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## INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

# PRC Transnational Repression: Key Actors and Their Tradecraft



Intelligence Assessments Branch  
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Canada



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**PRC Transnational Repression: Key Actors and Their Tradecraft**

Canada and other Western liberal democracies have long been considered places of asylum by Chinese political and religious dissidents, and by members of exile minorities (e.g., Tibetans, Uyghurs). This intelligence assessment is the second in a series that examines the key PRC agencies that are behind the transnational repression of these individuals, as well as the tradecraft that they are known to deploy. (U)

**Key Assessments**

- *The PRC has heavily targeted Chinese-Canadian communities*
- *The PRC engages in a wide range of activities to do so, including harassment, threats and other acts of transnational repression*
- [Redacted]
- Chinese dissidents not only undergo attacks against their personal dignity; they have also been subjected to threats of physical violence. [Redacted] (TS//CEO)
- [Redacted]
- A climate of suspicion often reigns in overseas dissident circles, which is likely part of the PRC's psychological warfare strategy. Contributing to this climate is the use of dissidents as PRC intelligence assets who have been coerced into spying on other dissidents, sometimes after threats against their family in the PRC. (U)





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**Agents of PRC transnational repression**

The PRC has maintained a whole-of-society approach to targeting dissidence. This has increasingly become the case with the adoption of the National Security Law and subsequent propaganda campaigns that are intended to mobilize PRC citizens in the “struggle against traitors and prevention against spies”. Therefore, any PRC national—overseas Chinese or even non-Chinese individual—may proactively become an agent of transnational repression to (i) curry the favour of PRC diplomatic missions or other agencies; (ii) secure their business interests in the PRC or their country of residence; or, (iii) exercise their ideological beliefs. (U)

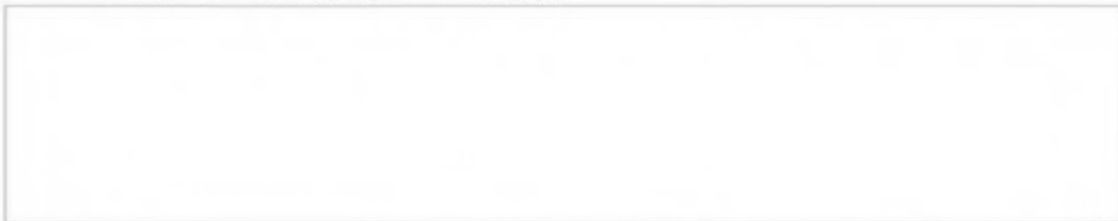
Most Chinese people, including Chinese-Canadians, are well aware of the priority given by the Chinese Communist party (CCP) to the ideological control of overseas Chinese and exile minorities. [ ]



**Methods of PRC transnational repression**

PRC agencies use a combination of methods to suppress Chinese dissent overseas—from diplomacy to united front work, to harsher forms such as online harassment, threats to family members and extraterritorial kidnappings. (U)

- **HUMINT collection and penetration operations:** While intelligence collection does not constitute repression *per se*, it can be considered as such when its ultimate objective is to intimidate and silence dissidents. Repression is also involved when intelligence is obtained via proxies who have been coerced into engaging in collection activities. In the case of the “Five Poisons” in the West, huge efforts have been deployed by PRC authorities to gather information on associated individuals, planned activities, sources of funding, supporters within foreign governments and agencies and internal sources of conflict. Such efforts have a clear objective to export the PRC’s policy of systematic suppression of these groups that has been implemented within the PRC. In a liberal democracy like Canada, part of the intelligence collection on the “Five Poisons” can be conducted overtly and in conformity with local laws. Chinese-Canadian dissidents who engage in protest activities are often met by counter-protesters who, in addition to yelling pro-PRC slogans, take photos and videos of dissidents and report them to PRC authorities. Given the PRC’s recent developments in facial recognition technologies, photos and videos have enhanced deterrent effects. As previously mentioned, such agents of transnational repression may engage in this type of activity on their own initiative, without receiving any formal tasking. (U)





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[Redacted content]

• **Online monitoring and cyber intrusions:**

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In addition to their online collection activities, both the MSS and the MPS have been sponsoring cyber operations against dissidents worldwide, especially in the West. For several years, many prominent Chinese-Canadian dissidents have reported being victims of spear phishing campaigns. More recently, PRC-based hackers known in the security industry as "Earth Empusa" or "Evil Eye" have been using various tactics, such as the creation of fake Facebook accounts that contain fictitious personas, to target activists, journalists and dissidents who predominantly comprise Uyghurs from Xinjiang located outside of the PRC, including in Canada. According to Facebook, this group used various cyberespionage tactics to identify targets and infect their devices with malware to enable surveillance. These operations have not been specifically attributed to the MSS or MPS, but their sophistication, pervasiveness and persistence highly suggest the implication of PRC state actors. (U)

• **Mobility control and coercion-by-proxy:**

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To counter Canadian-Chinese dissidents who choose not to return to the PRC, PRC S&I agencies have been leveraging threats against their family members in the PRC in order to silence these dissidents. [ ]



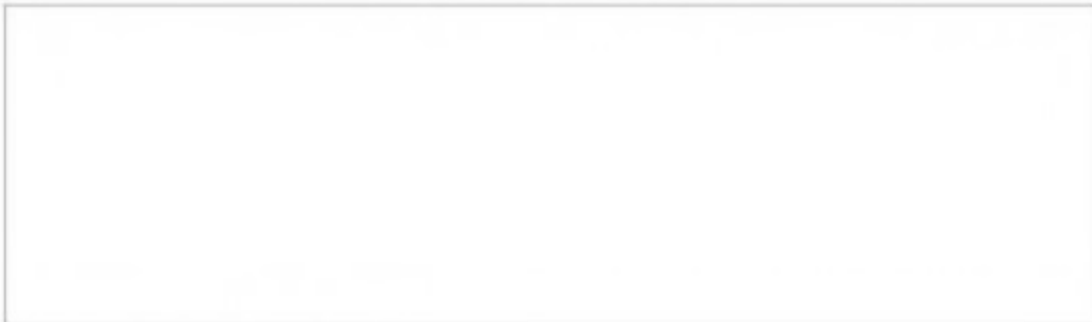


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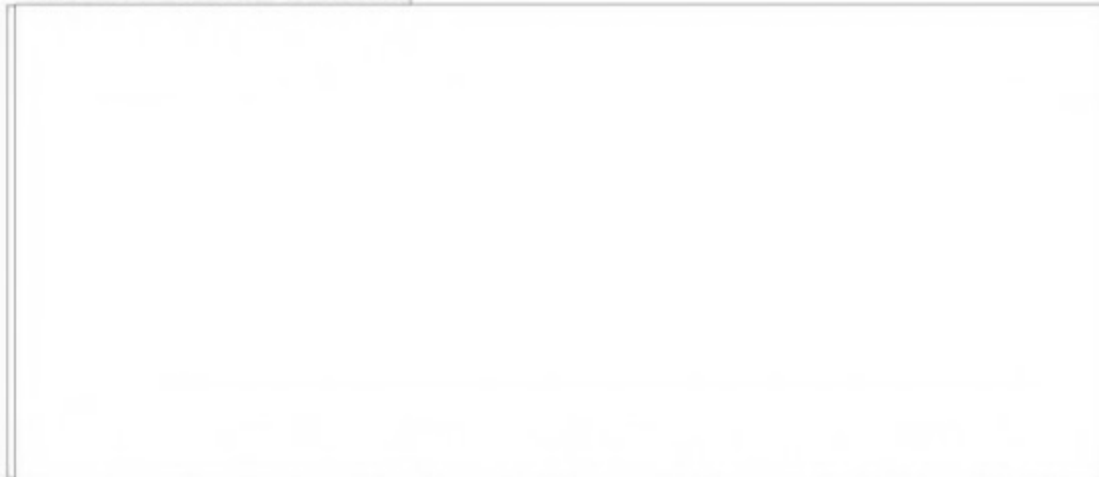
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• Harassment and threats of violence:



Chinese dissidents not only undergo attacks against their personal dignity; they have also been subjected to threats of physical and sexual violence. Chemi Lhamo, a Canadian post-secondary student of Tibetan origin, said she received thousands of intimidating messages, including threats of murder and rape, in early 2019. At that time, she successfully campaigned for the post of student union president at University of Toronto Scarborough. In another example,



- **Forced repatriations:** "Involuntary returns" of PRC nationals or non-PRC nationals born in the PRC has been very well documented with respect to operations Fox Hunt and Sky Net. In a 2022 report, the human rights NGO Safeguard Defenders revealed that, according to official data, the PRC had successfully



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returned nearly 10,000 people since the launch of Fox Hunt in mid-2014. In addition to threatening family members in China, PRC authorities had favoured these returns through in-person visits of overseas targets or kidnappings. There are many examples where the PRC has violated judicial sovereignty worldwide in its pursuit of alleged corrupted officials, including the cases of XIE Weidong (谢卫东), a former judge of the PRC's Supreme People's Court who was pressured to return to China during a visit by PRC officials in Toronto; and, XIAO Jianhua (肖建华), a PRC-born Canadian billionaire who was abducted in the Four Seasons Hotel in Hong Kong in 2017. (U)

Regarding political dissidents, various kidnappings have occurred over recent years in Southeast Asia – the most notorious cases being those of Chinese political cartoonist JIANG Yefei (姜野飞), human rights defender DONG Guangping (董广平) and Swedish bookseller GUI Minhai (桂民海). While no abduction case in the West has been reported to date, [REDACTED]



- **Physical violence:** the FBI indicted five individuals for participating in transnational repression schemes on US soil in March 2022. This example demonstrates the extent to which the PRC S&I apparatus is willing to go to silence critics in the West. One of the indicted individuals, an MSS officer named LIN Qiming, hired a private investigator in New York to disrupt the political campaign of an unnamed former student leader of the 1989 Tian'anmen protests, including by physically attacking the target. A Uyghur named Yusufjan Amet had been shot and seriously wounded in the streets of Istanbul in November 2020, after reportedly refusing to continue spying on overseas Uyghurs for the PRC's security services; no proof had corroborated the implication of the PRC in this assassination attempt. (U)

It is noteworthy that overseas Chinese dissidents who are suspected of covertly spying on behalf of the PRC may also become victims of physical violence. In November 2021, Chinese-Canadian democracy activist HUANG Ningyu (黄宁宇) was severely beaten in the street outside the residence of another Chinese-Canadian democracy activist named GAO Bingchen (高冰晨) in Vancouver. The perpetrators, reportedly working on behalf of GUO Wengui, had been protesting for over two months in front of GAO's residence, accusing GAO of being an agent of the PRC government. Whether or not GAO and HUANG were actually PRC intelligence assets, this example clearly demonstrates that the aforementioned climate of suspicion that reigns in overseas dissident circles—likely part of the PRC's psychological warfare strategy—bears great potential for violence that could put any dissident at risk. It is also an important reminder that some intelligence assets have been coerced into spying on other dissidents, sometimes after threats against their family in the PRC. (U)



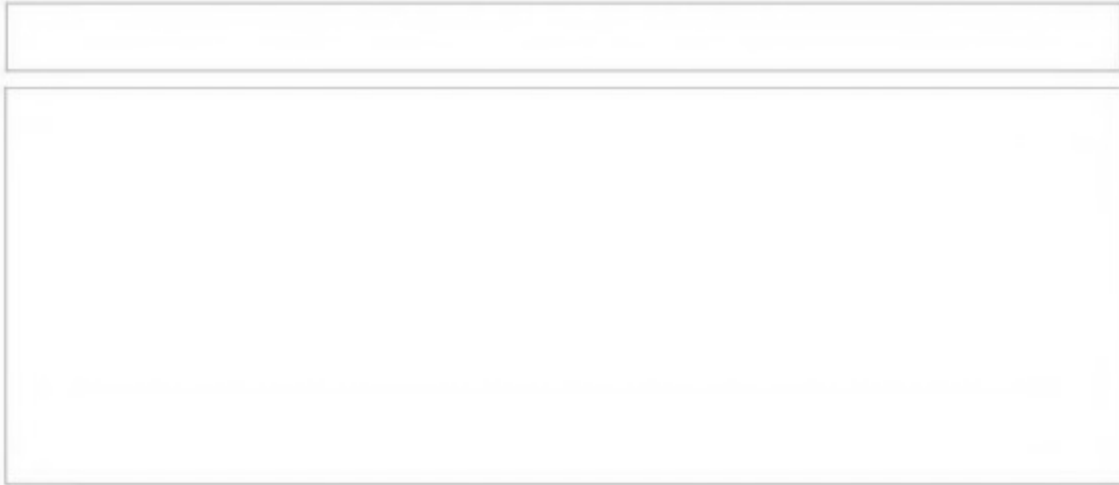




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1 Circa 2017–2018, an unnamed PRC student at a top Canadian university was contacted by the MPS after he reposted anti-CCP content on Twitter. In early 2020, LUO Daiqing, a PRC student in the USA, was detained by the MPS and jailed for tweets he posted while in the United States. In mid-2020, a PRC student in Melbourne, Australia, received a video call from an MPS officer after she criticized Xi Jinping on Twitter. (U)







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