

FOREWORD

In February 2018 twenty-three American and ten foreign academics, diplomats, journalists, and think tank members met at the Annenberg Foundation Trust's Sunnylands estate in Southern California to launch a project to map the challenges posed by the People's Republic of China's growing quest—in what Beijing propagandists call a “discourse war,” *huayuzhan* (话语战)—to influence civic discussions in societies outside the sovereign borders of China. Over the following months, participants in our Working Group on Chinese Influence Activities in the United States researched and drafted eight chapters assessing the nature and extent of China's influence-seeking activities in different sectors of American society, while our international associates contributed overviews of these efforts in eight other developed countries. The draft papers were discussed in several follow-up meetings and initially released as a report in November 2018. Following the release, we made modest revisions in response to new information and some specific concerns that were subsequently raised. This book represents the final version of our working group report.

As we stress repeatedly in our Introduction, every country has the right to promote its policies, values, and achievements abroad, so long as they do so through internationally accepted means of open engagement and persuasion, what is often referred to as “soft power” or “public diplomacy.” But increasingly, policy makers, analysts, and civic leaders in the world's democracies find themselves confronting a very different

form of power projection by the People's Republic of China (PRC). This entails efforts to advance the interest of the Chinese Communist Party by shaping, even constraining, policy discourse abroad in ways that are sometimes overt, but that also covertly disguise the origin and intent of the influence-seeking activity.

We want to briefly respond here at the outset to some of the criticisms that have been raised since the initial release of our working group report. One group worries that the report does not distinguish clearly enough between legitimate and illegitimate influence activities. As we noted in our original draft, and now in this final book, it is crucial to make a distinction between traditional soft-power activities and more subterranean and subversive “sharp power” projections. In the pages that follow, our concern with the PRC's ostensible soft-power activities in the United States—its surging media presence, the growing number of visits and exchanges of all kinds, the expansion of philanthropic activities—is not the rising scale of them, but their all-too-often covert and nonreciprocal nature. As we stress in our Policy Principles, it should no longer be acceptable that scholars, journalists, diplomats, and public officials from the People's Republic of China be afforded unfettered access to American society while reciprocal access is severely constrained or denied to American counterparts in China. It is here that the political question of what has been happening internally within China has relevance to our own foreign policy.

Although it was beyond the scope of our work to document in detail the political trajectory of the People's Republic of China, it is critical to understand that under Communist Party general secretary Xi Jinping China has become increasingly authoritarian and marked by rising levels of ideological indoctrination and control; diminishing tolerance for dissent; new crackdowns on human-rights lawyers; an unprecedented new assault on the rights of the Uighur and other Muslim minorities; and the emergence of a new surveillance state set on compiling digital profiles of every Chinese citizen with a “social credit score” that will double as a political loyalty index determining access to a wide range of services and privileges in Chinese life. For readers of this report, it is critical to remember that the PRC remains a Leninist regime in which

the Communist Party not only reigns supreme over the state at home but also now presides over a vast and lavishly resourced bureaucracy to project global influence, through so-called “united front” ties, to willing or ill-informed constituencies around the world.

We share with our critics the goal of building a healthy relationship between the world’s two superpowers that is based as much as possible on cooperation rather than conflict. But as we repeatedly argue in this book, this can only be possible with a rebalancing of the relationship toward greater transparency, reciprocity, and fairness. Such a rebalancing will require, in part, pushing back against nontransparent forms of intrusion, such as PRC efforts to vet which topics relating to US-China relations are open for discussion, which Americans can participate in scholarly delegations and conferences in China (or even in the United States), and what topics writers and journalists may cover without being treated in a punitive way. For example, when pluralism of perspectives largely disappears in the Chinese-language media within the United States, that development reduces the quality of the democratic experience for an important sector of American society, and thus the issue becomes a legitimate US national interest that must be addressed.

The same is true for the effects of other kinds of influence activities documented in this report. When foreign students and scholars have good reason to fear that their statements and comments—even in the classroom—may be monitored by some of their peers and reported back to authorities of their home government, which places little value on freedom of expression, societal freedoms in the United States are undermined. When American scholars and researchers concede that they engage in some degree of self-censorship in order to avoid losing access to Chinese visas, archives, libraries, institutions, officials, and society, *that* is an impact on academic freedom in the United States. When a think tank shies away from overt criticism of China for fear of jeopardizing its Beijing branch office or generous flows of financing, *that* is an impact on American public discourse. When US corporations are pressured to refer to Taiwan in their commercial activity only in a way that strictly adheres to PRC insistence that Taiwan is a province of the PRC, *that* impinges on their freedom to operate globally, as well as their freedom of expression in

the United States. We believe that the sum total of the PRC's influence-seeking activities in the United States and other societies (including but not limited to the eight case studies in our Appendix) represents an ambitious new project to *control* the narrative about China and to shape the policies and thinking of other societies toward China, and that a worrisome portion of these efforts involves illegitimate methods. A posture of informed, responsible, and balanced vigilance now will hopefully contain the potential for much more worrisome levels of untoward influence down the road.

Finally, as we have stated explicitly and repeatedly in our report—including in our Afterword—we reject casting general aspersions on Chinese Americans or Chinese nationals who are studying and doing business in the United States. Chinese Americans constitute a vital and treasured portion of the extraordinary cultural mosaic of American society and have come to constitute an important element of American exceptionalism. American Chinese are just as “American” as any other ethnic or nationality group in the United States, and their extraordinary achievements in business, science, the arts, philanthropy, and public affairs place them among the most successful and admired of all American nationality groups. It goes without saying that we oppose any efforts, past or future, to single them out as a group for investigation or discrimination, and this report notes examples of what we believe to constitute prosecutorial overreach.

Any American of any ethnicity or national origin could, for financial, ideological, or personal reasons, become an agent of covert influence of an adversarial power. Any concern about whether an American citizen or resident is acting inappropriately must therefore be judged on a case-by-case basis and strictly based on evidence. And American democracy will always be stronger when no ethnic group has its loyalty as a group to this country called into question.

However, as our report documents, the Chinese Communist Party views the situation quite differently: the “united front” influence bureaucracy in the PRC considers the whole worldwide Chinese diaspora as “overseas compatriots,” *buaqiao tongbaomen* (侨同胞们) owing a measure of loyalty to “the Chinese Motherland,” *zhongguode zuguo* (中国的祖国).

Consequently, the Communist authorities treat people of Chinese ethnic origin as a special priority in the PRC's global influence-seeking activities. This creates a situation that we cannot wish away, a racial targeting that many ethnically Chinese citizens of the United States and other democratic societies worry about and deserve protection from. It is *their* rights as American citizens—including their right to a wide range of information of sources in Chinese and freedom from pressure or intimidation by agents of foreign governments such as the PRC—that are highlighted in this report. This does not mean that Chinese Americans who advocate for more constructive relations with the PRC, or who may align themselves with certain PRC policies, are doing so because they have been inappropriately “influenced.” But in the context of an increasingly adversarial bilateral relationship, China's efforts to influence them, especially covertly, are a legitimate subject of research, discussion, and concern, which is what we have sought to do with this volume.

We do not advocate or support a new Cold War with China, nor do we hope for a diminution in ties between the two countries or a diminished flow of graduate students, even in “sensitive” STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). If the United States wants to maintain its global technological leadership, we believe a far better approach to the issue of tech transfer (addressed in chapter 8 of this book) is to carefully vet foreign graduate student applicants for undisclosed ties to PRC intelligence and security agencies, and then not only welcome the overwhelming majority of Chinese (and other foreign) applicants, but *encourage* them to stay on after their studies are completed to become citizens.

For the foreseeable future, China will be the United States' principal competitor for global power and influence. International peace and security require that the relationship between these two superpowers remain as constructive as possible. But any healthy relationship must be built on transparency, reciprocity, fairness, and balance. That is the promise that has motivated our working group, our initial report, and now this book.

