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Summary Report: PRC: Power Abroad and the Guardrails We Need

Session 1: Overview of PRC Influence Globally (China Index) and Lessons from Taiwan

By Elizabeth Donkervoort, Senior Advisor, China Programs

On March 13, 2026, the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada) launched a webinar series entitled “People’s Republic of China: Power Abroad and the Guardrails We Need,” on the tools and tactics used by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in its foreign relations. The inaugural session featured Wu Min-Hsuan (also known as “Ttcat”), CEO and co-founder of [Doublethink Lab](#), and was moderated by Elizabeth Donkervoort, Senior Advisor of APF Canada’s China Programs.

What was said

Elizabeth Donkervoort opened the session by introducing the “*PRC Power Abroad*” series, which aims to give policymakers in Canada’s public and private sectors a clearer picture of how the PRC conducts foreign relations across government, business, civil society, and community settings.

The series is designed not to prescribe action, but to ensure decision-makers have the information they need to navigate PRC engagements effectively in their own sectors and contexts; this is particularly timely as Canada works to recalibrate its relationship with the PRC. Drawing on experts who have spent decades studying — and in many cases experiencing — these issues firsthand, the series is designed as an ongoing conversation; attendees are encouraged to share feedback and suggest future topics.

The first session was designed to provide a global overview to ground the discussions to come, with lessons drawn from Taiwan, an open society whose experience navigating sustained PRC pressure offers a relevant, if imperfect, parallel for Canada.

Ttcat presented findings from the [China Index](#), a cross-regional assessment tool measuring PRC influence across nine domains — including media, academia, economy, technology, and domestic politics — using 99 evidence-backed indicators across 101 countries. Designed to be publicly accessible, the China Index allows researchers, journalists, and policymakers to interrogate the dataset for their own purposes. Ttcat walked through key shifts in global influence trends and demonstrated practical applications of the data for independent research.

Key insights



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PRC influence is growing fast. PRC influence expanded across nearly every region, with the sharpest gains in Latin America and the Caribbean. Rises were also noted across most of the nine domains, with soft power and diplomatic alignment making the largest gains. Between 70 to 80 per cent of countries now support or stay silent on core PRC positions, while diaspora-targeting and the use of proxies — individuals and organizations not formally connected to the PRC or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) — have expanded significantly.

Canada's experience offers a revealing case study. Despite a prolonged diplomatic freeze and growing domestic awareness, PRC influence continued to deepen. The Index suggests this reflects a shift in tactics: rather than overt pressure, the PRC is expanding exposure through educational, societal, technological, and economic channels. One argument is that this exposure creates incentives for actors to avoid actions that might provoke Beijing. The greatest vulnerabilities for influence in Canada are media, domestic politics, and society, driven by PRC-linked media partnerships.

Canada's jump from 38th in 2022 to 19th in 2024 in the Index places it alongside Egypt and Tanzania — both rated “Not Free” by Freedom House’s [*Freedom in the World*](#) — underscoring that these challenges cut across free and unfree societies alike, even if the tactics deployed differ.

Canada's trajectory reflects a broader finding in the Index data: **economic exposure, not coercion, is the more effective strategy.** The Index data shows that countries facing more PRC pressure don't necessarily align more with Beijing's priorities; it is economic dependencies and cultural ties that create the conditions for influence. Capital goods imports appear to be the strongest predictor of overall PRC influence, and soft exposure through Confucius Institutes and media ties promotes greater diplomatic alignment than coercive pressure does. As AI accelerates influence operations faster than democratic responses can match, dependency awareness and reduction become an increasingly urgent priority.

Pragmatic engagement with the PRC is an increasingly inadequate strategy. Ttcat cautioned that this approach — favoured by countries **such** as Canada — is difficult to sustain given the PRC's integrated, whole-of-government influence framework. He recommended prioritizing transparency legislation modelled on the U.S.'s Foreign Agents Registration Act, and protecting vulnerable populations, particularly diaspora members with family in China, rather than treating them as suspects.

The China Index is a valuable but incomplete diagnostic tool. While the Index identifies vulnerabilities, tracks deepening activity, and analyzes the efficacy of PRC pressure operations, it



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cannot define where legitimate engagement ends and exploitable dependency begins, or capture how societies respond to sustained influence over time. These gaps represent an important area for further research.

Taiwan's experience offers four concrete lessons for open societies: first, monitor influence infrastructure early, before it is activated politically; second, recognize that influence shapes who people trust, not just what they believe; third, understand that awareness alone is not resilience — institutions and civic capacity matter; and fourth, ensure responses match the scale of the threat, particularly as AI enables PRC tools to operate with unprecedented reach.