

## Written Submission to the Standing Committee on Science and Research (SRSR)

*Study: Use of Federal Government Research and Development Grants, Funds, and Contributions by Canadian Universities and Research Institutions in Partnerships With Entities Connected to the People's Republic of China*

Alliance Canada Hong Kong | September 2023

## Introduction

In recent years, the Government of Canada has released various resources and guidelines, such as [Safeguarding Your Research](#) and [National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships](#). ACHK acknowledges that the Government has taken a series of actions to engage with academics, universities and research institutes, including proactively providing briefings and guidelines on collaborating with foreign state-affiliated entities. However, the current efforts have a limited impact on the broader scale of foreign interference in academia.

While there are existing engagement initiatives with Canadian academics, universities, and research institutions, the outreach is often limited to science, engineering, mathematics, and technology scholars. Research security in arts, social sciences, humanities, and health sectors are largely overlooked. Canada needs to be proactively engaging with students, professors, and researchers who are vulnerable to foreign influence and interference, including those who are not engaged in critical research sectors. Foreign state actors may engage with academics for various strategic objectives, including elite capture,<sup>1</sup> censorship, disinformation and narrative discursion operations.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) may pressure researchers and scholars through various means, such as revoking project funding, scholarships, and visa or work permits.<sup>2</sup> Many international students are scared to speak up and endanger their family members, but they are also afraid their status could be revoked and forced to return to the PRC.<sup>3</sup> Transnational surveillance and repression had created undue pressure or fear of reprisal amongst students and scholars in Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Academic freedom must include students and researchers' safety, feeling educated and empowered in making informed decisions for their research. We urge Canada to support the development of equitable research and academic advancement. Students and researchers must feel protected. Canadian-funded research, such as intellectual property and research data, are protected and not misused by malicious actors. Most importantly, risks are proactively communicated and managed at all relevant stakeholders' levels.

ACHK had previously raised concerns about [academic influence from the Chinese party-state](#) (see chapter on *Academic Influence & Vulnerability of Intellectual Property Transfer*).

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<sup>1</sup> [China 'trying to influence elite figures in British politics', dossier claims](#) (July 2020). *Sky News*.

<sup>2</sup> [China: Government Threats to Academic Freedom Abroad](#) (March 2019). *Human Rights Watch*.

<sup>3</sup> [Uyghur students in Canada fear for their families in China — and their futures](#) (August 2019). *Ottawa Citizen*.

<sup>4</sup> [Canadian academics may fear reprisal for criticizing China — but they must not self-censor](#) (October 2020). *Globe and Mail*.

## Factors for Consideration

### ***Anti-Asian Racism***

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic along with growing geopolitical tensions with the PRC, Asian and ethnic Chinese Canadians have experienced a surge in violence and hate crimes.<sup>5</sup> The rapid increase in violence and hate crimes is and should be treated as a priority. Asian Canadians were at the forefront of mobilizing the #StopAsianHate movement, a legitimate social movement to raise awareness of anti-Asian violence. However, due to the fast-moving nature of social media, the movement has been vulnerable to a substantial effort by the CCP and United Front Work Department (UFWD)<sup>6</sup> actors to co-opt the #StopAsianHate as a way to deflect and invalidate criticisms of the state, rather than to confront anti-Asian hate and racism.<sup>7</sup>

Canadian decision-makers and officials had taken on a simplistic view of the Chinese-Canadian diaspora, often viewing the community as a homogenous community that is intertwined with the CCP. Like any other social group, ethnic Chinese communities hold diverse political views and are not a monolithic entity. The reductionist argument that all ethnic Chinese or the diaspora support the CCP regime is xenophobic and racist. It is crucial to challenge and reject claims that the Chinese party-state is representative of the Chinese and diaspora communities, whether through formal diplomatic channels or astroturfing through state-affiliated organizations.<sup>8 9</sup> Equally important is to understand that criticism of the CCP or the Chinese government should not be conflated with or embolden discrimination of the ethnic Chinese communities.

### ***A Culture of Fear and Silence***

There is a culture of fear and silence among the diaspora and Chinese communities. Because of the Chinese party-state apparatus' global system of control, surveillance, and influence, criticism of the regime could cost individuals their career and business opportunities, be socially ostracized, be barred from returning to PRC-controlled territories, and even jeopardize their personal safety and their extended family members.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese party-state targets vocal dissidents, which also underscores the consequences of public dissent. Anti-CCP activists often pay steep personal costs such as self-exile or harassment.<sup>11</sup> Within academic settings, professors and administrators hold influence over students. Students may feel pressured to stay silent

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<sup>5</sup> [Reports of Anti-Asian hate crimes are surging in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (March 2021). *CTV News*.

<sup>6</sup> [Foreign Interference – China's Use of the United Front Work Department](#) (June 2020). *Public Safety Canada*.

<sup>7</sup> [#StopAsianHate: Chinese diaspora targeted by CCP Disinformation Campaign](#) (July 2021). *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A: Sentiments from Chinese Community Forums

<sup>9</sup> [Lines blurred Chinese Community Organisations in Australia](#) (November 2021). *Lowy Institute*.

<sup>10</sup> [Why some Chinese immigrants living in Canada live in silent fear](#) (February 2019). *The Globe and Mail*.

<sup>11</sup> [Harassment & Intimidation of individuals in Canada working on China-related human rights concerns](#) (March 2020). *Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China & Amnesty International Canada*.

about personal concerns, as they rely on professors' recommendations and support to gain research funding and resources. The Chinese party-state has encouraged lateral policing and surveillance, which reinforces self-censorship among the community members.

### ***Totalitarian Governance of the PRC-CCP***

Unlike Western and liberal democracies' political parties, the CCP is the sole governing force within the PRC and its governance is notoriously opaque.<sup>12</sup> This submission refers to the political and bureaucratic institutions as "the Chinese-party state", capturing the dynamic relationship and interconnectedness between the CCP and the PRC state.

A 2018 report released by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) noted that the Chinese party-state presides over every entity that operates within the PRC, including the private sector, the military and security agencies, labour unions, and the civil society. In addition to the totalitarian control of the nation, the Chinese party-state may directly interfere and often dictate the direction of these individual entities.<sup>13</sup> Chinese public and private companies must include the CCP as part of their governance structure.<sup>14</sup> Under the tightening control<sup>15</sup> over the business sector, Chinese private businesses should not be assumed to be independent from the party-state's control.<sup>16</sup>

Under the civil-military fusion strategies, Chinese private companies' investments are often driven by the CCP committee within the boardrooms. With little transparency of the interconnectedness of the state and private sector, the Chinese foreign investments and acquisition of dual-use technologies received critical attention from the United State's defence department.<sup>17</sup> In recent years, foreign investments in critical infrastructures have also received attention from Australian<sup>18</sup> and Canadian<sup>19</sup> authorities.

The totalitarian reach into the Chinese non-governmental sector is combined with the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) "Military-Civil Fusion" strategy<sup>20</sup>, the party-state apparatus is actively bridging the development between the private sector and the PLA to facilitate the simultaneous development of Beijing's economic and military agendas.<sup>21</sup> Under Xi Jinping's leadership, the CCP

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<sup>12</sup> [How Transparent Is China's Government? Here's What We Know](#) (July 2021). *The Daily Signal*.

<sup>13</sup> [China and the Age of Strategic Rivalry](#) (May 2018). *Canadian Security Intelligence Service*.

<sup>14</sup> [Politics in the Boardroom: The Role of Chinese Communist Party Committees](#) (July 2019). *The Diplomat*.

<sup>15</sup> [China's Xi Ramps Up Control of Private Sector](#) (December 2020). *The Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>16</sup> [How the state runs business in China](#) (July 2019). *The Guardian*.

<sup>17</sup> [China Tech Investment Flying Under the Radar, Pentagon Warns](#) (7 April, 2017). *The New York Times*.

<sup>18</sup> [Australia's foreign ownership rules face first test in \\$7bn battle for AusNet](#) (October 2021). *Nikkei Asia*.

<sup>19</sup> [Chinese telecom firm seeks stay on order to divest Canadian subsidiary over national security concerns](#) (November 2021). *National Post*.

<sup>20</sup> [The Chinese Communist Party's Military-Civil Fusion Policy](#) (n.d.). *U.S. Department of State*.

<sup>21</sup> [Emily Weinstein's Testimony Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission](#) (March 2021). *Center for Security and Emerging Technology*.

has intensified party direction over the PLA.<sup>22</sup> There have been significant investments into the PLA's military capabilities often embedded in various commercial operations and academic collaborations, reinforcing the globalization of PLA activities.<sup>23</sup> While operational readiness and the procurement of military technology and equipment are key components to the PLA's development, the military-civil strategy also allows the PLA to operate in coordination with Chinese businesses outside of the PRC.

Beijing is actively recruiting scientists and researchers internationally, particularly those in science and technology, to contribute to the PRC's national economic and military advancements.<sup>24</sup> With opaque ties between the PLA and Chinese universities, it is difficult to differentiate between collaborating with Chinese individual scholars or Chinese military scholars,<sup>25,26</sup> and impossible to determine if the results of these research collaborations would benefit PLA or Chinese state actors.<sup>27</sup> There are known cases where scholars have purposely obscured their ties to the PLA.<sup>28 29 30</sup>

### ***Country-Agnostic Solutions***

ACHK's expertise is specific to the activities undertaken by the Chinese party-state. However, it is crucial that Canada creates country-agnostic strategies and policies. Though this brief mainly provides examples and threats posed by the Chinese party-state apparatus, it is important to note that foreign states across the globe (ex. Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, Iran, etc...) deploy similar tactics with varying effectiveness and reach. A country-agnostic approach enables the creation of safeguards against threats from external state actors, whilst avoiding the continued racist tropes and systemic racism within Canadian institutions. Where open source information fails to provide a meaningful assessment of suspicious foreign individuals or entities, Canada should ground their analysis of past affiliations, activities and/or behaviours.

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<sup>22</sup> [Understanding China's Military Expansion](#) (September 2019). *Pacific Council on International Policy*.

<sup>23</sup> [The Chinese Communist Party's Military-Civil Fusion Policy](#) (n.d.). *U.S. Department of State*.

<sup>24</sup> [Mapping China's Sprawling Efforts to Recruit Scientists](#) (November 30, 2020). *Defense One*.

<sup>25</sup> [The China Defence Universities Tracker](#) (November 2019) *Australia Strategic Policy Institute*.

<sup>26</sup> [Holding a pen in one hand, Gripping a Gun in the Other](#) (July 2020) *Wilson Center*.

<sup>27</sup> [Chinese universities with military ties classed as 'risky' collaborators](#) (December 2019). *Nature*.

<sup>28</sup> [PLA Scientists Obscuring Ties to Western Universities](#) (October 2018). *China Digital Times*.

<sup>29</sup> [Chinese government's Confucius Institute holds sway on Canadian campuses, contracts indicate](#) (March 2020). *National Post*.

<sup>30</sup> [Picking flowers, making honey](#) (October 2018) *Australia Strategic Policy Institute*.

## Community Observations

Open and informed scholarly exchanges are critical to advance scientific findings. Due to Canada's domestic underfunding of the research and academic sector, foreign investments can bring in much-needed resources for researchers, projects, and institutions. Malicious actors may capitalize on this opportunity and use their financial resources to persuade researchers into asymmetrical agreements.<sup>31</sup>

Chinese state-affiliated actors have exploited the financial needs of researchers, by offering significant funding and grants in exchange for exclusive or significant access to research data and intellectual property. There are three common recruitment tactics, used by Chinese state-affiliated and private businesses to recruit university professors and researchers:

1. Collaborative grant application from the Government of Canada and/or other Canadian funders;
2. Offer a lucrative research contract; and/or
3. Offer a lucrative consultancy contract.

Recruitment of Canadian academics is a long-term operation, where Chinese state-affiliated and private businesses seek to capture reputable professors and researchers. After establishing initial funding agreements, researchers and institutions may develop a dependency on the financial resources offered.<sup>32</sup> Significant financial resources from foreign state sources may also encourage self-censorship among those who have become reliant on the funding.

Beyond financial incentives, Chinese state-affiliated and private businesses may include non-financial resources in these lucrative contracts, such as easy access to research data, research subjects and participants, and the support of fully-funded research teams.

For example, if a Canadian researcher requires data for their research, they would need to navigate Canadian ethics processes and privacy laws to gain access. For Chinese state-affiliated businesses governed by laxer legal standards, Chinese state-affiliated actors can access and offer valuable raw datasets to Canadian researchers as part of the funding agreement. While the data may be legally obtained in the PRC, the data obtained would not meet privacy standards in Canada. While researchers may benefit from easier access to data, this circumvents the intent of existing domestic standards and practices.

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<sup>31</sup> [China and the Age of Strategic Rivalry](#) (May 2018). *Canadian Security Intelligence Service*.

<sup>32</sup> [REPORT: In Plain Sight - Beijing's Unrestricted Network of Foreign Influence in Canada](#) (May 2021). *Alliance Canada Hong Kong*.

Chinese state-affiliated actors have also demonstrated aggressive tactics to steal intellectual property from other private entities.<sup>33 34</sup> The Canadian government issued a warning that Beijing is undertaking a systematic campaign of economic espionage.<sup>35</sup> These illegal activities are well-recorded and have a significant impact on Canadian businesses. Nortel, a Canadian telecommunications company, was one notable victim of Beijing's state-led economic and industrial espionage.<sup>36</sup> With spies and listening devices planted in the research and development office of Nortel, Huawei was accused of reverse-engineering and recreating Nortel's equipment. Huawei denies these claims of industrial espionage. With considerations with respect to the Chinese party-state's Civil-Military Fusion and opaque operations, corporate and industrial espionage can be tied to Chinese military actors and strategic goals.

## Self-Censorship, Repression, & Campus Harassment

University campuses often have their own security bureau, "campus police" or "protection services". However, campus security is not trained or equipped to support students, professors, or researchers from foreign state repression. The diasporic students' experiences with on-campus harassment have largely gone ignored. Several recent cases highlight the systemic and institutional failure: campus police failed to report harassment to local police and/or intelligence agencies, so incident records remained internal to the university with no further follow-up from federal agencies or local police.

Universities and research institutions have many financial incentives to host more international students and/or foreign investments.<sup>37</sup> International students pay an inflated tuition compared to domestic students. While financial inflows may offer a clear short-term benefit, a systemic failure to clearly understand longer-term institutional risks (e.g. elite capture, espionage) is again apparent.

The Chinese authorities are known to obscure the background and military affiliations of scholars who are going overseas.<sup>38</sup> Sweden's media reported that Chinese international students sponsored through the China Scholarship Council (CSC)<sup>39</sup> signed pledges of loyalty prior, "and requiring them to serve China's interests during their stay."<sup>40</sup> For students who violate any rule or

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<sup>33</sup> [1 in 5 corporations say China has stolen their IP within the last year: CNBC CFO survey](#) (March 2019). *CNBC*.

<sup>34</sup> [Chinese National Pleads Guilty to Economic Espionage Conspiracy](#) (January 2022). *The United States Department of Justice*.

<sup>35</sup> [Canadian government report accuses China of widespread campaign of espionage, manipulation](#) (January 2022). *Global News*.

<sup>36</sup> [Did Huawei bring down Nortel? Corporate espionage, theft, and the parallel rise and fall of two telecom giants](#) (February 2020). *National Post*.

<sup>37</sup> [After cutting ties with Huawei, University of Waterloo must find funding elsewhere](#) (May 2023). *The Globe and Mail*.

<sup>38</sup> [China's Military Sends More Scholars Abroad, at Times Without Schools' Knowledge](#) (October 2018). *The Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>39</sup> [The China Scholarship Council: An Overview](#) (July 2020). *Center for Security and Emerging Technology*.

<sup>40</sup> [Tens of thousands of students pledge loyalty to Beijing before arriving abroad](#) (January 2023). *Radio Free Asia*.



refuse to follow instructions, the Chinese authorities may ask CSC students and their families to pay back the scholarship which they could not afford.

Foreign investments are meeting the financial needs of the starved academic community. Beijing exerts pressure on universities and research institutions, some may choose to appease the Chinese authorities, which may be rewarded through donations, access to the PRC, and gala events.<sup>41</sup> In comparison, those who are openly opposed to the Chinese party-state are faced with intensified scrutiny, which may endanger professors, students, and researchers' livelihoods and future career opportunities. Despite living and studying in Canada, the international student's home country Embassy and/or Consulates can revoke study permits or scholarships.

Transnational surveillance and repression cast a shadow on international and diasporic students' experiences at university. Back in 2021, Joanna Chiu from the Toronto Star reported<sup>42</sup> a Chinese student in Canada with 2 followers on Twitter was contacted by his father and the police in the PRC. The Chinese police claimed that the Ministry of Public Safety tracked his IP address after he retweeted 3 posts critical of Beijing.

Beijing governs through fear, the Chinese authorities encourage lateral surveillance amongst international students from the PRC, while enforcing guilt by association. In some cases, students' families and loved ones back home are leveraged as hostages. While some international students are motivated by the propaganda and patriotic education they received before arriving in Canada, international students face pressure to show up and do as they are told.

Notably, the Chinese party-state weaponized the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) globally to inject CCP ideology into Chinese international students.<sup>43</sup> The McMaster CSSA was banned by the McMaster Student Union in 2019, due to alleged ties to the consulate and the harassment campaign initiated against an Uyghur activist, Rukiye Turdush.<sup>44</sup> Chemi Lhama, a Tibetan Canadian student, was under attack by Chinese international students after becoming the University of Toronto Scarborough student union president.<sup>45</sup> <sup>46</sup> Most notably, numerous investigations across the globe have revealed the close relationships between the Embassy and/or Consulate's Education Office and CSSAs.<sup>47</sup> <sup>48</sup> Many in the diasporic communities suspect the Embassy and Consulates would mobilize CSSAs and international students through patriotic

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<sup>41</sup> [How Beijing made its way into the heart of British academia](#) (July 2023). *The Telegraph*.

<sup>42</sup> [A Chinese student in Canada had two followers on Twitter. He still didn't escape Beijing's threats over online activity](#) (September 2021). *Toronto Star*.

<sup>43</sup> [China's Long Arm Reaches into American Campuses](#) (March 2018). *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>44</sup> [McMaster student government bans Chinese students' group from campus](#) (September 2019) *CBC*.

<sup>45</sup> ['China is your daddy': Backlash against Tibetan student's election prompts questions about foreign influence](#) (February 2019) *CBC*.

<sup>46</sup> [Groups put renewed focus on suppression of speech critical of China on American and Canadian campuses](#) (May 2020) *The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression*.

<sup>47</sup> [China's Long Arm Reaches Into American Campuses](#) (March 2018). *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>48</sup> [Chinese consulates pressure CSSA members to carry out Chinese government directives](#) (July 2018) *Alliance for Securing Democracy*.



and ethnonationalism propaganda, initiating harassment and intimidation campaigns on campus.

## Recommendations

Canada has a robust academic environment where scholars are encouraged to share their knowledge and collaborate with each other. Research processes, protocols, and results are published and publicly available. There are enormous benefits to open academic and research collaborations, but we must also remain clear-headed and critical to understand potential risks. These measures should not discourage scholars, especially racialized and diasporic scholars, from collaborating with foreign researchers.

While we cannot predict how malicious actors will act, Canadian institutions can incorporate safeguards against sensitive and research data transfer, coercive agreements, and intellectual property transfers. Rather than applying a restrictive policy on collaborations with foreign entities, Canada should seek to establish clear guidelines and a rigorous review process to safeguard academic freedom and advancements.

We cannot regulate and limit academic freedom based on malicious, coercive, and covert operations. Instead, research collaborations should and must always be equitable and symmetrical, ensuring informed consent and proactive efforts to mitigate risks. Canada should seek to facilitate a safe environment where students, professors, and researchers are empowered in their academic journey.

### ***A Safe Academic & Learning Environment***

Safeguarding academia is not only preventing malicious actors from obtaining sensitive research data and findings, Canada should also ensure students, professors, and researchers are safe on campus. In the face of transnational repression and censorship, students and professors may not feel safe challenging the Chinese party-state, such as publishing an article that discusses the Tiananmen Square Massacre or offering a critique of the Chinese party-state's policies.

Some recommendations include:

- Anonymous participation in class discussions and assignments if a student does not feel safe to engage without triggering transnational repression;
- Strength of universities' institutional cybersecurity measures and awareness;
- Discourage video or audio recording of class discussions without informed consent; and
- Support international students whose study permits and scholarships are weaponized by their home governments.

## ***Raising National Security Awareness Amongst Scholars and Researchers***

Canada can empower academics, researchers, and administrators with knowledge and skills to identify foreign interference and malicious activities. ACHK advocates for establishing a foreign influence transparency scheme, as outlined in a previous report “[Murky Waters: Beijing’s Influence in Canadian Democratic and Electoral Processes](#)”. ACHK reiterates the importance of including foreign principals, their affiliated academic and research entities, as well as any of their proxies in a foreign influence transparency scheme.

Clear criteria for national security threat activities in academia would allow Canadian scholars and administrators to make informed assessments during their day-to-day operations, as well as empowered with resources to seek help from Canadian authorities. A foreign influence transparency scheme would provide a registry of foreign principals and their proxies, which can empower scholars to make informed decisions on whom to collaborate with.

Additional recommendations include:

- Raise awareness of university research and ethics offices;
- Include a compulsory course on foreign interference during the ethics and/or funding application process;
- Provide clear guidelines on collaborating with foreign state or military-affiliated entities, including regular evaluations and review of the guidelines.

## ***Limit Export of Dual Use Technologies***

Canada should also take steps to address the risks associated with the export of dual-use technologies and innovations, Jared Brown of the University of Calgary’s School of Public Policy recommended that Export Permits should be judicially allocated, particularly with dual-use and military technologies.<sup>49</sup>

## ***Protecting Canadian’s Data Rights***

In an increasingly cyber-reliant world, we cannot avoid all forms of data and user-information collection. We should try to mitigate the risks and strengthen privacy laws to meet the emerging challenges. More robust data and privacy laws and regulations can strengthen Canadians’ data rights,<sup>50</sup> as well as placing restrictions on foreign actors from the collection, purchase, or export of data and user information.

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<sup>49</sup> [An Examination of Intellectual Property Transfers to Third Party Entities at Publicly Funded Canadian Universities](#) (September 2019). *University of Calgary*.

<sup>50</sup> [Why We Need Data Rights: “Not Everything about Us Should Be for Sale”](#) (January 2019).