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RESEARCH ON NEW APPROACHES TO CHINA'S OVERSEAS UNITED FRONT WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF MAJOR CHANGES UNSEEN IN A CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

In the context of major changes unseen in a century, the international situation is evolving, countries are accelerating strategic adjustments with an eye to future competition, and global uncertainty and instability are particularly prominent. Overseas united front work faces new changes, situations, and characteristics. Efforts to explore the patterns of overseas united front work, focus on resolving current hot issues and difficulties, and enhance work consciousness and initiative are extremely important for consolidating and expanding the united front in the new era and achieving the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

KEYWORDS: *Major Changes Unseen in a Century, Overseas United Front, Chinese Culture*

1. INTRODUCTION

The united front is an important tool for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and plays a vital role in China's domestic and foreign affairs. In today's world, the international situation is complex and changing. World multipolarization, economic globalization, cultural diversity, and social informatization are developing in depth, with countries becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent. International security challenges are intricate and complex, strategic competition among major powers is intensifying, and the international balance of power is undergoing new changes. The ideological struggle is sharp and complex, with unprecedented exchanges, integration, and confrontation of diverse thoughts. Meanwhile, China faces arduous tasks in advancing the peaceful reunification of the motherland and safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and development interests. Overseas united front work needs to serve "One Country, Two Systems" and the realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. However, the structure of overseas Chinese communities is also changing, and the new generation of ethnic Chinese needs further cultivation and strengthening of their understanding and sense of belonging to their ancestral homeland. In the context of major changes unseen in a century, the timing, situation, mission, and tasks faced by the united front have undergone significant changes, and the importance of overseas united front work is increasing daily. The new changes, situations, and characteristics facing overseas united front work require us to strengthen the Party's comprehensive leadership, leverage civilian overseas advantages, emphasize enhancing the cultural attractiveness of overseas Chinese education, improve international public opinion guidance, and continuously promote the great unity and solidarity of Chinese people at home and abroad, gathering tremendous strength for achieving complete national reunification and the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

The vast number of overseas Chinese are an important extension of the Chinese nation. Realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation cannot be achieved without the support and cooperation of overseas Chinese. Regarding the new changes, situations, and characteristics of overseas Chinese affairs, General Secretary Xi Jinping has proposed a series of new concepts, thoughts, and strategies around why we need an overseas united front, what kind of overseas united front we need, and how to develop the overseas united front in the new era, providing basic guidelines for the effective development of overseas united front work in the new era (Li, 2020, p. 5).

2 UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF OVERSEAS UNITED FRONT WORK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MAJOR CHANGES UNSEEN IN A CENTURY

The world is experiencing major changes unseen in a century, which is both a historical observation and a political judgment, as well as a summary of changes in the world pattern over the past century. The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 has promoted the spread of conservative economic and political trends and anti-globalization amid various Western ideological trends. After the pandemic, isolation policies needed to prevent virus transmission have made international market segmentation, investment segmentation, and technological

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obstacles the new normal. The changes in this major transformation are the changes in national strength and world rules and order behind these events, including the collective rise of emerging countries on the world stage, the decline of traditional Western powers, and changes in the status of non-traditional security and political issues. The major changes unseen in a century, characterized by "the East rising and the West declining", have triggered profound changes in great power relations. Facing the comprehensive deepening of the century's changes and the evolving international relations, China-US relations are the core thread for observing the direction of these major changes. We need to grasp today's trends and international affairs, recognize the importance of overseas united front work in China's two-way interaction with the world's major changes, enhance the consciousness and initiative of overseas united front work, shoulder the mission and tasks entrusted to the united front by the times, consolidate and expand the united front in the new era, better serve the overall work of the Party and the state, and pave a broad path for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

3. NEW CHALLENGES FACED BY OVERSEAS UNITED FRONT WORK IN THE NEW ERA

3.1 Stigmatization of Overseas United Front Work

Western hostile forces often stigmatize China's united front. Facing China's steady increase in strength, some countries' anxiety continues to grow, leading them to create public opinion such as the "China threat theory" and use public opinion weapons to spread anti-China panic globally. They have also formed stigmatizing theories such as "infiltration theory", "racial theory", "thought control theory", "money theory", and "project theory" to achieve their goal of containing China's development. This has had serious consequences for overseas united front work, forming a basic "consensus": namely, that after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the goals and scope of united front work expanded, attempting to guide, induce, and coerce overseas political forces. This has damaged the international image of our overseas united front work and deepened international society's misunderstandings and prejudices against our country. Meanwhile, stigmatization has also interfered with the normal work, study, and activities of overseas Chinese, international students, and related institutions, damaging normal exchanges and cooperation with other countries.

3.2 Expansion of Overseas United Front Work Target Groups

The expansion of overseas united front work target groups is mainly reflected in the broad unity and winning over of overseas Chinese and all people who love the Chinese nation. Traditional overseas united front work targets mainly included Taiwan compatriots, Hong Kong and Macao compatriots, and overseas Chinese. These groups have always been the focus of overseas united front work, as they have deep blood, geographical, and cultural ties with the motherland and are important forces in promoting national unity and rejuvenation. With the development of the times, the targets of overseas united front work are constantly changing, such as the succession of old and new overseas Chinese and the rise of new-generation overseas Chinese, requiring overseas united front work to continuously consolidate traditional targets while also focusing on studying and adapting to these new changes, making the work more detailed and comprehensive. For example, outbound and returned international students have become new work targets, with more diverse thinking and needs, increasing the complexity and difficulty of united front work.

3.3 Increased Coordination Difficulties in Overseas United Front Work

First, with economic and social development and deepening globalization, the scope of overseas united front work targets has expanded, including Hong Kong and Macao compatriots, Taiwan compatriots and their relatives remaining on the mainland, outbound and returned international students, as well as overseas Chinese and returned overseas Chinese and their relatives. These groups are widely distributed, have diverse backgrounds and varied needs, increasing the complexity of coordination work. Second, different departments may have functional overlaps or conflicts of interest, leading to situations of buck-passing and difficulty in forming synergy during coordination work. Additionally, inadequate information channels may hinder smooth coordination work. Third, overseas united front work requires substantial human, material, and financial resources but is often constrained by limited resources. Meanwhile, the significant differences in needs among different groups and individuals make it difficult to meet everyone's expectations and requirements. Fourth, in recent years, some Western countries have suppressed and contained our overseas united front work, bringing considerable difficulties and challenges. The complexity and variability of the international situation may also adversely affect overseas united front work, as international tensions and geopolitical conflicts may increase coordination difficulties.

4. NEW APPROACHES TO CONSOLIDATE AND EXPAND OVERSEAS UNITED FRONT WORK

The policy of overseas united front work is to consolidate and expand the alliance of patriotism, work with overseas Chinese children, broaden horizons, make friends widely, promote policies, unite hearts, and serve the realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. Currently, China's overseas united front work must be built on a profound historical and cultural foundation, tell China's story well, shape and enhance China's international influence and cultural soft power, and use the greatest common divisor to unite

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hearts, broaden the scope and targets of united front work, and establish new focal points for overseas united front work to form long-term mechanisms for the grand united front work pattern.

4.1 OVERSEAS UNITED FRONT WORK MUST BE BUILT ON A PROFOUND HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL FOUNDATION TO TELL CHINA'S STORY WELL

Chinese culture and our overseas united front work are complementary. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "The united and unified Chinese nation is the common root of Chinese children at home and abroad, the profound Chinese culture is the common soul of Chinese children at home and abroad, and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the common dream of Chinese children at home and abroad". He also noted: "The common root makes our feelings deep and meaningful, the common soul makes our hearts beat as one, the common dream makes us of one mind, and we will certainly be able to write together a new chapter in the development of the Chinese nation in the new era" (Xi, 2014, p. 63). Spreading Chinese culture overseas and helping overseas Chinese and the international community better understand Chinese culture is to better conduct overseas united front work and correctly understand China's chosen socialist system and path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Thus, in the context of major changes unseen in a century, overseas united front work must be based on a profound historical and cultural foundation. Of course, whether spreading Chinese culture overseas or conducting overseas united front work, the purpose is to "win hearts and gather strength", fundamentally uniting all forces that can be united to create a favorable external environment for China's peaceful rise to develop faster. Chinese culture is the spiritual bond that maintains the unity of all Chinese people. Culture is the sum of a country's or nation's way of life, constituted by national language, traditions, and other elements that form a nation's cultural characteristics. Chinese culture is profound, has a long history, and has sustained itself for thousands of years, possessing powerful national cohesion and centripetal force. In the long river of Chinese history, unity has always been the mainstream. Although there have been periods of division, the divided parties generally still considered themselves members of the Chinese nation and ultimately moved toward unity. Since modern times, especially since the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, although the Chinese nation has suffered humiliation and gone through tribulations, Chinese culture has never been interrupted, maintaining continuity and always maintaining national unity and state unification. After the founding of New China, this unity became even closer and became the foundation for establishing and consolidating the socialist system. Whether living under the socialist system with Chinese characteristics on the mainland or under capitalist systems in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and overseas, all Chinese share a natural, heartfelt common wish: to inherit and carry forward the excellent traditions of Chinese culture and revitalize China. Chinese culture is also an important foundation for China to achieve peaceful unification. The united front in the new era will further promote unity between domestic and overseas Chinese. This unity largely stems from a high degree of identification with Chinese culture and the national identity formed on this basis. Unity and unification are the foundation of the united front in the new era and the cornerstone of all our development; we must work on cultural transmission.

Chinese culture is the common soul of the Chinese nation. Xi Jinping pointed out: "Excellent traditional Chinese culture has already become the gene of the Chinese nation, rooted in the hearts of Chinese people, imperceptibly influencing Chinese people's ways of thinking and behavior" (Xi, 2014, p. 170). National genes are the spiritual bloodline flowing in the minds of national members, a shared spiritual force formed through long-term accumulation, and also a unique spiritual force of a nation, serving as the spiritual element that unites national members (Shi, 2021, p. 76). General Secretary Xi Jinping has extensively quoted excellent traditional cultural thoughts in a series of speeches. These thoughts are beneficial for uniting Chinese children and consolidating and expanding the united front, as the development of the new era's overseas united front cannot be separated from core values.

The Chinese Dream is the common dream of the Chinese nation. Patriotism is the core of Chinese culture. "Patriotism has always been the stirring main melody" (Xi, 2014, p. 58), serving as a powerful force driving development. This patriotism is concentrated in the ideals and actions of every Chinese child to realize the Chinese Dream. The Chinese Dream is the dream of the country, the nation, and also of individuals. Every Chinese person knows that only when the country and nation prosper can individuals prosper. To realize the Chinese Dream, we must carry forward the Chinese spirit and gather Chinese strength (Jiang, 2017, p. 10).

4.2 Broadening the Scope and Targets of United Front Work, Using the Greatest Common Divisor to Unite Hearts

The Chinese Dream is the long-cherished wish of several generations of Chinese people. The achievements since reform and opening up have shown bright prospects for realizing the Chinese Dream, which will greatly encourage all Chinese people, including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan compatriots and all overseas Chinese children. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "Now, we are closer than any time in history to the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and we have more confidence and capability than

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any time in history to achieve this goal" (Xi, 2014, p. 240). This goal will greatly inspire and mobilize Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese people to join in building the Chinese Dream.

To broaden the scope and targets of united front work, make friends widely, and maintain friendships, we must liberate our thinking and broaden our horizons. We must unite all who love the country, support national unification, and are friendly to China. We should care for old friends, make new friends widely, develop deep friendships with good friends, and continuously expand the united front ranks. Making friends widely should have focus; while broadly acquainting ourselves with friends from various aspects and levels, we should take initiative to develop deep relationships with those who have political influence, economic strength, social prestige, and academic achievements, continuously maintaining emotional connections and enhancing friendships. For Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan compatriots, we should strengthen connections with Hong Kong and Macao associations and their representatives, continue working well with business circles, and gradually strengthen united front work with professional circles and Macanese of Portuguese descent.
Promoting policies and uniting hearts is crucial. The success of any endeavor depends on the direction of people's hearts, and the peaceful reunification of the motherland is a cause that concerns the common wishes and fundamental interests of millions of Chinese children. To transform "peaceful reunification" and "One Country, Two Systems" from hope into reality, the most fundamental aspect is to win people's hearts politically, as proven by the practice of Hong Kong and Macao's return. The key to Hong Kong and Macao's return lies in the return of people's hearts. Only by convincing millions of Hong Kong and Macao compatriots that the political proposition of One Country, Two Systems and peaceful reunification genuinely protects their interests can it be transformed into the driving force to support and realize it (Zhang & Huang, 2013, p. 21).

4.3 Forming Long-term Mechanisms for the Grand United Front Work Pattern and Establishing New Focal Points for Overseas United Front Work

Adhering to the patriotic united front, continuously broadening its scope and targets, and uniting all forces that can be united are valuable experiences from over a century of the Chinese Communist Party's leadership in overseas united front development. This is also a practical requirement for creating a favorable international environment for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and an important path for promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. To strengthen the overseas united front forces of Chinese children, systematic planning is needed to comprehensively enhance the effectiveness of united front work and form long-term mechanisms.

First, adhere to making friends broadly and deeply to achieve the most extensive and in-depth unity and grand alliance. Firstly, adhering to making friends broadly and deeply with overseas friends is an inherent requirement for strengthening overseas united front work forces. From a literal perspective, this specifically refers to forces that understand and are friendly to China, transcending definitions and limitations of nationality, occupation, and identity, meaning the population is broad, conforming to the united front work principle characterized by grand unity. We must first break out of small circles and expand our circle of friends. We need to make friends not only with developed countries but also with developing countries, as there is much work to be done with developing countries. Secondly, in making friends broadly, we should connect with social figures from various fields beyond politics, economics, and diplomacy, including cultural, scientific, educational, and religious circles. We must also coordinate traditional and emerging fields, emphasizing the role of today's information and network united front work, achieving effectiveness both online and offline. Of course, making friends must uphold the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences, allowing for and respecting differences in political propositions and ideologies, judging whether to associate with them based on whether it benefits the Party and modernization cause. In matters not involving principles, seek common ground while reserving differences, gathering hearts and strength to pursue prosperity and development together.

Secondly, focus on doing well in the united front work for international students. As targets of overseas united front work, outbound and returned international students have received special attention from Xi Jinping since the 18th National Congress. Raising the banner of patriotism and actively calling on and mobilizing international students to succeed in their studies and serve the motherland is one of the key contents of overseas united front work. General Secretary Xi Jinping earnestly hopes that international students will "always take national prosperity, national rejuvenation, and people's happiness as their striving direction" (Xi, 2014, p. 59). We should be good at uniting them and leveraging their intelligence and wisdom to contribute to realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation; if they remain overseas, they should serve the motherland through various forms. Additionally, international students coming to China are bridges of communication between China and the West and are important components of understanding and befriending China. General Secretary Xi Jinping has exchanged cordial communications through letters with international students in China multiple times, making important instructions on education work for international students coming to China, encouraging them to do more practical research to

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enhance their understanding of Chinese culture and the Chinese Communist Party. They should also cherish and utilize their valuable study opportunities, master skills, and bring their learned knowledge back to promote national construction in their home countries. They are encouraged to tell China's story to the world based on their deep understanding of China's real situation.

Third, do well in the overseas united front work for Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. The overseas united front work for Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan should seek common ground while reserving differences under the premise of adhering to One China, respecting diversity, seeking common ground in realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation while reserving differences in social systems, values, and lifestyles. Do well in correctly interpreting and promoting "One Country, Two Systems", promote deep cooperation between Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and the mainland, and safeguard national territorial and sovereign integrity.

Fourth, establish Internet thinking and build a talent think tank for overseas united front work. The foundation of united front work is gaining recognition. The Internet can break through time and space limitations, solve cross-national and cross-regional communication difficulties, and provide convenient conditions for spreading Chinese culture and maintaining friendly connections. Meanwhile, we can also leverage Internet personalized intelligent push technology and communication influence to tailor communication plans, conduct diverse and lively online publicity, positively guide mainstream public opinion, more accurately tell China's story, and more effectively spread China's voice. Furthermore, the Internet also provides convenience for establishing and improving talent think tanks for overseas united front work, quickly integrating information and resources, strengthening coordination work in a timely and effective manner, efficiently identifying outstanding talents for cultivation and training, and gathering talent resources for the long-term development of overseas united front work (Lin, 2023, p. 68).

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