

# THE CASE FOR REVOKING CLUB STATUS FOR THE CHINESE STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION

This document makes a case for the SRA to revoke club status for the McMaster Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) based on evidence assembled under three categories:

- 1) The CSSA is one of many that are linked to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and other universities' CSSAs have drawn similar controversy as the one at McMaster.
- 2) This document argues that the CSSA is in violation of multiple clauses of the MSU Clubs Operating Policy.
- 3) If the Dominion Society is going to have its club status revoked for the reasons stated in Josh Marando's July 24 statement, then it would be grossly negligent to allow the CSSA to escape a similar level of scrutiny.

This document also has two additional sections: **Issues to Consider** (p. 8), which adds nuance to the main evidence, and **Reponse to the MSU Clubs Department Memo** (p. 10), which highlights inaccuracies and misleading information from the MSU Clubs Department's June memo.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to members of the SRA for taking the time to read this document! This compilation of evidence was partly inspired by the lightning speed with which the MSU reacted to [a Twitter thread](#) about the Dominion Society. We hope the SRA can be consistent and ensure that diligence and scrutiny is also paid to other clubs of serious concern.

# 1. THE CSSA AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

There are numerous CSSA branches across university campuses in multiple countries; the McMaster CSSA is one of many. While they help newly arrived students from Mainland China<sup>1</sup> adjust to foreign locales, they also serve to surveil and control Chinese students in a similar way that the CCP does in China. A [2018 government report](#) from the US-China Commission (a bipartisan congressional commission) found that:

*“Despite the useful social services CSSAs provide for their members, they receive guidance from the CCP through Chinese embassies and consulates—**governmental ties CSSAs frequently attempt to conceal**—and are active in carrying out overseas Chinese work consistent with Beijing’s **United Front** strategy. Journalists and activists have also shown CSSAs to routinely coordinate with the Chinese government and to have been involved in the suppression of free speech and the harassment, intimidation, and surveillance of Chinese student activists ... The nature of the ties appears to involve **direct subordination and political direction rather than mere affiliation or cooperation.**”*

(p. 10-11; bold emphasis is added)

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- CSSAs are guided by Chinese embassies to advance the political agenda of the CCP.
- This political agenda often involves **silencing** or **surveilling** overseas critics of the CCP.
- CSSAs usually try to obscure the true nature of their relationship with the Chinese government.

### THE CCP’S “UNITED FRONT”

The Chinese Communist Party’s United Front Work Department “uses a range of methods to influence **overseas Chinese communities, foreign governments, and other actors** to take actions or adopt positions supportive of Beijing’s preferred policies.” (p. 3; emphasis added)

<sup>1</sup> “Mainland China” refers to the area of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) under direct control of the Chinese Communist Party. The term excludes Hong Kong and Macau (which are semi-autonomous former European colonies that have largely retained separate political and economic systems from the Mainland) and Taiwan (which is ruled by the Republic of China (ROC), the internationally-recognized government of China from before the Chinese Civil War).

## Why is it problematic if a MSU-ratified club is connected to the Chinese Communist Party and advancing the CCP's political agenda?

- The CCP runs an authoritarian state responsible for *crimes against humanity*, with some notable examples being:
  - ◉ The *mass internment and cultural genocide* of Uighur Muslims<sup>2</sup>
  - ◉ The *invasion and occupation* of Tibet<sup>3</sup>
  - ◉ *Forced organ harvesting* from the Falun Gong religious minority<sup>4</sup>
- Mainland China also uses *internet censorship, high-tech surveillance*, and a *social credit system* to stifle free speech and dissent.<sup>5</sup>
- Refugees, journalists, and activists have been subjected to intimidation and surveillance, even when overseas, as the CCP tries to silence dissent.<sup>6</sup>

**Having a branch of the CCP on campus, especially one that reports people/events to a genocidal regime, is a threat to students' academic freedom and safety, especially for refugees and dissidents.**

## Have other CSSA branches also attracted controversy?

YEAR/LOCATION	SELECT EXAMPLES OF MISCONDUCT BY OTHER CSSA BRANCHES
<b>University of Alberta (Canada)</b>	The CSSA's Chinese website used to note that the club was established by the Chinese Embassy; the English website excluded this information. (Source: <a href="#">USCC</a> ).
<b>2017 UC San Diego (USA)</b>	After UCSD invited the Dalai Lama on campus to speak, the CSSA protested against this and requested that the speech be censored of political content. The university was also reported to the Chinese consulate. (Source: <a href="#">New York Times</a> )
<b>2015 Columbia University (USA)</b>	Columbia University's CSSA was disbanded following "ongoing violations of multiple financial and student organizational policies". (Source: <a href="#">Forbes</a> )
<b>2011 University of Cambridge (UK)</b>	The Chinese Embassy ordered the CSSA to not hold an open election for the position of club president, fearing this could encourage criticism of past club presidents. The university then disbanded the club. (Source: <a href="#">Varsity</a> )
<b>Various</b>	Many CSSAs have received hundreds or even thousands of dollars from Chinese consulates. This money is often used for political purposes, such as paying students to attend rallies welcoming visiting Chinese politicians. (Source: <a href="#">FP</a> )

<sup>2</sup> For more info, [consider this feature](#) from the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (ABC)

<sup>3</sup> For more info, consider this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2013.806819>

<sup>4</sup> [See this article](#) from the *Guardian*

<sup>5</sup> More [examples here](#) from the *South China Morning Post*, a Hong Kong newspaper

<sup>6</sup> [See this piece](#) in the *Globe and Mail*, written by a Human Rights Watch researcher

## 2. EVIDENCE OF THE CSSA VIOLATING THE CLUBS POLICY

- 4.2 Where a group applying for recognition has direct connections with another body outside the MSU, either inside or outside the University, the nature of this connection and the name of the body must be disclosed fully and substantially in the application for recognition. Connections requiring disclosure include but are not limited to any kind of funding or sponsorship, or being an on-campus part of another body;

### Failure to disclose external connections (screenshot of the policy taken before the June amendment)

- In February, the CSSA had not disclosed its connections to the Chinese government (which it was required to do under the version of the policy in February), despite evidence on pages 2 and 3 of this document showing how CSSAs are connected to the Chinese government.
- Even after the policy was amended in June, the CSSA continues to avoid “fully and substantially” disclosing its external connections:

4. “Did your club play a leadership role in releasing the Feb. 13 statement and contacting the Chinese consulate in Toronto in response to the Feb. 11 MSA/MMPJ event featuring Rukiye Turdush? If yes, what were the reasons behind this?”

In addition to this issue, MACC SSA does not have any official cooperation with the Chinese Embassy or any other representative from China.

6. “The Chinese consulate and McMaster Chinese Graduate Students Society (from your Feb. 13 statement) are both bodies outside of the MSU, as defined by section 4.2 of the Clubs Operating Policy. What is the nature of your relationship with these two organizations?”

MACC SSA did not have any official cooperation with the Chinese graduate association before this issue and had cooperation with the Chinese Embassy with regards to Chinese cultural exchange as well as safety education for international students.

- The highlighted portions of their responses here shows that:
  - 1) The CSSA contradicts itself as it tries to present two alternate versions of them having/not having cooperation with the Chinese Embassy
    - Their selective use of the word “official” also shows a **disingenuous attempt to obfuscate their controversial ties** to the Chinese Embassy
  - 2) The CSSA has also failed to reveal the extent of their relationship with the Chinese Embassy, which the USCC described as “**direct subordination and political direction rather than mere affiliation or cooperation**” (see page 2 of this document)

- 5.1.1 Class A Offences: are actions that interfere with the right of an individual or group to enjoy life in the McMaster community. They include:
  - 5.1.1.1 Intentionally running a club in a manner which negatively affects the ability of another club, non-club group, or individual to conduct their lawful affairs;
  - 5.1.1.2 Interfering with another club's activity that has been approved by the Clubs Administrator;
  - 5.1.1.3 Any other actions, which unnecessarily cause a significant nuisance for an individual or group.

## Class A Offences

- 5.1.1.1: By reporting the event to the Chinese government, the CSSA is negatively affecting the ability of others to conduct their lawful affairs:
  - Their report and statement is an act of intimidation designed to discourage others from similarly speaking out against the CCP.<sup>7</sup>
  - The threat of also being reported to the Chinese government creates a chilling effect for those with ties to China, given the CCP's history of silencing overseas critics by arresting their family members in China.<sup>8</sup>
  - This therefore infringes on students' right to freedom of expression.
  - If the CSSA uses "freedom of speech" to justify their intimidation of others into silence, then they are acting no differently from white supremacists who do the same thing.
- 5.1.1.3: the policy does not define "nuisance," but given how the CSSA helped land McMaster into both domestic AND international headlines (and *not* in a good way), *something very problematic has clearly happened*. Here are just some of the English-language headlines:
  - ▶ [CBC News](#) (Canada): "McMaster student groups want feds to investigate Chinese involvement at McMaster"
  - ▶ [The Washington Post](#) (United States): "Angry over campus speech by Uighur activist, Chinese students in Canada contact their consulate, film presentation"
  - ▶ [Taipei Times](#) (Taiwan): "China's weaponization of students"
  - ▶ [South China Morning Post](#) (Hong Kong): "Beijing backs 'patriotic actions' of Chinese students who reported Uygur activist in Canada"
  - ▶ [Hong Kong Free Press](#) (Hong Kong): "Exclusive: How Uighur activist Rukiye Turdush felt the long arm of the Chinese Communist Party, in Canada"

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<sup>7</sup> [See this article](#) in the *Silhouette*

<sup>8</sup> Read this [special report](#) from *Reuters*

- 5.1.3 Class C Offences: are actions, which endanger the safety or security of any person or property. Class C Offences will always result in a punitive sanction. They include:
- 5.1.3.1 Any illegal behaviour;
  - 5.1.3.2 Failure to comply with the McMaster University Risk Management policy;
  - 5.1.3.3 Any other actions, which unnecessarily jeopardize the safety or security of any person or property.

## Class C Offences

- 5.1.3.3: The CSSA's surveillance of events on campus may have allowed the Chinese government to identify students or faculty who organized or attended the event, thus jeopardizing their safety:
  - ◉ There's an extensive history of the CCP tracking its overseas critics.<sup>9</sup>
  - ◉ If a Uighur student was caught attending the event, they could have faced retaliation such as having family in China sent to a concentration camp, potentially indefinitely.<sup>10</sup>
  - ◉ In other words, essentially **the CSSA provided information about dissident/refugee activity to a genocidal regime**, which goes against [Human Rights Watch recommendations](#) that campus activity stays on campus, **and their actions could have resulted in the imprisonment and even death of any individuals who were outed.**

### NOTE

Although this report does not comment on the legality of the CSSA's actions, the Clubs Policy (section 5.5) states that *"Any actions taken by the MSU shall be independent of those taken by any other judicial body"*.

Canadian freedom of speech laws *may* protect the CSSA's actions (publicly, there is no information about any lawsuits that may have been filed or court judgements rendered, though most of the impacted students would not have the resources to sue anyway); however, free speech is also why white supremacy is legal in Canada.

Since this clubs policy is enforced separately from other judicial bodies, SRA members should assess the CSSA's compliance with the policy that's under their jurisdiction rather than compliance with policies or laws that are beyond the SRA's jurisdiction.

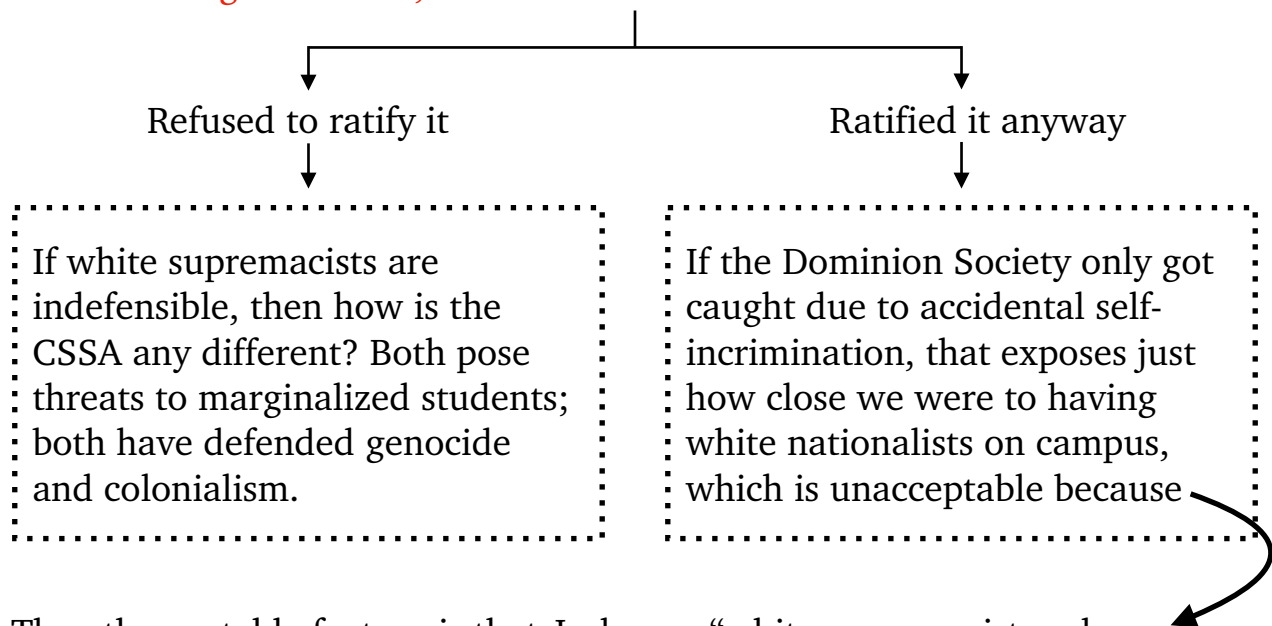
<sup>9</sup> See [this article](#) from *Time* or [this article](#) from the *Washington Post*

<sup>10</sup> Read [this piece](#) in the HKFP by Kevin Carrico, a professor at Monash University

### 3. HOW THE DOMINION SOCIETY IS RELEVANT TO THIS

Josh Marando’s recommendation to revoke status is notable for two reasons. Firstly, Josh’s formal reason was not the white supremacy, but rather, how the Dominion Society [“misrepresented themselves”](#). This begs the question:

If the Dominion Society did not misrepresent themselves, and instead openly declared that they were indeed connected with white supremacists, like how the CSSA openly declared their contact with the Chinese government, then what would the SRA have done?



The other notable feature is that Josh says “white supremacist and xenophobic attitudes ... have no place in the MSU Clubs system”

- However, we must also remember WHY that is the case. Reasons include white supremacy being an inherently racist and colonial ideology, representing a threat to marginalized students, etc.
- If the SRA truly believed that though, then members should recognize how dangerously similar the CSSA is: *the CSSA has openly defended a genocidal, race-based system of concentration camps that is intended to legitimize Han Chinese ethnocentrism and colonialism in Central Asia.*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Han Chinese ethnocentrism and colonialism has been covered by extensive academic research: read [this article](#), [this article](#), [this article](#), and/or [this article](#)

## ISSUES TO CONSIDER

### **What about the other clubs that co-signed the Feb. 12 statement?**

The Clubs Department memo and other clubs' Q&A responses make clear that the CSSA took a leading role in this incident, and the CSSA is also the only one with confirmed ties to the Chinese government. However, the other clubs did approve co-signing a statement that sought to defend genocide and intimidate people into not criticizing the CCP's policies.

### **What do Chinese students really think?**

The CSSA has claimed, without evidence, that a “majority” of Chinese students support them. On the contrary, Chinese students have risked their lives leaking<sup>12</sup> group chats to the media, and other Chinese students have been very vocal in their criticism of the CSSA<sup>13</sup>. In reality, *McMaster has a diversity of Chinese students*, and the CSSA's continued attempts to propagate and impose their own worldview upon other Chinese students says a lot about why they condemned and outed a Uighur speaker in the first place.

### **Are there cultural reasons the CSSA may have done what they did?**

Let's be very clear: their statement was deeply racist, and **none** of it is inherently rooted in Chinese culture in any way. Chinese people outside of the CCP's direct control (i.e. overseas Chinese, Chinese people in Hong Kong and Taiwan, etc.) show that they are fully capable of being tolerant. Rather, this is politically rooted: the CCP is using its CSSAs to advance its network of surveillance and censorship, and like how the CCP has shown throughout history<sup>14</sup>, they will gladly oppress Chinese people to maintain power.

### **Will revoking the CSSA's club status be unfair to members not involved in the harassment and surveillance?**

The CSSA does fill a niche that McMaster has shamefully neglected: providing support to students who may be unfamiliar with Canada. However, that's also why the CSSA is so dangerous. They lure people in with the promise of a social network, then spread extremist ideologies to those

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<sup>12</sup> The MSU Clubs Department memo on the CSSA says that the screenshots were “leaked”, which implies that they were not willingly distributed by the implicated clubs or individuals

<sup>13</sup> See [this piece](#) in the *Silhouette* or [this article](#) from *Radio Free Asia*

<sup>14</sup> See reports from [Freedom House](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and [Amnesty International](#)



with nowhere else to turn. This is also exactly why we don't want white supremacist clubs on campus: they would provide a formal venue to facilitate the recruitment and mobilization of more white supremacists. The open harrassment of a Uighur speaker in February shows the consequences of normalizing and legitimizing the extremist ideologies espoused by the CSSA. That harrassment also provides a taste of what might be possible if white supremacists were similarly also given a club, which, again, is why we do not want to allow white supremacists to mobilize through a club.

### **Is it xenophobic to criticize the CSSA?**

No, it's not, as long as you do it properly. The Chinese Communist Party has a long history of trying to blur the lines between Chinese ethnicity, Chinese nationality, and the CCP itself.<sup>15</sup> In other words, criticisms of the CCP are reframed as criticism of China itself, and therefore Chinese people. This is a disingenuous way of deflecting legitimate criticism, since it is entirely possible to criticize the CSSA or CCP without criticizing Chinese people.

### **Will McMaster face retaliation from the Chinese government if we revoke club status for the CSSA?**

Although this is a valid concern, there were no reports of such retaliation in the previously cited examples of universities revoking club status for their CSSAs.

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<sup>15</sup> For more nuance on this phenomenon and the word "Chinese", consider [this article](#)

# RESPONSE TO THE MSU CLUBS DEPARTMENT MEMO

- **February 13<sup>th</sup>:** 5 student groups, four of them MSU Clubs, released an official statement regarding the event. Translated, the statement reads:

This is slightly inaccurate: at the time, only three were MSU Clubs. The MELD Student Association applied for club status this summer, and was not an MSU-ratified club on February 13, 2019.

- **February 19<sup>th</sup>:** A meeting is scheduled with EIO , the Operations Coordinator, and the Clubs department to understand what is being done on the University level. During this meeting, the MSU learns that no formal complaints have been filed with EIO regarding the situation.

The second sentence here is highly misleading for multiple reasons:

- Just because there were no formal complaints filed as of February 19 does not mean there weren't any later, especially since the *Silhouette* only reported on this in March
- Filing a formal complaint with EIO requires identifying the complainant to the other party, which presents a barrier for those who would want to complain about the CSSA identifying them to the Chinese government
- Formal complaints were emailed to the Clubs Administrator at the time

## Did the CSSA violate the Clubs Operating Policy?

This document makes the case for yes, they did (pages 4-6). **The memo does not say they did, but also does not say they didn't.** If the Clubs Department believes that the CSSA did not violate any part of the policy — despite the pages of evidence in this document, which are backed up by international news stories and academic research — then that would be information that students deserve to know.

### CONCLUSION

Thank you for reading this in the end! Given the evidence of the CSSA's ties to the CCP, this document's case for their violations of the clubs policy, and the MSU's example set with the Dominion Society, we believe that this is sufficient evidence for the SRA to justify a decision to revoke club status for the CSSA.