⁵⁶ and Bosnia and Herzegovina⁵⁵⁷ in the lead up to the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.

Tommy Jiang controls Beijing Shinuo Kaige Management Consulting Company Ltd (北京世诺凯歌管理咨询有限公司) as a subsidiary of Global CAMG Media Group,⁵⁵⁸ and owns a real estate firm Beijing Shinuo Yili Real Estate Brokerage (北京世诺怡利房地产经纪有限公司).⁵⁵⁹ This latter company owns an 8% stake in Jilin Province Kaiaosite Cross-border Supply Chain Company Lt (吉林省凯澳斯特跨境供应链有限公司).⁵⁶⁰ This company’s general manager is Chen Yafang (陈雅芳), the Vice-Chairman of the Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations and Vice-Chairman of the ‘Northeast China Association of Australia’ (澳洲中国东北同乡会).⁵⁶¹

Figure 10: Tommy Jiang’s businesses in China



SBS Cantonese (SBS广东话)

The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) is a public broadcaster that serves Australia’s multicultural communities in more than 60 languages other than English.⁵⁶²

The SBS Cantonese radio program currently broadcasts locally produced content seven days a week for two hours in the morning.⁵⁶³ Its target audience is Australia’s Cantonese-speaking population of more than 280,000 people.⁵⁶⁴ The content is also accessible via the SBS website, podcasts, and mobile apps. SBS Cantonese has its own Facebook and Instagram accounts but its Facebook account is the more active platform.⁵⁶⁵

The SBS Viceland television channel broadcasts a daily 30-minute Cantonese ‘Hong Kong News’ segment from TVB, Hong Kong’s largest free-to-air broadcaster.⁵⁶⁶ TVB is controlled by Li Ruigang (黎瑞刚), a PRC media tycoon and former deputy secretary-general of the Shanghai Party Committee.⁵⁶⁷ In 2019, TVB was criticised by Hong Kong demonstrators for biased pro-Beijing reporting.⁵⁶⁸

SBS Cantonese team members listed on the website are from Hong Kong and have been working for SBS for many years. In addition, the team works with ‘correspondents’ based overseas and in various Australian cities.⁵⁶⁹

At least two of these correspondents have links to the CCP’s united front system.⁵⁷⁰

- Sam Wong (黄树樑), a former senior pharmacist working for the Australian Department of Health, regularly appears on SBS Cantonese as its Canberra correspondent and as a commentator.⁵⁷¹ He has been a member of united front groups, including the UFWD’s All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC).⁵⁷² As a correspondent for SBS Cantonese, Wong told SBS listeners that ACFROC’s key functions include ‘looking after’ returned overseas Chinese and their relatives, as well as ‘serving and helping’ overseas Chinese.⁵⁷³
- Sam Wong has also been a member of the Guangdong Overseas Exchange Association, which is the same united front organisation with which Liberal MP Gladys Liu was reportedly associated.⁵⁷⁴ In September 2019, Wong appeared on the SBS Cantonese program to discuss the controversies surrounding Gladys Liu’s united front links. In the program, Wong questioned whether media scrutiny would discourage future political participation of ethnic Chinese.⁵⁷⁵
- Dorisy Zhong (钟敏仪) regularly appears on SBS Cantonese as its freelance Guangzhou correspondent.⁵⁷⁶ She is deputy editor-in-chief of *Huaxia Magazine* (华夏杂志) which is supervised and published by the Guangdong Province Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, a united front body.⁵⁷⁷

SBS Mandarin (SBS中文普通话)

SBS also offers content in Mandarin through radio, television, the SBS website, and social media.⁵⁷⁸ Since 2013, SBS Mandarin radio has been broadcasting locally produced content seven days a week for two hours in the morning.⁵⁷⁹ The SBS Viceland television channel broadcasts a daily 30-minute Mandarin ‘China News’ segment from CCTV, the CCP-controlled broadcaster.⁵⁸⁰ In 2010, SBS launched a locally produced Mandarin news program for television, but it was cancelled in 2012 due to low viewership.⁵⁸¹

SBS Mandarin’s official WeChat account contains far less content than its website. As an international account (as opposed to one registered through the Chinese version of the app), it can only post four times a month and has had its posts censored by WeChat.⁵⁸² Headline stories in September 2020 about two Australian journalists fleeing China and Australia-based Chinese state media journalists being questioned by ASIO were not posted on SBS Mandarin’s WeChat account.⁵⁸³ An SBS spokesperson told the ABC in 2019 that ‘restrictions of the platform’ did not influence their editorial approach and that they focused on posting ‘less time-sensitive’ news stories that were ‘relevant to audiences settling into life in Australia.’⁵⁸⁴

Some of SBS Mandarin's past staff, commentators and correspondents have had connections to the CCP, Chinese Government or united front organisations. For example, SBS Mandarin executive producer Zhou Li's (周丽) husband Shi Shuangyuan (史双元) was an unpaid cultural commentator on SBS Mandarin radio while being head of the Chinese Government-backed Confucius Institute in the NSW Department of Education.⁵⁸⁵ After the decision to discontinue the Confucius Institute was announced in August 2019, SBS Mandarin reported the news and interviewed Chinese language teaching volunteers from China and a spokesperson from the Chinese Language Teachers Association NSW. Interviewees in both programs criticised the NSW Department of Education's review process and decision.⁵⁸⁶ SBS said in a statement that 'Zhou Li has not been involved in any editorial decisions relating to the occasional appearances of Mr Shi on the Mandarin program. All relevant protocols and procedures, in line with SBS's Editorial Guidelines, have been followed. Mr Shi's appearances were not related to his role with the NSW government.'

Both May Hu (胡玫), former head of group for SBS Mandarin, and former casual SBS producer Li Weiguo (Martin Li, 李卫国) attended CNS's GCLMF multiple times.⁵⁸⁷ However, no SBS staff have been listed as attendees since 2013. May Hu has been a senior member of two Australia-based United Front-linked organisations.⁵⁸⁸ In 2014, May Hu, as a casual producer for SBS Mandarin, interviewed Anson Hong who chairs the organisations she is associated with. In the same year, Hu attended a summit organised by the National Liaison Council of Chinese Australians as executive president of the organisation and acted as an MC.⁵⁸⁹

Since 2014, Tang Yongbei, publisher and editor of *Chinese News Tasmania*, has appeared on SBS Mandarin radio programs from time to time as a 'correspondent'.⁵⁹⁰ In 2017, Tang was appointed to a senior position in the Tasmanian branch of the ACPPRC. A few months later, Tang filed stories from Beijing as a correspondent covering the Chinese government's 'Two Sessions', the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress and the National People's Congress.⁵⁹¹

John Zhang (张智森), former president of the Australian Shanghainese Association, and a member of the ACPPRC and the UFWD's Shanghai Overseas Friendship Association, has been a regular commentator on SBS Mandarin.⁵⁹² In 2016, Zhang appeared on SBS Mandarin to comment on the role of ethnic Chinese voters in the 2016 Federal election and openly called on 'fellow ethnic Chinese' to ensure candidates 'who are close to us' get elected. Zhang's residence was raided by Australian authorities in June 2020 as part of an ongoing investigation into foreign political interference.

At least five of SBS Mandarin's eight team members have backgrounds working for Chinese state-owned media.⁵⁹³ While this is not necessarily concerning, it should highlight the need to maintain high editorial standards and ensure reporting is balanced.

Southeast Net Australia (东南网澳大利亚站)

Established in April 2016, *Southeast Net Australia* (东南网澳大利亚站, *SEN Australia*) is the Australian online wing of a state-owned media outlet from China's Fujian Province.⁵⁹⁴ *SEN Australia*'s parent website, *Southeast Net (SEN)*, is supervised by the Fujian Provincial CCP Committee Propaganda Department and managed by the Fujian Daily Newspaper Group.⁵⁹⁵ *SEN Australia* also has a WeChat account titled 'Southeast Spacetime' (东南时空).⁵⁹⁶

SEN Australia is *SEN*'s second website for overseas audiences after *Southeast Net USA*. These websites target communities around the world that trace their heritage to Fujian Province, which include most of the world's Hokkien-speaking population.⁵⁹⁷

SEN Australia publishes news on China and international affairs, feature articles, and information about Chinese culture and tourism. Much of its content, including news about Australia, is sourced from PRC state-owned media.⁵⁹⁸ It also produces Australian content including interviews with Australian politicians and feature articles about prominent ethnic Chinese Australians.⁵⁹⁹ Some of the featured individuals have close connections to the united front system.⁶⁰⁰

The *SEN Australia* website is located on the *fjsen.com* domain, which is under the broader *SEN* network, controlled by the state-owned Fujian Daily Newspaper Group and supervised by the Fujian Provincial CCP Committee Propaganda Department.⁶⁰¹ Depending on the specific topic, the *SEN Australia* website seamlessly takes viewers to other websites within *SEN*. For example, clicking on the topic 'Ethnic Chinese worldwide fighting the pandemic together' (全球华人共战'疫') takes viewers to *SEN USA*. Clicking on the topic 'Love the country and safeguard Hong Kong' (爱国护港) takes viewers to the *SEN HK* website, which features articles about pro-Beijing community groups denouncing Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters.⁶⁰²

SEN Australia's WeChat account is registered to Fujian Min'ao Southeast Network Technology Co. Ltd (福建闽澳东南网络科技有限公司). Business records in China show the now-deregistered company was established on 7 April 2016, the day before the *SEN Australia* website was launched.⁶⁰³ The sole owner of the company was Liu Chang (刘畅), who shares the same name as a 10% owner and secretary of Australia Southeast Net Media Pty Ltd.⁶⁰⁴ The WeChat account only offers brief summaries of international and Australian news.⁶⁰⁵

SEN Australia's manager, Golden Chen (Chen Weijie, 陈炜杰), owns 80% of Australia Southeast Net Media Pty Ltd.⁶⁰⁶

The work of *SEN Australia* has been praised by the Chinese Embassy in Australia. In May 2016, a month after launching *SEN Australia*, Golden Chen was commended by Huang Rengang (黄任刚), the Minister Counsellor for Economic and Commercial Affairs of the Chinese Embassy, for running the website and promoting trade between Australia and China. According to *SEN Australia*, Chen stated that *SEN Australia* will 'closely follow the steps of the Chinese embassy and consulate'.⁶⁰⁷

SEN Australia also has a strong relationship with leaders of the Fujian Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (Fujian OCAO). In June 2016, Golden Chen and Liu Chang (刘畅), the deputy manager of Southeast Net Australia, visited the Fujian OCAO and were praised by its director of the propaganda department. The deputy director of the Fujian OCAO reportedly emphasised that *SEN Australia* should serve the Chinese community in Australia, tell China's story well, and promote the Belt and Road Initiative.⁶⁰⁸

Golden Chen has reportedly been a member of three united front organisations in China—the Fujian Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, the Fujian Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs and the Fujian Overseas Exchange Association.⁶⁰⁹ He also has held senior positions in three Australia-based community groups: the Australian Fuzhou Community Alliance, the Australia Minshang Business Association and the Australian Dongbei Chinese Association.⁶¹⁰

Aside from media work, *SEN Australia* has been involved in organising community events. In 2018, it was a co-organiser of the 4th Fujian Entrepreneurs Forum (第四届闽商大讲坛), which was attended by consular officials, Australian politicians, prominent business people, and members of United Front organisations.⁶¹¹ The main organiser of the event was the Australian Fujian Entrepreneurs Association (福建总商会), one of *SEN Australia*'s partner organisations. During the forum, the association's vice president, Wu Qichang (吴启昌, Ramon Wu), was appointed deputy manager of *SEN Australia*.⁶¹²

In addition to operating the *SEN Australia* website, Golden Chen and the website editor-in-chief, Tang Weimin (汤唯敏), engage in business and cultural activities through a number of intertwined entities. Some of these activities involve *SEN Australia*. In 2018, the Fujian Culture Overseas Station (福建文化海外驿站) was unveiled in Sydney. According to *Xinhua*, the station is jointly founded by the Fujian Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism and the Australia Institute of Chinese Traditional Culture (澳大利亚中华传统文化学院, AICTC). Golden Chen reportedly is honorary director of the institute and its founder is Tang Weimin.⁶¹³ An article on the *SEN Argentina* website revealed that the Fujian Culture Overseas Stations in various countries, including the one in Sydney, are authorised by the Fujian Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, and managed by the overseas department of *SEN*.⁶¹⁴

Sydney Post (悉尼邮报)

Sydney Post is an online news outlet established in 2018. The outlet claims to take 'justice, pluralism and civil rights' as its mission.⁶¹⁵ When it began operating, it published a print newspaper, but has since shifted online and maintains a website and WeChat account.⁶¹⁶ No information could be found on the outlet's ownership or business registration.

It was founded by Xiao Shi Yi Lang (萧十一狼), the outlet's pseudonymous editor-in-chief. He began his career as a writer in 2013, first working as a columnist for the Sydney-based publication *New Market Newspaper* (新市场报).⁶¹⁷ In 2018, he founded Sydney Post and, in 2019, he established an online news commentary site *Chilli Comment* (天下火辣讨论区).⁶¹⁸

According to an interview with Xiao, Sydney Post focuses on local and international news, and has been popular with overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese students in Australia with readers in NSW, Victoria, and Queensland.⁶¹⁹

However, some of the articles published by Sydney Post have drawn attention for their nationalist tone. For instance, in August 2019, a permit apparently from the City of Melbourne authorising a rally supporting the 'One China' principle was circulated by several WeChat accounts. The permit was revealed to be fake, causing the rally to be indefinitely postponed. In response to the incident, Xiao Shi Yi Lang wrote that the permit was forged by Hong Kong pro-democracy protestors and was intended as a trap to lure more people to their protests which occurred on the same day.⁶²⁰

Xiao Shi Yi Lang has also been critical of the Australian media and its reporting on China, stating that it lacks neutrality and is biased in favour of the United States. He has also said that the Australian media 'misinterpreted the relationship between coronavirus and China, which in turn instigated a trend of racial discrimination in Australian society'.⁶²¹

Articles from the Sydney Post often draw from Western media outlets in their reporting, but also utilise or republish articles from Chinese state media sources, and Hong Kong and Taiwanese outlets with an editorial line favourable towards the Chinese government.⁶²²

TasChinese Media (塔州中文网)

Founded in 2007, TasChinese Media claims to be the oldest and the most influential Tasmania-focused Chinese language website in the local Chinese community, with 120,000 page views per month and average visits of 20,000 per month.⁶²³ The website is accompanied by a WeChat account, Nihao Tasmania (你好塔州), and a news app.⁶²⁴ The website's founder and director is Ding Songmao 丁松茂 (known as Mao Ding), a University of Tasmania graduate and motel operator.⁶²⁵

Content on the TasChinese Media website mainly includes local news, travel information, and classified advertisements. There is a dedicated section for Chinese-language content, including campus news supplied by the University of Tasmania.⁶²⁶ The platform does not appear to publish politically sensitive content, even if it is relevant to the Chinese community in Tasmania. For example, between 2017 and 2019, English-language media outlets, such as the ABC and *The Australian*, published articles about a prominent figure in Tasmania's Chinese community Wang Xinde (王信得 also known as Master Wang) who had ties to the ACPPRC—Wang was president of its Tasmanian branch.⁶²⁷ Relevant news about Wang cannot be found on the TasChinese Media website. Instead, the website reported a banquet in 2019 to welcome the Chinese Consul General in Melbourne, which was attended by Wang.⁶²⁸

The website was used as a campaign platform when Ding ran for the Hobart city council election in 2014. An article published on the TasChinese Media website called upon non-citizen Chinese friends to vote for Ding. It states that Ding's candidacy was 'selected' by a number of community groups, including the Tasmania Chinese Art and Communication Society (塔州中华艺术交流协会, TCACS), and the Tasmania Chinese Business Association (塔州中华商会).⁶²⁹ Some senior members of these groups are also key members of the Tasmanian branch of the ACPPRC.⁶³⁰

VAC International Media Group (澳华国际传媒集团)

VAC International Media Group (澳华国际传媒集团) was established in 2008 and is headquartered in Brisbane.⁶³¹ It publishes the *Australian Chinese Times* (澳华时报), first issued in 2001, which predates the establishment of VAC International Media Group.⁶³² This weekly newspaper has a claimed circulation of 10,000 readers distributed to more than 50 locations in the Brisbane and Gold Coast areas in Queensland.⁶³³ VAC International Media Group also includes an events management company, and previously included television, and English and Chinese radio; however, these no longer appear to be in operation.

VAC International Media Group has extensive links to Chinese state media. On the company's website, it states the group enjoys cooperative relationships with *Xinhua News Agency*, *CNS*, and several other China-based television and broadcast media organisations in the areas of program exchange.⁶³⁴ In 2010, the chairperson of VAC Radio signed an agreement with the Sydney branch of *Xinhua News Agency* to become *Xinhua's* special correspondent in Queensland.⁶³⁵

It is a member of the 'global Chinese TV broadcasting cooperation network' and the 'global Chinese broadcasting cooperation network'.⁶³⁶ It was the Australian partner of *China Radio International (CRI)* and a cooperative partner of *CCTV*.⁶³⁷ The publisher of *Australian Chinese Times*, Su Zhongchao (苏中朝), worked for the state-run newspaper *Sichuan Daily* for over ten years.⁶³⁸

The group also has numerous links with United Front organisations. VAC International Media Group is a member of the ‘Global Chinese Media Cooperation Union’ (世界华文传媒合作联盟) established by CNS. Representatives from *Australian Chinese Times* attended the GCLMF six times from 2005 to 2017.⁶³⁹

These representatives include the chairperson of VAC International Media Group, Liu Xiuhua (刘秀华) also known as Tina Liu.⁶⁴⁰ She is a 50% shareholder in the company, while Liu Zheng (刘政) also known as Steven Liu, the CEO and General Manager of VAC International Media Group, holds the remaining 50% share.⁶⁴¹

Originally from Shandong Province, Tina Liu immigrated to Brisbane in 2001 and went on to found VAC International Media Group and acquire *Australian Chinese Times*.⁶⁴² She has said that the overseas Chinese community must ‘continue to work hard to safeguard the rights and interests of overseas Chinese, promote Chinese culture, and actively strive for the right to speak in local society’.⁶⁴³

She currently serves as an executive vice-president of the ACPPRC, is president of the ACPPRC’s Queensland branch, a member of the Chinese Overseas Friendship Association (中华海外联谊会), and vice-president of the Hubei Overseas Friendship Association (湖北海外联谊会).⁶⁴⁴

She has also served as a director of the Australian liaison offices for two Chinese cities: the Shandong Province Liaison Office in Australia, where she was an overseas executive director of the Shandong Overseas Exchange Association (山东省海外交流协会), and she was also the president of the Australia Shandong Association (澳大利亚山东同乡会).⁶⁴⁵

VAC International Media Group has organised a number of events and visits with Chinese officials from United Front groups, including representatives of the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council and of Shandong Province, the China Overseas Exchange Association, and the Sichuan Federation of Overseas Chinese.⁶⁴⁶ Steven Liu has also participated in the ‘Global Outstanding Youth China Tour’ organised by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office.⁶⁴⁷

Vision Times Media Australia (看中国)

Vision Times Media Australia (看中国) is a Chinese media group established in Australia in 2006, which publishes a Chinese-language newspaper—*Vision China Times*—throughout Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Gold Coast and Perth. It also has a bilingual magazine, WeChat account, Facebook, Instagram, and electronic direct mail services. The company claims its newspaper has a weekly readership of 49,000 and more than 150,000 subscribers to its WeChat account.⁶⁴⁸ However, we were unable to find the WeChat account associated with Vision Times. The company also operates a number of websites, including:

- VCT News (看新闻, vct.news/au), Vision Times Media Australia’s online news website, which publishes articles in both Simplified and Traditional Chinese characters.
- AU Living (澳州生活网 www.auliving.com.au), which offers information on living in Australia including news, immigration, travel, lifestyle, and real estate.
- Chinese Classifieds (分类大全网站 auads.com.au), which publishes classified ads and is owned by AU Living.

Vision Times Media Australia says it seeks to connect Australia's Chinese speaking community with broader society through balanced reporting, promotion of both Australian and Chinese culture, and communicating the policies of the Australian government to its readers in an unbiased way.⁶⁴⁹ Vision Times Media Australia produces content on a wider variety of China-related subjects and often with different outlooks and editorial stances than many of its competitors in the Australian Chinese-language media market.

Vision Times is one of the country's only outlets for Chinese-language news and editorial opinions which does not have any known ties to the CCP.⁶⁵⁰ However, this stance has brought Vision Times into contention with the CCP and its associated organisations. In 2020, Vision Times Media Australia claimed its months-long coverage of the protests in Hong Kong made companies with business in China more wary of advertising in their publications for fear of retaliation from the Chinese government.⁶⁵¹ Maree Jun Ma, the general manager of Vision Times Media Australia has claimed that Chinese officials successfully pressured companies to drop advertisements in the past.⁶⁵² In 2019, the *ABC* reported that the Chinese consulate in Sydney pressured the Georges River Council into banning Vision Times from sponsoring the local Lunar New Year event.⁶⁵³

Vision Times has shown interest in shining a light on CCP influence in Australia. It maintains a 'special edition' website called *The Giant Awakens* which has published material from several China and security experts on the topic. Chief editor Yan Xia states in the introduction to the website, 'as the giant awakens and the Chinese government flexes its financial muscles globally, its influence seemingly comes with covert and overt censorship, control and attempts to silence dissent, which many perceive as a head-on collision with Australia's democratic values'.⁶⁵⁴

China's foreign ministry has accused Vision Times of being backed by Falun Gong, a new religious movement persecuted by the CCP.⁶⁵⁵ Reporting by *ABC News* has also alleged links between Vision Times and Falun Gong.⁶⁵⁶

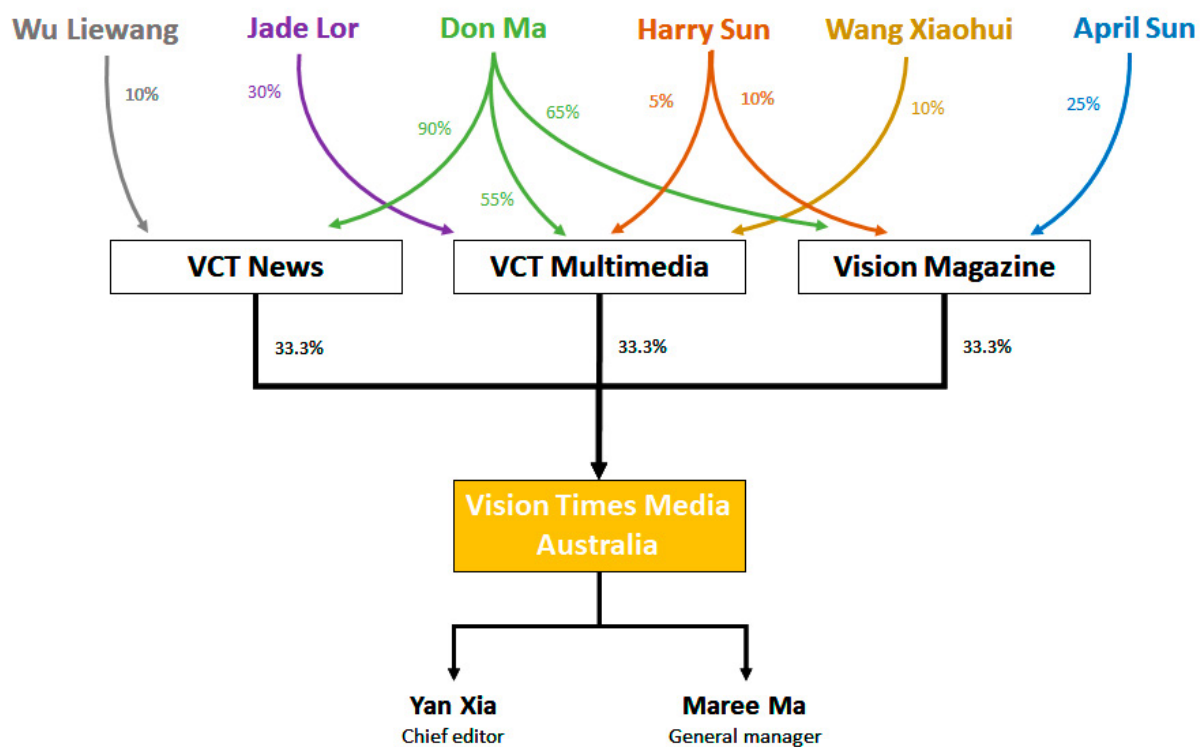
Vision Times has called such accusations 'completely false and defamatory' and stated the *ABC* misrepresented their editorial independence and business structure.⁶⁵⁷ Yan Xia, the chief editor, maintains there have been no interactions with Falun Gong groups or the US-based Vision Times on editorial content during their tenure, nor would they allow these sorts of attempts from any group. While practitioners of Falun Gong are involved in Vision Times, the publication maintains it was set up to provide independent news and not to promote the teaching of Falun Gong.⁶⁵⁸

ABC News has also claimed Vision Times Media Australia is connected to the global network of Vision Times Media outlets headquartered in the United States. While Vision Times Media Australia operates on several platforms under different names, its newspaper *Vision China Times* (看中国) has identical branding to the US-headquartered network.⁶⁵⁹ VCT News Pty Ltd, a parent company of Vision Times Media Australia, was also once registered as a company under the name (secretchina.com.au) which is the same domain name as the US company's current website (secretchina.com).⁶⁶⁰ However, Vision Times Media Australia has denied that it has 'any operational or financial deals apart from payment for yearly news sources' to the US-based company.⁶⁶¹ They claim to only buy articles, on an ad hoc basis, similar to the way syndication works for other news outlets.⁶⁶²

The current directors of Vision Times Media (Australia) Corporation Pty Ltd are Don Ma, Jade Lor, April Sun, Wu Liewang, and Wang Xiaohui. The company is owned by three entities each with a 33.3% stake (see Figure 11):⁶⁶³

- *VCT News Pty Ltd*—Registered in 2006, this company was previously named ‘www.secretchina.com.au’. The director is Don Ma who also holds a 90% stake in the company. The remaining 10% is owned by Wu Liewang. Maree Jun Ma has also been a director and shareholder.⁶⁶⁴
- *VCT Multimedia Pty Ltd*—Registered in 2013, this company has four directors who all hold shares: Don Ma (55%), Jade Lor (30%), Harry Sun (5%), and Wang Xiaohui (10%).⁶⁶⁵
- *Vision Magazine Pty Ltd*—Registered in 2015, this company has three directors who all hold shares: Don Ma (65%), April Sun (25%) and Harry Sun (10%). Wang Xiaohui was also previously a director and shareholder until September 2016.⁶⁶⁶

Figure 11: Vision Times Media Australia’s ownership structure



Don Ma is an important figure in Vision Times Australia.⁶⁶⁷ A Sydney-based businessman, Ma holds directorships and shares in a number of companies.⁶⁶⁸ Don Ma gained Australian residency through the Hawke government’s Chinese student protection visa after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. The general manager of Vision Times Media Australia is Maree Jun Ma. Ms Ma has been in that role since May 2016; prior to that she was the company’s finance director.⁶⁶⁹ Ma was appointed to the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations advisory board in February 2020.⁶⁷⁰ Mr Ma is now ‘semi-retired’ and is not involved in the day-to-day running of the company.⁶⁷¹

Vision Times Media Australia has links to the short-lived ‘Decode China’, an outlet intended to ‘expose and counter propaganda and disinformation’. Decode China was to operate a Chinese-language website under an arrangement with the US Department of State. However, the State Department

confirmed in August 2020 that Decode China had been terminated during the ‘development stage’.⁶⁷² The company was registered under the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme.⁶⁷³

Decode China Pty Ltd was registered in 2019 and has two directors:

- *Feng Chongyi*—An associate professor in China Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. In 2017, Feng was detained in China for a week and interrogated by authorities.⁶⁷⁴
- *Wu Liewang*—A director of Vision Times Media (Australia) Corporation Pty Ltd. The company is now 100% owned by Wu.⁶⁷⁵

Maree Jun Ma also served as secretary of the company from January to August 2020.⁶⁷⁶

Notes

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- 2 Haiqing Yu, Wanning Sun, 'WeChat subscription accounts (WSAs) in Australia: a political economy account of Chinese-language digital/social media', *Media International Australia*, 19 June 2020, 1–17. Note that the survey methodology used in this paper is unclear, so there may be room for further polling on WeChat usage.
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- 4 This description could be accurately applied to Australia's Chinese communities more generally. See John Fitzgerald, *Mind your tongue*, ASPI, Canberra, 2 October 2019, [online](#).
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- 10 Doug Hendrie, 'How a Chinese-language social media campaign hurt Labor's election chances', *The Guardian*, 9 July 2016, [online](#).
- 11 For example, the owners of *Australia51.com* (澳洲无忧) and *Sydney Post* ([online](#)) are unknown.
- 12 VAC International Media Group announced on 27 March 2020 that it was suspending its newspaper, radio broadcasts and WeChat account because of the pandemic, [online](#).
- 13 Australia's three main Chinese-language newspapers in the 1980s were *Singtao Daily*, the *Daily Chinese Herald* and the *Australian Chinese Daily*. See 张秋生 [Zhang Qiusheng], 赵昌 [Zhao Chang], '历史与时代视角下的澳大利亚华人报刊考察' [An examination of the history of Australian Chinese newspapers from the perspective of history and eras], 八桂侨刊 [*Overseas Chinese Journal of Bagui*], December 2018, [online](#).
- 14 '抚今追昔、重聚悉尼—澳洲传媒前辈刘云峰与媒体同仁聚餐会' [Reunite in Sydney, contemplating the present and recalling the past—Australian media veteran Liu Yunfeng and former colleagues held reunion banquet], *Aoweibang*, 5 July 2017, [online](#); Chin Jin [秦晋], '往事如烟·英雄何在? 中国留学生争取永居历史回顾' [The past is like smoke, where are the 'heroes'? Looking back at the history of Chinese students' campaign for permanent residency], *1688.com.au*, 12 November 2013, [online](#); Jia Gao, *Chinese activism of a different kind: the Chinese students' campaign to stay in Australia*, Brill, 2013, 157–161.
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- 21 '关于联盟' [About the union], Global Chinese Media Cooperation Union, no date, [online](#).
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- 26 Sean Rubinsztein-Dunlop, Echo Hui, 'Australia revokes Chinese scholar visas and targets media officials, prompting furious China response', *ABC News*, 9 September 2020, [online](#).
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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACPPRC	Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China
AICTC	Australia Institute of Chinese Traditional Culture
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
BSA	<i>Broadcasting Services Act 1992</i>
CASS	Chinese Australian Services Society
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CNS	<i>China News Service</i>
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
CRI	<i>China Radio International</i>
FITS	Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme
GCLMF	Global Chinese Language Media Forum
NSL	Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
OCAO	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office
PRC	People's Republic of China
UFWD	United Front Work Department
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

