

Report: How a U.S. University Helped China Conduct “Psychological Warfare”

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Overview

Michigan State University (MSU) maintains longstanding academic relationships with Chinese institutions that support China’s propaganda, public-opinion-management, international-communication and defense ecosystems.

Based on publicly available information, Strategy Risks identified several relationships that warrant closer scrutiny — most significantly, MSU’s collaboration with the Communication University of China (CUC) [中国传媒大学]. MSU also has a partnership with Shanghai Normal University (SNU) [上海师范大学], where it supports a journalism and communications master’s program that covers topics including “psychological warfare.”

Strategy Risks is not alleging that MSU knowingly supports Chinese military or propaganda objectives. Rather, MSU’s ties raise questions about how U.S. universities assess institutional risk when academic partners operate within systems where civilian education, political communications and national-security functions can overlap.

Indeed, expertise in strategic communication, audience analysis, digital media and artificial intelligence can serve legitimate educational and commercial purposes while also having applications in public-opinion management, political communications and information operations. China has developed an extensive public-opinion analysis ecosystem in which government agencies, propaganda departments, state media, police and military organizations use data and AI-enabled systems to monitor online discourse, identify emerging narratives, analyze foreign audiences, and wage “information warfare” on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).¹

When U.S. universities collaborate with institutions that also maintain relationships with propaganda authorities, public-security organizations or military entities, assessing how expertise may circulate downstream becomes more difficult.

The MSU case therefore raises a broader research-security question. Existing U.S. frameworks have generally focused on advanced technologies, direct military affiliation and restricted entities. Communications, public-opinion analysis, social-media research and AI-enabled audience analysis may fall outside those traditional categories while still carrying political, security or dual-use implications.

For universities, this suggests the need for due diligence that evaluates not only the subject matter of a collaboration, but also the institutional environment surrounding the partner, the organizations with

¹ Cate Cadell, “China harvests masses of data on Western targets, documents show,” *Washington Post*, December 31, 2021, observed September 10, 2026 at https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/china-harvests-masses-of-data-on-western-targets-documents-show/2021/12/31/3981ce9c-538e-11ec-8927-c396fa861a71_story.html, and archived at <https://archive.ph/ur3TL>

which it shares personnel and resources, and the pathways through which expertise may ultimately circulate.

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CUC: A Leading Institute for Propaganda and Ideological Research

CUC is a Beijing-based media and communications university with a documented role in the CCP's propaganda, ideological and international-communication systems.

Founded in 1954, CUC describes itself as “an educational stronghold for the Party’s propaganda, ideological and cultural undertakings.”² Its activities span communications education, public-opinion research, media technology, and professional training.

In 2019, China’s Ministry of Science and Technology designated CUC as the host institution for the construction of the State Key Laboratory of Media Convergence and Communication (SKLMCC) [媒体融合与传播国家重点实验室], one of only four national-level state key laboratories established for the media sector and the only one hosted by a university -- the other three were affiliated with major Chinese state-media outlets.³ SKLMCC conducts AI- and data-based media analysis and audiovisual processing, and states that part of its mission is to strengthen technological capabilities for safeguarding “ideological security and political security in the media field.”^{4,5}

CUC also plays a role in China’s international-communication strategy. Following Chairman Xi Jinping’s May 2021 call to strengthen China’s international communication capacity, CUC’s then-Vice President Duan Peng [段鹏], who at the time also held a Standing Committee seat on CUC’s CCP Committee, said the directive would guide the university’s work in talent development, scientific research and internationalization.⁶ He also proposed using SKLMCC to support related international-communication projects.⁷

The university serves as a talent pipeline for China’s international propaganda system. A 2016 Ministry of Education document identified CUC, alongside the prestigious Beijing-based universities Renmin University and Tsinghua University, as key universities for training master’s students in international journalism and propaganda, stating that these students receive intensive “ideological and political education and national conditions education,” participate in summer social practice and

² “Introduction to Communication University of China,” [中国传媒大学简介], *Communication University of China*, December 2023, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://www.cuc.edu.cn/2023/0728/c10091a210761/page.htm>, and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20260112171650/https://www.cuc.edu.cn/2023/0728/c10091a210761/page.htm>

³ “Notice from the Ministry of Science and Technology on Approving the Construction of Four National Key Laboratories Including Media Convergence and Communication,” [科技部关于批准建设媒体融合与传播等4个国家重点实验室的通知], *Ministry of Science and Technology of the People’s Republic of China*, November 6, 2019, observed September 10, 2026 at https://www.most.gov.cn/xxgk/xinxifenlei/fdzdgknr/qttw/qttw2019/201911/t20191112_149919.html, and archived at <https://archive.ph/HvjJo>

⁴ “Introduction to Communication University of China,” [中国传媒大学简介], *Communication University of China*, December 2023, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://www.cuc.edu.cn/2023/0728/c10091a210761/page.htm>, and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20260112171650/https://www.cuc.edu.cn/2023/0728/c10091a210761/page.htm>

⁵ Shuang Zhang, “Frontier | Four fusion labs: what new impacts will new actions bring?,” [前沿 | 4个融合实验室，新动作带来哪些新影响], *China Journalists Association Network*, June 11, 2020, observed September 10, 2026 at http://www.zgjx.cn/2020-06/11/c_139132028.htm, and archived at <https://archive.ph/K3sZT>

⁶ “Teachers and students of Communication University of China passionately discussed General Secretary Xi Jinping’s important speech during the 30th collective study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee,” [中传师生热议习近平总书记在中共中央政治局第三十次集体学习时的重要讲话], *Communication University of China*, June 3, 2021, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://www.cuc.edu.cn/cucnews/2021/0603/c10128a182397/page.htm>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/KBxIn>

⁷ Ibid.

domestic and international internships, and are trained to become high-level journalism and communication talents who “understand both national conditions and external propaganda.”⁸ The document also noted that CUC and China Central Television (CCTV), China’s dominant state broadcaster and a division of China Media Group, which operates under the direct control of the CCP’s Central Propaganda Department, jointly established a School of Journalism and Communication and conducted internship training cooperation. This demonstrates an institutionalized link between university training and the talent needs of state-owned media outlets.⁹

CUC’s propaganda expertise also extends into the defense sector. In July 2025, CUC experts delivered instruction for a training program hosted by the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND), a Chinese government agency which regulates defense technology. The program addressed news communications and public-opinion response within China’s defense science, technology and industrial sectors.¹⁰

These activities place CUC at the intersection of higher education, Party-state communications and defense-related training. That institutional role is central to understanding the significance of its academic relationship with MSU.

The MSU–CUC Collaboration

The extensive collaboration between MSU and CUC connects an American university with a Chinese institution that plays a documented role in propaganda education, public-opinion research and international communication.

MSU is a public research university located in East Lansing, Michigan. MSU’s student body consists of more than 41,000 undergraduate students and more than 10,000 graduate and professional students.¹¹ MSU’s College of Communication Arts and Sciences, which houses MSU’s joint degree program with CUC, describes itself as “one of the largest and most respected” communication

⁸ “Letter on the Reply to Proposal No. 3943 (Education Category No. 405) of the Fourth Session of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference,” [关于政协十二届全国委员会第四次会议第 3943 号（教育类 405 号）提案答复的函], *Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China*, September 20, 2016, observed September 10, 2026 at http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/xxgk_jyta/jyta_xwb/201611/t20161103_287586.html, and archived at <https://archive.ph/eGtIL>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence, “2025 Training Course on News Publicity and Public Opinion Response in the Defense Science, Technology, and Industry Sector Opens in Haikou,” [2025 年国防科技工业新闻宣传与舆情应对培训班在海口开班], *State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence*, July 16, 2025, observed September 11, 2026 at <https://www.sastind.gov.cn/n10086200/n10086344/c10688660/content.html>, and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20260911123747/https://www.sastind.gov.cn/n10086200/n10086344/c10688660/content.html>

¹¹ “MSU Facts,” *Michigan State University*, observed September 8, 2026 at <https://msu.edu/about/facts>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/F4De3>

colleges in the U.S.;¹² in 2020, the ShanghaiRanking Consultancy, an organization that researches higher education, ranked MSU's Communications program fourth globally.¹³

MSU and CUC jointly operate a dual degree master's program in international digital advertising, with study requirements in both China and the U.S. formalized through agreements signed in November 2019.¹⁴ Under the agreement, MSU and CUC jointly develop the curriculum, with MSU responsible for delivering the courses. CUC manages admissions support and logistics for students travelling to the United States, including visa assistance, as students spend their first year at CUC's Hainan campus, before transferring to MSU for year two. The curriculum combines MSU coursework with compulsory CUC modules, including "Research on the Theory and Practice of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," and "Marxism and the Methodology of Social Science."¹⁵¹⁶

¹² "Master of Arts in International Digital Advertising and the Dual Degree Master of Arts in International Digital Advertising," *Michigan State University College of Communication Arts and Sciences*, observed September 8, 2026 at <https://comartsci.msu.edu/academics/academic-departments/default/graduate/master-arts-international-digital-advertising-and>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/lbDx5>; "History, Mission and Vision," *Michigan State University College of Communication Arts and Sciences*, observed September 8, 2026 at <https://comartsci.msu.edu/about/history-mission-and-vision>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/D51yc>

¹³ "Communication at MSU Ranks in the Top Five in the World," *Michigan State University College of Communication Arts and Sciences*, July 27, 2020, observed September 8, 2026 at <https://comartsci.msu.edu/about/newsroom/news/communication-msu-ranks-top-five-world>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/ay0Hk>

¹⁴ "Memorandum of Understanding between Communication University of China and Michigan State University," *Michigan State University Academic Advancement and Collaborative Coordination*, November 19, 2019, observed September 10, 2026 at https://edge.sitecorecloud.io/michigansta4a14-msu70a4-prod718c-8cd0/media/project/msu/aacc/docs/ucc/consortium-agreements/signed-msucuchainan_mou.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20250613155523/https://edge.sitecorecloud.io/michigansta4a14-msu70a4-prod718c-8cd0/media/project/msu/aacc/docs/ucc/consortium-agreements/signed-msucuchainan_mou.pdf

¹⁵ "Memorandum of Understanding regarding the MSU-CUC Hainan joint education program between Michigan State University (MSU), Michigan State, USA, Lansing, and Communication University of China (CUC) in Hainan, China," *Michigan State University Academic Advancement and Collaborative Coordination*, October 10, 2022, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://edge.sitecorecloud.io/michigansta4a14-msu70a4-prod718c-8cd0/media/project/msu/aacc/docs/ucc/consortium-agreements/hnmou.pdf>, and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20260911123027/https://edge.sitecorecloud.io/michigansta4a14-msu70a4-prod718c-8cd0/media/project/msu/aacc/docs/ucc/consortium-agreements/hnmou.pdf>

¹⁶ Ibid.

The chart below illustrates the curriculum that will be taught for the 3+0 (CUC degree only) mode for the Internet and New Media master's degree and shows which Party is responsible for the various courses, whether the courses are compulsory or not, the number of credits for each course, etc.

类别 Type	课程序号 Course Code	课程名称 Course Name	学时 Hours	学分 Semester	开课学期 开课学期	备注 Remarks
学位课 Degree Courses	公共必修 Courses (≥9Credits)	1 中国特色社会主义理论与实践研究 Research on the Theory and Practice of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics	32	2	1	CUC
		2 马克思主义与社会科学方法论 Marxism and the Methodology of Social science	16	1	2	CUC
		3 学术英语 1 Academic English 1	48	3	1	MSU/ CUC
		4 网络与新媒体专业英语 2 Academic English 2	48	3	2	MSU/ CUC
	专业必修 Major Core	1 研究方法 Introduction to Research Methods, Core	32	2	1	CUC

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Screenshot from an October 2022 memorandum of understanding between MSU and CUC¹⁷

The partnership also includes extensive faculty and institutional exchanges. CUC agreed to cover travel and living expenses for MSU faculty teaching at CUC's campus in Hainan while MSU committed to transferring 10% of the tuition it receives from students studying in East Lansing, MI into a CUC staff development fund to support faculty training and exchanges based at MSU.¹⁸ CUC also operates a campus on the island of Hainan, China's southernmost province; the campus is located in an "International Education Innovation Pilot Zone."¹⁹

The location of the MSU-CUC joint program's administration demonstrates the institutional proximity between the collaboration and CUC's public opinion research architecture. CUC is building a new facility that will host both the MSU-CUC program and two strategically significant Chinese laboratories focused on analyzing, monitoring and shaping public opinion, the State Key Laboratory of Media Convergence and Communication and the National Public Opinion Laboratory. These laboratories have hosted delegations from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) National Defense University, with at least one also providing training in the military's "cognitive domain" (also

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Institutions," *Hainan Lingshui Li'an International Education Innovation Pilot Zone*, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://www.study-hn.cn/EN/UniversityOrganization?code=enentryCollege>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/znPAA>

commonly known as ‘cognitive warfare’). with the program and labs set to be hosted within the same building.²⁰²¹

Yang Yi [杨懿], CUC’s former Party propaganda chief, oversees both the laboratories and the school hosting the MSU–CUC program. This demonstrates a close physical and administrative integration between the joint program and CUC’s public opinion management apparatus, creating a risk through proximity whereby institutions with overtly authoritarian purposes may access the expertise gained from CUC’s collaboration with MSU.

Yang is the CUC official connecting Party propaganda, the National Public Opinion Laboratory (NPOL), PLA engagement and the college hosting the MSU joint program. In October 2022, CUC identified him as NPOL’s Executive Deputy Director, Member of the Standing Committee of the CUC Party Committee, and one of the Vice Presidents of Communication University of China.²²²³ In a January 2025 briefing to visiting officials from the China Television Artists Association, CUC’s account of the visit notes that Yang outlined key achievements in terms of how they “serve the Party’s news and public-opinion work.”²⁴

The CUC School of Advertising and Branding²⁵

Roughly nine staff from CUC’s School of Advertising and Branding teach on the joint program, which CUC identifies as the “supporting academic unit”, the institutional home responsible for administering the Chinese-side faculty.²⁶ The School of Advertising and Branding is closely connected to China’s party-state establishment, with partnerships spanning Party and Government departments, state broadcasters, and strategic state-owned enterprises such as the China National Nuclear Corporation.²⁷ It hosts multiple research institutes, including the CUC Strategic

²⁰ “2025 | Our annual moment,” [2025 | 我们的年度时刻], *Hainan International College, Communication University of China*, December 31, 2025, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://hainan.cuc.edu.cn/2026/0104/c8811a265819/page.htm>, and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20260519120251/https://hainan.cuc.edu.cn/2026/0104/c8811a265819/page.htm>

²¹ Hainan International College of Communication University of China, “Party Secretary Liao Xiangzhong led a delegation to Hainan to attend the groundbreaking ceremony for the Phase II exclusive building and conduct a working visit,” [廖祥忠书记带队赴海南参加二期专享楼奠基仪式并进行工作调研], *Hainan International College, Communication University of China*, November 4, 2024, observed September 11, 2026 at <https://hainan.cuc.edu.cn/2024/1104/c8811a244950/page.htm>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/FB2bE>

²² “Vice Minister of Education Weng Tiehui visited Communication University of China for inspection, research, and guidance,” *Communication University of China*, March 31, 2022, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://by.cuc.edu.cn/2022/0331/c13006a192036/page.htm>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/hA3sB>; “Yang Yi,” *Communication University of China School of Advertising and Branding*, October 19, 2022, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://ggxy.cuc.edu.cn/2021/1020/c8069a187682/page.htm> and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250424095632/https://ggxy.cuc.edu.cn/2021/1020/c8069a187682/page.htm>

²³ He remains Vice President as of September 2026. “Current leadership,” *Communication University of China*, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://www.cuc.edu.cn/10094/>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/eJ11M>

²⁴ Communication University of China, “China Television Artists Association Leadership Delegation Visits CUC,” [中国电视艺术家协会主席团一行来中国传媒大学考察调研], *Communication University of China*, January 22, 2025, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://www.cuc.edu.cn/cucnews/2025/0122/c1901a250969/page.htm>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/Isot1>

²⁵ The CUC School of Advertising and Branding was formerly known as the School of Advertising until being renamed in June 2025.

²⁶ Communication University of China, “Hainan International College,” June 18, 2021, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://hainan.cuc.edu.cn/2021/0618/c7686a183134/page.htm> and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20240728230654/https://hainan.cuc.edu.cn/2021/0618/c7686a183134/page.htm>

²⁷ “Introduction to the School of Advertising and Branding,” [广告与品牌学院简介], *Communication University of China*, June 30, 2025, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://ggxy.cuc.edu.cn/2025/0623/c8079a257418/page.htm>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/uEAJa>

Communication Research Centre, the CUC National Advertising Research Institute, and the CUC Regional Brand and Communication Research Institute.²⁸

The School of Advertising and Branding states that it has provided “top-level brand design” and strategic consulting for more than 200 regions, cities, and enterprises across China.²⁹ This includes branding exercises for cities and counties in Xinjiang, the site of highly repressive ethnic policies that have drawn significant international outrage and criticism.³⁰ The school’s projects in Xinjiang focused on “top-level design” for city branding and cultural tourism.³¹ This work appears to align with the Chinese government’s purported overall strategy of using tourism and cultural experiences to distract attention from atrocities in Xinjiang.³²

MSU’s Other Collaborations

In 2019, the Chinese Ministry of Education approved the establishment of the “MSU Institute” of Nanjing Agricultural University (NAU) [南京农业大学], which offers a dual-degree program.³³ The MSU-NAU Institute has its own embedded Party branch.³⁴ Under Article 30 of the CCP Constitution, a primary-level Party organization (typically a Party branch) must be established in any enterprise, school, research institute, social organization or other basic work unit where three or more full Party members are present.³⁵ Party branches exist to ensure that institutions are in line with Party directives.

That said, not all foreign educational ventures in China have Party branches. Whether or not a foreign joint educational venture has been able to resist the CCP’s push under Xi Jinping to establish Party branches speaks volumes about that institution’s relative power and its commitment to independence. Duke Kunshan University, a joint venture campus founded by Duke University and local partners, reportedly does not have a Party branch, and has a reputation for maintaining more academic freedom

²⁸ “Scientific research,” [科研机构], *Communication University of China*, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://ggxy.cuc.edu.cn/7838/list.htm>, and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20260716213145/https://ggxy.cuc.edu.cn/7838/list.htm>

²⁹ “Regional Brand and Communication Research Institute of Communication University of China,” [中国传媒大学区域品牌与传播研究院], *Communication University of China*, July 16, 2025, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://ggxy.cuc.edu.cn/2025/0716/c7898a258464/page.htm>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/FtcQa>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “Ding Junjie: Promoting rural China development through the concept of ‘domain branding’,” [丁俊杰：以“域牌”概念推动城乡中国发展], *Phoenix New Media*, July 3, 2023, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://i.ifeng.com/c/8R7bKhOCDxN>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/T2HwM>

³² “Xinjiang: Chairs Write to Travel Companies and U.S. State Department Concerning the Whitewashing of Atrocities,” *Congressional-Executive Commission on China*, March 6, 2024, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://www.cecc.gov/media-center/press-releases/letters-to-travel-companies-and-us-state-department-concerning-the>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/jTSLd>

³³ “Letter from the Ministry of Education on Approving the Establishment of the MSU Institute, Nanjing Agricultural University,” [教育部关于同意设立南京农业大学密西根学院的函], *Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China*, May 10, 2019, observed September 10, 2026 at http://www.moe.gov.cn/srscite/A20/moe_862/201905/t20190517_382363.html, and archived at <https://archive.ph/ZmIUM>

³⁴ “Studying Xi Jinping’s Important Discourses to Run First-Class International Education — The directly affiliated Party branches of the International Education College and Michigan College carried out branch micro-Party class activities,” *Nanjing Agricultural University*, October 12, 2020, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://msu.njau.edu.cn/info/1028/1002.htm>, and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20260902001359/https://msu.njau.edu.cn/info/1028/1002.htm>

³⁵ International Department, Central Committee of CPC, “Constitution of the Communist Party of China,” *International Department, Central Committee of the Communist Party of China*, observed September 10, 2026 at https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english2023/tjz/cpcjj/PartyConstitution/202307/t20230727_157811.html, and archived at <https://archive.ph/mPqTs>

in its China operations.³⁶ By contrast, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), a joint venture between the prominent UK research university and a Chinese defense-linked university, has a Party branch; XJTLU has become entangled with sanctioned entities and individuals, while foreign academics working there have raised concerns about academic freedom related to sensitive topics, including Xinjiang.³⁷

MSU's Connections to China's Propaganda System

MSU's connections to the Chinese propaganda ecosystem go beyond a single partnership: MSU collaborates with multiple Chinese institutions involved in propaganda, public-opinion management and international communication.

MSU's Strategic Communication program has a "cooperative exchange and training" agreement as part of a journalism and communications master's degree program offered by Shanghai Normal University (SNU),³⁸ a public research university in Shanghai. The SNU website states that students in this master's program will study "public 'psychological, conceptual, and information warfare,' social media information monitoring, and organizational strategic public influence," and that the concentration would draw on international education resources, including those available through the agreement with MSU.³⁹

SNU opened a public opinion monitoring center with Shanghai Municipal Propaganda Department in 2022, and its reports have been adopted by the Central Propaganda Department and Shanghai propaganda authorities, providing a possible channel through which MSU's communications expertise and educational resources could enter a university with established links to China's propaganda system.⁴⁰

MSU's engagement with China's propaganda training system includes frequent person-to-person connections. A 2026 press release states that the Propaganda Department of the CCP's powerful Central Committee sent former Nanchang city propaganda official and Renmin University of China academic, Professor Liu Li [刘力], to MSU to study "internet and city propaganda."⁴¹ The press release lauded his ability to "handling public opinion," stating that he has handled over 3,000 "public opinion incidents" – a term used to describe cases of online public criticism or discontent that authorities deem significant enough to require monitoring, response, or active management – and that

³⁶ "China Defence Universities Tracker," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/joint-ventures/duke-kunshan-university>, and archived at <https://archive.li/686lL>

³⁷ Bethany Allen, Danielle Cave, and Adam Ziogas, "A British university's technology entanglements with Russia and China," *The Strategist*, June 3, 2025, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/a-british-universitys-technology-entanglements-with-russia-and-china/>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/4bSz5>

³⁸ "Program Outlook" [专业概况], *Shanghai Normal University's Film-Television and Communication College*, observed September 11, 2026 at <https://xiejin.shnu.edu.cn/15610/list.htm>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/XfR0R>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Shanghai Normal University, "Shanghai Normal University Journalism and Communication Professional Degree Point Annual Construction Report (2022)," *Shanghai Normal University*, January 6, 2023, observed September 10, 2026 at https://yscm.shnu.edu.cn/_upload/article/files/3d/eb/fa24019e40b0a1d41659ce54fc8b/fec1b725-7c4e-43ca-8a8a-be10be719622.pdf, unarchivable

⁴¹ "Notice and announcement Professor Liu Li was invited to our institute to give a special lecture on public opinion management," *Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics School of Sociology and Humanities*, April 22, 2026, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://rwxynew.jxufe.edu.cn/news-show-4318.html>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/1XQ7J>

he delivered over 700 lectures to Party and government organs, universities, and enterprises across China.⁴²

MSU also delivered executive education in digital advertising and artificial intelligence to Chinese media and external-propaganda institutions, including a 2020 program for the China International Publishing Group (CIPG), a state-owned foreign-language publisher and media group operating under the CCP's Central Propaganda Department, on the use of AI in publishing. MSU faculty also helped lead a 2023 Chinese social-media AI forum whose proceedings included research from military universities on identifying "agitative opinions" online⁴³ – particularly significant because agitative opinion detection is a content-classification capability with direct application to China's broader public-opinion monitoring and cognitive-domain-operations toolkit. The forum's status as co-led by MSU faculty demonstrates how their expertise can be placed in direct proximity to tools built by PLA-affiliated institutions for opinion surveillance, even when the underlying research (in this case, flagging online abuse) has legitimate use.

Beyond Chinese universities, MSU has a long history of partnership with CIPG. In 2020, MSU hosted CIPG -- which MSU described as "responsible for the publicity of [China] to the world" -- for a two-week program in which sessions focused on the use of AI in publishing and developments in technology and media intelligence.⁴⁴ MSU highlighted its "longstanding partnership" with CIPG, and noted that CIPG sends its "most prominent employees" as visiting scholars.⁴⁵ Six young CIPG journalists spent a semester at MSU in 2017.⁴⁶

These cases suggest that MSU's expertise reaches multiple organizations involved in China's external propaganda, strategic communication and public-opinion management systems.

Military Engagement and Dual-Use Research

The Chinese institutions collaborating with MSU also maintain active relationships with the PLA and military-affiliated research organizations, creating dual-use concerns regarding the use of knowledge and learning from an American university to the Chinese military. The available evidence does not show that expertise supplied by MSU was directly transferred to the Chinese military. It does, however, show that CUC — while maintaining extensive academic ties with MSU — also provides facilities, training, and institutional support to PLA organizations. This overlap creates a plausible dual-use pathway in which capabilities developed or strengthened through civilian academic collaboration may also become accessible within a military-connected institutional environment.

In March 2023, leaders from the PLA National Defense University's College of Military Culture visited CUC and signed an open-education cooperation framework intended to promote military–

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Feng Wu, Xuanjing Huang, Xiangnan He, Jiliang Tang, Shu Zhao, Daifeng Li, and Jing Zhang, eds., "Social Media Processing: 11th Chinese National Conference, SMP 2023, Anhui, China, November 23–26, 2023, Proceedings," *Springer Singapore*, November 14, 2023, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-99-7596-9>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/Ekykt>

⁴⁴ "Exploring the Future of News Publishing: Media Intelligence Workshop Takes VIPP from Coast to Coast," *Michigan State University International Studies and Programs*, January 2, 2020, observed September 10, 2026 at https://globalyouth.isp.msu.edu/news_article/22466, and archived at <https://archive.ph/1GxYC>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "VIPP Director, Dr. Xinyu Wu Visits China," *Michigan State University International Studies and Programs*, April 16, 2019, observed September 10, 2026 at https://globalyouth.isp.msu.edu/news_article/22020, and archived at <https://archive.ph/zdXBx>

civilian integration and resource sharing. During the visit, the delegation toured the State Key Laboratory of Media Convergence and Communication and the NPOL and participated in a study session on realizing the “Chinese Dream” of a strong nation and strong military.⁴⁷ Yang chaired the study session; at the time, he was the National Public Opinion Laboratory’s Executive Deputy Director and Vice President of CUC.⁴⁸

That collaboration later expanded into a structured training pipeline. In 2025, for example, CUC’s Education Development Center ran a commissioned, week-long training program for the National Defense University’s College of Military Culture.⁴⁹ Military visits to CUC have included CUC’s most senior figures—including CUC President, Zhang Shuting [张树庭]—and senior staff from the National Defense University.⁵⁰ Similarly, as part of a series of bespoke training programs for PLA personnel, CUC organized a training program on “Cultural Theory and Creative Thinking” for the National Defense University in July 2023.⁵¹

This expanding relationship sits within a broader Chinese state strategy of deliberately dissolving the boundaries between civilian and military research. Under “military-civil fusion,” a strategy Xi has made a national priority since 2014,⁵² the PLA receives resources and cooperation from Chinese enterprises and institutions that would otherwise be classified as purely civilian.⁵³ Within this framework, private Chinese entities that develop new capabilities have little practical ability to withhold them from military application, since cooperation with state security and defense priorities is treated as a legal obligation rather than a voluntary choice.

While military-civil fusion is most often discussed in the context of hard technologies, the same logic of PLA institutions like the National Defense University, whose own writing has referred to broader

⁴⁷ “Integration and Sharing: National Defense University’s College of Military Culture and Communication University of China Jointly Open a New Chapter of Cooperation,” *The Paper*, March 24, 2023, observed September 10, 2026 at https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_22434023, and archived at <https://archive.ph/RopFj>

⁴⁸ Communication University of China, “Vice Minister of Education Weng Tiehui Visits CUC for Inspection and Guidance,” *Communication University of China*, March 31, 2022, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://by.cuc.edu.cn/2022/0331/c13006a192036/page.htm>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/hA3sB>.

⁴⁹ Communication University of China Training and Education Management Office, “2025 National Defense University Military Culture Academy Scientific Literacy and Teaching and Research Ability Training Program — Project Approval Notice,” *Communication University of China*, July 3, 2025, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://pxjy.cuc.edu.cn/2025/0703/c8054a258097/pagem.htm>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/Z6H4w>

⁵⁰ “Integration and Sharing: National Defense University’s College of Military Culture and Communication University of China Jointly Open a New Chapter of Cooperation,” *The Paper*, March 24, 2023, observed September 10, 2026 at https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_22434023, and archived at <https://archive.ph/RopFj>; Communication University of China, “Key teaching and research staff from the Military Culture Academy of the National Defense University visited our school for research and exchange” [国防大学军事文化学院教研骨干来我校调研交流], April 14, 2023, observed September 11, 2026 at <https://www.cuc.edu.cn/2023/0414/c13125a203730/page.htm>, and archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20260716215130/https://www.cuc.edu.cn/2023/0414/c13125a203730/page.htm>

⁵¹ Communication University of China, “Advancing Civil-Military Integration and Deepening Comprehensive Cooperation: Our University Hosts a Seminar on Cultural Theory and Creative Thinking for the College of Military Culture, National Defence University,” [推进军地融合 深化全面合作——我校举办国防大学军事文化学院文化理论与创意思维研修班], *Communication University of China*, July 18, 2023, observed September 11, 2026 at https://by.cuc.edu.cn/news/_t114/2023/0718/c1901a210466/page.psp, and archived at <https://archive.is/Txcc1>

⁵² Greg Levesque, “Commercialized Militarization: China’s Military-Civil Fusion Strategy,” *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, June 30, 2021, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://www.nbr.org/publication/commercialized-militarization-chinas-military-civil-fusion-strategy/>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/1wTS4>

⁵³ Christopher A. Ford, “The PRC’s ‘Military-Civil Fusion’ Strategy Is a Global Security Threat,” *U.S. Department of State*, March 16, 2020, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-prcs-military-civil-fusion-strategy-is-a-global-security-threat/>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/5V8SP>

information-based domains of strategic contest.⁵⁴ PLA researchers and strategists describe this as “cognitive domain operations”, an evolving doctrine aimed at “command of cognition”, using data-driven audience analysis and social-media monitoring to shape adversary and domestic public opinion in both peacetime and wartime.⁵⁵ CUC’s institutionalized training relationship with the National Defense University’s College of Military Culture thus serves as a documented channel through which knowledge, methods and institutional relationships developed in an academic setting can become accessible within a military-connected environment, reinforcing the need to assess dual-use risk at the institutional level.

These activities show that CUC’s public-opinion and communications infrastructure do not operate solely within a civilian academic environment. The same institution that maintains extensive educational ties with MSU also provides training, facilities, and institutional cooperation to PLA personnel.

The Limits of Current U.S. Scrutiny

CUC’s absence from existing U.S. government designation frameworks raises a broader question about whether current research-security tools fully capture risks associated with institutions focused on propaganda, public-opinion management and international communication. Although many Chinese universities maintained sensitive relationships for years before facing formal U.S. restrictions, their eventual designation generally followed the accumulation of evidence connecting them to the PLA, China’s defense-industrial base, military-civil fusion programs, restricted technology procurement, or research in strategically sensitive fields. As of September 2026, CUC does not appear on any U.S. government watch list, including the Bureau of Industry and Security Entity List, the Department of War Section 1260H Chinese military companies list, or State Department sanctions, and the NDAA Section 1286 List. But this does not mean that CUC poses no risk; it may only mean it has not yet come to the attention of U.S. authorities.

CUC’s continued absence from designations likely reflects the scope of the U.S. framework. CUC’s documented functions center on propaganda training, international communication, narrative construction, and domestic public-opinion management, whereas technology transfer restrictions have primarily targeted military affiliation, sensitive technology transfer, and risks to federally funded scientific research. CUC may therefore represent a category of political-influence risk that U.S. government scrutiny has not been designed to address yet.

Conclusion: The Strategic Concern

U.S. government assessments have warned that China seeks to leverage the openness of American universities to advance strategic objectives, including through researchers, academics and postgraduate students who may serve as non-traditional collectors of scientific, technological and economic knowledge. These concerns have driven stronger attention to research security, particularly in advanced and emerging technology fields.

⁵⁴ Jackson Smith and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, “PLA Social Media Warfare and the Cognitive Domain,” *China Brief, The Jamestown Foundation*, September 8, 2023, observed September 10, 2026 at <https://jamestown.org/program/pla-social-media-warfare-and-the-cognitive-domain/>, and archived at <https://archive.ph/yq38s>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

That focus may leave a gap around less technical forms of expertise that still carry strategic value. Strategic communication, audience analysis, digital media, public-opinion research and artificial intelligence can all support legitimate academic and commercial purposes, while also having applications in political influence, information operations and national security.

MSU's relationships in China illustrate this broader challenge. Over many years, the university has developed sustained institutional ties with organizations involved in propaganda, public-opinion management and, in some cases, military-linked activity. These relationships do not demonstrate that MSU knowingly transferred expertise for political or military use. They do, however, create pathways through which communications, digital-media and AI expertise may circulate within institutions that also serve CCP political, ideological and national-security priorities.

The broader lesson extends beyond MSU. International academic collaboration can produce substantial educational and scientific benefits, but it also requires careful assessment of the institutional environment in which a foreign partner operates. Effective due diligence should therefore examine not only the subject matter of a collaboration, but also the partner's governance structures, relationships with Party-state and military organizations, and the potential downstream uses of shared expertise.

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