

State patriotism

by Chen Weijian

(translation by Daisy Lee)

Chen Weijian is New Zealand-based editor-in-chief of the political magazine *Beijing Spring*

4 June 1989 was a bloody day that cannot be erased in Chinese history. The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) opened fire on unarmed students whose blood stained Tiananmen Square. 29 years later, on the same day, a New Zealand overseas Chinese leader, former PLA member Zhang Yikun, received the New Zealand Order of Merit.

On September 12th, Zhang Yikun was formally honoured at Government House. The news was even covered by China's CCTV: a star in the overseas Chinese community was on the rise. But while awaiting his spectacular future, Zhang Yikun this month burst into public view in New Zealand following his undeclared \$100,000 donation to National Party.

The question of what political donations are legal and illegal is a matter for the relevant authorities. What I want to talk about is Zhang Yikun's political background in China and the role he has been effectively playing in New Zealand as a "patriotic overseas Chinese" leader.

In his motherland, China, Zhang Yikun has held quite a few resounding political titles which distinguish him from all the other community leaders of the CCP's United Front organisations in New Zealand.

In 2012, Zhang was elected as the vice chairman of Hainan Provincial Federation of Industry and Commerce.

The website's home page says the Federation is a group of people's organisations and chambers of commerce under the leadership of the CCP. It is a bridge between the Party and the government to connect with the private sector.

That all members of the Federation must serve the party's interest was explicitly addressed by Sun Chunlan, the minister of the United Front Department, when she spoke at a national training conference in July 2017 to the chairmen and party secretaries from all of the provincial Federations of Industry and Commerce.

She said then that "where the work of the Party and state is progressed, the Federation of Industry and Commerce should organize the majority of people in the non-public economic organisations to follow".

Zhang Yikun's superior, the chairman of this Federation, is a famous businessman, Chen Feng, the co-founder and chairman of the Chinese conglomerate HNA Group.

HNA is known in New Zealand after the Overseas Investment Office declined its \$660 million bid to acquire ANZ Bank's UDC Finance last December.

Ranked No. 205 on Forbes 2017 China Rich List at \$1.7 billion, Chen Feng is also a former PLA member.

It is unclear if Zhang Yikun's wealth in China can be compared with Chen Feng's holdings in HNA, because on several Chinese websites Zhang is only declared as the chairman of [Hainan Lian Sheng Fa Industrial Co., Ltd.](#) and there is no information about the company's financial position.

However, one thing is certain: Zhang Yikun is not a normal business person, otherwise he would not have been able to become the vice chairman of the Hainan Provincial Federation of Industry and Commerce.

In Hainan province, Zhang Yikun plays an important role in another United Front Organisation, the Hainan Provincial CPPCC (**Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference**) where he was [promoted to the Standing Committee in January 2013](#). [A Brief History of the CPPCC](#) in its website explains that the CPPCC, established in 1949, is a creation of the CCP which combines the Marxist-Leninist theories on united front, political parties and democracy, with China's concrete practice. In its new century and new stage of development, China's united front has further expanded and become the broadest possible patriotic united front composed of all socialist workers, builders of the socialist cause, and patriots who support socialism and the reunification of the motherland.

Five months after he was elected in the Standing Committee of the CPPCC, Zhang Yikun was nominated by the United Front Work Department of the Hainan Provincial Committee as a ["Builder of the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics."](#)

At the top of a list of criteria, any potential nominee is required to have good political quality, resolutely support the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system, the party's line, and its principles and policies.



Southland District Mayor Gary Tong says Zhang Yikun, posing here with John Key, is well known in central government.

While Zhang Yikun has been diligently fulfilling his political responsibility in China, he has also been highly committed to the United Front Work in New Zealand.

Although he has been in New Zealand for nearly 20 years and is still unable to speak English, it has not affected him networking with politicians. Gary Tong, the mayor of Southland, who is currently travelling with Zhang in China, said that Zhang is [well known in central government](#) and has close links to high level ministers and MPs. They include National Party leader Simon Bridges, former PM [John Key](#), party president Peter Goodfellow, Deputy Leader [Paula Bennett](#), Auckland Mayor and former Labour leader [Phil Goff](#), current Justice Minister and former Labour Party leader [Andrew Little](#) and other senior politicians.



Auckland Mayor Phil Goff at Zhang Yikun's house wearing a gifted Chinese costume.

Among them, Auckland Mayor Phil Goff, who was in Hong Kong on 4 June 1989, and saw the massacre on live broadcast TV. The experience had moved him and he has showed sympathy for activists in the past. For example, when Wei Jingsheng, a famous Chinese democracy activist visited New Zealand, Goff invited him to lunch at Parliament. Times have changed, and though Goff is still particularly fond of China, his favour now seems to rest with interests associated with the CCP.

In New Zealand, Zhang appears to have been almost fated to succeed. He is admired by many immigrants who have been working hard for small achievement. Zhang talks of his own success quite modestly, as if "I was not intending to pursue wealth, but prosperity just landed on me without my intention".

Zhang Yikun was born in a village called Nigou in Puning County of Guangdong Province. In 1990, at the age of 18, he joined the People's Liberation Army in China. Joining the army was an opportunity for a rural youth to get out of the countryside. In his brief time in the army, Yikun was promoted to the headquarters. In 1992, he was discharged, and started to work at the government of the Hainan Provincial Special Administrative Region. The fact that he was able to transfer positions implies that he was already well-regarded, since only those who were could get such transfers.

In 1996, Zhang Yikun was sent to the (prestigious) Chinese Academy of Social Sciences for postgraduate study. This in-service postgraduate program is specially designed by the CCP for the training of its officials. Having joined the army at age of 18, his education was at most an intermediate level. What led to him, an official with only an intermediate school education, being sent to an institution for higher education? We can only speculate.

Soon after his arrival to New Zealand in 2000, he ran his own restaurant called “China Yum Cha Restaurant”, located at a premium location near Princes Wharf in Auckland. Unlike most Chinese immigrants who start washing dishes and cutting vegetables, Zhang directly became the boss of a large-scale restaurant (and subsequently opened another two restaurants). He had never run his own business in China nor apparently had any opportunity to make extra money. His monthly wage was just 800RMB in 1996. A large investment was required to finance this restaurant, so we can wonder where did the money come from?

Since then his business has becoming extremely successful. He has successively founded New Zealand Huanglian Group Ltd, HLG property Management Ltd, New Zealand Huanglian Natural Food Ltd and KCC Construction Ltd. The penthouse of 175 Queen St Auckland, the most expensive commercial building in New Zealand, has become the heart of his business empire. His business has developed to encompass multiple fields and multiple countries. Activities include property development and management, export and import, commercial investment. Several overseas offices have been set up in Hainan province, Guangdong province, Hong Kong and Thailand.

After establishing his business empire, Zhang Yikun began to build his career as an overseas Chinese community leader. Unlike Steven Wai Cheung Wong, the former head of the United Chinese Association in New Zealand, who had to cultivate his relationship with the Chinese consulate for some years for his dreamed position, Zhang Yikun’s political promotion has been as astoundingly rapid as his commercial success.

In 2015, he formed the New Zealand Chaoshan General Association (CGSA), for people from Chaozhou and Shantou district of Guangdong province, and has taken the role as the chair of the International Chaozhou Federation after two years.

Undoubtedly, Zhang Yikun is treasured by the senior Chinese politicians or he wouldn’t have been given this significant role to unite those wealthy ethnic Chinese who are valuable to the CCP in their attempts to expand China’s global influence.

As just one example of his connections, on 3 September 2015, Zhang Yikun was invited to Zhu Ri He military base in Inner Mongolia to watch the military parade. He stood on the viewing platform watching the armed forces marching, various new types of military vehicles and missiles in the parade, and the aerial display. He emotionally said, "as a military officer, seeing the country is strong, (my) feeling of pride is rising."

In New Zealand, he has been frequently visited by high level Chinese delegations. On 8 June 2018, his former comrade, Luo Baoming, the former party secretary of Hainan province, now the vice chairman of OCAC (Overseas Chinese Affairs Office) was warmly hosted by Zhang Yikun and his CGSA in Auckland.

At the reception dinner party, the two Chinese MPs who have made such a contribution to the New Zealand-China relationship, Jian Yang and Raymond Huo, witnessed how this senior OCAC official praised Zhang Yikun.

"The fulfilment of China's dream needs the overseas Chinese community leaders like president Zhang Yikun who has the strength and passion for the state patriotism".

State Patriotism! Here we have Jian Yang, former officer lecturer of a PLA spying school, and his fellow PLA veteran, Zhang Yikun, both members of "New Zealand Veteran Association" (Zhang Yikun is the president of the association), standing together to welcome a high ranking Chinese communist official, is it a coincidence?



Jian Yang (far right) and Zhang Yikun (second from right), the two former PLA members greet Luo Baoming, the vice chair of OCAC

If the above is not enough to set the scene, here is another photo. This one was taken on 30 August this year in Beijing. Zhang Yikun is staring at the display wall of propaganda and listening. The display wall is themed in communism red, titled "Always Go With the Party" and next to it is the symbol of communism, the hammer and sickle.



Zhang reading the “Always Go With The Party” display banner in Beijing on 30 Aug 2018

The New Zealand government granted him a high honour on 4 June, the day the whole world commemorates the young students whose lives were taken by the evil party. Zhang Yikun, the former PLA member, carried his honour back to Beijing to express his love to the party.

Is his beloved country New Zealand or China? There is nothing wrong if he says he loves China. But in reality, he loves the Communist Party and is following the steps of the party forever. Of course, we can't simply conclude just from a photo that he wants to follow the party all the way. For that, we should see what he has done in the past and what he is doing now.

The revelation of Zhang's donation has brought back to fore stories that had been dormant for a while. The National MP Jian Yang, exposed last year for his hidden past as a PLA intelligence officer and teacher in PLA spy school, and later sitting in the Foreign Affairs committee of Parliament. And now, another (former) PLA member, Zhang Yikun has emerged on the stage.

New Zealand is the land of the long white cloud, often described as the last pure - uncorrupt - land in the world. Unfortunately, it has been polluted by CCP's Human Common Destiny. The clean-up of the pollution may have begun, but completing it will take time.

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