

**SECRET//CANADIAN EYES ONLY**

25 OCTOBER 2021

**SITE TF ANALYSIS**

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**CHINESE STATE MEDIA AND OTHER ONLINE ACTIVITY DURING GE44**

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**Key Findings**

- SITE observed online/media activities aimed at discouraging Canadians, particularly of Chinese heritage, from supporting the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), party leader Erin O'Toole, and particularly former Richmond-Steveston candidate Kenny Chiu in Canada's 44<sup>th</sup> General Election (GE44).
- SITE TF defines Foreign Interference (FI) as: activity conducted or supported by a foreign state/actor that is detrimental to Canadian national interests and is clandestine, deceptive or involves a threat to a person. Based on available information, SITE cannot conclusively assess to what extent the People's Republic of China (PRC) sought to clandestinely orchestrate online and/or media efforts to discredit the CPC, its candidates, or policies with the specific intent to influence the outcome of the election.
- These online/media activities, spreading false narratives about Kenny Chiu, the CPC, and the party leader, appear to have taken place across multiple platforms and mediums including WeChat, Douyin,<sup>1</sup> Chinese-language news sites, and reportedly radio. However, the primary source of amplification appears to be WeChat's group chat and news account features.
- While we do not have clear evidence of a PRC-directed Foreign Interference (FI) campaign, we have observed indicators of potential coordination between various Canada-based Chinese language news outlets as well as PRC and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) news outlets.
- For example, while we did not observe direct Chinese state media participation in spreading the narrative about Chiu, SITE identified Canada-based Chinese-language news sites and WeChat accounts that maintain close ties with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) media spreading the narrative widely. At least three of these Canadian Chinese-language news sites that first circulated a false narrative about Chiu are very likely members of a media partnership with the Chinese state-run media agency, *China News Service* (CNS), which is under the direct control of the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD).
- The UFWD is mandated, among other things, to engage the ethnic Chinese diaspora as potential vectors of influence and propaganda.
- SITE notes that the nature of UFWD work encourages proxies and third-parties favorable to the PRC to conduct work generally in China's interest. Given the sanctions imposed by China on Kenny Chiu, as well as Ambassador Cong Peiwu and official party media disparaging the CPC in general, domestic actors within Canada may have endeavored to further narratives damaging to the CPC of their own accord without official direction or resources from any PRC officials.

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<sup>1</sup> Douyin is a video sharing service hosted by the China based company Bytedance. Following the success of Douyin in China, Bytedance then launched the popular video sharing service TikTok, for the international market. Douyin and TikTok are very similar in terms of functionality; however Douyin remains popular among Chinese-speakers.

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- If the activities observed by SITE were part of a PRC-directed campaign, the loss of CPC candidates in ridings with large numbers of Canadians of Chinese heritage may lead the PRC to conclude the operation was a success and may result in their attempt to conduct similar activities in forthcoming elections across multiple levels of government. It may also have a chilling effect on candidates' perceived ability to critically discuss China-Canada relations.
- This case demonstrates a grey area between foreign interference and overt influence and illustrates the challenges of identifying foreign interference with certainty in the digital information environment.
- Current frameworks, definitions, and legal authorities are ill-equipped to respond to overt/public commentary from foreign governments which may be intended to influence diaspora populations in Canada.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to present a timeline of all evidence available to SITE supporting our observations that CPC Leader Erin O'Toole, former CPC MP Kenny Chiu, and the CPC in general were the target of online/media activities aimed primarily at discouraging Chinese-speaking Canadian electors from supporting the CPC in GE44.

### **Methodology**

This analysis is based in large part on Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) Canada's efforts to monitor priority themes in the digital information environment that may be leveraged for the purpose of foreign state sponsored information manipulation<sup>2</sup>. RRM Canada used a combination of methods to analyze this online activity, primarily manual review of Chinese social media platforms including WeChat, Douyin, Weibo, Chinese-language Bulletin Board System (BBS)<sup>3</sup> websites, as well as open-source forensic digital analysis through using website archives, social listening tools, and cross-platform social media ranking tools. We also received information from the CPC, the MacDonald-Laurier Institute (MLI), including DisinfoWatch, and the Media Ecosystem Observatory. This analysis is also informed by classified intelligence.

### **Observations**

Following a deep dive into Canada's Sinophone media ecosystem, SITE has identified numerous articles posted and shared among PRC and Canada-based Chinese-language news websites and WeChat news accounts containing false claims about former CPC candidate for Richmond-Steveston, Kenny Chiu, and his Private Members' Bill C-282 (An Act to establish the Foreign Influence Registry). The articles claimed that, if elected, Chiu would pass a "foreign power registry act" that would designate "any individual or group connected with China as a spokesperson of the Chinese government."

<sup>2</sup> Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) Canada produces Open Data Analysis to chart trends, strategies, and tactics in foreign interference. This analysis supports the G7 RRM, an initiative agreed by the G7 in 2018, to strengthen coordination to identify and respond to diverse and evolving threats to G7 democracies, including through sharing information and analysis, and identifying opportunities for coordinated response.

<sup>3</sup> BBS is likely a legacy term describing computer servers which allowed users to connect using a terminal emulator or terminal program in the case of dial-in BBS's not connected to the internet or other networks. In modern contexts, BBS's are websites that serve up news content, community discussion forums and classifieds for job posting, available rentals, etc.

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The articles portrayed Chiu and Bill C-282 in a false or misleading way, and the narrative appeared embedded or alongside other news stories that claimed Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole "almost wanted to break diplomatic relations with China" with his GE44 platform.



SITE notes that there is a common narrative in these articles, and that the close timing and publication of the similar content across several platforms is unusual. SITE also notes that some of the material mirrors narratives publicly presented by the PRC government and the CCP. However, there is currently no intelligence indicating the PRC government or the CCP clandestinely or deceptively coordinated the content and/or publication of these narratives.

In some cases, FI threat actors (including the PRC) seek to utilize the 'grey zone' between appropriate, overt activities, and illegitimate and clandestine activity. The CCP's united front work, for example, is designed to take place in this legal and normative grey zone. It is difficult to decisively conclude whether certain individuals or entities are acting at the behest of the Party-state given shared interests between the PRC government, the CCP, and these entities. Individuals or groups of concern can have well-established relationships with the PRC's government and/or Party entities and proactively act in a manner that benefits PRC interests given an intimate knowledge of Party-state priorities and a general understanding of issues of concern. By proactively behaving in this manner, individuals or groups of concern invite 'benefits' and the favour of the PRC and CCP.

#### Timeline of Events

- **Mid-Aug to late-Aug:** Reporting from Chinese-language media on GE44 is relatively light and presented in a non-partisan manner.
- **Late-Aug to early Sep:** Chinese-language media notes that the CPC is pulling ahead in the polls and LPC support is dipping.
  - Three (or more) messages that present false narratives about the CPC and Kenny Chiu begin to circulate among WeChat and WhatsApp group chats.
- **Aug 28:** The popular York BBS WeChat news account shares an anonymous post that CPC leader would "ban WeChat, if elected" and is the "Canadian version of Trump"
- **Aug 29:** Popular WeChat news accounts in the Vancouver area also share the anonymous post from York BBS.
- **Sept 6:** Markham-based 105.9 Yes My Radio publishes an anonymous Chinese-language blog calling on readers to "pay attention to Kenny Chiu's 'Foreign Interference Registry.'" The author writes "any individual or group with ties to China may be considered a spokesperson" and would need to register.
- **Sept 8:** Markham-based news site CGCTV shares a slightly revised blog post from 105.9 Yes My Radio. The author claims Chiu's "anti-China" stance comes from his Hong Kong background.

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- **Sept 9:** Chinese State media as well as Canada based Chinese-language news outlets begin to publish on WeChat:
  - Toronto-based news sites Today Commercial News and CouponKing share the CGCTV article on their WeChat news accounts, along with a call to action: “if you care about the well-being of the Chinese community, please spread this message...!!”.
  - Chinese state media tabloid The Global Times publishes three pieces on WeChat that claim the CPC “almost wants to break diplomatic relations with China.” The piece draws quotes from a Hill Times piece that discusses the LPC, CPC and NDP’s China-Canada relations policies.
- **Sept 10 to 16:** As advance polls open, anti-CPC narratives are further developed:
  - At least eight popular WeChat news accounts in Canada share the Global Times story that the CPC would “break ties” with China, but do not credit the state tabloid as the original author.
  - More than a dozen Chinese provincial and state-level media outlets also publish the story.
  - On Sept 11, Burnaby-based Road to Canada Consulting shares the false narrative about Chiu and Bill C-282.
- **Sept 16 to 20:** RRM Canada does not detect any new Chinese-language stories from Canadian or Chinese state media about Chiu, Bill C-282, the CPC, or the party leader.

For an extended review of the timeline of these online activities, as well as data analysis on the levels of engagement each post received, please see Annex A.

### Analysis

#### **Target Audience**

There appear to be different primary target audiences for these narratives:

1. Canadian electors of Chinese heritage who live in Canada, especially those in the greater Toronto or greater Vancouver areas.
2. Canadian electors of Chinese heritage who live in the electoral district of Richmond-Steveston (the former riding of MP Kenny Chiu).
3. The public in mainland China who has not heard of Conservative Party leader Erin O’Toole or formed an opinion of him.

While Chinese-Canadians were likely the primary target audience, and some content appears to be related to mainland China, other communities who consume Chinese language media were

#### **Possible links to PRC**

Following the election, SITE performed analysis on the WeChat accounts and websites involved in the dissemination of these narratives. In particular, the three news sites who first shared the false narrative about Chiu and C-282 – *105.9 Yes My Radio*, *CGC TV*, and *Today Commercial News* – all appear to have entered into a partnership with China News Service (CNS), a Chinese state-run news



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wire service, similar to *Xinhua*.<sup>4</sup> While *Xinhua* mostly provides copy for domestic state-run media, CNS is supervised by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) a state-run agency responsible for liaising with overseas Chinese abroad.<sup>5</sup>

In April 2021, Carolyn Bartholomew, Chairperson of the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission, spoke at a meeting of Parliament's Canada-China Relations Committee, that CNS "covertly runs other overseas media agencies, is officially part of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, which is controlled by the United Front."<sup>6</sup> Analysts at the Australian Strategy Policy Institute (ASPI) and at the Department of Sinology at Charles University in Prague report that the OCAO was absorbed into the United Front Work Department (UFWD) in 2018.<sup>7 8</sup> The UFWD is a component of the CCP Central Committee, and has a mandate to produce and disseminate propaganda, suppress narratives critical of the CCP, engage the ethnic Chinese diaspora as potential vectors of influence and propaganda, and co-opt prominent foreign individuals to gain access to information of value to the CCP.

According to a published attendee list provided by CNS, the editors-in-chief of all three media outlets attended the most recent CNS conference in October 2019.<sup>9</sup> All three share CNS content on their respective websites. A CNS website also overtly lists *105.9 Yes My Radio*,<sup>10</sup> *Xinflix TV*<sup>11</sup> (*CGC TV's parent company*)<sup>12</sup> and *Today Commercial News*<sup>13</sup> as CNS partner organizations.<sup>14</sup> When media organizations enter into partnership agreements with CNS, they are given access to free content published by the news wire and can take all-expenses paid trips to a bi-annual conference held by CNS. ASPI reports that partner organizations are also given access to a members-only "content-sharing platform so they can freely syndicate CNS reports as well as articles uploaded by other members."<sup>15</sup>

It is possible that the three news sites used the CNS-provided platform to upload and then re-share the negative narrative about Chiu and Bill C-282 to their respective websites. However, SITE does not have access to this platform and cannot verify whether stories about Chiu, the CPC or the CPC leader circulated there.

It is also possible that the three news sites copied the content from each other, or from a separate unknown source. However, *105.9 Yes My Radio*, the first outlet to publish the false narrative, is not a popular site for online news.

Scholars Larry Diamond and Orville Schell write that diaspora news outlets that have taken part in CNS partnership agreements or attend CNS events often change their editorial stance and "become more

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ecns.cn/>

<sup>5</sup> "Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council". The Chinese Government's Official Web Portal. [Archived from the original 2007 site.](#)

<sup>6</sup> <https://openparliament.ca/committees/canada-china-relations/43-2/23/carolyn-bartholomew-1/>

<sup>7</sup> Joske, Alex. "Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work". *Jamestown Foundation*, 19 May, 2019. <https://jamestown.org/program/reorganizing-the-united-front-work-department-new-structures-for-a-new-era-of-diaspora-and-religious-affairs-work/>

<sup>8</sup> Jirouš, Filip; Ševčíková, Petra. "Covert propaganda operations in plain sight: The CCP united front system's media network in Europe." *Sinopsis*, July, 2020. <https://sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/cns0.pdf> (pp. 2)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.sohu.com/a/345976856\\_123753](https://www.sohu.com/a/345976856_123753)

<sup>10</sup> <https://archive.is/RKPbl>

<sup>11</sup> <https://archive.is/zmAUE>

<sup>12</sup> [https://easyca.ca/archives/acadp\\_listings/3577](https://easyca.ca/archives/acadp_listings/3577)

<sup>13</sup> <https://archive.ph/q4PLl>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gcmcu.com/web/LMCY/index.html>

<sup>15</sup> Joske, Alex, et al. "The Influence Environment | A Survey of Chinese-Language Media in Australia." *ASPI*, 17 Dec. 2020. <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/influence-environment>

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positive about the PRC.”<sup>16</sup> In 2018, the *Financial Times* reported CNS was involved in an “aggressive push” to “establish agreements with overseas publications, which allow them to publish party-approved content under the masthead of other news outlets.”<sup>17</sup>

#### **Possible implications of this possible campaign**

SITE cannot determine the impact of possible or confirmed FI campaigns on voting intentions and elections results.

If the activities observed by SITE constituted or were part of a broader PRC-directed campaign, the loss of CPC candidates, including Chiu, in ridings with large numbers of Chinese-speaking Canadians may lead the PRC to conclude the campaign was a success. This may result in future attempts to conduct similar activities in forthcoming elections at multiple levels of government. This could also tacitly encourage pro-PRC/CCP WeChat news account owners in Canada to attempt similar tactics.

These online activities, fairly widely reported in mainstream Canadian media, may also have a chilling effect on candidates’ perceived ability to critically discuss China-Canada relations.

#### **Next Steps**

SITE, through RRM Canada, will:

- Catalogue and map the Chinese-language media ecosystem in Canada, and potentially the U.S.;
- Continue to monitor Chinese social media platforms to better understand how the PRC leverages these platforms to influence Canadians; and
- Research new, privacy-respecting methods to track and monitor false information on closed social media platforms and messaging apps.

#### **Annex A: Extended Timeline**

##### **Aug 28: WeChat News groups share narrative that CPC leader would “ban WeChat”**

During GE44, RRM Canada observed very high levels of engagement with content on WeChat’s “news accounts” or “subscriptions” feature and made the platform the primary focus for its Chinese-language monitoring activities. We also believe that if a state actor wanted to propagate a narrative about a political party or candidate to Canadians of Chinese heritage at scale, the most favorable place to do so would be through WeChat news accounts.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Diamond, L., & Schell, O. (2018). *China's Influence & American Interests*. Hoover Institution, pp. 111-112

<sup>17</sup> Feng, Emily. “China and the World: How Beijing Spreads the Message.” *Financial Times*, 12 July 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/f5d00a86-3296-11e8-b5bf-23cb17fd1498>.

<sup>18</sup> WeChat is China’s most popular app and was estimated to have passed over a billion monthly active users in 2018. According to a report from Columbia Journalism Review, WeChat is also the primary method for the Chinese diaspora in North America to read the news. Tencent, the creators of WeChat, do not break down their user numbers by country, however, some marketing firms believe the number is likely around 1 million WeChat users in Canada.

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RRM Canada judges that narratives possibly relating to the online/media activities against the Conservative Party, party leader Erin O'Toole, and former MP Kenny Chiu first appeared on WeChat in late August or early September. Up until that time, discussion about the Conservative Party and its candidates was relatively minimal on Chinese social media platforms and Chinese-language news sites.

However, on August 28, a popular nationalistic WeChat news account in the Greater Toronto Area called *York BBS* (195K subscribers), posted an anonymous article claiming Conservative leader Erin O'Toole would "ban WeChat, if elected." The author also claimed that O'Toole is the "Canadian version of Trump" and that he is "significantly more radical and tougher on China" than his predecessor, Andrew Scheer.<sup>19</sup>

The article received high engagement (over 27K views), and soon spawned more<sup>20</sup> articles<sup>21</sup> from what appear to be nationalistic WeChat news accounts that made the same claim, such as *VanPeople* (155K subscribers) and *VanSky* (89K subscribers). The spurious claims against O'Toole coincided with a rise in the polls for the Conservatives in the first half of the writ period, a phenomenon that the *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, the official publication that represents the views of the Chinese Communist Party, also noted in a September 7<sup>22</sup> report.

#### **Late Aug to Sept 10: WeChat group chats share Kenny Chiu and C-282 narrative**

On September 7 and 8, Chiu gave two<sup>23</sup> separate<sup>24</sup> interviews with local English-language Greater Vancouver Area publications that there was a "concerted effort to spread misinformation about him" and that he had "not anticipated the smears and level of falsehood" circulating about him on WeChat and WhatsApp. A reporter for *Glacier Media*, a local Vancouver area publication, reviewed three of the WeChat group messages for the September 8 interview with Chiu, including:

1. A message that levied criticism at the Conservatives, and urged the Chinese community to "use their power" and vote for the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) "so that we can have a chance to influence the future of Canada"
2. A message that urged "ethnic Chinese to unite" and "resolutely oppose the crazy Sino-phobic Conservative candidates" and to cast their vote for the LPC
3. A message that claimed Bill C-282 would deem anyone who attended an event hosted by the Chinese consulate as under the influence of the Chinese government; it also suggested that if China is targeted by the Bill, then America should be too.

However, on September 4, a web user on the popular Chinese-language BBS site *iAsk* posted that they "heard Kenny Chiu's recently proposed Bill C-282, also known as the 'foreign power registration act',

<sup>19</sup> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/uSrBJKvcwspvuxFH4z6XDQ>

<sup>20</sup> [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/tRHi8qKINSc78euFCpj\\_cQ](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/tRHi8qKINSc78euFCpj_cQ)

<sup>21</sup> [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5C616aOIT\\_yis4ENfU3pVg](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5C616aOIT_yis4ENfU3pVg)

<sup>22</sup> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/QPKLcemnueOJrEKWv5FIHg>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.richmond-news.com/local-news/richmond-candidate-attacked-on-wechat-for-proposed-foreign-influence-legislation-4312022>

<sup>24</sup> <https://biv.com/article/2021/09/vancouver-beijing-allies-align-trudeau-liberals>

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would have a negative effect on mainland Chinese immigrants, is that true? Is anyone able to analyze this situation?"<sup>25</sup> It is unusual that C-282 would suddenly become a focal point; prior to September 2021, no WeChat news accounts had published widely about Chiu's proposed bill.

On September 6, *105.9 Yes My Radio*, a Greater Toronto Area radio station that broadcasts in Mandarin, published an anonymous blog post on the open web titled "please pay attention to Kenny Chiu's 'foreign power registration act.'"<sup>26</sup> The post claimed:

*"If Kenny Chiu is re-elected, this "Foreign Power Registry Act" may become law. Mainland immigrants in Canada need to pay attention, because once it becomes law, any individual or group with ties to China may be considered a spokesperson for the Chinese government and be required to register, which will have a very negative impact on the freedom of expression of mainland immigrants... failure to register or inaccurate information is punishable by a fine of up to \$200,000 and two years in prison."*

*"If the purpose of the bill is to prevent foreign governments and political organizations from interfering in Canadian politics, then all foreign governments (e.g., the United States) should be treated equally... given that Sino-Canadian relations are at an all-time low, and given the "anti-Chinese" background of the bill's sponsor, it is easy to guess that this is a bill that targets mainland Chinese groups and individuals in Canada, with the aim of curbing any pro-China speech in Canada and controlling and monitoring mainland groups and individuals."*

The content of the *105.9 Yes My Radio* post bear some similarities to the content of the third WeChat group message reported by *Glacier Media*, and they are likely one in the same.

#### **Sept 8-17: Canadian News Accounts Pile On, Chinese State Media Jumps In**

Following the publication of the *105.9 Yes My Radio* piece, others followed suit. On September 8, Chinese-language news site *Global Chinese Convergence Media* (CGC TV) published a piece by author Yanshan Xiaoge (燕山小哥) comparing "Trudeau's China policy and Kenny Chiu's "foreign power registration act."<sup>27</sup> The author writes approvingly of the PM's approach, then suggests Chiu's bill seeks to "suppress the Chinese community." The author then repeats many of the claims asserted in the *105.9 Yes My Radio* piece, but adds an additional section that explores Chiu's background:

*Speaking of Kenny Chiu's anti-Chinese-ness, what is his background? He was born in Hong Kong, immigrated to Canada in the 1980s... After his election win in 2019, he was invited to Hong Kong as a Canadian MP by the Hong Kong's "Anti-China Movement" to monitor the city's district council elections. He subsequently criticized China and Hong Kong authorities in Canadian*

<sup>25</sup> <https://forum.iask.ca/threads/926652/page-3#post-13713669>

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.yesmyradio.com/news\\_detail.php?menuid=52&id=7476](http://www.yesmyradio.com/news_detail.php?menuid=52&id=7476)

<sup>27</sup>

<http://www.cgctv.com/2021/09/08/%E6%9D%9C%E9%B2%81%E5%A4%9A%E7%9A%84%E5%AF%B9%E5%8D%8E%E6%94%BF%E7%AD%96%E4%B8%8E%E4%BF%9D%E5%AE%88%E5%85%9A%E5%9B%BD%E4%BC%9A%E8%AE%AE%E5%69%1%98%E8%B5%B5%E9%94%A6%E8%8D%A3%E7%9A%84%E3%80%8A%E5%A4%96/>

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*Parliament. As a result, Chiu was sanctioned by China, and banned from entering Chinese territory.”*

The article appeared to receive some attention from web users. According to the news site’s page read counter, the piece received over 7K page views. However, web analytic tools like BuzzSumo show that the piece was not widely shared on U.S. social media platforms. RRM Canada is unable to determine the identity of the author; Yanshan Xiaoge is likely a pseudonym.

At the same time, Chinese state media outlets began paying close attention to GE44 and the Conservative Party campaign. For example, the state tabloid *Global Times* published a Chinese-language piece on WeChat with the headline “[They] mentioned China 31 times,” and ‘almost want to break diplomatic relations with China.’<sup>28</sup> The piece draws most of its content from a September 8 piece from the *Hill Times*.<sup>29</sup> Although the *Hill Times* speaks with more than half a dozen foreign policy experts for the piece – some who spoke approvingly of the Conservatives’ proposed China policies – the *Global Times* zeroed in on quotes from former political advisor Jocelyn Coulon only. One of Coulon’s quotes appears in the *Global Times* headline: “almost wants to break diplomatic relations with China.” *The Global Times* also picks out quotes that the Conservative Party’s China policies were “too excessive” and that O’Toole needs to propose “much more responsible” policies, especially when it pertains to Taiwan.

A similar version of the article also appeared in the English edition of the *Global Times* with the headline “Canadian Tories ‘hostile China blueprint’ caters to toxic atmosphere against Beijing amid sour ties.”<sup>30</sup>

Shortly after its publication, other state media outlets re-published versions of the *Global Times* piece on their WeChat and Douyin accounts. State-media *Xinhua* published a short video on Douyin – the Chinese version of TikTok – that repeated the *Global Times* headline and received considerable user attention (over 297K views).<sup>31</sup> *Xinhua* is China’s official state-run press agency, plays an equivalent role to AP or *Reuters*, and is the highest-ranking state-media organ next to the *People’s Daily*.

Over the course of seven days, from September 9 to 16, state media and state-controlled provincial media outlets published continuously on the Conservatives’ China platform, with most pieces featuring the headline “Canada almost wants to break diplomatic relations with China.” Media outlets in Fujian, a coastal province that borders the Taiwan Strait, paid particular attention to the story, likely because the Conservatives’ China policy plank proposes greater participation for Taiwan in international fora.<sup>32</sup>

WeChat news accounts in Canada also shared articles that made the claim but, crucially, did not share that they received the article content from the *Global Times*. From September 10 to 13, *YorkBBS* (195K subscribers),<sup>33</sup> *GTALife* (74K subscribers),<sup>34</sup> *Winnipeg Express* (98K subscribers),<sup>35</sup> *Canada News Today*

<sup>28</sup> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/WAKcggVWYQA8VUOnNRVZsA>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.hilltimes.com/2021/09/08/liberals-quiet-on-canada-china-relationship-while-tory-approach-could-lead-to-beijing-retaliation-experts/315452>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1233869.shtml>


<sup>31</sup> <https://v.douyin.com/dqk6ndm/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://v.douyin.com/dqkLDa3/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/17jkHPxkaezlBuslgVjaaQ>

<sup>34</sup> [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Wjxryc9O2TT792lvQ5gu\\_Q](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Wjxryc9O2TT792lvQ5gu_Q)

<sup>35</sup> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/fPEDUXM5ROoHv58hJVfuWw>

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(96K subscribers),<sup>36</sup> *Really Canada* (28K subscribers)<sup>37</sup> and *Dawa News* (26K subscribers)<sup>38</sup> all shared a variation of the *Global Times* headline with similar content. Some publications added color commentary that urged WeChat users not to cast their ballot for a Conservative Party candidate:

*“As a Chinese, how do you feel when you read comments [made by O’Toole]. As a former hardcore Conservative supporter, and after this pandemic, I have to say I’m shaken. Please move your little hands to see how polling is going and which way the election will go this week. Does [O’Toole] not care about Chinese voters and the feelings of the Chinese people?” – Really Canada<sup>39</sup>*

*There are many items in the Conservative Party’s election platform that Chinese people find unacceptable. These include identifying China as carrying out cultural genocide against Uyghurs, greater international cooperation with Taiwan, and showing support for “pro-democracy” activists in Hong Kong. Is he trying to challenge Chinese people’s bottom line?? ...my fellow countrymen, seeing this, will you still support the Conservatives? – Canada News Today<sup>40</sup>*

Many of these articles received strong user interest, between 1.5K to 10K page views each. Unless otherwise credited, WeChat users would not know that the narrative about the Conservatives and O’Toole originated from the *Global Times* and would assume the articles were original reporting from the Canadian WeChat accounts.

While this may appear to be a coordinated campaign controlled by Beijing, RRM Canada notes that Chinese-Canadian outlets may have published this content for alternative reasons such as cost savings in content production or because they perceived high interest in this content from their audiences. Whether by intent or by accident, false or misleading anti-CPC content produced by Chinese Communist Party outlets spread widely among Chinese-Canadian news outlets.

#### **Sept 8-14: WeChat News accounts in Canada share Kenny Chiu and C-282 narrative**

On the same day as the *Global Times* publication, the negative narrative about Chiu and Bill C-282 carried over to WeChat’s news accounts feature. On September 9, the WeChat account for *Today Commercial News* (40K subscribers) carried a nearly identical article about Chiu and C-282 that appeared on September 8 on news site *Global Chinese Convergence Media*.<sup>41</sup> The publisher, however, added important details to encourage WeChat users to share the article with others. First, it altered the headline to become a call for action: “Please spread the word! Conservative MP Kenny Chiu’s proposed ‘Foreign Interference Registry’ bill will suppress the Chinese community.” Second, it ended the article with:

*“If you care about the well-being of the Chinese community, please spread this message so that more people will know about this matter that is of personal concern to them!”*

<sup>36</sup> [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/b8QDHIKwq10\\_QADxwYz48Q](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/b8QDHIKwq10_QADxwYz48Q)

<sup>37</sup> [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/sMT0zSp82LnFAD4Qb\\_3OtA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/sMT0zSp82LnFAD4Qb_3OtA)

<sup>38</sup> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/vEZvE-kfwySBpptaJWexsg>

<sup>39</sup> [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/sMT0zSp82LnFAD4Qb\\_3OtA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/sMT0zSp82LnFAD4Qb_3OtA)

<sup>40</sup> [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/b8QDHIKwq10\\_QADxwYz48Q](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/b8QDHIKwq10_QADxwYz48Q)

<sup>41</sup> <https://archive.is/KHXpU>

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The article received considerable engagement from WeChat users (about 11.5K page views, and 67 shares to their personal WeChat profiles). *Today Commercial News* also shared the article through their website but received minimal attention from users (855 page views).<sup>42</sup>

Also on September 9, a WeChat account called "CouponKing51ca" (60K subscribers) shared an anonymous article titled "Why should Chinese oppose Conservative MP Kenny Chiu"?<sup>43</sup> The content of the article is nearly identical to the one published by *Today Commercial News*, and included the same conclusion to "spread the message so that more people will know...". It is unclear what relation the *CouponKing51ca* account has with the more popular *51.ca* news site and WeChat account (602K subscribers). The following day, WeChat news account *CCVoice.ca* (12K followers) also shared the *Today Commercial News* article.<sup>44</sup> On September 12, a WeChat account for Road to Canada Consulting (3.6K subscribers) shared the *Today Commercial News* again.<sup>45</sup>

Based on RRM Canada's observation, there were no other WeChat news accounts posting the false narrative about Chiu and C-282 after September 12.

In a post-election interview, Chiu claimed that GVA talk radio jockeys who broadcast in Cantonese also helped to spread negative narratives about his campaign and Bill C-282. RRM Canada could not locate any saved recordings of this broadcast. However, a Twitter user on September 13 claimed they heard a broadcast from Thomas Leung In-Sing on *AM1320* that "urged voters not to cast their ballot for Chiu because of his proposed bill C-282."<sup>46</sup>

From September 15 to 19, RRM Canada did not detect any online/media activities or false narratives about the Conservative Party, party leader Erin O'Toole, or Kenny Chiu's candidacy. RRM Canada notes that the decline in interest by Chinese state, and other outlets tracked closely with a decline in the polling numbers for the CPC.

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.todaycommercialnews.com/canada/49207>

<sup>43</sup> [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dg671kXWokmUcLlz\\_dz9FQ](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dg671kXWokmUcLlz_dz9FQ)

<sup>44</sup> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/r0VwQUOkmcYjuPjWY53ArA>

<sup>45</sup> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/tycugTlrzmAlJRryBgdZsQ>

<sup>46</sup> [https://twitter.com/jetta\\_beretta/status/1437627084298342407?s=19](https://twitter.com/jetta_beretta/status/1437627084298342407?s=19)



