

SINOPSIS



**‘The coconut tree does
not sway by itself’:
Assessing China’s¹
foreign interference in
Sāmoa and its impact**

Anne-Marie Brady, Wendy Cheung,
Martin Hála, and Bryce Vevey

Coastwatchers 2.0

Table of Contents

Executive summary	4
Key Findings.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Why China is interested in Sāmoa	11
Overview of China-Sāmoa relations.....	13
Making the foreign serve China	16
Collecting information on elites	17
Party-to party links	20
A tale of two Parliaments.....	22
Sāmoa-China Friendship Association	24
Cultivating influence through business opportunities: The Sasina Nexus	28
Deploying tourism for strategic purposes	36
From elite capture to internal split	43
Sub-national relations as a vector for foreign influence	45
Teaching authoritarianism: China's global training push.....	48
The Global Security Initiative: A China-centred public security network	49
Economic Coercion: all roads lead to China	56
Debt dependency.....	59
China's dual-use deep sea fishing fleet	63
Cyber attacks	65
Telling a good story of China	65
Embedding influence mechanisms in the Sāmoan media	66
Leveraging education links for influence	70
Controlling the Chinese Diaspora.....	73
Anti-Chinese sentiment rising	79
Revival of passports sales	82
American Sāmoa.....	82
Relations with the PRC.....	83
Zhenhua data leak.....	84

American Sāmoa China Friendship Society	85
Overseas Chinese in American Sāmoa	85
Illegal fishing	87
Analysis and policy advice	89
Conclusion	91
Appendix 1	93
Appendix 2	97
Appendix 3	99



倪学德 [Ni Xuede], 萨摩亚 Sāmoa, Social Sciences Academic Press.

Executive summary

Once a model of political and economic stability in the Pacific, Sāmoa has in recent years swung from political turmoil to economic crisis. China is a significant factor in this churn. As the proverb says, *E le falala fua le niu, ae falala ona o le matagi*—the coconut tree does not sway on its own, it sways because of the wind. A decade of China-linked loans, opaque ventures, and elite cultivation have magnified factionalism and eroded guardrails. The economy, already heavily aid-reliant (13th globally by aid-to-GNI), carries massive Chinese debt from projects such as a costly, dual-use-adjacent airport and national broadband network. By 2024, repayments to China ranked among the world's highest relative to GNI, tightening the fiscal vise and deepening dependency.¹ Now years of cultivation appear to have posted a result, as Susuga La'aulialemalietoa Leuatea Polataivao Fosi Schmidt (La'aulialemalietoa), a controversial Sāmoan politician, has unexpectedly become prime minister. His electorate stands out as the only one to have received millions from companies connected to China's united front.² These connections include Chinese-backed tourism ventures and cryptocurrency projects tied to his family and political network, fuelling concerns about foreign interference shaping Sāmoa's political landscape.

The relationship with China is fundamentally unequal. Sāmoa is a small, open democracy with fragile administrative capacity, while China is a centralized Leninist party-state able to mobilize and coordinate formidable diplomatic, commercial, security, propaganda, and financial tools. This asymmetry is reinforced by the CCP's united front system, which channels and choreographs external contacts across government, business, and civil society through front organizations presented as independent counterparts.

China is interested in Sāmoa for several reasons, chief among them the island nation's strategic position in the Third Island Chain bridging U.S. territories and allied partners across the Pacific. Influence in Apia offers access to air and maritime nodes, votes in regional and multilateral forums, and commercial footholds in EEZ fisheries and prospective seabed resources. Our research has found that China's foreign interference activities in Sāmoa have had a corrosive effect on Sāmoan democracy, sovereignty, and custom.

¹ Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Government Finance Statistics March Quarter 2021', [online](#).

² Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'District remains committed to SEZ', 2 April 2025, *Samoa Observer*, [online](#).

The situation will be of concern to many people in Sāmoa, as well as New Zealand, Australia and other neighbouring states. Proximity to American Sāmoa, a U.S. territory, raises the stakes for Washington: risks of illegal fishing and commercial surveillance, pressure on borders and governance, and a potential gateway for eroding U.S. presence and freedom of action in the wider Pacific region.

Drawing on Chinese and English-language sources, official statements, company filings, and local reporting, this paper maps the principal channels of leverage—elite capture, party-to-party ties, propaganda work, policing and security diplomacy, economic inducements and coercion, and links through the Chinese diaspora. It concludes with recommendations to build resilience and safeguard Sāmoa’s sovereignty.

Key Findings

1. Beijing has systematically cultivated influence through elite capture, fuelling internal divisions and political friction. The Fiamē government (2022-2025) tried to rebalance the political and strategic relationship with China, publicly speaking out about concerns of China's foreign interference in Sāmoa and refusing to sign a China-centred Pacific security pact. Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa's government has committed to deepening relations with China, reviving risky investment schemes and dual-use infrastructure projects.
2. China-financed debt has placed Sāmoa under intense fiscal pressure, with repayments to China reaching 2.6% of GDP—among the highest globally. The Fiamē government worked hard to reduce the debt, succeeding in relieving the financial risk. The economy also experienced a post-Covid bounce, performing at around 2.7% GDP growth in 2025. La'aulialemalietoa's plans to revive large infrastructure projects, from dual-use wharfs at Asau and restoring WWII-era domestic airfields, risk raising Sāmoa's debt profile again. The plans don't make financial sense, but they could be useful for China, which has a pattern of expanding its military presence in the Pacific through dual-use facilities. Previous infrastructure projects funded by China such as the Faleolo airport expansion and the Sāmoan National Broadband Project have turned out to be the white elephants the IMF once predicted they would be.
3. Sāmoa's strategic location in the Third Island Chain and its proximity to U.S. territory (American Sāmoa) raise the geopolitical stakes for the potential impact of the La'aulialemalietoa government taking Sāmoa's relations with China to a new level. Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Cook Islands have all signed security-related agreements with China in recent years, until now Sāmoa has held back. Sāmoa has great needs for investment, tourism, exports and aid. Australia and New Zealand provide the bulk of external aid and are also the main sources of tourism and aid, but it is still not enough for Sāmoa's development needs. Will likeminded partners like Korea, Japan, India, the EU or the U.S. itself, step up to help fill the vacuum that China is poised to fill? Sāmoa's sovereignty and the strategic environment may depend on it.

Introduction

In September 2025, Sāmoa witnessed a stunning political upset. Susuga La'aulialemalietoa Leuatea Polataivao Fosi Schmidt (La'aulialemalietoa), a populist leader dogged by ten criminal charges and recently expelled from his own government,³ won the snap election with 40 percent of the vote to become Sāmoa's eighth prime minister. It was a big win for La'aulialemalietoa, but it was a win for China too.

La'aulialemalietoa's connections to CCP influence mechanisms run deep. He is the president of the Sāmoa-China Friendship Association and Sāmoa's delegate on the board of the Pacific China Friendship Association⁴—an organization created to cultivate Pacific elites and normalise China's dual-use activities in the region.⁵ Chinese companies linked to united front interests have funnelled millions into land leases and business ventures in La'aulialemalietoa's rural electorate in Savai'i, via annual payments and beneficial corporate arrangements.⁶ Shareholder registry records show direct involvement of La'aulialemalietoa's family in blockchain and cryptocurrency startups funded by united front-connected Chinese interests.⁷ These payments are not philanthropy—they are investments to build up relationships and to embed China-aligned actors within the community and political fabric.

Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa has been closely involved in negotiating high-level Sāmoa-China relations for more than fifteen years. He replaces Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa (Fiamē) (2021-2025), who during her time in government tried to rebalance Sāmoa's relationship with China.

Fiamē and La'aulialemalietoa had once been political allies. Fiamē and La'aulialemalietoa's Fa'atuatua i le Atua Sāmoa ua Tasi (FAST) party won power in 2021, ending decades of rule by former Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi (1998-2021). Under the previous Human Rights Protection Party government (HRPP), Sāmoa accumulated unsustainable

³ John Malaeolevavau Peterson, 'La'aulialemalietoa Schmidt sacked following criminal charges', *Samoa Newshub*, 10 January 2025, [online](#).

⁴ Pacific China Friendship Association, 'PCFA-Profile-2022', [online](#).

⁵ Anne-Marie Brady, 'When China knocks at the door of New Caledonia', ASPI, Special Report, 23 August 2024; [online](#).

⁶ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Crypto companies paid millions to Sasina', *Sāmoa Observer*, 29 March 2025, [online](#).

⁷ Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour – Sāmoa, 'Sāmoa Digital Asset Exchange Ltd (201706619) [Private Company]', accessed 23 April 2025, [online](#); Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour – Sāmoa, 'Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone Ltd (201706623) [Private Company]', accessed 23 April 2025, [online](#).

loans from China and pursued dual-use infrastructure projects, including plans for two new ports. By the time Prime Minister Fiamē took office, national debt had swollen to US\$1 billion, with China holding almost 40 percent.⁸

Fiamē scrapped a proposed US\$93 million China-funded port that critics allege could have been adapted for military use and she moved to pay back debt.⁹ By 2025, the FAST 1 government had managed to reduce Sāmoa's external debt to US\$776 million, cutting the amount owed to China to US\$261 million.¹⁰

In 2022, when the Chinese government proposed setting a China-centred Pacific security agreement, Prime Minister Fiamē was one of the few Pacific leaders to speak publicly against the initiative, saying that the Pacific can manage its own security.¹¹ Later that year, she described her government's priority as managing what she called a "fear of influence" from China.¹² That strategy was complicated by her deputy, La'aulialemalietoa, who pressed ahead with his unapproved united front-linked business ventures.¹³ Yet even as Fiamē sought to limit financial dependence, her government broadened engagement with Beijing—accepting China's offer of a police forensics lab and granting visa-free entry to Chinese passport holders.

In early 2025, a power struggle within Sāmoa's government pushed the country into political and financial turmoil.

In January, Prime Minister Fiamē asked La'aulialemalietoa to resign from Cabinet over conspiracy and harassment charges.¹⁴ When he refused, she dismissed him as well as three other ministers, for insubordination.¹⁵ La'aulialemalietoa struck back by expelling Fiamē and her allies from the

⁸ Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Government Finance Statistics March Quarter 2021', [online](#).

⁹ Joyetter Feagaimaali'i, 'No military intentions for Vaiusu Wharf: Minister', *Samoa Observer*, 26 February 2021, [online](#).

¹⁰ Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Government finance statistics March quarter 2021', [online](#).

¹¹ Lucy Craymer, 'Samoa's prime minister says Pacific can deal with its own security issues', *Reuters*, 17 June 2022, [online](#).

¹² Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, "Fear of Influence" Is Samoa's Concern: Fiamē', 1 August 2022, *Samoa Observer*, [online](#).

¹³ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'District remains committed to SEZ', 2 April 2025, *Samoa Observer*, [online](#), Editorial, 'The Mystery of the Stock Exchange Companies Needs Clear Answers', *Samoa Observer*, 16 March 2025, [online](#).

¹⁴ 'Samoa's head of police clarifies charges against cabinet minister', *PMN News*, 9 January 2025, [online](#); Grace Tinitali-Fiavaai, 'What you need to know about Samoa's political crisis', *RNZ*, 5 February 2025, [online](#).

¹⁵ More Cabinet Ministers removed in Samoa political saga', *RNZ*, 14 January 2025', [online](#).

FAST party. Soon after came the government collapse in May after it failed to pass the budget, and a snap election.¹⁶

The question now is, will Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa continue Fiamē's efforts to rebalance Sāmoa-China relations, or pull them even closer? In November 2025—while officially on medical leave—La'aulialemalietoa sent a personal message to China's premier Li Qiang, saying Sāmoa was willing to work with Beijing to deepen cooperation.¹⁷ La'aulialemalietoa campaigned on reinstating the very China-connected cryptocurrency and Special Economic Zone in his electorate Sasina that had seen him cast out of Cabinet.¹⁸

China's advance in Sāmoa was not won overnight. It was cultivated—relentlessly, strategically, and now, successfully.

Sāmoa is politically divided and economically weak, with a corrupt political elite. China appears to be a key corrosive factor in this dynamic. This policy paper examines contemporary Sāmoa-China relations through the lens of CCP foreign interference activities, what the CCP government calls “united front work”, assessing both China's intentions and Sāmoa's response, as well as the impact on Sāmoan democracy, sovereignty, and custom. The examples we highlight are by no means exhaustive, by its nature united front work is clandestine, part of what the CCP calls covert work [隐蔽工作].

Under CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping, united front work has an important role in China's increasingly assertive foreign policy, which follows a three-pronged approach:

1. State to State interactions.
2. Military shows of force.
3. Covert operations via international united front work activities.

The CCP's international united front work is a form of political warfare and foreign interference, using “front” organisations and individuals. Mao

¹⁶ Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, 'Budget fails, early elections triggered', *Samoa Observer*, 27 May 2025, [online](#).

¹⁷ '习近平同萨摩亚国家元首图伊马莱阿利法诺就中萨建交 50 周年互致贺电' [Xi Jinping and Samoan Head of State Tuimalai Alifano exchanged congratulatory messages on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Samoa], PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 November 2025, [online](#).

¹⁸ 'FAST Party New Beginning: Pathway for the Development of Samoa 2026-2031, 7, [online](#).

Zedong praised united front work as a “magic weapon” which helped bring the party to power.

After years of maintaining the fiction of a separation between Party and State, the CCP and its agencies now have a very prominent role in Xi foreign policy. United front work is the task of all party members and Party-State-Military agencies. Chinese companies are required to take part in united front work with more than 70 percent of the CEOs of major companies in China Party members. The CCP approach to foreign policy is called “total diplomacy”, meaning that every possible channel will be utilised.

Each society is somewhat different, so the emphases of united front work may be different in each country. Sāmoa is an interesting case study for understanding how CCP united front work adapts, but also how Pacific Island countries respond to it. This paper gives an overview of CCP united front work efforts in Sāmoa, using the categories set out in Anne-Marie Brady’s “Magic Weapons” template on CCP united front work, which we detail in Appendix 2:

1. Elite capture: Systematic cultivation, penetration, and co-option of foreign political, business, and academic elites to align their interests with, and actively promote, the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) external policy objectives.
2. Overseas Chinese Diaspora control: Escalated state-directed initiatives to monitor, manage, and mobilise ethnic Chinese communities abroad as instruments of CCP influence operations, while imposing coercive measures on individuals and groups that resist alignment.
3. Narrative dominance: Coordinated information operations designed to shape global perceptions of China by amplifying pro-PRC messaging, leveraging state-aligned media outlets, cultural diplomacy, and educational partnerships, while marginalizing critical discourse.
4. Economic coercion: Application of targeted economic measures to foster structural dependency, secure influence over strategic infrastructure, and embed states within a China-centric economic, transport, and communications architecture.

In Sāmoa, all four vectors of united front work have had an observable impact on local politics.

Why China is interested in Sāmoa

The PRC has strategic, military, economic, and political interests in Sāmoa, that form part of China's broad strategic interests in the Pacific.¹⁹

Sāmoa's importance lies in its geography and history. The archipelago—divided between the Independent State of Sāmoa in the west and American Sāmoa, a United States territory, in the east—occupies a pivotal position at the center of the Third Island Chain linking the United States and Australia. Chinese official sources highlight the country's small but geostrategically central position within the Pacific Island chains, its traditional maritime economy, and its political distinction from but proximity to American Sāmoa. Its location has made it strategically valuable in every era of Pacific power competition.

Already in the late nineteenth century, the Sāmoan islands became contested ground among colonial powers. In 1899, the islands west of 171° west longitude were annexed by Germany, while those to the east were annexed by the United States.²⁰ Western Sāmoa remained German colony until the outbreak of the First World War, when New Zealand troops seized the islands in August 1914 to take control of a German military telegraph station near Apia. The transmitter could send Morse-code messages directly to Berlin and was connected to Germany's ninety-ship strong Pacific fleet.²¹

Sāmoa's location again proved critical during the Second World War. Both New Zealand and American troops were stationed there, with U.S. forces establishing bases on Savai'i Island and on American Sāmoa's Tutuila Island.²² A World War II U.S. intelligence report stated that an undefended Western Sāmoa is a "hazard of first magnitude for the defence of American Sāmoa".²³ The U.S. Tutuila base became the largest jungle-training facility in the South

¹⁹ 倪学德 [Ni Xuede], 萨摩亚 *Sāmoa*, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2015, 1-2; 文峻飞 [Wen Junfei], 中国在太平洋岛国安全利益研究 [Research on China's Security interests in Pacific Island countries], 中共中央党校硕士论文 [CCP Central Party School MA Dissertation], 2016, 48; 喻常森 [Yu Changsen], '太平洋岛国在 21 世纪中国战略谋划中的定位' [The Positioning of Pacific Island Countries in China's Strategic Planning for the 21st Century], 大洋洲蓝皮书: 大洋洲发展报告(2014~2015) [Oceania Blue Book: Oceania Development Report (2014-2015)], 社会科学文献出版社出版的书籍 [Social Sciences Academic Press], 2015.

²⁰ John Henderson, 'American Samoa Supplement', *Area Handbook for Oceania* 1 (1971): 469.

²¹ 'Capture of German Sāmoa', NZ History [online](#), 3, [online](#).

²² Operations & Codenames of WWII, 'Operation Straw', [online](#).

²³ Lieutenant Colonel Frank O. Hough USMCR, Major Verle E. Ludwig, USMC, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, Vol. I: *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958, 89, [online](#).

Pacific, hosting up to 5,600 troops.²⁴ The U.S. Navy constructed the Faleolo airstrip on Upolu to support Allied operations.²⁵ In January 1942, Imperial Japanese aircraft attacked Pago Pago Harbour in American Sāmoa because of its strategic value as a supply and naval-air base.²⁶

In the 1950s, the United States closed its wartime installations in American Sāmoa, leaving only a Coast Guard presence there.²⁷ Yet Washington continued to regard Sāmoa's waters as militarily important. In 1978, the U.S. government requested permission to send nuclear-armed warships to dock in Apia.²⁸ Decades later, in 2023, the growing Chinese military presence across the Pacific prompted American Sāmoan and U.S. army leaders to discuss strengthening the territory's defence capabilities.²⁹

Since 2012, the PRC has built a series of dual civil-military facilities in Sāmoa, ranging from the nation's National Broadband Highway fibre-optic network, to expanding Faleolo Airport, and offered to finance and build new deep-water ports at Upolu Island's Vaiusu and Asau in Savai'i. Beijing has also expanded policing and security cooperation with Sāmoa—an established avenue for embedding intelligence-gathering capabilities, as the PRC Ministry of Public Security functions both as a police service and an intelligence agency.

From 1912 to 1963, and 1972 to 1975, Sāmoa had diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan). Since the switch to Beijing, the PRC has cultivated close links with Sāmoan elites to forestall any possibility of future governments reverting to Taipei—a reversal that has occurred in several other Pacific states.³⁰ Maintaining Sāmoa's recognition strengthens

²⁴ U.S. National Park Service, 'American Samoa's Role In World War II', [online](#).

²⁵ Robert W Franco, '16 Samoans, World War II, and Military Work', n.d., 76, [online](#).

²⁶ Holger Droessler, 'Whose Pacific? U.S. security interests in American Samoa from the age of empire to the Pacific Pivot', *Pacific Asia Inquiry* 4, no. 1 (2013): 58–65, [online](#). Lieutenant Colonel Frank O. Hough USMCR, Major Verle E. Ludwig, USMC, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *History of U.S. Marine Corps operations in World War II, Vol. I: Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958, 89, [online](#).

²⁷ Holger Droessler, 'Whose Pacific? U.S. security interests in American Sāmoa from the age of empire to the Pacific Pivot', *Pacific Asia Inquiry* 4, no. 1 (2013): 58–65, [online](#).

²⁸ 'Ambassador's biannual visit to Western Samoa', US Embassy Sāmoa, declassified cable, 10 May 1978, [online](#).

²⁹ Office of the Governor, 'Key leader engagement part III: USARPAC', Office of the Governor, 10 May 2023, [online](#).

³⁰ 喻常森 [Yu Changsen], '太平洋岛国在 21 世纪中国战略谋划中的定位' [The Positioning of Pacific Island Countries in China's strategic planning for the 21st Century], 大洋洲蓝皮书：大洋洲发展报告(2014～2015) [Oceania Blue Book: Oceania. Development Report (2014-2015)], 社会科学文献出版社出版的书籍 [Social Sciences Academic Press], 2015.

China's campaign to isolate Taiwan diplomatically and secures Sāmoa's support within key international organisations such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the United Nations. In return for aid and concessional finance, PRC diplomats often require Sāmoa to endorse Chinese policies and candidates in multilateral forums.³¹

China's interest further extends to Sāmoa's natural and marine resources. The country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) contains extensive cobalt-rich seabed crusts and abundant tuna fisheries—resources increasingly vital to Beijing's industrial and food-security agendas.³² Chinese state-owned enterprises have conducted seabed exploration in Sāmoan waters,³³ positioning themselves for future exploitation once international regulations on deep-sea mining are finalized. These ventures align with Beijing's broader strategy to secure access to critical minerals and marine-protein supplies while consolidating its maritime presence in the South Pacific.³⁴ Through its fishing fleets, marine-science missions, and port-development projects, the PRC seeks not only economic advantages but also logistical footholds that could be adapted for dual-use operations in times of crisis.

In sum, Sāmoa's strategic location, political value, and resource potential make it an essential component of China's long-term ambitions in the Pacific. Through infrastructure development, security cooperation, and elite-level engagement, Beijing has embedded itself in Sāmoa's political economy, advancing a China-centred regional order that challenges the influence of traditional partners such as the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

Overview of China-Sāmoa relations

Chinese people have lived in the Sāmoan islands since the 1840s. In 1909, Imperial China opened a consulate in German Sāmoa, to support some 4,000 Chinese indentured labourers working in copra plantations.³⁵ After the fall

³¹ Tuila'epa Luplesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi and Peter Swain, *Pālemia: Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi of Sāmoa: A memoir*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2017.

³² 萨摩亚 [Sāmoa], 一带一路数据库 [BRI Database], [online](#).

³³ '深海采矿的中国法制建设方案研究' [Research on China's legal system construction plan for deep-sea mining], Tongji University, 2021, [online](#); 赵业新 [Zhao Yixin], '论海上丝绸之路背景下中国与太平洋岛国深海采矿合作' [Cooperation in deep sea mining between China and Pacific Island Countries under the framework of the Maritime Silk Road], 太平洋学报 [Pacific Journal], Vol. 27, No. 10, 2019, [online](#).

³⁴ '中国大洋协会组团访问南太岛国' [A delegation from the China Ocean Association visited South Pacific island nations], 21 July 2015, [online](#).

³⁵ Nancy Y.W. Tom, 'The Chinese in Western Sāmoa 1875-1985: The dragon came from afar', Apia: Western Sāmoa Historical and Cultural Trust, 1986, 82.

of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the Republic of China (ROC) took over this consulate. In 1947, the consulate was closed, but consular affairs continued via New Zealand.

Western Sāmoa gained independence from New Zealand in 1962. This was noted by the PRC's domestic broadcasting service, but China did not attempt to establish diplomatic relations with Sāmoa at that stage.³⁶ In May 1972, the Republic of China established non-resident diplomatic relations with Western Sāmoa.³⁷ The two governments signed a fisheries technical cooperation agreement, and the ROC dispatched technicians to provide training in fishing techniques and processing.³⁸ In 1973, Sāmoan Prime Minister Fiamē Mata'afa Faumuina Mulinu'u II, the father of Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, visited Taipei for talks with ROC President Chiang Kai-shek, consolidating Sāmoa-ROC relations.³⁹

Switching recognition to the People's Republic of China

Prime Minister Mata'afa died suddenly in May 1975. His successor, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi IV, received a delegation from the PRC in September 1975 seeking to establish diplomatic relations.⁴⁰ On 6 November 1975, Sāmoa and the PRC signed the "Joint Communique on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations",⁴¹ ending their relationship with the Republic of China. Sāmoa's switch made it the second Pacific Island nation—after Fiji—to recognize Beijing.⁴² Sāmoa Head of State Malietoa Tanumafili visited China the following year and signed an economic assistance agreement.⁴³ The PRC opened an embassy in Apia shortly thereafter,⁴⁴ for many years it was the largest Chinese diplomatic mission in the Pacific.

³⁶ 'West Samoa proclaims independence', *Peking Domestic Service*, 4 January 1962, FBIS.

³⁷ Thomas V. Biddick, 'Diplomatic rivalry in the South Pacific: The PRC and Taiwan', *Asian Survey* 29, no. 8 (1989): 804.

³⁸ '西薩摩亞' [Western Sāmoa], 中薩漁業技術合作協定 [Technical cooperation in the field of fishery], [online](#).

³⁹ Biddick, 'Diplomatic rivalry in the South Pacific', 1989, 804.

⁴⁰ Biddick, 'Diplomatic rivalry in the South Pacific', 1989.

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Joint Communique on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations', 6 November 1975, [online](#).

⁴² On the 5th of November 1975, Fiji established diplomatic relations with the PRC. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Joint Communique of the Government of the People's Republic', 5 November 1975, [online](#).

⁴³ 'Paper welcomes Western Samoa Head of State, *Xinhua News Service*, 2 September 1976, FBIS.

⁴⁴ 'China-Sāmoa Relations', PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [online](#).

Since the break in diplomatic relations, there have been limited ROC-Sāmoa links. The only connection is with the ROC Trade Office in Fiji, which offers services to Sāmoa.⁴⁵

Consolidation and expansion of ties

For more than a decade after recognition, the PRC's assistance to Sāmoa remained modest, consisting mainly of small-scale projects, medical teams, and scholarships.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, successive Sāmoan governments have offered political support to the PRC at critical moments, useful from an ideological point of view. In 1989, Sāmoan Prime Minister Tofilau Eti was one of the first foreign leaders to visit China following the Tiananmen crackdown, signalling political solidarity at a time when the PRC was internationally isolated. Shortly after, China offered Sāmoa a US\$12 million interest-free loan for a new government building.⁴⁷

China's aid and loan portfolio expanded significantly after 2006, when Beijing intensified its engagement across the Pacific. From 2008 to 2022, Chinese financial assistance accounted for roughly nine percent of Sāmoa's total aid inflows. In the same period, Australia provided about twenty-one percent and New Zealand twelve percent.⁴⁸

Despite numerous cooperation agreements,⁴⁹ bilateral trade remains minimal.⁵⁰ In 2023, around 2.7 percent of Sāmoa's exports went to China, while 11 percent of imports originated there.⁵¹ By comparison, exports to Taiwan—recorded by the Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics as “Taiwan, Province of China”—totaled US \$2.4 million,⁵² or just over five percent of Sāmoa's exports. The Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics does not publish the figures on imports from the ROC.⁵³ According to the ROC trade site, ROC exports to

⁴⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 'Taipei Trade Office in Fiji', Taipei Trade Office in Fiji 駐斐濟臺北商務辦事處, 6 June 2011, [online](#).

⁴⁶ 石莹丽 [Shi Yingli], '中国对萨摩亚援助述论' [A review of China's aid to Sāmoa]. 苏州科技大学学报(社会科学版) [Journal of Suzhou University of Science and Technology] (2018). (04), [online](#).

⁴⁷ 'Western Sāmoa', *New Internationalist the World*, 5 August 1991, [online](#).

⁴⁸ Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map Samoa, 'Samoa and Foreign Aid Graph', [online](#).

⁴⁹ Sāmoa Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Bilateral Agreements/ Exchange of Notes', [online](#); AFP, SBS, 'Samoa signs deal with China with talks underway for a Police Training Centre', SBS News, 28 May 2022, [online](#).

⁵⁰ For example, exports and imports to and from New Zealand are 20.9% and 25.7% respectively. Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Sāmoa Trade Imports and Exports Dashboard', accessed 5 April 2025, [online](#).

⁵¹ Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Sāmoa Trade Imports & Exports Dashboard', accessed 5 April 2025, [online](#).

⁵² Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Sāmoa Trade Imports and Exports Dashboard', accessed 5 April 2025, [online](#).

⁵³ Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Sāmoa Trade Imports and Exports Dashboard', accessed 5 April 2025, [online](#).

Sāmoa were just over US\$4 million,⁵⁴ representing 1.94 percent of Sāmoa's imports.⁵⁵

China's engagement has deepened under the Belt and Road Initiative, providing concessional loans for infrastructure, telecommunications, and public buildings. In 2018, Sāmoa formally joined the BRI. The PRC now holds about one-third of Sāmoa's external debt.

Making the foreign serve China

Elite capture is a cost-effective instrument through which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) repurposes democratic governance abroad to serve its own strategic ends. Mao Zedong famously called this approach "making the foreign serve China" (洋为中用)⁵⁶ and this term also appears in Xi era policy discussions. By cultivating and co-opting select individuals, the Party can shape the institutions those individuals represent, advancing Beijing's political and economic objectives by proxy. The CCP's own Leninist bureaucracy—disciplined through tight hierarchy and harsh penalties for deviation—is largely impervious to reciprocal influence. In exploiting the openness and pluralism of democratic systems, the CCP turns yet another structural asymmetry to its advantage.

The goal of CCP united front work towards elites is one, to turn them into assets for China and get them to promote China's foreign policy agenda within their own political systems, two, to use them as sources of information on their government's intentions and attitude towards China and its policies, and three, to provide China access to new technology and military or intelligence-related information. The last objective may be pursued with or without the consent of targets—for example, by compromising the electronic devices of visiting VIPs while they attend events in China.

The individuals targeted in this process often believe they are engaged in ordinary diplomatic or commercial exchanges, unaware that a vast party-state apparatus is orchestrating and instrumentalising the relationship. Material inducements, prestige, and appeals to status or access can further

⁵⁴ International Trade Administration, MOEA, 'Export/Import Value (by Country) - FSCE3010F', International Trade Administration, accessed 15 June 2025, [online](#).

⁵⁵ Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Sāmoa Trade Imports and Exports Dashboard', accessed 5 April 2025, [online](#).

⁵⁶ See Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

entrench this misperception, ensuring their cooperation under the illusion of normal engagement.

CCP united front activities in Sāmoa follow a familiar pattern: they concentrate on senior politicians and political parties, local government officials, public-sector actors, youth organisations, and leading intellectuals.

Collecting information on elites

The CCP has long been working to build positive relations and networks of trust with Sāmoan elites, targeting key individuals and interest groups. In 2020, some of this work behind the scenes was revealed after a data leak from a Chinese tech firm, Zhenhua Data, linked to China's military and intelligence networks.⁵⁷ Zhenhua's OKIDB dataset held the names and details of 2.4 million of the world's most important people and their families—a veritable who's who of politics. Internet 2.0, a joint US-Australian cybersecurity firm,⁵⁸ was able to restore 10 percent of the corrupted data.⁵⁹

The names recovered in the Sāmoa section of the database were prominent figures in Sāmoan society from the 1980s to the present. The Zhenhua data leak indicated extensive, sophisticated work behind the scenes to understand relationships between people of influence in Sāmoa, revealing how the CCP lays the groundwork for elite capture. Forty-nine prominent figures in Sāmoan society and their family members were listed.⁶⁰ Forty-four

⁵⁷ Anne-Marie Brady, 'How China's ruling party secretly builds ties around the globe', *NZ Herald*, 16 September 2020, [online](#); Anne-Marie Brady, 'The data dump that reveals the startling breadth of Beijing's interference ops', *Washington Post*, 27 September 2020, [online](#); 'Details of citizens from Pacific Island nations harvested by Chinese technology firm', *1News*, 17 September 2020, [online](#).

⁵⁸ Internet 2.0, 'About Internet 2.0', *Internet 2.0*, 5 July 2023, [online](#).

⁵⁹ Internet 2.0, 'Zhenhua data leak public report', *Internet 2.0*, n.d., [online](#); Anne-Marie Brady, 'The data dump that reveals the startling breadth of Beijing's interference ops', *Washington Post*, 27 September 2020, [online](#).

⁶⁰ Thank you to Internet 2.0 for sharing the database. The 49 listed in the Sāmoa section of the dataset were as follows: Alesana Mauli; Ativalu Patu; Fa'aolotoi Pogi; Faamausili Tuimalealiifano; Faimalotoa Stowers-Ah Kau; Fetu Tiatia; Fetuao Alama; Fiti Olo; Florence Baragwanath; Fuimaono Te'o; Genious Elisaia; Ioelu Gafa; Katarina Potoi; Keneti Solamalemalo; Kosimiti Latu; Kuiniselani Tago-Elisara; Lafainatau Tuitama; Leitu Puleitu-Ligaliga; Luciano Fonoti; Maeva Betham-Vaai; Maimoana Matatumua-Vermeulen; Malolo Vaai; Maryann Lameko-Vaai; Mata'utia Ropati; Max Aiona; Melini Lameko; Melvin Jungblut III; Muliagatele MacDonald; Mulitalo Vui; Nadezda Saveenho; Nipe Aiafi; Omana Sua; Papalitele Neru; Rosemarie Salele; Safanua Ioane; Sala Ah Leong; Sefo Pau; Sepulona Tapuai; Silafau Meredith; Sililoto Tuaifaiva; Sydney Faasau; Take Naseri; Tatiana Warren; Taua Tielu; Tigillagi Eteuati; Toese Tapua'i; Toleafoa Betham; Toluono Toluono; Winniefret Toleafoa.

prominent individuals from American Sāmoa were also included in the list—indicating the strategic importance of that territory for China’s interests.⁶¹

The Sāmoan individuals included local and national politicians, religious leaders, journalists, public servants, and in some cases, the children of prominent figures in Sāmoan society. Seventeen out of the forty-nine listed were senior civil servants, two were senior leaders in the Sāmoan Police Force, fourteen were politicians, one was a religious leader, and six were family members of prominent individuals, including judges. Two were journalists. The public servants listed oversaw strategic portfolios such as the Police and Prison Services, the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the Ministry of Finance, the Asian Development Bank, the Sāmoa Export Authority, the Central Bank of Sāmoa, and Inland Revenue.

Among the names on the database were Alesana Mauli (Tofilau Eti Alesana) who served as Sāmoan Prime Minister from 1982 to 1985 and 1988 to 1998 and was Sāmoa’s Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1984 to 1985 and 1988 to 1998. Another name listed was Ativalu Patu [Patu Togi II Ativalu Vaimasamu Tunupopo] who served as Chief Superintendent for Police and Prison Services in the 1990s and as an MP from 2001 to 2011. He became Associate Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Deputy Chairman of Justice, Police and Prisons, Land and Titles, the Privileges and Ethics Committee and a member of the Geographic Names Board. Police Commissioner, Papaliitele Loranese Neru, whose term was not renewed due to his involvement in arms smuggling from American Sāmoa, was also listed.⁶² Radio Polynesia’s Fetu Tiatia was one of two Sāmoan journalists to appear on the list. Faimalatoa Kika Stowers-Ah Kau is the second. She was an announcer and journalist at Sāmoa’s national radio station, Radio 2AP from 1968 to 2003, and became Director of Broadcasting. From 2014 to 2021 she served as an MP for the HRPP Party. During Prime Minister Fiamē’s first vote of no confidence,

⁶¹ The 44 listed in the American Sāmoa section of the dataset were as follows: Fa’amausili Mau; Te’o Fuavai; Puletuimalo Koko; Peter Brown; Savali Ale; Tago Afeleti; Joseph Tuitele; Jonathan Fanene; Malepeai Setu; Utu Malae; Fiapapalagi Atoe; Sarah Haleck Tuitele; Faimealelei Allen; Steve Shalout; Danielle Sonoma; Jason Tuitele; Pohakalani Mauga; Bill Fazio; Utiofili Maga; Joshua Scanlan; Fualili Sonoma; Salu Hunkin-Finau; Saole Mila; Carolyn Budd; David Robinson; Va’a Matalasi; Leonard Seumanutafa; Sotoa Savali; Sialega Malaetasi Togafau; James Mockler; Su’a Schuster; Leolemau Veleutu; Fa’amausili Pola; Paolo Sivia; Andra Sāmoa; Mary Taufaasau; Magalei Logovi’i; Mavis Matautia-Lauofo; Toetasi Tuiteleleapaga; Ufagafa Tulafono; Vaoita Sotoa Savali; Keith Matautia; Le’ala Elisara; Fagamalama Sonoma.

⁶² ‘Arms probe ends Samoa Police Commissioner’s career’, RNZ, 22 September 2009, [online](#).

Faimalatoa was one of five MPs to criticise Fiamē for violating the constitution by leading a minority government.⁶³

The database also lists former MP Toluono Feti Toluono, with notes on his 2011 court case for fraud.⁶⁴ Previously, Toluono served as the General Manager of the Electric Power Corporation.⁶⁵ Fauoo Taua Fatu Tielu (listed in the database as “Taua Tielu”) is another entry, noted as associated with Polynesian Limited. Registry records confirm Taua Tielu as a director of Polynesian Limited⁶⁶—trading as Polynesian Airlines and Samoa Airways.⁶⁷ Currently, Taua Tielu is the CEO of Samoa Airways,⁶⁸ which played a key role in establishing direct flights between China and Sāmoa. Toleafoa Elon Betham also appears in the database as being affiliated with the Samoa Ports Authority. In 2005, Toleafoa held the roles of CEO and General Manager at the Samoa Ports Authority.⁶⁹

Some of the names on the list lack online profiles, suggesting insider knowledge of Sāmoan politics and society. Abbreviated or local name forms imply oral sources rather than automated scraping. Many names belong to figures whose careers ended long before 2020, showing long-term surveillance of Sāmoan elites.

The list of names and associations would have required detailed, granular knowledge of the Sāmoan political landscape. Many of those listed have little or no social media presence. The OKIDB dataset represents the reconnaissance phase of foreign interference. The first step is identifying targets and their associates. The second is gathering data—determining whether they are friendly to China’s policies and whether they have vulnerabilities to be exploited. The final step is cultivation—offering business

⁶³ Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, ‘Fiamē still PM, no confidence motion fails’, *Samoa Observer*, 26 February 2025, [online](#).

⁶⁴ Zhenhua Samoa and American Samoa Dataset, Internet 2.0.

⁶⁵ RNZ, ‘Former MP in Samoa found guilty of forgery and fraud’, RNZ, 22 March 2012, [online](#).

⁶⁶ Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour – Samoa, ‘Directors of Polynesian Limited (0354) [Private Company]’, accessed 27 April 2025, [online](#).

⁶⁷ Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour – Samoa, ‘Polynesian Limited (0354) [Private Company]’, accessed 27 April 2025, [online](#).

⁶⁸ Marieta Heidi Ilalio, ‘\$10M tag to retrofit aircraft’, *Samoa Observer*, 17 March 2025, [online](#).

⁶⁹ RNZ, ‘Former shipping manager appointed head of Samoa Ports Authority’, RNZ, 11 October 2005, [online](#).

opportunities, board appointments, or honorary titles, all-expenses paid trips to China, or political donations via intermediaries.⁷⁰

Party-to party links

Party-to-party links are an important channel for CCP united front work. The CCP utilises senior current and former politicians as bridges to their governments, and in exchange, offers them status, free trips to China, and access to business opportunities.

Such party-to-party ties embody another profound asymmetry. The CCP is not a political party competing for power—it is the power. It monopolises the functions and authority of the state itself, blurring any distinction between party and government. The imbalance in power, resources, and institutional role between the CCP and its counterparts in Sāmoa is monumental.

For a small island developing state, Sāmoa has had a very high level of political visits to China from the earliest days of diplomatic recognition, as well as high level political visits from China,⁷¹ particularly on party-to-party lines, a classic technique of united front work. The CCP's International Liaison Department manages party-to-party united front work with foreign political parties, cultivating them as “friends” of China. In 2013, the CCP International Liaison Department boasted that these political visits had been a very effective way to develop close relations with Sāmoan politicians.⁷²

Every year since 1976, several senior Sāmoan politicians and their entourages have been invited to visit China. China has also sent delegations of senior CCP leaders and representatives of united front organisations to visit Sāmoa.⁷³ In September 1976, as CCP General Secretary Mao Zedong lay on his deathbed, Sāmoan Head of State, Malietoa Tanumafili II, became the first Sāmoan political leader to visit China. He visited again in 1977 with a parliamentary delegation. The co-founder of the Human Rights Protection

⁷⁰ Anne-Marie Brady, ‘The data dump that reveals the startling breadth of Beijing's interference ops’, *Washington Post*, 27 September 2020, [online](#); David Robinson and Robert Potter, ‘Zhenhua Data- Event’, *Internet 2.0*, 5 July 2021, [online](#).

⁷¹ ‘中国同萨摩亚的关系’ [China-Sāmoa relations], MOFA, August 2025, [online](#).

⁷² 江玲 [Jiang Ling], ‘Side notes on the visit of the CCP Friendship Delegation to New Zealand, Sāmoa and Fiji’ [中共友好代表团访问新西兰、萨摩亚、斐济侧记], 人民网 [People's Daily], 26 July 2013, [online](#).

⁷³ ‘中国与萨摩亚的相互访问记录’ [Records of mutual visits between China and Sāmoa], 北京港骏 [Beijing Gangjun], saved offline.

Party, Va'ai Kolone, visited China in 1980 as an MP, and again in 1983 as Prime Minister.

The CCP has longstanding close links with the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), until recently, the dominant political force of Sāmoan politics since its founding in 1979 by Va'ai Kolone and Tofilau Eti Alesana. HRPP governed Sāmoa almost continuously from 1982 until its election defeat in 2021, except for a short period between 1986 and 1987. HRPP delegations have visited China multiple times under the auspices of the CCP International Liaison Department.⁷⁴

Prime Minister Tofilau Eti Alesana (1982-1985; 1998-1998) made four trips to China during his political career—the first in 1987 not long after he stepped down as Foreign Minister, he later visited as Speaker, and then as Prime Minister. The CCP International Liaison Department credits Tofilau with strengthening both China-Sāmoa relations and CCP-HRPP ties.⁷⁵ His successor, HRPP's Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi (1998-2021) made nine official visits to China while in office.⁷⁶ Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa (2021-2025) made six visits—four when she was a minister in the HRPP government, once as Prime Minister of the first FAST government in November 2024.⁷⁷ She first visited China in 2014.⁷⁸ Current Prime Minister Susuga La'aulialemalietoa Leuatea Polataivao Fosi Schmidt (2025-) has visited China twice: in 2012 on a Pacific Leaders "study tour", and again in 2014.⁷⁹ Most Sāmoa Deputy Prime Ministers, and at least two Chief Justices, have also been hosted in China.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ '吴邦国在人民大会堂会见萨摩亚人权保护党代表团' [Wu Bangguo meets with Sāmoan Human Rights Protection Party delegation at the Great Hall of the People], 新华社 [Xinhua], 26 March 2008; [online](#); '萨摩亚人权保护党代表团将访华' [A delegation from Sāmoa Human Rights Protection Party will visit China], CCP International Liaison Department, 7 July 2015, [online](#).

⁷⁵ 'Role of former P.M. Tofilau acknowledged', *Sāmoa Observer*, 3 May 2018, [online](#).

⁷⁶ Shen Shiwei, 'How has China-Sāmoa Friendship featured on Sāmoan banknotes?', *Samoa Observer*, 24 November 2024, [online](#).

⁷⁷ Shen Shiwei, 'How has China-Sāmoa Friendship featured on Samoan banknotes?', *Samoa Observer*, 24 November 2024, [online](#).

⁷⁸ 在这个太平洋岛国，中国专家创造了哪些奇迹？[What miracles have Chinese experts created in this Pacific island nation?], *Voice of China*, 1 December 2024, [online](#).

⁷⁹ '中国同萨摩亚的关系' [China-Sāmoa relations], MOFA, August 2025, [online](#).

⁸⁰ '中国同萨摩亚的关系' [China-Sāmoa relations], MOFA, August 2025, [online](#).

A tale of two Parliaments

Parliamentary exchanges are another false equation. China's National People's Congress (NPC) is not a legislature in the democratic sense but a party instrument that rubber-stamps CCP's executive decisions. During their ceremonial trips to Beijing, parliamentarians from democracies do not meet their peers but rather another interface of the party-state.

Sāmoa's Fono—the unicameral Legislative Assembly—is where laws are passed, budgets approved, and ministers scrutinised. Its engine room is the Fono Secretariat (Office of the Clerk), which manages schedules, briefings, and committee documentation, controlling both the paper and digital records that shape what issues are discussed, when, and by whom. In a system this small, modest influence over the Secretariat can yield disproportionate access: committee staff effectively curate the legislature's information flow.

Beijing has cultivated this channel methodically and long-term. Already in 2009, the PRC Embassy donated office equipment—laptops, printers, and other hardware—to Sāmoa's Parliament.⁸¹ More recently, in 2025, the PRC funded the installation of a Televic wireless conference system in the Sāmoan Fono, formally handed over to the Speaker by Ambassador Fei Mingxing.⁸² These modest contributions help embed PRC-supplied infrastructure into the legislature's daily operations and normalise the Embassy's presence within its precincts.

China-Sāmoa parliamentary exchanges have flowed both ways. In 2012, Sāmoa sent a parliamentary delegation on a ten-day study tour to China, alongside other Pacific legislators, intended to deepen understanding of China's governance and the CCP system. One member of that delegation was La'aulialemalietoa, then Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.⁸³ His later ascent in Sāmoan politics illustrates how valuable early ties—such as parliamentary exchanges—can become in cultivating influence.

⁸¹ AidData, 'Chinese embassy donated office equipment to the Samoan Parliament', [online](#).

⁸² Marc Membrere, 'Samoa Parliament is going wireless with televic conference system funded by China', *Samoa Global News*, [online](#).

⁸³ 'Samoa parliamentary delegation in China for study tour', RNZ, 23 May 2012, [online](#).

In 2016, a delegation led by Zhang Baowen, Vice Chairman of China's NPC Standing Committee, visited Sāmoa and met with the Speaker and other officials, pledging deeper legislative cooperation.⁸⁴ In November 2023, Sāmoa's Speaker, Hon. Papali'i Li'o Taeu Masipau, led a delegation to Beijing, where he met NPC Chairman Zhao Leji. The meeting emphasised legislative cooperation, the exchange of oversight and lawmaking experience, and ambitions to deepen ties between Sāmoa's Legislative Assembly and Chinese legislative institutions.⁸⁵

The idea that China's one-party rubber-stamp congress could claim kinship with Sāmoa's democratic, multi-party Fono might be laughable if it wasn't so unsettling. Firstly, HRPP ruled Sāmoa almost continuously for more than twenty years. The emergence of a genuine opposition has been fraught with controversy, evidenced by the lengthy constitutional crisis after the 2021 election. After the 2025 election, Sāmoan courts made the bombshell statement that vote-buying had become normalised and expected in Sāmoan elections.⁸⁶ In recent years, several prominent Sāmoan politicians have shown increasingly authoritarian tendencies, attacking the courts and the media.⁸⁷

Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa's actions have been particularly concerning.

In 2023, while he was in the FAST 1 government, he endorsed banning a fellow high chief from his village Sasina, who had challenged his political authority and use of government funds.⁸⁸ In 2024, La'aulialemalietoa was charged with three counts of conspiracy or attempt to defeat or pervert the course of justice, conspiracy to commit an offence (fabricate evidence), harassment utilising means of electronic communication, three counts of false statement causing harm to a person's reputation, and two counts of using insulting words with intent to provoke a breach of the peace.⁸⁹ The case concerns allegations that La'aulialemalietoa and five co-accused conspired to fabricate evidence and spread defamatory claims alleging

⁸⁴ 'China, Samoa vow to further promote ties', Xinhua Silk Road, 8 September 2016, [online](#).

⁸⁵ Sāmoa Embassy Beijing, 'Official visit to Beijing on 22 November 2023 by Sāmoa's Speaker of Parliament, the Hon. Papali'i Li'o Taeu Masipa'u', 22 November 2023), [online](#).

⁸⁶ 'Judgment of the Court Leana Ronnie Mulitalo Posini vs Seve Tei Fuimaono', Supreme Court of Samoa, 27 November 2025, [online](#).

⁸⁷ Joyetter Feagaimaali'i, 'Court finds former Samoa PM guilty of contempt', RNZ, 24 March 2022, [online](#).

⁸⁸ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Sasina to reassess banishment', *Samoa Observer*, 1 September 2024, [online](#).

⁸⁹ Marieta Heidi Ilalio, 'Conspirators guilty submit prosecution Samoa', *Samoa Observer*, 24 November 2025, [online](#).

a political rival, MP Lealailepule Rimoni Aiafi, and Sāmoan Police Commissioner Auapa'au Logoitino Filipo were involved in a 2021 fatal hit-and-run incident. The matter is still before the courts. During the 2025 election, La'aulialemalietoa also made defamatory allegations against Prime Minister Fiamē, accusing her of being involved in a high-profile murder case.⁹⁰ Police Commissioner Auapa'au was informed he must vacate his position not long after the new FAST 2 government was formed in October 2025. He had served in the Sāmoan police for 27 years.⁹¹ La'aulialemalietoa appointed himself as Minister of Police in the new government.⁹²

After coming into power as prime minister of the FAST 2 government, La'aulialemalietoa barred the Samoa Observer, the country's major newspaper, from interviewing members of cabinet.⁹³ He next announced a ban on all paid government public notices and advertising in the Sāmoan private media—a major source of income for them and ensuring there would be one voice on government news.⁹⁴ Then his government's restrictive new media policy was released, which imposes drastic new restrictions on domestic and foreign journalists in Sāmoa, including checks on their 'political alignment'.⁹⁵ It looks remarkably like a China Model media reform.

La'aulialemalietoa's participation in early parliamentary diplomacy with China shows how such programs can mature over time and yield political dividends in the long run.

Sāmoa-China Friendship Association

Friendship is a political term in CCP united front work. The CCP adopted the terminology of political "friendship" for united front purposes from the Soviet Union.⁹⁶ Since 2018, La'aulialemalietoa has been President of united front organisation the Sāmoa-China Friendship Association (萨摩亚中国友好

⁹⁰ Lagi Keresoma, 'Fiaame seeks \$1.1M in defamation lawsuit against Laaulialemalietoa', *Talamua News*, 16 October 2025, [online](#).

⁹¹ 'Cabinet Decision: Samoa Police Commissioner told to Vacate Office', *Samoa Global News*, 9 October 2025, [online](#).

⁹² Doug Dingwall, Adel Fruean, Nick Sas, 'Who is Samoa's new prime minister, Laaulialemalietoa Polataivao Fosi Schmidt?', *ABC*, 25 September 2025, [online](#).

⁹³ 'Samoan PM bans nation's only newspaper from government access', *RNZ*, 18 November 2025, [online](#).

⁹⁴ 'Samoa Govt will stop advertising in private media', *Talanei.com*, 3 December 2025, [online](#).

⁹⁵ Jarrett Malifa, 'Gagged: media rules emerge Samoa', *Samoa Observer*, 7 December 2025, [online](#).

⁹⁶ See Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the foreign serve China: managing foreigners in the People's Republic*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.

协会), an organisation that has almost no online profile.⁹⁷ In 2020, Prime Minister Tuila'epa was described as “honorary president” of the Sāmoa-China Friendship Society.⁹⁸ It is not known if Prime Minister Fiamē then took on the same role when she became prime minister. La'aulialemalietoa and Tuila'epa were formerly in government together, but they are certainly not allies now. China targets political elites for united front efforts because of their proximity to power and influence, across all party lines and allegiances.

As president of the Sāmoa-China Friendship Association, since 2018 La'aulialemalietoa has been Sāmoa's delegate on the board of the Pacific China Friendship Association.⁹⁹ This organisation was set up to cultivate Pacific elites and normalise China's dual-use activities in the region.¹⁰⁰ Its parent body is CCP united front body the Chinese People's Association of Friendship with Foreign Countries, who take the lead in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative and developing united front links at the local government level.

La'aulialemalietoa is the most the most senior and politically active of all delegates on the Pacific China Friendship Association board. He was given pride of place when he attended the 2023 meeting of the Pacific China Friendship Association in Fujian. The Sāmoa-China Friendship Association has sent delegates to Pacific-China Friendship Association annual meetings since 2018.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Pacific China Friendship Association, ‘PCFA-Profile-2022’, [online](#).

⁹⁸ ‘户思社副会长应邀出席庆祝中国萨摩亚建交 45 周年招待会’ [Vice President of CPAFFC Hu Sishe attends reception celebrating the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Samoa], Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, 12 November 2020, [online](#).

⁹⁹ Pacific China Friendship Association, ‘PCFA-Profile-2022’, [online](#).

¹⁰⁰ Anne-Marie Brady, ‘When China knocks at the door of New Caledonia’, ASPI, Special Report, 23 August 2024; [online](#).

¹⁰¹ Ma Zhiping, ‘2018 Friendship Forum convenes in Haikou’, [chinadaily.com.cn](#), 23 November 2018, [online](#).



La'aulialemalietoa, who at the time was the Minister of Agriculture in the FAST 1 government attending the China-Pacific People's Friendship Forum in Fujian in May 2023.



A photo from the China-Pacific People's Friendship Forum listing La'aulialemalietoa as President of the Samoa-China Friendship Association.



China-Pacific People's Friendship Forum conference photo. La'aulialemalietoa does not appear in this photo, *online*.

- PCFA Permanent Patron and Board Chairperson:

THE PRINCESS ROYAL, HER ROYAL HIGHNESS, PRINCESS SALOTE MAFILE'O PIOLEVU TUITA

- Board Members are all Presidents of Friendship Association Members of PCFA

1. American Samoa: Mr. Pa'u Roy AUSAGE
2. Australia: Ms. Jan EVERETT
3. Cook Islands: Mr. Sam NAPA
4. Federated States of Micronesia: Mr. YANG Gang
5. Fiji: Ms. Fang Fang JAMADAS
6. French Polynesia: Ms. Dhana BRILLIANT
7. New Caledonia: Mr. Johanito WAMYTAM
8. New Zealand: Mr. Chris LIPSCOMBE
9. Māori: Ms. Patricia TAUROA
10. Niue: Mr. LI Jun
11. Palau: Mr. Christopher KITALONG
12. Samoa: Hon. Laauli SCHIMDT
13. Solomon Islands: Mr. Alfred SASAKO
14. Tonga: Mr. Siosiaia Moehau
15. Vanuatu: Ms. Elaine LAM
16. Wallis & Futuna: Mr. Mikaele KULIMOETOKE

- PCFA President: Dr. Hiria OTTINO
- PCFA Secretary General: Ms. Anthony LEONG
- PCFA Board Secretary: Ms. Mishka TUIFUA

Pacific China Friendship Association in 2022, *online*.

Cultivating influence through business opportunities: The Sasina Nexus

Sasina is a small seaside village on the furthest corner of the island of Savai'i, part of the district of Gaga'ifomauga, with a population of about 540 (2021 census).¹⁰² It lies within Gaga'ifomauga No. 3, the constituency represented by Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa Leuatea Schmidt.

Because Sasina is La'aulialemalietoa's home village, any project anchored there carries political and symbolic weight for his constituency and authority. That connection makes Sasina a focal point for a cluster of ambitious, China-linked ventures—many speculative, opaque, or possibly phantom. Even when they do not fully materialise, these ventures bind business interests, expectations, and obligations to La'aulialemalietoa's political base.

In April 2023, an event at the St. Regis Hotel in Hong Kong revealed how the various threads intersect.¹⁰³ Minister of Finance Mulipola Anarosa Ale Molio'o was photographed attending the launch of the Sāmoa Stock Exchange, the Sāmoa Digital Asset Exchange, and the Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone—all claiming to be based in Sasina village.¹⁰⁴ Sasina's modest open-sided wooden and cinder block public buildings and dirt roads show no indication of the existence of these entities, they exist on paper only.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, *Census 2021 Final report*, Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 2021, [online](#).

¹⁰³ '崛起的金融新星, 薩摩亞將成為南太平洋新金融中心' [Rising financial star: Sāmoa set to become the new financial hub of the South Pacific], 香港商報 [Hong Kong Commercial Daily], 28 April 2024, [online](#).

¹⁰⁴ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Crypto companies paid millions to Sasina', *Samoa Observer*, 29 March 2025, [online](#).

¹⁰⁵ View images of Sasina village here, [online](#).



'At the inauguration ceremony of the two enterprises and one SEZ in Sāmoa jointly held by Kangmeng Group and the Sāmoan government, Zhu Hua, chairman of Kangmeng Group, and representatives of the Sāmoan government jointly unveiled the project, symbolising the official launch of the global strategic cooperation between [China and Sāmoa]', [online](#).

Local reporting described the attendance as contentious: Mulipola's presence at the event and the launch of the SEZ were apparently against the wishes of Prime Minister Fiamē.¹⁰⁶ Also present of course was La'aulialemalietoa, then Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries,¹⁰⁷ though unusually, he was not in the photo lineup.

The launch attracted CCP united front leaders, including members of united front organisations the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the Hong Kong General Assembly for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, 'Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead', *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

¹⁰⁷ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Chinese firms change address to Savaii', *Samoa Observer*, 9 December 2023, [online](#).

¹⁰⁸ Hong Kong Commercial Daily [香港商報], '崛起的金融新星： 薩摩亞將成為南太平洋新金融中心' [Rising financial star: Sāmoa set to become the new financial hub of the South Pacific], 28 April 2023, [online](#).



Sāmoa Digital Currency Exchange, Sāmoa Stock Exchange, and Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone Establishment Ceremony and Press Conference in Hong Kong, [online](#).

During the event, Yao Zhisheng, a Standing Committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Standing Committee, outlined a vision to transform 50,000 acres in Sāmoa into 3,000 villas, 54 (sic) golf courses, a China-Sāmoa international university, hospitals, hotels, wellness centres, nursing homes, and more. Sāmoa would become a new financial hub for the Pacific.¹⁰⁹

Hong Kong-based company, Sāmoa Trade and Investment Promotion for Hong Kong and Asian Countries (Sāmoa HKA), organised the event,¹¹⁰ and its President, Luna Chen, was at the launch.¹¹¹ Luna Chen is the daughter of Chen Ke'en, Jack Chen (陈克恩, CHEN Ke'en), who has a long association with La'aulialemalietoa, and Sāmoa. Chen Gen, Jack's brother, was also at the launch.¹¹²

Sāmoa HKA, calls itself “the bridge between China and Sāmoa”. The company's website highlights its plans for large-scale development projects

¹⁰⁹ Hong Kong Commercial Daily [香港商報], ‘崛起的金融新星：薩摩亞將成為南太平洋新金融中心’ [Rising financial star: Sāmoa set to become the new financial hub of the South Pacific], 28 April 2023, [online](#).

¹¹⁰ Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, ‘Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead’, *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

¹¹¹ Hong Kong Commercial Daily [香港商報], ‘崛起的金融新星： 薩摩亞將成為南太平洋新金融中心’ [Rising financial star: Sāmoa set to become the new financial hub of the South Pacific], 28 April 2023, [online](#).

¹¹² Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, ‘Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead’, *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

in Sāmoa, which were first promoted in 2018 to La'aulialemalietoa on a visit to China.¹¹³



On 1st October 2018, the Association lead Samoa VIPs to visit Mawei Port in Fujian Province, China to discuss about possible cooperation.

'About us', Samoa HKA, [online](#).

The Sāmoa HKA website outlines grand development schemes and steps for Chinese nationals to obtain Sāmoan citizenship and passports,¹¹⁴ and imagery suggesting La'aulialemalietoa's and the FAST Party's endorsement with checked tick-boxes.¹¹⁵

During the Hong Kong event, Zhu Hua, Chairman of Kangmeng Group and co-chairman of the Sāmoa Exchange, and the Sāmoan Minister of Finance Mulipola signed a strategic cooperation agreement on finance and trade.¹¹⁶ Hong Kong authorities only incorporated Kangmeng Group as a company

¹¹³ Sāmoa Trade and Investment Promotion For Hong Kong And Asian Countries, 'Invest Intro', 薩摩亞-亞洲及香港經貿發展促進會 [Sāmoa-Asia and Hong Kong Economic and Trade Development Association], accessed 13 April 2025, [online](#).

¹¹⁴ Sāmoa Trade and Investment Promotion for Hong Kong and Asian Countries, 'Immigration', 薩摩亞-亞洲及香港經貿發展促進會 [Sāmoa-Asia and Hong Kong Economic and Trade Development Association], accessed 14 April 2025, [online](#).

¹¹⁵ Sāmoa Trade and Investment Promotion for Hong Kong and Asian Countries, 'Immigration', 薩摩亞-亞洲及香港經貿發展促進會 [Sāmoa-Asia and Hong Kong Economic and Trade Development Association], accessed 14 April 2025, [online](#).

¹¹⁶ Jiuming Network [九鳴网络], '康盟集团：董事长受聘萨摩亚交易所中国区联席主席，开启国际合作新篇章' [Kangmeng Group: Chairman appointed as Co-Chairman of Sāmoa Exchange China, opening a new chapter in international cooperation], 29 April 2023, [online](#).

a few months before the event.¹¹⁷ Zhu Hua's businesses have been described as a "pyramid scheme".¹¹⁸

The Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone named La'aulialemalietoa's daughter, Isadora Schmidt, as a director until 11 March 2024.¹¹⁹ Both the Sāmoa Digital Asset Exchange and the Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone still list her as the contact person for their businesses.¹²⁰ All three businesses (the Sāmoa Stock Exchange, the Sāmoa Digital Asset Exchange, and the Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone) registered their office as the District Council Office in the village of Sasina in Savai'i, Gagaifomauga No. 3.¹²¹

Since 2010, the village of Sasina has received payments of US\$250,000 and more per annum from land leases to these three united front-connected Chinese companies.¹²² The companies have never developed any land. So, the question must be asked, La'aulialemalietoa's village leaders—and he is one of them of course—have received over US\$4 million for what exactly? Sasina is still the same as it was in 2010, a tiny hamlet with dirt roads and a cluster of houses.¹²³ Concerns have been raised for years about these payments, there has been no transparency around exactly what money people were paid, and if everyone in the village got some, or just a select few.¹²⁴

Sasina has a history of speculative projects. From 2008, Sasina village was also receiving \$US120,000 per annum from a U.S.-based company South Pacific Development Group L.L.C. for a 120-year lease on 600 acres of prime

¹¹⁷ Hong Kong Companies Directory, 'China KangMeng Group Limited', HK Company Directory, accessed 14 April 2025, [online](#).

¹¹⁸ Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, 'Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead', *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

¹¹⁹ Editorial, 'The mystery of the stock exchange companies needs clear answers', *Samoa Observer*, 16 March 2025, [online](#).

¹²⁰ Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour – Sāmoa, 'Sāmoa Digital Asset Exchange Ltd (201706619) [Private Company]', accessed 23 April 2025, [online](#); Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Labour – Sāmoa, 'Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone Ltd (201706623) [Private Company]', accessed 23 April 2025, [online](#).

¹²¹ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Rogue deal: Mulipola's stock exchange deal not approved', *Samoa Observer*, 9 March 2025, [online](#).

¹²² Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Crypto companies paid millions to Sasina', *Samoa Observer*, 29 March 2025, [online](#).

¹²³ Sasina, [online](#).

¹²⁴ Galumalemana Tipi Autagavaia, 'Samoa village customary land payments queried', *RNZ*, 10 April 2018, [online](#).

oceanfront to develop the Sasina Village Resort and a casino,¹²⁵ and to develop Asau airstrip and port.¹²⁶ Prime Minister Tuila'epa was keynote speaker at the signing ceremony.¹²⁷ An L.L.C. is a "limited liability company", used for tax advantages. The resort and casino were never built, and in 2020 the company was dis-established.¹²⁸



Residents from Gagaifomauga No.3. during the distribution of lease payments from the SEZ in past years, Samoa Observer, [online](#).

In January 2025, the IMF spoke out against the digital currency project saying it raised concerns of potential money laundering and terrorism financing. They also raised concerns about supervision of casinos in Sāmoa.¹²⁹ In March 2025, the Central Bank of Sāmoa said the plans for an SEZ with revenue of 2.5 billion tala, or \$US900 million to be hosted in Sasina, were just "too good to be true".¹³⁰ An ally of La'aulialemalietoa, who was associate Minister of Finance at the time of the launch of the Oceania Blockchain SEZ, Leota Laki Lamositele-Sio (Leota), publicly defended the plan, saying "it can be true".¹³¹ MP Lealailepule Rimoni Aiafi, the very

¹²⁵ 'South Pacific Development Group secures land deal for \$450 Million resort in Samoa', *Hotel News Resource*, 21 August 2008, [online](#); 'Hawaii company unsure when Samoa issues casino licences', *RNZ*, 9 July 2012, [online](#).

¹²⁶ Matai'a Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, 'Coral problem delays Asau Wharf revival', *Samoa Observer*, 17 June 2019, [online](#).

¹²⁷ 'Sāmoan-Savai'i Villages Resorts lease signing', YouTube, [online](#).

¹²⁸ 'South Pacific Development Group L.L.C.', Open Corporates, [online](#).

¹²⁹ 'Samoa', IMF, 2024 Article IV Consultation, [online](#).

¹³⁰ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Warning: CBS against Special Economic Zone', *Samoa Observer*, 17 March 2025, [online](#); Editorial: *A deal that is too good to be true*, *Samoa Observer*, 10 March 2025, [online](#).

¹³¹ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Crypto companies paid millions to Sasina', *Samoa Observer*, 29 March 2025, [online](#).

individual who La'aulialemalietoa made defamatory comments about in 2024, has been an outspoken opponent of the SEZ and cryptocurrency plans saying they are “very dangerous for a small country like Sāmoa”.¹³² He said they are linked to earlier plans by businessman Jack Chen to set up a casino in Sasina for Chinese visitors.

Jack Chen, a Sāmoan chief from China

Jack Chen (Chen Ke'en) is a Hong Kong–New Zealand businessman and former PLA serviceman¹³³—the PLA being the CCP’s army, not a neutral state military; membership signifies political trust.

Chinese media describe him as founder of the New Zealand Chinese Business Roundtable Council (新西兰华商圆桌),¹³⁴ an investment entity registered in New Zealand from 2008 to 2013.¹³⁵ He arrived in Sāmoa in 2006 and over the next decade built social legitimacy, political access, and commercial connections. The Sāmoa Digital Asset Exchange, the Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone, and the Sāmoa Stock Exchange all list a certain Jia Ling Chen, who happens to live at one of Jack Chen’s New Zealand residential addresses,¹³⁶ as a director and the contact person.¹³⁷

In 2011, Sasina village elders bestowed on Chen the matai (chiefly) title Tupa'ilelei, formally embedding him in the local chieftain system.¹³⁸ La'aulialemalietoa appears in photos of the ceremony alongside Chen and other influential figures.¹³⁹

¹³² Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, ‘Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead’, *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

¹³³ 陈克恩 [Chen Ke'en], [online](#).

¹³⁴ 萨摩亚诞生首位华人酋长 按习俗举行授予式’ [Sāmoa’s first Chinese matai is anointed with a customary conferment ceremony], 人民网 [*People’s Daily online*], 12 July 2011, [online](#).

¹³⁵ New Zealand Chinese Business Roundtable Council Investments Ltd, NZ Companies Office, [online](#).

¹³⁶ Jack Keen CHEN, NZ Companies Office, [online](#).

¹³⁷ Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour – Sāmoa, ‘Directors of Sāmoa Digital Asset Exchange Ltd (201706619) [Private Company]’, accessed 26 April 2025, [online](#); Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Labour – Sāmoa, ‘Directors of Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone Ltd (201706623) [Private Company]’, accessed 26 April 2025, [online](#); Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Labour – Sāmoa, ‘Sāmoa Stock Exchange Limited (1098) [Private Company]’, accessed 26 April 2025, [online](#).

¹³⁸ 萨摩亚诞生首位华人酋长 按习俗举行授予式’ [Sāmoa’s first Chinese matai is anointed with a customary conferment ceremony], 人民网 [*People’s Daily online*], 12 July 2011, [online](#).

¹³⁹ 萨摩亚诞生首位华人酋长 按习俗举行授予式’ [Sāmoa’s first Chinese matai is anointed with a customary conferment ceremony], 人民网 [*People’s Daily online*], 12 July 2011, [online](#).



La'aulialemalietoa with Jack Chen and a business associate at his matai ceremony, People's Daily, 12 July 2011, [online](#).

Immediately after the matai ceremony, Chen led a 16-member “business family” delegation—including former All Blacks star Savae La’aulialemalietoa Michael Jones, Reef Group representatives, then-Speaker La’aulialemalietoa, and oddly, a Buddhist monk George Wou (Ng Siu Quing)—to discuss investment opportunities.¹⁴⁰

That same year, Jack Chen donated about US \$147 000 to the Sāmoa Rugby Union for the national team’s Rugby World Cup campaign.¹⁴¹ In 2012, he signed a lease with Sasina landowners to develop noni plantations for export to China—leasing 500 acres at US \$125 000 per year.¹⁴² La’aulialemalietoa brokered the deal and was named as Chen’s business partner in the exports.¹⁴³ At the second annual payment ceremony, however, La’aulialemalietoa said he was “unclear and cannot recall the name of the company” making the payment, raising transparency concerns.¹⁴⁴ In 2016, Prime Minister Tuila’epa acknowledged that no noni farm had been developed.¹⁴⁵

Across the Pacific, Chinese-owned noni farms have been associated with PRC dual-use infrastructure—airstrips and wharfs in remote locations—prompting strategic concerns beyond agriculture. In 2012, Chen faced money-laundering allegations in Hong Kong.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ ‘萨摩亚诞生首位华人酋长 按习俗举行授予式’ [Samoa's First Chinese Chief Emerges; Conferment Ceremony Held According to Custom], 人民网 [People's Daily online], 12 July 2011, [online](#).

¹⁴¹ Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, ‘Govt. defends Chen’, *Samoa Observer*, 12 June 2016, [online](#).

¹⁴² ‘Samoa village customary land payments queried’, RNZ, 10 April 2018, [online](#).

¹⁴³ ‘Village in Samoa positive of nonu deal with controversial Chinese businessman’, RNZ, 22 March 2012, [online](#).

¹⁴⁴ Joyetter Feagaimaali'i-Luamanu, ‘\$250,000 for Sasina village’, *Samoa Observer*, 7 April 2018, [online](#).

¹⁴⁵ Gatoaitele Savea Sano Malifa, ‘Jailed Tupa'i Jack Chen, a philanthropist?’, *Samoa Observer*, 19 June 2016, [online](#).

¹⁴⁶ ‘Village in Samoa positive of nonu deal with controversial Chinese businessman’.

La'aulialemalietoa publicly defended him, insisting the charges were unrelated to the Sasina project.¹⁴⁷

In 2016, Chen was convicted in Hong Kong of conspiracy to defraud and laundering more than US \$10 million connected to the Crafar Farms deal and was sentenced to seven years and nine months in prison.¹⁴⁸ The conviction was overturned in 2019 due to a legal error; a 2021 retrial collapsed over procedural issues, and the case remains before Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal as of 2025.

Chen Gen, Jack's brother, was also at the launch of the Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone.¹⁴⁹ Chen Gen, is banned for life from operating finance companies in China for financial misconduct.¹⁵⁰ Luna Chen—often described as Jack Chen's daughter—is the President of the Sāmoa Trade and Investment Promotion for Hong Kong and Asian Countries which launched the SEZ scheme.¹⁵¹

Deploying tourism for strategic purposes

At the 2023 Hong Kong launch of the Oceania Blockchain Special Economic Zone, it was also announced that Kangmeng Group and Sāmoa Airways would begin direct flights between China and Sāmoa in May 2024.¹⁵²

Sāmoa Airways is wholly government owned.¹⁵³ The idea of direct flights between China and Sāmoa had circulated for years, despite weak demand. The following month, the first direct flight ceremony was held in China's Haikou,¹⁵⁴ but it unleashed a series of events that exacerbated the FAST government's political divide over China's dual-use activities in Sāmoa.

¹⁴⁷ 'Village in Samoa positive of nonu deal with controversial Chinese businessman'.

¹⁴⁸ Jenée Tibshraeny, 'One of the masterminds behind a fraudulent bid to buy the Crafar farms has defaulted on an ASB mortgage over one of his frozen Auckland properties', *Interest.co.nz*, 12 December 2017, [online](#).

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, 'Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead', *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

¹⁵⁰ Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, 'Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead', *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

¹⁵¹ Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, 'Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead', *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

¹⁵² '康盟集团：董事长受聘萨摩亚交易所中国区联席主席，开启国际合作新篇章' [Kangmeng Group: Chairman appointed as Co-Chairman of Samoa Exchange China, opening a new chapter in international cooperation], 九鸣网络 [Jiuming Net], 29 April 2023, [online](#).

¹⁵³ Digital Logistics Capacity Assessments, '2.2 Samoa aviation', Logistic Cluster, accessed 14 April 2025, [online](#).

¹⁵⁴ '康盟集团&萨摩亚国际战略合作发布会暨"帝王一号"航线开通' [Kangmeng Group and Samoa International Strategic Cooperation Conference and the launch of the "Emperor One" route], Sohu, 28 May 2024, [online](#).

Tourism has often served as a lever for China's foreign interference activities.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, China is a major outbound tourism market, and Sāmoa has long sought to attract more Chinese visitors. In 2015, Sāmoa's Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labour set a goal of 6,000 Chinese tourists per year,¹⁵⁶ but by 2023 only 4,018 of 174,967 total visitors were from the PRC.¹⁵⁷

In 2016, China and Sāmoa signed an Air Service Agreement allowing both countries designated carriers to fly between and beyond their territories to third states such as New Zealand,¹⁵⁸ without limits on frequency or aircraft type.¹⁵⁹ Despite this agreement, no flights materialised. In 2018, then PRC Ambassador to Sāmoa Wang Xuefeng said the absence of direct flights was holding back Chinese tourism and he proposed opening charter services.¹⁶⁰

In 2019, CCP united front group the Pacific-China Friendship Association announced a Belt and Road Initiative plan to develop a network of Pacific hub airports linked by China using Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) hydroplanes.¹⁶¹ The AVIC hydroplane is a dual-use airplane with important military capabilities. It extends China's logistical capabilities and strategic mobility in island areas, eliminating the need for conventional runways.¹⁶²

The new BRI plan emphasised the need for visa-free access for PRC passport holders in Pacific Island states and scheduled direct China-Pacific flight routes.¹⁶³ La'aulialemalietoa as mentioned, is the Sāmoa representative on the Pacific China Friendship Association. In November 2019, Solomon Islands signed an agreement with AVIC to develop three airfields into

¹⁵⁵ Caleb Fotheringham, 'China using economic coercion to influence Palau's relationship with Taiwan - Palau leader', RNZ, 15 August 2024, [online](#).

¹⁵⁶ Anuelua Samuel Enari, 'Trade and investment: the Sāmoan experience', in *China and the Pacific: the view from Oceania* (2016), 220.

¹⁵⁷ Sāmoa Tourism Authority, 'Total Visitor Arrivals by Country/Year', accessed 7 April 2025, [online](#).

¹⁵⁸ Eirenei Ariu, 'Sāmoa Signs Air Service Agreement with China', *Government of Sāmoa*, 26 October 2016, [online](#); Government of the People's Republic of China and Government of the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'Flight Agreement Sāmoa-China', 24 October 2024, [online](#).

¹⁵⁹ Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Door opens for direct flights between China and Samoa', *Samoa Observer*, 25 October 2016, [online](#).

¹⁶⁰ 'China hoping for direct flights to Samoa', RNZ, 9 August 2018, [online](#).

¹⁶¹ Siamelie Latu, 'Implementing the Belt and Road Initiative in Tonga and Pacific Islands', *Matangi Tonga*, 31 July 2019, [online](#).

¹⁶² 'China certifies its giant amphibious aircraft AG600 Kunlong', *Aviaci Online*, 22 April 2025, [online](#).

¹⁶³ Siamelie Latu, 'Implementing the Belt and Road initiative in Tonga and Pacific Islands', *Matangi Tonga*, 31 July 2019, [online](#).

a regional Pacific air hub, connected back to China.¹⁶⁴ Sāmoa was seen as a logical next candidate to be another Pacific regional hub, since Faleolo International Airport had recently been doubled in capacity with PRC loans. The only other barrier to Sāmoa's involvement in this plan was direct China-Pacific flights and visa-free access for PRC tourists.

In 2019, Prime Minister Tuila'epa announced that the first China-Sāmoa charter flight would begin mid-year.¹⁶⁵ Just a week later, China launched the 2019 Year of Tourism for China and Pacific Island Countries with an event in Apia, attended by Chinese Minister of Culture and Tourism Lou Shugang. Acting Prime Minister Fiamē said the Year of Tourism for China and the Pacific was part of China's BRI Pacific plan.¹⁶⁶ However, no charter flights took place in 2019. Sāmoa then closed its borders from March 2020 until August 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶⁷

In 2021, PRC Ambassador Chao Xiaoliang raised the 2016 Air Service Agreement again, pressing for a direct flight link when Sāmoa reopened its borders.¹⁶⁸

In March 2023, the Sāmoan Tourism Authority hired Hong Kong-based firm Travel Focus, to promote Sāmoa tourism in China.¹⁶⁹ Travel Focus director Luna Chen, daughter of businessman and Sasina village matai Jack Chen, was the liaison for this project.¹⁷⁰ In the same month, La'aulialemalietao bestowed a matai title from Sasina village on PRC Ambassador Chao

¹⁶⁴ Stephen Dziedzic, Evan Wasuka and Iris Zhao, 'Leaked documents reveal Chinese company's aviation plans for Solomon Islands to become a 'regional hub'', ABC, 29 April 2022, [online](#).

¹⁶⁵ Lanuola Tusani Tupufia - Ah Tong, 'Govt. reveals direct China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Los Angeles Flights', *Samoa Observer*, 30 March 2019, [online](#).

¹⁶⁶ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'Year of Tourism for China and Pacific Island Countries launched in Sāmoa to promote cultural, personnel exchanges', Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 3 April 2019, [online](#).

¹⁶⁷ China Diplomatic Digest, 'China and the 'Pathway for the Development of Sāmoa'', 3 January 2024, [online](#).

¹⁶⁸ Chao Xiaoliang, 'Opener China, better opportunity for Sāmoa', Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 10 November 2021, [online](#).

¹⁶⁹ 张艺 [Zhang Yi], '海口⇒萨摩亚航线正式开通 拓展海南国际航线网络布局 [Haikou ⇒ Samoa route officially launched, expanding Hainan's international route network]', Hainan net, 28 May 2023, [online](#).

¹⁷⁰ Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, 'Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead', *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

Xiaoliang.¹⁷¹ After the ceremony, Tapa'iialofa Chao Xiaoliang told the villagers, "Sasina is my home."¹⁷²



Marc Membrere, 'Chinese Ambassador a Savai'i Matai', *Savali Newspaper*, 24 March 2023, [online](#).

Four days after the matai title was bestowed, Hainan Airlines announced they'd be running charter flights from Hainan to Sāmoa, and that flights would start in May 2023.¹⁷³ Yet when the first Hainan Airlines flight took off for Sāmoa, reports from Chinese government media described it as a regular weekly service, highlighting that it was China's first ever scheduled direct flight to a Pacific nation.¹⁷⁴ Hainan Airlines Group (HNA Group, 海南航空公司) is known as a source of funding for global united front activities.¹⁷⁵ The airline had previously been used for charter flights between China and New

¹⁷¹ 'Chao Xiaoliang, Chinese Ambassador to Samoa bestowed a chiefly title at Sasina', *Talamua News*, 18 March 2023, [online](#); Marc Membrere, 'Chinese ambassador a Savai'i matai', *Savali Newspaper*, 24 March 2023, [online](#).

¹⁷² Marc Membrere, 'Chinese ambassador a Savai'i matai', *Savali Newspaper*, 24 March 2023, [online](#).

¹⁷³ Prudence Lui, 'Samoa tourism makes its foray into China', *TTG Asia*, 28 March 2023, [online](#).

¹⁷⁴ 张艺 [Zhang Yi], '海口⇌萨摩亚航线正式开通 拓展海南国际航线网络布局' [The Haikou ⇌ Samoa route was officially launched to expand the layout of Hainan's international route network], *Hainan net*, 28 May 2023, [online](#); '中国至萨摩亚直飞航线首航' [First flight of direct flight from China to Samoa], *China News*, 29 May 2023, [online](#).

¹⁷⁵ HNA-CSR-S&R-2018-5, [online](#); Jenée Tibshraeny, 'Winston Peters pledges that he would block ANZ's sale of UDC to the HNA Group', *Interest.co.nz*, 1 February 2017, [online](#).

Caledonia, and separately to French Polynesia that were also initially planned to become a regular service.¹⁷⁶

The China-Sāmoa flights were coordinated by the Hainan government.¹⁷⁷ In May 2023, a ceremony celebrating the first direct flight was held in Hainan.¹⁷⁸ Three Sāmoan associate ministers, Faleomavaea Dickie Tafua, Niuava Eti Malolo and Maiava Fuimaono Tito and Board member of the Sāmoa Tourism Authority, Tupa'i Saleimoa Vaai, were present at the ceremony, as were several CCP united front organisations, including the Hainan Overseas Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the China Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs, the Hong Kong Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations, and the Hong Kong Chinese General Chamber of Commerce.¹⁷⁹ Jack Chen's brother, Chen Gen, who serves as Co-Chair of the Oceania Blockchain SEZ, delivered remarks in support of the new flights.¹⁸⁰ Chen is a leader in two CCP united front groups: the Honorary President of the Hong Kong Overseas Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, and Executive Chairman of the Overseas Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Hainan Province.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Anne-Marie Brady, 'When China knocks at the door of New Caledonia', ASPI, Special Report, 23 August 2024, [online](#).

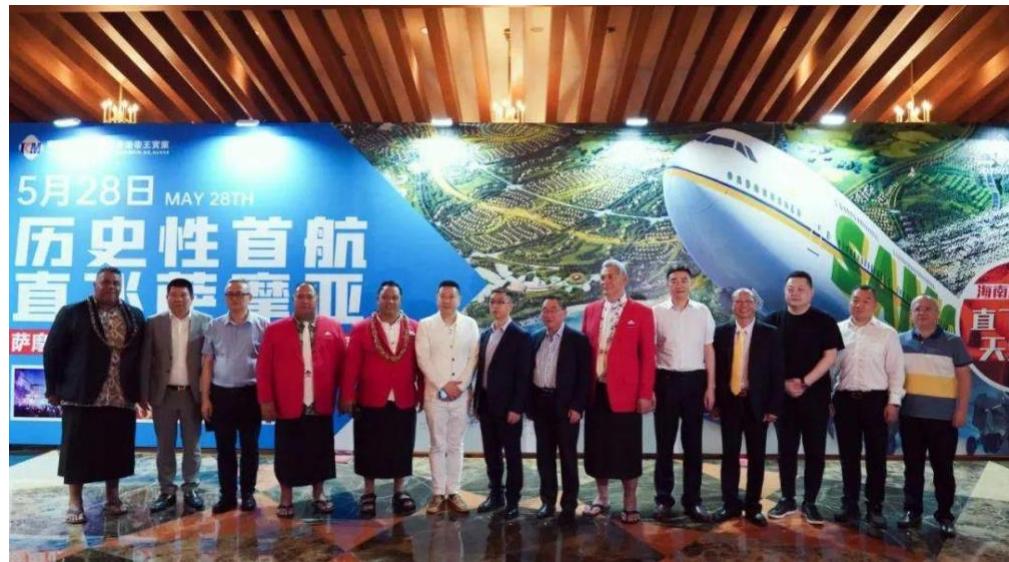
¹⁷⁷ Prudence Lui, 'Samoa tourism makes its foray into China', TTG Asia, 28 March 2023, [online](#).

¹⁷⁸ 糊了的生煎包, '康盟集团：传递中国文化，助力南太平洋天堂岛国萨摩亚旅游' [Kangmeng Group: promoting Chinese culture and supporting tourism in Samoa, a Paradise Island Nation in the South Pacific], 哔哩哔哩 [Bilibili], 21 June 2023, [online](#).

¹⁷⁹ 'First direct flight from China to Samoa Arrives to rousing welcome', Talamua Online, 29 May 2023, [online](#); '康盟集团&萨摩亚国际战略合作发布会暨“帝王一号” [Kangmeng Group & Samoa International Strategic Cooperation Launch Conference and 'Emperor No. 1' Route Opening], Sohu.Com, 28 May 2023, [online](#).

¹⁸⁰ '康盟集团&萨摩亚国际战略合作发布会暨“帝王一号”航线开通' [Kangmeng Group & Samoa International Strategic Cooperation Conference and the launch of the "Emperor One" route], Sohu, 28 May 2024, [online](#).

¹⁸¹ '康盟集团&萨摩亚国际战略合作发布会暨“帝王一号”航线开通' [Kangmeng Group & Samoa International Strategic Cooperation Conference and the launch of the "Emperor One" route], Sohu, 28 May 2024, [online](#).



'Authorised tourism promotion party by the Government of Sāmoa Hong Kong Emperor Holdings Limited, Fuda Tourism (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd., with the coordination and support of the Hainan Provincial Party Committee, Provincial Government, Hong Kong Overseas Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, and Hainan Overseas Chinese Chamber of Commerce', online.

The flight carried 300 Chinese entrepreneurs seeking investment opportunities in Sāmoa.¹⁸² The Sāmoa Tourism Authority hosted a welcoming ceremony on 28 May 2023;¹⁸³ a second flight arrived one week later with another 300 passengers.

Yet the flights lit a political bonfire, which further highlighted divisions within the Fiamē government over China. Soon after the first flight arrived, the Sāmoan media revealed that Sāmoa Royal Tours Ltd.—the company given exclusive hosting rights—had been incorporated only five weeks before the new route commenced.¹⁸⁴ The national business directory listed La'aulialemalietoa's daughter, Rosary F. Leilua, as the contact person,¹⁸⁵ and sole director of the company.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² 张艺 [Zhang Yi], '海口⇒萨摩亚航线正式开通 拓展海南国际航线网络布局'[Haikou ⇒ Samoa route officially launched, expanding Hainan's international route network], Hainan net, 28 May 2023, [online](#).

¹⁸³ 'First direct flight from China to Samoa arrives to rousing welcome', *Talamua Online*.

¹⁸⁴ The Editorial Board, 'The baffling tour experience', *Samoa Observer*, 1 June 2023, [online](#).

¹⁸⁵ The Editorial Board, 'The baffling tour experience', *Samoa Observer*, 1 June 2023, [online](#).

¹⁸⁶ Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour – Sāmoa, 'Sāmoa Royal Tours Ltd (202307608) [Private Company]', accessed 23 April 2025, [online](#).

It appears Aggie Grey's Hotel arranged the contract with Sāmoa Royal Tours.¹⁸⁷ The current owners of the hotel are China and New Zealand-based investors.¹⁸⁸

This arrangement fits a pattern of creating new entities linked to political elites to enable their participation in lucrative deals. Prime Minister Fiamē acknowledged the apparent conflict of interest in parliament, noting that Travel Focus Hong Kong had confirmed Minister La'aulialemalietoa's involvement.¹⁸⁹ The government severed ties with Travel Focus soon after.

No further flights were authorised, ostensibly due to aviation rules limiting two long haul charter flights per 28-day days. The Fiamē government initially said that Travel Focus was working with international regulators to secure permanent authorisation, with plans to resume flights in September 2023.¹⁹⁰ In August 2023, Civil Aviation Minister Olo Fiti Va'ai said Sāmoa was negotiating with Hainan Airlines for a code-share agreement with Sāmoa Airways and possible extension to New Zealand routes.¹⁹¹ He said Hainan Airline was now proposing three to four flights from China to Sāmoa per week.¹⁹²

Although Sāmoa has yet to reinstate the flights, during Prime Minister Fiamē's visit to China in November 2024, the two countries agreed to pursue a visa-free arrangement.¹⁹³ Sāmoa had previously granted visa-free entry to Hong Kong (1996) and Macau (2000).¹⁹⁴ A Mutual Visa Exemption Agreement was signed in January 2025 and entered into force on 2 April 2025.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁷ The Editorial Board, 'The baffling tour experience', *Samoa Observer*, 1 June 2023, [online](#).

¹⁸⁸ Joyetter Feagaimaali'i-Luamanu, 'Iconic hotel Aggie Grey's sale talks', *Samoa Observer*, 2 October 2017, [online](#); 'Samoa promotes Chinese investors', RNZ, 12 January 2018, [online](#); 'Integrity Investments Holding Limited/He Wanying', Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, [online](#).

¹⁸⁹ Joyetter Feagaimaali'i, 'Samoa's plan for Chinese visitors stumbles on Minister's ties to tour company', *Benar News*, 21 June 2023, [online](#).

¹⁹⁰ Talaia Mika, 'China flights postponed to September.', *Samoa Observer*, 11 June 2023, [online](#).

¹⁹¹ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Hainan Airline to start flying next month', *Samoa Observer*, 15 August 2023, [online](#).

¹⁹² Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Hainan Airline to start flying next month', *Samoa Observer*, 15 August 2023, [online](#).

¹⁹³ Xinhua, 'Full Text: Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and the Independent State of Samoa', *Chinadailyhk*, 27 November 2024, [online](#).

¹⁹⁴ Iati Iati, 'China and Samoa', *China in Oceania*, New York: Berghahn Books 2010, 154.

¹⁹⁵ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'China-Sāmoa Mutual Visa Exemption Agreement coming into effect soon', 14 March 2025, [online](#).

Officials in American Sāmoa raised concerns about the policy's border-security implications, warning that the new visa-free arrangement could facilitate PRC entry into the U.S. territory.¹⁹⁶ In response, officials have suggested reviewing and tightening entry requirements for Sāmoans traveling to American Sāmoa.¹⁹⁷ Sāmoan citizens, by contrast, may only apply for a 14-day entry permit if they have an American sponsor.¹⁹⁸

From elite capture to internal split

In September 2023, the Fiamē government quietly reshuffled its Cabinet: Mulipola lost the Finance portfolio. La'aulialemalietoa faced no sanction at this time,¹⁹⁹ though Fiamē later stated that both ministers had been involved in Chinese-linked initiatives.²⁰⁰ La'aulialemalietoa himself said Mulipola's participation in the Hong Kong SEZ launch likely prompted her reassignment to Minister of Women, Community, and Social Development.²⁰¹

At the start of 2025, Sāmoan authorities charged La'aulialemalietoa with a series of offences including conspiracy and harassment—against an Opposition MP who'd raised public concerns about the Sasina SEZ.²⁰² In February, Prime Minister Fiamē asked La'aulialemalietoa to resign; when he refused, she dismissed him from Cabinet,²⁰³ along with Mulipola and another minister Leota Laki Sio Lamositele.²⁰⁴

In retaliation, La'aulialemalietoa expelled Fiamē and six others from the FAST party, leaving her at the government's helm without a political base.²⁰⁵ Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, long-time HRPP leader and former Prime

¹⁹⁶ 'Concerns about Samoa and China's visa agreement', *Talanei*, 4 February 2025, [online](#).

¹⁹⁷ 'Amata cautions Pacific about China's economic help', *Talanei*, 29 January 2025, [online](#).

¹⁹⁸ 'Entry Requirements 2025', Visit Pago Pago, 6 March 2021, [online](#); American Samoa Department of Legal Affairs, '14 Day Permit Info', Department of Legal Affairs, accessed 8 April 2025, [online](#).

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Wright and Mary Zhao, 'Samoa wanted Chinese tourists – it got a dreamer and grifters instead', *Benar News*, 29 November 2023, [online](#).

²⁰⁰ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Rogue deal: Mulipola's Stock Exchange deal not approved', *Samoa Observer*, 9 March 2025, [online](#).

²⁰¹ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Crypto companies paid millions to Sasina', *Samoa Observer*, 29 March 2025, [online](#).

²⁰² Grace Tinetali-Fiavaai, 'What you need to know about Samoa's political crisis', *RNZ*, 5 February 2025, [online](#).

²⁰³ Grace Tinetali-Fiavaai, 'What you need to know about Samoa's political crisis', *RNZ*, 5 February 2025, [online](#).

²⁰⁴ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Crypto companies paid millions to Sasina', *Samoa Observer*, 29 March 2025, [online](#).

²⁰⁵ Grace Tinetali-Fiavaai, 'What you need to know about Samoa's political crisis', *RNZ*, 5 February 2025, [online](#).

Minister, then launched a no-confidence motion against Fiamē, citing FAST's internal split.²⁰⁶ The motion failed when FAST temporarily reunited.²⁰⁷ Tuila'epa then denounced La'aulialemalietoa as a hypocrite for not supporting his move to oust Fiamē.²⁰⁸

The following week, La'aulialemalietoa tabled his own no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Fiamē.²⁰⁹ Because he and Tuila'epa remained divided, the HRPP joined Fiamē's faction, and the motion was again defeated.²¹⁰ The dismissed Mulipola and Leota sided with La'aulialemalietoa.²¹¹

Prime Minister Fiamē then accused Mulipola of signing a secret agreement at the Hong Kong SEZ launch, though she had herself previously denied that Mulipola signed any documents.²¹² Mulipola publicly challenged her to present evidence, which she never did.²¹³

Having survived two no-confidence votes, Fiamē's government finally collapsed in May 2025 when the Parliament failed to approve her budget. In the new government sworn after the September elections, Mulipola became Minister of Finance again, La'aulialemalietoa ascended to Prime Minister, and Leota lost his seat.

The Fiamē government's internal divisions and failure in May 2025 to pass the budget, followed by the snap election, could be understood as a failed pushback against China's elite capture and political interference.

²⁰⁶ Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, 'Fiamē still PM, no confidence motion fails', *Samoa Observer*, 26 February 2025, [online](#).

²⁰⁷ Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, 'Fiamē still PM, no confidence motion fails', *Samoa Observer*, 26 February 2025, [online](#).

²⁰⁸ Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, 'Fiamē still PM, no confidence motion fails', *Samoa Observer*, 26 February 2025, [online](#).

²⁰⁹ Grace Tinetali-Fiavaai, 'Samoan PM defeats second no-confidence Vote in two weeks', RNZ, 6 March 2025, [online](#).

²¹⁰ Grace Tinetali-Fiavaai, 'Samoan PM defeats second no-confidence Vote in two weeks', RNZ, 6 March 2025, [online](#).

²¹¹ Staff Reporter, 'Second motion of no confidence against Prime Minister and Cabinet rejected by 32-19', *Samoa Global News*, 6 March 2025, [online](#).

²¹² Staff Reporters, 'I never signed any Hong Kong agreement as PM Said - Mulipola', *Talamua Online*, 11 March 2025, [online](#).

²¹³ Staff Reporters, 'I never signed any Hong Kong agreement as PM Said - Mulipola', *Talamua Online*, 11 March 2025, [online](#).



Mulipola with an unknown agreement at the launch of the SEZ, [online](#).

Sub-national relations as a vector for foreign influence

Subnational engagement with the PRC suffers from the same asymmetry that characterises the broader relationship: China's party-state controls its subnational entities through a rigid hierarchy stretching from the Politburo down to the county level. Dedicated agencies exploit this imbalance by managing all "friendship" partnerships under CCP direction in the name of people-to-people ties.

China uses "friendship-city" relations at the sub-national level to cultivate local level leaders, offer political and economic advantages to MPs within their constituencies, and advance local dual-use projects which may not be accepted by central government leaders. The agency responsible for these partnerships is the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), which operates under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (which is affiliated with the United Front Work Department), and the CCP International Liaison Department.²¹⁴

Sāmoa's first ever "friendship city" partnership began in 2014 between the megacity of Shenzhen in Guangdong Province and Apia, the capital of

²¹⁴ Anne-Marie Brady, 'Party faithful--how China spies, and how to resist,' *Australian Foreign Affairs*, July 2020.

Sāmoa, and was formally signed in 2015.²¹⁵ Guangdong, home to many of the Chinese contract labourers who came to Sāmoa in the colonial era is now a major hub for China's Pacific-focused organisations such as the China-Pacific Island Countries Center for Disaster Risk Reduction Cooperation.

2014 is significant as the year China expanded the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to the Pacific. It is also the year that Sāmoa became a strategic partner of China and signed a deal with China for a \$US55 million loan to redevelop Faleolo Airport—originally a WWII base. The World Bank later assessed the airport project as “over-scaled” for the needs of Sāmoa, and breaching agreed borrowing costs indicators.²¹⁶

At the 2015 Shenzhen-Apia partnership signing ceremony, officials emphasised that the new friendship city link was part of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's new strategic order.²¹⁷ Yet Sāmoa did not become a member of BRI until 2018. There was external and internal concern about the strategic implications of Sāmoa's growing links with China.

Prime Minister Tuila'epa expressed hope that the next step of the friendship city link would be agreements with airlines in Shenzhen to bring Chinese tourists to Sāmoa.²¹⁸ Later in 2015, Tuila'epa signed another friendship city agreement, this time with Huizhou, a nearby city of Shenzhen that was also in Guangdong Province.²¹⁹ Tuila'epa signed six Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with Huizhou. The MOUs included medical equipment for the Tupua Tamasese Meaole Hospital in Apia, an electronic teaching platform for Sāmoa's 23 high schools, and 60 hardship scholarships for students in Sāmoa for three years. Huizhou also agreed to finance the Sāmoa-China Friendship Park and a Cultural Center.²²⁰

The Friendship Park, built by the state-owned Shanghai Construction Group—the same firm that handled the Faleolo Airport expansion—was

²¹⁵ Eirenei Ariu, 'Apia signs sister-city agreement with Shenzhen', *Government of Sāmoa*, 31 August 2015, [online](#).

²¹⁶ 'China Eximbank provides RMB 340 million government concessional loan for Faleolo International Airport Upgrade Project', AidData, [online](#).

²¹⁷ Eirenei Ariu, 'Apia signs sister-city agreement with Shenzhen', *Government of Sāmoa*, 31 August 2015, [online](#).

²¹⁸ 'Apia and Shenzhen linked in sister city deal', RNZ, 1 September 2015, [online](#).

²¹⁹ 'Samoa signs MOU with China's Huizhou City', *PNG Today*, 17 November 2015, [online](#).

²²⁰ 'Huizhou Municipal Government grant in 2017 for the Sāmoa-China Friendship Park Project', China Aid Data, [online](#); James Robertson, 'Chinese company warned over construction breaches', *Samoa Observer*, 20 September 2020, [online](#).

marred by substandard workmanship and debris hazards.²²¹ A confidential exchange between Chinese and Sāmoan officials later leaked²²² to the Epoch Times revealed concerns over rubbish and exposed wiring at the construction site.²²³ The Sāmoa Observer corroborated these events in independent reporting.²²⁴

To contain the fallout, the Sāmoan government allowed the PRC Embassy to publish a rebuttal on the official Sāmoan Government website the day after the Sāmoa Observer article was published.²²⁵ The Embassy dismissed the Epoch Times as a source, saying it was an “illegal cult organisation”²²⁶ and called the criticisms “absurd”.²²⁷ The Sāmoan government quickly released its own statement, asserting that Shanghai Construction Group had completed remedial work to the satisfaction of the Planning and Urban Management Agency.²²⁸

The episode underscored mounting domestic unease about Sāmoa’s growing debt and the opaque nature of Chinese-funded projects, many of which carried dual-use potential.²²⁹ The leaking of bilateral documents indicate that Sāmoan officials were worried too.

²²¹ James Robertson, ‘Chinese company warned over construction breaches’, *Samoa Observer*, 20 September 2020, [online](#).

²²² Nicole Hao, ‘China’s park project in Samoa saddled with quality concerns: leaked documents’, *The Epoch Times*, 18 September 2020, [online](#); James Robertson, ‘Chinese company warned over construction breaches’, *Samoa Observer*, 20 September 2020, [online](#).

²²³ James Robertson, ‘Chinese company warned over construction breaches’, *Samoa Observer*, 20 September 2020, [online](#).

²²⁴ James Robertson, ‘Chinese company warned over construction breaches’, *Samoa Observer*, 20 September 2020, [online](#).

²²⁵ The Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘Press Release; the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China responds to Samoa Observer’s article; “Chinese company warned over construction breaches”’, 21 September 2020, [online](#).

²²⁶ The Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘Press Release; the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China responds to Samoa Observer’s article; “Chinese company warned over construction breaches”’, 21 September 2020, [online](#).

²²⁷ The Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘Press Release; the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China responds to Sāmoa Observer’s article; “Chinese company warned over construction breaches”’, 21 September 2020, [online](#).

²²⁸ Ministry of Works, Transport and Infrastructure, ‘Press Release; MWI responds to Samoa Observer article’, 21 September 2020, [online](#).

²²⁹ Joyetter Luamanu, ‘P.M. rubbishes claims about debt to China’, *Samoa Observer*, 11 January 2018, [online](#); Alexander Rheeney, ‘Taking a breather on China’s Belt and Road Initiative’, *Samoa Observer*, 16 October 2018, [online](#).

Teaching authoritarianism: China's global training push

China's overseas training programs for foreign elites—both short and long term—serve as a key instrument to export its authoritarian governance model, advance Xi Jinping's vision of a "community with a shared future for mankind,"²³⁰ and cultivate assets.

Since launching the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, Beijing has dramatically expanded in-country training programmes across the Pacific. Between October 2013 and December 2017, China hosted Sāmoan officials in six senior civil-service research courses, eight tropical aquaculture training courses, and six tropical crop sessions. During that period, 102 Sāmoan students received full PRC government scholarships.²³¹ These exchanges have since become a pillar of bilateral cooperation. Since 2018, numbers of between 300 and 350 Sāmoan trainees go to China each year, in fields ranging from civil servants, teachers, chefs, farmers, medical personnel, journalists, scientists, artists, entrepreneurs, and NGO workers.²³² In such a small population that is a phenomenal number of people coming to study the China Model.



'Chinese Embassy in Samoa and Samoa Public Service Commission Co-host Exchange Meeting for Participants of Training Programs in China', PRC Embassy Sāmoa, 28 October 2025, [online](#).

²³⁰ '第三次中国—太平洋岛国外长会联合声明' [Joint Statement of the Third China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting], PRC MFA, 28 May 2025, [online](#).

²³¹ 石莹丽[Shi Yingli], 中国对萨摩亚援助述论' [A discussion on China's aid to Sāmoa], 苏州科技大学学报(社会科学版) [Journal of Suzhou University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)], Issue 4, 2018.

²³² '驻萨摩亚大使王雪峰在 2018 萨摩亚公共管理与人力资源管理研修班学员座谈会上的讲话' [Speech by Wang Xuefeng, Ambassador to Sāmoa, at the 2018 Sāmoa Public Administration and Human Resources Management Training Course student symposium], MOFA, 5 October 2018, [online](#).

In 2014, China launched the Youth of Excellence Scheme, offering 200 full Masters scholarships to mid-career government officials to study at PRC universities. China began offering these scholarships to Pacific applicants from 2017.²³³ Only Sāmoan officials holding senior positions in government bodies, universities or scientific research institutions, or who have work experience in international organisations are eligible to apply. The numbers going to China for both short and long-term training has continued to rise each year.

The Global Security Initiative: A China-centred public security network

Police cooperation has become a central pillar of China's expanding dual use presence in the Pacific, framed under Xi Jinping's Global Security Initiative. China is trying to set up a cross-Pacific policing network in parallel to the existing order. The shape of it is becoming increasingly apparent, but initially it was through small gestures of support to Pacific police forces like Sāmoa, focused on relationship-building. There were no doubt multiple interactions, few publicised.

Sāmoa, which has no military and a police force of roughly 900 officers—including a small maritime unit with a single patrol vessel—has proven a convenient and low-resistance target for Chinese influence operations. The Sāmoa Police Service has historically been perceived as under-resourced and prone to corruption, making it especially vulnerable to external inducement.²³⁴

The 2020 Zhenhua database listed two former Sāmoan police commissioners among its intelligence targets—one serving in the 1990s, the other in the early 2000s—illustrating the CCP's long-term interest in Sāmoa's internal security apparatus.

The first observable sign of cooperation between Sāmoan police and China came in 2015, when the Tuilaepa government accepted Beijing's offer to fund and build a Police Academy on a projected budget of US \$15 million.²³⁵

²³³ 'CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: Youth of Excellence Scheme of China Program 2025/2026', Sāmoa Public Service Commission, 17 January 2025, [online](#).

²³⁴ 'The man who led major reforms to Samoa's police service resigns', *Samoa Global News*, 23 August 2021, [online](#).

²³⁵ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Mid-year opening for new police academy', *Samoa Observer*, 22 March 2024, [online](#).

Designed by Shanghai Architecture Engineering company and built by Shaanxi Construction Engineering Group, the academy was finally opened in 2024, after delays and limited transparency over financing.²³⁶ Neither of the two state-owned firms had any experience building either police or training facilities, which may explain the problematic design—the academy has very few classrooms. Large meetings must be held in the gymnasium, which is open-sided, so unavailable on windy or rainy days.²³⁷ Only one year after opening the paint is peeling on the buildings and cracks have appeared in the concrete.

The academy has been designed as a regional training hub for police across the Pacific.²³⁸ The PRC Ambassador said that the new academy will cooperate closely with the China-Pacific Island Countries Police Training Centre in Fujian Province²³⁹—designated as one China's Belt and Road projects for the Pacific²⁴⁰—which had itself only been launched in 2024.²⁴¹ The head of the China-Pacific Island Countries Police Training Centre and five other PSB personnel attended the opening ceremony of the Sāmoa Police Academy.²⁴²

²³⁶ 'Chinese Government provides RMB 100 million grant for Police Academy Construction Project', AidData, [online](#).

²³⁷ '\$33 million Samoa police training academy opens at Tafaigata—August 2024', Government of Samoa, [online](#).

²³⁸ Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Police mark milestone with new academy', *Samoa Observer*, 19 August 2024, [online](#); 'Police Academy design revealed', *Samoa Observer*, 10 September 2018, [online](#).

²³⁹ '\$33 million Samoa police training academy opens at Tafaigata—August 2024', Government of Samoa, [online](#).

²⁴⁰ Fujian Police Academy, 'About Fujian Police Academy', accessed 28 April 2025, [online](#).

²⁴¹ '中国-太平洋岛国警务培训中心正式揭牌'[China-Pacific Island Countries Police Training Center Officially Unveiled'], 福建省人民政府外事办公室 [Fujian Provincial Foreign Affairs Office website], 12 December 2023, [online](#).

²⁴² '\$33 million Samoa police training academy opens at Tafaigata—August 2024', Government of Sāmoa, [online](#).



‘援萨摩亚警察学院项目举行移交仪式’ [Handover Ceremony Held for Samoa Police Academy Project], 商务部经济合作局 [Ministry of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Cooperation], 24 August 2024, [online](#).

The academy took nine years to build, and in the process, China steadily strengthened its police cooperation with Sāmoa. In 2019, the PRC Embassy donated a set of brass instruments to the Sāmoa Police Band.²⁴³ In 2021, eight officers from the Criminal Investigation Bureau of China’s Ministry of Public Security (MPS) spent one month in Sāmoa providing “forensics training” and assisting with a backlog of unidentified bodies in the national morgue.²⁴⁴ The Sāmoa Police Service’s Facebook page downplayed the visit, describing them euphemistically as “medical pathologists.”²⁴⁵

The MPS, however, is China’s central authority responsible for counterintelligence, dissident-suppression, counterterrorism, criminal investigation, immigration control and other aspects of internal security. Some of its functions overlap with the Ministry of State Security, which is roughly comparable to the former Soviet Union’s KGB.

In May 2022, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Sāmoa to try and get Prime Minister Fiamē to sign a China-centred Pacific security treaty which would have greatly upped security-cooperation between PRC agencies and Sāmoa police. Among the terms was that China would train Sāmoan police officers both multilaterally and bilaterally.²⁴⁶ Fiamē refused to sign the

²⁴³ ‘Donation of musical instruments to police’, Sāmoa Police, Prisons and Corrections Services, 27 February 2019, [online](#).

²⁴⁴ ‘MPS organizes forensic pathologist team to Samoa for technical assistance’, Ministry of Public Security, 21 July 2021, [online](#).

²⁴⁵ ‘Chinese pathologists exit meeting’, Sāmoa Police, Prisons, and Correction Services, 2 June 2021, [online](#).

²⁴⁶ ‘China-Pacific Island Countries Common Development Vision’, 2022, [online](#).

agreement saying that the Pacific can manage its own security.²⁴⁷ Wang Yi was forced to leave Apia empty-handed, but he signed an Exchange of Letters for the Fingerprint Laboratory for Police, a “gift” complementary to the Police Academy.²⁴⁸ The laboratory’s cost was never disclosed.



Prime Minister Fiamē, her chief of police, secretary for Foreign Affairs, and other staff meet with PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his team to discuss strengthening security cooperation in 2022, [online](#).

In August 2023, China’s Ministry of Public Security invited ten Sāmoan officers to China—from police, corrections, and prisons—to attend a three-week Seminar on Civil Peacekeeping and Police Capacity for the South Pacific Island Countries, run by the Public Security Bureau (PSB, 公安局).²⁴⁹ The PSB functions less like a civilian police service and more like a political-security force akin to the Stasi or Gestapo,²⁵⁰ it is infamous for brutality and torture to extract confessions.²⁵¹

Upon their return, Police Commissioner Auapa’au Logoitino Filipo praised the training, claiming it would “enhance their capacity to participate in

²⁴⁷ Lucy Craymer, ‘Samoa’s prime minister says Pacific can deal with its own security issues’, *Reuters*, 17 June 2022, [online](#).

²⁴⁸ Eirenei Ariu, ‘Press Release: Samoa Visit of the State Councillor and Foreign Minister of the Peoples’ Republic of China H.E Mr. Wang Yi, 27-28th May 2022’, *Government of Sāmoa*, 28 May 2022, [online](#).

²⁴⁹ Shalveen Chand, ‘Samoan police officers travel to China’, *Samoa Observer*, 21 August 2023, [online](#).

²⁵⁰ Anne-Marie Brady, ‘Party faithful--how China spies, and how to resist’, *Australian Foreign Affairs*, July 2020.

²⁵¹ ‘Police torture in China still routine despite reforms - rights group’, *Reuters*, 13 May 2015, [online](#).

peacekeeping missions within the region and globally.”²⁵² China now deploys the largest peacekeeping contingents in the world.

In December 2023, Sāmoa’s Minister of Police attended the Second China-Pacific Ministerial Dialogue on Police Capacity Building and Cooperation in Beijing²⁵³—Sāmoa had skipped the inaugural meeting.²⁵⁴ Yet at the 2023 dialogue, PRC Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong and Sāmoa’s Minister Faualo Harry Schuster co-chaired proceedings.²⁵⁵

Wang declared that China sought to “build a shared future”²⁵⁶ with Sāmoa—CCP language for institutional integration within its global security architecture, including implanting PSB agents in foreign governments’ police departments.²⁵⁷ Sāmoa’s response was restrained: unlike Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, or Vanuatu, Sāmoa does not yet permit a permanent Chinese police presence, though Chinese police teams now embed for lengthy visits while Sāmoan officers regularly travel to China for short courses. The two countries do not yet have a formal policing or security treaty, relying instead on the dialogue mechanism at the ministerial meetings as a de facto cooperation framework.²⁵⁸

In February 2024, Beijing launched a new initiative: a six-month Chinese-language course for nearly twenty Sāmoan police and corrections officers,²⁵⁹

²⁵² Timothy Komiti, ‘SPPCS Members returned after attending the Civil Peacekeeping Capacity Training’, Sāmoa Police Prisons and Corrections Services, 11 September 2023, [online](#).

²⁵³ Talaia Mika, ‘China Offers Law Enforcement Support’, *Samoa Observer*, 13 December 2023, [online](#).

²⁵⁴ Xinhua, ‘China, some South Pacific Countries hold dialogue on law enforcement, police cooperation’, Ministry of Justice of the People’s Republic of China, 23 November 2022, [online](#).

²⁵⁵ ‘第二次中国—太平洋岛国执法能力与警务合作部级对话举行’ [The Second China—Pacific Island Countries Ministerial Dialogue on law enforcement capacity and police cooperation], *Xinhua*, 8 December 2023, [online](#).

²⁵⁶ Xinhua, ‘China vows to strengthen law enforcement, security cooperation with Pacific Island Countries’, The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 9 December 2023, [online](#).

²⁵⁷ Chen Xiaodong, ‘Jointly acting on the Global Security Initiative and Building a Community with a shared future for mankind that enjoys universal security’, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 15 September 2024, [online](#).

²⁵⁸ ‘第二次中国—太平洋岛国执法能力与警务合作部级对话举行, 王小洪与萨摩亚警察部部长法乌阿诺共同主持’ [The second China-Pacific Island Countries Ministerial Dialogue on Law Enforcement Capacity and Police Cooperation was held. Wang Xiaohong and Sāmoan Police Minister Fauano co-chaired the meeting], PRC Ministry of Public Security, 8 December 2023, [online](#).

²⁵⁹ Marc Membrere, ‘Samoa police take first step in their journey to learn the Chinese language’, *Samoa Global News*, 5 February 2024, [online](#); ‘Chinese ambassador to Samoa Fei Mingxing attends graduation ceremony of the first Chinese language training course for police officers’, MOFA, 6 August 2024, [online](#).

taught at the National University of Sāmoa's Confucius Institute.²⁶⁰ A similar programme had been offered in 2019 to staff from the Ministry of Customs and Revenue.²⁶¹ Such courses mirror those provided to foreign law-enforcement personnel in other CCP-partner countries, notably New Zealand.²⁶²

In February 2025, twenty-one officers completed another six-month course; nine passed the HSK-1 Mandarin proficiency exam.²⁶³ The programme was billed as improving "communication in professional scenarios," though it remains unclear why so many Sāmoan police officers need to have fluency in Chinese language—Mandarin speakers in Sāmoa are few, and most citizens speak English or Sāmoan. There are few PRC tourists.

In June 2024, a Sāmoa police officer joined delegates from the Land Transport Authority, Fire and Emergency Service, and the Red Cross at a Disaster Management Seminar for Pacific Island Countries in Guangzhou.²⁶⁴ The event, part of the BRI "Thousand Talents Plan" for disaster-response cooperation,²⁶⁵ advances China's goal of creating a parallel humanitarian-assistance (HADR) framework in the Pacific—one that often employs dual-use logistics and military assets.²⁶⁶

The Third China–Pacific Ministerial Dialogue convened in September 2024 in Fujian, with Sāmoan participation.²⁶⁷ In December 2024, eight Sāmoan officers received forensic-training from MPS specialists at the PRC Embassy in Apia, culminating in an equipment handover ceremony.

²⁶⁰ Marc Membrere, 'Samoa police take first step in their journey to learn the Chinese language', *Samoa Global News*, 5 February 2024, [online](#); Talaia Mika, 'Ministry of Revenue and Customs staff learn Chinese', *Samoa Observer*, 27 August 2019, [online](#).

²⁶¹ Talaia Mika, 'Ministry of Revenue and Customs Staff learn Chinese', *Samoa Observer*, 27 August 2019, [online](#).

²⁶² Anne-Marie Brady, 'Inquiry needed after "shocking naivety" by NZ Police over China', *Newsroom*, 30 March 2025, [online](#).

²⁶³ Sāmoa Police, Prisons and Correction Services, 'SPPCS complete Chinese Language Course and Pass HSK1 Exam', 27 February 2025, [online](#).

²⁶⁴ 'SPPCS attend disaster management seminar in China', Sāmoa Police Prisons and Corrections Services, 11 July 2024, [online](#).

²⁶⁵ '2024年太平洋岛国灾害管理研修班在广州开班', 广东省应急管理厅, 21 June 2024, [online](#).

²⁶⁶ Anne-Marie Brady, 'How China is using humanitarian aid to gain a military foothold in the Pacific', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 February 2022, [online](#).

²⁶⁷ Xinhua, 'China, Pacific Island countries hold dialogue on law enforcement', The State Council of People's Republic of China, 12 September 2024, [online](#).



'Completion of Forensic Training and Handover of Equipment by Chinese Embassy', Apia, Sāmoa, Sāmoa Police, Prisons, and Corrections Service Facebook page, 5 December 2024, [online](#).

On January 11, 2025, the PRC Embassy in Sāmoa held a 'Sāmoan Security Situation and Legal Lecture' for about 100 representatives of Chinese-funded institutions and overseas Chinese,²⁶⁸ where Sāmoan police briefed attendees on local law and safety, so that they could "establish a good image for Chinese citizens".²⁶⁹



'Completion of Forensic Training and Handover of Equipment by Chinese Embassy', Apia, Sāmoa, Sāmoa Police, Prisons, and Corrections Service Facebook page, 5 December 2024, [online](#).

²⁶⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星主持萨摩亚安全形势和法律讲座' [Ambassador Fei Mingxing of China to Sāmoa hosted a lecture on Sāmoa's security situation and law], 14 January 2025, [online](#).

²⁶⁹ '驻萨摩亚大使费明星主持萨摩亚安全形势和法律讲座' [Ambassador Fei Mingxing of China to Sāmoa hosted a lecture on Sāmoa's security situation and law], PRC MFA, 14 January 2025, [online](#).

In September 2025, Sāmoa sent a non-ministerial delegation to the Fourth China-Pacific Island Countries Ministerial Dialogue on Law Enforcement Capacity and Police Cooperation, as the new Minister for Police had not yet been sworn in after the election. Six other Pacific Island nations sent ministerial-level representation.

China's policing links with Sāmoa mirror similar its efforts in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Tonga. Beijing portrays these initiatives as paving a "new landscape for global public security governance".²⁷⁰

Notably, while expanding policing relations with China, since 2023, Sāmoa also upped its police engagement with Australia, New Zealand, and even India. Under the Fiamē prime ministership, Sāmoa took advantage of policing opportunities China offered, but tried to balance the risk.

Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa has now appointed himself Minister of Police and Prisons, as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Minister of the Sāmoa Law Reform Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Public Service Commission—effectively judge and jury in key aspects of government and societal supervision. It can be predicted that he will take China-Sāmoa policing cooperation much further than his predecessors' cautious approach.

Economic Coercion: all roads lead to China

In 2021 and again in 2023, the IMF assessed Sāmoa as at high risk of debt distress. More than forty percent of Sāmoa's debts are owed to China. In 2024, Sāmoa's debt repayments to China were the fourth highest in the world.²⁷¹

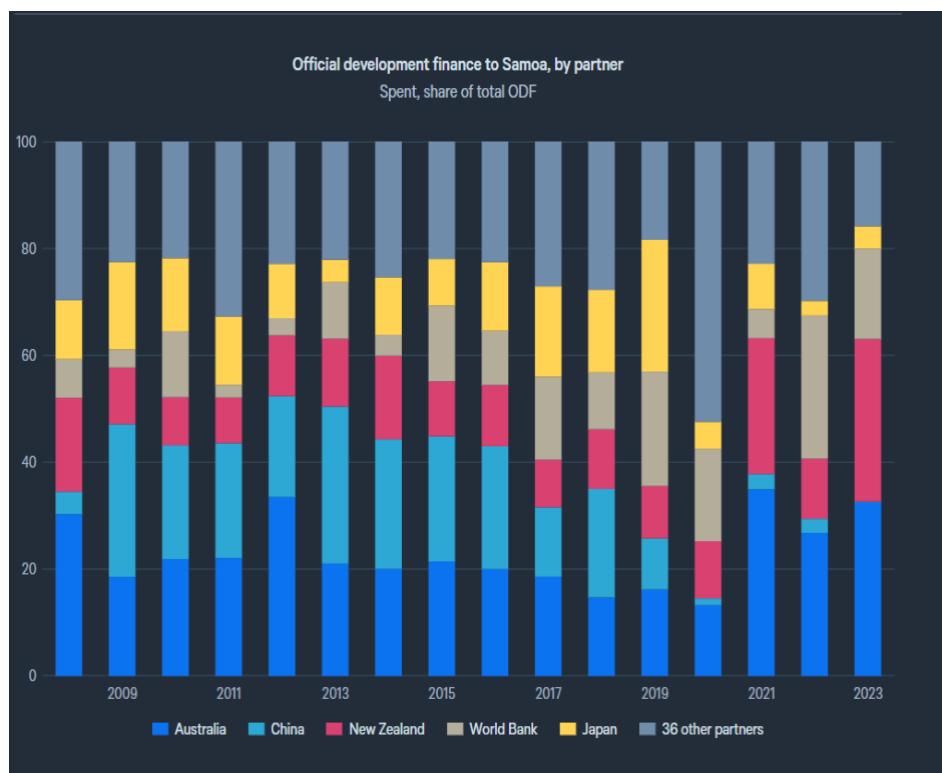
Creating such dependencies is a key tool of CCP international united front work. The CCP government offers preferential trade, loans and other opportunities to diplomatic partners, it then uses these preferential terms to create client relationships. Several Pacific leaders have stated that these unequal relationships require them to vote as China instructs them to. In 2014, under Xi Jinping, China launched an initiative to create a China-

²⁷⁰ '第四次中国—太平洋岛国执法能力与警务合作部级对话举行' [Fourth China-Pacific Island Countries Ministerial Dialogue on Law Enforcement Capacity and Police Cooperation], Xinhua, 18 September 2025, [online](#).

²⁷¹ Doug Dingwall and Marian Kupu, 'Pacific Island nations owe "astronomical" debts to China, can they repay?', RNZ, 29 July 2024, [online](#).

centred political and economic bloc designed to reshape the global order.²⁷² The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) creates new dependencies, particularly targeting strategic infrastructure. Sāmoa did not join BRI until 2018, but it began accessing funds for BRI-related projects from 2014.

Sāmoa is among the most aid-reliant nations in the world, ranking 13th in the world among developing nations on aid-to-GNI ratio. Australia is Sāmoa's largest bilateral donor, followed by China, Japan, and New Zealand. China's assistance has mostly come in the form of concessionary loans, whereas Australia and New Zealand provide the largest grant contributions.²⁷³ In 2023, China's contribution to Sāmoan aid dropped to less than 1 percent.



Sāmoa, Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map, [online](#).

²⁷² 彭光谦 [Peng Guangqian], '一带一路"战略构想与国际秩序重构' [China's Silk Road strategic concept and the reconstruction of the international order], *Xinhua*, 9 January 2015, [online](#).

²⁷³ 'Samoa Country Plan', MFAT, May 2025, 2, [online](#).

Sāmoa: Public Debt Stock, FY2022

	Share of total debt	In percent of GDP
Total public debt	100.0	43.7
External	99.8	43.7
Multilateral	51.2	22.4
IDA	29.5	12.9
ADB	19.5	8.5
OPEC	1.6	0.7
Other	0.6	0.2
Bilateral	48.7	21.3
Exim Bank (China)	41.5	18.2
Japan	7.1	3.1
Domestic	0.2	0.1
Memorandum items:		
Nominal GDP (millions of SAT)		
Market rate (tala/U.S. dollar, end period)		

'Sāmoa: Staff Report for the 2023 Article IV Consultation—Debt Sustainability Analysis', International Monetary Fund, Asia and Pacific Department, 15 March 2023, [online](#).

Debt dependency

In the 1980s and 1990s, China's loans to Sāmoa were modest, interest-free, and often accompanied by aid. In 1980, Beijing provided Sāmoa US\$11.5 million across five interest-free loans for water and agriculture-related development and for a sports complex in Apia.²⁷⁴ China cancelled these debts in 2006.²⁷⁵

China has also offered numerous grants. For example, in 2005, China provided a grant of US\$11.3 million to upgrade the Apia Park Stadium.²⁷⁶ When Sāmoa later struggled to maintain the complex, China financed upgrades and renovations to the building through another grant, but the exact amount was kept secret.²⁷⁷ In 2017, China provided an additional US\$1.36 million maintenance grant.²⁷⁸

The next round of major loans began in 1989, when Prime Minister Tofilau Eti Alesana led a delegation to China—one of the first such visits by a foreign head of government after the Tiananmen Square massacre. His finance minister, Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, joined the trip seeking support for a new government office building. China's loans subsequently financed a five-storey complex housing the offices of the Prime Minister, Cabinet, and several ministries.²⁷⁹

In 2004, China established its Pacific Loans Facility, and the Tuila'epa government began accessing concessional finance through the Export-Import Bank of China (Eximbank).²⁸⁰ Unlike Sāmoa's earlier loans from China, Eximbank credit must be repaid. The bank raises capital commercially, with

²⁷⁴ Thomas V. Biddick, 'Diplomatic rivalry in the South Pacific: The PRC and Taiwan', *Asian Survey* 29, no. 8 (1989): 805; 'Chinese Government provides RMB 43 million grant for Apia Park Stadium rehabilitation project', China AidData, [online](#).

²⁷⁵ Fergus Hanson and Mary Fifita, 'China in the Pacific: the new banker in town', Lowy Institute, April 2011, [online](#).

²⁷⁶ 'Chinese government provides RMB 43 Million grant for Apia Park Stadium rehabilitation project', AidData, accessed 11 April 2025, [online](#).

²⁷⁷ 'Chinese Government provides grant for Apia Park Stadium renovation project', AidData, [online](#).

²⁷⁸ 'Chinese Government provides RMB 7.95 Million grant – via ETCA – for Apia Park Stadium and Aquatic Center technical cooperation project', AidData, [online](#).

²⁷⁹ Tuila'epa Luplesolai Sailele Malielegaoi and Peter Swain, *Pālema: Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi of Sāmoa: A Memoir* (Victoria University Press, 2017).

²⁸⁰ Peseta Noumea Simi, 'The Sāmoa experience: Aid from China', China and the Pacific: the view from Oceania Conference, 2015, [online](#).

Beijing subsidising below-market interest rates. From China's perspective, these loans promote the export of Chinese construction services and materials, using recipient countries' natural resources as collateral.²⁸¹ Eximbank funding typically targets large public infrastructure projects with potential civil–military utility.²⁸²

Between 2006 and 2014, Eximbank loans financed:

- Parliamentary and Ministry of Justice buildings (2006) – US \$41 million²⁸³
- National Convention Centre and government buildings (2007) – US \$79 million²⁸⁴
- National Medical Centre and Ministry of Health headquarters expansions (2010 & 2012) – US \$81 million²⁸⁵
- Huawei National Broadband Highway Project (2012) – US \$25 million²⁸⁶
- Faleolo International Airport upgrade (2014) – US \$61 million²⁸⁷

In 2014, the Tuila'epa government signed an undisclosed agreement with Beijing to upgrade relations to a strategic cooperative partnership. The airport loan alone equaled 7.5 percent of Sāmoa's GNP.

By 2020, Sāmoa's debt burden had become acute. The government twice suspended repayments on the Faleolo loan, in 2020 and 2021.²⁸⁸ The World Bank assessed Sāmoa as at high risk of debt distress: public debt stood at 46.7 percent of GDP, with 46 percent owed to Eximbank.²⁸⁹ By 2024, under the more cautious Fiamē government, improved revenues and fiscal

²⁸¹ Yun Sun, 'Can China fill the void in foreign aid?', Brookings Institute, 11 March 2025, [online](#).

²⁸² Domingo I-Kwei Yang, 'China's dual-use infrastructure in the Pacific', Coastwatchers 2.0 Project, April 2025, [online](#).

²⁸³ 'China Eximbank provides RMB 160 million government concessional loan for Parliamentary Complex & MJCA Building Construction Project', AidData, [online](#).

²⁸⁴ 'China Eximbank provides \$52 million concessional loan for International Convention Center and Government Building Complex Construction Project', AidData, [online](#).

²⁸⁵ 'Phase 1 of National Medical Center and Ministry of Health Headquarters Construction Project', AidData, [online](#); 'Phase 2 of National Medical Center Construction Project', AidData, [online](#).

²⁸⁶ 'PRC Huawei National Broadband Highway Project', AidData, [online](#).

²⁸⁷ 'Faleolo International Airport Upgrade Project', AidData, [online](#).

²⁸⁸ 'China Eximbank provides RMB 340 million government concessional loan for Faleolo International Airport Upgrade Project', AidData, [online](#).

²⁸⁹ 'Samoa', 2021, World Bank, [online](#).

discipline reduced total debt to 25.9 percent of GDP, of which 36 percent remained owed to China.²⁹⁰

A World Bank review found that the Faleolo project lacked proper economic analysis, violated national procurement rules, and breached Sāmoa's borrowing limits. It concluded the project was 'over-scaled and at high risk of being a white elephant.' The Sāmoa Airport Authority reached a similar conclusion, judging the terminal financially unsustainable.²⁹¹ Originally constructed in 1942 by the U.S. Navy Seabees as a military airfield, Faleolo served as an auxiliary base to U.S. Naval Base Tutuila in American Sāmoa.²⁹² Both were set up to defend the Central Pacific against Japanese invasion.

The Tuila'epa government's heavy borrowing from China pushed Sāmoa into debt distress while delivering few tangible benefits. China's two largest infrastructure loans—the broadband network and the airport—failed to achieve their intended outcomes. The National Broadband Highway did not deliver reliable connections to health and education services, and its technology quickly became obsolete.²⁹³ The airport expansion, designed to handle 600,000 passengers annually,²⁹⁴ managed only 270,000 passengers by 2024—less than half capacity.²⁹⁵

Despite these meagre results, the Tuila'epa government pursued additional Chinese-financed projects. In 2019, it signed an agreement with Beijing to dredge Asau Port in Savai'i, with the intention of converting it into an international cruise-ship terminal.²⁹⁶ Asau is considered one of Sāmoa's best natural harbours, sheltered by a World War II airstrip built by the U.S. Seabees. The Asau port project is part of plans for the Oceania Blockchain

²⁹⁰ 'Samoa', IMF, December 2024, [online](#).

²⁹¹ 'China Eximbank provides RMB 340 million government concessional loan for Faleolo International Airport Upgrade Project', AidData, [online](#).

²⁹² 'Faleolo Airport', Pacific Wreck Inc., [online](#).

²⁹³ Sina Retzlaff, 'Toeolesulusulu calls for review of \$40M tala Samoa National Broadband Highway', *Samoa Global News*, 21 September 2021, [online](#).

²⁹⁴ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, '\$25M regional terminal now in operation', *Samoa Observer*, 17 October 2024, [online](#).

²⁹⁵ See quarterly reports on arrivals, Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'International Arrival Statistic Fourth Quarter 2024', [online](#). Faleolo is 100,000 passengers larger than the capacity of New Caledonia's state-of-the-art La Tontouta Airport at its peak in 2022. La Tontouta is a regional hub, connecting the Pacific to Asia, the U.S. and Europe. Tontouta is also a military base for the France armed forces, and an intelligence installation. In contrast, Faleolo currently only has regular flights to Auckland, Brisbane, Nadi, American Sāmoa, and a weekly flight to Honolulu.

²⁹⁶ 'Exchange of Letters to undertake feasibility study for the Construction of the Vaiusu Port and dredging of the Asau Port', Sāmoa Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019, [online](#).

SEZ in Sasina. The ADB have long assessed the project as economically unjustified due to the coral seabed and the port's isolation from commercial and tourism centers.²⁹⁷ A Chinese feasibility study in 2020 did not lead to financing commitment,²⁹⁸ yet the Fiamē government retained the project in Sāmoa's 2022–2027 Five-Year Plan.²⁹⁹ Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa has said he will go ahead with the Asau project.

In 2019 Prime Minister Tuila'epa further announced plans for a new port at Vaiusu, valued at Tala 250 million (US \$93 million), to accommodate twelve deep-draft vessels.³⁰⁰ The project's feasibility was questioned given that fewer than 200 large ships dock annually at the existing Apia Port.³⁰¹ Local Vaiusu MP Faumuina Wayne Fong opposed the proposal, arguing it could serve military purposes.³⁰² The ADB, which had in 2016 rejected the plan as financially unviable (with estimated cost at US \$350 million),³⁰³ instead provided US \$63 million to upgrade the existing facility at Apia Port.³⁰⁴

The Vaiusu project was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic but remained politically contentious. In January 2021, Prime Minister Tuila'epa reiterated that it would proceed, sparking criticism over cost and strategic intent. Two months later, the government claimed on its Facebook page that China had offered a grant rather than a loan.³⁰⁵

Following the 2021 elections, the incoming Fiamē government cancelled the project, citing its fiscal burden. Prime Minister Fiamē later said that public opposition to new loans from Beijing contributed to her electoral victory, noting that 'the level of indebtedness of our government to the government of China was a pressing issue for voters.'³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, she worked to

²⁹⁷ Matai'a Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, 'Coral problem delays Asau Wharf revival', *Samoa Observer*, 17 June 2019, [online](#).

²⁹⁸ Adel Fruean, 'China asked to fund Asau Wharf redevelopment', *Samoa Observer*, 28 October 2020, [online](#)

²⁹⁹ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Govt. firm on Asau port plans', *Samoa Observer*, 11 July 2024, [online](#).

³⁰⁰ Joyetter Feagaimaali'i, 'Proposed Vaiusu wharf to cost \$250 million tala', *Samoa Observer*, 16 June 2019, [online](#); 'Vaiusu Port Project Feasibility Study', AidData, [online](#).

³⁰¹ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Vaiusu Port plans still alive: Tuila'epa', *Samoa Observer*, 27 October 2021, [online](#).

³⁰² Joyetter Feagaimaali'i, 'No military intentions for Vaiusu Wharf: Minister', *Samoa Observer*, 26 February 2021, [online](#).

³⁰³ Jonathan Barrett, 'Samoa's disputed leader promises Chinese-backed port at a third of the cost', *Reuters*, 10 June 2021, [online](#); 'Samoa: Ports Development Master Plan', ADB, [online](#).

³⁰⁴ 'Samoa: Enhancing Safety, Security, and Sustainability of Apia Port Project', ADB, [online](#).

³⁰⁵ 'Vaiusu Bay project a loan not a grant', Government of Sāmoa, 3 March 2021, [online](#).

³⁰⁶ Jonathan Barrett, 'Samoa's disputed leader promises Chinese-backed port at a third of the cost', *Reuters*, 10 June 2021, [online](#).

maintain positive relations with China. During her 2024 visit to Beijing, she reaffirmed Sāmoa's participation in BRI and that it was in alignment with Sāmoa's Five-Year Development Plan.³⁰⁷

China's dual-use deep sea fishing fleet

Albacore tuna is central to the economies of the Sāmoan islands, yet local fisheries face immense pressure from PRC fishing fleets.³⁰⁸ Chinese vessels are often described as 'pariahs' of the world's oceans for their illegal fishing and integration into Beijing's dual-use maritime strategy, where they function as a de facto maritime militia and auxiliary assets of People's Armed Police Maritime Division (popularly known as the Chinese Coast Guard), which serves under the PLA-Navy.³⁰⁹

As Chinese sources note, Sāmoa has a relatively small EEZ.³¹⁰ This is why Sāmoa bans wholly foreign-owned fishing operations, allowing only joint ventures with up to 40 percent foreign equity. Two Sāmoa-registered companies Tradewinds and the Taiwanese-owned Apia Dea Sea Fishing (ADSF)—which operates Chinese vessels under Vanuatu flags³¹¹—fish in Sāmoan waters alongside locals' owner-operator boats.

In 2023, 20 Sāmoan-registered longline vessels caught 1,929 tonnes of albacore in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) area,³¹² dwarfed by 327 PRC-registered vessels that hauled in 26,552 tonnes.³¹³ With China now capturing more than 30 percent of the Pacific

³⁰⁷ Xinhua, 'Full Text: Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and the Independent State of Samoa', *China Daily*, 27 November 2024, [online](#).

³⁰⁸ Samuelu Ah Long, 'China's growing tuna fishing fleet in the Pacific Ocean: A Sāmoan fisheries perspective', in Michael Powles ed., *China and the Pacific: the view from Oceania*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016, 244; Pacific Island Times News Staff, 'Fishery Council Chair: without Tuna Cannery, American Sāmoa becomes "useless" to the US', *Pacific Island Times*, 24 October 2023, [online](#).

³⁰⁹ Raul (Pete) Pedrozo, 'China's IUU fishing fleet: pariah of the world's oceans', *International Law Studies*, 319 (2022), Volume 99.

³¹⁰ '萨摩亚' [Sāmoa], Consular Service of PRC MOFA, [online](#).

³¹¹ 'Apia deep sea fishing', Sāmoa Business Registry, [online](#); 'Tuna long liner owners to bear costs for harbour mishap', Samoa Newshub, 1 January 2024, [online](#).

³¹² Oceanic Fisheries Programme Pacific Community, 'Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Tuna Fishery Yearbook 2024', Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, 32, [online](#); The WCPFC is a regional organisation tasked with regulating and overseeing fish stocks; China and Sāmoa are both members of the WCPFC and report their operations to the WCPFC. 'About WCPFC', accessed 7 April 2025, [online](#); Longline fishing is a method of catching fish with lines that reach 100-300 metres to target mature fish.

³¹³ Oceanic Fisheries Programme Pacific Community, 'Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Tuna Fishery Yearbook 2024', Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, 11, [online](#).

total,³¹⁴ Sāmoa is vulnerable to both PRC vessels illegal incursions into its territorial waters and the PRC fishing industry dictating the price for tuna. This imbalance increases Sāmoa's economic vulnerability.

The country's enforcement capacity is minimal. With only one patrol vessel to monitor a 75,000-square-mile EEZ,³¹⁵ Sāmoa relies on the U.S. Coast Guard for maritime policing. In 2024, the two countries amended their 2012 Shiprider Agreement, allowing U.S. patrols to enforce Sāmoa's EEZ without requiring a Sāmoan official onboard.³¹⁶ Sāmoa also participates in the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency's Rai Balang operation, launched in 2025 to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.³¹⁷ The operation has already identified Chinese vessels engaged in such activities.³¹⁸

Although Sāmoan officials rarely name China directly, they have expressed unease about China's fishing dominance. As early as 2015, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries warned that data gaps and market saturation caused by Chinese fleets posed risks to the stability of albacore stocks.³¹⁹ In 2023, La'aulialemalietoa, who was then Minister for Agriculture, highlighted declining tuna stocks and the growing strain on local fishers, without providing an explanation of why this was occurring.³²⁰

Across the Pacific, Chinese fleets have raised wider security alarms. American Sāmoan Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata has linked them to hybrid warfare,³²¹ noting their coordination with PLA-Navy and Coast Guard operations elsewhere.³²² For Sāmoa, the proliferation of Chinese fishing fleets represents both an economic challenge and a strategic threat to maritime sovereignty.

³¹⁴ Oceanic Fisheries Programme Pacific Community, 'Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Tuna Fishery Yearbook 2024', Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, 32, [online](#).

³¹⁵ Alexander Mitchell, 'Samoa strengthens maritime security: Guardian-Class patrol boat handover from Australia', *Military.News*, 27 November 2023, [online](#).

³¹⁶ 'Samoa Grants USCG expanded enforcement powers in its EEZ', *The Maritime Executive*, 7 April 2024, [online](#).

³¹⁷ F. F. A. Media, 'OPERATION RAI BALANG 2025: FFA members hunt for illegal fishing across 14 Million square kilometres of ocean', *Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency FFA*, 21 March 2025, [online](#).

³¹⁸ Koroi Hawkins, 'Pacific surveillance operation picks up illegal fishers', *RNZ*, 20 March 2017, [online](#).

³¹⁹ Samuelu Ah Long, 'China's growing tuna fishing fleet in the Pacific Ocean,' *China and the Pacific: the view from Oceania conference, Wellington: Victoria University*, [online](#).

³²⁰ Shalveen Chand, 'Tuna catch on the decline', *Samoa Observer*, 13 December 2023, [online](#).

³²¹ Matt Kaye, 'PRIMNM fishing access and China's ability to wage war linked', *Talanei*, 7 July 2023, [online](#).

³²² Gregory B. Poling, 'Illuminating the South China Sea's dark fishing fleets', *Stephenson Ocean Security Project*, 9 January 2019, [online](#).

Cyber attacks

In February 2025, the Sāmoa Computer Emergency Response Team (SamCERT) announced that government networks had been breached by the advanced persistent threat group APT40,³²³ a unit operating under China's Ministry of State Security (MSS).³²⁴ SamCERT described APT40 as a state-sponsored actor targeting government systems and critical infrastructure.³²⁵

APT40, linked to the Hainan State Security Bureau, is one of Beijing's principal cyber-espionage units and has conducted operations across the Indo-Pacific. The Sāmoa case marked the first time a Pacific Island government publicly attributed a cyberattack to China.³²⁶

Sāmoa's vulnerability is amplified by its reliance on Chinese-built digital infrastructure. The Huawei National Broadband Highway, completed in 2014 under an Eximbank loan, is still a critical component of Sāmoa's telecommunications network. Analysts have warned that such systems may include hidden access features enabling surveillance. While direct compromise has not (yet) been demonstrated, the APT40 incident underscores the strategic risks of technological dependency on Chinese suppliers.

Telling a good story of China

Since 2009, the CCP has invested heavily in shaping international perceptions of China and the Party's policies.³²⁷ Sāmoa's media landscape is small, financially constrained, and sensitive to political pressures. Its education and cultural institutions face similar challenges of limited resources and scale. Chinese funding for Sāmoa's media, cultural initiatives, and educational exchanges has been welcomed as a much-needed source of support. Yet such assistance carries risks: coverage of China may become less critical, civil society concerns may be muted, and academia's essential

³²³ 'Advanced Persistent Threat 40 (APT40) Advisory', Samoa Computer Emergency Response Team, 11 February 2025, [online](#); Sulamanaia Manaui Faulalo, 'Govt cyber-attack confidential', *Samoa Observer*, 30 April 2025, [online](#).

³²⁴ The Australian Signals Directorate's Australian Cyber Security Centre et al., 'APT40 Advisory', Australian Signals Directorate, 9 July 2024, [online](#).

³²⁵ 'Advanced Persistent Threat 40 (APT40) Advisory', Sāmoa Computer Emergency Response Team, 11 February 2025, [online](#).

³²⁶ Stephen Dziedzic, 'Chinese hacking group blamed for cyber-attacks on Samoa', ABC News, 12 February 2025, [online](#).

³²⁷ Anne-Marie Brady, 'China's foreign propaganda machine', *Journal of Democracy*, October 2015.

role in evaluating both the opportunities and risks of engagement may be compromised.

Embedding influence mechanisms in the Sāmoan media

Sāmoa's media sector underwent a significant shift in 2008 when the state broadcasting corporation was privatised, leaving only one public radio station.³²⁸ TV9 was launched in 2018 for government programming alongside the transition to digital broadcasting. The Samoa Observer remains the country's principal privately-owned daily newspaper, Savali News is the government's biweekly newspaper, supplemented by multiple online outlets such as Talamua News, Bluwave TV (a New Zealand-based online media operated by Prime Minister La'aulialemaletoa's cousin, it is a pro-FAST, pro-La'aulialemaletoa propaganda outlet), private radio stations like Radio Polynesia, and Facebook, which is now a major source of news and information. China's media presence in Sāmoa has grown markedly, especially since around 2016-2018, when China greatly expanded its media operations across Oceania.

Since 2005, China Global Television Network (CGTN) has broadcast on Sāmoan free-to-air television for 16 hours a day³²⁹—though the cost or terms of access are not publicly known. In 2016, China Radio International (CRI) took over Radio Australia's shortwave frequencies in the Pacific, including Sāmoa, and in 2018 obtained an FM radio slot in Apia;³³⁰ again, fees for use of this channel remain undisclosed.

The Sāmoa Observer and Xinhua News Agency have maintained a long-term content-sharing arrangement.³³¹ Sāmoan journalists have been invited on all-expenses-paid trips to China since at least 2003, most have been from government media organisations.³³² In 2008, Beijing sponsored a tour for Sāmoan reporters through several Chinese cities,³³³ and in 2016 four Sāmoan journalists became the first Pacific cohort to attend a three-week

³²⁸ 'Deal on sale of Samoa's public broadcaster almost complete', RNZ, 13 February 2008, [online](#).

³²⁹ Anne-Marie Brady, 'CCP political interference activities in Oceania', Center for Strategic Budget Assessment, 2019, [online](#).

³³⁰ 'List of Broadcasters', Office of the Regulators, Sāmoa, [online](#).

³³¹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'Ambassador Wang Xuefeng meets with editor-in-chief of Samoa Observer', 4 August 2016, [online](#).

³³² Iati Iati, 'China and Samoa', *China in Oceania*, New York: Berghahn Books 2010, 155.

³³³ 'China-Samoa Aid, A friend in need is a friend indeed', U.S. State Department, 2008, [online](#).

media-training course in China.³³⁴ Three television technicians from Sāmoa's state broadcaster went to China on a short course in the same year.³³⁵

For a number of years, the Sāmoa Observer published Chinese government content in a four-page 'China Today' section³³⁶—an arrangement that would normally be paid advertising. More recently it simply reprints the PRC ambassador's speeches and statements verbatim. Elsewhere in the Pacific, China has reportedly offered US\$130,00 annually, plus free computers and mobile phones to a newspaper in exchange for favourable coverage.³³⁷

Reprinting content directly from CCP mouthpieces turns foreign media into what Party propaganda experts call "borrowed boats" – a media equivalent of the proverbial "useful idiots". State-controlled Chinese outlets are bound to carry the official Party line; transferring their content wholesale, without analysis or critique, into the open media environment of a democracy plays into the structural mismatch between the two systems.

In 2018, the PRC Ambassador visited Sāmoa's Newsline news agency where the Editor-in-Chief pledged to "actively report on the fruitful results of pragmatic cooperation between the two countries and make due contributions to the development of friendship between the people of Sāmoa and China".³³⁸ The embassy's English-language site did not report the visit.³³⁹ In 2019, Ambassador Chao met both Newsline and the Sāmoa Observer on the same day,³⁴⁰ who both expressed readiness to promote

³³⁴ Sarafina Sanerivi, 'My time in China', *Samoa Observer*, 1 May 2016, [online](#).

³³⁵ PRC Embassy Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚大使王雪峰会见萨赴华参加“2016 年发展中国家广播技术管理培训班”学员' [Ambassador to Samoa Wang Xuefeng met with participants in the 2016 Developing Countries Radio and Television High-Definition Technology Management Training Course "2016"], 13 April 2016, [online](#).

³³⁶ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'Ambassador Wang Xuefeng meets with editor-in-chief of Samoa Observer', 4 August 2016, [online](#).

³³⁷ Charley Piringi, 'Leaked emails shows China interfering in Solomons media', Indepth Solomons, 22 January 2024, [online](#); interview with Tongan journalist, April 2024.

³³⁸ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚大使王雪峰参观《新闻连线报》报社' [Ambassador Wang Xuefeng visits the News Link newspaper office], 28 November 2018, [online](#).

³³⁹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'What's New Page 7 2017.09.19-2019.05.01', accessed 2 May 2025, [online](#).

³⁴⁰ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚大使巢小良拜会萨摩亚《新闻连线报》发行人兼总编辑' [Ambassador Chao Xiaoliang of China to Samoa pays a courtesy visit to the publisher and editor-in-chief of Samoa's News Link], 19 June 2019, [online](#).

China–Sāmoa friendship—again, unreported on the Embassy’s English page.³⁴¹

The following year, Ambassador Chao met with Observer editors to discuss “further strengthening of Sino-Sāmoa media cooperation.”³⁴² The paper agreed to “create a good atmosphere of public opinion” to support bilateral friendship.³⁴³ The meeting was again not listed on the Embassy’s English-language website.³⁴⁴

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ambassador Chao met with the CEO of Sāmoa TV1.³⁴⁵ According to the PRC Embassy website, TV1 “has long maintained good cooperative relations with China Central Television (CCTV) and China International Television (CGTN). The ambassador discussed China’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.”³⁴⁶ The following day, TV1 aired an interview with Ambassador Chao highlighting China’s “success” in containing the virus.³⁴⁷

In 2019, China sponsored a young Sāmoan reporter to study a bachelor’s degree in communication at Beijing’s Jiaotong University.³⁴⁸ The journalist had previously worked for the Ministry of Prime Minister and Cabinet as an English reporter at Savali News for three years, plus one year at TV3

³⁴¹ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘驻萨摩亚大使巢小良拜会萨摩亚《新闻连线报》发行人兼总编辑’ [Ambassador Chao Xiaoliang of China to Samoa pays a courtesy visit to the publisher and editor-in-chief of Samoa’s News Link], 19 June 2019, [online](#).

³⁴² Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘驻萨摩亚大使巢小良拜会《萨摩亚观察家报》发行人’ [Ambassador Chao Xiaoliang of China to Samoa pays a courtesy visit to the publisher of the Samoa Observer], 19 June 2019, [online](#).

³⁴³ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘驻萨摩亚大使巢小良拜会《萨摩亚观察家报》发行人’ [Ambassador Chao Xiaoliang of China to Samoa pays a courtesy visit to the publisher of the Samoa Observer], 19 June 2019, [online](#).

³⁴⁴ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘What’s New Page 6 2019.05.03.-2021.11.01’, accessed 3 May 2025, [online](#).

³⁴⁵ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘巢小良大使会见萨 TV1 电视台首席执行官马塔菲奥’ [Ambassador Chao Xiaoliang meets with TV1 CEO Matafeo], 13 March 2020, [online](#).

³⁴⁶ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘巢小良大使会见萨 TV1 电视台首席执行官马塔菲奥’ [Ambassador Chao Xiaoliang meets with TV1 CEO Matafeo], 13 March 2020, [online](#).

³⁴⁷ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘巢小良大使接受萨 TV1 电视台采访’ [Ambassador Chao Xiaoliang was interviewed by TV1], PRC Embassy, 13 March 2020, [online](#).

³⁴⁸ Talaia Mika, ‘Through God, anything is possible-aspiring Samoan reporter ready for China’, *Samoa Observer*, 24 August 2019, [online](#).

television station.³⁴⁹ She had previously travelled twice to China on work-related trips,³⁵⁰ and published a defence of China's policies in Savali.

In 2024, Samoa Observer journalist Marc Membrere participated in a four-month training program in China,³⁵¹ managed by the China International Press Communication Centre, which promotes pro-China media content globally.³⁵² Marc Membrere is also a journalist for Savali³⁵³ as well as for Samoa Global News.³⁵⁴ Membrere frequently covers news related to China in Sāmoa.³⁵⁵ He often republishes the PRC Ambassador's statements as the main focus of the article.³⁵⁶ Membrere has featured in CGTN news programmes, providing a "Pacific", but inevitably pro-China, perspective on events.³⁵⁷

As noted above, the Sāmoan Government itself has allowed the PRC Embassy to promote material directly on its website. Domestic news agencies—including the Samoa Observer and Newsline—routinely reprint the Embassy's press releases and ambassadorial op-eds in full.³⁵⁸

One of the CCP's core media objectives is to export its political language and talking points through foreign outlets. In Sāmoa, several recurring CCP narratives appear repeatedly. First, that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China (in fact Taiwan has never been within the borders of the PRC, it was taken over by the Qing Empire from 1683, was occupied by Japan from 1895-1945, then the ROC took control of Taiwan after the Japanese

³⁴⁹ Talaia Mika, 'Through God, anything is possible-aspiring Samoan reporter ready for China', *Samoa Observer*, 24 August 2019, [online](#).

³⁵⁰ Talaia Mika, 'Through God, anything is possible-aspiring Samoan reporter ready for China', *Samoa Observer*, 24 August 2019, [online](#).

³⁵¹ Jasmine Netzler-lose, '16 Samoan students to study in China', *Samoa Newshub*, 15 August 2024, [online](#).

³⁵² Leota Marc Membrere, 'Leota Marc Membrere', Instagram, 1 March 2024, [online](#).

³⁵³ Leota Marc Membrere, 'Leota Marc Membrere', Instagram, 1 March 2024, [online](#).

³⁵⁴ Samoa Global News, 'Marc Membrere', 1 July 2025, [online](#).

³⁵⁵ Marc Membrere, 'Samoa police take first step in their journey to learn the Chinese language', *Samoa Global News*, 5 February 2024, [online](#); Marc Membrere, 'Secondary Chinese learning needed: Education Ministry', *Samoa Observer*, 21 April 2021, [online](#); Marc Membrere, 'Students complete Chinese Language community course', *Samoa Observer*, 7 May 2021, [online](#).

³⁵⁶ Marc Membrere, 'Samoa on display at China's Import Expo', *Samoa Observer*, 9 November 2021, [online](#).

³⁵⁷ CGTN, 'A Pacific perspective on the Two Sessions', CGTN, 5 March 2025, [online](#); CGTN, 'UN@80: Hear the voice of journalist from Pacific Island nation', CGTN, 16 August 2025, [online](#).

³⁵⁸ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'Chinese Ambassador to Sāmoa Fei Mingxing publishes a signed article in Samoa Observer', 2 February 2025, [online](#); Mingxing Fei, 'China and Samoa: Building consensus, deepening cooperation, and crafting a shared future', *Samoa Observer*, 4 December 2024, [online](#); Xiaoliang Chao, 'China's resolute commitment to the national reunification in the New Era', *Newsline Samoa*, 15 August 2022, [online](#).

defeat).³⁵⁹ Second, that Sāmoa and the People's Republic of China share a long history of friendship (in fact the Sāmoan people's bonds and shared history through weal and woe with the Republic of China lasted 70 years, versus 50 years of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic). Third, that China's economic rise offers a model for the developing world (the PRC's wasteful State capitalism model offers little as an approach to resolve Sāmoa's needs).³⁶⁰ Finally, Embassy statements reported in Sāmoan media depict China as a benevolent and reliable partner,³⁶¹ while portraying the United States and Western-aligned countries as neglectful of the Pacific and obsolete in the emerging China-centred world order.³⁶²

Leveraging education links for influence

Between 1982 and 2024, China has awarded scholarships to over 300 Sāmoan tertiary students to pursue their degrees.³⁶³ Sāmoan students may study in all fields except Medicine and Law under these programs. The 2025 priority subjects include cyber security and artificial intelligence.³⁶⁴ In the 1980s and 1990s, China allocated two annual government scholarships to Sāmoa—equal to the number granted to New Zealand, despite New Zealand's population being roughly twenty-five times greater. From 2006 onward, China dramatically expanded its Pacific scholarships program, offering up to 2,000 slots annually. Of all Pacific nations, Sāmoa had the highest uptake.³⁶⁵ Concurrently, China increased its bilateral allocations to

³⁵⁹ Xiaoliang Chao, 'China's resolute commitment to the national reunification in the New Era', *Newline Samoa*, 15 August 2022, [online](#).

³⁶⁰ Shen Shiwei, 'How has China-Sāmoa friendship featured on Samoan banknotes?', *Samoa Observer*, 24 November 2024, [online](#); Tuatagaloa Aumua Ming Leung Wai, 'Reflections on the experience of the Chinese community in Samoa', paper presented at China and the Pacific: The View From Oceania Conference, 2015; Mingxing Fei, 'China and Samoa: Building consensus, deepening cooperation, and crafting a shared future', *Samoa Observer*, 4 December 2024, [online](#); Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'Ambassador Wang Xuefeng holds summing-up meeting on visit to China by Samoa Youth Delegation', 21 July 2016, [online](#).

³⁶¹ Mingxing Fei, 'China and Samoa: building consensus, deepening cooperation, and crafting a shared future', *Samoa Observer*, 4 December 2024, [online](#).

³⁶² 'Opening up to the real China narrative', *Samoa Observer*, accessed 18 August 2025, [online](#).

³⁶³ Jasmine Netzler-lose, '16 Samoan students to study in China', *Samoa Newshub*, 15 August 2024, [online](#).

³⁶⁴ Sāmoa Public Service Commission, 'Scholarship schemes for undergraduate studies information sheet', 3, accessed 18 August 2025, [online](#).

³⁶⁵ 'China awards scholarships to 13 Samoan students', AidData, [online](#).

Sāmoa—from 13 to 20, and now up to 30 annually.³⁶⁶ In 2023 there were 88 Sāmoan students doing degree courses in China.³⁶⁷



China-Sāmoa alumni march at Sāmoa's 2025 Independence Day Parade, [Leota Marc Membrere Photography](#).

In 2016, Chinese officials selected twelve Sāmoan students to be part of the first Sāmoan Youth Delegation to China.³⁶⁸ In 2017, under a sister-school scheme, seven Sāmoa College students and three teachers visited Hua Loo Geng Secondary School,³⁶⁹ a follow up exchange occurred in 2018.³⁷⁰

China also deploys educators and academic staff in Sāmoa. In September 1984, China sent two teachers for a two-year assignment. Since 2002, China has placed a teacher at the National University of Sāmoa (NUS) to teach Chinese language. From 2014, it dispatched three Chinese language

³⁶⁶ Sāmoa Public Service Commission, 'Scholarship schemes for undergraduate studies information sheet', 3, accessed 18 August 2025, [online](#).

³⁶⁷ Sāmoa Embassy China, Sāmoa-China relations, [online](#).

³⁶⁸ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'Ambassador Wang Xuefeng hosts send-off reception for Samoa youth delegation to China', 14 June 2016, [online](#).

³⁶⁹ Wang, 'Remarks by Ambassador Wang Xuefeng at the departure reception for teachers and students of Samoa College on "Discovering Huizhou--A tour of Friendship between Chinese and Sāmoan youngsters" Program', 14 September 2017, [online](#).

³⁷⁰ Adel Fruean, 'Teachers and students looking forward to programme', *Samoa Observer*, 21 September 2018, [online](#).

teachers to primary schools, and from 2016, five science teachers to secondary schools.

In 2017, Liaocheng University established a Confucius Institute at NUS. Liaocheng University houses the China's Research Center for Pacific Island Countries, which conducts policy research on Pacific nations. Most of their reports are not made public. Since 2013, Liaocheng has sent Chinese language instructors to Sāmoa.³⁷¹ The PRC Embassy did not post coverage of this development on its English site.³⁷² The NUS Confucius Institute now plays a leading role in promoting Chinese language and culture education in Sāmoa.³⁷³

Also in 2017, China funded NUS's School of Maritime Training, and continues to provide equipment and support for the maritime school.³⁷⁴ In 2025, NUS signed MOUs with Liaocheng University, the National Ocean Technology Centre of China's Ministry of Natural Resources, Sun Yat-sen University, and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies.³⁷⁵ In 2018, the PRC government granted 30 National University of Sāmoa (NUS) students scholarships to finish their degrees in China.³⁷⁶ China also invited eight NUS teachers to participate in an art training program in China.³⁷⁷

Promoting a state-sanctioned version of Chinese culture is central to CCP united front work. It helps to build a favourable image of China and cultivate asset relationships with civil society leaders. In the Xi era this is called "Telling a good story of China"/ 讲好中国的故事. The PRC Embassy frequently organises cultural events—lantern festival and the spring festival, or what the CCP has since 2012 renamed "Chinese New Year"³⁷⁸—even

³⁷¹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚大使夫人重新参观萨国立大学孔子学院' [Wife of Chinese Ambassador to Samoa Tong Xin visits the Confucius Institute at the National University of Samoa], 16 November 2018, [online](#).

³⁷² Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'What's New Page 7 2017.09.19-2019.05.01', accessed 2 May 2025, [online](#).

³⁷³ 'Chinese language Beginners Class graduates', *Newsline Sāmoa*, 5 October 2021, [online](#).

³⁷⁴ 'History of the University', NUS, [online](#).

³⁷⁵ 'Fiamē opens Pacific-China Symposium on Higher Education and Innovation', Samoa Newshub, 23 June 2025, [online](#).

³⁷⁶ Deidre Tautua-Fanene, 'Twenty-two more Chinese language speakers in Samoa', 1 July 2017, [online](#).

³⁷⁷ Deidre Tautua-Fanene, 'Twenty-two more Chinese language speakers in Samoa', 1 July 2017, [online](#).

³⁷⁸ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚使馆举办元宵节招待会' [The Chinese Embassy in Samoa holds a Lantern Festival reception], 7 February 2023, [online](#); Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星出席"中国年·中萨情"春节招待会' [Ambassador Fei Mingxing of China to Samoa attended the "Chinese New Year, China-Samoa Friendship" Spring Festival Reception], 24 January 2025, [online](#).

though many other Asian cultures celebrate the Lunar New Year. The Embassy also hosts Sāmoan primary schools to learn Chinese cultural activities such as calligraphy.³⁷⁹ Chinese cultural troupes regularly tour Sāmoa, and Sāmoan groups are invited to perform in China.³⁸⁰ Sports are not neglected either. In 2017, the Chinese Rugby Association and the Sāmoa Rugby Federation signed an MoU on cooperation.³⁸¹

Controlling the Chinese Diaspora

The Chinese diaspora has long been a primary channel for the CCP's united front strategy. The CCP government views the overseas Chinese community with a mix of suspicion and ambition: a population that could potentially mobilise against the party, but also a tool it seeks to bend to its own purposes.

The CCP aims to exert control over the Chinese diaspora, regardless of how long ago their ancestors migrated from China, and 'turn them into propaganda bases for China'³⁸² by involving them in united front work. Across the Pacific, Beijing has affiliated existing Chinese community organisations with the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and has established new Chinese community groups whose sole purpose is to promote the CCP agenda.³⁸³

The Sāmoan Chinese community is both economically and politically influential and yet not united. The CCP distinguishes between those of Chinese descent and "pure-blooded Chinese",³⁸⁴ but both are targeted for united front work aimed at trying to strengthen their connection to the

³⁷⁹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星欢迎阿艾利小学师生做客大使馆' [Ambassador Fei Mingxing welcomes teachers and students from Aili Primary School to the embassy], 12 December 2024, [online](#); Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星欢迎马塔乌图小学师生做客大使馆' [Ambassador Fei Mingxing welcomed teachers and students from Mata-Utu Primary School to the embassy], 5 September 2024, [online](#).

³⁸⁰ Chinese Embassy in Sāmoa, 'Chinese Ambassador to Samoa Fei Mingxing meets the Samoan performing troupe going to China', 23 July 2024, [online](#).

³⁸¹ '驻萨摩亚大使王雪峰在 2018 年华侨华人春节招待会上的致辞', [Speech by Ambassador Wang Xuefeng to Samoa at the 2018 Chinese New Year Reception for Overseas Chinese], PRC MFA, 14 February 2018, [online](#).

³⁸² Wang Zhongshen, *Introduction to foreign propaganda*, Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2000, 172.

³⁸³ 'Improve cooperation between old and new overseas Chinese groups', *Qiaojing*, 23 August 2004, 34:1-7.

³⁸⁴ '萨摩亚' [Samoa], PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 April 2019, [online](#). For more on China's strategy towards the Overseas Chinese, see James Jianhua To, 'Hand to hand, heart to heart', University of Canterbury PhD thesis, 2009.

Ancestral Land (祖国). It is estimated that up to a third of Sāmoans are of Chinese descent (华裔).³⁸⁵

The Sāmoan-Chinese population are descended from Chinese men who came to work in the coconut plantations of Sāmoa or set up trading businesses,³⁸⁶³⁸⁷ forging a complex and enduring link between Sāmoa and the Chinese people. Genealogy is very important in Sāmoan culture. Many descendants of these families are anxious to trace their roots to China, though it is often very difficult due to the way the Chinese labourers' names were recorded. China has a dedicated united front connected effort for helping with this, linked to the Belt and Road Initiative,³⁸⁸ and has helped several prominent Pacific leaders of Chinese descent trace their roots to China.³⁸⁹ There have been Sāmoan politicians of Chinese descent in every Sāmoan parliament since independence in 1962.³⁹⁰

In addition to Sāmoans of Chinese descent, there are an estimated 1000 ethnic Chinese living in Sāmoa today.³⁹¹ This group consist of a later generation of Sāmoan Chinese migrants who mostly did not intermarry with Sāmoan families (老侨/laoqiao), as well as an influx of newer migrants from the PRC (新侨/xinqiao). The PRC migrants are now the largest proportion of this population. Sāmoans of Chinese descent and ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs tend to dominate much of Sāmoa's business landscape. Another important subset of the Sāmoan Chinese community are prominent Chinese business figures, like Jack Ke'en Chen, who was born in China, and obtained New Zealand residency, who has had extensive dealings in Sāmoa, without living there.

³⁸⁵ Ron Crocombe, *Asia in the Pacific Islands: replacing the West*, Suva: University of South Pacific, 2007, 32

³⁸⁶ Julia T. Martínez and Zhang Renzhe, 'Chinese business in Samoa before World War II', in Julia T. Martínez, Claire Lowrie, Gregor Benton, eds., *Chinese colonial entanglements: commodities and traders in the Southern Asia Pacific, 1880-1950*, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2024, 153–178.

³⁸⁷ Tuatagaloa Aumua Ming Leung Wai, 'Reflections on the experiences of the Chinese community in Sāmoa', paper presented at the China and the Pacific: The View From Oceania Conference, National University of Sāmoa, Apia, Sāmoa, 25th February 2015, 9, [online](#).

³⁸⁸ See 南洋华裔族群寻根谒祖综合服务平台 [Comprehensive Service Platform for Nanyang Chinese Ancestral Roots Tracing and Worship], [online](#).

³⁸⁹ Xu Keyue, 'Nauru President's tracing of family lineage in Guangdong strengthens people-to-people ties: expert', *Global Times*, 9 July 2025, [online](#).

³⁹⁰ Tuatagaloa Aumua Ming Leung Wai, 'Reflections on the experiences of the Chinese community in Sāmoa', paper presented at the China and the Pacific: The View From Oceania Conference, National University of Sāmoa, Apia, Sāmoa, 25th February 2015, 18, [online](#).

³⁹¹ Vaelei Von Dincklage, 'Chinese community welcome the Year of the Snake', *Samoa Observer*, 29 January 2025, [online](#).

The Republic of China had maintained close consular relations with the Chinese community in Sāmoa for decades when Apia switched recognition to Beijing in 1975. Naturally this community were pro-ROC and anti-communist like almost all the Overseas Chinese population in the Pacific at the time. In 1978, one of the first acts of the new PRC embassy when it set up in Apia aimed to change that. PRC diplomats invited 28 Chinese business leaders and their wives—effectively the whole Sāmoan Chinese business community at that time—to China for political tourism and to attend the Canton Trade Fair.³⁹² With one political hospitality overture, the embassy seems to have obtained their acquiescence for the new relationship with the PRC. Political tourism is a longstanding approach of CCP united front work.

As in most Pacific Island nations, the small Sāmoan Chinese community has a long-established community organisation set up to protect the rights and culture of their community. Founded in 1936 as the Chinese National Salvation Association (华人救国会) to support the Republic of China during the Sino-Japanese War, it was later renamed the Western Sāmoa Chinese Association (西萨摩亚华人公会), and then the Sāmoan Chinese Association (萨摩亚华人协会).

In 2016, the PRC Ambassador urged the Association to represent the interests of both the old Chinese (老乔)—long-settled families—and the new Chinese (新桥)—recent PRC migrants.³⁹³ Yet they are two very different communities, with frequently conflicting interests. The old Chinese speak dialects of Cantonese and originate from Guangdong Province, while many of the new Chinese are from Fujian and other provinces, and they speak Mandarin and their own regional dialects. The old Chinese are well-established in the Sāmoan business community, but the new Chinese have better links to PRC-based supply chains and networks. As elsewhere in the Pacific, new Chinese-owned warehouse-retail stores are now taking over Sāmoa's commercial sector.

One prominent member of the Old Chinese community who has worked closely with China was Tapunuu Papaliitele Niko Lee Hang, Minister of Finance (2006 to 2011), and Minister of Works, Infrastructure and Transportation (2016 to 2021) in the Tuila'epa HRPP government. Lee Hang

³⁹² 'Ambassador's biannual visit to Western Sāmoa', US Embassy Samoa, declassified cable, 10 May 1978, [online](#).

³⁹³ '驻萨摩亚大使王雪峰会见萨当地侨领帕特里克·陈茂先生' [Ambassador Wang Xuefeng meets with local Samoan overseas Chinese leader Mr. Patrick Chenmao], PRC MFA, 6 February 2008, [online](#).

was Secretary-General of the Sāmoa Chinese Association for many years, including when he was in ministerial roles.³⁹⁴ In 2016, while he was Secretary-General of the Chinese Association he signed the agreement for direct flights between China and Sāmoa.³⁹⁵ In 2019, he accepted a Sāmoan tala \$63,000 [US\$22,000] donation from the PRC Embassy for Vailima Primary School, which is in his electorate Vaimauga 3.³⁹⁶ He was closely involved in getting the Faleolo Airport extension done at the time.³⁹⁷ In 2021, he defended the Vaiusu Port project saying it was “not a military wharf for the Chinese Government”.³⁹⁸



‘Ambassador Ma and his wife took a group photo with Finance Minister Lee Hang and his family’, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 January 2011, [online](#).

In 2022, a new PRC-backed organisation the Sāmoa Chinese Business Association (萨摩亚华裔公会), was founded with the support of the PRC Embassy to represent newer migrants.³⁹⁹ The group has little public visibility – no website, no official social media accounts. A 2025 Lunar New Year

³⁹⁴ ‘驻萨摩亚大使马崇仁宴请萨摩亚华裔公会负责人’ [Ambassador to Samoa Ma Chongren hosted a banquet for the head of the Chinese Association of Samoa], PRC MFA, 19 December 2018, [online](#); 驻萨摩亚大使马崇仁举办春节招待会 [Ambassador to Samoa Ma Chongren held a Spring Festival reception], PRC MFA, 30 January 2011, [online](#); ‘驻萨摩亚大使王雪峰会见华裔公会侨领’, PRC MFA, 18 April 2016, [online](#).

³⁹⁵ Sarafina Sanerivi, ‘Door opens for direct flights between China and Samoa’, *Samoa Observer*, 25 October 2016, [online](#).

³⁹⁶ Soli Wilson, ‘Vailima Primary gets helping hand from China’, *Samoa Observer*, 19 September 2019, [online](#).

³⁹⁷ ‘Tapunuu Papaliitele Niko Lee Hang remembered for his service and love for God, Family and Country’, *Samoa Global News*, 17 December 2022, [online](#).

³⁹⁸ Soli Wilson, ‘Vailima Primary gets helping hand from China’, *Samoa Observer*, 19 September 2019, [online](#).

³⁹⁹ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘Ambassador Chao Xiaoliang Attended the Founding Conference and Unveiling Ceremony of the Samoa Chinese Business Association’, 13 September 2022, [online](#).

article named Ji Zhiming as president.⁴⁰⁰ Ji, a restaurant owner who arrived in 2005 and became a citizen in 2020,⁴⁰¹ has participated in several PRC embassy events,⁴⁰² including the Taiwan symposium.⁴⁰³

The PRC Embassy in Sāmoa serves as the main channel for implementing Chinese government foreign policy objectives within the Sāmoan Chinese community,⁴⁰⁴ which has steadily grown to its present size after China loosened emigration restrictions in the early 2000s. In January 2022, the embassy held a meeting for Sāmoan Chinese community where they told to "closely unite around the CCP Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core".⁴⁰⁵ In August 2022, the PRC Embassy in Apia hosted a symposium for the Sāmoan Chinese community on the "Taiwan Issue and the Cause of Chinese Reunification in the New Era," for the Overseas Chinese in Sāmoa.⁴⁰⁶ This event focused on reminding the diaspora of Taiwan's status as a part of the PRC.⁴⁰⁷ The Chinese participants voiced their support for China's policies.⁴⁰⁸ On average about six attendees from the

⁴⁰⁰ Vaelei Von Dincklage, 'Chinese community welcome the Year of the Snake', *Samoa Observer*, 29 January 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁰¹ Staff Writer, '22 take oath to become citizens of Samoa', *Samoa Global News*, 22 January 2020, [online](#).

⁴⁰² 驻萨摩亚大使馆, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星与侨胞代表座谈交流', 中华人民共和国外交部, 23 January 2024, [online](#); 驻萨摩亚大使馆, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星新年走访慰问侨胞', 中华人民共和国外交部, 3 January 2024, [online](#); 驻萨摩亚大使馆, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星向旅萨侨胞发放“新春暖心包”', 中华人民共和国外交部, 23 February 2024, [online](#); 驻萨摩亚大使馆, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星向侨胞发放春节“暖心包”', 中华人民共和国外交部, 24 January 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁰³ 驻萨摩亚使馆, '驻萨摩亚使馆举办在萨侨胞座谈会 宣介《台湾问题与新时代中国统一事业》白皮书'.

⁴⁰⁴ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚使馆提醒旅萨中国公民注意安全' [The Chinese Embassy in Sāmoa reminds Chinese citizens in Sāmoa to pay attention to their safety], 20 March 2024, [online](#).

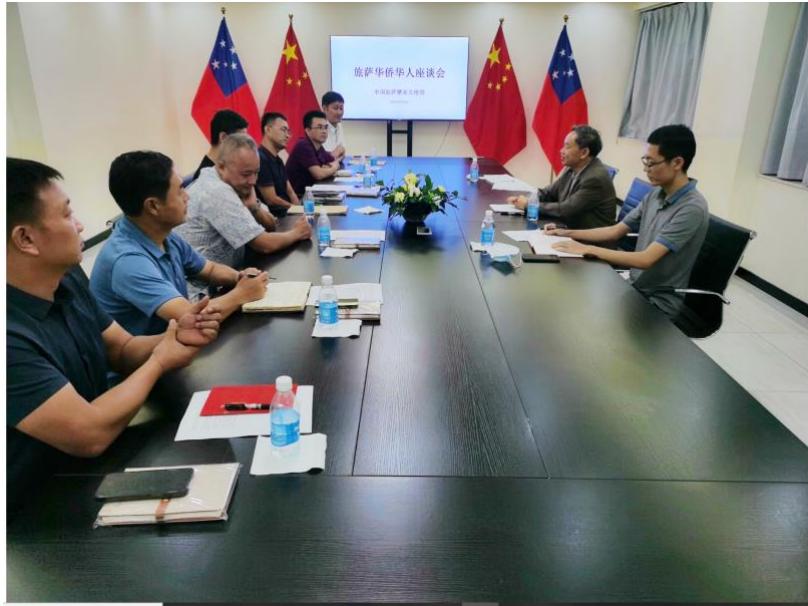
⁴⁰⁵ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '致萨摩亚侨胞的一封家书' [A letter to overseas Chinese in Sāmoa], 30 January 2022, [online](#).

⁴⁰⁶ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚使馆举办在萨侨胞座谈会 宣介《台湾问题与新时代中国统一事业》白皮书' [The Chinese Embassy in Sāmoa held a symposium with Chinese compatriots to promote the White Paper "The Taiwan Question and China's Unification in the New Era"], 15 August 2022, [online](#).

⁴⁰⁷ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚使馆举办在萨侨胞座谈会 宣介《台湾问题与新时代中国统一事业》白皮书' [The Chinese Embassy in Sāmoa held a symposium with Chinese compatriots in Sāmoa to promote the white paper "The Taiwan Question and China's Unification in the New Era"], 15 August 2022, [online](#).

⁴⁰⁸ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, '驻萨摩亚使馆举办在萨侨胞座谈会 宣介《台湾问题与新时代中国统一事业》白皮书' [The Chinese Embassy in Sāmoa held a symposium with Chinese compatriots to promote the white paper "The Taiwan Question and China's Unification in the New Era"], 15 August 2022, [online](#).

Sāmoan Chinese community were present at these events. This meeting was not reported in the English version of the PRC Embassy site.⁴⁰⁹



The Chinese Embassy in Samoa held a symposium with Chinese compatriots in Samoa to promote the white paper "The Taiwan Question and China's Unification in the New Era", 15 August 2022, [online](#).

There may be some political and economic advantages from attending such events. PRC national Wang Peizheng (王培政), director of the Sāmoa-registered Zheng Construction Co. Ltd, attended many embassy political events for the Samoa Chinese community.⁴¹⁰ In June 2025, Wang marched alongside PRC Ambassador Fei at Sāmoa's 63rd Anniversary Independence commemoration, holding a banner that read "Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of China-Sāmoa Diplomatic Ties".⁴¹¹ Zheng Construction has been very successful at winning contracts for major infrastructure projects such as the Regional Terminal at the Faleolo Airport, the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) Office, and the Apia Waterfront over other

⁴⁰⁹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, 'What's New Page 5 2021.11.10-2023.03.30', accessed 3 May 2025, [online](#).

⁴¹⁰ See previously cited PRC Embassy posts, '驻萨摩亚使馆举办在萨侨胞座谈会 宣介《台湾问题与新时代中国统一事业》白皮书'; '驻萨摩亚大使馆, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星向侨胞发放春节“暖心包”'; '驻萨摩亚大使馆, '驻萨摩亚大使费明星向旅萨侨胞发放“新春暖心包” [The Embassy in Sāmoa held a symposium for overseas Chinese to promote the White Paper on the "Taiwan issue and the cause of China's reunification in the New Era"; 'Ambassador to Sāmoa Fei Mingming distributed Spring Festival "Warmth Packets" to overseas Chinese in Samoa']'.

⁴¹¹ 林, '在晨曦中感受中萨友谊的蓬勃生机——参加萨摩亚独立日巡游侧记', 中华人民共和国外交部, 13 June 2025, [online](#).

Sāmoan companies, a point the Samoa Observer has made several times in its reporting on Zheng Construction's contracts. In 2023 and 2024, Zheng Construction also won major contracts for extensions of Sataua and Satupaitea District Hospitals in Savai'i,⁴¹² and construction of a new market and upgraded bus shelter at Savalalo.⁴¹³ The market project, worth tala \$30 million [US\$10.8 million], is funded by the New Zealand government. Zheng Construction is owned by PRC national Xue Ji and Sāmoan Chinese businessman Feagaimaleata Lei Sam.⁴¹⁴

Anti-Chinese sentiment rising

The rising numbers of new Chinese migrants and suspicions of criminal activity⁴¹⁵ or concerns about market dominance has fuelled ethnic tensions in Sāmoa.⁴¹⁶ In 2011, the president of the Sāmoa Chamber of Commerce warned that Chinese retailers were operating in violation of the Foreign Investment Act.⁴¹⁷ The PRC Embassy responded with concern that such remarks could incite violence against Chinese residents.⁴¹⁸ In reply, the Samoa Observer's publisher asserted that "everyone in Sāmoa is free to express their opinion" and suggested that the PRC embassy "engage in open discussions".⁴¹⁹

By 2015, frustration had spread. A local businesswoman told the press, "All these new Chinese-owned businesses are killing genuine Sāmoan businesses with the rubbish they are bringing in".⁴²⁰ Her business continued to lose customers as she recorded the lowest-ever sales, which she attributed to the rise of Chinese shops. She accused Chinese shops of unfair pricing and tax evasion. She pledged to raise the issue with Prime Minister Tuila'epa and questioned his assurances that "the Chinese were going to help local

⁴¹² Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Zheng Construction gets Savai'i contract', *Samoa Observer*, 8 November 2023, [online](#).

⁴¹³ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Zheng gets \$269K bus shelter contract', *Samoa Observer*, 1 November 2024, [online](#); Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Zheng wins \$24m Savalalo contract', *Samoa Observer*, 7 February 2024, [online](#).

⁴¹⁴ Zheng Construction Co. Ltd, [online](#).

⁴¹⁵ Staff Reporter, 'Chinese gunman charged with attempted murder, also had an outstanding warrant of arrest', *Samoa Global News*, 25 January 2025, [online](#).

⁴¹⁶ Savusa P L Sopoaga, 'Concern over immigration and border security', *Samoa Observer*, accessed 11 March 2025, [online](#).

⁴¹⁷ 'Chinese Embassy Concerned About Comments in Samoa', RNZ, 29 March 2011, [online](#).

⁴¹⁸ 'Chinese Embassy Concerned About Comments in Samoa', RNZ, 29 March 2011, [online](#).

⁴¹⁹ 'Chinese Embassy Concerned About Comments in Samoa', RNZ, 29 March 2011, [online](#).

⁴²⁰ 'Small businesses "dying a slow death" in Samoa', *Cook Islands News*, 28 May 2015, [online](#).

Sāmoans", noting that Chinese shops rarely hired Sāmoans and routinely undercut local competitors.⁴²¹

Several villages banned Chinese nationals from operating shops there, citing debt-trap practices such as allowing purchases on credit. This had left some residents forced to sell land to repay debts—something that is regarded as taboo in Sāmoan culture.⁴²² One Mayor warned, "if foreign businesses are allowed to be established now, future generations will not be able to access land".⁴²³

A 2025 Samoa Observer report alleged that some PRC migrants were "secretly...serving as agents for customs and immigration and even acting as tax agents". They said there have also been "rumours of Chinese nationals establishing a political presence in Sāmoa".⁴²⁴ The report raised fears that some migrants could be armed with weapons "for protection", increasing the potential for violent altercations.⁴²⁵ This is a plausible concern, given the 2019 murder of a Chinese couple during a robbery.⁴²⁶ After the crime, the Sāmoan police "[advised] the business community, especially Chinese business owners, to use banking institutions to safeguard their money".⁴²⁷ In January 2025, Sāmoa was rocked with a hostage crisis at gunpoint, when a PRC Chinese businessman held his Sāmoan wife hostage for several hours in their shop, while police and the PRC Embassy tried to reason with him.

Despite the ban on Chinese shops in certain villages, the Sāmoan retail sector has essentially been taken over by PRC Chinese-owned businesses,⁴²⁸ a pattern that has been repeated elsewhere in the Pacific. In 2020, Parliament debated the dominance of Chinese traders and the decline of local enterprises. An MP alleged that Chinese-owned shops sold expired

⁴²¹ 'Small businesses "dying a Slow death" in Samoa', *Cook Islands News*, 28 May 2015, [online](#).

⁴²² 'Another village in Samoa bans Chinese shops', *RNZ*, 1 December 2017, [online](#).

⁴²³ 'Another Village in Samoa bans Chinese shops', *RNZ*, 1 December 2017, [online](#).

⁴²⁴ Savusa P L Sopoaga, 'Concern over immigration and border security', *Samoa Observer*, 26 January 2025, [online](#).

⁴²⁵ Savusa P L Sopoaga, 'Concern over immigration and border security', *Samoa Observer*, 26 January 2025, [online](#).

⁴²⁶ 'Four arrests in Samoa over killing of Chinese man', *RNZ*, 16 October 2019, [online](#).

⁴²⁷ 'Four arrests in Samoa over killing of Chinese man', *RNZ*, 16 October 2019, [online](#).

⁴²⁸ Maina Vai, 'Chinese shops grow while Samoan-owned shops close down', *Samoa Global News*, 24 January 2020, [online](#).

goods and failed to issue receipts —to evade taxes.⁴²⁹ The issue was again raised as a concern in the lead up to the 2025 election.⁴³⁰

In March 2025, media reported that the Sāmoa National Provident Fund had sued the Chinese-owned Princessa Company for defaulting on a loan from SNPF.⁴³¹ One defendant, Chen Zhujian, allegedly used his wife Faasao, as a nominee to set up and manage the business.⁴³² Chen began a relationship with Faasao when she was 15, and they married when she turned 18.⁴³³ Faasao claimed she was used as the local face dealing with government agencies and ministries for her husband.⁴³⁴ More than eighty percent of the PRC migrant population is male,⁴³⁵ following the pattern of the past of Chinese sojourners.

Another case involved the Chinese retailer Wilco, found in April 2025 to have concealed its major shareholder, China National Building Material Co. Ltd., a Chinese SOE.⁴³⁶ Local traders protested that state-subsidised competition was driving them out of business. The Fiamē government declined to renew Wilco's business licence.⁴³⁷

Mutual distrust between Chinese nationals and Sāmoans appears to be deepening. Promised economic opportunities tied to Chinese investment and loans have not been widely felt. According to the Pacific Attitudes Survey conducted by the Australian National University in 2020–2021, 69 percent of Sāmoans said China had a “great deal of influence” in the country. Public opinion was sharply divided: 57 percent viewed this influence positively, while 43 percent viewed it negatively.⁴³⁸

⁴²⁹ Maina Vai, ‘Chinese Shops Grow While Sāmoan-Owned Shops Close Down’, 24 January 2020, [online](#).

⁴³⁰ Renate Rivers, ‘Born for This: Fa’afāfine, Matai, and Now ... MP?’, RNZ, 29 July 2025, [online](#).

⁴³¹ Matai’ā Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, ‘SNPF sues Chinese supermarket’, *Samoa Observer*, 17 March 2025, [online](#).

⁴³² Matai’ā Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, ‘SNPF sues Chinese supermarket’, *Samoa Observer*, 17 March 2025, [online](#).

⁴³³ Matai’ā Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, ‘SNPF sues Chinese supermarket’, *Samoa Observer*, 17 March 2025, [online](#).

⁴³⁴ Matai’ā Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, ‘SNPF sues Chinese supermarket’, *Samoa Observer*, 17 March 2025, [online](#).

⁴³⁵ Samoa Bureau of Statistics, *Samoa Gender Dynamics Monograph*, 2020, [online](#).

⁴³⁶ The Editorial Board, ‘Every company, local or foreign, has to follow the law’, *Samoa Observer*, 30 April 2025, [online](#).

⁴³⁷ The Editorial Board, ‘Every company, local or foreign, has to follow the law’, *Samoa Observer*, 30 April 2025, [online](#).

⁴³⁸ ‘Pacific attitudes survey: Samoa’, Australian National University, [online](#).

Revival of passports sales

Facilitating further Chinese migration to Sāmoa using a ‘Golden Passport’ scheme for investors, is one of the projects put forward by KangMeng Group as part of the Oceania Blockchain SEZ. In 2023, KangMeng’s promotional material stated, “Kangmeng will assist those experiencing high living costs and unsatisfactory quality of life in China to obtain Sāmoan immigration status, helping more people achieve a freer and happier life in Sāmoa”.⁴³⁹ The Sāmoan passport is highly coveted as it allows visa-free travel to Canada, the EU Schengen area, the United Kingdom, Russia and China. Between 1991 and 1997 Sāmoa sold 2200 passports to Chinese nationals via Hong Kong agents; the Sāmoan government earned US\$24.2 million—2 percent of GDP—from these sales.⁴⁴⁰ The La’aulialemalietoa government initiated a review of the Citizenship-through-investment Programme soon after coming into office, proposing to offer citizenship in return for what amounts to five-year interest free loans to the government.⁴⁴¹ This may also be linked to recently announced plans for Samoa Airways to purchase a new plane with funds “at no cost”.⁴⁴²

American Sāmoa

A Sāmoa compromised by China poses a direct threat to the security of American Sāmoa. Any new developments in China-Sāmoa relations are watched very closely in Pago-Pago. In April 2025, a mutual visa-free agreement between Sāmoa and China came into effect.⁴⁴³ Leaders in American Sāmoa have raised concerns about the potential for illegal Chinese immigration.⁴⁴⁴ American Sāmoa has also held talks about reactivating its former military facilities in response to the growing presence of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in the South Pacific.⁴⁴⁵ During WWII, American

⁴³⁹ 糊了的生煎包, ‘康盟集团：传递中国文化，助力南太平洋天堂岛国萨摩亚旅游’ [Kangmeng Group: promoting Chinese culture and supporting tourism in Samoa, a paradise island nation in the South Pacific], 哔哩哔哩 [Bilibili], 21 June 2023, [online](#).

⁴⁴⁰ ‘The forgotten history of passport sales’, 26 January 2021, [online](#).

⁴⁴¹ Sulamanaia Manaui Faulalo, ‘Investment citizenship under review’, *Samoa Observer*, 11 October 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁴² Andrina Elvira Burkhart, ‘Cabinet sets up committee for buying planes’, *Samoa Observer*, 30 November 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁴³ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Independent State of Sāmoa, ‘China-Sāmoa mutual visa exemption agreement coming into effect soon’, 14 March 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁴⁴ ‘Concerns about Samoa and China’s visa agreement’, *Talanei*, 4 February 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁴⁵ Office of the Governor, ‘Key leader engagement Part III: USARPAC’, Office of the Governor, 10 May 2023, [online](#).

Sāmoa hosted more than 5,000 troops⁴⁴⁶ –roughly the same number currently stationed in Guam.⁴⁴⁷ Officials have also proposed permanently stationing a Coast Guard vessel in the territory.⁴⁴⁸

Relations with the PRC

The PRC Consulate in Los Angeles handles consular issues for the territory.⁴⁴⁹ There is a small population of residents from the PRC living in American Sāmoa, as well as travellers visiting on tourist visas. In 2014 the PRC Consul General met with American Sāmoan officials to discuss increasing exchanges and cooperation,⁴⁵⁰ a similar visit was made in 2019.⁴⁵¹ No further progress was made. American Sāmoa does not participate in, nor has it signed, any police-cooperation agreements with China. Nor does Beijing offer the aid, loans and scholarships extended to Sāmoa.

⁴⁴⁶ U.S. National Park Service, 'American Samoa's Role In World War II', [online](#).

⁴⁴⁷ Andrew Tilghman, 'Guam: Defense Infrastructure and Readiness', Congressional Research Service, 3 August 2023, 8, [online](#).

⁴⁴⁸ Ridge Alkonis, 'The case for U.S. Coast Guard cutters in American Samoa' CIMSEC, 20 July 2020, [online](#).

⁴⁴⁹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, 'The Consular Jurisdiction of Chinese Embassy and Consulates General in the United States of America', Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, 1 July 2024, [online](#).

⁴⁵⁰ 'Consul General Liu Jian Visits American Samoa', Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Los Angeles, 25 February 2014, [online](#).

⁴⁵¹ PRC Los Angeles Consulate Deputy Consul General visit to American Sāmoa to attend 'Flag Day', Consul General of the PRC in Los Angeles, 22 April 2019, [online](#).



Photos from the 2019 visit of PRC Los Angeles Consulate Deputy Consul General visit to American Sāmoa to attend 'Flag Day', [online](#).

Zhenhua data leak

Despite the absence of formal ties, the CCP has still collected data on American Sāmoan elites. Interestingly, although American Sāmoa's population is one-quarter the size of Sāmoa's,⁴⁵² it had nearly as many individuals listed in the recovered Zhenhua database⁴⁵³—more, in fact, on a per-capita basis. The names are listed in full in the endnotes.

⁴⁵² Editorial, 'The mystery of the Stock Exchange companies needs clear answers', *Samoa Observer*, 16 March 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁵³ The 44 listed in the American Sāmoa section of the dataset were as follows: Fa'amausili Mau; Te'o Fuavai; Puletuimalo Koko; Peter Brown; Savali Ale; Tago Afeleti; Joseph Tuitele; Jonathan Fanene; Malepeai Setu; Utu Malae; Fiapapalagi Atoe; Sarah Haleck Tuitele; Faimealelei Allen; Steve Shalout; Danielle Sonoma; Jason Tuitele; Pohakalani Mauga; Bill Fazio; Utoofili Maga; Joshua Scanlan; Fualili Sonoma; Salu Hunkin-Finau; Saole Mila; Carolyn Budd; David Robinson; Va'a Matalasi; Leonard Seumanutafa; Sotoa Savali; Sialega Malaetasi Togafau; James Mockler; Su'a Schuster; Leolemau Veleutu; Fa'amausili Pola; Paolo Sivia; Andra Sāmoa; Mary Taufaasau; Magalei Logovi'i; Mavis Matautia-Lauofo; Toetasi Tuiteleleapaga; Ufagafa Tulafono; Vaoita Sotoa Savali; Keith Matautia; Le'ala Elisara; Fagamalama Sonoma.

The leak includes multiple figures from the American Sāmoan government. Fa'amausili Mau, a former member of the Senate and chair of the Public Safety Committee, is named.⁴⁵⁴ So is Te'o Fuavai, who helped secure American Sāmoa's self-governance⁴⁵⁵ and later served as Senator, Commissioner of Public Safety (Police Commissioner), and Director of Public Works.⁴⁵⁶ Leonard Seumanutafa, Director of the Criminal Justice Planning Agency, also appears.⁴⁵⁷ All of these positions are related to policing and criminal justice.

Another politically sensitive name on the list is Utu Malae, former Executive Director of the American Sāmoa Power Authority, which oversees water and electricity distribution.⁴⁵⁸ The dataset notes his connection to that agency.

The list also includes religious leaders, among them Peter Brown, who served as Catholic Bishop of the Sāmoa–Pago Pago Diocese from 2013 to 2023.⁴⁵⁹ Bishop Brown also served in Safotu village in Savaii, and Mangere in Auckland, New Zealand.

American Sāmoa China Friendship Society

Pa'u Dr. Roy Ausage, a Sāmoan citizen who lives in American Sāmoa, leads the American-Sāmoa China Friendship Society. The American Sāmoa China Friendship Society was a founding member of the Pacific China Friendship Association.⁴⁶⁰ Pa'u was an unsuccessful FAST Party candidate in Sāmoa's 2021 election. He was formerly Director of the Department of the Youth and Women Affairs in American Sāmoa and now runs a small business there.⁴⁶¹

Overseas Chinese in American Sāmoa

American Sāmoa is home to a small population of ethnic Chinese. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, 613 people identified as Chinese—about 1.4

⁴⁵⁴ Ballotpedia, 'Faamausili Mau Mau Jr.', Ballotpedia, accessed 20 August 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁵⁵ 'HC Aumoeualogo Te'o J. Fuavai Passes Away', *Talanei*, 13 June 2019, [online](#).

⁴⁵⁶ 'HC Aumoeualogo Te'o J. Fuavai Passes Away', *Talanei*, 13 June 2019, [online](#).

⁴⁵⁷ 'American Samoa government departments', American Samoa Government, accessed 20 August 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁵⁸ 'Tributes for late American Samoa power authority head', *RNZ*, 4 October 2018, [online](#).

⁴⁵⁹ Catholic-Hierarchy, 'Bishop Peter Hugh Brown', Catholic-Hierarchy, accessed 20 August 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁶⁰ *Pacific China Friendship Association* in 2022, [online](#).

⁴⁶¹ FAST Party, 28 October 2020, [online](#).

percent of the total population of 49,710—up from 409 in 2010.⁴⁶² Despite the community being so small, it is represented by a number of community organisations, one of them with links to the PRC.

The American Sāmoa Chinese General Association (美属萨摩亚中华总会馆) was founded in 1975. It was officially registered with the Overseas Community Affairs Council of the Republic of China in 1975 through a petition submitted by Liu Endi, then Republic of China Consul in Western Sāmoa.⁴⁶³

The American Sāmoa Chinese Association Inc. (美属萨摩亚华人协会) was founded in 2015. Its 2016 Lunar New Year event was jointly organised by a leader of CCP united front group the Zhejiang Provincial Committee of the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang. It was founded by “overseas Chinese from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong residing in American Sāmoa”.⁴⁶⁴ American Sāmoa has a small Taiwanese community — 21 people according to the 2020 Census,⁴⁶⁵ down from 31 in 2010.⁴⁶⁶ The American Sāmoa Chinese Association also has a Youth Club,⁴⁶⁷ and together they raise funds for local charities.⁴⁶⁸ Their Facebook page appears inactive, with the last posting dated 2019.⁴⁶⁹ The Youth Club’s photos show both PRC and ROC flags displayed together and include traditional and simplified Chinese characters, which is rare, as the PRC usually strictly polices any ROC content.⁴⁷⁰ The American Sāmoa Chinese Association is listed by the Los Angeles consulate of the People’s Republic of China as a contact in case of consular issues.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶² United States Census Bureau, ‘DP1: general demographic characteristics - Census Bureau Table’, accessed 2 May 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁶³ American Samoa Chinese Association, [online](#).

⁴⁶⁴ ‘美属萨摩亚华人协会（ASCCA）成功举办 2016 新春联欢会’ [The American Samoan Chinese Association (ASCCA) successfully held its 2016 Chinese New Year Gala], [online](#).

⁴⁶⁵ United States Census Bureau, ‘DP1: general demographic characteristics - Census Bureau Table’, accessed 2 May 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁶⁶ United States Census Bureau, ‘US Census 2010 American Samoa Ethnicity’, 2010, [online](#).

⁴⁶⁷ Andrea Suozzo et al., ‘American Samoa Chinese community association Inc’, ProPublica, 23 April 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁶⁸ Blue Chen-Fruean, ‘Groups donate over \$10k to Audrey and Community Cancer Coalition’, *Samoa News*, 16 December 2018, [online](#).

⁴⁶⁹ American Sāmoa Chinese Community Association Youth Club, ‘美属萨摩亚华人协会’, American Sāmoa Chinese Community Association Youth Club Facebook, 19 November 2019, [online](#).

⁴⁷⁰ American Sāmoa Chinese Community Association Youth Club, ‘美属萨摩亚华人协会’, American Sāmoa Chinese Community Association Youth Club Facebook, 19 November 2019, [online](#).

⁴⁷¹ Office of Foreign Affairs of the CCP Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, [online](#).

The American Sāmoa Chinese Chamber of Commerce (美属萨摩亚中华总商会) was established in 1993 to represent local Chinese-American business owners, but it appears to be inactive.⁴⁷²

Another Chinese-related organisation, a Chinese Church founded in 1963, remains active.⁴⁷³

Illegal fishing

Like Sāmoa,⁴⁷⁴ American Sāmoa faces incursions by Chinese fishing vessels.⁴⁷⁵ The territory's own fleet of 19 vessels caught 893 tonnes in 2021,⁴⁷⁶ yet according to U.S. government scientist Mark Fitchett of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, American Sāmoa has been losing its share of albacore tuna to Chinese encroachment.⁴⁷⁷ A U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis report confirmed that the local economy contracted in 2021 due to a decline in tuna exports.⁴⁷⁸ Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) data show that albacore catches remained stable.⁴⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Chinese encroachment poses a significant economic threat, given the territory's high exposure to the tuna market. Tuna exports accounted for 99.5 percent of American Sāmoa's exports and 84 percent of private employment in 2023.⁴⁸⁰

American Sāmoa is subject to U.S. federal restrictions on commercial fishing within Marine National Monuments (MNMs), which were established to

⁴⁷² 华人百科 [Chinese Encyclopedia], '美属萨摩亚中华总商会' [American Samoa Chinese Chamber of Commerce], accessed 2 May 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁷³ 'First Chinese Church of American Samoa', accessed 2 May 2025, [online](#); 'First Chinese Baptist Church American Samoa Google Maps', Google Maps, accessed 2 May 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁷⁴ Samuelu Ah Long, 'China's growing tuna fishing fleet in the Pacific Ocean: A Sāmoan fisheries perspective'.

⁴⁷⁵ Mike O'Sullivan, 'Hawaii fishermen concerned over growing Chinese presence', VOA, 5 August 2021, [online](#).

⁴⁷⁶ Oceanic Fisheries Programme Pacific Community, 'Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Tuna Fishery Yearbook 2024', Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, 43, [online](#).

⁴⁷⁷ Mike O'Sullivan, 'Hawaii Fishermen concerned over growing Chinese presence', VOA, 5 August 2021, [online](#).

⁴⁷⁸ Pacific Island Times News Staff, 'Fishery Council Chair: without tuna cannery, American Samoa becomes "useless" to the US', *Pacific Island Times*, 24 October 2023, [online](#).

⁴⁷⁹ Oceanic Fisheries Programme Pacific Community, 'Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Tuna Fishery Yearbook 2024', Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, 43, [online](#).

⁴⁸⁰ Pacific Island Times news staff, 'Fishery Council Chair: without tuna cannery, American Samoa becomes "useless" to the US', *Pacific Island Times*, 24 October 2023, [online](#).

protect biodiversity.⁴⁸¹ The PRC fishing fleets do not honour these bans.⁴⁸² In 2017, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior recommended that President Trump allow commercial fishing in two MNMs, but no action was taken at the time.⁴⁸³ In April 2025, Congresswoman Aumua Amata wrote to President Trump urging him to reopen fishing in American Sāmoa's MNM; later that month, he signed an executive order authorising it.⁴⁸⁴

During Trump's first administration, National Security Advisor Robert C. O'Brien announced in 2021 a study into basing U.S. Coast Guard Fast Response Cutters in American Sāmoa.⁴⁸⁵ After President Trump's return to office in February 2025, Representative Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen proposed that the U.S. government also station a second Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team (FAST) Company at the Pele U.S. Army Reserve Center in the territory.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸¹ 'Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument', U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 25 September 2023, [online](#).

⁴⁸² Matt Kaye, 'PRIMNM fishing access and China's ability to wage war linked', *Talanei*, 7 July 2023, [online](#).

⁴⁸³ Ryan Zinke, 'Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's report to the President on National Monuments', accessed 7 April 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁸⁴ Rebecca Dzombak and Lisa Friedman, 'Trump opens huge Central Pacific Protected Zone to commercial fishing', *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, 17 April 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁸⁵ 'Statement from National Security Advisor Robert C. O'Brien', White House, 23 October 2020, [online](#).

⁴⁸⁶ Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen and Michael Walsh, 'President Trump should base a new Anti-Terrorism team for the Pacific in American Samoa', *Breaking Defense*, 7 February 2025, [online](#).

Analysis and policy advice

The IMF has already warned that the proposed Oceania Blockchain SEZ and digital trading platforms supported by the La'aulialemalietoa government risk being a channel for money-laundering and terrorism financing. The associated Gold Passport scheme risks undermining the value and reputation of the Sāmoa passport. Sāmoa is already on the EU blacklist for being a non-cooperative tax jurisdiction and had been working to make the changes which would allow it to come off it. Countries on this list face a risk of loss of financial and investment opportunities, increased scrutiny and audits, reputational damage, and economic sanctions.⁴⁸⁷

Under the Tuila'epa government, Sāmoa took on Chinese loans for a series of projects that put the country in debt distress and raised security concerns. Now the La'aulialemalietoa government is proposing to take on new infrastructure loans, for projects such as the uncommercial, but strategically significant, Asau wharf project. Sāmoa depends on concessional loans and foreign aid to construct major infrastructure, but it can ill afford another set of unwise loans when currently basic health costs cannot be covered.⁴⁸⁸

Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa has attacked the media since coming to power. Sāmoa needs to pass Freedom of Information legislation, to help strengthen the role of the media in holding power to account. Fiamē's FAST 1 government promised to enact this legislation, but did not follow through.

Growing China-Sāmoa policing links have created another foothold for one of Chinese intelligence forces in the Pacific. If the new Sāmoa Police Academy becomes a regional hub for police training, China could target participating Pacific Island states through elite capture and information gathering.

Sāmoa needs to look to trusted friends to help boost its tourism industry. If Sāmoa could get more direct flights to Australia and New Zealand, they could increase their share of tourists. Sāmoa already has free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand but could look at increasing its exports of foods such as coconuts or other commodities that Sāmoa can produce and

⁴⁸⁷ Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, 'Samoa strides towards removal from EU Blacklist', *Samoa Observer*, 23 February 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁸⁸ 'Chronic shortage of medicines, a persisting illness', *Samoa Observer*, 1 December 2025, [online](#).

sell competitively. Australia and New Zealand should help Sāmoa meet strict biosecurity requirements for its agricultural exports.

Sāmoa needs to pay closer attention to PRC-connected business schemes like the one at Sasina, identify conflicts of interest within its government, and act to deter corruption. Sāmoa should audit any businesses that may not be paying taxes and continue to restrict those that receive subsidies from the PRC government. If Sāmoa is to allow foreign-funded projects, the government should mandate that Sāmoan labour take on most of the project.

China's growing fishing presence has caused the decline of the Sāmoan Islands' fishing industry. Sāmoa has sought assistance from other nations to patrol its waters from IUUF, as Sāmoa does not have the capacity to protect its EEZ.

One policy decision that could strengthen both Sāmoas' economies and security is the permanent stationing of a US Coast Guard cutter in Pago Pago, American Sāmoa. Commentators have proposed that it would mitigate Chinese IUUF.⁴⁸⁹ A US Coast Guard installation could further mitigate Chinese IUUF across the South Pacific, especially as the closest Coast Guard base is in Hawaii.⁴⁹⁰ The Chinese maritime militia poses an imbalance to the power of US forces in the Pacific and the US Coast Guard can help dampen the militia's effectiveness.⁴⁹¹ The US Coast Guard can help in emergency relief situations, as it did when Kiribati needed clean water.⁴⁹² A port for the US Coast Guard in American Sāmoa would also be interoperable with the US Navy, should the need arise.⁴⁹³ Congresswoman Amata has repeatedly advocated for a Coast Guard presence in Sāmoa to help counter China's rising presence.⁴⁹⁴ Through a stronger US Coast Guard presence, American Sāmoa, Sāmoa, and other Pacific Islands can regain control of their EEZs, resulting in a boost to their fishing industries.

⁴⁸⁹ Ridge Alkonis, 'The Case for U.S. Coast Guard Cutters in American Samoa', CIMSEC, 20 July 2020, [online](#).

⁴⁹⁰ Ridge Alkonis, 'The Case for U.S. Coast Guard Cutters in American Samoa', CIMSEC, 20 July 2020, [online](#).

⁴⁹¹ Ridge Alkonis, 'The Case for U.S. Coast Guard Cutters in American Samoa', CIMSEC, 20 July 2020, [online](#).

⁴⁹² Ridge Alkonis, 'The Case for U.S. Coast Guard Cutters in American Samoa', CIMSEC, 20 July 2020, [online](#).

⁴⁹³ Ridge Alkonis, 'The Case for U.S. Coast Guard Cutters in American Samoa', CIMSEC, 20 July 2020, [online](#).

⁴⁹⁴ 'Uifaatali reiterates call to base USCG Cutters in Pago Harbor', *Talanei*, 9 March 2022, [online](#).

Conclusion

This case study has assessed China’s foreign interference activities in Sāmoa, with reference to American Sāmoa, examining their effects on democracy, sovereignty, and custom. The events of 2023—an annus horribilis for Sāmoa—exposed deep networks of influence linking La’aulialemalietoa and senior members of the Fiamē government with CCP united front figures advancing Beijing’s strategic agenda.

China will be content with La’aulialemalietoa’s rise to Prime Minister, given his readiness to pursue PRC-linked projects. Fiamē’s struggle to manage her fractious cabinet underscores the extent of foreign leverage now shaping Sāmoa’s domestic politics.

Formerly stable, Sāmoa has shifted from turmoil to crisis in recent years. As the proverb reminds us, *E le falala fua le niu, ae falala ona o le matagi*—the coconut tree does not sway on its own, it sways because of the wind. A decade of China-linked debt, opaque investments, and elite targeting has deepened political divisions and eroded institutional safeguards. Today, Sāmoa carries one of the world’s highest Chinese debt ratios, driven by costly dual-use ventures. The case of La’aulialemalietoa’s electorate—recipient of more than US\$3 million from Chinese united front-linked companies—illustrates how strategic financial cultivation can convert into political leverage and external influence over national leadership. Meanwhile, deepening ties between Sāmoa’s police force and Chinese security agencies, alongside an emerging “China Model” of media control, signal a troubling drift in governance norms.

Sāmoa is a small, open democracy facing an organized, centralized Leninist party-state capable of aligning diplomacy, commerce, propaganda, and finance for coordinated influence. The CCP’s united front system magnifies this imbalance, channeling pressure through seemingly independent networks that ultimately serve Beijing’s strategic aims.

China’s interests in Sāmoa are overtly strategic: the country’s position within the Third Island Chain offers key access points for air and maritime movement, regional voting blocs, and future entry into fisheries and seabed resource markets. Our evidence shows China’s interference efforts are corroding Sāmoa’s democracy, sovereignty, and traditional systems of governance. This trend should alarm not only Sāmoans, but also

policymakers across the Pacific. Sāmoa's proximity to American Sāmoa extends the risks to Washington, opening space for grey-zone activities—illegal fishing, espionage, and influence operations—that undermine regional governance, U.S. presence, and strategic mobility across the Pacific.

The situation we have detailed is challenging, but not irredeemable. Now is the time to use all the available levers of Sāmoa's democracy to hold the FAST 2 government to account, and to foster a public conversation on the security risks of the China relationship. Likeminded partners must also step up now, providing tangible economic and political support to help Sāmoa preserve its sovereignty, rebuild institutional autonomy, and retain its place as a stable and resilient democracy in the Pacific.

Appendix 1

Frayed edges: vulnerabilities in Sāmoan politics, law, and government

The CCP's foreign interference activities always find the frayed edges in each society. Below we provide an overview of Sāmoan political history and legal set up relevant to the conversation on political interference.

Sāmoa is a South Pacific Island state in the Third Island Chain.⁴⁹⁵ Sāmoa's nine islands have a total land mass of 1,093 square miles.⁴⁹⁶ Sāmoa has one of the smallest EEZs in the region with 75,000 square miles.⁴⁹⁷ The main islands of Sāmoa are Upolu and Savai'i. The capital of Apia is found on Upolu.

The earliest human presence in Sāmoa dates to 1000 BCE. First contact with Europeans was in 1722.⁴⁹⁸

According to the last census taken in 2021, Sāmoa's total population is 205,000. About 36,000 Sāmoans live in Apia.⁴⁹⁹ 96 percent of the population identify as ethnic Sāmoans, while the remainder are Sāmoan-New Zealanders, or other.⁵⁰⁰

About 80 percent of Sāmoans live rurally. The rural population face water security issues and are dependent on wells for water.⁵⁰¹ Sāmoan society is united in religion; around 97 percent of Sāmoans identify as Christian.⁵⁰²

Local government has an important role in Sāmoa. There are over 360 villages with 11 administrative districts.⁵⁰³ The local villages have councils

⁴⁹⁵ Frederick Cichon, 'Learn from the fall of the Philippines: prepare the Third Island Chain', U.S. Naval Institute, December 2024, [online](#).

⁴⁹⁶ Sophie Foster, 'Samoa', *Britannica*, 25 August 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁹⁷ Ivamere Nataro, 'Why Samoa's Exclusive Economic Zone is small', *Samoa Observer*, 16 August 2019, [online](#).

⁴⁹⁸ Sophie Foster, 'Samoa', *Britannica*, 25 August 2025, [online](#).

⁴⁹⁹ The Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Sāmoa Population and Housing Census 2021', 2022, 30, [online](#).

⁵⁰⁰ Sophie Foster, 'Samoa', *Britannica*, 25 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵⁰¹ Sophie Foster, 'Samoa', *Britannica*, 25 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵⁰² Alexander Rheeney, 'Census data confirms C.C.C.S. Largest Church', *Samoa Observer*, 11 January 2023, [online](#).

⁵⁰³ Sophie Foster, 'Sāmoa', *Britannica*, 25 August 2025, [online](#).

which are formed by matai (chiefs), chosen by Sāmoa's extended families.⁵⁰⁴ These village councils then deal with local affairs.⁵⁰⁵

About 80 percent of Sāmoa's land is under customary ownership.⁵⁰⁶ Under Sāmoan law, resources on customary land are owned by the landowners.⁵⁰⁷ The designated matai for the customary land has the authority to manage the resources.⁵⁰⁸

There is a complicated bureaucratic process to determine infrastructure projects and resource extraction. The Ministry of Finance will receive a proposal for a project, once approved it will move onto the Cabinet Development Committee. Ultimately the Cabinet Development Committee approves major projects.⁵⁰⁹

In accordance with the Sāmoan constitution, the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers are appointed by the Head of State. The Head of State appoints Ministers based on the Prime Minister's advice.⁵¹⁰ The Attorney General is also appointed by the Head of State per the advice of the Prime Minister and the Principal Law Officer.⁵¹¹ The Police Commissioner is appointed by the Head of State under advice from the Cabinet.⁵¹²

The nominal GDP of Sāmoa in 2024 was \$US1.07 billion.⁵¹³ The main exports for Sāmoa are refined petroleum products and copra/coconut products.⁵¹⁴ In 2024, Sāmoa's unemployment rate was at 4.55 percent.⁵¹⁵ 2018, Sāmoa's national Multidimensional Poverty Index that measures health, education, employment, and living standards, found that 25 percent of Sāmoans were multidimensionally poor.⁵¹⁶

⁵⁰⁴ Sophie Foster, 'Samoa', *Britannica*, 25 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵⁰⁵ Sophie Foster, 'Samoa', *Britannica*, 25 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵⁰⁶ United States Department of State, '2024 investment climate statements: Samoa', United States Department of State, 2024, [online](#).

⁵⁰⁷ Fiu Mata'ese Elisara, 'Law, custom and constitutionalism: customary land tenure in Samoa', *Samoa Observer*, 19 February 2018, [online](#).

⁵⁰⁸ Fiu Mata'ese Elisara, 'Law, custom and constitutionalism: customary land tenure in Samoa', *Samoa Observer*, 19 February 2018, [online](#).

⁵⁰⁹ Glen D'Este et al., 'Samoa national infrastructure strategic plan', 2011, 72, [online](#).

⁵¹⁰ Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Government of Sāmoa Cabinet Handbook', 2011, 17, [online](#).

⁵¹¹ 'The Attorney General', Office of the Attorney General, accessed 5 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵¹² Ministry of Police, Prisons and Correction Services, 'Police Service Act 2009', Ministry of Police, Prisons and Correction Services, 2009, 11, [online](#).

⁵¹³ Trading Economics, 'Samoa GDP', Trading Economics, accessed 5 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵¹⁴ World Integrated Trade Solutions, 'Samoa Trade', WITS, accessed 5 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵¹⁵ The Global Economy, 'Samoa Unemployment Rate', The Global Economy, accessed 5 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵¹⁶ Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 'Sāmoa Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022', 2022, VIII, [online](#).

Sāmoa is dependent on aid. 16 percent of its national income comes from aid. 30 percent of aid goes towards supporting the government sector.⁵¹⁷

Vodafone assumed control of Sāmoa's Government-owned Blue Sky phone company in 2020.⁵¹⁸ Vodafone Sāmoa is owned 25 percent by Unit of Trust Sāmoa with the remaining 75 percent owned by overseas and other local investors.⁵¹⁹ Unit Trust of Sāmoa is a Sāmoan SOE, allowing Sāmoans to invest in large-scale projects.⁵²⁰ The parent company is Amalgamated Telecom Holdings Limited based in Fiji.⁵²¹ Digicel is the other main player in the Sāmoa telecom market.

Sāmoa's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment manages and assesses applications for forestry and other resource extraction.⁵²²

Sāmoa's Electoral Commission supervises elections and investigates electoral offences.⁵²³ Parliamentary elections are normally held every five years.⁵²⁴ Sāmoan political parties are not required to disclose donations.⁵²⁵ Sāmoa does not allow overseas votes. In 2025 Parliament dissolved before a bill could be presented permitting overseas voting.⁵²⁶

In the past couple of years Sāmoa has fallen in its ranking on the Global Press Freedom Index. The Sāmoan government has used defamation law to press criminal charges against journalists, causing a decline in press freedom rankings.⁵²⁷

Sāmoan's perception of traditional partners is more positive than towards China when looking at survey data on the positive influence of other states. New Zealand (95 percent), Australia (92 percent), the US (81 percent) are positively regarded by Sāmoans.

⁵¹⁷ Lowy Institute, 'Samoa', Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map, accessed 5 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵¹⁸ Marc Membrere, 'Vodafone Samoa celebrates second anniversary', *Samoa Observer*, 4 April 2022, [online](#).

⁵¹⁹ Marc Membrere, 'Vodafone Samoa celebrates second anniversary', *Samoa Observer*, 4 April 2022, [online](#).

⁵²⁰ Unit Trust of Sāmoa, 'About', UTOS, accessed 5 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵²¹ Marc Membrere, 'Vodafone Samoa celebrates second anniversary', *Samoa Observer*, 4 April 2022, [online](#).

⁵²² Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 'Forestry', Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, accessed 5 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵²³ Ofisa o le Komisi o Faiga Palota, 'About the Office of the Electoral Commission', Ofisa o Le Komisi o Faiga Palota Office of the Electoral Commission, accessed 5 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵²⁴ Office of the Electoral Commissioner, 'Electoral Act 2019', n.d., 14, accessed 5 August 2025, [online](#).

⁵²⁵ Bethel Ale, 'Political donors can stay hidden', *Samoa Observer*, 19 July 2025, [online](#).

⁵²⁶ Grace Tinetali-Fiavaai, 'July 4 deadline for voters to enrol for Samoa election', RNZ, 11 June 2025, [online](#).

⁵²⁷ Mong Palatino, 'Media groups call for repeal of Samoa's defamation law', *Global Voices Advox*, 28 May 2025, [online](#).

Sāmoa has a National Security Policy, but it does not explicitly state foreign interference or espionage.⁵²⁸ It does mention commercial espionage and cyber-attacks from State actors as concerns.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁸ Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Samoa national security policy 2018', Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018, [online](#).

⁵²⁹ Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Samoa national security policy 2018', Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018, 20, 27-28, [online](#).

Appendix 2

Key China-Sāmoa agreements

- November 6, 1975: Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Independent State of Western Sāmoa
- July 1996: Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Independent State of Western Sāmoa on the Maintenance of a Consulate-General for Western Sāmoa in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China
- July 1996: Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Independent State of Western Sāmoa on Mutual Visa Exemption
- March 1997: Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Independent State of Western Sāmoa
- August 2000: Agreement between the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Independent State of Sāmoa on Mutual Visa Exemption
- January 2008: Memorandum of Understanding between the National Tourism Administration of the People's Republic of China and the Tourism Authority of the Independent State of Sāmoa on the Implementation Plan for Chinese Tourist Groups to Sāmoa
- November 2010: Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Independent State of Sāmoa on Mutual Visa Exemption for Holders of Diplomatic and Service (Official) Passports
- 2014: Strategic Cooperative Partnership Agreement
- October 2016: Civil Aviation Transport Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Independent State of Sāmoa
- September 2018: Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Independent State of Sāmoa on Jointly

Promoting the Construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

- October 2018: Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement
- April 2025: Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Independent State of Sāmoa on Mutual Visa Exemption

Appendix 3

The Magic Weapons template⁵³⁰

China is working to change the strategic order in the Pacific, creating a parallel order, and undermining the existing order. Central to this effort are foreign interference activities, what the CCP calls international united front work (国际统战工作).⁵³¹ The CCP supports foreign interference activities in every state and territory of the Pacific. China's efforts have undermined Pacific political systems, created debt dependency, threatened sovereignty and security, and affected the rights of Pacific Chinese residents to freedom of speech, association, and religion.⁵³²

In 2014, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping gave a speech on the importance of united front work, calling it one of the CCP's "magic weapons".⁵³³ The CCP is a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary political party, and the united front was a basic tactic of Lenin.⁵³⁴ United front activity is considered a responsibility of all CCP agencies and a basic duty of every party member. Organizations such as the International Liaison Department, the Central Propaganda Department, and the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries all engage in united front work, as do government departments and local authorities across the PRC. At least 70 percent of the CEOs of Chinese major companies are party members. This means their companies are required to take part in united front work. The CCP describes their approach to foreign relations as "total diplomacy".⁵³⁵ Every possible channel is utilised to support the CCP's interests.

⁵³⁰ This template builds on a series of publications by Anne-Marie Brady from 2017 to present assessing China's foreign interference tactics.

⁵³¹ Zhao Pitao [赵丕涛], 外事概说 [An overview of foreign affairs work], Shanghai: Shanghai Social Sciences Publishing House, 1995, 87.

⁵³² See Anne-Marie Brady, 'China's activities in the island states of the Pacific', in Babbage, ed., *Winning Without Fighting*, [online](#); Ben Doherty and Kate Lyons, 'Outgoing president of Micronesia accuses China of bribery, threats and interference', *The Guardian*, 10 March 2023, [online](#).

⁵³³ '专设统战工作领导小组 中央“大统战”思维升级 [United Front Leading Small Group: more emphasis on CCP Politburo's "Big United Front"], People's Daily, 31 July 2015, [online](#).

⁵³⁴ Anne-Marie Brady, 'Exploit Every Rift: United Front Work Goes Global', *Party Watch Initiative Annual Report 2018*, [online](#).

⁵³⁵ Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

The CCP employs united front tactics in both domestic and foreign policy. Under Xi Jinping, international united front work is focused on four main areas:

1. Elite capture: Systematic cultivation, penetration, and co-option of foreign political, business, and academic elites to align their interests with, and actively promote, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) external policy objectives.
2. Overseas Chinese Diaspora control: Escalated state-directed initiatives to monitor, manage, and mobilize ethnic Chinese communities abroad as instruments of CCP influence operations, while imposing coercive measures on individuals and groups that resist alignment.
3. Narrative dominance: Coordinated information operations designed to shape global perceptions of China by amplifying pro-PRC messaging, leveraging state-aligned media outlets, cultural diplomacy, and educational partnerships, while marginalizing critical discourse.
4. Economic Coercion: Application of targeted economic measures to foster structural dependency, secure influence over strategic infrastructure, and embed states within a China-centric economic, transport, and communications architecture.

Elite capture: Make the foreign serve China

The CCP has a comprehensive strategy targeting foreign economic and political elites, to get them to promote the PRC's foreign policy agenda within their own political system; to encourage them to relay information on foreign government intentions, strategies and the attitude of key actors towards China; and to permit access to China's security presence via dual-use facilities. Mao Zedong famously called this approach "make the foreign serve China" (洋为中用).⁵³⁶

The core agencies used in CCP international united front work targeted at foreign political and economic elites are as follows: the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries; the CCP International Liaison Department; the All-China Federation of Trade Unions; the Ministry

⁵³⁶ See Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

of Foreign Affairs; PRC provincial and local governments; State Owned Enterprises and major Chinese corporations such as Huawei.

Policies:

- Building up asset relationships with susceptible individuals via China-based political hospitality at all-expenses-paid conferences and official visits to China, paid talks, paid and unpaid 'advisory' roles and consultancies. If necessary, compromise prominent individuals via hacking of devices used while in China, bribery, honey traps, or use of intimidation tactics.
- Using party-to-party links to target political elites and subvert diplomatic relations, as these are managed by professional diplomats following set policies. The CCP International Liaison Department Strengthen runs this activity.
- Coopt foreign elites to promote China's foreign policy agenda within their own political systems, use them as a source of information on their government's intentions and attitude towards China and its policies perspective in the media and academia.⁵³⁷
- Provide China-based "China-model" training programs and exchanges for foreign government officials.⁵³⁸
- Develop "friendship" sister city and sister province relations. Friendship (友谊, 友好) is a political term in CCP united front work. One of the key organisations involved in the PRC's sub-national relations is the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (友协, Youxie, Friendship Association).⁵³⁹ In the Xi era, the China Friendship Association is also in charge of promoting participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, the Xi government's effort to set up a China-centred strategic and political order.
- Using "the local to surround the center" (地方包围中央), use sub-national relations with local governments and indigenous elites to subvert central government policies or to undermine local governments who are resisting CCP foreign interference.

⁵³⁷ Zhao Pitao, Summary of Foreign Affairs, 167.

⁵³⁸ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, 'In Tanzania, Beijing is running a training school for authoritarianism', Axios, 20 August 2023, [online](#).

⁵³⁹ The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries is supervised by the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the CCP's united front organization, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; and the CCP's International Liaison Department.

- Use of diplomatic cover for united front work.⁵⁴⁰ The PRC embassy in each country has an important role in united front work. The CCP has a long tradition of party and government personnel “double-hatting”.⁵⁴¹
- Build up a global network of strategic partnerships with China at the centre.⁵⁴²
- Promote the Global Security Initiative.⁵⁴³ This is the PRC’s overarching narrative for establishing an intelligence presence in partner states via policing agreements, military links, and proxy police stations.
- Offering business opportunities to politicians. Appoint foreigners with access to political power to leadership roles in Chinese companies or Chinese-funded entities in the host country.⁴⁵
- Use partnerships with foreign universities and enterprises to acquire local identities; and potentially, access to military technology, commercial secrets, and other strategic information.
- Use people to people relations (民间外交) with trade unions, religious groups, women, youth, and other civil society organisations to influence society.

Controlling the Chinese diaspora: Bring together the hearts and the power of the overseas Chinese

The CCP seeks to utilise Overseas Chinese along with Chinese companies—both PRC-based and ethnic-Chinese international businesses—to advance

⁵⁴⁰ ‘Intelligence Services, part 1: Espionage with Chinese Characteristics’, Stratfor Global Intelligence, March 2010, 12.

⁵⁴¹ Frederick T. C. Yu, *Mass persuasion in communist China*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1964, 70.

⁵⁴² ‘China’s ‘partnerships’ with the world’, Organisation for Research on China and Asia, [online](#); 施欣怡 [Shi Xinyi], ‘中国的伙伴关系升级模式—以中国与中亚国家伙伴关系为例’ [China’s Partnership Upgrading Model: Taking the Partnership between China and Central Asian Countries as an Example], Shanghai Institute for International Studies, [online](#).

⁵⁴³ ‘践行全球安全倡议，破解人类安全困境’ [Implementing global security initiatives to resolve human security dilemmas], MOFA, 2023, [online](#).

the party's strategic agenda.⁵⁴⁴ Xi Jinping calls this "Bringing together the hearts and the power of the overseas Chinese".⁵⁴⁵

Some of the key agencies involved in this vector are as follows: the CCP's Central Committee United Front Work Department (UFWD); the UFWD's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of State Security; PLA military intelligence; Chinese People's Consultative Conference; Overseas Chinese associations, and the Peaceful Reunification Associations.

Policies:

- Control and monitor the Chinese diaspora via infiltrating their existing community organizations to neutralise any "anti-China" elements. Get these groups to promote pro-China policies within their adopted societies. Set up new organizations reporting directly to the CCP.⁵⁴⁶ The most well-known of these groups is the Peaceful Reunification Association of China, which has branches all over the world.
- Insert CCP-supported diaspora political figures within their home political systems; pressure foreign-based diaspora politicians already in government to promote CCP policies and provide information on the policies of the government's they represent.⁵⁴⁷
- Use Chinese companies and individuals in espionage and to establish civil-military infrastructure in foreign countries.⁵⁴⁸
- Control the diaspora community by setting and policing the boundaries on what constitutes Chinese culture.⁵⁴⁹
- Use wealthy overseas Chinese who are politically acceptable to the PRC government to provide electoral funding and other financial

⁵⁴⁴ '凝聚侨心侨力'. '习近平对侨务工作作出重要指示强调,凝聚侨心侨力同圆共享中国梦' [Xi Jinping's important instructions for the work of Overseas Chinese: Unite the Overseas Chinese and share in the Chinese Dream], Xinhua, 17 February 2017, [online](#).

⁵⁴⁵ 凝聚侨心侨力. "Xi Jinping dui qiaowu gongzuo zuochu chong yao zhishi qiangdiao ningju qiao xin qiao li tong yuan gongxiang Zhongguo meng" [Xi Jinping's important instructions for the work of Overseas Chinese: Unite the overseas Chinese and share in the Chinese dream], February 17, 2017, [online](#).

⁵⁴⁶ 'Xin lao qiao tuan lianghao hezuo' [Improve cooperation between old and new overseas Chinese groups], *Qiao qing* no. 34 (August 23, 2004), 1-7.

⁵⁴⁷ 'Meiguo daxuan huaren canzheng liliang zhanlou' [Chinese participatory strength in American elections revealed], *Qiaoqing*, no. 51 (December 1, 2004): 1.

⁵⁴⁸ 'Zhuanjia zixun weiyuanhui wei qiaowu gongzuo xianji ance' [Special Advisory Council: Suggestions and advice on Overseas Chinese work], *Qiaoqing*, no. 8 (March 15, 2005), 11.

⁵⁴⁹ 'Jiaqiang qiaowu wenhua gongzuo' [Increase Overseas Chinese Cultural Activities], *Qiaoqing*, no. 16, (May 24, 2005), 1-5.

support to subsidise politicians who support China's political agenda.⁵⁵⁰

- Force the overseas Chinese media to adopt the same censorship standards as the Chinese media.⁵⁵¹
- Co-option of local Chinese media to promote pro-CCP narratives.⁵⁵²
- Extend the PRC's global security presence by providing security support to Chinese enterprises abroad.⁵⁵³
- Utilise triads to pursue united front work objectives.⁵⁵⁴
- Target prominent individuals of Chinese descent, helping them connect to extended family in China (寻根) to strengthen their bonds to China.⁵⁵⁵

Economic coercion: One belt, one road: all roads lead to China

In 2014, the Xi government launched an initiative to create a China-centred political, strategic, military and economic bloc, one that will reshape the global order.⁵⁵⁶ The Belt and Road Initiative is essentially a united front project. It is presented as an agenda for inclusive globalisation but is intended to reorient the international system around China. Chinese sources frequently describe strategic infrastructure projects involving Chinese SOEs as BRI, even if the host national has not signed BRI or is not a diplomatic partner of China. Via BRI and FTAs, China is creating economic dependencies in susceptible economies via preferable terms of trade, loans, aid, directed mass tourism, and cyber-attacks.

Agencies: National Development and Reform Commission (lead agency), State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the

⁵⁵⁰ 'Zhuanjia zixun weiyuanhui wei qiaowu gongzuo xianji ance' [Special Advisory Council: Suggestions and advice on Overseas Chinese work], *Qiaoping*, no. 8 (March 15, 2005), 11.

⁵⁵¹ '第二届海外华文新媒体高峰论坛, 9月, 成都, 不见不散' [The Second Overseas Chinese New Media Summit Forum will be held in Chengdu in September. See you there!], Sina, 30 August 2017, [online](#).

⁵⁵² 詹正茂 [Zhan Zhengmao], '发挥华侨华人的作用促进中华文化在海外的传播' [Exploiting the role of overseas Chinese to promote the spread of Chinese culture overseas], 研究与探讨 [Research and Discussion], 2012, No.1, [online](#).

⁵⁵³ '践行全球安全倡议, 破解人类安全困境' [Implementing global security initiatives to resolve human security dilemmas], MOFA, 2023, [online](#).

⁵⁵⁴ Martin Purbrick, 'Criminal Organizations as Vectors of Influence in Taiwan', *China Brief*, Volume: 25 Issue: 16, 5 September 2025, [online](#).

⁵⁵⁵ See Nanyang Chinese Ancestral Roots Platform which aims to "strengthen the natural ties among descendants of the Yellow Emperor, to further awaken the sense of belonging and connection among the Chinese ethnic group through the themes of "roots, soul, and dreams," playing a positive role in serving national strategies and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation", [online](#).

⁵⁵⁶ See Nadège Rolland, 'China's New Silk Road', National Bureau of Asia Research, 2017, [online](#).

State Council, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other relevant state agencies, PRC SOEs, Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

Policies:

- Use access to aid, loans and the China market as a lever to intimidate foreign central and local governments; create economic dependencies.⁵⁵⁷
- Use BRI to provide China access to strategic natural resources and strategic sites to create forward-based military and intelligence installations.⁵⁵⁸
- Set up trade zones, ports, and digital communications infrastructure that connect back to China, creating a China-centred political, digital, and economic order.⁵⁵⁹
- Get foreign governments to do the work of promoting China's BRI to their own citizens and neighbouring states.⁵⁶⁰

Dominating the narrative: Telling a good story of China

The Xi government's multi-platform, international strategic communication strategy aims to shape global perceptions about China and the policies of the CCP government. In line with CCP tradition on propaganda, all forms of mass communication are targeted, as well as the culture and education sectors.⁵⁶¹

562

⁵⁵⁷ 'China's economic coercion: Evolution, characteristics and countermeasures', European Parliament Briefing, 2022, [online](#); 'Annual threat assessment of the U.S. intelligence community', 2025, [online](#).

⁵⁵⁸ Peng Guangqian "Yidai yilu" zhanlue gouxiang yu guoji zhixu zhong gou" [China's Silk Road strategic concept and the reconstruction of the international order], Xinhua, 9 January 2015, [online](#).

⁵⁵⁹ Peng Guangqian "Yidai yilu" zhanlue gouxiang yu guoji zhixu zhong gou" [China's Silk Road strategic concept and the reconstruction of the international order], Xinhua, 9 January 2015, [online](#).

⁵⁶⁰ Anne-Marie Brady, 'China's foreign propaganda machine', *Journal of Democracy*, October 2015.

⁵⁶¹ '牢记职责使命 创新构建现代传播体系—新闻舆论战线贯彻落实习近平总书记 2·19 讲话一周年' [Bearing in mind our duties and missions, innovating and building a modern communication system - one year after the implementation of General Secretary Xi Jinping's February 19 Speech on the News and Public Opinion Front', CCTV, 19 February 2017, [online](#).

⁵⁶² 'Xi Jinping: Jianchi zhengque fangxiang chuangxin fangfa shouduan tigao xinwen yulun chuanbo li yindao li' [Xi Jinping: Maintain the Correct Direction and Innovative Methods to Improve the Guidance of News Public Opinion], Xinhua, February 19, 2016, [online](#); 'Laoji zhize shiming chuangxin goujian xiandai chuanbo tixi—xinwen yulun zhanxian guanche luoshi Xi Jinping zong shuji 2·19 jianghua yi zhounian' [Uphold the mission to build a modern communication system - the news media's implementation of Xi Jinping General Secretary February 19 speech], CCTV, February 19, 2017, [online](#).

Some of the key agencies: Xinhua News Service, CGTN, China Radio International, the State Council Information Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Administration for Radio, Film and Television, Press and Publishing, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, and other relevant state organs.

Policies:

- Getting China's political language and viewpoints inserted into foreign public discourse.⁵⁶³
- Offering short- and long-term training courses to journalists to shape the information environment.
- Set up pro-China social media accounts targeted at local audiences.
- Offer generous strings-attached academic research funding through the Confucius Institutes and other China-connected funding bodies to set the boundaries of China analysis and debates in academia.
- Promote a CCP-defined notion of Chinese culture and language internationally through Confucius Institutes, cultural centers, and festivals.
- Offer generous scholarships for students and education subsidies to create-pro China narratives in the education sector.
- Using cultural links as a vehicle for united front work and influence operations.

⁵⁶³ Liu Qibao, "Vigorously Promote Chinese Culture to the World," *Guangming Ribao*, May 22, 2014, [online](#).

Acknowledgements: Fa'afetai tele lava, thank you so very much, to those we were able to discuss this project with in Sāmoa and Aotearoa New Zealand. We are very grateful to the expert feedback we received on the paper from the paper reviewers, which has helped to hone our analysis.

Research for the Coastwatchers 2.0 project has been supported by the Smith Richardson Foundation.

A note on macrons: Sāmoa should have a macron for correct pronunciation. However, many companies like Samoa Observer and the Samoa Port Authority do not use it. We have used it in all situations except when companies or media sources do not use it themselves.