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House of Representatives

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November 4, 2025

Claire Shipman
Acting President
Office of the President
Columbia University
202 Low Library, 535 W. 116 St., MC 4309
New York, NY 10027

Dear Ms. Shipman:

I write to urge your university and its student groups to discontinue any exchange programs that are supported by entities with ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and commit to a rigorous review of foreign funding of student groups at Columbia University. As Chairman of the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition between the United States and the CCP (the “Select Committee”), I consider CCP-affiliated entities’ malign influence campaigns that exploit our academic institutions and students through United Front organizations and its insidious strategy of co-option, coercion, and concealment to be serious threats to America.¹

It has come to my attention that the Greater China Initiative (GCI), an officially recognized student organization affiliated with Columbia University’s Weatherhead East Asian Institute, is promoting a January 2026 exchange trip to China called “China Trek” that is co-sponsored by the China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF). In the application form, prospective recruits, who are exclusively Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) students, are informed that “CUSEF will cover transportation, board, and lodging expenses.” A Senate Select Committee on Intelligence hearing identified the CUSEF as “a united front-linked organization that advances Chinese Communist Party interests.”²

¹ Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster (Ret.), Testimony Before the Select Committee on the CCP, (Feb. 28, 2023) *available at* https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/FILE_1998.pdf.

² *Nomination of Ambassador William Burns to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA): Hearing Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 117th Cong. (Feb. 24, 2021).

In November 2023, the House Select Committee released its *United Front 101* memo, which explains that United Front work is “a unique blend of engagement, influence activities, and intelligence operations”³ used by the CCP to “shape its political environment, including to influence other countries’ policy toward the PRC and to gain access to advanced foreign technology.”⁴

As the House Select Committee and U.S. intelligence officials have warned in the past, CUSEF is an instrument of the CCP’s approach to political warfare, including influence operations intended to shape Americans’ views toward the People’s Republic of China (PRC) government. The CUSEF is guided by officials in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a key United Front forum designed to advance CCP objectives in and beyond the PRC through overt and covert political mobilization. The founder and chairman emeritus of CUSEF, Tung Chee-hwa, served as a vice chairman of the CPPCC from 2005-2023 and is a proxy for the CCP in Hong Kong.⁵

CUSEF’s influence operations are well documented and underscore the organization’s motive. Under U.S. law, foreign entities undertaking activities in the United States related to the political or public interests, policies, or relations of a foreign government or a foreign political party are required to be transparent about their operations. It is no surprise then that multiple firms representing CUSEF have filed with the Department of Justice under the *Foreign Agent Registration Act* on numerous occasions.⁶ As one independent study noted, “CUSEF’s controversial funding for U.S. research and academic institutions is only the tip of the iceberg in a much larger, multi-faceted effort to exert influence over U.S. policy.”⁷ In his nomination hearing to serve as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Ambassador William Burns, agreed with a statement by Senate Select Committee on Intelligence leadership that “...Beijing uses nominally private civic organizations like the China-U.S. Exchange Foundation to sway public opinion and build influence.”⁸

³ *Memorandum: United Front 101, U.S. House Select Committee on Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party* at 1 (Nov. 27, 2023) available at <https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/uf-101-memo-final-pdf-version.pdf>.

⁴ *Id.* at 2.

⁵ *Tung Chee Hwa*, Tatler Asia, available at <https://www.tatlerasia.com/people/chee-hwa-tung>.

⁶ Supplemental Statement, BLJ Worldwide LTD., (Registration No. 5875) (Aug. 31, 2020) available at <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5875-Supplemental-Statement-20200831-31.pdf>; Exhibit AB, Capitol Counsel LLC, (Registration No. 6328) (Jan. 15, 2019) available at <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6328-Exhibit-AB-20190115-8.pdf>; Exhibit AB, Wilson Global Communications, LLC (Registration No. 6584) (Feb. 1, 2019) available at <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6584-Exhibit-AB-20190201-9.pdf>; and Exhibit AB, BGR Government Affairs, LLC (Registration No. 5430) (Mar. 1, 2019) available at <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5430-Exhibit-AB-20190301-72.pdf>.

⁷ John Dotson, *The China-U.S. Exchange Foundation and United Front “Lobbying Laundering” in American Politics*, The Jamestown Foundation (Sept. 16, 2020) available at <https://jamestown.org/program/the-china-u-s-exchange-foundation-and-united-front-lobbying-laundering-in-american-politics/>.

⁸ *Nomination of Ambassador William Burns to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA): Hearing Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 117th Cong. (Feb. 24, 2021).

The fact that the exchange program with CUSEF was organized by a student group described as “active in generating programming” for the school and “most closely affiliated with the Institute” also raises serious questions about the university’s policies on student group recognition, and particularly its regulations on foreign funding for recognized student organizations.⁹ Columbia should not recognize or promote student groups that accept foreign funding or form partnerships with a foreign agent known to be engaging in malign influence operations.

Notably, CUSEF has exchange programs with multiple universities throughout the United States.¹⁰ However, not all institutions of higher education that CUSEF has courted have accepted funds from this CCP affiliate after conducting their due diligence about the organization and the risks. The University of Texas at Austin stands out for its exemplary decision to reject funding from CUSEF.¹¹

This is not the first time that CCP-affiliated entities attempted to recruit students at Columbia University, and it will likely not be the last.¹² Heightened vigilance is needed as ever before. The U.S. Intelligence Community’s unclassified assessment delivered to Congress this year highlighted that “Beijing will continue to expand its coercive and subversive malign influence activities to weaken the United States internally and globally.”¹³ Another unclassified intelligence assessment released earlier this year by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence also underscored how U.S. academic institutions and students are targets of the CCP’s malign influence campaign.¹⁴

⁹ *Get Involved*, Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University, available at <https://weai.columbia.edu/content/get-involved>.

¹⁰ *CUSEF Hosts Harvard Students for Environmental and Cultural Exchange in China*, CUSEF, available at <https://www.cusef.org.hk/en/newsroom/cusef-hosts-harvard-students-for-environmental-and-cultural-exchange-in-china>.; *CUSEF Hosts Lawrenceville School Students for Youth Exchange in China*, CUSEF, available at <https://www.cusef.org.hk/en/newsroom/cusef-hosts-lawrenceville-students-for-youth-exchange-in-china>.; *China-United States Exchange Foundation Welcomes Students from Montana Baucus Institute to China*, CUSEF, available at <https://www.cusef.org.hk/en/newsroom/montana-baucus-institute-student-delegation-visits-beijing>.; and *Columbia SIPA Students Visit China*, CUSEF, available at <https://www.cusef.org.hk/en/newsroom/columbia-sipa-student-delegation-visits-china>.

¹¹ *UT Won't Take Funding From Group With Chinese Gov't Ties*, AP NEWS (Jan. 16, 2018) available at <https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/ut-wont-take-funding-from-group-with-chinese-govt-ties/2053977/>.

¹² Jimmy Quinn, *China's Communist Youth League Tried to Recruit Columbia Students for 'Sustainability' Junket*, NATIONAL REVIEW (June 7, 2024) available at <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/chinas-communist-youth-league-tried-to-recruit-columbia-students-for-sustainability-junket/>.

¹³ *Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, (Mar. 2025) available at <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2025-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.

¹⁴ *Safeguarding Academia*, The National Counterintelligence and Security Center (Aug. 2025) available at https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/products/08222025_Safeguarding-Academia.pdf.

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While universities often emphasize the values of open exchange, academic freedom, and free speech, entities such as CUSEF operating under the auspices of the United Front Work Department systematically work to suppress speech and activity related to what Beijing deems the “Five Poisons” (Tibet, Taiwan, Falun Gong, Xinjiang, and pro-democracy movements). These influence mechanisms exploit the very openness of U.S. academic institutions to shape narratives, restrict dissenting discourse, and advance the CCP’s political objectives within American higher education.

In the interest of protecting students and the integrity of Columbia University’s programs, I urge you to immediately terminate any ties that the university or its student groups have with CUSEF and commit to a rigorous review of student groups’ foreign funding and partnerships going forward. At a minimum, such a vetting process should exclude accepting funding and partnerships with organizations like CUSEF that exist to promote the CCP’s narratives and interests—which have proven antithetical to academic freedom and free exchange of ideas—and to help the CCP identify foreigners who the party could exploit.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



John Moolenaar
Chairman