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THE MANCHURIAN QUESTION: CHINA'S EXPANDING GLOBAL MEDIA DOMINANCE AND THE CHINESE DIASPORA

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http://hdl.handle.net/10945/64041

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

THE MANCHURIAN QUESTION: CHINA'S
EXPANDING GLOBAL MEDIA DOMINANCE
AND THE CHINESE DIASPORA

by

Justin V. Padua and Austin Y. Liu

December 2019

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		*Form Approved OMB* *No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY *(Leave blank)*	2. REPORT DATE December 2019	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE THE MANCHURIAN QUESTION: CHINA'S EXPANDING GLOBAL MEDIA DOMINANCE AND THE CHINESE DIASPORA			**5. FUNDING NUMBERS**
6. AUTHOR(S) Justin V. Padua and Austin Y. Liu			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			**10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER**
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.			
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			**12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE** A

13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream has elicited the assistance of ethnic Chinese people around the world in achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The People's Republic of China has not hidden its intent at influencing the overseas Chinese diaspora having embarked on a soft power campaign to achieve its geopolitical objectives. Using its extensive state media apparatus, the PRC has extended its media influence throughout the globe with a persistent narrative conforming to the China "story" developed by the Chinese Communist Party. This study determines the extent to which China leverages its state media and diaspora to promote its narratives regarding its core national interests around the world. These interests concern primarily its issues over sovereignty to include the South China Sea, Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang. This study includes a quantitative analysis through regression testing of a sample of Twitter and media archive data and United Nations migrant data. Furthermore, this study highlighted several regional cases in Oceania—namely, Australia and New Zealand—and Southeast Asia in a qualitative analysis to answer this study's research question. Overall, this study found significance of a relationship between Tweets regarding the PRC's core national issues and the Chinese diaspora implicating overseas Chinese communities' contribution to the PRC's geopolitical narratives.

14. SUBJECT TERMS People's Republic of China, PRC, China, Chinese, CCP, Chinese Communist Party, Chinese diaspora, Chinese migrant, social media, information communication technology, state media, influence			**15. NUMBER OF PAGES** 137
			16. PRICE CODE
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE** Unclassified	**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT** Unclassified	**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT** UU

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239-18

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**THE MANCHURIAN QUESTION: CHINA'S EXPANDING GLOBAL
MEDIA DOMINANCE AND THE CHINESE DIASPORA**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS
(IRREGULAR WARFARE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream has elicited the assistance of ethnic Chinese people around the world in achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The People's Republic of China has not hidden its intent at influencing the overseas Chinese diaspora having embarked on a soft power campaign to achieve its geopolitical objectives. Using its extensive state media apparatus, the PRC has extended its media influence throughout the globe with a persistent narrative conforming to the China "story" developed by the Chinese Communist Party. This study determines the extent to which China leverages its state media and diaspora to promote its narratives regarding its core national interests around the world. These interests concern primarily its issues over sovereignty to include the South China Sea, Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang. This study includes a quantitative analysis through regression testing of a sample of Twitter and media archive data and United Nations migrant data. Furthermore, this study highlighted several regional cases in Oceania—namely, Australia and New Zealand—and Southeast Asia in a qualitative analysis to answer this study's research question. Overall, this study found significance of a relationship between Tweets regarding the PRC's core national issues and the Chinese diaspora implicating overseas Chinese communities' contribution to the PRC's geopolitical narratives.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	Chinese Central Television
CSSA	Chinese Students and Scholars Association
ICT	Information Communication Technology
INDOPACOM	Indo-Pacific Command
KMT	Kuomingtang (Chinese Nationalist Party)
OCAO	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
UFWD	United Front Work Department

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis attempts to re-trace the process by which the Chinese government, via its state media apparatus and ethnic diaspora communities, could influence the international population. We hypothesize a trilateral relationship, in which the Chinese diaspora, through its bifurcated cultural and psychological allegiances, can serve as an intermediary channeling Beijing's strategic messages to the mainstream audience of the host country. Specifically, we set out to test the commonly held belief that the Chinese diaspora, often viewed as model immigrants in their respective host countries, can impart a "goodwill" effect on the wider population, indirectly improving the favorability of the People's Republic of China (PRC) abroad.

To test this notion, we first measured PRC's ability to promote its narratives via the circulation of Chinese state media contents on social media around the world. Next, we gauged China's favorability abroad based on the volume of anti-China hashtags encountered on Twitter. Finally, we looked for empirical evidences that would link countries with a relatively larger population of Chinese diaspora to higher circulation of Beijing's narratives as well as fewer anti-China posts in their respective national social media.

Surprisingly, results from our regression analysis have contradicted some of the key tenets behind our initial hypotheses. Key findings are listed below:

- A larger Chinese diaspora population does not necessarily lead to higher salience of Beijing's narratives abroad, and the pattern could in fact be the opposite.

- Cumulating evidence suggests that the "Chinese Diaspora as Beijing's Goodwill Ambassador" notion requires further qualification. Our regression results indicate that the presence of recent Chinese migrants from mainland China might be associated with increased mainstream backlash against Beijing's narratives and consequently could devalue the Chinese government's credibility around the world.

- Chinese state media content covering sensitive topics—Xinjiang, Taiwan, Tibet, and South China Sea—generates most of the international public interest in Beijing's narratives, while at the same time stirring anti-China sentiments. One conclusion could be that not all publicity is good publicity after all for Beijing.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Since Deng Xiaoping's Opening Reform in 1978, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has benefited from unprecedented economic growth, transforming the country into a formidable world power contender at a historic pace. China's meteoric rise has understandably alarmed the U.S., the dominant power in the current world order. Naysayers have warned that China's resurging influence in Asia could come at the expense of the United States' strategic interests in the region. Some have analogized the current geopolitical rivalry to a "Thucydides' Trap," a term coined by Allison Graham to describe the inevitable conflict between a rising power and a status-quo power. Steering the U.S. away from the impending Thucydides' Trap has since become the popular war cry for the China hawks inside the Belt Way. Their concerns are not unfounded. Within a span of a few years, the international community has witnessed an increasingly confrontational China, not only in rhetoric but also in the implementation of its foreign policy. China's global narrative has escalated from Hu Jintao's "Peaceful Rise and Co-existence" in 2007 to Xi Jinping's not-so-subtle prescription of the Beijing Consensus for the world today. While the PRC possesses one of the most powerful militaries in the world, its leaders rightly recognize the danger of an open and armed confrontation with the U.S. Rather, the PRC appears to be less reserved in leveraging other instruments of national power to compete against the U.S.—namely, on the diplomatic, economic, and informational fronts. These more indirect forms of competition will serve as the conceptual point of departure for this thesis.

A.   STRATEGIC CONTEXT

One strategy that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has demonstrated affinity for is Joseph Nye's famed soft power (软实力, *ruan shili*) approach. A regime will focus on attraction rather than coercion as a function of its national power to induce favorable behaviors from its neighbors.[1] This is not to imply that all of China's soft power efforts

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[1] Thomas Barker, "The Real Source of China's Soft Power," *The Diplomat*, November 28, 2017, https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/the-real-source-of-chinas-soft-power/.

undertaken thus far have only furthered its geopolitical self-interest – as there could exist equally benign rationales. For one, an improved cross-cultural understanding and interaction could lead to a mutually beneficial end in all rational actors' calculus. This ongoing debate over Chinese strategic intention provides the contextual backdrop to this thesis. The broad purpose of this study is to reduce some of the uncertainties over this topic, which in turn, could help us better discern the PRC's ultimate soft power objectives.

B.   SOFT POWER: FROM THE DIASPORA'S PERSPECTIVE

A strategic advantage that the PRC already possesses is its large and influential overseas diaspora of ethnic Chinese, known as *Haiwai Huaqiao* (海外华侨). In recent years, the Chinese diaspora has proven its political weight by generating a seemingly "domestic" pro-PRC voice within their host country's pluralistic policymaking process. Examples range from the CCP's efforts to groom pro-PRC ethnic Chinese politicians inside the Australian legislature to Beijing's leverage of Chinese international students in the U.S. and Canada to censor the mentioning of Falun Gong and Tibet Independence in Western academia. [2] Conventional wisdom suggests that Beijing's investment in its overseas diaspora constitutes an integral component of its global soft power strategy.[3] A politically mobilized and PRC-leaning diaspora community, after all, could readily promote Beijing's narratives in their respective host countries with more convincing power than any foreign sovereign could wield. Yet, Western understanding of this subject remains limited, preventing U.S. policy makers from fully understanding the diaspora's role in China's influence campaign. In the age of an instantaneous global information environment, where the prerogative for disseminating and accessing information has been democratized to the everyday social media user, Beijing now has perhaps the greatest opportunity to amplify the effects of its soft power instrument.

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[2] Rob Schmitz, "Australia and New Zealand Are Ground Zero for Chinese Influence," National Public Radio, October 2, 2018, https://www.npr.org/2018/10/02/627249909/australia-and-new-zealand-are-ground-zero-for-chinese-influence.

[3] Sheng Ding, "Chinese Soft Power and Public Diplomacy: An Analysis of China's New Diaspora Engagement Policies in the Xi Era" (working paper, East Asia Institute, 2014), http://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/eng_report/201404011627122.pdf.

C. RESEARCH QUESTION AND WAY AHEAD

Under this premise, this thesis will attempt to re-trace the process by which the Chinese government, via its state media apparatus, could influence its diaspora as well as the international population at large. We envision this to be a trilateral relationship, in which the diaspora, through its bifurcated cultural and psychological allegiances, can serve as an intermediary channeling Beijing's strategic messages to the mainstream audience of the host country. Our central research question is: how and to what extent has the PRC been able to leverage the strength of its state media infrastructure and the overseas Chinese diaspora to better project its preferred narratives on the global stage?

The first part of the question—the "how"—focuses on forms and functions and will require an explication of the PRC's current theoretic approach to influence operations. The second part—"to what extent"—is an assessment of effectiveness and will require a more empirical approach. We will conduct this assessment through a quantitative analysis corroborated with qualitative case studies. In the quantitative portion, we will empirically analyze the following variables: (1) the PRC's state media presence abroad, (2) the size of the Chinese diaspora and (3) their aggregated impact on the direction of social media discussion in countries outside of China. Once a statistical relationship has been identified between the variables, the qualitative section of the research will attempt to describe the process on the ground as it unfolds. We will reference several countries in Oceania and Southeast Asia with large diaspora populations as case studies. The final part of this thesis will draw lessons from both the quantitative and qualitative chapters and make recommendations to U.S. policy makers and the DOD enterprise alike on ways to exploit or mitigate the implications from the findings of this study.

Ultimately, this study discovers that the PRC's efforts to exercise its informational power, specifically through the internationalization of its state-owned media apparatus, may be having an opposite effect of its desired outcome. Instead of developing an appealing global image to promote its political agenda—namely, those that protect the PRC's sovereignty and affirm the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) monopoly on power—the PRC's leadership may be further exacerbating intra-demographical tensions throughout the world. As such, the ethnic Chinese diaspora, which the CCP has not been secretive about

targeting, may not be responding to the PRC's media influence efforts as intended. Instead, state media activities may be widening the social and ideological rift between recent mainland Chinese migrants and members of the "old" Chinese diaspora. While new migrants tend to echo China's state media narrative, the old diaspora appears to be pushing back the same; and perhaps the most surprising of all, the presence of large ethnic Chinese communities overseas may ultimately subdue the effectiveness of PRC propaganda abroad. These findings indicate that nation-states concerned with China's growing power and influence may have an opportunity to capitalize on the heterogeneous nature of the global Chinese diaspora to counter the CCP's international propaganda machine.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scope of this thesis tangentially intersects with a range of disciplinary fields—from soft power theory and diaspora politics to Chinese public diplomacy and influence strategy. However, this research's primary contribution to current literature is on the topic of the Chinese state media influence in the age of information and communication technology, with specific implications for the two primary targets of the PRC's ongoing influence campaign. These targets include the Chinese diaspora abroad and the general population in countries of strategic importance to the PRC. We will start our analysis by breaking down the components of the conventional country-diaspora relational model and examine the interactions amongst each component within the context of mass and social media theories. Next, our quantitative research will attempt to identify any statistical associations amongst the PRC's state media, the presence of diaspora, and the direction of social media discussion in the greater population. The qualitative aspect of the research will then focus on specific case studies to unveil the process on the ground as it unfolds where the PRC media infrastructure has historically leveraged its diaspora communities to influence social media discussions abroad. Subsequent sections in this literature review will provide a primer of the relevant fields of study, highlight existing gaps in the literature, and discuss how this research can best fill in some of these voids.

1. Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics

In his seminal work, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Joseph Nye defined soft power as one country influencing or co-opting another to "want what it wants"—the source of power, therefore, derives from attraction values rather than traditional coercive measures.[4] From this lens, the forms of soft power could be diverse, ranging from pop culture and mass media to political ideology and public diplomacy. Unsurprisingly, the western concept of "soft power" wields great appeal to the CCP, which has demonstrated a historical predisposition for the indirect application of influence since

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[4] Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), xx.

its founding. The CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD) is certainly no stranger to conducting a wide array of influence campaigns against both domestic and foreign actors to achieve the Party's political objectives for the better part of the 20th Century. This trend continued well into the new millennium with Hu Jintao famously adopting the phrase "Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics" ("具有中国特色的软实力") in a speech during the 17th National People's Congress in 2007. The former party General Secretary effectively codified the term as an official CCP strategy to promote its national interest. In the CCP's version of soft power, however, the focus is on enhancing the appeal of Chinese culture abroad ("软实力必须提倡中国文化").[5]

2.   Diaspora in the Context of Soft Power Theory

What role can the diaspora assume in its kin country's soft power strategy? The diaspora can certainly increase the attraction value of its kin country via various non-coercive means. One theory postulates that successful diaspora communities, through their inherent social, economic, and political capital, could indirectly exert influence on the wider population of their adopted home country. This influence could translate into an expansive power base for the diaspora communities themselves; but more importantly for this thesis, a powerful diaspora could also serve the political interests of its ancestral country. The academic field of Diaspora Politics is dedicated to understanding this process.

Fiona Adamson contextualizes diasporas in this political power framework and explains that diaspora politics is not a new phenomenon—in fact, it has been widely practiced in modern history. Irishman, Sein Fein, and the Chinese Revolutionaries in the early 20th Century were amongst the first to introduce "ethnic lobbying" to the political vernacular. Adamson takes a broad perspective on the influence that these diasporas wield within their host countries, or countries of residence. She conjectures that their expansive influence derives from the diaspora leaders being able to "gain access to policy circles,

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[5] "Hu Jintao Seeks to Enhances Cultural Appeal," *Xinhua*, October 15, 2007.

resources, and networks in both their country of residence and their 'homeland,' as well as increasing their status within the group they are seeking to represent."[6]

3. The Influence of the Chinese Diaspora

There are obvious political and economic incentives for the PRC to engage its vast diaspora communities, numbered at 65 million in 2014; many of whom also belongs to the top of the income ladder in their respective host countries. The diasporic business communities in the so-called "Bamboo Network," for instance, owns a majority of the most profitable business enterprises in Southeast Asia. Together, they hold an impressive $2.5 trillion in assets, ranking the Chinese diaspora as the eighth largest aggregated holder of assets in the world.[7] Their economic power often translates to a political one as well, creating enduring access to policy circles in their adopted homelands—much as Adamson's theory has predicted. The enormous financial and political leverage that the diaspora communities can wield, if they so choose, could significantly benefit China's strategic goals for the region.

Indeed, a preponderance of China scholars have cautioned that the PRC, through various soft power instruments, has already begun co-opting overseas Chinese communities to undertake its political biddings. Alexander Bowe's report to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission suggests that the UFWD "seeks to co-opt ethnic Chinese individuals and communities living outside China" with key affiliated organizations guided directly by the Chinese state while other organizations with less explicit ties are influenced by the party to an extent.[8] In implementation, Mercy Kuo

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[6] Fiona Adamson, "The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics" *Current History* 115, no. 784 (November 2016): 291–297.

[7] "Xi's Secret Economic Weapon: Overseas Chinese," *Nikkei Asia Review*, April 3, 2017, https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Xi-s-secret-economic-weapon-Overseas-Chinese2.

[8] Alexander Bowe, "China's Overseas United Front Works," U.S. Congressional Staff Research Report, August 24, 2018, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China%27s%20Overseas%20United%20Front%20Work%20-%20Background%20and%20Implications%20for%20US_final_0.pdf

suggests that the Chinese diaspora groups have routinely amplified the PRC's message for a peaceful reunification with Taiwan.[9]

Through his research at the Air War College on this same topic, Olivier Brault hypothesized that the PRC has been operationalizing its diaspora as an integral part of its national power instrument. As such, Beijing has embarked on a kind of "charm offensive" to actively attract the overseas Chinese communities back into the Party's embrace. This is reflected in a series of favorable Chinese economic policies toward the diaspora as well as Beijing's redoubled efforts to engage with the overseas Chinese community leaders in recent years.[10] Brault's study parsed the complex diaspora relational system down to three distinct components: the PRC (or kin country), the overseas Chinese diaspora community, and the host country (or country of residence).[11] This trilateral influence model is useful in identifying the relational flows amongst the key stakeholders in diaspora politics. This study will adopt the same model as the backbone to subsequent analysis.

4.   Current Schools of Thought on Diaspora Politics

A brief survey of contemporary literature on diasporas as a political tool of influence yields two broad schools of thought that could trace their theoretical origins to Constructivism and Liberalism within the field of International Relations.

First School: Diaspora as Passive Actors. This is the traditional perspective of a diaspora's role. Under this model, the diaspora identifies with a state or proto-state and acts on behalf of its host or kin country either unilaterally or more often, at the direction of the kin country (Figure 1).

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[9] Mercy A. Kuo, "China's United Front Work: Propaganda as Policy," *The Diplomat*, February 14, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/chinas-united-front-work-propaganda-as-policy/?allpages=yes&print=yes.

[10] Olivier Brault, "The Chinese Diaspora: China's Instrument of Power?" (master's thesis, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2010).

[11] Brault, "The Chinese Diaspora: China's Instrument of Power?"
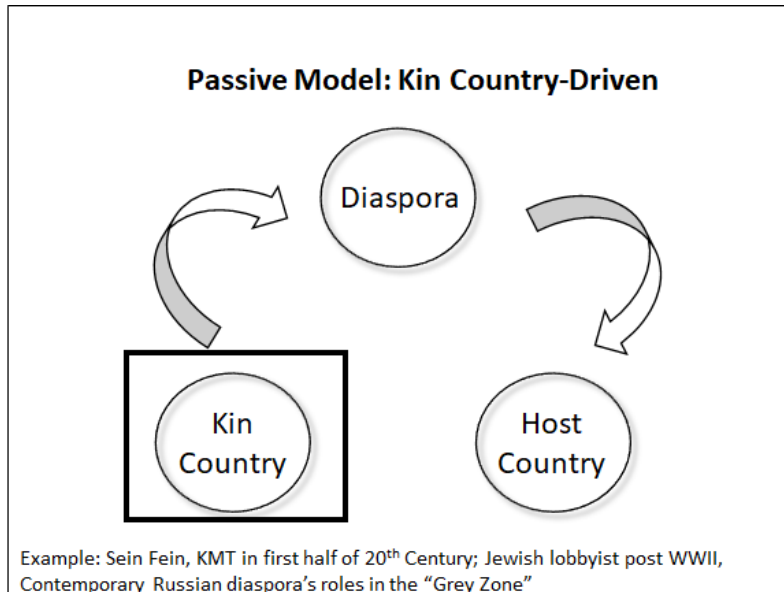
Figure 1. Kin Country-Driven Diasporic Influence Model

Charles King and Neil Melvin, in "Diaspora Politics: Ethnic Linkages, Foreign Policy, and Security in Linkage," suggest that only diasporas holding strong "ethnic identity and communal solidarity" with their ancestral homelands can be leveraged by their kin country to influence the host country. He drew case studies from the post-Soviet states of Ukraine and Kazakhstan and concluded that the lack of a distinct ethnic identity in these states' diaspora communities explain the minor role diaspora politics played in the region after the fall of the Berlin Wall. [12] On the opposite end, Adamson observes that authoritarian states often forcefully control their overseas diaspora communities to expand the state's power beyond national borders. [13]

Under this school of thought, a second scenario involves a host country leveraging the diaspora to influence its kin country's domestic politics (Figure 2). This is perhaps best illustrated when the U.S. government reached out to its elite Iraqi diaspora to select Ahmed

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[12] Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, "Diaspora Politics: Ethnic Linkages, Foreign Policy, and Security in Eurasia," International Security 24, No. 3 (Winter, 1999–2000): 132.

[13] Fiona Adamson, "The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics," *Current History* 115, no. 784 (November 2016): 291–297.

Chalabi, a prominent member of the exiled Iraqi diaspora, to be the political leader of the Post-Saddam Iraq.
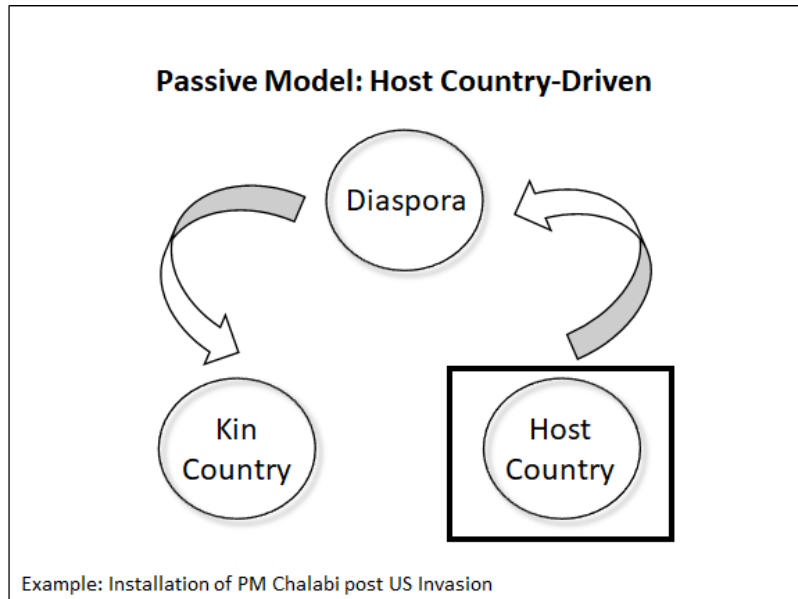
Figure 2. Host Country-Driven Diasporic Influence Model

For both passive models, the diaspora is a potent option to exert political influence on the global stage, particularly for a weaker nation-state that has yet to possess a robust public diplomacy arsenal. A mobilized diaspora, in turn, can promote its kin country's interests abroad, forming powerful lobbying groups. Unsurprisingly, Adamson noted, that state, proto-state, and non-state actors have fiercely competed for the "control of the diaspora"[14] (Figure 3).

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[14] Adamson, "The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics," 294.
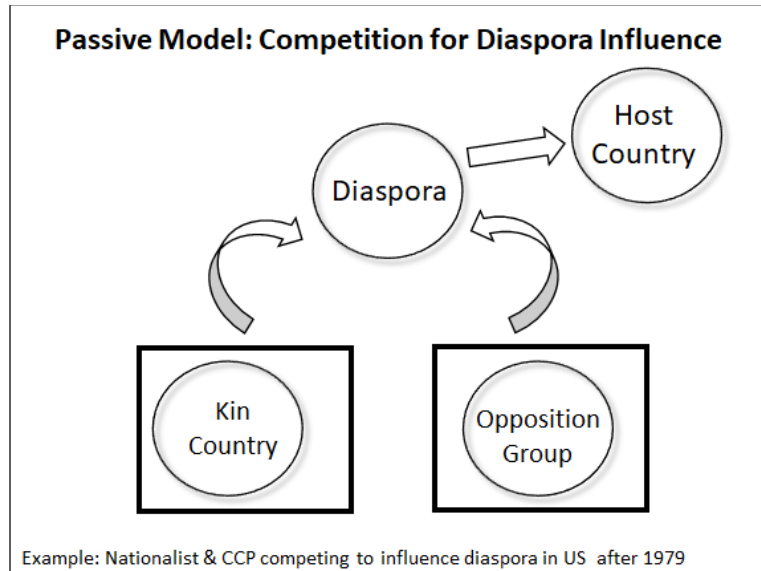
Figure 3. Competitive Influence Model

Second School: Diaspora as an Active Actor. Under this model, a diaspora acts on its own initiative and mobilizes unilaterally without explicit directive from either the kin or host country. Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth attributed this growing diaspora assertiveness to their accumulated wealth and resources in the host countries. As such, a diaspora has the potential to even surpass the power status of the elites within its kin or host state. The formidable Jewish lobbyists in the U.S., for example, not only can influence their host country's foreign policy but also maintains "political proxies" at home to pressure Israel's domestic politics.[15] The Tamil diaspora who sympathized with the rebel cause is another example of a powerful self-mobilized diaspora group that was able to impact the politics in both their home and kin country via an aggressive fundraising and social awareness campaign.[16]

Shain and Barth's active diaspora model has certainly benefited from the communication technology advancements of the 21st Century. Indeed, Aihwa Ong argues

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[15] Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth, "Diaspora and International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 57, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 454.

[16] Camilla Orjuela,"Distant warriors, distant peace workers? Multiple diaspora roles in Sri Lanka's violent conflict," *Global Networks* 8, no. 4 (October 2008): 436–452.

that today's diaspora, armed with the power of the internet, can mobilize an unprecedented level of public support in response to political events of significance—all in real time. As such, globalization and online opinion forums have enabled the emergence of a new transnational class of diaspora who are united by their shared ethno-cultural background and often operate without explicit state-affiliation. This new "Cyberpublic" has become an independent stakeholder alongside traditional state and non-state actors in international relations theory (Figure 4). The series of protests against the global anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia in 1998 is an excellent example of a "stateless" diaspora online movement organized by transnational elites of the same ethnicity in reaction to a certain world event. Nevertheless, the rise of this new class is not without its perils. The moral and political dilemma derived from a Cyberpublic is accountability—who will be held responsible for the constructive as well as destructive effects of their actions?[17]
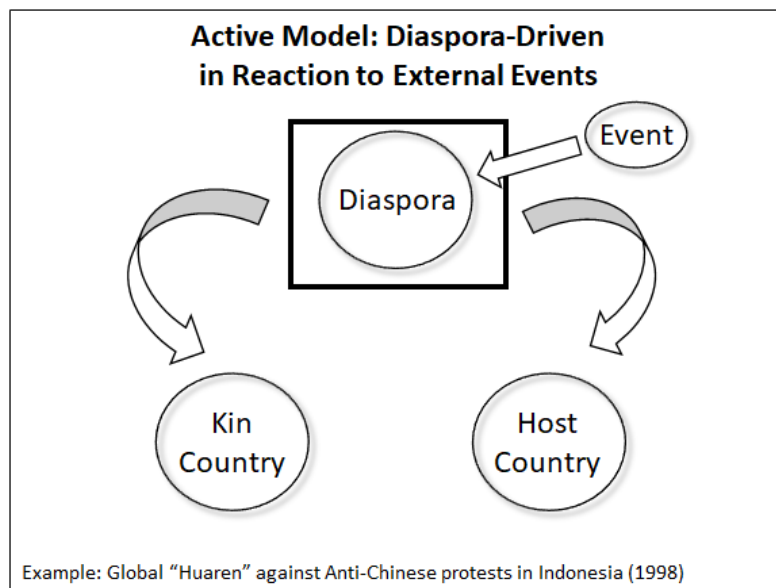
Figure 4. Diaspora-Driven Influence Model

[17] Aihwa Ong, "Cyberpublics and Diaspora Politics Among Transnational Chinese," *Interventions* 5, no. 1 (2003): 97, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13698032000049815.

5. Western Academic Views on the Chinese Diaspora's Political Influence

While ample amounts of literature exist on the Chinese diaspora, academic research focusing specifically on its *political influence* both abroad and at home is surprisingly limited. Stephen Fitzgerald's *China and the Oversea Chinese (1972)* was perhaps the earliest and most comprehensive study on the Chinese diaspora's influence around the world. Since then, qualitative studies by Western and Chinese scholars alike tend to generalize Chinese diaspora politics as one sub-category under the PRC's "public diplomacy," with the sole purpose of advancing a positive international image. This academic trend is an intuitive reflection of the observable PRC soft power strategy at the time. Up to that point, the CCP leadership had primarily directed considerable resources to improve its cultural appeal to the Western audience.

Yet, this singular focus by Western academics also precludes any critical consideration of the Chinese diaspora's other potentials. For example, researchers from AidData and William & Mary College conducted a comprehensive quantitative analysis of China's public diplomacy and its good neighbor effects in 2018. Among the many interesting findings, the research reveals that the PRC might be leveraging the positive image of its diaspora to improve the host country's perception of China.[18] Nevertheless, the study did not pursue this topic further. The authors focused solely on empirical datasets pertaining to public diplomacy in the official capacity at the national level rather than the informal diasporic activities at the grass-roots level. This research will attempt to address this gap by highlighting the process under which the Chinese diaspora's favorability could spill over to boost the favorability of China itself, akin to a "Goodwill Ambassador" effect.

6. The Metamorphosis of Chinese Diaspora Identity in the Digital Age

There is one area of consensus between the general diaspora literature and Chinese diaspora-specific studies—the transformative effect of information and communication

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[18] Samantha Custer et al., Ties That Bind: Quantifying China's public diplomacy and its "good neighbor" effect (Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary, 2018), http://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/pdfs/Ties_That_Bind--Full_Report.pdf.

technologies (ICT) on the diaspora's influence. Scholars such as Sheng Ding have highlighted the PRC's increasing reliance on the internet and social media to deliver an appealing state narrative abroad. Beijing's targeted audience, perhaps unsurprisingly, has predominantly been the overseas Chinese diaspora. In this respect, Ding's "Chinese Digital Diaspora in the age of China's Rise" bears striking resemblance to Ong's trans-border "Cyberpublic"—both suggesting that the emergence of online ethnic communities has enabled the diaspora to swiftly traverse between their dual identities as a citizen of their host country and a *notional one* in their kin country.[19] The implication of this digital fluidity is that the diaspora's viewpoint can quickly assimilate into its host country's mainstream narrative, all beneath the seams of the cyber realm's non-attributional nature.

The topic of Chinese diaspora identity in the digital age was further explored in Jajie Lu's recent study. He concludes that the PRC has been ineffective in influencing the Chinese diaspora's digital identity. Instead, Lu believes that the Chinese diaspora cannot simply be tied to a singular persona that is merely an extension of the predominant ethnicity in the PRC. The overseas Chinese have in fact developed a distinct identity with its own internal divisions and conflicts. Nevertheless, Lu's study must be taken in context. He primarily studied the diasporic Chinese in Australia who may have previously emigrated from overseas Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia, thus further diluting their identity as mainland Chinese.[20]

One particular aspect of Lu's study that this research will further ascertain is the existence of a heterogeneous identity in the Chinese digital diaspora, and Chinese migrant communities in general. This thesis will specifically examine the diaspora identities divided along the temporal line of emigration—whether there is a generational factor that erodes away a diaspora's sense of Chinese nationalism. This nuance would undoubtedly affect the PRC's influence strategy abroad.

[19] Sheng Ding, "Digital Diaspora and National Image Building: A New Perspective on Chinese Diaspora Study in the Age of China's Rise," *Pacific Affairs* 80, no. 4 (Winter 2007/2008): 627–648.

[20] Jiajie Lu, "Understanding the Chinese Diaspora: The Identity Construction of Diasporic Chinese in the Age of Digital Media" (doctoral thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2017), https://eprints.qut.edu.au/112817/1/Jiajie_Lu_Thesis.pdf.

Our research also draws on existing studies of Chinese state media's influence in the digital age. The emergence of ICT and its implications for China have spurred a distinct series of Western academic research in recent years. The prevailing platforms that these studies focus on are the popular social media services such as Facebook, Twitter, or its Chinese analogue, Weibo. In 2018, Joyce Nip and Chao Sun at the University of Sydney conducted a comprehensive study of the influence of Chinese news media on international social media. They examined the popularity of the three largest Chinese state media conglomerates—**Xinhua, People's Daily, and CGTN**—based on the number of replies and retweets of their news feeds from average Twitter users around the world.[21] The study reveals that Chinese state media has established a steady foothold in the social media space and is quite successful in gaining an international following. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Nip and Sun also reach the conclusion that Chinese media accounts on Twitter are largely an extension of the Party's one-way propagation system. The fact that over 60% of their news tweets are dedicated to China-related content ensures that Chinese state media's viewpoints will dominate international narratives pertaining to the PRC in the digital age. And true to its communist propaganda origins, the PRC's social media presence is focused on outcompeting Western narratives. Big data analysis suggests that the PRC might be quite successful at achieving this goal. For instance, Chinese state media outlets were ranked amongst the most active and most retweeted accounts for all information pertaining to the South China Sea dispute during the study's reporting period.[22]

Nip and Sun's study is important to our study in a more fundamental way—it categorically establishes the Chinese state media as a soft power venue via which the PRC attempts to enhance its appeal. Referring back to the trilateral model, we can now confidently add Chinese state media as an enabler in the flow of influence between the kin country and host country.[23] We build upon Nip and Sun's study by adding a third component—the Chinese diaspora communities—to determine whether they facilitate or

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[21] Joyce Nip and Chao Sun, "China's News Media Tweeting, Competing with U.S. Sources," *Westminister Papers in Communication and Culture* 13, no. 1 (2018): 98–122.

[22] Nip and Sun, "China's News Media Tweeting, Competing with U.S. Sources," 98–122.

[23] Nip and Sun, "China's News Media Tweeting, Competing with U.S. Sources," 98–122.

hamper the flow of influence from the Chinese media to the host countries. Moreover, as Nip and Sun's research methodology have aptly validated, social media services, such as Twitter, are indeed an effective measure for the level of influence in the age of ICT. This study's research methodology will adopt a similar approach.

7.   Illuminating the PRC's Methods for Conducting Diaspora Politics

The academic references examined thus far are based mainly on Western research. What has the PRC government disclosed vis-a-vis its own methods and approach to diaspora politics? The inherently opaque nature of the PRC's inner political workings implies that official publications on this topic are sparse. Perhaps the most revealing statement came from the PRC's Political Work Guidelines of the People's Liberation Army" in 2003, four years prior to the official adoption of Hu's "Soft Power with Chinese characteristics." In this white paper, the CCP for the first time outlined a three-pronged approach known as the **"Three Warfare"**（三战论）campaign to influence Western audiences. Each prong represents a focus, to include media, public opinion, and sense of legality. For "Media Warfare," the PRC seeks to establish narrative dominance in popular foreign media. For "Public Opinion Warfare," the Party aims to sway the opinion of foreign audiences to align closer with the PRC's strategic objectives. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, "Legality Warfare" entails securing legitimacy for the PRC's narrative not only *de jure* but also *de facto* in the eyes of the target audience. In implementation, each focus of the Three Warfare concept is intrinsically related, if not interdependent, to one another. Media dominance could easily produce a favorable narrative, which in turn, sways public opinion and propels certain popular views into the mainstream political circle.

Unfortunately, no additional government literature on the Three Warfare concept has been published since 2003. Yet, it is clear the Chinese leadership has adhered to this construct to some extent in carrying out its foreign policy in recent years. The most indicative example was in 2013–2015 during the South China Sea dispute, when the PRC ostensibly waged a "legality" campaign via mass and social media to establish historical

legitimacy in its claim over the Scarborough Islands.[24] One critical information gap in the understanding of the Three Warfare concept is the identity of the "operators," or the agents operating on behalf of the PRC and carrying out the influencing act itself. In this function, a large ethnic Chinese diaspora community, with an established access and social prestige in the host country, could certainly be the prime candidate to serve in this capacity. Limited academic research in this area precludes us from validating this hypothesis. This study aims to fill in this gap.

8. Summary of Gaps in the Current Literature

In assessing the current literature holistically, we observed a series of knowledge gaps that upon addressing could significantly illuminate the logic and methods of diaspora politics in the age of mass and social media. First, has today's diaspora politics transformed beyond the traditional active vs. passive framework in the era of social media? Is the active vs. passive distinction still relevant? Can a state actor take advantage of the inherently amorphous and non-attributional characteristics of today's "Cyberpublic" to carry out a traditional influence campaign against the host country?

In other words, can a rising power, such as the PRC, intentionally blur the line between active and passive diaspora politics in order to create the façade of a seemingly "legitimate" domestic voice within the host country? Answers to these questions would enable U.S. policymakers to develop appropriate responses against revisionist states *currently* leveraging diaspora politics to erode U.S. political influence. Moreover, an improved situational awareness of the existing influence channels will improve the U.S.'s ability to tap into the wealth of diaspora resources abroad in furthering its own national interest.

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24 Doug Livermore, "China's Three Warfares in Theory and Practice in the South China Sea," *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, March 28, 2018, http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2018/03/25/chinas-three-warfares-in-theory-and-practice-in-the-south-china-sea/.

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III. THEORIZING CHINESE INFLUENCE STRATEGY ABROAD

This thesis is designed to answer the following research question: how and to what extent has the PRC been able to leverage the strength of its state media infrastructure and the overseas Chinese diaspora to promulgate its narratives on the global stage? This chapter addresses the first part of the research question—the "how" behind Beijing's ability to leverage. The essence of this question is one of forms and functions; this is best answered by a synthesis of available literature on the known theoretical framework of Chinese influence strategy in the age of mass and social media.

A. NATION BRANDING—THE GOAL OF BEIJING'S SOFT POWER STRATEGY

Chinese influence activities, ranging from benign cultural exchanges to more portentous attempts at fostering economic dependency, generally fall under the so-called "Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics" strategy that was discussed above in the literature review. President Hu Jintao first unveiled the Communist Party's reinterpretation of Joseph Nye's soft power theory in 2007, which Hu's successor Xi Jinping carried forward with even greater zeal. The explicit goal of the PRC's soft power strategy is to increase both its physical and cognitive appeal to an international audience; or as one American scholar keenly observed—to promote China's international image as one would when "branding" a popular commercial product. In other word, the attraction of the China brand is based on its positive reputation and perceived trustworthiness; both are necessary to build brand loyalty.[25]

The question for scholars is thus *via which means and in what ways* can Beijing's soft power strategy promote its national name brand around the world. We hypothesize that this occurs through the growing strength of the PRC's state media abroad as well as the expansive influence of its ethnic Chinese diaspora. The answer to the latter—the mechanism of national branding—is the conventional wisdom that a well-respected

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[25] Sheng Ding, "Digital Diaspora and National Image Building: A New Perspective on Chinese Diaspora Study in the Age of China's Rise," *Pacific Affairs* 80, no. 4 (Winter 2007/2008): 631.

diaspora community can successfully amplify and promote its kin country's media narrative to the host country's general population.
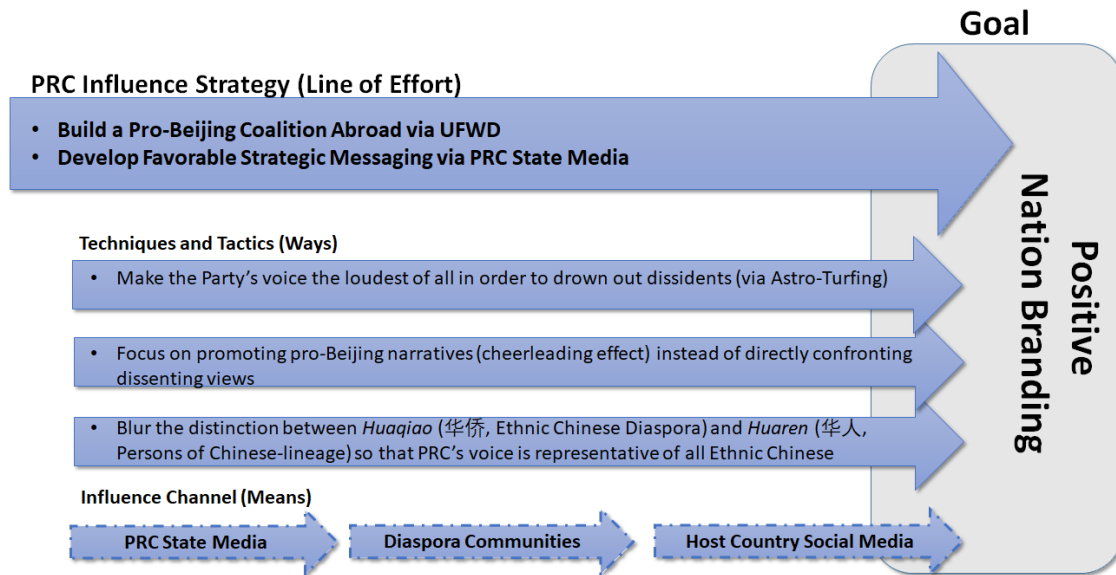
Figure 5. PRC Overseas Influence Framework (Hypothesized)

But the challenge for the PRC is that its diaspora is not as an easily malleable group as conventional wisdom has led us to believe. The 65 million-strong overseas Chinese is not only the largest diaspora in the world, but also amongst the richest and most influential.[26] Yet, the group is by no means homogenous and indeed has developed its own identity that could oppose the CCP on certain issues. Simply put, it is an unlikely scenario that the diaspora communities would unanimously amplify Beijing's narratives in all instances without external influence. Therefore, the first hurdle that Beijing must overcome is to manage its diaspora, or at least to minimize dissension within its ranks.

This chapter will provide the theoretical framework for understanding how the PRC state media are able to not only influence the powerful diaspora communities to support Beijing's view but also to enhance the China name brand in their respective host countries. Our discussion will focus particularly on Beijing's management style in dealing with the

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[26] Nazira B. Boldurukova, "Potency of the Chinese Diaspora," *Procedia Economics and Finance* 26 (2015): 36.

emerging digital diaspora that transcends physical borders**.** Figure 5 depicts an interpretation of the Chinese influence campaign framework—a *playbook* of a sort—which will be detailed in the following sections.

B.   REVISITING DIASPORA POLITICS FROM MAO TO XI

The ethnic Chinese diaspora has played a quiet yet pivotal role in the rapid modernization of China since Deng's reforms and his opening up policy (改革开放). The diaspora helped jump-start the People's Republic of China's bourgeoning economy via direct investment during the initial reform years, and Beijing continued to call on these "Patriotic Chinese Diaspora Communities" (爱国华侨) to lobby on behalf of their ancestral home. The Party's reliance on the ethnic Chinese abroad should not come as a surprise— after all, the approach was clearly in line with Mao's policy of "leveraging civil actors to persuade the politicians; civil sector will take the first step" ("以民促官, 民间先行"), which contributed to the monumental thawing of Sino-Japan relations in the 1970s. In that particular episode, the "civil actors" the Chairman referred to were predominantly ethnic Chinese communities residing in Tokyo.[27] Since then, this policy has produced similarly successful results in breaking China out of its international isolation. Under Xi's tutelage, the importance of the diaspora has once again been elevated into the spotlight. In the now famous "Chinese Dream" speech in 2017, Xi ostensibly proclaimed "The realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation requires the joint efforts of Chinese sons and daughters at home and abroad (" 實現中華民族偉大復興，需要海內外中華兒女共同努力"). This speech proves to be the harbinger of a renewed effort to gain the support of a new generation of millennial Chinese overseas.

1.   Defining the Chinese Diaspora in Modern History

A brief discussion is due on the evolving definition of the Chinese diaspora. Similar to Sheng Ding, Dudley Poston, and Juyin Wong's interpretations, we take a broad approach

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[27] "以民促官、以经促政--陈昊苏评点 2006 年中国民间外交," http://news.sina.com.cn/w/2006-12-21/ 170410831490s.shtml.

to categorize Chinese diaspora as "persons of Chinese ancestry that reside outside the PRC or Taiwan".[28] It is worth noting the term Chinese diaspora or "Huaqiao" (华侨) was originally meant to describe only those Chinese who are living overseas but have retained their Chinese citizenship. Recently, however, this term has increasingly become synonymous with Chinese ethnicity, "Huayi" (华裔), or any person of Chinese lineage, "Huaren" (华人) in academic journals.[29] Under this broad interpretation, the Chinese diaspora includes both the new immigrants (those born in PRC who might have yet to obtain citizenship of their host country) and the older and more established immigrants whose progeny migrated generations earlier. The blurring distinction between *Huaren* and *Huaqiao* may actually benefit the PRC's narrative, as the party can now legitimately appeal to the shared "Chinese-ness" of both new and old generations of immigrants in support of the rejuvenation of their kin country.

Scholars usually divide the history of Chinese migration into two periods: before and after the year 1952. The outward flow of Chinese people from mainland China has been occurring for centuries, reaching its peak during the latter half of the 19th Century when waves of impoverished Chinese emigrants rushed westward to seek employment as manual laborers in their newly adopted homelands. In particular, the "Coolie Trade" witnessed a high demand in cheap Chinese indentured servants to replace the African slaves after the abolition of slavery in Britain and the U.S. The migration trend gradually tapered going into the first half of the 20th Century and essentially halted in 1952. This watershed year marked the beginning of Mao's strict prohibition on outmigration that lasted for the next three decades. This policy was later reversed by Deng as part of his "Open-Door Policy." Migration volume then began to climb as more than half of the

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[28] Dudley L. Poston Jr. and Juyin Helen Wong, "The Chinese Diaspora: The Current Distribution of the Overseas Chinese Population," *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 2, no. 3 (2016): 349.

[29] Sheng Ding, "Digital Diaspora and National Image Building: A New Perspective on Chinese Diaspora Study in the Age of China's Rise," 627.

Chinese students studying abroad opted to stay behind after graduation. Scholars have often characterized this post-Deng rebound as the second migration peak in China's history.[30]

Looking at the latest migration period, several key trends emerged. First, the majority of the emigrants now come from mainland China as oppose to Taiwan or Hong Kong (an increase from 58.5% to 74.5% in the U.S. since 1989).[31] Secondly, emigrants from this period are highly educated, possessing many professional skills critical to sustaining their host countries' economies.[32] These trends, in turn, afford Beijing with new opportunities for positive representation—conveniently aligning with its overall national branding efforts.[33] Nevertheless, in order to effectively realize the full potential of the diaspora's 65-million members as Beijing's instrument, a correspondingly robust state infrastructure must be in place to interact with the diaspora.

2.   Evolution of Beijing's State Apparatus for Diaspora Affairs

Since its founding, the PRC has always invested heavily in Diaspora Affairs (侨务工作) with specialized agencies assigned to carry out its engagement with the overseas Chinese communities. During the Cold War era, these responsibilities fell on ideology-centric agencies such as the United Front Work Department (UFWD), International Liaison Department, Propaganda (or "Publicity") Department, and the PLA Second Department. For Mao, the Chinese diaspora was integral to the global proliferation of his revolutionary ideas. Diaspora affairs during this period therefore generally had implicit objectives to foment leftist rebellions around the world.

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[30] Jan Priebe and Robert Rudolf, "Does the Chinese Diaspora Speed Up Growth in Host Countries?" *World Development* 76 (2015): 251–252.

[31] Aihwa Ong, "Cyberpublics and Diaspora Politics Among Transnational Chinese," *Interventions* 5, no. 1 (2003): 89, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13698032000049815.

[32] Sheng Ding, "Digital Diaspora and National Image Building: A New Perspective on Chinese Diaspora Study in the Age of China's Rise," 635.

[33] Jan Priebe and Robert Rudolf, "Does the Chinese Diaspora Speed Up Growth in Host Countries?" *World Development* 76 (2015): 252–253.

Beijing's approach to diaspora affairs changed dramatically in 1989. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square Massacre when China's international standing plummeted, the Party shifted to a more constructive model—with diaspora now viewed as "propaganda bases" to repair China's damaged international image. It was during this period, that the State Council's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO, 国务院侨务办公室) began taking over much of the diaspora affairs responsibilities from the ideology-centric agencies to match with this paradigm shift.[34]

In the early 2000s, a series of high profile Western academic studies brought the world's attention to the Chinese diaspora's significant contribution to the global economy. One work's regression model, for example, found that an additional 10% of population in ethnic Chinese category translates to nearly a one percent increase in the host country's GDP.[35] These revelations compelled Beijing to rethink once again its approach to diaspora affairs. As such, the Overseas Chinese Office undertook an aggressive campaign to engage the ethnic Chinese business leaders around the world—in hope of leveraging the diaspora's newfound economic attractiveness to access mainstream foreign audiences.

In recent years with Xi in power, analysts have noticed signs of yet another change in Beijing's approach to diaspora affairs. In March of 2018, the PRC announced that the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office will regroup under the purview of the United Front Work Department (UFWD). This reshuffle shifted the pendulum closer to the earlier party/ideology-dominant model—perhaps not to the extent of active subversion as during the Cold War, but certainly a more assertive approach to engage, guide, and if necessary, coerce the diaspora community to do its bidding .[36] [37] Scholars have speculated that this recent move might not only be a reflection of Xi's nationalistic rhetoric but also due to

34 Ann-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapon: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping" (paper presented at the conference on "The corrosion of democracy under China's global influence," supported by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, Arlington, VA, September 16–17, 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/magicweaponsanne-mariebradyseptember162017.pdf.

35 Jan Priebe and Robert Rudolf, "Does the Chinese Diaspora Speed Up Growth in Host Countries?" *World Development* 76 (2015): 259.

36 "中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案," http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/21/c_1122570517.htm.

37 Amy Qin, "Worries Grow in Singapore Over China's Calls to Help Motherland," *The New York Times*, August 5, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/05/world/asia/singapore-china.html.

political survivability. Xi's vision for China is not without its critics, and dissidents abound particularly overseas. This brings up an importance characteristic of the diaspora community for the next discussion—its inherently contested nature that could pose a challenge to Beijing's legitimacy.

C. BEIJING'S APPROACH TO INFLUENCING AUDIENCES ABROAD

1. United Front Work Department—Building a Pro-Beijing Coalition

Aside from improving China's image abroad, are there other incentives for China to engage its diaspora? Some scholars suspect a more existential rationale. A vibrant diaspora population could espouse a rival narrative alongside the Party's ideology that could easily gain international approval, if not by proximity of the source alone. Worse, these narratives could creep back into China and win over the support of its population, directly challenging the legitimacy of the CCP. One does not need to look far into China's history to understand the threat posed by a dissident diaspora community. The founding members of Tongmeng Hui (同盟会 · Pre-cursor to KMT) and key cadres of the later Chinese Communist Party belonged to the ethnic Chinese diaspora and became radicalized abroad. The cataclysmic Wuchang Revolution (武昌起义) that brought down the last emperor of China in 1911 was orchestrated and financed largely by diaspora communities abroad. More recently, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the widespread protest from the diaspora communities was a disquieting reminder for the Party of a potential repeat of history. [38] The PRC's goal in engaging with the diaspora, therefore, entails "managing" if not outright "controlling" the diaspora's voices. The organization that is at the forefront to fulfill this role is none other than the UFWD.

To better understand UFWD's role in controlling diaspora dissidents, we must first examine its role in the broader context of China's influence operations abroad. Scholars widely agree that the PRC's influence operations fall under the "External

[38] Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "The Chinese Community Party is Still Afraid of Sun Yat-Sen's Shadow," *Foreign Policy*, March 8, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/08/the-chinese-communist-party-is-still-afraid-of-sun-yat-sens-shadow/.

Propaganda" (对外宣传) umbrella.[39] As seen in Figure 5, this is depicted as two broad yet mutually supported efforts—first, building a Pro-Beijing coalition abroad via the UFWD and second, conducting strategic messaging via PRC-endorsed media outlets. This section will focus the discussion on the former. The concept of United Front (统一战线) is inspired by the Leninist theory to "unite all forces that can be united" to "thwart enemy forces abroad."[40] Beijing has traditionally employed the United Front strategy both domestically and internationally to consolidate its base of power. According to a recent Congressional Staff Research report, at the national level, the United Front strategy is guided by the CCP's Politburo Standing Committee and coordinated via the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference which regularly brings together relevant stakeholders in the influence campaign. At the operational level, the department's methods of influence consist of establishing official or semi-official organizations as well as co-opting compatible non-official entities to promote the Party's agenda.[41]

While China has euphemistically labeled its United Front activities as part of its soft power, Western analysts remain skeptical. A report by the National Endowment for Democracy in 2017 cynically termed China's UFWD efforts as "Sharp" powers—hiding behind a benign appearance and "innocuously sounding language" but backed by the threat of hard power to achieve the Party's political objectives.[42] The importance of UFWD was reaffirmed recently when Xi Jinping referred to UFWD as China's "magic

[39] Mercy A. Kuo, "China's United Front Work: Propaganda as Policy," *The Diplomat*, February 14, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/chinas-united-front-work-propaganda-as-policy/?allpages=yes&print=yes.

[40] Alexander Bowe, "China's Overseas United Front Work," *US-China Economic and Security Commission Staff Research Report*, August 24, 2018, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/ China%27s%20Overseas%20United%20Front%20Work%20%20Background%20and%20Implications%20for%20US _final_0.pdf.

[41] Alexander Bowe, "China's Overseas United Front Work," https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/ China%27s%20Overseas%20United%20Front%20Work%20%20Background%20and%20Implications%20for%20US _final_0.pdf.

[42] Marcel Angliviel de la Beaumelle, "The United Front Work Department: 'Magic Weapon' at Home and Abroad," *China Brief* 17, no. 9 (July 6, 2017), https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-department-magic-weapon-home-abroad/.

weapon" (法) to expand political influence abroad.[43] Under Xi's supervision, the UFWD has added an additional 40,000 employees and, as mentioned, now has direct control over the Overseas Chinese Bureau.[44]

The dual lines of effort in the PRC's general influence operations also translate to its relationship with the diaspora communities. Along the first line, UFWD has unilaterally established as well as co-opted thousands of chapters of Beijing-aligned organizations around the world. An example in the unilateral category includes PRC fronts such as "Peaceful Reunification Societies"; an example of a co-opted organization is the ubiquitous Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA) on major campuses around the world that receives funding and maintains tacit ties with the nearest Chinese consulates. The message of ethnic unity is the purported motivation behind these organizations—as Beijing exploits the ongoing trend of conflating Chinese diaspora (Huaqiao, 华侨) with persons of Chinese lineage (Huaren, 华人). Another interpretation of this is that Beijing is attempting to transform an inherently heterogeneous diaspora into a more homogenous group.

Once the diaspora communities are co-opted to the side of the PRC, this *newly united front* could then turn to promoting PRC-favored viewpoints, while stifling dissenting views—such as those that promotes Taiwan or Tibet's independence, protection for Falun Gong members, or awareness of the oppression of Uyghur populations. In confronting these contested issues, scholars have noted the PRC's strategy of tuning up the volume to overwhelm the opposition, or as Anne-Marie Brady describes, "to make the Party's voice the loudest of them all."[45]

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[43] Ann-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapon: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping" (paper presented at the conference on "The corrosion of democracy under China's global influence," https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/magicweaponsanne-mariebradyseptember162017.pdf.

[44] Bates Gill and Benjamin Schreer, "The Global Dimension of China's Influence Operations," *The Strategist*, April 11, 2018, https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/global-dimension-chinas-influence-operations/.

[45] Ann-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapon: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping," https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/magicweaponsanne-mariebradyseptember162017.pdf.

2. State Media—Propagating Beijing's Global Narrative

This strategy of using mass to overwhelm dissenting views is also visible in the second line of effort of Beijing's influence strategy; the PRC has been aggressively expanding its global media reach to stifle out the voices of the few independent diaspora outlets. For example, PRC-sponsored Chinese Central Television (CCTV, 央视) has rapidly expanded its international presence with the establishment of Chinese Global Television (CGTV), providing 24-hour broadcasts and low-cost media content to over 100 countries with a steady viewership of at least 85 million people. Similar patterns of international expansion are also visible in the PRC's other two state media enterprises, Xinhua News (新华社) and People's Daily (人民日报). The intent is to saturate international audience and diaspora alike with PRC-endorsed narratives.

Anne-Marie Brady has characterized this media expansion as an attempt to integrate, or "harmonize," diaspora mass media with the PRC's official media narratives—a strategy known as 海外华文媒体融合 or *haiwai huawen meiti ronghe.* Beijing's voice could then become representative of all ethnic Chinese people around the world. She further noted that this strategy could also create a seemingly favorable domestic voice from within the host country itself, providing the PRC's narrative that much more credence to mainstream audiences abroad. Concurrently, the Party has made a concerted effort to diversify its media output beyond traditional domains and into the cyber realm, particularly the social media platform where great potential and even greater challenges are presented to Beijing.

D. BEIJING AND THE EMERGING DIGITAL DIASPORA

Thus far, the discussion of Beijing's influence has been focused on a physical population, but do these strategies also apply to the emerging digital populations? A review of the available literature strongly suggests that some of Beijing's influence strategies have dual applicability for both the physical and cyber realm.

Since the 2000s, with the democratization of information and communication technologies (ICT), diaspora communities have increasingly turned to online public forums to reaffirm their identity, voice their political opinions, and even mobilize for collective

action. This new "digital diaspora" transcends borders and has grown in both legitimacy and power. For the Chinese diaspora, similar discourse took shape in the formation of a "Cyberpublic"—the best example was the *Global Huaren Online* (全球华人网) movement in 1998 against the anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia. In describing this episode, Aihwa Ong highlighted how the movement was able to unite and mobilize the Chinese diaspora across the entire Southeast Asia region with frightening speed and intensity, all allegedly without the encouragement from any state actor.[46] Ding similarly concluded that "the more China engages in globalization … the more important is the role played by the Chinese digital diaspora in Chinese politics and foreign policy." He credited the borderless nature of the cyber realm for eroding away the separation amongst "mainland Netizens, Taiwan Netizens, American Chinese Netizens, etc." Instead, he observed "in the virtual world, all of them belong to one family"—creating a new diasporic digital nationalism.[47]

Yet the rise of the Chinese digital diaspora also presents a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the digital diaspora seems to precipitate Beijing's desire to create a singular Chinese identity. On the other, the digital diaspora could endanger the Party—as the inherent anonymity in the western cyber realm render it impervious to coercion. The example of the *Global Huaren Online* Movement demonstrates that without positive control, similar movements could mobilize an unprecedented number of ethnic Chinese people potentially against the Communist government. While literature remains scarce on the PRC's techniques in managing the social media space abroad, one can make a reasonable inference from Beijing's cyber policy for its own netizens within the confines of its border.

Recent research by Gary King and Jennifer Pan has illuminated Beijing's strategy for shaping the domestic cyber realm for its desired narrative. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Party avoids outright censorship whenever possible, and instead, opts for "astroturfing"—fabricating a large amount (estimated to be 448 million annually) of pro-

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[46] Aihwa Ong, "Cyberpublics and Diaspora Politics Among Transnational Chinese," *Interventions* 5, no. 1 (2003): 84, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13698032000049815.

[47] Sheng Ding, "Digital Diaspora and National Image Building: A New Perspective on Chinese Diaspora Study in the Age of China's Rise," *Pacific Affairs* 80, no. 4 (Winter 2007/2008): 641.

PRC commentaries—to overwhelm public discussion forums. Likewise, Beijing's hired online commentators, known colloquially as the "50-cent Party" (五毛党), dodge direct confrontations with dissenting views.

Scholars surmise that Party leadership understands basic human psychology—the more a state attacks the opposition, the more it fuels the opposition's desire to defend its position. Instead, the 50-cent Party's preferred *modus operandi* is cheerleading the Party's narrative or creating distractions for the online public with increased coverage of less-threatening topics.[48] Here, a parallel pattern has emerged. The techniques of astroturfing, cheerleading, and distraction are all in line with the general influence techniques of "making PRC's voice the loudest of them all" and using mass to overwhelm dissenting views. Indeed, similar techniques are allegedly being employed against the Taiwanese cyber space leading up to its recent elections.[49]

Given the comparatively less restrictive nature of Western cyberspace, one can reasonably assume that Beijing's influence techniques inside China likely extend abroad and the general strategy to manage and control the *physical* diaspora also applies to the *digital* ones.

E.   THE PRC'S USE OF COMPUTATIONAL PROPAGANDA TO MANIPULATE THE SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITY

The topic of Chinese usage of online "bots" to influence popular sentiment requires a separate discussion. Various academics have charged the Communist state for its attempts at using these "bots," or fake online user accounts operating on the basis of computer codes and posing as a human user to interact with other members of the online community. Many academic researchers have coined China's use of bots with the term "computational propaganda" to describe the PRC and other authoritarian governments' activities involving

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[48] Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Robert, "How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument," *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 3 (2017): 496–497.

[49] Josh Rogin, "China's Interference in the 2018 Elections Succeeded – In Taiwan," *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2018/12/18/chinas-interference-elections-succeeded-taiwan/.

automated social media accounts that are associated with specific narratives.[50] Consider the speed at which communication technologies has evolved and its relatively fresh impact on political discourse, few academic research has been done on the topic of computational propaganda; nevertheless, due to its headline grabbing tendency, this topic has made increasing frequent appearances in academic journals recently.

Most academics would agree that China's use of bots to manipulate discussions in the online community is primarily focused on political matters. In Tibet, China has used bots to drown out sovereignty movements. Tibetan sympathizers have noticed that Twitter hashtags such as #tibet and #freetibet are constantly bombarded with junk tweets from automated Twitter accounts. The result of which deemed the hashtags as unusable to track the ongoing discussion on the Tibet independence movement. When it comes to political movements, protests or security issues, China has been known to intervene using computational propaganda to not only demobilize those online discussions but also to inundate the online space with pro-government messages.[51] In this way, we are seeing a repeat of the tactic of "tuning up the volume to drown out the dissidents" as discussed in the previous section. On Sina Weibo, one China's most popular social media platforms, researchers found that 13% of messages had been deleted to crack down on those that were "too politically charged."[52] With its draconian control over the internet and its domestic social media platforms, the PRC government and CCP uses whatever means necessary to control and manipulate its domestic online discussions to protect its core national security interests—namely, countering threats to its sovereignty and CCP-rule.

Despite some research indicating the use of automation to manipulate social media, other studies indicate that the PRC government's bot use may not be as pervasive. According to a study by Bolsover and Howard in 2019, their analysis of data collected

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[50] Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, "Troops, Trolls and Troublemakers: A Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation" (working paper, University of Oxford, 2017).

[51] Samuel C. Woolley, "Automating Power: Social Bot Interference in Global Politics," *First Monday* 21, no. 4 (April 4, 2016), https://firstmonday.org/article/view/6161/5300.

[52] Katina Michael, "Bots Without Borders: How Anonymous Accounts Hijack Political Debate," *The Conversation* 25 (January 2017): 1–3.

from both Twitter and Weibo social media platforms "indicate that the Chinese state is not using automation as part of either its domestic or international propaganda efforts."[53] This study defeats previous assumptions that the Chinese government, because of its authoritarian power, would undoubtedly be using computational propaganda to manipulate social media discussions. Instead, Bolsover and Howard suggest that the reasons why China may not be exercising automation in the social media landscape is because of several reasons. China's traditional state media apparatus including CCTV, China Radio International, and China Daily have already dominated most of China's international propaganda efforts. China also has a significantly large pool of human resources; therefore, manual dissemination of social media content such as through its 50-Cent army may be a smarter and more effective strategy. Lastly, automation on platforms such as Twitter may not be as effective since information propagates mainly through those users with significantly large followings (i.e., celebrities, social media influencers) and not through merely individual users.

In the end, accounts used by actual humans attempting to manipulate online discussions are more common and possibly more effective than the use of bots. According to a 2019 report by the Computational Propaganda Research Project, despite bot accounts being used in 50 out of 70 countries studied, human-run accounts are more common than bot accounts and can better manipulate conversations by posting comments, tweeting, and private messaging. With regards to China, the report indicates that China has a high cyber troop capacity involving "large numbers of staff, and large budgetary expenditure on psychological operations or information warfare."[54] Because of its ability to use real people to manipulate social media and less budgetary constraints, China sees less of a need to automate its social media manipulation.

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[53] Gillian Bolsover and Philip Howard, "Chinese Computational Propaganda: automation, Algorithms and the Manipulation of Information about Chinese Politics on Twitter and Weibo," *Information, Communication & Society* 22, no. 14 (2019): 2063–2080.

[54] Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, "The Global Disinformation Disorder: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation" (working paper, University of Oxford, 2019).

Despite advancements in social media technologies, artificial intelligence, and ultra-fast computing speeds, the mere size of population of the Communist state may deem the use of bots as an ineffective way of manipulating social media conversations. Instead, studies suggest that its own 50-Cent army is more capable of traversing the online environment in search of conversations detrimental to the CCP's hold on state power. Since the PRC government places less emphasis on using bots to spread propaganda abroad to include influencing the ethnic Chinese diaspora, this study's analysis does not formally account for automated social media accounts and deems it negligible in capturing the volume of social media discussion.

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IV.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter focused on answering the first part of our research question—"how" was China been able to leverage the strength of its state media infrastructure and overseas diaspora to propagate its narratives abroad. We now attempt to answer the second part of the question—"to what extent" was China able to leverage the aggregated strength of its state media and diaspora. This question is inherently an assessment of effectiveness and is best addressed with a combination of quantitative analysis supported by qualitative case studies that will be featured in Chapter V and VI, respectively. The following is a brief overview of the research methodology to assess the "extent" of state media and diasporic influences around the world.

A.   HYPOTHESES
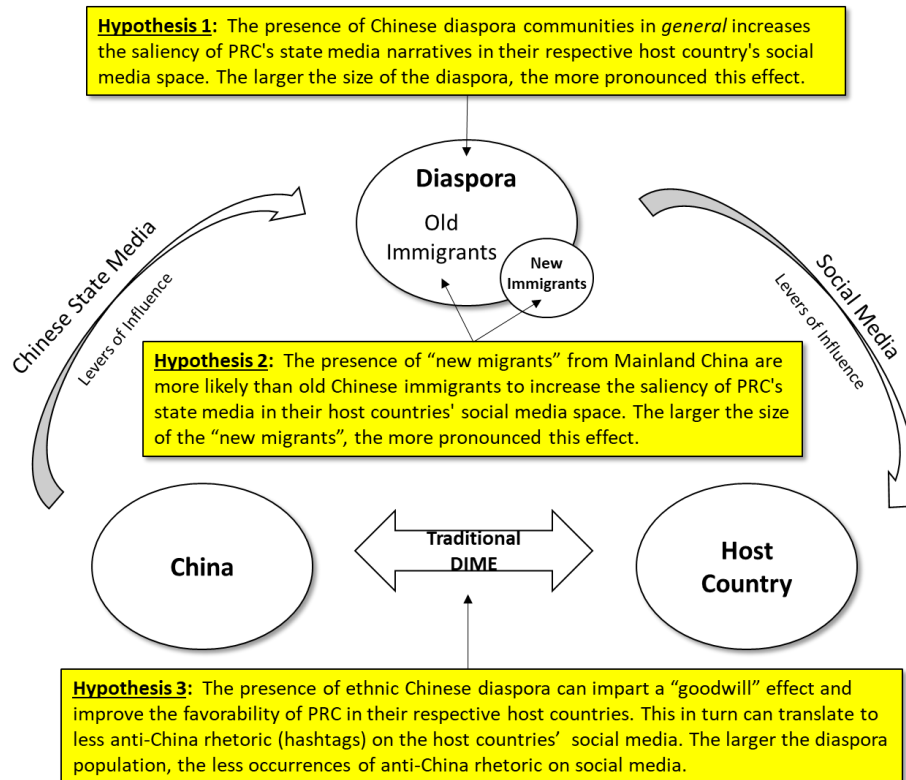
Figure 6. Conceptual Visualization of the Hypotheses

The quantitative portion of this research will empirically explore the effectiveness of the trilateral influence model (consisting of the PRC, host countries, and diaspora) in promoting Beijing's narratives around the world. We have developed a series of hypotheses to help gauge the extent of influence that each of the three key stakeholders impart on the model. Figure 6 is a conceptual visualization of this trilateral model introduced above. Multiple regression models will be used to test the premises behind each of the three hypotheses.

The first hypothesis asserts that the presence of Chinese diaspora communities in general increases the saliency of the PRC's state media narratives in the respective host country's social media space. The expected relationship is that the larger the size of the diaspora population, the more pronounced this effect.

The second hypothesis expands upon the first and further applies this principle to a specific demographic within the diaspora communities. We expect that the presence of "newer" Chinese immigrants would have a more pronounced effect on the saliency of the PRC's state media within the social media environments of their host countries than the presence that the older generations would.

The third hypothesis will briefly divert from online saliency and apply the diaspora theory to mainstream sentiments on social media. We expect that the Chinese diaspora— through its positive image and symbiotic interactions with the host countries' population— can improve the favorability of the PRC and correspondingly decrease the amount of anti-China sentiments exhibited on mainstream social media of their host countries.

This last hypothesis is perhaps the most relevant for China watchers, as this study will attempt to assess a key premise behind Xi Jinping's soft power strategy—that overseas Chinese are an indispensable national instrument to enhance China's appeal around the world. If this "Chinese Diaspora as Goodwill Ambassador" hypothesis is valid, then we should expect to observe a reduction in anti-China rhetoric on social media in countries with a comparably large Chinese diaspora population. The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to defining the terms in the hypotheses and the methodology used to assess them.

B.   OPERATIONALIZING OUR KEY VARIABLES

1.   Intra-diaspora Demographics

As indicated in the previous chapters, this study broadly defines the overseas Chinese diaspora as all ethnic Chinese living abroad (海外华裔), to include both the "new" and "old" classes of immigrants. The former is defined as the first-generation immigrants who have yet to obtain their respective host countries' citizenship; while the latter are host country citizens of ethnic Chinese-descent, including those with lineage tracing back generations to the first wave of Chinese immigrants that left Imperial China in the 19th Century. This class distinction is pivotal to understanding the PRC's relations with its overseas diaspora in the trilateral model. Conventional knowledge suggests that Chinese diaspora communities are generally united by a shared enthusiasm to self-identify with their kin country out of an intrinsic sense of nationalism. Hence, nationalism in this sense transcends spatially beyond physical borders and even temporally across generations.

Recent studies, however, have discovered that the new migrants might be more inclined than the older generations to support and promote Beijing's narratives. One explanation is that these recent immigrants continue to maintain active ties with their kin country thanks to the widely available Chinese-based social media apps such as Weibo and WeChat. Furthermore, this tendency to remain "plugged in" to Chinese social media could be both a cause and a symptom as to why new immigrants might have more difficulties assimilating into their newly adopted homes. At the core of this study is an attempt to validate the conjectures on the differing degrees of influences from the "new" and "old" generations of Chinese immigrants via our proposed hypotheses.

2.   Chinese Diaspora Netizens: Amplifiers to Beijing's Messages Abroad?

To further assess the trilateral influence model, this study seeks to identify the trickle-down effect that a more active diaspora would have on the host country itself. Scholars, such as Anne-Marie Brady, have long theorized China's attempt to integrate and "harmonize" diaspora mass media with the PRC's official media narratives, known as

海外华文媒体融合 (*haiwai huawen meiti ronghe*.)[55] The goal is to engender a seemingly favorable domestic voice from within the host country itself, which could then influence the direction of mainstream media discussions. This strategy could explain Chinese state media's rapid expansion abroad in recent years, particularly in diaspora-heavy regions, as well as the diversification of its output platforms to reach a new generation of social media-savvy populations.[56]

In this view, the diaspora community can serve as an *intermediary* linking the PRC's strategic message to the host country population. The trickle-down effect from a particularly involved and outspoken diaspora community could therefore be an elevated level of mainstream interest—as displayed on traditional and social media—regarding the Chinese state media content. It should therefore be possible to gauge the spread of the PRC's strategic messaging by measuring the extent that social media abroad has echoed, or even internalized, Chinese state media's narratives. This is the underlying logic to our research's methodology.

This research will look beyond traditional mass media platforms such as print and television to focus on the online public sphere—specifically, social media as a democratized platform where the average citizen has the freedom to access and disseminate information almost instantaneously. But beyond the spread of information, social media is also becoming the public platform of choice to express individual opinions, and consequently, a fitting venue for researchers to identify salient topics to the wider society. This research will primarily focus on the latter; and the measure for saliency will be based on how frequently a particular narrative has been referenced on social media, regardless of the personal sentiments expressed in the original post. For this research, saliency refers to the level of public interest in a topic—as measured by the rate of reposting of the original content.

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[55] Brady, "Magic Weapon: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping," https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/magicweaponsanne-mariebradyseptember162017.pdf.

[56] Brady, "Magic Weapon: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping," https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/magicweaponsanne-mariebradyseptember162017.pdf.

The particular social media platform this research will explore is the microblogging services of Twitter. A microblogging service provides its users with an online space for relatively succinct verbal expressions—consisting of short sentences and hashtags—with minimal censorship in most free and democratic countries. In the case of Twitter, a user's messages known as "tweets" are restricted to a mere 280 characters. Furthermore, microblogs allow users to "retweet" and "repost" another user's messages. The former indicates the reader's perception of saliency concerning the feed content (equivalent to the "forward" function in an email) while the latter suggests an even greater expression which includes adding his or her own interpretation to the original feed. Both are excellent measurements of the echoing effect on a given topic.

We will rely on the three most popular Chinese state-run media outlets online, both domestically and abroad, as the basis for Beijing's official narratives. They are the following: *People's Daily* (人民日报), *XinhuaNet* (新华网), and *Global Times* (环球时报). To illustrate the global reach of these media outlets, Xinhua News Agency alone, which is the Chinese government's primary mouthpiece, owns 170 foreign bureaus.[57] Its Twitter account currently has over 11.7 million followers, virtually all originating outside of China since Western social media is censored inside the authoritarian state.[58]

C. TRENDING ISSUES: ARE CERTAIN STATE MEDIA NARRATIVES MORE POPULAR ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

We have selected four issues of China's national interest to isolate and test the impact of state media narratives. These issues—known as core interests (核心利益) in Chinese literature—are Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, and potentially, the South China Sea territorial claims.[59] These topics were selected based on their inherently contentious nature where in most cases, the host country's mainstream views could be diametrically opposed

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[57] Eleanor Albert, "China's Big Bet on Soft Power," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 9, 2018, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-big-bet-soft-power.

[58] Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, "Inside China's Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping.

[59] Jinghan Zeng et al., "Securing China's Core Interests: The State of the Debate in China," *International Affairs* 91, no. 2 (March 2015): 245–266.

to those of the PRC. In contrast, a more benign topic would likely generate minimum interest, or debate, even in the absence of PRC media influence.

We then queried for all online articles related to these issues in the three identified Chinese state media sources. Of note, this approach differs from other similar studies in the past because our search terms are bilingually coded in both English and Chinese. This way, the input of the "new" Chinese immigrants can be incorporated into the overall data results. The underlining assumption is that recent immigrants would gravitate more towards news content in their native tongue. Finally, we recorded the frequency of these state media publications by week from August 1, 2013, to July 31, 2014.

At this point, an additional control variable composed of an alternative, non-PRC-sponsored media narrative will need to be introduced. The purpose is to account for the competitive informational landscape to which the host country population is likely exposed to. This addresses the possibility that the test populations could simply have been stimulated by an international event of significance that was equally covered across the oceans—and not by the Chinese state media alone. For this reason, the same search criteria for China's core interest issues will be applied to Western media such as CNN and the New York Times.

D. TO TWEET OR NOT TO TWEET: MICRO-BLOGGING AS A GAUGE OF CHINESE STATE MEDIA'S SALIENCE

The last step is to quantify the saliency of the collected media narratives in the host country's social media space. In other words, how much interest was generated by Beijing's state-run media in the host country population? To answer this question, we examine a global Twitter database, which contains 10% random sample of all public messages sent through the Twitter network over the period August 2013 to July 2014. The saliency of Chinese state media contents is measured by the number of "tweets" on state media news articles concerning the core issues (based on co-occurrence of state media URLs and core issue keywords). These tweets represent not only volume but also the popularity of a given narrative. Popularity, of course, need not equate to favorability; it merely indicates the extent to which Beijing's narratives were being circulated in the

mainstream discussions on global social media. Concurrently, we can also pinpoint each tweet's country of origin through the "location" profile label and compare this data against the greater ethno-geographic map of the Chinese diaspora population.

None of the variables thus far are sufficient to measure public *sentiments* on Chinese state media narrative. For this, one would require coding for a pre-determined set of words commonly associated with the human emotional spectrum. Previous academic works on similar topics have resorted to this approach with varying results—the most notable of which was the paper by Zhang Yinxian, that measured "nationalism" on Chinese-based social media Weibo.[60] This study, on the other hand, will take a more simplified approach by looking for the occurrences of anti-China hashtags. In recent years, several popular anti-China hashtags have become prevalent on Western social media as part of the greater backlash against purported Chinese atrocities against Uyghur and Falun Gong practitioners. Examples include #ChinaLies and #ShameOnChina. A number of Twitter postings with these anti-China hashtags were manually sampled, and they have consistently demonstrated unfavorable views towards Beijing. It is reasonable to assume that Twitter postings with these anti-China hashtags are most likely to be critical of Beijing's stance. In testing the "Diaspora as Goodwill Ambassadors" hypothesis, one can take the relative volume of anti-China hashtags as an indirect indicator of public favorability towards China. In countries where anti-China sentiments are strong, one can therefore expect to see a correspondingly high level of anti-China hashtags. Conversely, societies with milder sentiments towards China should display fewer numbers of the same.

E. SUMMARY OF EXPECTED REGRESSION RESULTS

If Hypothesis #1 is correct and the presence of ethnic Chinese diaspora communities increases the saliency of Chinese state media narratives in their host countries, one would expect to see a *statistically significant increase* in "tweets" and "posts" of Chinese State media narratives from the Twitter users in countries with comparably larger Chinese diaspora populations.

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[60] Yinxian Zhang, Jiajun Liu, and Ji-Rong Wen, "Nationalism on Weibo: Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Chinese Nationalism," *The China Quarterly* 235 (2018): 758–783.

If Hypothesis #2 is correct and the presence of new immigrants in the Chinese diaspora communities are more likely than the older generations to increase the saliency of Chinese state media narratives in their host countries, we should expect to see a *statistically significant increase* in "tweets" and "posts" of Chinese state media narratives from the Twitter users in countries with comparably larger "new Chinese immigrant" populations.

If Hypothesis #3 is correct and the presence of Chinese diaspora (both new and old) can convey a sense of goodwill to the greater society and improve the favorability of China in the eyes of their respective host countries' mainstream populations, we would expect to see a *statistically significant decrease* in the number of anti-China hashtags from the Twitter users in countries with comparably larger ethnic Chinese population.

F.   QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

The qualitative part of this thesis is built upon the quantitative research. This helps contextualize our diasporic influence model in a real-world setting. The discussions focus on the visible dynamics between the "new" and the "old" classes of Chinese diasporas and their relations vis-a-vis the Chinese state media infrastructure in certain regions of interest. In doing so, it may be possible to translate the results from the quantitative findings into qualitative understanding. By focusing on specific countries and regions, the case studies can also illuminate the actual process as it unfolds on the ground via which the Chinese state is able to leverage the Chinese diaspora to influence the greater population.

We have selected Australia and New Zealand as the first set of case studies. Australia and New Zealand are both an integral part of the "Five Eyes," the well-known intelligence alliance that also includes the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. Australia and New Zealand have also experienced an influx of "new" Chinese immigrants from the Mainland in the last decade. Recent security investigations have accentuated the deepening PRC influence in Australia and New Zealand's policymaking apparatus, leading some to view certain members of the recent Chinese migrant communities as a risk to the sovereignty of these countries. The more relevant question to determine the extent of Chinese influence then becomes not the size of the diaspora populations alone—but the degree to which these relatively small migrant communities were able to penetrate the

greater society at the decisive entry point to induce such a disproportionally significant impact.

Another case study focuses not on a single country but rather the greater region of Southeast Asia. Our discussion centers on trends, patterns, and broad observations spanning several nation-states in this region. Southeast Asia was selected based on its unique diaspora composition and vital strategic importance to the INDO-PACOM Area of Responsibility. The region boasts some of the largest Chinese diaspora communities in the world—namely, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Similar to the first set of case studies, Southeast Asia has also witnessed an increase in "new" migrants from Mainland China, albeit on a much smaller scale. For those interested in geopolitics, the region provides an opportunity to explore the "hedging" and "bandwagoning" tendencies exhibited by some of its regimes. Most countries in this region have chosen to maintain a robust diplomatic relationship with both the U.S. and the PRC in the form of an enduring security pact with the former and a bourgeoning economic nexus with the latter. Nevertheless, behind this delicate balance lies a deeply contested region.

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V.   EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND KEY FINDINGS

The second part of our research question seeks to measure the "extent" to which China is able to leverage its state media and diaspora to promote its narratives around the world. This question is an assessment of effectiveness; and the degree of effectiveness can be translated as the level of saliency of Chinese state media content amongst the mainstream social media users abroad.

A.   SPECIFYING THE REGRESSION MODELS

To ascertain whether the presence of ethnic Chinese diaspora populations can indeed affect the saliency of Chinese state media abroad, we sought empirical evidence that would connect Chinese diaspora size with the volume of social media postings repeating Chinese state media narratives around the world. The evidence, in this case, was drawn from a series of regression models utilizing United Nations migrant stock data and aggregated micro-blogging records that are publicly available comparing the volume of tweeting activities to variation in the size of diaspora population around the world and the level of Chinese state media output during the test period.[61] Since UN migrant data is drawn primarily from national censuses of non-resident migrants, this study referenced another dataset from a study by Poston and Wong that captures the populations of both residents and citizens of Chinese descent around the world.[62]

To further infer sentiments in the micro-blogging data, our analysis examined hashtags that unambiguously disclosed the preference of the senders. The popular #ChinaLies (#中国谎言) hashtag is a good entry point to estimate anti-China sentiments in Twitter communities around the world. If our third and final hypothesis—the presence of

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[61] United Nations database (object name POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2017; accessed June 22, 2019), https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/data/ UN_MigrantStockTotal_2017.xlsx.

[62] Dudley L. Poston Jr. and Juyin Helen Wong, "The Chinese Diaspora: The Current Distribution of the Overseas Chinese Population," *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 2, no. 3 (2016): 348–373. Inclusion of these multiple data sources delineating the difference between the "new" and "old" ethnic Chinese immigrants provides more robust explanatory strength of the regression models.

a large Chinese diaspora would generate goodwill from their host countries towards the kin country—is correct, then the evidence should reveal that as the diaspora population size increases the volume of anti-China hashtags will correspondingly subside.

## B.	QUANTIFYING THE VARIABLES

The first independent variable, the output from Chinese state media, was measured over a one-year period, spanning from August 1, 2013, to July 31, 2014. As mentioned previously, the three main state media outlets considered in this study were *Xinhua News* (新华社), *People's Daily* (人民日报), and *Global Times* (环球时报). The specific media platforms to be tested were each outlet's official websites, their direct subsidiaries, and international variations on the internet. Ultimately, we included 14 distinct state media URL fragments in the search parameter—a testament in itself to the Chinese state media's rapidly expanding global footprint (Figure 7).

Next, we ran a search across a global online media archive for articles that were published by these outlets during the test period—websites that contained the listed state media URLs—and counted these outputs by day (Figure 8). A quick glance at the chart reveals that aggregated state media output was on a slight upward trend, with rhythmic spiking throughout, possibly reflecting occurrences of major news events during the year. For instance, the Philippines' decision to elevate the South Chinese Sea dispute to UNCLOS in March of 2014 generated much Chinese state media response. In short, Beijing's voice was steadily growing around the world during the test period.

Parent Outlet	Derivative URL	Description
Xinhua	xinhua.	Primary
Xinhua	paper.news.cn	Variation of Xinhua
People's daily	.peopledaily.	Primary
People's daily	.people.com.cn	Variation of People's Daily
People's daily	.people.cn	Variation of Peoples' Daily
People's daily	.haiwainet.	Overseas Version (海外版)
People's daily	.taiwan.cn	Affiliated with People's Daily, focusing on Cross-Strait Relations, Pro-CCP narratives
People's daily	.huanqiu.	Global Net (环球网), subsidiary of People's Daily with investments from Global Times, "Global Times" for the domestic audience
Global Times	.globaltimes.	Global Times, PRC's most dynamic English-language newspaper that focuses on international issues
Official Government	.gov.cn	various Chinese government websites
Official Government	.cnr.cn	Chinese National Radio (CNR) on a web-based platform
Official Government	.chinamil.	Official Chinese PLA website
Official Government	.chinadaily.	Official English-Language Newspaper of PRC, founded in 1981

Figure 7. List of State Media URLs
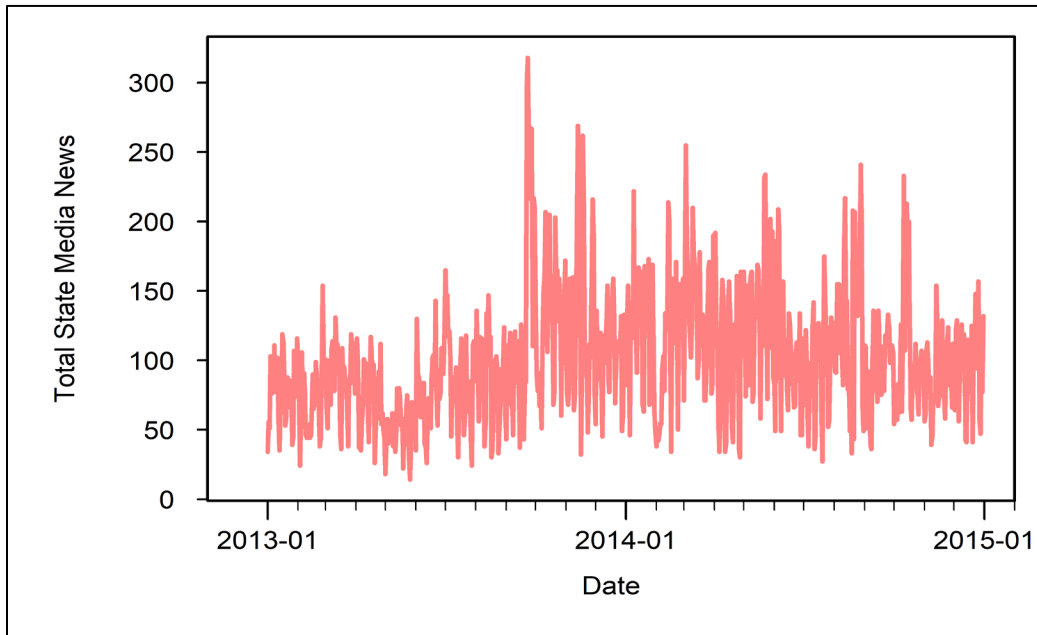
Figure 8. Total Output of Chinese State Media during the Test Period

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To enhance the political relevance of the regression models, we further parsed the collected state media data down to China's core interest issues—Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan, and the South China Sea (SCS). Each was coded as its own variable to determine relative saliency. Whenever possible, we took a nuanced approach to look for compound key words that further qualified the core issue with a political action or stance. For example, the parameters were coded to search for articles that not only contained the terms "Taiwan Strait" and "Uyghur" but also "Taiwan's Independence" and "Uyghur Separatist." By seeking out these co-occurrences in the news articles, we attempt to exclude "hits" that matched the region of interest but were of only "soft news" value.

Taiwan Strait	South China Sea	Tibet	Xinjiang
Taiwan's Independence	South China Sea Dispute	Tibet Independence	Xinjiang Separatist
Independence of Taiwan	South China Sea Issue	Independence of Tibet	Xinjiang Independence
台独	南海问题	藏独	Xinjiang Separatism
台独分子	南海問題	藏獨	新疆分裂分子
台湾独立	南海争端	西藏独立	新疆分裂主意
台湾獨立	南海议题	西藏獨立	新疆分裂
臺灣獨立	南海議題	西藏问题	신장의 분열의 아이디어
台獨	남중국해 문제	西藏問題	신장 의 사단
台獨分子	남중국해 분쟁	Tibet's Independence	維吾爾
臺獨	南シナ海問題	Tibet Independent	维吾尔
臺獨分子	南シナ海紛争	Tibetan Independence	Uyghur
대만의 독립		Independent Tibet	Uighur
대만 독립		Independence of Tibet	위구르
대만독립		チベット独立	ウイグル
Taiwan Strait Crisis		티베트 독립	
台海危机		Dalai Lama	
台海危機		达赖喇嘛	
臺海危機		]喇嘛	
台湾海峡の危機		達賴喇嘛	
대만 해협의 위기		라마	
대만해협의위기		ダライラマ	

Figure 9. News Media Search Terms for Core Issues

Figure 9 provides a list of the key terms in the search parameter. In addition to English, each search term was concurrently coded in Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Korean, and Japanese—the secondary and tertiary languages in which Chinese state media

outlets operated parallel websites. Together, test samples taken in these four languages represented the dominant linguistic attributes of the vast majority of the host countries where the ethnic Chinese diaspora resided in 2014.

The next step was to generate the second independent variable—the variation in ethnic Chinese population size by country during the test period. Here, the analysis further distilled the "new migrant" category from the "general diaspora population." The former consisted of students, migrant workers, and short-term residents who have yet to obtain their host countries' citizenships. The latter, as suggested by its title, are inclusive of all self-identified ethnic Chinese populations living abroad. This categorical distinction is a central argument in the hypotheses in which it is conjectured that "new migrants" are more willing to echo Chinese state media and consequently are more effective in increasing the overall saliency of Chinese narratives in their host countries' social media. The underpinning logic is that new migrants tend to exhibit a higher degree of loyalty to China and are more likely to accept Chinese media at its face value, if not simply due to the shorter assimilation period they have experienced in their newly adopted homes.

Measuring the true influence of the diaspora population, however, is dependent upon its context within each country's ethno-demographic distribution. For instance, a diaspora community of twenty thousand would understandably be more influential in a country of two million people than the same in a population of two hundred million. Thus, each migrant and diaspora population size was measured as a proportion of the total population of its respective host countries, creating a standardized set of population data for 74 countries.

Diaspora Population

People (thousands)

- 1×10^4
- 8×10^3
- 6×10^3
- 4×10^3
- 2×10^3
- 0×10^0

New Migrant Population

People

- 2.5×10^6
- 2.0×10^6
- 1.5×10^6
- 1.0×10^6
- 5.0×10^5
- 0.0×10^0
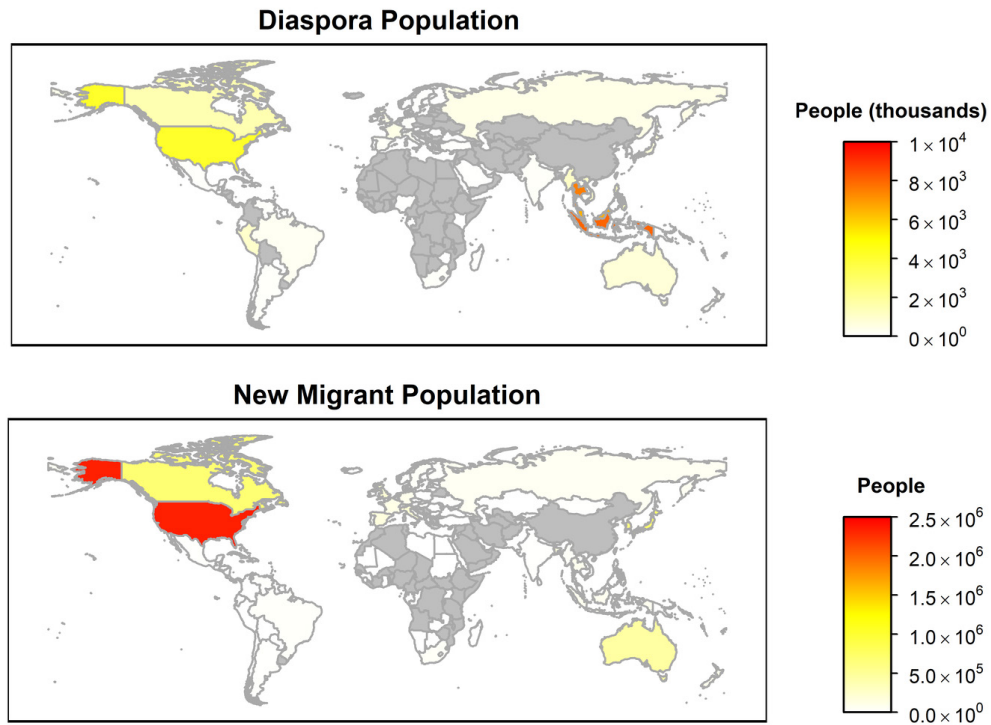
Figure 10. Raw Distribution of New Migrant vs. Ethnic Chinese Diaspora

Figure 10 depicts the raw distribution of "new migrants" versus "general diaspora" around the world. The majority of ethnic Chinese diaspora claimed Southeast Asia and North America as their permanent residence. The newcomers, however, are heavily concentrated in the U.S., Canada, Australia, UK, and Japan. It is noteworthy that the distribution of new Chinese migrants also approximately aligned with the destinations of choice for Chinese students seeking to obtain secondary and tertiary education abroad.
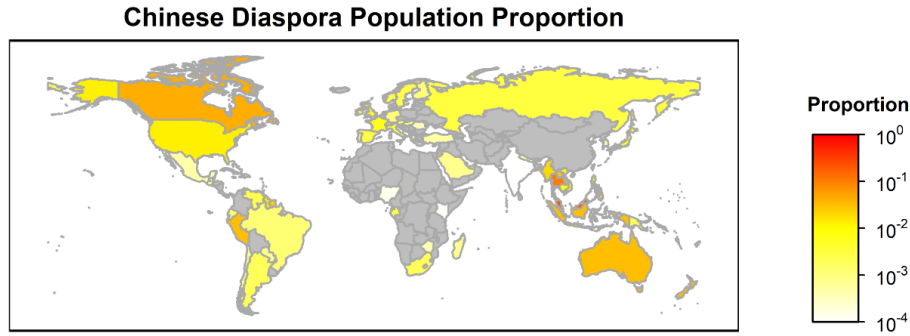
Figure 11. Distribution of Chinese Diaspora as a Proportion of Total Population
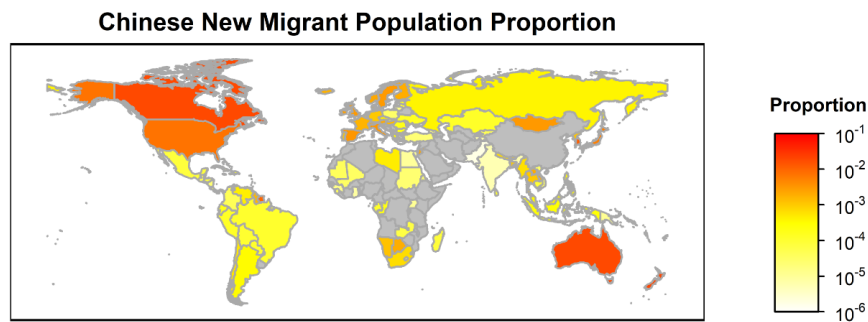
Figure 12. Distribution of New Chinese Population as a Proportion of Total Population

To further contextualize the data, Figure 11 depicts the distribution of Chinese diaspora populations as a proportion of their host countries' total populations. Here, we see that countries in Southeast Asia (Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore) have the world's largest proportional share of ethnic Chinese populations living outside China.

Figure 12 further breaks down the demographic composition by depicting only the new Chinese migrant populations as a proportion of their respective host countries' total populations. Comparing Figure 12 with Figure 10, we now see that the largest new Chinese migrant populations in relative terms are actually in Canada and Australia, as opposed to the U.S. when depicted as raw data.

The last step was to calculate our dependent variable, the social media posting volume in each country. We reasoned that average internet users could easily transfer Chinese state media's online contents to their personal micro-blogging applications such

as Twitter. They can either manually copy and paste the URLs or via an embedded Twitter "share" button on the articles themselves. As such, the same state media search parameter was recycled and re-applied to the Twitter archive.

The analysis also added to this parameter a set of trending sentiment-specific hashtags, to include #ChinaLies (#中国谎言) and its variations. By overlapping these two groups of search parameters, we could estimate both the level of "amplification" of Chinese state media contents as well as the perceived "favorability" in the Twitter community regarding the circulation thereof. The results from each regression model, derived from 22,932 observations by country-day, are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Regression Results on State Media Salience and Anti-China Sentiment

	Dependent Variable:				
	Tweets on State Media Content			Anti-China Hashtags	
	(M1)	(M2)	(M3)	(M4)	(M5)
Independent Variable					
New Migrant Population	0.866***	0.865***	0.864***	1.339***	1.350***
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.107)	(0.107)
Chinese Diaspora Population	0.070**	0.070**	0.071**	-0.206**	-0.211**
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.084)	(0.084)
Chinese State Media Output (time-lagged)	0.343***		-0.990***	-1.890***	-9.957***
	(0.032)		(0.139)	(0.078)	(0.484)
State Media Output by Core Issue:					
- Taiwan (Time-lagged)			0.240***		0.968***
			(0.024)		(0.069)
- Tibet (Time-lagged)			0.354***		1.481***
			(0.046)		(0.130)
- Xinjiang (Time-lagged)			0.585***		3.316***
			(0.054)		(0.188)
- Southeast China (Time-lagged)			0.237***		2.524***
			(0.045)		(0.157)
Tweets of State Media Content (Time-lagged)				1.392***	1.338***
				(0.051)	(0.051)
World News Media Output (Time-lagged)	-0.352***		-0.603***	0.245	-0.553***
	(0.067)		(0.071)	(0.163)	(0.168)
Anti-China Tweets (Time-lagged)	0.212***	0.203***	0.201***		
	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.021)		
Total Tweets (Time-lagged)	1.590***	1.590***	1.588***	0.839***	0.849***
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.062)	(0.062)
Total Tweets in Chinese (Time-lagged)	0.898***	0.896***	0.895***	0.319***	0.311***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.048)	(0.048)
Total Tweets in English (Time-lagged)	-0.327***	-0.327***	-0.328***	1.437***	1.439***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.031)	(0.031)

Table 1 (*continued from previous page*)

Total Population	0.120***	0.124***	0.129***	-2.027***	-2.006***
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.067)	(0.068)
GDP Per Capita	0.536***	0.546***	0.548***	-0.241*	-0.256**
	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.124)	(0.125)
Interaction: Diaspora x New Migrants	0.229***	0.229***	0.229***	0.406***	0.403***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.030)	(0.030)
Constant	-7.409***	-8.823***	-5.260***	-5.901***	3.290***
	(0.461)	(0.285)	(0.500)	(1.053)	(1.162)
Observations	22,932	22,932	22,932	22,932	22,932
Log Likelihood	-26,924.120	-26,981.600	-26,840.650	-14,525.010	-14,293.810
Akaike Inf. Crit.	53,872.250	53,983.190	53,713.290	29,074.030	28,619.610

Note: *p**p***p<0.01

C. REGRESSION MODELS OVERVIEW

Results from the given regression models are reported in Table 1. Models 1, 2 and 3 measured the volume of Chinese state media tweets as the dependent variable. Model 4 and 5, on the other hand, measure the volume of anti-China hashtags as the dependent variable. Since all our dependent variables are counts of positive integers, Poisson models were used for the regression analysis. The primary independent variables that are standard across all five models are the sizes of Chinese diaspora populations as well as the sub-category of Chinese diaspora characterized as new migrants from the PRC. Both are measured as a proportion of the host country's total population.

Each model, in turn, includes (or excludes) additional independent variables for the purpose of testing the strength of the relationship between our primary independent variables and the dependent variable. Model 1, for instance, included total Chinese state media output volume as an additional independent variable while Model 2 omitted the same. On the other hand, Model 3 included not only total Chinese state media output but also considered the output by core issue. These same selection criteria likewise apply to the model set for measuring anti-China hashtags. For example, Model 4 included state

media output and Model 5 expanded the output to include core issues. By comparing the final Akaike Inference Criteria (AIC) score generated by each model with different sets of inputs, we can determine the combination of independent variables that have the strongest predictive relationship to our dependent variables.

Nevertheless, populations seldom exist in a vacuum, especially in today's social media-saturated environment; numerous socio-economic interactions are taking place that could also impact the saliency of Chinese state media. All five models therefore included additional control variables to better capture the effects of these influencers. For instance, we have factored in the volume of social media messages by language (Chinese vs. English), which accounts for the ethno-linguistic influences from the general population. Further, we have included the total volume of non-Chinese state media output, which could be indicative of broader trends in reporting on events of international significance. This could ensure that our interpretations of the regression results do not over-emphasize common narratives that are shared between Chinese and international media sources. On the macroeconomic side, we have also included national GDP per capita to explore the possibility that financial status could impact social media activities. All these control variables were measured in the same unit of analysis, by country and by day.

Central to our hypotheses is the logic that recent Chinese migrants, as a function of their presence, affect the intra-demographic dynamics of the greater ethnic Chinese communities in their host countries in ways that were unprecedented with their predecessors. We introduced this notion as an "interaction variable" in our regression models by multiplying the new migrant variable with the diaspora variable. Any demonstrated significance in this "interaction variable" would indicate intricacies between the diaspora and the new migrants, in which each category influences the effects of the other.

Finally, we need to establish whether or not our dependent variables were indeed caused by our independent variables. While this study will not likely establish absolute causality, we can, however, uncover some evidence of causality by observing whether statistical significance exists between variables that are staggered in a chronological order. If we want to conclude that the increase in tweets about a certain Chinese state media

narrative is triggered by a corresponding spike in state media output on the same topic, we must be able to observe the latter occurring first temporally before the former. Extending this logic to our regression, we have time-lapsed the occurrences of our social and news media-based independent variables by 24 hours vis-à-vis the occurrences of our dependent variables. This could help us detect the presence of any time-sensitive action/reaction cycle.

As a curiosity, we have also included the two dependent variables as an independent variable in each other's regression models. Together with the time-lapsed method of analysis, we can determine whether the volume of social media messages about Chinese state media content could be a viable independent variable in itself and trigger occurrences of anti-China hashtags abroad, and vice versa.

D.   DIASPORIC INFLUENCE ON STATE MEDIA SALIENCY

Is the saliency of Chinese state media higher in countries with a larger diaspora population?

Let us start with the results from the regression models that measure social media messages reposting Chinese state media content as their dependent variable (Models 1–3 in Table 1). As we can see, the coefficients for the migrant variable, diaspora variable, and their interactions are all statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). As such, the trade-offs in the directions of each variable's effects is difficult to intuit directly from the table. We need to visualize these effects with a prediction graph that calculates the expected value of the dependent variable at differing levels of each independent variable. Figure 13 shows the prediction derived from Model 1. The solid lines show the predicted value of the dependent variable at a given level of the independent variable with other variables held constant at their means, and shaded bands show 95% confidence intervals. The X-axis depicts the sizes of the ethnic Chinese diasporas in proportion to the total population of their host countries. The Z-axis (color bar), on the other hand, further parsed out a country's new mainland Chinese migrants population from the larger ethnic Chinese diaspora. The "green" end of the spectrum denotes countries that have the highest proportion of recent migrants from

mainland China; the "red" end, conversely, depicts those countries that have the smallest percentage.
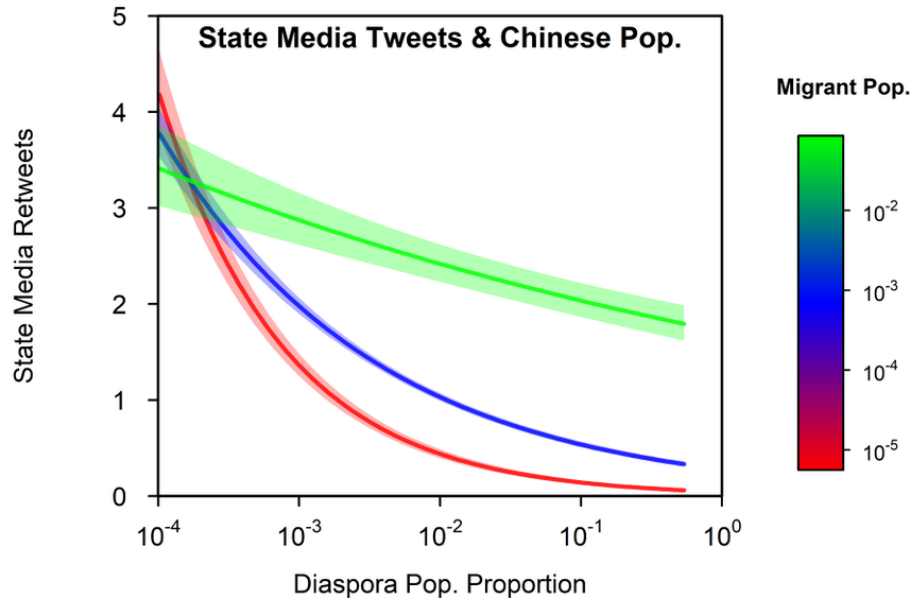
Figure 13. Chinese State Media Saliency Based on Diaspora Size

Several key observations can be made. First, surprisingly, the larger the proportion of ethnic Chinese population to the total population in a host country, the less popular the Chinese state media contents appear to be. This is evident in the three negative slopes (red, blue, and green lines) depicting the declining volume of tweets about Chinese state media content along the X-axis. This observed inverse relationship belies a key assumption behind our hypotheses—that countries with a larger diaspora population will witness higher levels in the saliency of Chinese state media narratives on their national social media space. In fact, this evidence suggests the opposite is true.

Second, the rate at which Chinese state media loses its saliency across countries of increasing diaspora populations differs significantly based on the relative size of the mainland Chinese migrant populations. For example, countries with a larger percentage of new Chinese migrants (green line) appear to experience a much gentler rate of loss in Chinese state media saliency than countries with smaller percentage of the same (red line).

This moderating effect that the new migrants have on Chinese state media's mainstream saliency is still conceptually aligned with our conjecture that this particular class of diaspora are more inclined to promote Chinese state narratives abroad.

Interestingly, an inflection point is visible at the furthest left of the graph, where countries with the smallest percentage of ethnic Chinese population to its total population will briefly witness a reversal of the aforementioned effect—in that, the presence of new Chinese migrants is actually associated with a decreased state media saliency. Looking at the graph as a whole, the differences amongst the three diaspora-to-saliency rates are less dramatic in countries with smaller proportion of ethnic Chinese diaspora to their total population than in countries with higher proportion of ethnic Chinese diaspora. This is visibly evident as the gaps between the three lines progressively widen along the X-axis.

One interpretation, therefore, could be that in countries with a historically high percentage of ethnic Chinese demographics (think Singapore, Thailand, or Malaysia), an influx of new migrants from mainland China will be much more effective in retaining the relevance of Beijing's narratives on mainstream social media. Conversely, in countries at the opposite end of the Chinese Diaspora-to-Total Population ratio (think Mexico or Cuba), new Chinese migrants will only have limited influence on the mainstream population's willingness to circulate Chinese state media narratives.

1.   **Geographical Depiction of Chinese State Media Saliency around the World**

Where was Chinese state media the most salient? Admittedly, looking at the aggregated global statistics alone could not produce the regionally focused descriptions that are of more interest to geopolitical watchers and policymakers alike. The regression models are also unable to pinpoint in which countries Chinese state media was more salient than others. Figure 14 compares the circulation of the state media output in the social media space of each host country by presenting a geographical "heat" map. This map depicts the concentration of tweets about Chinese state media content around the world, based on the raw number of postings in each country.

Chinese State Media Tweets
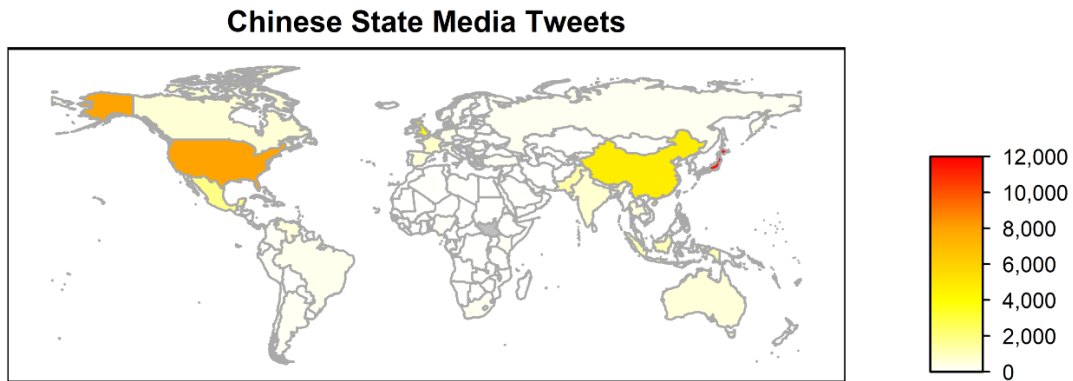
Figure 14. Chinese State Media Retweets (10% Sample) – Aug. 1, 2013, to
Jul. 31, 2014

One oddity is immediately apparent—tweets from within mainland China. After all, the Communist state has infamously banned all western social media from its internet. While certain domestic usage of VPNs could theoretically bypass China's Great Fire Wall and explain this phenomenon, the magnitude of the tweets pointed to another more plausible answer. In this case, the fact that the geo-references of the Tweets were based on each Twitter user's self-identified profile suggested that it is *much* more likely that the tweets were actually originating outside of China by users who have selected China as their "hometown." One can even take a step further and assume those shown tweeting inside China were in fact recent expats who still saw themselves as Chinese first—evident in their choice of hometown affiliation. They are, therefore, a perfect fit to the "new migrant" profile.

While Figure 14 shows an expectedly higher saliency of Chinese state media in diaspora-heavy countries such as U.S., UK, and Japan, it also revealed outliers such as Mexico and Pakistan, where ethnic Chinese presence were relatively negligible as a ratio to the total population. For these outliers, two possible scenarios could be occurring. First, a few "repeat offenders," likely the new migrants themselves, were doing most of the retweets; or second, Chinese state media were indeed viewed in these countries as a news source and mainstream users were circulating Beijing's narratives as a result.

Proportion of Chinese State Media Tweets
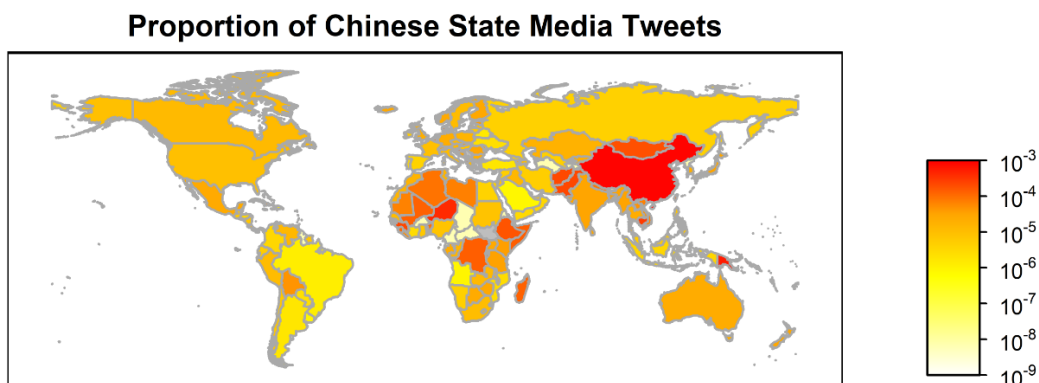
Figure 15. Chinese State Media Retweets as a Proportion of Total Tweets
(10% Sample)

One way to further contextualize the concentration of tweets of Chinese state media content is to contrast it against the total tweet volume in any given country. The result would provide a more accurate assessment of Chinese state media's true influence as a proportion of a national Twitter community. Figure 15 shows a revised geographical heat map depicting the distribution of tweets as a proportion of the total Twitter traffic in their respective countries. There are two "hotspots" where the proportions were the highest: China and certain countries in Central Africa. For the former, our suspicion was confirmed that a preponderance of the Twitter postings "coming out of China" were indeed state media driven.

On the other hand, Central Africa, specifically Niger, was a more revealing case. The interpretation here is that in Niger, where a nascent Twitter community has been bourgeoning, a relatively large volume of mainstream tweets was actually a circulation of Chinese state media content. Another way of looking at this is that Beijing's narratives appeared to be more salient in Niger than other parts of the world. Keep in mind, however, a high level of circulation does not necessarily translate to the public perception of the media outlets as being reliable or even truthful.

2. State Media Output and Core Issue-Specific Content as Independent Variables

Does the volume of Chinese state media output, in addition to diasporic presence, play a role in promoting the circulation of Beijing's narratives abroad? This question was framed in Model 1 and Model 3 (Table 1) where Chinese state media outputs are included as an additional independent variable both in the form of an aggregated news source and when parsed down to the core issue, respectively. Model 2, on the other hand, is a reduced specification that excludes all news media volume variables. A comparison of AIC scores amongst these three models can help to determine whether Chinese state media output is indeed a viable independent variable when combined with Chinese diasporic presence. The model with the lower AIC score would theoretically be more accurate in predicting the dependent variable.

As one can see, Model 2 exhibits the highest AIC score (53,983.190) and therefore can be assumed to be the least accurate of the three. Model 3 yields the lowest AIC score (53,713.290) and should therefore be viewed as the most plausible model. One interpretation could be the following: the size of diasporic presence, combined with the level of state media contents containing specific core issues (Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan, and SCS), are the best predictors of the saliency of Beijing's narratives in national social media environments around the world.

There is a more revealing discovery upon examining the coefficients for the independent variables' influences. The direction of the influence from the Chinese state media output (in total) actually shift from being positive (0.343) to negative (-0.990) as we transition from Model 1 to Model 3. Meanwhile, the coefficients on core issue-specific state media outputs all yield positive relationships. The first conclusion to be drawn is that most of the public interest generated by Chinese state media content on Twitter, in fact, can be attributed to these four core issues. Furthermore, as suggested by the results of Model 3, when one separates the core issue-specific contents from the aggregated Chinese state media output, the influence from the latter actually becomes negative. A more revealing interpretation here is that when Chinese state media outlets omit the four core issues, they could actually risk *diminishing* their overall saliency online.

3. Anti-China Sentiment as an Independent Variable

What other factors could impact the saliency of Chinese state media in a national community? Models 1, 2 and 3 all indicate that anti-China tweets act as an independent variable with statistically significance coefficients ($p < 0.05$). The coefficients ranged from 0.202 to 0.211 across the models, suggesting that regardless of the presence or volume of Chinese state media output, anti-China tweets will always tend to trigger more online interest in Beijing's narratives. Since all of the social media-based variables are already time-lapsed by 24 hours, this evidence is also consistent with a causal interpretation. One interpretation could be that the spread of anti-China sentiment on Twitter may have triggered the pro-China camp to rush to Beijing's defense by doubling down on the state media's narratives. In a less polarizing scenario, the spread of anti-China sentiment on Twitter could have piqued the curiosity of other micro-bloggers less familiar with the Chinese narratives to see for themselves what Beijing has to say. In both scenarios, China's narratives are increasingly being circulated, alongside the saliency of the Chinese state media.

E. DIASPORIC INFLUENCE ON ANTI-CHINA SENTIMENT

Is the volume of anti-China postings lower in countries with a larger Chinese diaspora population? Conventional wisdom has taught us that overseas Chinese are often considered the "model immigrants" in their respective host countries. It is not difficult to imagine that the presence of a productive Chinese immigrant community, through its symbiotic interactions with the greater society, could eventually pave the way for a more favorable view of China around the world. A country with such sentiment would certainly encounter less anti-China postings on its national social media traffic.

We will now turn to the results from the regression models that measure the number of anti-China hashtags as their dependent variable (Model 4–5 in Table 1). Once again, the coefficients for the migrant variable, diaspora variable, and their interactions are all statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This means that the trade-offs in the directions of each variable's effects are not readily discernable from the table; a prediction graph is best suited to describe the effects. Figure 16 shows the predictions derived from Model 4. The

definitions for X and Z-axis are the same as in Figure 13. The Y-axis, in this case, measures the volume of anti-China hashtags posted in a national Twitter community.
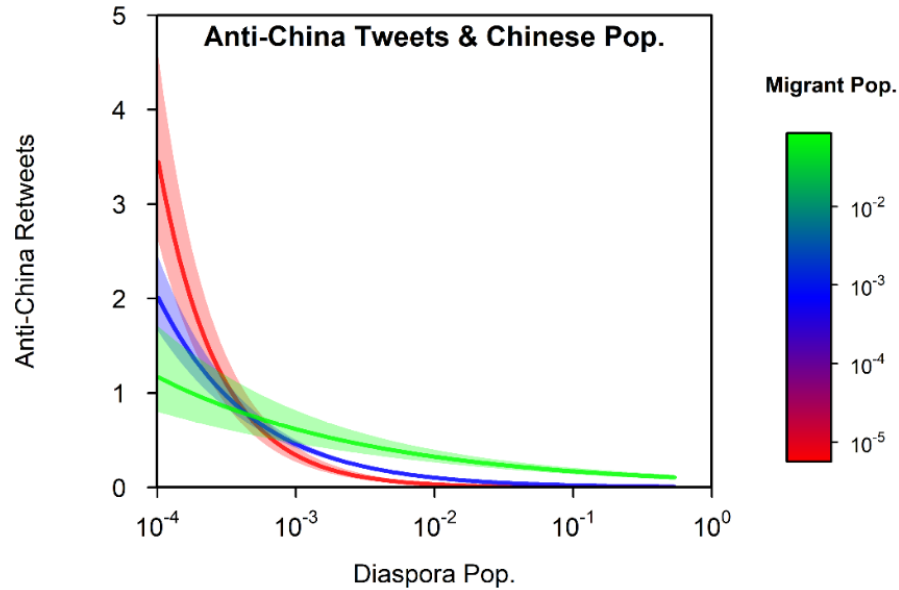
Figure 16. Volume of Anti-China Hashtags Based on Size of Diaspora

The downward slopes visible in all three lines appear to support our "Diaspora as Goodwill Ambassador" hypothesis. In general, countries with a larger population of ethnic Chinese diaspora as a proportion of its total population will witness less anti-China posts in its local social media environment. While a broad trend can be established at the macro-level, we need to highlight importance nuances at the intra-demographic level.

Similar to the previous model on state media saliency, we see the diaspora and the new migrant population each exerting distinctly different levels of effect on their host countries' social media activities. For one, the rate at which anti-China postings decreases across countries of increasing diaspora size appears to be determined in part by these countries' ratios of new mainland Chinese migrants to the total population. In that, countries with a larger percentage of new migrants from mainland China will generally witness a more constant level of anti-China postings, as depicted by the relatively gentler slope of the green line.

A pronounced inflection point is visible near $X = 10^{-3.5}$, which denotes countries with an ethnic Chinese population constituting 0.03 percent of the total population. To the left of this inflection point, the larger the ratio of new Chinese migrants to the total population in a given country (green line), the less its national Twitter community will post anti-China hashtags. Conversely, the smaller the ratio of the new Chinese migrants to the total population in a given country (red line), the more one can expect to see anti-China postings in its national Twitter community.

Moving to the right of the inflection point, however, we see a reversal to this pattern, albeit at a much smaller contrast between the rates of change. In this case, the larger the ratio of new Chinese migrant size to the total population in a given country (green line), the more likely its national Twitter community will generate anti-China postings, when compared to a country with the smaller proportion of the same (red line.) Since majority of the countries around the world carries an ethnic Chinese population that is at least 0.03 percent of its total population, this predicted pattern bears more weight for geopolitical analysis.

At this point, an important observation can be made on the new migrants as an independent variable in our regression analysis. Both the prediction graph and the regression statistics reveal that the new migrants might not be exerting the expected level of "goodwill" effect on the mainstream populations of their host countries as postulated in our hypothesis. Rather, the positive and statistically significant coefficient (1.34, $p < 0.01$) associated with the new mainland Chinese migrants suggest that their presence could correlate to an increased anti-China sentiment. In all instances, an ethnic Chinese diaspora population with a minimum share of recent migrants from Mainland China appears to be the better fit to our "Goodwill Ambassador" profile.

1.   Geographical Spread of Anti-China Hashtags

Where are the anti-China hashtags the most prevalent? Figure 17 depicts the distribution of anti-China tweets around the world. We immediately notice that this time there were no anti-China hashtags detected inside China, or more precisely, none from any of the Twitter users who have self-selected China as their hometown. One potential

interpretation is that amongst the Twitter users who best fit the profile of the "recent migrants from the Mainland," anti-China sentiments were generally low.

Figure 17. Anti-China Hashtags Distribution (10% Sample)—Aug. 1, 2013, to Jul. 31, 2014

The "heat map" reveals that anti-China Tweets seems to be the most prevalent in the UK, U.S., Australia, Japan, and India. What could explain this? The hostilities against China on both Japanese and Indian social media are long expected due to these countries' historical animosity. China's bilateral relations with the United States and Australia also soured over the former's increasingly aggressive stance on the South China Sea during the test period. Therefore, it is entirely plausible that geopolitical sentiments spilled into domestic discussions and are consequently reflected in the micro-blogging communities.

But could the presence of an ethnic Chinese diaspora also be a factor to consider? Looking at the U.S. and Australia again, these are countries with not only some of the largest population of Chinese diaspora but also new Chinese migrants, particularly students. At the same time, note the negligible amount of anti-China tweets emanating from Southeast Asia—where, coincidentally, new migrant populations have been historically low despite the region being the world's largest hub for ethnic Chinese communities. In the UK, where we have seen the most anti-China tweets, the opposite was true—a large Chinese student population nested within a comparably smaller Chinese diaspora. In fact,

the overwhelming majority of ethnic Chinese in the UK are the students or those who have secured local employment afterward.

Thus, the geographical spread of the anti-China hashtags appears to further reinforce our suspicion gleaned from the previous results—that the presence of recent migrants from Mainland China is indeed associated with more anti-China sentiments online.

2.   State Media's Impact on Anti-China Sentiment

Can the promulgation of Chinese state media narratives improve the favorability of China abroad? As mentioned in the previous chapter, the PRC's influence strategy abroad is, in part, buttressed on the effective propagation of its desired narratives to the international audience, and concurrently to drown out the critical voices. This tactic has been described as "making the party's voice loudest of them all." Models 4 and 5 in Table 1 set out to test this notion by considering Chinese state media output volume as an additional independent variable in our regression analysis on the posting of anti-China hashtags on Twitter. Both models associate the presence of Chinese state media content with a negative and statistically significant coefficient, at -1.890 and -9.957, respectively ($p < .01$). This seems to suggest that higher saturation of Chinese state media content online can indeed lead to less anti-China sentiments. But there are important caveats to be made.

Model 5 further parsed out the four core issue-specific media contents (Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, and SCS) from the total Chinese state media output and calculated them as their own independent variables. The resulting coefficients from all four core issue-specific media outputs yield positive values, with Xinjiang-related media contents exerting the largest effect (3.31). A comparison between the AIC scores indicate that Model 5 in fact is the more plausible specification of the two. The reversal in the direction of influences associated with core issue-specific media contents illuminates an important observation—if Beijing focuses its media on promoting its desired narratives on the four contested topics, it could actually damage, rather than improve, its favorability abroad. The state media outlets have a much better chance of enhancing China's image when they choose to cover more benign topics unrelated to the core issues.

3. Tweeting of State Media vs. Expression of Anti-China Sentiment

We have observed previously that anti-China social media messages can lead to more tweets about Chinese state media narratives. Can the opposite be true? Both Model 4 and 5 in Table 1 demonstrate that the same topics that are associated with more postings of Chinese state media content are also associated with a higher volume of anti-China posts. Given the lagged independent variables, this evidence indicates that Chinese media's perceived saliency appears to trigger a certain level of backlash online. In the previous model, we postulated that pro-PRC migrants could be rushing to retweet Beijing's narratives as a defensive gesture against the emerging anti-China vitriols online. This current model suggests a potential sequel, where micro-blogging communities critical of the PRC have reacted angrily after encountering the state media retweets and decided to respond with even more anti-China hashtags. In fact, the distinction between sequel and prequel could be blurred as the scenario drags on. The pattern of back and forth—the tweeting and retweeting—might eventually become *cyclical*.

F. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

How well did the quantitative results support the initial hypotheses and postulated trilateral model for diaspora influence on social media? Figure 18 is the "revised version" of the relational model we first postulated in Chapter 1. Results from our regression analysis have contradicted some of the key tenets behind the initial hypotheses.

- We discovered that a larger Chinese diaspora population does not necessarily lead to higher salience of Beijing's narrative, and the pattern could in fact be the opposite.

- Cumulating evidence suggests that the "Diaspora as Goodwill Ambassador" notion require further qualification. Both the prediction graph and regression statistics indicate that the presence of recent mainland Chinese migrants might be associated with mainstream backlash against China's narratives and consequently could devalue China's credibility around the world.

- State media content related to the four core issue topics—Xinjiang, Taiwan, Tibet, and SCS—appear to be generating most of the public interest in Chinese state media contents, while at the same time stirring anti-China sentiments. One conclusion could be that not all publicity is good publicity after all for Beijing.
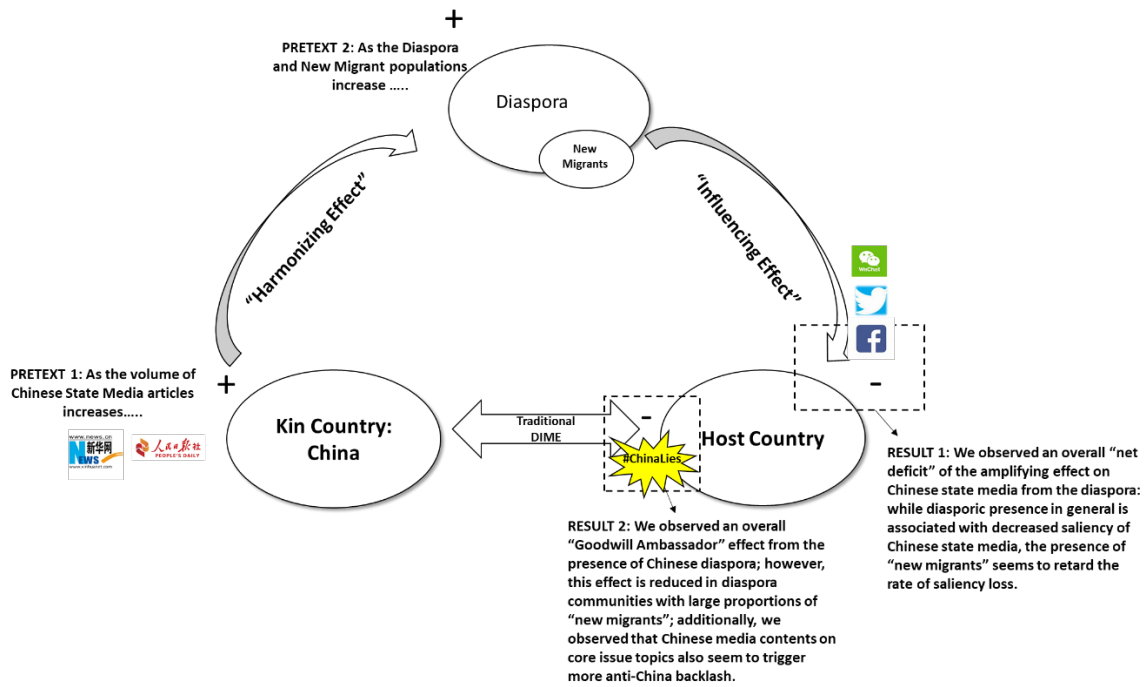

Figure 18. Adjusted Relational Concept Chart (Overlaying the Qualitative with the Quantitative)

VI. CASE STUDIES

The purpose of the case studies is to explain the quantitative findings from Chapter IV in the proper regional context. Whenever possible, this section will also reference the PRC's influence strategy and playbook that were outlined in Chapter III to describe the processes under which the quantitative results have transpired on the ground. In this way, the case studies serve as a sort of "reality check" for both the aggregated data science as well as the theoretical framework behind the conventional understanding of the PRC's diasporic influence campaign.

A. A QUALITATIVE ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN THE QUANTITATIVE

The fundamental question that the next two case study chapters seek to answer is: *why are the "New" Chinese migrants better suited to promote the circulation of Chinese state-run content on their respective host countries' mainstream social media than older Chinese diaspora?* There is a technological and perceptional component to this question. The most immediate consideration is that Beijing has undeniably improved its ability to embed state media content within the social media landscape. This is the technical pre-requisite that would allow the youthful social media users—both diaspora and non-ethnic Chinese—to access Beijing's state-run media content in the first place.

A more granular approach is necessary, however, to ascertain whether the mainstream users had direct exposure to Beijing's narrative and unilaterally decided to repost the content, *or* was their awareness of this narrative somehow enhanced by the surrounding diaspora communities? This chapter asserts that the two scenarios are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the regression results suggest the latter scenario—particularly when the involved Twitter communities have experienced an inflow of recent migrants from Mainland China—could provide the most proximate explanation behind the high level of Chinese state media circulation amongst mainstream Twitter users.

A sub-question of equal relevance to policymakers is *whether the diasporic influence will actually translate to an overall increase in the favorability of Beijing's narrative in the mainstream society?* The quantitative analysis of Twitter data during the

test window has revealed an increase in the co-occurrence of anti-PRC hashtags with the influx of the "new" Chinese migrants from the PRC. This discovery puts the "Chinese Diaspora as Goodwill Ambassador" hypothesis into serious doubt.

Additionally, result from the time-lapse analysis has indicated that anti-PRC hashtags might also have stemmed from an increase in public tweets about Chinese state media contents. This suggested that the culprit might not be Beijing's message alone but the online users doing the echoing. What could be the demographical profile of this group? Our regression analysis, unfortunately, was not designed to uncover the individual identities behind the tweets. Yet, the aggregated results from our model uncovered a curious pattern—the saliency of Chinese state media is at its height in populations with a large recent Chinese migrant community, preferably even outnumbering the second or third-generation ethnic Chinese. This observation is an important clue and suggests two possible scenarios to explain this regression pattern. The scenarios are not mutually exclusive. First, the interaction between the new migrants and their host countries' general populations could generate wider public interest on Chinese state media content. Second, the individuals re-circulating Chinese state media narratives could in fact be the recent migrants themselves.

The last scenario is particularly poignant considering that several recent public perception surveys have suggested that diasporic social media influence in its most zealous form could actually antagonize the mainstream population on certain divisive issues. One conclusion to be drawn is that while diaspora could elevate the saliency of the PRC's narrative abroad, the feedback from the target audience might not always be in favor of Beijing.

B. AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES FROM BEIJING'S DIASPORIC INFLUENCE STRATEGY

We will use the cases of Australia and New Zealand as an illustration—where a large and seemingly malleable ethnic Han population has indeed elevated Beijing's narrative to the national spotlight but then quickly faced pushback from the mainstream population.

Where did Australia and New Zealand stand in our regression results? Figure 20 depicts Australia and New Zealand's positions on the prediction graph of state media saliency from the previous chapter. Both countries are on the medium to high side of ethnic Chinese demographics (4–6% of total population) and both experienced some of the highest influx of Mainland Chinese migrants in recent years—with Australia and New Zealand currently the top two destinations in Oceania for emigrating Chinese. With this large proportion of its total ethnic Chinese population being new migrants from Mainland China (estimated at 40–50%), we have consequently observed a sustained level of saliency of Chinese state media on the mainstream social media of these host countries. A similar observation can be made on Australia and New Zealand's predicted level of anti-China sentiment on Twitter. Both countries stand on the high end in our global data in terms of anti-China posting volumes, as a result of their large new migrant to ethnic Chinese diaspora ratios.
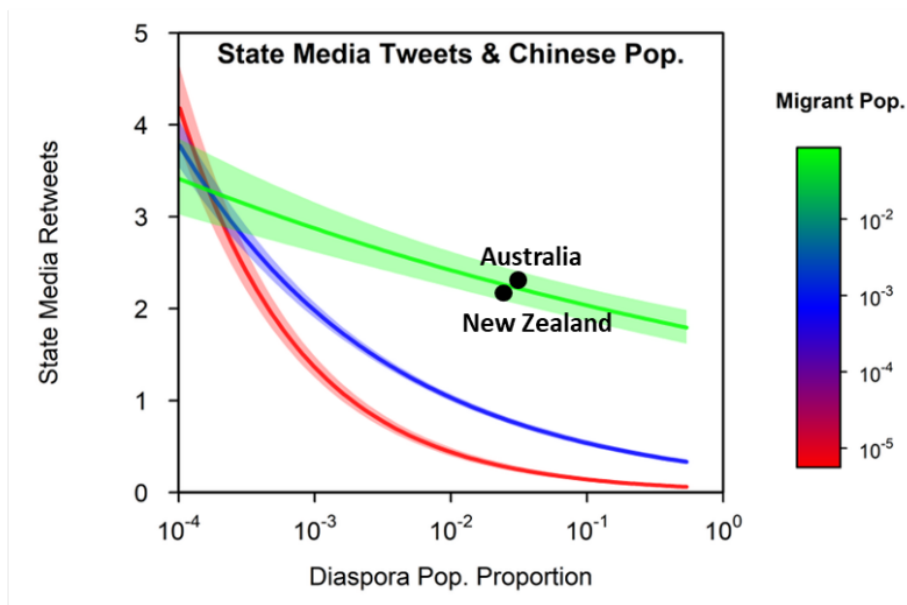

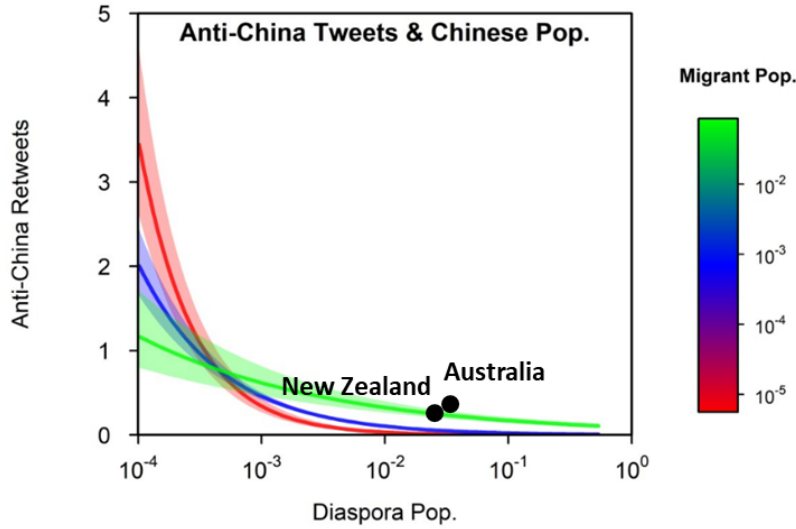Figure 19. State Media Salience Based on Diaspora Size (Australia and New Zealand Highlighted)

Figure 20. Anti-China Posting Based on Diaspora Size (Australia and New Zealand Highlighted)
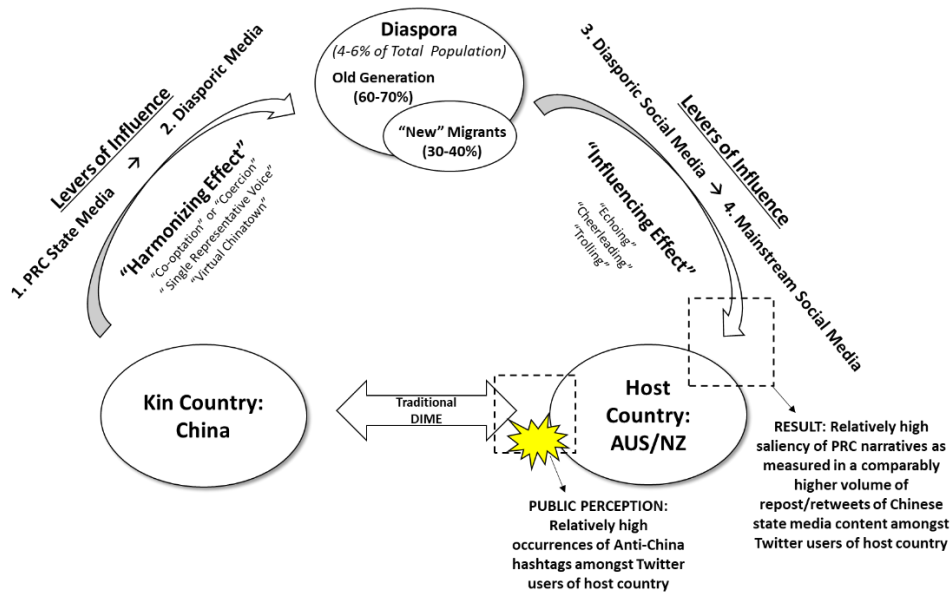

Figure 21. *Reinterpreted* Diaspoic Influence Model (in the Context of Australia and New Zealand)

Figure 21 is a reinterpretation of the trilateral influence model based on the regression results as applied to Australia and New Zealand. Subsequent sections of this chapter will attempt to illuminate the model vis-à-vis each of the three key actors. We will explore the model from the perspective of the PRC, the diaspora, and the host country population. In the first section, discussions will focus on how Beijing is able to unify a heterogeneous diaspora population in Australia and New Zealand by "harmonizing" the various diasporic mass media outlets into one single voice—Beijing's voice. The second section will explore how this seemingly "unified" diaspora made its voices heard first on the diasporic social media platforms and then spilling into the mainstream cyberspace. The last section will explain the reactions from the host country mainstream populations, both positive and negative ones, in regards to the diaspora's increasingly aggressive activities on social media.

1. CHINA'S PERSPECTIVE

a. *Global Strategy: Going Out and Telling China's Story Well*

Under Xi Jinping's tutelage, Chinese state media has undergone a dramatic transformation—both in its content and delivery—on a scale that is not unlike the "Going Out" of China's economics sector some thirty years prior. Beijing's state-run media, led by *Xinhua, People's Daily,* and *China Radio International,* has dramatically broadened its scope of coverage from a narrow domestic focus to strategic messaging on a global scale. These media have shifted their *modus operandi* from one that is preoccupied with passive damage control to a much more assertive approach in a bid to control the narrative abroad. This new operating philosophy is perhaps best characterized in Xi's own guidance to his propaganda chiefs in 2014 "to go out and tell China's story well".[63] China's official media outlets have since expanded its footprint around the world at a frantic pace. In Australia and New Zealand, Chinese state media's presence can be felt through the increasing number of offshore correspondents as well as partnerships with major English-language

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[63] Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, "Inside China's Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping.

media names to carry its content.[64] But for the diasporic Chinese-language media, Beijing has a more nuanced approach.

b.   Beijing's Diasporic Media Strategy: Promoting a Singular "Chinese-ness"

The chapter on China's influence playbook has described Beijing's media strategy towards the overseas Chinese as one keen on harmonizing the diasporic mass media with the PRC's own state media, a strategy known officially as *haiwai huawen meiti ronghe* (海外华文媒体融合.) The goal of the "harmonizing" strategy, according to Anne-Marie Brady, is twofold—first, to stifle out potential dissidents from within the diaspora communities; and second, upon completion of the first, to turn this seemingly unanimous—and arguably, more legitimate—diasporic voice outward to influence the mainstream public opinion.[65] While scholars have generally agreed on Beijing's desired outcomes, the process through which the PRC implements this "harmonizing" strategy around the world remains speculative. Australia and New Zealand, however, are unique cases that could shed light onto this process.

Recent international spotlight on alleged Chinese meddling into Australia and New Zealand's inner political circle has led to a closer scrutiny over Beijing's control over the diaspora, including its vast influence on local Chinese-language media outlets. Several high profile academic journals and investigative reports have since painted an alarming picture—Beijing has been quietly monopolizing Australia and New Zealand's diasporic media across all platforms to include emerging social media technology. To the surprise of many, this process began almost thirty years ago when the first wave of the immigrants from Mainland China entered Australia and New Zealand under Deng Xiaoping's "Open

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[64] Wanning Sun, *Chinese-Language Media in Australia: Development, Challenges and Opportunities* (Ultimo, New South Wales, Australia: Australia-China Relations Institute Press, 2016): 20, https://www.australiachinarelations.org/sites/default/files/Australia-China%20Relations%20Institute_Chinese-language%20media%20in%20Australia%20Developments%2C%20challenges%20and%20opportunities_Wanning%20Sun_web%20version.pdf.

[65] Ann-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapon: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping" (paper presented at the conference on "The corrosion of democracy under China's global influence," supported by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, Arlington, VA, September 16–17, 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/magicweaponsanne-mariebradyseptember162017.pdf.

Door" reform. Henceforth, Australia and New Zealand's traditionally Cantonese-speaking diaspora gradually became outnumbered by the newer Mandarin-speaking immigrants from Mainland China. Parsing through the details in these reports, a rudimentary Chinese media playbook for Oceania begins to emerge. The pattern is a familiar one—**Beijing sought to blur the distinction between overseas diaspora (*huaqiao*, 华侨) and those of Chinese descent in general (*huaren*, 华人)**. This is the same ubiquitous guidance from the CCP observed in its greater diasporic influence strategy. In the case of media, the byproduct of the integration would be a new voice loudly in favor of China.

c. *"Harmonizing" Techniques in Practice*

Upon closer examination, the PRC appears to have been employing one of three "harmonizing" techniques against local diasporic media, and in escalating order. These techniques are to co-opt, buy out, and if all else fail, starve out.

First, state media outlets, such as Xinhua or China Radio International (CRI), would attempt to **co-opt** local media by offering content sharing with seemingly no-strings attached. This option is particularly attractive to smaller cash-strapped migrant media outlets struggling to stay competitive. These "journalistic joint ventures" are particularly prevalent in Australia, where traditionally independent Chinese media outlets have signed multiple content cooperation agreement with the PRC, transforming themselves into the mouthpieces for Chinese state media almost overnight.[66]

If this voluntary approach fails, the PRC will then attempt to buy-out the diasporic medias outlets via its proxies or satellite firms—by either purchasing shares of the parent conglomerate, or if unable, exerting pressure against the same, since most of these conglomerates have considerable commercial interests inside China. Once Beijing attains a position of influence, it could either directly muzzle the subsidiary media outlets, or preferably, these outlets would choose to self-censor.[67] An example of this buy-out

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[66] Joshua Kurlantzick, "Australia, New Zealand Face China's Influence," *Council on Foreign Relations*, December 13, 2017, https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/australia-new-zealand-face-chinas-influence.

[67] "New Report Shows Growing International Reach of Chinese Media Censorship," *Freedom House*, October 22, 2013, https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-shows-growing-international-reach-chinese-media-censorship.

technique is evident in Global CAMG, a media conglomerate in Melbourne that owns some of the most popular Chinese-language media outlets in Australia. The company is ostensibly set up by a local businessman, Tommy Jiang; few knew that a Beijing-based company called Guoguang Century Media Consultancy owns over 60% of its share. Even fewer know that this Beijing-based company, in turn, is actually owned by Chinese State Media—CRI. It should not come as a surprise that radio stations flagged under Global CAMG now carry the same contents as China's state radio.[68]

Lastly, if both techniques fail, Beijing could deprive local media outlets of revenue. This could take form of Beijing's proxies pressuring major advertisers to withdraw support for uncooperative media outlets. Since most regional media depends on advertising profits to survive, this technique is particularly devastating. Beijing, via its proxies, could even mount expensive legal proceeding against its victims. In a recent interview with NPR, Chen Weijian, an exiled PRC dissident who has since established an independent newspaper in New Zealand, recounted how the Communist Party continued its prosecution abroad. According to Chen, a pro-Beijing newspaper in Auckland "sued him for defamation after he criticized it for being too pro-Beijing," and the resulting legal procedure bankrupted his paper. The plaintiff was reportedly funded generously by the PRC.[69]

d.   *Assessing the Impact on the Chinese Migrant Media Sphere*

Most scholars and commentators would agree that the aforementioned techniques have been effective so far in achieving their intended goals. The CCP has more or less succeeded in "harmonizing" the once diverse diaspora media landscape in Auckland and Sydney. A recent report from University of Technology Sydney concluded there is a "discernible shift in Chinese language migrant media from a mostly critical to a mostly supportive stance in their coverage of China, Chinese government and issues and topics

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[68] Koh Gui Qing and John Shiffman, "Beijing's Covert Radio Network Airs China-Friendly News Across Washington, and the World," *Reuters*, November 2, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-radio/.

[69] Rob Schmidt, "Australia and New Zealand are Ground Zero for Chinese Influence," *NPR*, October 2, 2018, https://www.npr.org/2018/10/02/627249909/australia-and-new-zealand-are-ground-zero-for-chinese-influence.

that are considered to be politically sensitive in China.[70]" The same report compared and contrasted Singtao Daily's (星岛日报) coverage of the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989 with the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement in 2014—during the former, the newspaper was overwhelmingly supportive of the student protestors; whereas during the latter, the editorial was unabashedly critical.[71] In a trend that is quickly becoming the norm, most Australian Chinese-language media have tried to avoid Beijing's ire by self-censorship on "hot topic" issues such as Falun Gong, Xinjiang, and Tibet. For instance, in June of 2014, majority of the Chinese language media in Australia omitted any mention of the 25th Anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Conversely, should Beijing decide to publicize its stance on these sensitive issues, the state media will almost certainly have the monopoly over the narrative. Even for those few courageous independent outlets who dare to challenge, their voice would likely be drowned out by the peers already succumbed to Beijing's influence. In the eyes of the mainstream audience outside of the migrant community, this contrived appearance of unison could be mistakenly perceived as consensus with Beijing's voice. The lack of competing diasporic media views should be taken into consideration when attempting to explain the significant reposting and retweeting of Chinese state media content in the study's data. There often may be no alternative narrative for mainstream consumption other than the state-run media, at least when it comes to issues that China cares about.

2.   The Diaspora's Perspective

Thus far we have assessed Beijing's diasporic media approach strictly from a strategic messaging angle; but an increasingly homogenous media sphere also impacts the

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[70] Wanning Sun, Chinese-Language Media in Australia: Development, Challenges and Opportunities (Ultimo, New South Wales, Australia: Australia-China Relations Institute Press, 2016): 25, https://www.australiachinarelations.org/sites/default/files/Australia-China%20Relations%20Institute_Chinese-language%20media%20in%20Australia%20Developments%2C%20challenges%20and%20opportunities_Wanning%20Sun_web%20version.pdf.

[71] Wanning Sun, Chinese-Language Media in Australia: Development, Challenges and Opportunities (Ultimo, New South Wales, Australia: Australia-China Relations Institute Press, 2016): 26, https://www.australiachinarelations.org/sites/default/files/Australia-China%20Relations%20Institute_Chinese-language%20media%20in%20Australia%20Developments%2C%20challenges%20and%20opportunities_Wanning%20Sun_web%20version.pdf.

social dynamics of the diaspora communities as a whole. For the Chinese migrants, particularly those First Generation diaspora who have yet to be fully assimilated, diasporic media provides the first, and sometimes the only, social-cultural interactions with the new world. In the context of a propaganda-saturated media sphere, Beijing's narrative could have a compounded influence on these immigrants. On the one hand, we have witnessed a stronger solidarity amongst the diaspora communities in Australia and New Zealand, congealing around Beijing's narrative of their shared "Chinese-ness." On the other, these diaspora communities are also more likely to self-compartmentalize, becoming more impervious to out-group influences. This last observation and its ramifications to the quantitative results is the focus of this section.

a. The Rise of a "Virtual Chinatown"

The phenomenon of the new diaspora's self-compartmentalization was first described by Phoebe Li of Auckland University as akin to an "Imagined Chinatown," along with all of its inherent historical and social connotations. For the diaspora, Chinatown has always been a place where they can "seek psychological comfort and sense of Chinese solidarity from others whom they may never meet physically." [72] For the outsiders however, the meaning of Chinatown could vary significantly. In Australia and New Zealand, Chinatowns have evolved from an urban feature stigmatized by racial exclusion to a kind of cultural "theme park" for a Eurocentric population. These varied perceptions have largely been transplanted to the online sphere—manifesting into a kind of "Virtual Chinatown." The rise of internet and microblogging technology has only precipitated the compartmentalization of the diaspora communities due to these platforms' interactive format. In many cases, it appears that virtual interactions have supplanted the physical ones.

A brief content analysis of a popular web-based media site catering specifically to the Chinese diaspora (www.chinese.net.nz/) will illustrate this point. Figure 22 provides a snapshot of the website 新西兰中文网 on an average day. The site is described as being

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[72] Phoebe Hairong Li, *A Virtual Chinatown: The Diasporic Mediasphere of Chinese Migrants in New Zealand* (Auckland: The University of Auckland, 2009), 47.

privately-owned by the local diaspora since 2001. The design and layout of the page is typical of today's Chinese-language media sites in both New Zealand and Australia. The website embodies the "Virtual Chinatown" concept on three levels: social, economic, and cultural.

One of the most striking features of the homepage is the high concentration of soft news items—contents are prioritized based on their relevance to the migrants' daily lives. Typical headlines include "*car buying tips for new migrants*" and "*how to renew expired Chinese passport after becoming New Zealand citizen*." These diaspora-friendly topics, which are unlikely discussed by mainstream media, would draw their intended audience in, especially those lacking English literacy or familiarity with urban life in New Zealand. As a hat-tip to the social media-savvy millennials, the website even offers an app version that is compatible with Weibo (微博) and WeChat (微信). Conversely, the absence of any visible links to Western social media could further isolate the diaspora and hamper their assimilation into the wider society.

Figure 22. Preliminary Content Scraping of 新西兰中文网 at www.chinese.net.nz.

The Virtual Chinatown effect also spills into the commercial aspect of immigrant life. Taking a look at Figure 22, the website exhibits a high advertisement to content ratio—no less than 30% of the hyperlinks are for Chinese-based online stores or familiar Chinese brands. This trend is not unexpected considering most private migrant media depends on advertisement revenue to survive. Phoebe Li believes this commercial practicality, both for the audience and the media companies, is the Virtual Chinatown's defining characteristic. She explains that a "boundary of socioeconomic space" has been forged in the minds of the diaspora communities, further confining them psychologically to this invisible migrant community. In fact, one particular section of the website in this example has transformed into a kind of virtual One-Stop-Shop for not only Chinese-focused e-commerce, but also diaspora-oriented job ads, social clubs, and even dating for Chinese singles. The Virtual

Chinatown has become a hub for networking within a network. Newly arrived immigrants will never have to step out of the Virtual Chinatown—nor their apartments for that matter.

Despite the website being labeled as privately owned, Beijing's influence is tangible throughout. This is reflected not only in the aforementioned soft news topics—"renewing Chinese passports"—but also the ubiquitous state-sponsored tourism advertisement for the Mainland. Juxtaposed with images of the beautiful Fujian coast are the latest reviews of popular Chinese TV dramas. Indeed, the Virtual Chinatown in many ways is a microcosm of the real China. In this way, the audience is encouraged to remain culturally and emotionally attached to their kin country. The subliminal message bears uncanny resemblance to Beijing's strategy to blur the distinction between diaspora (华侨) and ethnic Chinese (华人), and this is most likely by design. If the subliminal is not enough, Beijing's tacit endorsement is also visible in the numerous links to state media such as People's Daily and its many affiliates, where the diaspora can access the real "hard news" items in the Party's flavor. Finally, the Chinese Embassy also lends its public service announcements at the very bottom of the page. These are solemn reminders to the overseas Chinese community that the "motherland" is always just one click away.

To summarize, a Virtual Chinatown engenders a strong homogenous diaspora identity but at the cost of the diaspora's ability and *willingness* to socialize outside of their ethnic network. To say the atrophied interaction is unconducive to ethnic integration would be an understatement. Some scholars have described the social dynamics between the Chinese diaspora and their host country as a "one-way" stream. In that, the former is relatively impervious to outside influence but will not shy away from protesting to the latter on issues threatening to the in-group identity. In the "harmonized" media landscape that we have described, issues of diaspora identity are quickly becoming interchangeable with issues of Chinese national identity. Indeed, Chinese nationalism in general has become the favorite subject of many lively online discussions—where populist sentiments, often carried forth by young migrant students, spill into the mainstream social media sphere of the host countries.

b.   *"Virtual Chinatown" and the Rise of Chinese Nationalism.*

Professor Wanning Sun's 2016 report vividly captures the role of Chinese-language media overseas in spreading Chinese nationalism amongst the diaspora in Australia. After a comprehensive content scraping of major media in both their traditional and online platforms, Sun observed that on polarizing issues concerning China's national security, the diasporic media tend to "articulate both the Chinese official position and populist sentiments." The former can be explained by the "harmonizing" effect already discussed, the latter, however, is a social phenomenon that is as much a response to Beijing's call for action as the particular demographic's own initiation. Sun observed that the migrant media in Australia concurrently drives and echoes the popular sentiments. And the more youthful online media outlets—especially those run by migrant students—are comparably more outspoken when it comes to issues of national pride. The outcome, he somberly cautioned, could "position the Chinese migrant community at odds with mainstream Australian society."[73]

So which diasporic groups are more likely to respond to Beijing's propaganda and demonstrate Chinese nationalism? The answer is, as expected, those who recently came from the Mainland, or the "new" migrants. Within this population, the Chinese students are more likely to exhibit popular nationalistic tendencies. Both groups have steadily increased since the relaxation of China's immigration policy under Deng in the 1980s. In 2018, there are about 1.2 million ethnic Chinese in Australia; over 54% are considered "new" immigrants. A quarter of which, numbering about 150,000, are Chinese students seeking secondary and tertiary education.[74] Similar migration patterns are discernible in New Zealand, albeit in a smaller proportion due to the country's size.

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[73] Wanning Sun, *Chinese-Language Media in Australia: Development, Challenges and Opportunities* (Ultimo, New South Wales, Australia: Australia-China Relations Institute Press, 2016): 62, https://www.australiachinarelations.org/sites/default/files/Australia-China%20Relations%20Institute_Chinese-language%20media%20in%20Australia%20Developments%2C%20challenges%20and%20opportunities_Wanning%20Sun_web%20version.pdf.

[74] Australian Bureau of Statistics (object name 3412.0 – Migration, Australia, 2017–18; accessed 10 September 2019), https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3412.02017-18?OpenDocument.

The changing diaspora composition certainly favors the permeation and acceptance of Beijing's state media, making the harmonizing strategy almost a customer-driven calculation for the smaller media outlets. But it would be unscrupulous—even prejudiced—to wave off all "New" Chinese immigrants as mindless followers of Chinese propaganda. Indeed, Fran Martin takes a different stance in a recent Economist article; he believes only a fringe of these new migrants are true believers of Beijing's propaganda; most just think it is occasionally "cool" to change their social media profile pictures to the PRC flag on October 1st.[75] Yet, it is difficult to discount the seemingly genuine pride of over 10,000 Chinese students who showed up to protect the Olympic Torch in Victoria as an isolated outlier; this group also displayed the same enthusiasm to welcome Li Keqiang's recent visit to Melbourne. In effect, Sun Wanning described this fervor more accurately as a "synergy" between the overseas Chinese students and Beijing that is "sometimes planned but at times arising organically."[76]

Both Sun and Martin can agree that the few Chinese migrants who took the effort to act out their nationalism are often the ones catching the mainstream headlines. In consequence, they exert a disproportionally significant influence on Australian public perception of China. Unfortunately, the regression model did not distinguish whether the tweets of state media contents originated from the "same group" of prolific social media users in the diaspora communities. We can, however, reasonably speculate that the influence from this group contributed to the overall pattern in the dataset.

c.   *Stepping Out of the "Virtual Chinatown" and onto the World*

So how can the "new" Chinese immigrants, whether a fringe or a sizable proportion of the total diaspora, emerge from the "Virtual Chinatown" and flaunt their nationalism to the outside world? This can be done physically via open demonstration or "virtually" on

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[75] Fran Martin, "How Chinese Students Exercise Free Speech Abroad," *The Economist*, June 11, 2018, https://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/06/11/how-chinese-students-exercise-free-speech-abroad.

[76] Wanning Sun, "Motherland Calling: China's Rise and Diasporic Responses," *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 126.

the social media—at a much smaller opportunity cost—by echoing supported state media narrative. There is a technological and tactical component to this approach.

First, the initiating diaspora must repackage the state media narratives onto a platform that is accessible to the mainstream audience. For materials originating from Weibo or WeChat, there must be a manual transfer to Twitter or Facebook, along with appropriate linguistic translations. In most cases, however, Chinese state media has redundant official handles on Western social media in the target language. The diaspora simply has to "repost" or "retweet" with their own comments. This could explain in part the higher level of reposts/retweets of Chinese state media handles in the quantitative results from countries with a relatively larger new migrant population such as Australia.

The tactical aspects are a social media user's manipulation of the frequency, sequence, and tone of the transmitted information to achieve the desired psychological effect on the target audience. Figure 23 presents a spectrum of diasporic sentiments towards the mainstream society—ranging from conciliatory to argumentative—on contested issues that pertain to China's core interest. Additionally, we have highlighted few social media tactics that correspond to their respective sentiment. Most of the diasporic social media activities fall somewhere in the middle. Cheerleading with ubiquitous pro-PRC hashtags and accompanying state media articles appear to be the most prevalent tactic on issues such as the South China Sea based on the quantitative results. In contrast, the infamous "Little Pinks" (小粉红), an anonymous group of mostly young Chinese female netizens living in China and abroad, have become synonymous with extreme Chinese jingoism online.[77] Their ruthless trolling against Australian Olympic swimmer Marc Horton and ethnic-Taiwanese K-Pop star Zhou Ziyu, both of whom were accused of violating China's core interests, are just the latest example of these keyboard warriors' cyber infamy..[78]

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[77] "The East is Pink," *The Economist*, August 13, 2016, https://www.economist.com/china/2016/08/13/the-east-is-pink.

[78] Pinghui Zhuang, "The Rise of the Little Pink: China's Angry Young Digital Warriors," *South China Morning Post*, May 26, 2017, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2095458/rise-little-pink-chinas-young-angry-digital-warriors.
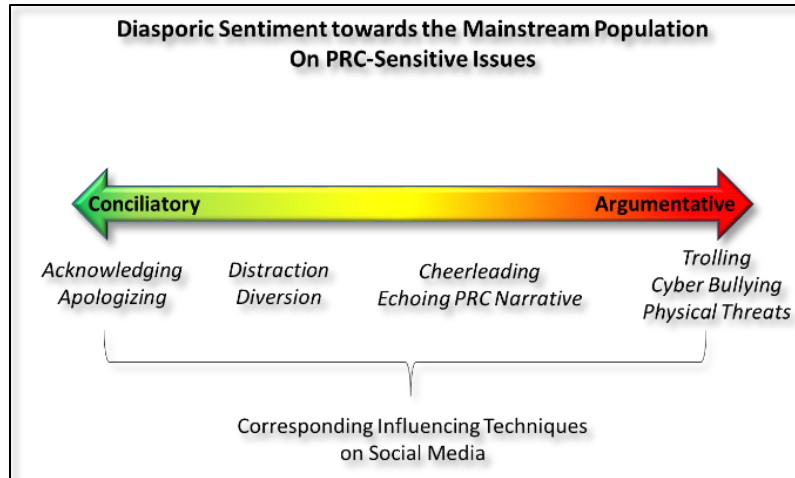
Figure 23. Possible Influencing Techniques Adopted by Chinese Social Media
Users Who Have Recently Emigrated from Mainland China

In a few instances, the hateful online vitriols could translate into physical violence. The latest episode took place in August of 2019, as Pro-Beijing Chinese students, emboldened by waves of social media support, attacked Hong Kong students and their Australian supporters during multiple peaceful protests across Sydney and Melbourne.[79] The events were widely covered by mainstream Australian media, with public sympathy overwhelmingly for the victims. Here, we have witnessed the "Virtual Chinatown" effect at its most detrimental form—divisive for the society and antagonistic along ethnic lines. Such negative episodes could account for the time-lapse cycles observed between anti-PRC hashtags and retweets of Chinese state media articles in the previous regression results. Beijing likely did not foresee the counterproductive second and third order effects from its patriotic youth overseas.

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[79] "Hong Kong's Protest Spread Across Australia and Revealing Deep Divisions in Chinese Communities," ABC News, August 11, 2019, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-10/hong-kong-protests-spread-across-australia/ 11398832.

3. **Host Country's Perspective**

If Beijing's diasporic engagement strategy was to leverage a unified migrant voice to induce a more favorable mainstream perception of China, the feedback from Australia has so far been mixed at best.

a. ***Public Perception of China***

Public perception towards other countries can be inferred through opinion surveys. The Lowy Institute has been conducting such surveys on an annual basis since 2005. During 2013–2014, which reflects the quantitative data collection window, the Australian public's trust in China to act responsibly in the world has remain relatively constant at 57%. As Figure 24 shows, during the same period, there has been a 7-point increase in the Australian public perception of China being a military threat. This increase is likely due to the unflattering Western publicity over China's provocative gestures in the South China Sea during that year. Taken together, the decade-long surveys indicate no significant sway in the public perception of China's good faith to the rest of the world.
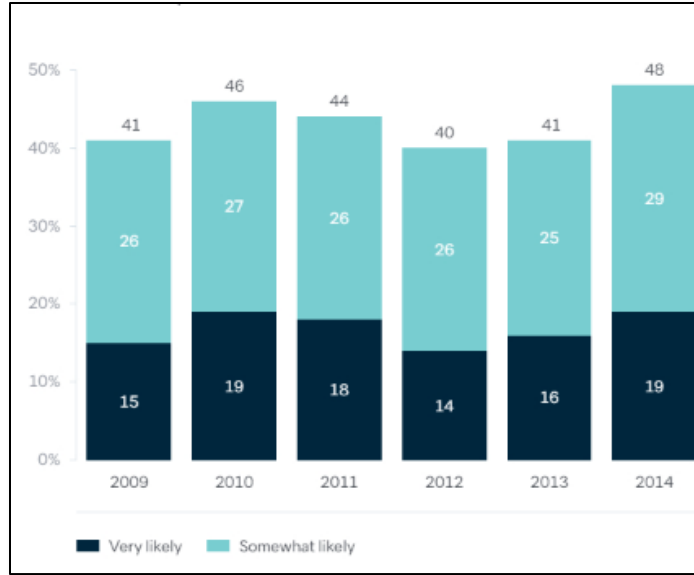
Figure 24. Lowy Institute Survey Question: Do You Think China Will be a
Military Threat in the Next 20 Years?[80]
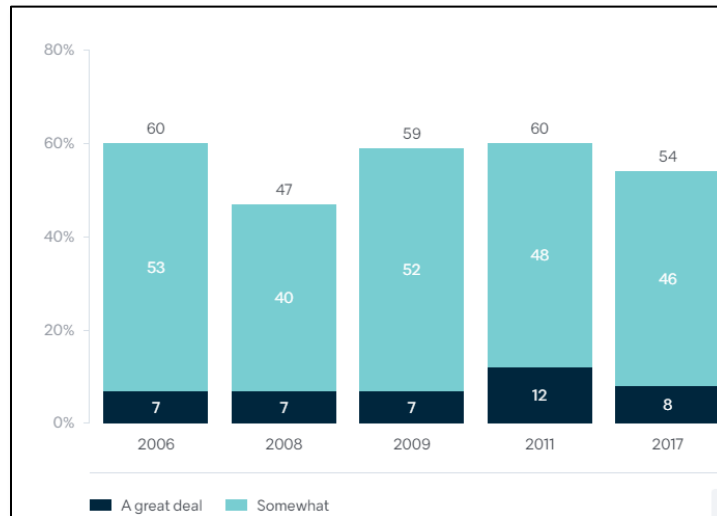
Figure 25. Lowy Institute Survey Question: Do You Trust China Will Act
Responsibly in the World?[81]

[80] Source: Alex Oliver, *The Lowy Institute Poll 2014* (Sydney, Australia: Lowy Institute, 2014),
https://lowyinstitutepoll.lowyinstitute.org/themes/china/.

[81] Source: Lowy Institute, *China – Lowy Institute Poll 2019* (Sydney, Australia: Lowy Institute, 2019),
https://lowyinstitutepoll.lowyinstitute.org/themes/china/.

b. *Saliency Does Not Always Translate to Favorability*

We now revisit the question posed in the beginning—whether increased saliency of Chinese media narratives translates to an overall increase in the favorability of Beijing's narrative around the world? There is no conclusive evidence that suggests this is the case. The one-way stream characterization of the Virtual Chinatown, where new migrants have balked at assimilating into their host countries, could also be reversed and applied to the mainstream Australians; the general public might have equally tuned out diasporic voices as another mouthpiece for Chinese Communist propaganda.

The quantitative analysis of global social media has established a positive correlation between Chinese state media's saliency in mainstream society and the size of the diaspora population. However, the public perception surveys in Australia demonstrate that this increased saliency only brings public awareness to an issue and generates discussions, at times even heated debates. The detected anti-China hashtags along with Chinese state media retweets in our data analysis shows that there is a fair chance that the saliency could actually promote antagonistic sentiments from the very audience that Beijing is trying to win over. The lesson here for Beijing is clear: *not all publicity is good publicity.*

4.   Summary of Key Findings from Australia and New Zealand Case

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Key Observation from the Australia and New Zealand Case:

- Beijing has successfully "harmonized" – co-opted or coerced – majority of the local diasporic media in Australia and New Zealand into a single voice aligned with the State media narrative.

- The "harmonization" has created a diasporic identity that is unquestionably less heterogeneous and more pro-Beijing; this is not a difficult task considering almost half of the Australia and New Zealand diaspora are recent immigrants from the PRC.

- Aided by Chinese-based Social Media platforms such as WeChat, the new diaspora identity has manifested into a "Virtual Chinatown" that is relatively impervious to outside influence – further compartmentalizing the new Chinese immigrants from the mainstream society and exacerbating the "Us vs. Them" rift.

- Tension arises when certain divisive political issues trigger a reaction from the "Virtual Chinatown", with the more activist element of the diaspora communities rushing forth to demonstrate their "nationalism" to the mainstream population.

- The rise of the new Chinese diaspora voice has certainly spurred national-level discussions on issues relevant to the diaspora; however, these discussions might not be conciliatory but confrontational, ultimately rendering PRC's narrative *less* appealing to the mainstream population.

C.   SOUTHEAST ASIA: A STUDY ON THE DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE NEW AND OLD GENERATIONS OF CHINESE DIASPORA

In the previous case of Australia and New Zealand, we focused on the social dynamics between the Chinese diasporas and their host countries' populations. It was noted that the presence of new migrants might have triggered some level of backlash against China within these host countries' mainstream social media. In this case study, we will turn our attention inward to examine the interactions amongst the diaspora communities within

the ethnic Chinese demographic itself. The question we ask then is whether the influx of these recent Chinese migrants could also instigate anti-PRC sentiments from the older generations of ethnic Chinese overseas?

The two sub-diasporic groups of our interest are the new and old generations of Chinese migrants, who often exhibit contrasting social values and ideologies that is a direct reflection on the extent of their assimilation into the general population. Indeed, our previous regression models have already yielded important clues as to the heterogeneous nature of the Chinese diaspora. The "interactive variables," which is a statistical attempt to capture the dynamics between the two sub-groups in our regression analysis, all demonstrate significance; this is our first clue to the existence of an underlying pattern of inter-group interactions. Next, the prediction graphs derived from our regression models further revealed the diverging influences each sub-group seemed to impose on the general population. The interactions might, in fact, be inversely related—at least when it comes to how each group's presence affects their host country's interest in Beijing's narratives. The more Mainland Chinese migrants there are in the general population, the more likely this population will encounter and circulate Chinese state media contents. Meanwhile, the opposite can be said of the presence of the older generations of ethnic Chinese. To ascertain whether these differences would lead to inter-group biases or even *animosity*, we need to take a qualitative survey of a region where the Chinese diaspora's generational divides are ostensible. And perhaps nowhere in the world is the heterogeneous nature of the diaspora on fuller display than in Southeast Asia.

To begin, where did Southeast Asia as a region stand in our regression results? Figure 26 depicts the region's position on our prediction graph in regards to state media saliency from the quantitative analysis. The region is home to countries with the world's largest share of ethnic Chinese populations in their overall demographics. Three countries stood out in this respect: Singapore, where 76% of its populations are ethnic Chinese; Malaysia, where 34% are ethnic Chinese; and Thailand, where 14% are ethnic Chinese. On the contrary, Southeast Asia, when compared to North America, Europe, and Oceania, has witnessed a smaller inflow of recent migrants from Mainland China. Our own dataset estimates that between 10–25% of the ethnic Chinese populations in the countries of this

region to be recent Mainland Chinese migrants. Consequently, we can see from the prediction graph that Chinese state media saliency on the social media of this region to be comparably lower than regions with a larger share of new migrants—namely, Australia and New Zealand in the previous case study. A similar observation can be made on the anticipated volume of anti-China tweets in Southeast Asia's social media space (Figure 27)—where a smaller population of new migrants translate to less anti-China sentiments online.
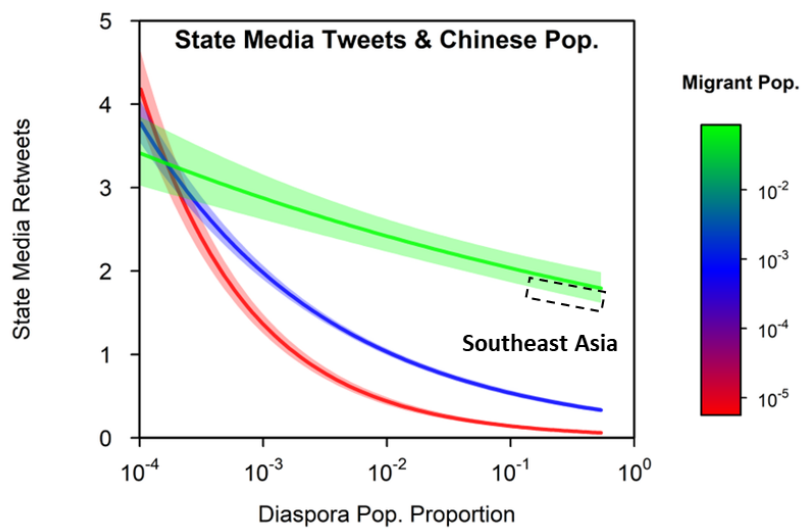
Figure 26. State Media Saliency Based on Diaspora Size (Southeast Asia Highlighted)
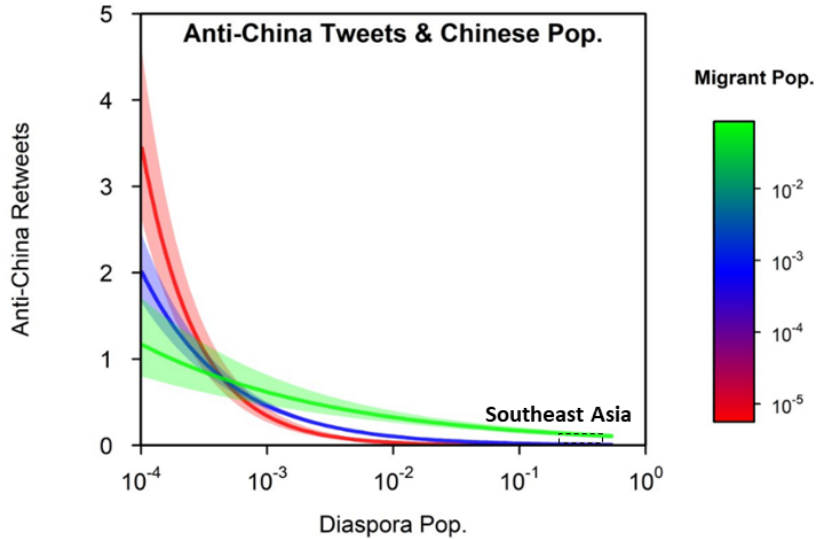
Figure 27. Anti-China Posting Volume Based on Diaspora Size (Southeast Asia Highlighted)

At this point, one might be tempted to conclude that Southeast Asia is a case where "less publicity" over China could actually better insulate the PRC from public criticism overseas. However, it is important to note that on our prediction graph (Figure 27), the differences in the anti-China posts volume as determined by the diaspora size become relatively miniscule the farther we move along the X-axis, where most of the Southeast Asian countries are profiled. Calculating the sizes of the diasporic groups alone, could also risk over-simplifying the complex social dynamics of what has been a continuously evolving and fiercely contested diasporic landscape. Indeed, the relatively lower volume of anti-China sentiments observed in our data might not have been due to a lack of Chinese state media's saturation into the mainstream, but rather because of the older generations of ethnic Chinese staunchly pushing back to retain their own historical and unique identity. The rest of this section is dedicated to explain this phenomenon by first retracing the inter-group tensions between the new and old generations of the ethnic Chinese diaspora and then assessing the effect of these tensions on China's influence abroad.

1.   Forging a Diaspora-Specific Identity

The Southeast Asia region represents the largest community of ethnically Chinese, or Han Chinese, people residing outside of their ancestral domain. This is evident from the mass migration over several centuries of Chinese from Mainland China seeking new homes and opportunities afforded by the proximity of the region. This group is in stark contrast to the "new" Chinese diaspora consisting of migrants from the PRC following the economic reforms of the 1980s. The contrast between the two diasporic sub-groups are particularly pronounced in Southeast Asia when compared to the rest of the world. This is primarily due to the older generations of ethnic Chinese in this region having already forged their own identity from centuries of in-group interactions, often with minimum to no direct influence first from Imperial China, and later the Republic of China. In fact, the ethnic Chinese diasporas in Southeast Asia have accrued considerable power and influence of their own in their adopted homes.

A survey on the history of the ethnic Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia reveals its upward climb to the elite class of political and economic power, and the Chinese diaspora's success can be attributed first and foremost to the pivotal roles they have assumed in the region's business communities. Many academics agree that the Chinese business communities are mainly comprised of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) whose successful growth is based on the diaspora's mastery of *guanxi (关系)*, or opportunistic relationships with other members of the diaspora.[82] The principles of *guanxi* has led Chinese networks to center around "common religious orientation, language or dialect, descent affiliations, together with guilds and secret societies."[83] This economically integrated network of connections provides Chinese-owned SMEs the ability to monopolize the lower end of the economy ensuring that they remain principal players in the subcontracting arrangements made by larger, foreign enterprises. With this comparative

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[82] Donald M. Nonini, "All are Flexible, but Some are More Flexible than Others: Small-Scale Chinese Business in Malaysia," in *Ethnic Business: Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia*, ed. K. S. Jomo and B. C. Folk (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

[83] Vivienne Wee et al., "Positioning Strategies of Southeast Asian Chinese Entrepreneurs," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 36, no. 3 (2006): 365.

advantage, Chinese diasporic businesses find economic opportunities in connecting larger corporations with its flexible labor force that can readily respond to market demands and maintain a high level of productivity and output.[84] Furthermore, the informal, family-centered nature of Chinese SMEs ensures that the Chinese diaspora maintains control over major sectors of their host country's business economy.[85] This *modus operandi* of Chinese businesses in Southeast Asia has provided *Huaqiao (华侨)* considerable economic influence in the region that has not gone unnoticed.

Economic prestige aside, some experts suggest that the multi-generational presence of *Huaqiao* in Southeast Asia has also rewarded them with significant political capital. Since Chinese migration to Southeast Asia began in the mid-19th Century, successive generations of ethnic Chinese have successfully integrated into their host communities. In Singapore, ethnic Chinese have become assimilated into the island nation with many surrendering their ethnic identity in favor of an English-speaking, technocratic Chinse Singaporean identity. The political influence of this new group of ethnic Chinese who identify as nationalistically Singaporean explains the decline of formerly influential ethno-centric organizations such as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce due to the new generation of *Peranankan*, or local-born Chinese Singaporeans who now dominate the national government.[86] This decline in a pure Chinese identity also explains the drop in the usage of the Chinese language in Singapore's education system and consequently an increase in efforts to counter the influence of China's Communist Party. Ironically, one of Singapore's most ardent champions of a multi-racial society, where each ethnicity including the predominant Han Chinese race is treated equally, was the Chinese Singaporean prime

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[84] Donald M. Nonini, "All are Flexible, but Some are More Flexible than Others: Small-Scale Chinese Business in Malaysia," in *Ethnic Business: Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia*, ed. K. S. Jomo and B. C. Folk (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

[85] Kit G. Machado, "Japanese Transational Production Networks and Ethnic Chinese Business Networks in East Asia: Linkages and Regional Integration," in *Ethnic Business: Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia*, ed. K. S. Jomo and B. C. Folk (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

[86] Vivienne Wee et al., "Positioning Strategies of Southeast Asian Chinese Entrepreneurs," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 36, no. 3 (2006): 365.

minister, Lee Kuan Yew.[87] As ethnic Chinese assimilated into their respective host countries, they slowly transformed their identity to one that accepts local language, culture, and customs to afford them greater political participation and influence in their local government.

But the permeation of political power amongst the Chinese diaspora is not a universal trend across the region. Scholars have observed that in countries where ethnic Chinese are a small minority group with scant political power, their dominance in business and economic activities has produced mixed results in engendering actual political influence. The strength of Chinese businesses in these instances has proven to be a double-edged sword—solidifying the diaspora's relationships among powerful indigenous political players while also hampering the diaspora's assimilation into the local society, and consequently curbing their political potential. For example, the Manadonese-Chinese in Indonesia are a minority among the majority Minahasa people but have accrued a disproportionate share of economic capital thanks to the prevalence of Chinese businesses, best represented by the diaspora's monopolization of the wholesale and retail sectors in the region. These successful Chinese communities have maintained a separation between their social and economic relationships, selectively bypassing business relationships with the native Minahasan while continuing to pursue social assimilation, albeit with varying results.[88] In contrast to the Manadonese-Chinese, Chinese Malaysians in Johor Baru have learned to pursue relations with politically powerful Malay leaders for the purpose of broadening the diaspora's local alliances. Unsurprisingly, Chinese Malaysians were much more successful in evoking their *guanxi* with the local politicians to transform the ethnic Chinese communities' economic success into concrete political capital.[89] The cases of Malaysia and Indonesia demonstrate that the Chinese diaspora often seeks out political connections outside of their *Huaqiao* community as a means to maximize their own

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[87] Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

[88] Wee et al., "Positioning Strategies of Southeast Asian Chinese Entrepreneurs," 365.

[89] Vivienne Wee et al., "Positioning Strategies of Southeast Asian Chinese Entrepreneurs," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 36, no. 3 (2006): 365.

political worth in their respective host countries. This, in fact, is a survival tactic by a minority in the face of a dominating, and oftentimes not so friendly, majority.

The Chinese diaspora's journey of assimilation is not without its obstacles. Some academics describe the plight of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia as akin to being treated as second-class citizens by the indigenous ethnic group. In countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, political leaders have exploited their overseas Chinese communities as political scapegoats. For instance, Prime Minister Mahathir Bin Mohamad of Malaysia has routinely painted ethnic Malays as victims of the overseas Chinese who were only able to secure their current aristocratic positions through their involvement in the country's colonial past. Likewise, General Suharto's government in Indonesia unleashed anti-Chinese legislation banning Chinese newspapers, educational institutions, and organizations.[90] Unfortunately in many instances, Southeast Asians of Chinese descent have been labeled "as a 'foreign' Other, leading to their social and political marginalization, despite generations of settlement in their country of citizenship and residence."[91] But adversity breeds solidarity. The hostilities demonstrated by the indigenous majority eventually spurred the formation of a version of ethno-nationalism unique to the Chinese diaspora.

Indeed, ethno-nationalist sentiments can be a powerful political motivator that when threatened can lead to major political and social movements or even conflict. One only needs to reflect on the conflicts in the Balkans to understand the powerful impact ethno-nationalist sentiments can have in a region rife with ethnic tensions. In the context of this study, overseas Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia are uniquely distinct with significant economic power to shape national government policies. Should the diasporas become threatened by indigenous groups or be provided with external opportunities, they could readily leverage their influence to shape national policies to their own benefit. But does this suggest that the Chinese diaspora of Southeast Asia will wield

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[90] Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

[91] Wee et al., "Positioning Strategies of Southeast Asian Chinese Entrepreneurs," 365.

their power and influence in support of their ethnic homeland as it rises to a great power status?

2.   Rise of Ethno-Nationalism amongst the Chinese Diaspora

What does the Chinese diasporic version of ethno-nationalism in Southeast Asia look like? Southeast Asia's mainstream media landscape tend to characterize the overseas Chinese as being "Chinese first and foremost, with little or no sense of allegiance to the countries in which they live."[92] This notion could not be farther from the truth. George Hicks reminds us that the "Southeast Asian Chinese have become substantially integrated into their adopted societies" while President Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, an ethnic Chinese person himself, spoke of his ethnic brothers and sisters as being loyal to their home country Singapore, and not to China.[93] The diaspora communities are in reality highly heterogeneous with differing origins, religious affiliations, economic backgrounds, and political allegiances. It is erroneous to assume that their ethno-nationalism is a singular expression of pride over Mainland China. Rather, ethno-nationalism is defined differently between the two competing sub-groups of the Chinese diaspora.

Examining the social behaviors of the old and new Chinese diasporas, it is clear that there are significant differences between the two groups. The disparities are strong enough to discourage meaningful interactions between the old and new generations of Chinese. A survey in Japan, for instance, indicated that "only 10% of the elder generation of Chinese in Japan agreed to incorporate [voluntary Chinese] associations into their own circles, while 70% found it difficult to accommodate them." [94] In his discussion of nationalist sentiments of the global Chinese community, Hong Liu insists that "conflicting political persuasions among the Chinese overseas have constituted an impediment to the progress of overseas Chinese nationalism in the international arena."[95] Clearly, the global

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[92] George Hicks and J. A. C. Mackie, "A Question of Identity," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 157, no. 28 (July 14, 1994): 46.

[93] Hicks and Mackie, "A Question of Identity," 47.

[94] Hong Liu, "New Migrants and the Revival of Overseas Chinese Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 43 (2005): 307.

[95] Liu, "New Migrants and the Revival of Overseas Chinese Nationalism," 311.

Chinese diaspora is socially and politically heterogeneous deterring the development of a unified identity among overseas Chinese and, in fact, causing significant tensions between the two groups.

The social tensions between old and new generations of ethnic Chinese are particularly ostensible in Singapore. The small nation state has a majority ethnic Chinese population and due to its size has experienced exponentially stronger inter-group tensions as the local and Mainland Chinese identities mix in close proximity. Many Singaporeans have felt obligated to publicly reaffirm their unique in-group identity as distinctive from that of the recent PRC migrants. Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore, made it a point for Singapore to be the last country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to establish diplomatic ties with Beijing. With English as its official working language and ongoing efforts to establish uniquely Singaporean cultural references, the message from Lee to the world was clearly intended to communicate that Singapore and its ethnic Chinese majority population is not an extension of Mainland China.[96]

On the other end, China has not remained on the sideline of the ongoing tussle over ethnic identity. Beijing has undertaken an aggressive influence campaign to promote its own nationalist identity that conflates loyalty to the Chinese heritage with Mainland China, or more specifically, the PRC government. The CCP has, in essence, attempted to seize the diaspora's ethno-nationalism and mold it in its favor. With President Xi's call for the participation of overseas Chinese to realize the "Chinese Dream," this attempt is emphasized even more so.[97] These efforts, in turn, has tested the allegiance of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, triggering further unease between the old and new diasporas. In China's calculation, a pro-Beijing version of ethno-nationalism could serve the party's political agenda by countering the anti-PRC political narratives originating in the diaspora's host countries.

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[96] Amy Qin, "Worries Grow in Singapore Over China's Calls to Help 'Motherland,'" *The New York Times*, August 5, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/05/world/asia/singapore-china.html.

[97] "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at the 19th CPC National Congress," *China Daily*, November 4, 2017, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm.

The most susceptible to these influencing efforts involve the 15 million recent Chinese migrants, many of whom have maintained active ties with their home country. And indeed, as we have seen in the Australia and New Zealand cases, most of these new migrants are genuinely pro-Beijing. But here is where the Chinese government might have overestimated the strength of its new migrants and underestimated the resolve of the older diaspora in this region. We have seen that the more outspoken the new migrants are in support of the PRC's narratives, the more the older generations of diaspora feel obligated to defend its unique dual-identity.

The world might be witnessing a duel between the two competing versions of Chinese ethno-nationalism, where the prerogative to define the subject of this term could come down to a number's game after all. Unfortunately for China, in Southeast Asia, the population size of the older generations of ethnic Chinese far outnumbers the population size of the new migrants from Mainland China. The former group, in turn, might have effectively "drowned out" most of the noise from the latter group. As a result, the mainstream population never had the opportunity to hear the Chinese state media's voices. Ironically, the "tune up the volume" tactic that was so favored by the PRC against the dissident diasporas in Australia and New Zealand might have been repurposed and reversed in the case of Southeast Asia. This could provide a distal explanation behind why the mainstream online communities in Southeast Asia encountered less circulation of Chinese state media narratives and consequently obviated the public's need to react in one direction or the other.

3.   Summary of Key Findings from the Southeast Asia Case

> **Key Observation from the Southeast Asia Case**:
>
> - The ethnic Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia has forged its own in-group identity that is both distinct and resilient against external influences; consequently Beijing's attempt to "harmonize" the diaspora communities has produced mixed results.
>
> - The older generations of the diasporas in Southeast Asia have accrued considerable power base to be able to stand against Beijing's influence campaign.
>
> - Since there are more older generations of ethnic Chinese diaspora than new migrants from Mainland China in Southeast Asia, the former group is able to "tune up" and "drown out" the relevance of Chinese state media narratives in this region.

VII. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY AHEAD

A. CONCLUSION

The quantitative analysis of this study identifies a number of conclusions related to the effect of the PRC's state media apparatus on the social media landscape as it relates to the global ethnic Chinese diaspora. This research found significance in the relationship between tweets amplifying state media output and the Chinese diaspora in which we identify that a large Chinese diaspora presence in a given respective host country does not necessarily result in greater salience of Chinese state media narratives belying an essential hypothesis of this study. In fact, the presence of a larger Chinese diaspora may have an opposite effect of suppressing Chinese state media narratives emanating from the host country. Despite this finding, we observe that the presence of newer Chinese migrants may actually temper the effect leading to the possible conclusion that a country's amplification of the PRC's state media is dependent on the level of integration of the Chinese minority population. As new migrants assimilate into the host country's population through the attainment of residency and citizenship, the general population's contribution towards the spread of Chinese state media narratives will decrease.

Furthermore, this study also identified a significant relationship between tweets with anti-China characteristics in the form of hashtags and other keywords and the Chinese diaspora. We observed that there exists an anti-China backlash through social media following the publication of Chinese state media regarding the PRC's core issues that generate controversy among other nations. Furthermore, it would seem that the presence of Chinese migrant populations may generate more anti-China sentiments. This suggests that perhaps the general population is more aware of controversial PRC issues due to the presence of newly arrived ethnic Chinese in the country generating public backlash against the Chinese state media narratives.

The case study analysis section of this study relied on cases from Australia, New Zealand and Southeast Asia due to their geographic proximity to the PRC and pervasive ethnic Chinese communities residing there. Therefore, these regions generate interesting

conclusions illustrating the extent of Chinese state media influence on the Chinese diaspora populations. In the case of Australia and New Zealand, recent immigrants from the PRC make up nearly half of all ethnic Chinese in the region with many adopting nationalist sentiments originating from narratives within their homeland. With the PRC's harmonization of media outlets targeting diasporic Chinese, the Chinese identity has become less heterogenous and more pro-CCP. This rise in Chinese nationalism commandeered by the Chinese Communist regime, may prove to be detrimental to the Chinese state as pro-Beijing narratives only exacerbate political and social tensions within the diaspora's host countries.

Southeast Asia is home to the largest population of ethnic Chinese diaspora globally. The PRC's more recent media push into the region targeting ethnic Chinese has resulted in a significant expansion of Chinese state programming for not only the Chinese-speaking diaspora but also host country locals who live amongst their minority neighbors. Despite the PRC's media campaign to support its soft power influence among Chinese in the region, a majority of the ethnic diaspora has resided in the region for generations with immigration occurring since the mid-19th Century. Therefore, the Chinese of Southeast Asia who are comfortable with their dual identity status (i.e., Chinese Singaporeans, Chinese Filipinos, Chinese Malaysians) have established an "old diaspora" distinguishable from more recent Chinese migrants. The PRC's media campaign to try homogenizing overseas Chinese into a single ethno-nationalist identity risks alienating Chinese who hold no political allegiance to the Communist state further accentuating the divide between old and new Chinese diaspora groups.

B.   RECOMMENDATIONS

This research recognizes a variety of implications related to efforts by The People's Republic of China to influence the global ethnic Chinese diaspora to attain political objectives. Furthermore, China has not been secretive of its approach to mobilize its ethnic people. Under the veil of a "peaceful rise," Xi Jinping has called for China's propaganda arms to provide a narrative of China's story indicating the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to influence the global community in support of the Party's version of China and

the Chinese people. Through government institutions such as the United Front Work Department, the PRC has conducted a wide range of influence activities targeting both domestic and foreign entities. Along with its state-controlled media, Chinese propaganda institutions are fully capable to persistently deliver a consistent narrative of China's Story. With its tantamount national security concerns for its core issues involving sovereignty including those of the South China Sea, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan, China publicly and globally distributes a message supporting the CCP's biased viewpoint using its state-owned media. Understanding China's motivations and actions involving its influence activities presents policy implications that contribute to national security studies in an age of global power competition.

Despite China's best efforts to inspire a unified and pro-PRC version of Chinese nationalism abroad, the global community of ethnic Chinese people proves to be highly heterogeneous. Some of the largest Chinese diasporas can be found in Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong where the PRC does not have complete sovereign control as it does within its own borders. Ethnic Chinese are also spread throughout Southeast Asia representing some of the largest diaspora groups of overseas Chinese people who wield considerable political and economic power domestically. Even in the United States, Chinese have been immigrating into the country since the 19th Century settling primarily in the West Coast but expanding across the country over several generations. It is wrong to assume that since these are all people with a self-proclaimed "Chinese" identity that their loyalty resides with the PRC, a sovereign that has only existed since 1949. In fact, older generations of overseas Chinese have developed uniquely dual identities as both ethnically Chinese and as members of their host nation.

1.   Policy Recommendation #1: Promote Non-PRC-Sponsored Chinese Cultural Programs

Host nations with Chinese diaspora communities should promote Chinese cultural programs recognizing the community as a group proud of its cultural heritage and welcomed by the host nation. This should counter PRC-sponsored organizations looking to influence the Chinese diaspora communities to include Confucius Institutes. Although they provide important cultural and language education, they are also known to advance

the narratives specifically approved by the Chinese Communist Party. Therefore, alternative Chinese cultural organizations advancing its own cultural education programs are capable of presenting a perspective without a pro-PRC political agenda.

Within the U.S. national security apparatus, Civil Affairs (CA) and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) units can promote these kinds of cultural programs that present an alternate view of the CCP's "China Story"—one that is based on truth, transparency and open to multiple viewpoints. This support can appropriately counter influence activities organized by the PRC and develop a more open community of ideas opposed to a monopoly of influence by the Chinese government. Furthermore, CA and PSYOP units can contribute towards influencing overseas Chinese diaspora communities and host nation populations by accentuating the gap between new Chinese migrants and old diaspora communities. Recognizing the difference in communities can distinguish between newer migrants who are less integrated into the host nation's society and older generations of ethnic Chinese who represent the children, grandchildren or further generations of original Chinese immigrants well-integrated into the host nation with more of a dual-identity status (i.e., Chinese Singaporean, Chinese American, Chinese Australian).

2.   **Policy Recommendation #2: Empower Non-aligned Ethnic Chinese within the Online Community**

Virtual Chinatowns are monopolized by the PRC and present a narrative consistent with the CCP's political views. Online communities such as these represent a new technological environment capable of influencing individuals and groups toward certain political interests. The online space represents a free and open community that can allow for a multitude of interest groups. In order to break the monopolies that the PRC has held in certain online communities, host nations can empower non-PRC-aligned ethnic Chinese to develop websites, social media groups and other online communities through the internet medium to counter the biased views of the PRC and CCP. For example, views critical of the Chinese government's position on Uyghurs in Xinjiang or the Dalai Lama can be present in online communities led by members of the Chinese diaspora who are not staunchly loyal to the PRC government. For example, Facebook groups are popular online communities to advance certain interests. Groups such as these that can contribute to a

more open and democratic discussion on the PRC's more controversial political interests and can specifically promote more openness in political thought among the global Chinese diaspora community.

Subtle Asian Traits (SAT) is an immensely popular Facebook group established by a 21-year-old Chinese Australian from Melbourne. The group focuses on being an open community for English-speaking Asians throughout the globe to discuss their culture and heritage as members of primarily Western communities. SAT "has become a happy home to memes that center on the experience of being a second-generation Asian living in a predominantly English-speaking culture.[98] Groups like SAT are open, online communities that attempt to bring understanding of Asian cultural identity. Groups such as these can be developed and moderated by members of the ethnic Chinese diaspora to have open discussions outside the authority of the PRC's censorship.

3.   Policy Recommendation #3: Increase Efforts to Assimilate Ethnic Chinese into the Wider Society

Ethnic Chinese who have as yet to integrate and eventually assimilate into their host nation adopting a dual-identity of being Chinese and a member of their host nation may be contributing towards political tensions with the PRC's agenda. Therefore, host nation governments should enact policies and promote activities that better integrate ethnic Chinese into the local community. This could range from promoting more cultural awareness events for the Chinese community to changing immigration policies that incentivize Chinese migrants to enjoy the comparative advantages of the host nation (i.e., quality education, universal health care) through the attainment of residency or even citizenship. Furthermore, certain groups such as non-governmental organizations promote the involvement of minority communities in civic engagement and political representation. Specific NGOs can engage with the Chinese community and encourage their participation in democratic institutions. Assimilation of ethnic Chinese to develop a dual-nation identity (i.e., Chinese-Australian, Chinese-American) may not only diversify the host nation but

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[98] Kat Lin, "The Story of the Subtle Asian Traits Facebook Group," *The New Yorker*, December 22, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-story-of-the-subtle-asian-traits-facebook-group.

also advance the sense of civic nationalism in which members of any nation can adopt citizenship and nationhood status within their host nation community.

Students from China represent one of the largest groups of international students especially among Western nations. This provides Western governments the opportunity to promote Western democratic norms to members of the Chinese diaspora who grew up under the PRC's strict political monopoly of the Communist Party without any knowledge of democratic norms. Student organizations in local colleges and universities promoting democratic political activism can seek the membership of even minority groups such as international Chinese students despite their lack of citizenship. Groups such as these can benefit from an alternative political viewpoint involving the benefits of democratic norms as enjoyed in Western-style democracies. This can lead to healthy political debates to illuminate not only foreign but even domestic students on the spectrum of political ideologies.

C.   WAY FORWARD

Certain limitations of this research study indicate the need for further research in this area of academic interest. Despite the detailed analytical method used in the quantitative analysis portion of this thesis, more comprehensive data may provide a more accurate analysis. State media and Twitter data could only be analyzed during a single year period with Twitter data only capturing a tenth of global tweets. Using the methodology in this study in concert with multi-year news media and Twitter data archives may confirm the findings identified. Furthermore, this study only used Twitter to sample social media output; other social media sources such as Facebook and especially those used by ethnic Chinese such as Weibo would enhance an analysis of Chinese state media and its amplification effect among the Chinese diaspora active in the social media community.

Despite this study addressing "bot" activity as negligible due to China's seemingly more effective means to manipulate social media conversations with actual people instead of automation, computational propaganda may become a more viable investment with the development of artificial intelligence and smart computing. As internet usage continues to expand along with China's growing network of relationships globally, Chinese human

resources as cyber troops may not be able to keep pace with the state's requirements toward its social media propaganda effort. Future studies should attempt to investigate how bots utilized by the Chinese state may enhance the influence of traditional Chinese state media output.

In addition, there exists certain issues concerning accuracy and comprehensiveness of this study's Chinese diaspora data. Poston and Wong's study on the Chinese diaspora was the only source of data used to represent the global ethnic Chinese population to include those who are well assimilated or integrated (i.e., attained citizenship) in their respective host countries differentiating this data from UN migrant stock data. In their study, they drew data resources from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Council in Taiwan which could not be contacted for more accurate and comprehensive population data.[99] Therefore, future research should encompass data from more authoritative, first-hand sources to include almanacs published by government authorities or robust research studies on the Chinese diaspora.

Despite the case studies used in this research, the Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand cases only broadly studied the Chinese diaspora in those regions. Future studies can further explore ethnic Chinese in a variety of other countries. This can include further research into diaspora issues within Western countries (i.e., Great Britain, United States) and those with large Chinese populations (i.e., Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia). These case studies can further derive comparisons and differences across countries to provide a better understanding of the PRC's influence activities among ethnic Chinese. Furthermore, specific cases involving China influencing and eventually co-opting members of the ethnic Chinese diaspora to conduct intelligence gathering and other illicit activities abroad in support of the PRC's national security interests may provide depth to the study of China's influence on the diaspora. Due to China rise to great power status and its growing exercise of soft power globally, it remains imperative to study the PRC's

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[99] Poston and Wong, "The Chinese Diaspora: The Current Distribution of the Overseas Chinese Population," 348–373.

influence abroad and the effect and implications it has on individuals, communities, and nations.

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