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The Chinese United Front in the Czech Republic

Methods, goals and organizational structure

Čínská Jednotná fronta v ČR

Metody, cíle a organizační struktura

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Declaration:

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In Prague, July 31, 2020

Filip Jirouš

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English Abstract

This thesis describes the CCP united front work in the Czech Republic and challenges the current understanding of the Chinese diaspora's role in the PRC's influence in countries with small Chinese communities. Through an analysis of primary Chinese-language sources contextualized using secondary literature, the study presents the first overall picture of the CCP united front work in a European country. It identifies the main united front groups within the Czech Chinese diaspora and describes their engagement with the Czech and PRC political systems, as well as pan-European Chinese diaspora associations. The main finding is that, while these organizations play an auxiliary role to the Party-state organs and channels PRC uses for interacting with Czech and European politics, their importance and activity is higher than noticed in previous research. The study further finds that the trans-national mobility of the European Chinese migrant communities, well-established in previous scholarship, influences united front work in its treatment of the continent as single space. The creation of pan-European Chinese associations is actively supported by the PRC organs that engage them on higher level than groups restricted to specific countries. The relevance of previous research on European Chinese diaspora to the analysis of the CCP's interactions with Europe is further demonstrated by the observation that PRC political system shapes the structure of Chinese associations abroad. The findings point to the existence of incentives to form groups that mimic PRC mass organizations, defined by affiliation with smaller PRC administrative units, rather than organizations aiming to represent the entire local diaspora. The conclusions of this work are relevant to the study of PRC's influence activities abroad. Due to global PRC policies and mechanisms, even in countries whose Chinese communities are smaller than in more traditional destinations for Chinese emigration, such as Australia or Canada, diaspora organizations need to be analyzed when researching local manifestations of PRC influence.

Czech Abstract

Tato diplomová práce popisuje čínskou práci na jednotné frontě v ČR a zpochybňuje dosavadní pohled na roli čínské diaspory v rámci vlivových aktivit ČLR v zemích s malou čínskou komunitou. Prostřednictvím analýzy primárních zdrojů v čínštině, zasazených do kontextu pomocí sekundární literatury, tato studie nabízí první celkový pohled na čínskou práci na jednotné frontě v Evropské zemi. Výzkum identifikuje hlavní organizace napojené na systém jednotné fronty v rámci čínské diaspory v ČR a popisuje jejich interakce s politickým systémem ČR a ČLR, a také s panevropskými čínskými spolky. Hlavním zjištěním je větší důležitost i zapojení čínské diaspory do vztahů ČLR s ČR a Evropou, než bylo doposud popsáno, i přestože tyto organizace hrají spíše pomocnou roli pro další preferovanější kanály. Studie dále odhaluje, že mezinárodní mobilita čínské komunity v Evropě, dobře popsána v dostupné literatuře, ovlivňuje práci na jednotné frontě v jejím vnímání celého kontinentu jako jednoho prostoru. Orgány ČLR aktivně podporují vznik panevropských čínských spolků a udržují s nimi styky na vyšší úrovni než se skupinami omezenými na konkrétní stát. Význam předchozího výzkumu čínské komunity v Evropě pro pochopení vztahů ČLR s evropskými státy je dále demonstrován na tom, jak politický systém ČLR utváří strukturu čínských organizací v zahraničí. Výsledky této práce poukazují na existenci pobídek k vytváření spolků, které napodobují masové organizace v ČLR, definované příslušností k menším administrativním jednotkám ČLR, spíše než sdružení, která si kladou za cíl reprezentovat celou místní diasporu. Závěry této analýzy jsou relevantní pro studium vlivových aktivit ČLR v zahraničí. Při jejich zkoumání by měly být, s ohledem na globální politiku a mechanismy ČLR, organizace čínské diaspory zkoumány i v zemích s menší čínskou komunitou než v tradičních cílových zemích pro čínskou emigraci jako je Austrálie nebo Kanada.

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Glossary

Qiaoling	侨领	Leader of overseas Chinese association, typically linked to the united front system.
Qiaotuan	侨团	Overseas Chinese organization, typically linked to the united front system.
Qiaowu	侨务	United front work targeting overseas Chinese.
United front work	<i>Tongyi zhanxian gongzuo</i> 统一战线工作	Cooptation tactic typical for Leninist regimes used to forge pragmatic alliances.
Xinqiao / Xin yimin	新桥 / 新移民	Chinese national who has recently emigrated (especially after 1980s).
Xitong	系统	System. Grouping of Party-state agencies under the supervision of a senior leader.

Acronyms

ACFROC	Zhonghua quan guo gui guo Huaqiao lianhehui 中华全国归国华侨联合会	All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese. UF organ targeting OC, after 2018 in charge of significant part of <i>qiaowu</i> .
BRI	Yi dai yi lu 一带一路	Belt and Road Initiative (or New Silk Road etc.). Main foreign policy initiative under Xi Jinping.
CCAPPNU	Jieke heping tongyi cujin hui 捷克中国和平统一促进会	Czech China Association for the Promotion of Peaceful National Unification. Czech chapter of CCPNU.
CCPIT	Zhongguo guoji maoyi cujin weiyuanhui 中国国际贸促进委员会	China Council for the Promotion of International Trade. People's diplomacy organ of the financial system engaged in business-related activities abroad.
CCPPNU	中国和平统一促进会	China Council for the Peaceful Promotion of National Unification. UF organ with global network of chapters.
CEE	Zhongdong'Ou 中东欧	Central and Eastern Europe. Post-Communist European countries.
CNS	Zhongguo xinwen she 中国新闻社	China News Service. Propaganda organ of the UF system.
COEA	Zhongguo haiwai jiaoliu xiehui 中国海外交流协会	China Overseas Exchange Association. UF body recently subsumed by COFA.

COFA	Zhonghua haiwai lianyihui 中华海外联谊会	China Overseas Friendship Association. Platform for coopting and interacting with overseas united front figures.
CPAFFC	Zhongguo renmin duiwai youhao xiehui 中国人民对外友好协会	Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. People's diplomacy organ of the foreign affairs system.
CPPCC	Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi 中国人民政治协商会议	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Top UF body.
CSSA	Zhongguo xuesheng xuezhe lianhehui 中国学生学者联合会	Chinese Students and Scholars Association. Organizations abroad uniting Chinese students and academics. Typically linked to the UF system.
EFCO	Ouzhou Huaqiao Huaren shetuan lianhehui 欧洲华侨华人社团联合会	European Federation of Chinese Organizations. Pan-European OC organization.
EPRCP		Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Prague.
ILD	Zhongyang duiwai lianluo bu 中央对外联络部	International Liaison Department. Foreign affairs organ carrying out international united front work targeting foreign political elites.
LSG	Lingdao xiaozu 领导小组	Leading small group. Top level body within a <i>xitong</i> .

KMT	Guomindang 国民党	Nationalists. The Republic of China's ruling party between 1928 and 1991. One of the two major parties in Taiwan after 1991.
KSČM	Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy	Czech Communist Party. Left-wing party important in Czech-China relations.
MSS	Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guojia anquan bu 中华人民共和国国家安全部	Ministry of State Security of the People's Republic of China. Civilian intelligence service.
OC	Huaqiao / Huaren 华侨 / 华人	Overseas Chinese
OCAO	Guowuyuan qiaowu bangongshi 国务院侨务办公室	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, top <i>qiaowu</i> organ until 2018, now under UFWD.
PRC	Zhonghua renmin gongheguo 中华人民共和国	People's Republic of China (est. 1949).
ROC	Zhonghua minguo 中华民国	Republic of China (est. 1911). After 1949 controlling only Taiwan.
SOE	Guoyou qiye 国有企业	State-owned enterprise.
UF	Tongyi zhanxian 统一战线	United Front. CCP's institutionalized political alliance system.
UFWD	Tongyi zhanxian gongzuo bu 统一战线工作部	United Front Work Department. Coordinating body of the UF system.
WRSA	Ou Mei tongxue hui 欧美同学会	Western Returned Scholars Association. UF organ targeting Chinese students and scholars abroad.

ZFROC	Zhejiang gui guo huaqiao lianhehui 浙江归国华侨联合会	Zhejiang ACFROC.
ČSSD	Česká strana sociálně demokratická	Czech Social Democratic Party. Party with a key role in recent Czech-China relations.

1.0 Introduction

This study contributes to existing research on the Chinese diaspora in the Czech Republic and Europe from a previously under-explored perspective. Previous works focused on broader aspects of the Chinese migrant communities and generally disregarded their political affiliations, or claimed that the role of the Chinese diaspora is much less significant in countries with smaller Chinese communities than in more traditional regions such as Australia or Canada. This study argues otherwise, and describes the Czech Chinese diaspora organizations in the light of their involvement in the local, European and Chinese political structures guided by the CCP through its united front system. While these united front groups play a clear auxiliary role in PRC's relations with Europe, their level and frequency of participation of united front work is higher than estimated by previous research on the topic. The study presents the first overall picture of united front work in a European country.

The UF work in managing OC communities as described in other regions such as New Zealand or Australia has always been important but has become even more prominent in recent years. This is best manifested in the 2018 reforms of the UF system, where *qiaowu* was one of the key restructured areas, which makes a better understanding of this aspect of PRC influence work abroad even more important. Managing OC communities via united front groups abroad, forming artificial diaspora representation, makes it possible for the CCP to control its citizens, and to a certain degree even non-citizens of Chinese heritage beyond its borders. Although the main goal is to neutralize threats to the Party's legitimacy through political mobilization and the incentivization of cooperation and patriotism, the OC are also viewed as an important resource of capital – e.g. intellectual and financial.

UF work provides the link and conduit between OC communities and the Party-state system abroad. The leadership of local united front groups includes individuals with current or previous united front positions in China. The UF link works in both directions,

providing a useful mechanism for the PRC to pursue its goals in the host countries, including the Czech Republic, and at the same time provides benefits in the form of access or prestige for the OC leaders. Despite small numbers and low level of integration of the OC in the Czech Republic, some of the community leaders have cultivated contacts with Czech political actors on local, regional and central level going as high as the last two Czech presidents. The diaspora organizations are also part of pan-European Chinese diaspora federations, another largely understudied topic, despite the prominence of some of these groups, actively supported by the PRC in order to make the interaction more effective in Europe, treated as a single space.

This study also contributes to the understanding of the pressure the OC communities face from the PRC, which may include coercion and intimidation, especially in the case of ethno-religious minorities such as the Uyghurs or Tibetans. Members of OC communities often appear to have little choice but to join UF-linked organizations, or risk antagonizing the relevant PRC bureaucracy, with potentially serious consequences for their relatives in China, and their businesses. It should be stressed that united front work can bring serious harm to the OC communities, fomenting anti-Chinese sentiment, as manifested perhaps most gravely in Indonesia in the 1960s.

This work does not explore the conditions of membership in the UF-linked groups overseas, or the nature of their relationship with the local OC communities, but the issue has been deemed important in at least one country with a large OC community – Australia. The federal government there introduced legislation in 2018 to counter CCP's united front work in the country, with aims including protecting the OC from coercion by outside authorities.

The author hopes that this work can inform future research in the field. The relevance of such research grows with recent fast development of the bilateral Czech – China relations, including the many controversies that have been accompanying it. A better understanding of UF work both in the PRC and abroad is directly relevant to informed policy-making in other countries' relationship with the PRC.

1.1 Methodology

This thesis employs qualitative research methods on Chinese (and some European language) sources, mainly official government and diaspora media accounts of meetings between Chinese diaspora organizations, their leaders, and representatives of the Chinese and local political systems. These references and other material such as official registers of businesses and self-descriptions and descriptions of the organizations are treated as primary sources. As most of this material is available online, links are provided in an archived form so as to preempt any modification or deletion of the original link, which would affect the reproducibility of the results in future.

These primary sources are then contextualized using relevant secondary literature that identifies the organizations involved, tactics employed, and helps explain the significance of the interactions that are the core interest of this work. As the highly formalized primary sources often come from the CCP or biased entities within the OC system, there is a risk of intentional or subliminal distortion of reality. To mitigate this, critical reading is applied and the document's facts are compared with other sources of information, including photographic material often accompanying the OC media reports, and less formal personal accounts, where available.

The diaspora groups and their leaders, who are the core subject of this study, are selected based on their prominence in Chinese-language media and official reports. While this method could omit certain facts, it still yields enough data for evidence-based description of the diaspora landscape and produce conclusions about the methods and general principles.

Throughout the thesis, the Chinese transliteration system *pinyin* (拼音)¹ and Simplified Chinese Characters (*jianti zi* 简体字) are used for all Chinese sources, including those originating in Hong Kong or Taiwan, where Traditional Chinese Characters (*fanti zi* 繁体字) remain in usage. All names of organizations and titles of publications are provided in the original language and in English.

¹ Unless different spelling is established in English.

1.2 Previous research

United front work has been rather understudied outside of China. The founding publication of “united front studies” is the 1997 dissertation by Gerry Groot. It provides a general overview of the concept, its history and the role it plays in the PRC. Another major contribution to the understanding of UF is James To's 2009 doctoral thesis focusing on *qiaowu*. While several studies on specific aspects of the united front work have been published in the last couple of years, the first overview of the contemporary united front system was published only in June 2020 by Alex Joske.

The first comprehensive case studies of the united front work abroad as a whole were *Magic Weapons* (2017) by Anne-Marie Brady and a study of the Australian example by Clive Hamilton in *Silent Invasion* (2018). Further case studies have been provided for example by Martin Hála, Jichang Lulu, Nadège Rolland or Didi Kirsten Tatlow in their research for *Sinopsis*, the Jamestown Foundation's *China Brief* and other publications.

Research into the Chinese diaspora in Europe was seemingly at its height between the late 1990s and late 2000s, when OC migration soared on the continent. The first major publication detailing the Chinese diaspora history and recent developments (*The Chinese in Europe*) came out in 1998. The 2007 publication *Beyond Chinatown* discusses more recent developments regarding European OC. Pál Nyíri's 2007 monograph *Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia* described the OC groups in this understudied region providing data not only on the diaspora in the non-traditional territory in general, but also on the OC associations and their political activities.

There seems to be a lack of comprehensive research on the European Chinese diaspora landscape in recent years, as new major publications focus mostly on specific aspects of Chinese migration, such as participation in global trends (*City Making and Global Labor Regimes Chinese Immigrants and Italy's Fast Fashion Industry* by Antonella Ceccagno) or organized crime (*El imperio invisible: El éxito empresarial chino y sus vínculos con la criminalidad económica en España y Europa* by Spanish journalists and writers Heriberto Araújo Rodríguez and Juan Pablo Cardenal Nicolau). The first (and possibly

only) publication (2017) focusing on the OC associations in Europe, or to be precise Austria, by Gerd Kaminski and Xu Fangfang did not reveal much in terms of the political organization or united front work of these groups.

Research on the Czech diaspora was first conducted by Markéta Moore in her doctoral thesis and by Lubica Obuchová (*Čiňané 21. století*) in the early 2000s. Several bachelor and master' theses followed, but these works often focused only on specific aspects and relied on Moore's research for a significant amount of data. Only Moore provided a more thorough description of the early OC associations in the Czech Republic based on personal interviews with the individuals involved and OC media reporting.

In general, there seems to be a lack of publications discussing the political activities of the Chinese diaspora in Europe and their organizations. This thesis aims to provide a baseline survey of these phenomena, but further work will be needed in order to truly understand them.

1.3 United front work: From Sneevliet to Xi Jinping

A united front (UF) is a specific type of a political coalition typical of Communist regimes and movements. At its core is the united front work (*tongzhan gongzuo* 统战工作) or tactics, which aim to form tactical coalitions with as many potential individuals and groups under the guidance or leadership of the revolutionary vanguard as possible. By legitimizing or delegitimizing the targets, both members of a united front and its opposition lose maneuverability and bargaining positions until they become coopted or ostracized. United front as a tactic to be applied by all communist movements was promoted by Lenin and the Comintern in 1921 after German and Hungarian practice showed the potential of this method and theory (Riddell 2011). As the CCP's establishment in 1921 was facilitated by Comintern advisers, and specifically by one of the early supporters and pioneers of UF work in Asia Henk Sneevliet, the concept of UF was closely linked to the founding of the Party, which soon adopted it and transformed it into one of the most important tools, or as Mao put it – one of the three "magic weapons" (*fabao* 法宝) at the Party's disposal (CPPCC 2019). The UF in China has developed into a sophisticated system, at times disfavored by the leadership for its proximity with the cooptees or bourgeois thinking, but in Xi Jinping's era enjoying renewed prominence. Xi has reformed the united front work system, one of the six or seven top suprabureaucracies in the PRC, and upgraded its significance, calling for a Grand United Front (*Da Tongyi zhanxian* 大统一战线) to expand well-beyond the PRC's borders (Groot 2019: 2).

1.3.1 History

The united front tactics, or united front work, were first pioneered in 1919 by in the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic when local communists joined the Socialists (a non-revolutionary party aligned with the Second International) in order to form a government (Riddell 2011). Other early experiments included the Lenin-supported alliance between the Communist Party of Britain and the Labour Party, or uniting European armament factory workers in strikes to halt supply shipments to the Polish military's invasion of the USSR in 1920 (ibid.). The most prominent in developing these tactics were the German communists, who united workers in their struggle against capitalism. One of their successes was the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands) coopting and merging with the left wing of the centrist Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) in 1920 (ibid.). In Asia, the UF was used in the Russian Far East to coopt local elites during the civil war (ibid.), but was also adopted by the Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia), founded by Henk Sneevliet in 1914, who would later on become a prominent supporter of the UF tactics (Saich and Tichelman 1985: 176). Lenin was familiar with Sneevliet's methods and experience and it was on his recommendation that the Dutchman was sent to China to help build the CCP (Bing 1971: 679).

The tactics continued to develop and modify, mainly in terms of which forces were legitimate targets. For example, the popular fronts in 1930s France and Spain, not envisioned in the early days of the UF, came as a reaction to the rise of fascism. The Comintern and the united front policy in general were paralyzed in the late 1930s by the Stalinist purges and the pact between the USSR and the Third Reich, perhaps an extreme case of a united front. It was only in 1941 when the Soviet Union was attacked by the Axis, that united front anti-fascist efforts were reinstated, and the policy continued regardless of the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943. As Jichang Lulu (2017) notes on the changes in the united front work:

From Lenin onward, its purpose has not been to proselytize, or form a majority under an ideological consensus, as might be the goal of other political or belief-based

organizations. As the history of the united front shows, ideology is simply a tool; state Communism has sought alliances with the Western centre-left, later only with orthodox Communists, then with a broad 'bourgeois' arc reaching past the center, and then directly with Nazism; or, in the Chinese case, with the entire Kuomintang, then only its left wing, later foreign leftists, assorted brands of non-Soviet Communism, and finally a variety of foreign politicians willing to collaborate with its initiatives. Whatever 'Communist' might mean to those identifying as such in other countries, the Chinese Party of that name is not primarily an ideological organization. The country it controls has been through various economic policies which might not be to Marx's liking.

United fronts as institutionalized alliances became prominent during the 2nd World War and in the post-war communist world. While these arrangements bore different names – e.g. Patriotic Front (Laos), National Front (Czechoslovakia), United Front (China, DPRK), Fatherland Front (Vietnam) or Independence People's Front (Hungary) – the basic policy remained the same as stipulated by the Comintern. United front bodies in communist regimes became tools of cooption and control of domestic populations, used to boost the party-states' legitimacy through the creation and mobilization of artificial representation of various segments of society under the communist party's leadership.

The Czechoslovak example, as studied by the Czech historian Karel Kaplan, shows that the National Front (Národní fronta, NF), established by the Communists in 1945, was initially supported by other political parties (1978: 82). The "people's democratic coalition" of several democratic parties effectively dominated by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Komunistická strana Československa, KSČ), eventually monopolized the political power in the country (1978: 87). Decisions agreed by the NF were barely even debated in the post-war parliament (1978: 88) and the legislative institution then assumed the role of a rubber-stamping body, such as the PRC National People's Congress has today. The NF helped the Communists disable any form of real opposition, becoming the "clamping tentacles" for the non-communist parties as they could not effectively leave the alliance even if they felt constrained by the Communist leadership (1978: 97). To further cement the loyalty and destroy all disloyal dissent, the KSČ secretly planted its members into the other parties (1978: 107-8).

In 1947, the NF became a burden to the KSČ (1978: 113), and the party decided to bypass it by mobilizing seemingly independent popular movements and organizations such as trade unions (1978: 108), stipulating that political activities of these mass organizations are "true and direct manifestations of the political will of the people" and thus more significant than the parliament (1978: 108-109).

After the 1948 Communist takeover, the NF effectively became a "democratic facade" of the regime and one of its political power transmission channels (Kaplan 1978: 114), repurposing the previously democratic system including general elections, where voters had no choice other than to support the NF candidate list, or refuse and face consequences. Other countries in the communist bloc saw similar development.

In China, Sneevliet (also known under his pseudonym Maring; Malin 马林) helped establish the CCP in 1921 under the Comintern's guidance. Sneevliet, who believed that a "wide-ranging program of cooperation with the national bourgeoisie" is important in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism (Saich and Tichelman 1985: 176), persuaded the weak Chinese communists to adopt the united front tactics and form the United Front with the KMT (Bing 1971: 697), despite initial opposition (Saich and Tichelman 1985: 180). The two united fronts with the KMT in 1924-1927 and 1936-45 respectively (Groot 1997: 1) were rather successful considering the initially small support and membership of the CCP. The success of the CCP united front work was "contingent on political alliances: the Party mobilized support through the successful invocation of national popular appeals, particularly nationalist ones, and by granting concessions to strategically important groups, especially in the form of promises of political representation and a role in government", according to Groot (1997: 6). The CCP focused on the intellectuals and other political parties in particular "in order to build hegemony and to isolate the ruling power"² (1997: 12), proposing "a united front of supporters of democracy" (Joske 2020: 5).

² One of its tactics was "publicly dropping calls for class warfare and land seizures" (Groot 1997: 10), something the Party actually started soon after it established the new republic in 1949.

After seizing power, the CCP used the UF to build the socialist state and maintain hegemony. Apart from domestic actors such as the so-called “democratic” parties, ethnic minority leaders, and organized crime groups³ (Groot 1997: 107), the CCP started using united front tactics also abroad on triads in Hong Kong (Jourda 2019: 13) and OC across the globe to help bypass the international blockade and isolation, drawing essential resources to the new regime through unofficial or even illegal channels (To 2009: 52, 172). At times these activities indirectly contributed to local anti-Chinese sentiments and to ethnic violence, such as in Indonesia in 1965-6 (2009: 216-218).

The CCP effectively employed corporatism as "a method of interest intermediation in which a state accords some groups privileged status and access to itself while demanding in return compliance from, and some influence over, such groups" (Groot 1997: 5), which can be argued is at the core of UF policies. This manner of "class reconciliation" (ibid.) or "class assimilation" promoted by the UF coordinating body, the United Front Work Department (Tongyi zhanxian gongzuo bu 统一战线工作部; UFWD), established in 1939 (Stokes and Hsiao 2013: 7), was rejected by Mao Zedong during the Anti-rightist campaign of 1958–1959. The UFWD was revived only after his demise in 1976 (Wang and Groot 2018: 3-4). The department and UF cadres in general were always close to the intellectuals and other parties and when the UFWD head personally tried to negotiate between the students at the Tian'anmen Square and the Party leadership in 1989, the responsible cadres were punished during purges following the crackdown (Joske 2019b: 2). The United Front has also played an important role in controlling Hong Kong and Macau (To 2009: 248) and in political warfare targeting Taiwan. In all these three regions, engaging organized crime and local media is the more visible manifestation of the UF's work (Jourda 2019: 13; 17-24).

During Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening era, new focus on OC and the new strata of "red capitalists" was initiated as part of the UF work, but this shift intensified after 1989 (Brady 2018: 3-4). The CCP considered it both an opportunity to draw upon foreign resources through Chinese students and OC and a risk to the Party hegemony. The UF

³ A method learned from the KMT that even used triads to kill communists in the 1920s.

work abroad intensified and increasingly incorporated propaganda efforts, which also led to proliferation of OC associations to help control the OC. Furthermore, engagement of the OC in local political systems was promoted, while Chinese diaspora media were coopted (2018: 8). With Xi Jinping's ascent to power in 2012, the united front system gained new powers, agenda, and prominence (Groot 2019: 3; Joske 2019a). This happened possibly because of Xi's first-hand experience with united front work and *qiaowu* in Zhejiang and Fujian, where he previously served as the Party's secretary (Joske 2020: 8; Groot 2019: 1). Both provinces are an important source of OC, especially in Europe, as described in sub-chapter 1.4.

1.3.2 System

In the contemporary PRC, the United Front work system (*tongyi zhanxian xitong* 统一战线系统) is one of the several main systems (*xitong* 系统) of the PRC political structure. *Xitong* is a "kind of suprabureaucracy that links agencies in a horizontal as well as a vertical structure" (Brady 2017a: 116) or "the name used to indicate a group of bureaucracies that together deal with a broad task the political leaders want performed" (Lieberthal 2003: 218). A system is a grouping of agencies under the supervision of a senior leader who coordinates and directs the organs that are part of the system. This tool is designed to overcome coordination issues and unwanted competition between officials with equal ranks and to improve policy implementation.

These systems function on all levels of the PRC administration (Zheng 2010: 109) and while authors do not agree on the total number (and admittedly, this changes over time) of the main *xitong*,⁴ they do agree that at the top of a system stands a leading small group (or leadership small group/small leadership group [*lingdao xiaozu* 领导小组]; Brady 2017: 116; Lieberthal 2003: 218; Zheng 2010: 110) that is "usually headed by a Politburo Standing Committee member in charge of that *functional portfolio*" (Lieberthal 2003: 218; Zheng 2010: 110) at the central level.

The leading small groups are not exclusive to the central level Party or state administration and can be created at lower levels as well (Tsai and Wang 2019: 8). Leading small groups can also take on different names, such as committees or commissions (2019: 17), and while the LSGs sit on top of the relevant system, multiple LSGs can be found within one system (2019: 18). The central LSGs (CLSG) "do not formulate concrete policies; instead, they often focus on setting up guiding principles for concrete policies" (Zheng 2010: 108), they are "coordinating agencies" (*yishi xiediao jigou* 议事协调机构) that hold "departmental interests at bay so that superiors' policies can be promoted effectively" (Tsai and Wang 2019: 2).

⁴ Zheng (2010: 110-111) gives 7, Lieberthal (2003: 218) 6, and Brady (2003: xi) mentions the foreign affairs system (*waishi xitong* 外事系统) that others claim to be a subsection of one of the top ones.

CLGSs have been "an increasingly important tool" in the post-Deng era (Zheng 2010: 108). Xi Jinping strengthened the cross-system nature of the LSGs, especially in the new ones he created, such as the Central Commission for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (Zhongyang quanmian shenhua gaige weiyuanhui 中央全面深化改革委员会; Tsai and Wang 2019: 17). According to Tsai and Wang (2019: 19), this example "shows that the Chinese government is aware that if it is to tackle tough issues in its reform agenda, it must establish consolidated high-level organizations" or "decision-making and coordination institutions" (*juece yishi xiediao jigou* 决策议事协调机构).

According to Joske (2020: 4), the united front system "has nearly always been a core system of the CCP. For most of its history it's been led by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee", the Party's top leadership organ. For example Xi's father Xi Zhongxun 习仲勋 headed the last known UFW CLSG prior to Xi Jinping's era in 1986 (Joske 2019: 2). After purging the previous head of the Central United Front Work Department (Zhongyang tongyi zhanxian gongzuo bu 中央统一战线工作部; UFWD) Ling Jihua 令计划 in 2014 (Joske 2020: 8), Xi introduced sets of major reforms of the UF system and eventually consolidated the powers of the UFWD in 2018, with new agenda including more religious work and international operations with "only one objective: to strengthen the party's centralized and unified leadership of united front work" (Joske 2019a).

Currently, the UF system's leader is Wang Yang 汪洋, the fourth-ranked member of the seven-person Politburo Standing Committee, who heads both the Central United Front Work Leading Small Group and chairs the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi 中国人民政治协商会议; CPPCC), formally the top UF system position (Joske 2020: 10). The UFW CLSG was re-established in 2015 to research and direct united front work across the whole system (Joske 2019b: 4). Xi referred to the UF as "being about drawing the largest concentric circle around the party", and as Joske (2020: 8) shows, the broad scope of united front work is re-emphasized in Xi's era:

Under the direction of the united front system's leaders, agencies of the united front system seek to coopt influential individuals and groups in a range of areas, including business, politics and science. Party committees, whether in multinational companies, research institutes or embassies, have been directed by Xi to follow the Central Committee's directions and regulations on united front work.

The scope of united front work is constantly evolving, reflecting the perceived threats and set global goals as shown in the previous sections of this work. Today, the international functions of UF work include "increasing the CCP's political influence, interfering in the Chinese diaspora, suppressing dissident movements, building a permissive international environment for a takeover of Taiwan, intelligence gathering, encouraging investment in China, and facilitating technology transfer" (Joske 2020: 7).

The United Front system's goals and methods are changing and so are its targets, the latest CCP regulations on UF work targets give the following list (CCP News 2015):

1. members of China's eight minor parties
2. individuals without party affiliations
3. non-CCP intellectuals
4. ethnic minorities
5. religious individuals
6. non-public-economy individuals (private businesses)
7. new social strata individuals (urban professionals)
8. overseas and returned overseas students
9. people in Hong Kong and Macau
10. Taiwanese people and their relatives in the PRC
11. overseas ethnic Chinese and their relatives in the PRC
12. any other individuals who need uniting and liaising.⁵

⁵Translations by Joske (2020: 16).

1.3.3 *Qiaowu* system and its recent transformations

A special attention is paid to one specific united front work target group - the overseas Chinese. According to UN data (UNDESA s.d.), Chinese migrant population abroad was the third largest in the world with 10.7 million people only behind India and Mexico in 2019. But *qiaowu* system targets much larger number of people (48 million in 2008; To 2009: 2; 60 million in 2017; Brady 2017: 4), because the PRC treats anybody with Chinese ancestry as someone whose loyalty should be primarily with the ancestral land (2009: 13), establishing the categories of *huaqiao* (Chinese citizens living abroad), *huaren* (ethnic Chinese naturalized abroad) and *huayi* (foreign national with Chinese ancestry).

The CCP refers to the work with the OC as *qiaowu* (侨务) and it has always been a key part of UF abroad. The PRC has always tried to exploit OC's resources and know-how, using both patriotic notions and pragmatic rewards (such as access and business opportunities) to attract the OC interest. But the OC have also been used to promote the CCP's political goals both at home and abroad, including international revolutionary activities (To 2009: 64). *Qiaowu* is a large diaspora engagement system (2009: 3) with "tens of thousands" of staffers and "with over 1000 trade, sports and cultural groups traveling abroad annually to promote China and things Chinese" already in 1998 (To 2009: 2). Joske (2020: 7) states that "united front work draws on hundreds of thousands of united front figures and thousands of groups, most of which are inside China". *Qiaowu* managed to establish the "concept of equating patriotism with love of China and its communist leadership" (2009: 15) among the OC communities across the globe, mere two decades after the fallout of the Tian'anmen Massacre (2009: 26). To (2009: 273-4) concludes in his dissertation that *qiaowu*

is not merely an opportunistic attempt to take advantage of their [OC] resources. Rather, it is a strategic and pro-active approach to guiding, fostering, manipulating and influencing their behavior for constructing an international environment friendly to China's interests.

This politicization of diaspora affairs caused backlash in Southeast Asia at several points in the last century, contributing to ethnic violence and cleansing targeting Chinese communities (2009: 216-218). More recently, united front links of OC leaders and Chinese students abroad have come under scrutiny in New Zealand (Brady 2017: 16), Australia (Hamilton 2018: 39-40; Joske 2016), Canada (Burton 2019: 4), or the Czech Republic (Sinopsis and Jichang Lulu 2018). The mobilization of global Chinese diaspora to participate in the Virus Prevention People's War (Yiqing fangkong renmin zhanzheng 疫情防控人民战争; Li 2020) by ACFROC (Sliz and Čunderlíková 2020) in January 2020 revealed many links between the united front system and Chinese diaspora in Slovakia (ibid.), the Czech Republic (Valášek 2020), Argentina, Brazil and Spain (Cardenal 2020: 10, 13), but also pan-European coordination between Chinese diaspora communities and UF organs (Valášek 2020).

New emphasis on *qiaowu* as a significant part of united front work is reflected both in the Xi Jinping's 2018 reforms (Joske 2019a) and also by recent prominence of the term "united front qiaowu system" (*tongzhan qiaowu xitong* 统战侨务系统; UFWD 2020). The 2018 reforms saw *qiaowu* moved from state agencies to the UFWD (Joske 2019a). The former top *qiaowu* coordinating body, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (Guowuyuan qiaowu bangongshi 国务院侨务办公室, OCAO), with branches across the whole administrative system now exists only in name as part of the UFWD.

All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (Zhonghua quanguo guiguo huaqiao lianhehui 中华全国归国华侨联合会, ACFROC), a "peak united front body for ethnic Chinese with overseas links" (Joske 2020: 7), was established in 1956 (To 2009: 55) as an "ostensibly national non-governmental organization under the CCP leadership for rallying and uniting all of the OC for China's national interests" (2009: 72), but the CCP Central Committee described it as "a bridge and a bond for the party and government to connect with overseas Chinese compatriots" (Joske 2020: 4). Many of the OCAO staffers also reinforced the federation when it took over most of its agenda in 2018, including a military intelligence officer (Joske 2019a) that became a deputy head of its liaison

department. Current chairman of the federation Wan Lijun 万立骏 (OC returned from Japan) is a member of the Politburo (Kou 2019: 158).

Another two important UF organs are the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Unification (Zhongguo heping tongyi cujin hui 中国和平统一促进会, CCPNU) and the China Overseas Friendship Association (*Zhonghua haiwai lianyihui* 中华海外联谊会, COFA), which are both directed by the UFWD (Joske 2020: 7). The CCPNU was founded in 1988 (Stokes and Hsiao 2013: 34) to promote the unification of the PRC and the ROC and to neutralize Taiwan advocates (Groot 2019: 11), but its global push to establish presence with chapters in as many as 91 countries (Dotson 2019) or territories seems to have begun only in 2000. The local branches usually act as top OC associations of the respective countries.

The COFA is "one of the UFWD's most important platforms for co-opting and interacting with overseas united front figures" (Joske 2020: 44) and has recently subsumed the China Overseas Exchange Association (Zhongguo haiwai jiaoliu xiehui 中国海外交流协会; COEA; 2020: 7). The COFA acts as "mechanism linking the OC" and the CPPCC Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and the Overseas Chinese Committee (*Gang Ao Tai qiao weiyuanhui* 港澳台侨委员会), a major forum for *qiaowu* policies (To 2009: 75). Promotion of the unification with Taiwan is one of the COFA's major tasks (ibid.).

The minor party that counts OC among its constituency is the Zhi Gong Party (致公党 or the China Party for Public Interest; To 2009: 75). As part of the United Front, it follows the CCP and the UFWD's leadership and guidance (ibid.) and its members are mostly "returned OC and their relatives, experts, scholars and those with overseas relations" (ibid.). The party was formed in 1925 in San Francisco as "a political party for the Overseas Chinese", with strong links to secret societies and southern Chinese provinces such as Guangdong or Fujian. Jourda (2019: 19-22) stresses the party's importance in united front work in Taiwan, Hongkong, Macau, or Malaysia.

The minor party Revolutionary Committee of the KMT (Zhongguo Guomindang geming weiyuan 中国国民党革命委员会) started as a renegade socialist faction within the KMT

in the early 1940s (Groot 1997: 102). The party was officially launched in January 1948, but consolidated only after the CCP won the civil war and its early members included Sun Yat-sen's wife Song Qingling 宋庆龄 (1997: 103) and its constituency was former KMT party and government personnel (1997: 182). That would potentially include several million people, same as the other minor parties, the Revolutionary KMT was first restricted to only tens of thousands of members by CCP-imposed limits (1997: 187). These were later eased, but the CCP still did not want the other parties to become mass organizations (ibid.). One of the party's continuing tasks is the unification with Taiwan (1997: 236, 335-6, 351) and united front work targeting former and current KMT members overseas (1997: 357). As its membership limited to KMT-linked figures inevitably aged, in the 1990s they included wealthy rural entrepreneurs (1997: 450), but the party also targets the Taiwanese youth and politicians (Kou 2019: 115-6).

Another party active in the Taiwan affairs is the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League (Taiwan minzhu zizhi tongmeng 台湾民主自治同盟; TDSGL), which was founded by former communist cadres who fled the island to Hong Kong in 1947. Its constituency comprises of the people with roots or relatives in Taiwan (Groot 1997: 107). The party promotes the unity of the Chinese nation through cultural and professional exchange (Kou 2019: 125-6). TDSGL's mass organization, the All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots (Zhonghua quan guo Taiwan tongbao lianyihui 中华全国台湾同胞联谊会; Tailian), established in 1981 is under the UFWD supervision and aims to act as a "bridge and link between Taiwanese people and the Party-state"⁶ (Tailian 2018). It actively supports the unification and opposes Taiwanese independence (Kou 2019: 145-146). The chairman of the federation Huang Zhixian 黄志贤, originally from Tainan 台南 (city in southern Taiwan), is also the federation's CCP committee general-secretary, vice-chair of the ACFROC (2019: 146) and a member of the TDSGL (Xinhua Network 2017a). The organization primarily targets the Taiwanese youth and businessmen (2019: 146-7).

⁶ 党和政府联系台湾同胞的桥梁和纽带。

The NPC Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee (Huaqiao weiyuanhui 华侨委员会), the UFWD, the ACFROC, the Zhi Gong Party, and the CPPCC Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and the Overseas Chinese Committee form the "five overseas Chinese" (Wuqiao 五侨), i.e. the five most important *qiaowu* organs (Joske 2020: 14).

The *qiaowu* system also engages in propaganda and education work. The UFWD's media group targeting the OC *China News Service* (*Zhongguo xinwen she* 中国新闻社, CNS) counts among the "CCP's largest media networks" (Joske 2020: 12). CNS owns or controls several Chinese-language media abroad, or at least tends to be in some form of cooperation or partnership, as is the case of the *European Times* (*Ouzhou shibao* 欧洲时报; Tatlow 2019: 12) and *Prague Chinese Times* (*Bulage shibao* 布拉格时报; Prague Chinese Times s.d.). Work with students abroad is an important part of *qiaowu* propaganda and education efforts. While ethnic Chinese youth living abroad were a target of revolutionary agitations in Chinese-language schools that the CCP sponsored often unofficially in the past (placed under the OCAO guidance; To 2009: 134), today it is mainly loyalty and patriotism that the CCP wants to instill in the young people and chiefly students living abroad (after the failure of pre-1989 policies) as reiterated by Xi Jinping in 2015 (Joske 2020: 30). That year even undergraduate and high school students abroad were added to the list of UF targets (Groot 2019: 3).

Chinese students and scholars associations (*Zhongguo xuesheng xuezhe lianhehui* 中国学生学者联合会, CSSA) are the "primary platform for united front work on overseas students" (Joske 2020: 30) and operate under the guidance of local Chinese representative offices, while "reporting on dissident students, organizing rallies and promotional events in coordination with the Chinese Government and its talent recruitment programs, and enforcing censorship" (ibid.). Since 1989, the Ministry of Education attachés at local embassies have become active in establishing CSSA chapters (To 2009: 28). Another organization that actively engages Chinese students abroad is the Western Returned Students Association (*Ou Mei tongxue hui* 欧美同学会, WRSA), which draws students back to the PRC through incentives such as the Thousand Talents Plan (*Qian ren jihua* 千人计划) and thus actively participates in technology transfer (Joske 2020: 28).

To identify a united front group, defined by Joske (2020: 7) as an “organization guided or controlled by parts of the united front system”, he lists following activities that may suggest it is linked to the system (2020: 25):

- Its executives hold positions in China-based united front groups.
- It advocates for the ‘reunification’ of China.
- It associates frequently with the local PRC diplomatic mission.
- It participates in pro-PRC political rallies.
- It hosts visiting CCP officials from the united front system.
- It issues statements or holds events in coordination with known united front groups.

1.3.4 United front work by other means

United front work is not conducted only by the united front system. Especially with regard to activities abroad, there are dozens of party and government agencies that help the CCP forge united fronts across the globe. As Stokes and Hsiao (2013: 31) note, other Party-state systems support, cooperate or compete with each other in these efforts. Hála (2019) defines "united front work by other means" as cooption activities modified according to the target's conditions, mainly by stressing "apolitical" business and other cooperation rather than political goals. Lulu (2019: 4-5) writes that actors from different systems engaged in influence work can provide each other platforms to further their respective agendas. According to him, we need to analyze "foreign activities of China's entire political system, rather than decontextualized aspects of the work of its more familiar agencies" (ibid). Hála and Lulu (2019: 15, 22) describe this overlap between these systems as key to the CCP elite's capture. Rolland's work (2019: 1-2) on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – Xi Jinping era's key foreign influence initiative – describes how organs from various systems cooperate in influence work under the BRI brand, including the creation of cross-systems platforms for this purpose. Brady (2019: 2-3) describes the CCP-led system as the "Party-State-Military-Market nexus".

Targets of higher-level cooption abroad include current and former politicians, local and multi-national businesses (Joske 2020: 18), and various lobbyists (Khidasheli and Sinopsis 2018), achieving "élite capture" both in state politics (Hála and Lulu 2019: 19) and at international bodies such as the UN (Sinopsis and Lulu 2018b, Worden 2019: 8-11). As Lulu (2019: 41) notes, "élite capture allows the CCP to repurpose political, economic, academic and media structures of Western states as its tools", rather than simply disrupting them.

United front work abroad draws upon concepts at the core of foreign affairs work. For example, one has to show hospitality in order to develop *ganqing* (feelings, 感情) with the target, as Anne Marie-Brady (2003: 15) quotes a former foreign affairs cadre:

Ganqing is the response of people to objective events. It is an important motivation for human activity. In order to work on people [i.e. foreigners] we first of all need to establish *ganqing*.

Only then can one establish *guanxi* (relationship, 关系; *ibid.*), eventually culminating in friendship (*youhao guanxi* 友好关系). In party work, friendship refers to the Soviet concept of *druzhba*, which "has the meaning of a strategic relationship; it does not have the meaning of good or intimate personal relations" (2003: 7). Friendship is developed amid political struggle and the "friendship terminology is a means to neutralize opposition psychologically and to reorder reality" (*ibid.*).

United front work and local OC leaders are often utilized at sub-national levels, where the knowledge of the OC can be utilized and where these tactics can be more effective, as targets need less cultivation and lack knowledge about the PRC political system even more than national-level politicians and businessmen. Lulu (2018) calls this approach "localization tactics" and claims they "offer considerable potential for the implementation of Xi's 'Belt and Road' initiative and other CCP strategies" (*ibid.*). Not only are the lower-level targets easier to coopt, but they often involve younger or junior persons that can move into higher positions within their relevant spaces.

Another target of united front work are media and think-tanks, where UF work helps to achieve the propaganda work's goal of creating a "landscape favorable to the advancement of party goals", involving "managing a 'neutral' space in order to normalize the party's proxies as no less legitimate than its critics" (Lulu 2019: 3).

An overlap between UF and the propaganda and education system (*xuanchuan jiaoyu xitong* 宣传教育系统; Lieberthal 2003: 218) can be exemplified by the Confucius Institutes (CI), officially under the Ministry of Education but "overseen with heavy involvement from the UFWD" (Joske 2020: 4). The current vice-premier and former UFWD head Sun Chunlan 孙春兰 oversees the global program (2020: 10). CIs have been involved in cases of suppression of academic freedom (Hunter 2019), alleged spying (Ekblom 2019), and actively engage in UF work (Tatlow 2019: 8).

Ostensibly non-party and non-governmental organizations including some of those mentioned above, but even private companies can help united front work abroad employing another foreign affairs tactic, "using the unofficial to support the official" (*yi min cu guan* 以民促官; Lulu 2019: 22). According to Brady (2003: 23), it is an adaptation of Soviet "people's diplomacy" (*minjian waijiao* 民间外交) aiming to "unite people of the world against a common enemy or for common goals" with the eventual objective of making "as many friends as possible" while identifying enemies and promoting China in the world (*ibid.*). Unofficial groups and individuals can also open doors for Party-state organs in manners similar to that of the people's diplomacy organs. One such example of a private enterprise opening doors for the "official" was CEFC, a nominally private company, which cultivated high-level political, business and academic contacts in the Czech Republic and elsewhere and collaborated for example with the ILD (Hála and Lulu 2019: 15).

Examples of the systems and organizations engaged in united front work abroad:

The foreign affairs system

The International Liaison Department (Zhongyang duiwai lianluo bu 中央对外联络部; ILD), was established in 1951 initially for liaising with other communist parties (Stokes and Hsiao 2013: 38). Today it engages even bourgeois parties and think-tanks.⁷ A former head of the ILD framed its work as international united front work (China National Radio s.d.). It has its own fronts, such as the China Association for International Understanding (Zhongguo guoji jiaoliu xiehui 中国国际交流协会, CAFIU) established in 1981 (Hála and Lulu 2018).

The Chinese People's Association for Friendly Contacts (Zhongguo renmin duiwai youhao xiehui 中国人民对外友好协会, CPAFFC), a people's diplomacy organ, has always been engaged in foreign influence work (Stokes and Hsiao 2013: 37). The CPAFFC has played a key role in sub-national level contacts, including sister-city

⁷ E.g. through its own think-tank China Center for Contemporary World Studies (Zhonglianbu dangdai shijie yanjiu zhongxin 中联部当代世界研究中心; Rolland 2019: 6).

agreements (Brady 2017: 34). It often invites politicians on free trips to China and at times serves as a primary contact point for other agencies (Lulu 2019: 20-3).

Propaganda and education system

As already mentioned above, Confucius Institutes fall under both united front and propaganda and education systems. They target university officials, academics and students.

Party-state media are also involved in foreign influence work as they deal with local media, the OC and other relevant groups. For example through “buying a boat to go out in the ocean” (*maichuan chuhai* 买船出海) or “borrowing a boat to go out in the ocean” (*jiechuan chuhai* 借船出海) tactics, i.e. buying local media or offering them content and/or subsidies in order to promote the CCP's narratives (Brady 2019: 7-8). Among outlets, *Guangming Ribao* (光明日报) stands out; in the Czech Republic, it uses the formerly prestigious *Literární noviny* as its "borrowed boat" (Valášek and Konrád 2020; Klimeš 2020).

Finance and economy system (*caijing xitong* 财经系统)

The China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (Zhongguo guoji maoyi cujin weiyuanhui 中国国际贸促进委员会; CCPIT) is a people's diplomacy organ established in 1952 and originally tasked to engage in trade with the non-communist world (Lulu 2019: 24). More recently, it has established relations with chambers of commerce across the globe. The CCPIT controls the China Chamber of International Commerce (Zhongguo guoji shanghui 中国国际商会, CCOIC), which often acts as a partner of these chambers (2019: 25). The CCPIT also targets individual businesses, politicians and academics.

PLA

The PLA uses its front, China Association for International Friendly Contact (Zhongguo guoji youhao lianluo hui 中国国际友好联络会; CAIFC), as the front for the army's

political warfare (Stokes and Hsiao 2013: 24), as manifested in the Czech Republic in recent years through the CAIFC-linked company CEFC (Hála and Lulu 2019: 15).

Political and legal system (*zhengfa xitong* 政法系统)

The MSS operates united front bodies disguised as NGOs, such as the China International Cultural Exchange Center (Zhongguo guoji wenhua jiaoliu zhongxin 中国国际文化交流中心; Joske 2020: 15) and the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (Zhongguo xiandai guoji guanxi yanjiuyuan 中国现代国际关系研究院, CICIR), which is the Party leadership's internal think-tank, but it also interacts with foreign think-tanks and scholars (Stokes and Hsiao 2013: 39).

Business

As mentioned above, Brady lists the PRC "market" as part of the CCP foreign influence work. Market mechanisms must be understood not as integrated but coopted in the PRC system (Hála 2020: 4) meaning that "market forces do not operate independently, but in a virtual 'sandbox' where they can be safely contained and corrected as needed" and used for foreign policy goals. While the mere presence of Party committees inside the enterprises does not guarantee participation in foreign cooption, businesses can be very effective proxies of the Party's influence work (Jirouš and Lulu 2019; Hála and Lulu 2019). Some Party-state organs utilize front companies (Stokes and Hsiao 2013: 52).

Other

This is not a full list of all agencies and organizations targeting foreigners, the above examples are organs relevant chiefly to this thesis. It should be noted that there are cross-systems institutions, as well. Rolland (2019) lists many such examples involved in the BRI operations.

1.4 Chinese diaspora in Europe: southern dominance

1.4.1 Chinese migration to Europe

The first Chinese migrants settling in Europe came in the 18th and 19th century (Parker 1998: 68). Originally from southern provinces such as Guangdong 广东, Fujian 福建 or British Hong Kong (ibid.), these were usually sailors and other workers mostly employed by British (Parker 1998: 68-69), German (Gütinger 1998: 197), and in the early 20th century by Dutch entities (Pieke and Benton 1998: 126-127). They soon opened small businesses (1998: 128) and became an integral part of growing Western European industrial urban centers.

Around the turn of the 20th century, a new group of migrants emerged – students. As the Qing Empire realized its comparative weakness in technology and science (as manifested in military conflicts), dozens of students were sent to Western European (and American) universities to learn from the perceived "barbarians". Among the later generation of Chinese students were revolutionaries such as Zhou Enlai (周恩来; 1898-1976) or Deng Xiaoping (邓小平; 1904-1997), who studied in Paris (Live 1998: 98). Some of the young men decided to stay in Europe, but the real first larger migration wave was to come with the battles of the First World War. The young Chinese Republic (est. 1911) joined the Allied Powers in 1917 and sent hundreds of thousands of workers to help build the trenches on both the French and Russian fronts (Larin 1998: 281). These men were predominantly from the eastern provinces of Zhejiang 浙江, Shandong 山东, Shanghai 上海, and Hong Kong (Xianggang 香港; Moore 2002: 224). Some of them stayed in Europe (Live 1998: 98) and laid the foundation of the continental Europe's OC community.

The number of Chinese migrants continued to grow throughout Europe. In Russia (Soviet Union) they joined the civil war on both sides⁸ (Nyíri 2007: 31-9) and in the rest of the continent used extended family networks (Pieke and Benton 1998: 131) to search for a

⁸ For example, dozens of Chinese troops served as an auxiliary force for British troops (Larin 1998: 287), while the Red Army employed tens of thousands of Chinese fighters on all fronts of the Civil War (Larin 1998: 289)

better life here. The dominance of Zhejiang continued in most of Europe, with large groups of the Zhejiangese (or specifically the natives of the rural areas of Wenzhou 温州 and Qingtian 青田) especially in France (Live 1998: 99).

The Second World War restricted the scale of this Chinese migration to Europe. Following the war, migration restarted in limited scope, with the exception of communist Europe, which ethnic Chinese abandoned nearly completely as those countries abolished private ownership. The renewed migration (Pieke and Benton 1998: 130), for example created a significant dominance of Cantonese speakers (both from Guangdong and Hong Kong) in the Netherlands, as they built on the previous community of seamen. Even in the 1990s they were stronger in numbers than other Chinese migrants (1998: 137-138).

With the Reform and Opening (Gaijie kaifang 改革开放) policy of Deng Xiaoping's era starting in 1978, a new wave of migration to Europe (and the rest of the world) began. This trend continued to intensify and both legal and illegal Chinese migration peaked in the 1990s and the 2000s. Most of the legal migrants were employees of SOEs trying to expand abroad under the "Go-Out Strategy" (Zou chuqu 走出去战略), which aimed to use "migration as a tool to further its national interests" (To 2009: 239). Illegal migration soon became one of the main issues in Chinese-European relations, as the business was very profitable for human traffickers (Antonil 1998: 234) known as snakeheads (*shetou* 蛇头), who were mostly from Zhejiang and Fujian (Nyíri 2007: 65). Available research shows that as the Zhejiangese (Ceccagno 2003: 187) could rely on already established family networks, it was mainly the late-coming Fujianese (Moore 2002: 132) that used the smugglers' services (Thunø 1998: 180; Moore 2002: 131-2).

The European Chinese diaspora has always been very "transnational" (Li 1998: 24-26; Nyíri 2007: 102), treating the many countries on the continent as one realm, where they could move depending on business opportunities and visa policies. This attitude towards Europe only strengthened with the eastward expansion of the European Union in the new century. Among the most favored migrant destinations are Italy and Spain in Southern Europe, France and the UK in Western Europe, Sweden in the Nordics, and Hungary,

Romania and Serbia in Eastern Europe. The contemporary composition of the European Chinese diaspora is mostly "new migrants" (*xin yimin* 新移民). Traditional diaspora communities exist outside the former communist bloc, but even there they are vastly outnumbered by the newcomers.

The numbers of Chinese immigrants in respective countries stated by relevant Chinese and European institutions, as well as the diaspora groups themselves, have been deemed unreliable and purely "orientational" (Nyíri 2007: xv, 68). In the 1990s and the 2000s, as Chinese illegal migration became a major topic, both European mainstream media and state institutions often overstated the scale of migration. Other reasons for inaccurate statistics include imperfect reporting policies (for example failing to factor transit migration in, or only counting a certain type of visa holders; Moore 2002: 211; Nyíri 2007: 68) on the European side, and reliance on OC reporting⁹ on the Chinese side as the OC "have an interest in inflating numbers in order to bolster their importance" (Nyíri 2007: xv-xvi). Still, for some sense of scope, the following data are recent official statistics from selected countries: Germany (143,135 in 2018; Destatis 2019: 35), Poland (8100 in 2020; Office for Foreigners 2020), Hungary (19,600 in 2020; Központi statisztikai hivatal 2020: 2), Italy (309,110 holders of residence permit in 2017; Istat 2018: 1), France (100,441 in 2016; Insee 2019), the United Kingdom (393,141 in 2011 in England and Wales; UK Government 2020), Slovakia (2709 in 2019; Presidium of the Police Force Bureau of Border and Foreigners Police s.d.: 9), and the Czech Republic (8,263 in 2020; MVČR 2020).

⁹The so-called overseas Chinese census (*qiaoqing pucha* 侨请普查) is still in use today (Nyíri, email communication, June 17, 2020)

1.4.2 Chinese associations in Europe

The first¹⁰ known official European Chinese diaspora organization – Association générale des travailleurs chinois en France (General Association of Chinese Workers in France) – was created in 1919, running evening schools and a Chinese-language newspaper (Live 1998: 114). New organizations in France mushroomed in the 1920s and 30s (including Qingtian, Wenzhou and Zhejiang associations; 1998: 115). Another country with a relatively long tradition of OC organizations is the Netherlands, where the first of them appeared in 1947 (Pieke and Benton 1998: 150), often founded by the Wenzhounese or Qingtianese.

In 1936, the first pan-European organization, the European Chinese Federation to Resist Japanese Aggression and Save China, was founded by an education reformer Tao Xingzhi 陶行知 (1891-1946) and a communist leader Wu Yuzhang 吴玉章 (1878-1966) in Paris (Li 1998: 23). In Western and Southern Europe a significant number of OC organizations were formed, many transnational in character, with nine fully pan-European (Li 1998: 24-26). Parts of the UK, Germany and the Netherlands were frequent founding locations of these European OC organizations (1998: 25). These associations were often supported by the ROC,¹¹ largest of them being the Union of Chinese Associations in Europe established to "support 'free China'" (1998: 32) in Hamburg shortly after Chiang Kai-shek's death in 1975. The union held annual meetings attended by high-level ROC politicians (1998: 33). Due to the PRC pressure on European countries where these events were held, at times even leading to visa denials, the Union changed its name to the "Tourism Association of the Overseas Chinese in Europe" (Lü'Ou Huaqiao lüyou guanguang lianyihui 旅欧华侨旅游观光联谊会) in an attempt to mask its political nature. Christiansen (1998: 52-54) looks at the pan-European

¹⁰ Unless one would count the Chung Hwa Hui (*Zhonghua hui* 中华会), established by two Indonesian-Chinese students in 1911 (Pieke and Benton 1998: 126).

¹¹ In Spain, a local branch of the KMT was established in 1957 and in the next three decades, several organizations promoting ROC culture and ideology, including the cooperation between Spain and Taiwan, emerged (Beltrán 1998: 231).

organizations affiliated with the PRC formed in the 90s, saying that the European OC leaders "are trying to make the overseas Chinese community organizationally fit to stroll down the corridors of power in Brussels to compete with other lobbyists" and that the PRC supports them in these efforts, because it wants "to ensure a high degree of harmony in relations among overseas Chinese in Europe, and to be able to influence patronage networks more effectively".

The struggle between the ROC and the PRC over the Chinese communities in Europe (Li 1998: 32-34; Moore 2002: 470-471) was tilted in the PRC's favor since the 1980s due to the numeral dominance of the *xin yimin*.¹² The Taiwanese influence was limited and the then-largest pan-European organization EFCO (Ouzhou Huaqiao Huaren shetuan lianhehui 欧洲华侨华人社团联合会) has always been pro-PRC since its establishment in 1992 (Nyíri 2007: 107). After the ROC's 2006 decision (To 2009: 96) to focus solely on people of Taiwanese origin, its influence over the European OC has completely vanished.

Most of the OC associations, both local and especially the pan-European, were founded in the 90s or later. In France, at least 50 Chinese associations had been formed by 1998 (Live 1998: 114-115), including the prominent French Qingtian Hometown Association (Faguo Qingtian tongxianghui 法国青田同乡会), established in the fall of 1994 after the last founding member of the previous Zhejiangese-dominated association died – possibly because it was easier to claim the right to represent the Qingtian community without the competition of the old migrant generation.

Nyíri discusses the dominance of the new type of Chinese associations in CEE (2007: 109), with the local *xin yimin* communities naturally preferring the PRC over the ROC (at times deliberately avoiding any Taiwanese connections; 2007: 105). These organizations "reproduced the logic of 'mass organizations' in the PRC" (2007: 110), formed with the intention "not to represent the particular interests of a native-place group but to forge connections with the corresponding territorial administrations in China" (2007: 122).

¹²With some exceptions such as Germany, where the Taiwanese have had a relatively strong position since at least the 60s (Güttinger 1998: 204)

Even traditional OC associations in other parts of the world seem to have transformed (through successful cooption by the PRC organs) into such bodies (Nyíri, email communication, June 17, 2020). The OC in CEE started forming associations as early as in 1992 (2007: 104), especially in Romania and Hungary. By 2007, there were dozens of Chinese associations in Hungary dominated by the Qingtianese and Wenzhounese (2007: 109). Hungarian OC associations organized high-profile Chinese New Year events already in the 90s (2007: 107, 116), Hungarian OC leaders "received official posts in the People's Political Consultative Conferences" (2007: 128) and actively participated in the pan-European Chinese networks (ibid.; 2007: 120, 109). Nyíri also described that some of the organizations in Hungary incorporated "European" into their name despite having a purely Hungarian scope, merely reflecting "a desire for added importance and cosmopolitanism" (2007: 109).

The most comprehensive work on OC associations in Europe known to the author is Kaminski and Xu's paper on Austrian OC groups. The work shows that the 11,374-strong Chinese diaspora, dominated by the Qingtianese and the Wenzhounese (2017: 86-87), started forming official associations in 1991. First cross-regional organizations such as the Association of the Chinese in Austria (Verband der Chinesen in Österreich; Aodili huaren zong hui 奥地利华人总会; 2017: 91), and later regional organizations, the most important being the Austrian Qingtian Hometown Association (Aodili Qingtian tongxiang hui 奥地利青田同乡会; 2017: 102). While the authors provide a list of almost 40 associations (2017: 97-101) and detail some of their history, they offer only limited data on their political engagement or united front work (2017: 113).

As shown in this summary, previous research on the Chinese diaspora in Europe has focused on general trends and standard ethnographic or anthropological issues associated with the diaspora. Only few publications have described European OC associations' engagement with the PRC organs, local political systems and pan-European coordination, let alone united front work.

1.5 Chinese diaspora in the Czech Republic

The first known handful of the OC in the country were chiefly the Zhejiangese who took part in the Great War as elsewhere in Europe (Moore 2002: 224, 226, 230). In the 1930s, most of the OC were spread around Northern and Central Bohemia (western part of the country) and worked as traders (2002: 232). As private ownership was forbidden by the socialist government after the 1948 takeover, most of the OC moved out and only a handful of older men remained in the country (Zlata Černá, personal conversation, June 30, 2020).

Except for a couple of Chinese women (married to Czechoslovak students in China after the PRC approval), there was no immigration until the normalization of the Czechoslovak-Chinese relations in the 1980s (2002: 128-9). The main immigration wave started after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, which promised privatization of state-owned economy and business opportunities.

While most immigrants came from Zhejiang (Qingtian and Wenzhou, especially), many new migrants were from Fujian (2002: 165-6, 504). Another segment came from large cities such as Beijing or Shanghai, a group more open to interactions with locals (2002: 167, 463). The lack of Chinese diaspora tradition in the Czech Republic meant that illegal migration was widespread and some of the Chinese that settled in the Czech Republic only remained there because they could not continue further west (Prague was an important transition point in the mid-90s). Most OC established companies in the country, in part because obtaining a standard work permit was complicated, meaning many of the firms could be described as "phantoms", mere vehicles to get around the visa policy (2002: 152-3, 287).

Most of the Chinese diaspora came to the Czech Republic either directly from China or Hungary (Matějovská 2014: 115), keeping certain levels of trans-nationality and "Europeanship", a feeling further supported by the inclusion of a large part of post-communist Europe into the EU and the Schengen Area in the 2000s (2014: 113). Many of them were from "cadre families" and often rented spaces from the Czechs who gained

property (Zlata Černá, personal conversation, June 30, 2020) in the rather non-transparent privatization process and started restaurants. Some of them merely as fronts for other business since to get a business license in other areas was difficult (ibid.). Most Chinese nationals were rather disillusioned with the Czech Republic (Moore 2002: 143) and struggled with learning the Czech language (Dubják 2013: 39).¹³ By contrast, some were mesmerized by the free election process, something unimaginable in the PRC (Zlata Černá, personal conversation, June 30, 2020).

The only research on the Chinese diaspora organizations in the Czech Republic known to the author focuses on the two earliest associations. The first, the Association of Chinese Businessmen in the Czech Republic (Ústřední sdružení čínských podnikatelů a obchodníků působících v ČR), was established by a wealthy restaurant owner from Shanghai between 1993 and 1994 and became known as *Shanghai* (商会; Moore 2002: 472-3). Officially the organization aspired (2002: 473) "to unite all Chinese people in the Czech Republic, protect their legal rights and interests, and help them to create a stable community", but the OC saw the *Shanghai* as the chair's "private vehicle for accumulating power and control over the Chinese community". The association quickly became entangled with organized crime. In 1993, a group of five to six Beijingers, train robbers deported from Russia, arrived to the Czech Republic. They started terrorizing the community forcing it to join the *Shanghai* and pay "membership fees" dubbed as "protection money" (*baohu fei* 保护费). They were collected by the chairman and paid directly to the gang (2002: 474-476). Soon the practice caught the attention of both the Czech authorities and the Chinese Embassy, which put a stop to the racketeering, kidnapping, extortion and blackmail that terrorized the Chinese community.¹⁴ It was too late for the organization associated with gangsters and the chair was left as the sole member of the now dissolved association.

¹³ This improved with the second generation of Chinese migrants, according to Kratochvílová's research.

¹⁴ This was not a uniquely Czech phenomenon in those years, as the OC in Spain (Beltrán 1998: 233-4) or Hungary (Nyíri 2007: 102) suffered from similar gang and mafia activities, including bomb attacks (Moore 2002: 87).

The second (still existing) organization was the Association of the Chinese in the Czech Republic (Krajanské sdružení Číňanů žijících v České republice, Lü-Jie Huaren Lianyihui 旅捷华人联谊会). The organization was officially founded in 1998 by three frustrated female (rather unique for OC associations) ex-members of the *Shanghai* (Moore 2002: 477-8). The first chairwoman was Tang Yunling Rusková 唐云凌, originally from a Beijing Manchu family (Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 30, 2020), who settled in the then Czechoslovakia in the 1950s with her Czechoslovak husband and remained in the position until her passing in 2019. The organization profiled itself as "apolitical" and independent and tried to help the OC integrate into the Czech society (Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 30, 2020), even welcoming their Taiwanese compatriots to the displeasure of the Chinese Embassy (Moore 2002: 478), while attempting to mend the bad reputation Chinese nationals had in the country then.

The relationship with the PRC authorities changed with the arrival of a new ambassador in 2000, who received Rusková at the embassy in April. The same year the association's leadership was received by the CPAFFC vice-chair and by both the OCAO and the ACFROC in 2001; the chairwoman also attended the 9th annual meeting of the EFCO in October that year (2002: 483-4). On the other hand, the association repeatedly refused to join the CCPPNU and was reluctant to "participate in the politically driven and PRC-controlled European-wide Chinese structures" and attempted to distance itself from other European diaspora organizations that in "the chairwoman's belief only facilitated business activities and boosted the power of their leaders, and often have a political agenda based on directives from China, exercised through the Chinese Embassies" (2002: 485).

Nonetheless, the chair's line between "apolitical" and "political" was blurry, which can be documented by her support for "the Embassy's anti-Falun Gong campaign" in 2001 (2002: 483). Nevertheless, she generally tried to keep some distance between her and the embassy, and the organization's relations with the representative office were highly influenced by the character of the ambassador. The association also helped to set up the

Czech Chinese Christian Society (Česko-čínské křesťanské sdružení; Jieke huaren jidujiao hui 捷克华人基督教会) in 2004 (Kratochvílová 2017: 36-38).

Later research discussed the organization of Chinese diaspora in the Czech Republic and its connections to both the PRC and Czech politics, but mostly relied on Moore's findings from the 2000s, thus coming to the wrong conclusions regarding the diaspora's willingness to organize themselves (2017: 31). Other inquiries suggested that the OC associations are "less influential in most CEE countries than might be the case elsewhere" (Hála 2019) or that they are confined to "cultivating lower-level decision makers", running a "pedestrian side show" to the actual united front work done by central level organizations back in China (Sinopsis and Lulu 2018a). Although some published works have already showed isolated cases of the local Chinese diaspora acting as a conduit for rather high-level exchanges in both political, business and cultural spheres (Lulu and Jirouš 2019, Valášek 2020), a comprehensive overview is lacking. The following chapter will further discuss the Czech OC groups and demonstrate that the previous views of their political significance might have ignored rather important developments in the Czech diaspora's political connections in the country, Europe as a whole, and in the PRC, and that the groups have been using similar channels of influence as in more traditional and better studied OC communities across the world, engaging in united front work in highest-levels of the political systems.

2.0 Czech Chinese associations and united front work

This chapter aims to describe the current state of *qiaowu* and OC groups in the Czech Republic. The central thesis of this work (to be elaborated mainly in this chapter) is that the Czech OC groups play more significant role in the Czech-China relations than was the previously established opinion. Using the examples of the pan-European organizations the Czech groups interact with, this section also shows the prominence of coordination of OC across Europe, which is treated as single space both by the OC and the PRC organs. This part also discusses the incentivization of diaspora associations modeled as mass organizations, which are defined by smaller PRC administrative units rather than groupings that aspire to represent the whole local diaspora. This seems to apply to both the country-level and pan-European organizations.

The Chinese community in the Czech Republic does not have a long tradition and its numbers are quite modest – according to Czech government data, there currently resides 8,263 Chinese nationals in the country, the majority of them (6,071) in Prague (MVČR 2020). They have not integrated into the society to a large degree, and ethnic Chinese groups thus do not participate in Czech politics directly (through running for public office etc.), yet some of the OC leaders show a significant level of interaction with local and state-level politicians, reaching as high as the last two presidents. The intensity of Czech OC contacts with the Chinese political system, especially with organs such as the UFWD, the ACFROC or the OCAO engaged in *qiaowu*, remained previously mostly unnoticed. These interactions range from regional, provincial to as high as the central level of the united front organizations. The Czech Chinese diaspora landscape is absolutely dominated by new migrants (*xin yimin* or *xinqiao*), mainly from Zhejiang and specifically Qingtian (might total up to 60 percent of the OC in the country [Ye 2012]). They also hold important positions both within the local Chinese associations, Chinese-language media, pan-European Chinese groups, and PRC political structures.

Another influential group with larger numbers are the Fujianese who, despite being latecomers, appear to be very active in the political engagements, chiefly through the person of James Wu (more in section 2.2.3). Many of the first generation of businessmen have "retired" and started pursuing their passions such as writing or painting and established or took charge of already existing cultural associations, for example the chair of the Czech Chinese Writers Association (Jieke huawen zuojia xiehui 捷克华文作家协会) or the current head of the Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic (Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 30, 2020).

There are two clear types of active OC organizations in the country – those whose membership is defined by certain regional affiliations (e.g. hometown associations) and those defined rather by aims and a type of activities where the regional groupings intersect and cooperate. As Nyíri (2007: 110) observed in the case of new organizations formed in the CEE in the 2000s, the OC organizations in the Czech Republic all seem to be modeled after the PRC mass organizations and are structured in a way to correspond with the parts of the Party-state political system they wish to engage. There appear to be approximately 50 diaspora associations (roughly one per 160 Chinese nationals in the country), although their membership and activity are hard to validate. Some are clearly one-man enterprises that serve solely as a nameplate (see 2.2.3) to be used when interacting with the PRC organs. None of the organizations in the country is openly critical of the CCP; some try to keep certain distance between themselves and the Chinese political system, represented primarily by the local embassy (Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 30, 2020), but in general still support "patriotic" activities, such as the fight against the Falun Gong or the independence of Taiwan and Hong Kong. A few of the organizations in the country seem to fit Nyíri's argument that not all Chinese association with "Europe" in their name are actually "international", but rather use this designation to appear more "cosmopolitan" (2007: 109) than just "Czech". This seems to be the case of the media group Europe-China Today as well.

This chapter will give an overview of the composition of the diaspora and known organizations and will further discuss several associations in greater detail. These will be

selected on the basis of quality and quantity of their political interactions and their observable position within the local OC hierarchy (criteria include the size of the represented community, the historical role and the prestige of their members). This section will briefly describe their current role and activities. For each of the groups, a brief summary of the history and a description of activities and relevant leadership will be provided, with a special focus on the engagement with the Czech and Chinese political structures and individuals as well as on the known engagement with the pan-European OC groups. Although some of the groups below appear to lack European connections, they seem to bring the highest level of political interaction for others.

More research on the political activities of Chinese diaspora organizations in other countries with a similar OC community structure and history should be conducted to determine whether this is an anomaly or a standard situation even in the context of small diaspora groups. The following chapter does not provide an exhaustive list of these entities in the Czech Republic, nor does it attempt to provide all details for those identified.

2.1 Cross-regional organizations

These OC groups aim to represent and unite the diaspora members from all regional factions. Some have not been successful at that, as was the case of the Association of Chinese Businessmen in the Czech Republic (see chapter 1.5), others, like the CCAPPNU, claim to have managed to incorporate the OC leaders from all the diaspora groups but arguably are not really active. By contrast, the Women Federation and the new business association are both rather active and successful at obtaining membership of the OC leaders from most of the factions. While these organizations indeed theoretically unite large segments of the OC and some are politically active, they do not seem to reach as high in the political engagement as the technically "smaller" organizations defined by regional affiliations. Their leaders perhaps want to establish the highest-level contacts through the OC associations where they do not have to share power with other possibly competing OC leaders, and can claim all the success and prestige for themselves and their close collaborators.

There are also Chinese associations that do not seem to interact much with the local political system; one of them is the Czech CSSA (Jieke Zhongguo xuesheng xuezhe lianyihui 捷克中国学生学者联谊会) headed by Dai Bo 戴波, the principal (possibly throughout the whole existence of the institution) of the Chinese International School of Prague (Bulage Zhonghua guoji xuexiao 布拉格中华国际学校), established in 1995 as a school for pupils from the age of six to eighteen (Chinese International School of Prague 2015). Since 2007 the school has hosted a Confucius Classroom (ibid.) and in 2018 it was visited by the vice-director of the OCAO (before the reform that rendered it powerless) during his visit in Prague (Xiang dong xiang xi 2018). In the capacity of the CSSA head, Dai organizes (in cooperation with the embassy) events for Chinese students living in the Czech Republic; for example, last year's Chinese New Year celebration was attended by more than 160 of them, which reveals that the CSSA has established (possibly informal) branches in Olomouc and Ostrava and other places (WRSA 2019). The event was reported by the WRSA (ibid.), which suggest a certain link between the CSSA and this united front body. This year, Dai and his school co-organized an "online summer camp"

for Chinese pupils with the ACFROC (Czech-Chinese Journal 2020a: 15). Dai Bo is also a vice-chair of the CCAPPNU (Taiwan Scholar Association 2019). Despite these united front links and activities aimed at controlling the students, the local CSSA represents a Chinese association abroad that does not interact with foreigners frequently.

2.1.1 The Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic

The Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic (Lü Jie Huaren lianyihui 旅捷华人联谊会 ; Krajanské sdružení Číňanů žijících v ČR) was established in 1998 (the organization's history was already discussed in section 1.5) as the first still existing Chinese association in the country. The association does not appear to be involved with high-level PRC or Czech politics, focusing primarily on the OC community itself. Its reported activities indicate a level of distance from the PRC system, but it still participates in “patriotic” manifestations when mobilized by the embassy.

The association describes itself as a "core OC organization in the Czech Republic, coordinating with the Chinese embassy"¹⁵ and an organization "under the care of the Chinese embassy"¹⁶ that works to protect the rights of the Czech OC community and to help them find new business opportunities. The association also conducts charity fundraisers for Chinese regions stricken with disaster (EPRCP 2008). While the association does not appear as active as some of its fellow organizations, it remains high on the lists of Czech Chinese organizations produced by Chinese organs (MOFCOM 2019; ZFROC 2017a) and Party-state-linked media (Prague Chinese Times 2016). This respectful treatment is possibly bestowed upon the organization due to its historical role (see chapter 1.5) and the reputation of the now deceased chairwoman rather than as a reflection of the current hierarchy of the Czech OC community. The organization is supposed (Mei 2012) to have eleven members of the board and three-members-strong supervisory board, but the only other known representative¹⁷ of the association is its executive vice-chairman Zhang Hong 张鸿. The sole public information available about Zhang is his executive chairmanship of the Czech-Chinese Cultural Exchange Promotion Association (Jie-Zhong wenhua jiaoliu cujin hui 捷中文化交流促进会 ; Jinse Bulage 2018), which is one of the organizations behind the Prague International Student Art

¹⁵ 作为旅捷华人的核心组织，配合中国驻捷克大使馆

¹⁶ 在中国驻捷克大使馆的关怀下。

¹⁷ Publicly uses his membership in this organization as his main title when interacting with Chinese entities.

Festival (Bulage guoji xuesheng meishu jie 布拉格国际学生艺术节). The event officially supported by the Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic was attended by the Czech Communist Party chairman Vojtěch Filip (CCCA 2019), whose presence was allegedly demanded by the embassy in order for the organizers to receive funding, as they wanted some local politician's attendance (Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 30, 2020).

Tang Yunling Rusková 唐云凌, born in Beijing, was one of the first OC to settle in the Czech Republic and an important diaspora leader (now the eternal chairwoman of the Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic and Czech Chinese Women Federation). She married the Czechoslovak engineer Jaroslav Rusek in 1956, allegedly only after a special permission given by Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (1898-1976; Pinhuang 2019). She established the Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic, the *Czech-Chinese Journal*, the Czech Chinese Women Federation, the European Overseas Chinese Women Federation, and was also one of the founders of the Czech China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Unification (Pinhuang 2019). This information might be imprecise, as Rusková was originally reluctant to participate in the CCPPNU system (Moore 2002: 485) and the Women's Federation founding (Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 30, 2020).

According to Zhang Hong 张鸿, the organization's vice-chair until Rusková's passing (Pinhuang 2019), she "had resolutely advocated for the unification of the fatherland and opposed separatism her whole life".¹⁸¹⁹ Her funeral was attended by the embassy's general office director Xu Jinsong 徐劲松, several Czech sinologists, members of the Czech-Chinese Society²⁰, and local the OC, including Chen Jinmei 陈金妹, who referred to the deceased community leader as "Mother Tang".

¹⁸ 她一生坚定地主张祖国统一，反对分裂。

¹⁹ This is likely a form of "praise" that does not necessarily correspond to reality, which may be far more complex.

²⁰ Česko-čínská společnost, an organization with long history (while re-established in 1990, its roots go as far back as 1936) mainly consisting of Czech sinologists (Česko-čínská společnost s.d.).

Among other agenda, the association operates the Chinese-language printed bi-weekly *Czech-Chinese Journal* (*Jie-Hua tongxun* 捷华通讯; *Česko-čínský žurnál*); the paper was founded the same year as the association and provides information regarding the Czech OC activities, information on new Czech and European regulations relevant to OC businessmen, but also statements by the EPRCP or political commentaries, for example regarding the 2019 Hong Kong protests (Lao Mu 2019: 9). According to a report by *Europe-China Today* from Tang's funeral, the journal is the most influential Chinese media outlet in the country (Pinhuang 2019), which does not seem to correspond to reality, as *Prague Chinese Times* seem to be the true dominant Chinese newspaper in the Czech Republic.

The organization seems to be involved mainly in various cultural events, such as the foundation of the Czech Fujian OC library (Guangming Ribao 2012) or a 2018 BRI-themed art exhibition (Jinse Bulage 2018), but it also engages in political activities. For example, in 2008 its representatives (details missing) participated in a debate with the vice-chairman of the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (Haixia liang'an guanxi xiehui 海峡两岸关系协会; Guangming Ribao 2012),²¹ moderated by the then Chinese ambassador. The association also co-signed a congratulatory letter to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (EPRCP 2012), or an open letter supporting China's "anti-separatist" policies in Hong Kong (Prague Chinese Times 2016).

The Czech-Chinese Christian Society that the association helped set up still exists and holds weekly meetings at a Prague church owned by the Baptist Union in the Czech Republic, advertised in the *Czech-Chinese Journal* (2020: 20). Pastor Ye 叶 refused to discuss the association's affairs with the author, but considering the lack of any reported interaction with the embassy, it can be asserted it is rather independent of the PRC system.

²¹ The article wrongly asserts it was the China Council for Peaceful Promotion of National Unification (Zhongguo heping tongyi cujin hui 中国和平统一促进会).

The organization has never held any elections, despite criticism by Zlata Černá (personal communication, June 30, 2020), and Zhang simply took over after Rusková died without any proper process (Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 30, 2020).

Czech interactions

Except for the contact with the Czech communists basically by proxy, the organization seems to engage with Czech sinologists and local "friends of China" only, who are affiliated with the Economic Cooperation Club With The PRC (Klub ekonomické spolupráce s ČLR; KES) at the Czech-Chinese Society (Česko-čínská společnost; Prague Chinese Times 2016b). The club's membership includes a former Czechoslovak ambassador to China and an agent of the Czechoslovak secret police (EPRCP 2019), or one of the founders of Sinoskop (now the chair of the club), an institute engulfed in a PR operation aimed to boost the CCP's image in the country (Horák and Valášek 2019). The club claims to cooperate with various Czech government business organizations and their offices in China and organizes meetings with incoming Chinese delegations (Česko-čínská společnost s.d.b).

In 2020, the organization donated PPE to the town of Třebíč²² with other OC groups and the delegation met with the mayor (Prague Chinese Times 2020d).

PRC interactions

While the organization was initially reluctant to cooperate closely with the PRC organs, it eventually got close to the CCAPPNU network and openly supported Chinese claims over the Senkaku Islands²³ (Diaoyu dao 钓鱼岛; Australian China Association for Promotion of Peaceful National Unification 2014), Taiwan (EPRCP 2005), and the South China Sea (Prague Chinese Times 2016: 1). Since 2000, it has also cooperated to some extent with the local embassy.

European interactions

²² The small town in Vysočina Region sent aid to China in winter 2020 to help with the virus (ČT24 2020).

²³ They added their signature to a declaration of nearly 1300 organizations.

The organization participated in the EFCO events in the past; nevertheless, it remains an open question whether it is a member of this federation (Moore 2002: 483-4). Other than that, there do not seem to be direct active connections to any pan-European OC groups.

Summary

Despite original attempts to avoid high-level politics and to exercise some level of independence from the PRC political system, the association has participated in "patriotic" mobilization initiatives such as supporting the CCP policies in contested territories. Initial engagement with the European OC structures seems to have been all but abandoned. Regarding the interactions with the Czech population, the organization has only cooperated with the Czech-Chinese Society and its affiliated organization called the Economic Cooperation Club. No example of meetings with the Czech or Chinese high-level political representation has been found. To a large extent, the organization fits Joske's definition of a UF group.

2.1.2 Czech China Association for the Promotion of Peaceful National Unification

As is common in other countries with large enough Chinese diaspora, the Czech China Association for the Promotion of Peaceful National Unification (Jieke Zhongguo heping tongyi cujin hui 捷克中国和平统一促进会, CCAPPNU) is a united front umbrella organization. This denotes, from the point of view of the PRC, the highest position within the local OC group hierarchy. This is reflected by its top position in official government documents (MOFCOM 2019) or media reports (Prague Chinese Times 2016e: 1). It was established in 2004 and its president has been Ni Jian 倪健 since then (CCPPNU s.d.). As Ni said himself in an interview for *Zhejiang TV International Channel* (2016), every important OC group in the Czech Republic is represented in the organization's structure and the presidents of their respective associations become vice-presidents of the CCAPPNU. There were 14 vice presidents at the time of the interview, according to Ni. Rusková was one of the co-founders of the organization (Pinhuang 2019), despite initially declining to participate in the unification activities (Moore 2002: 485). The CCAPPNU appears to almost exclusively engage only the local OC, lacking in ties to Czech or European politics.

Ni Jian is a Chinese businessman from Hangzhou (杭州市) in Zhejiang province (Zhejiang TV International Channel 2016), where he used to be a teacher. He now owns a company and property rights to a certain piece of land he intends to develop and build a school on (ibid.). He arrived to Central Europe in 1990, seemingly as part of a group of OC that started doing business in Hungary, Poland, Germany, Yugoslavia and the Czech Republic (then Czechoslovakia); since the companies in Prague seemed to develop the best, he eventually moved his headquarters there in 2003. Based on his own words, he spends most of his year traveling between his host country and the PRC (Zhejiang TV International Channel 2016).

The CCAPPNU does not seem to hold any events on its own, does not hold election sessions, and lacks a website and an entry in the Czech Trade Registry. This further shows its umbrella organization nature – it is basically an empty nameplate. There is also no official consolidated list of members, though these OC have been identified as holding positions in the organization at some point (Taiwan Scholar Association 2019; Xiang dong xiang xi 2018; ACFROC 2020a):

Lin Guoguang 林国光 (vice-chair, Head of the Czech Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce [Jieke Wenzhou shanghui 捷克温州商会; Zhejiang Merchants Museum 2019], member of the 10th ACFROC Overseas Committee [ACFROC 2018] and overseas council member of the China Association For International Cultural Exchanges With Overseas Chinese in 2012; People's Network 2012), Chen Jinmei 陈金妹 (vice-chair, chair of the Women Federation, holds leadership positions in UF bodies in China; see below), Dai Bo 戴波 (vice-chair), Li Kefei 李克非 (general secretary), Jia Jianping 贾建萍 (vice-chair, vice-chair of the Women Federation, see below), Li Rujiang 李如江 (vice-chair), Sun Yuexin 孙悦新 (vice-chair, former chair of the Qingtian Hometown Association, currently active in a mixed-membership organization, more below), Zhan Hailing 詹海灵 (executive vice-chair; former executive chair of the Czech Chinese Business Federation; Prague Chinese Times 2018e; currently at the European Chamber Of Commerce Alliance Association [*Ouzhou shanghui lianmeng* 欧洲商会联盟]; European Chamber Of Commerce Alliance Association s.d.), Zong Weiyong 宗伟勇 (vice-chair, current chair of the Czech youth federation and non-voting delegate to the CPPCC, see below), Qu Zhengle 瞿正乐 (vice-chair), Xu Chenjiang 徐晨江 (vice-chair), Zhou Lingjian 周灵建 (vice-chair, current head of the Qingtian Hometown Association, see below).

Czech interactions

As an umbrella organization, the CCAPPNU supports, co-organizes or attends many OC events in the country. The association also interacts with Czech politicians, but it is not

always clear when the organization only lends its name to an event and when its members attend using the CCPPNU title.

Possibly the highest profile event the CCAPPNU co-organizes is the Chinese New Year. 2020 was the second edition that the CCAPPNU co-organized (Horák 2020). The gala featured the Czech MEP Jan Zahradil, the now deceased Czech Senate Speaker Jaroslav Kubera, the chair of Czech Communists Vojtěch Filip, and some current and former government ministers (Rychetský 2020); the event was sponsored, for example, by the Olomouc Region. According to the website of the organizing Czech event agency (Intercharm s.d.), major Chinese companies and institutions such as Huawei, ICBC, the Confucius Institute in Olomouc, Bank of China, CITIC, or the PRC Ministry of Culture and Tourism were among the sponsors. The first year, the gala featured Filip and vice-minister of culture Petra Smolíková and vice-minister of foreign affairs Lukáš Kaucký (China-Europe Culture and Arts Exchange Association 2019).

Ni Jian claimed once in an interview to have directly interacted with the Czech president Zeman regarding a project to build a Forbidden City-style palace in Prague (Zhejiang TV International Channel 2016), but there are no additional sources to support his statement.

PRC interactions

The organization is very active when the Party-state mobilizes its diaspora to support its policy goals regarding "patriotic" matters such as in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or in the South China Sea. The CCAPPNU then organizes (often in cooperation with the local embassy) study sessions (EPRCP 2016, EPRCP 2005), discussing the current topic of political mobilization and later issues a statement with signatures and support declared by the other OC groups (Prague Chinese Times 2016c). In 2008, the association participated in an embassy-moderated debate with the vice-chairman of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (Xinhua Network 2008), an organization to which the CCAPPNU previously that year sent a letter to congratulate them on talks with their Taiwanese counterparts (EPRCP 2008a).

The CCAPPNU also joined its signature under a joint global declaration of the CCPNU chapters to commemorate 150 years from Sun Yat-sen's birthday (CCPPNU 2016). Ni Jian (2005: 32) personally wrote an article for *Unification Forum* (Tongyi luntan 统一论坛), the central official CCPNU publication in 2005, where he claimed that "the people on both sides of the strait believe it is their sacred duty to strive to unify the nation as soon as possible,"²⁴ further saying that due to the KMT's cooperation, it was a great opportunity to pursue this major goal. In 2018, the CCAPPNU sent vice-chairs Lin Guoguang 林国光 and Chen Jinmei 陈金妹 to represent it at the 30th anniversary of the CCPNU in Beijing (Prague Chinese Times 2018b). The same year the OCAO vice-director visited the country and the association's general secretary Li Kefei 李克非 presented him with a gift (Xiang dong xiang xi 2018) on behalf of the organization.

In 2019 the CCAPPNU participated in the First African OC People's Diplomacy Forum News Conference (Shou jie Feizhou Huaqiao Huaren minjian waijiao luntan xinwen fabu hui 首届非洲华侨华人民间外交论坛新闻发布会; China Overseas Chinese Network 2019) held in Botswana and attended by relevant local embassy representatives and mainly African OC.

European interactions

In 2019, the CCAPPNU's executive vice-chair Zhan Hailing 詹海灵 attended a meeting between the CCPNU vice general secretary and regional chapters in Austria (CCPPNU 2019).

The CCAPPNU does not appear to engage with the European China Association for the Promotion of Peaceful National Unification (*Ouzhou Zhongguo heping tongyi cujin hui* 欧洲中国和平统一促进会; CCPPNU s.d.).

²⁴ 对于海峡两岸的中国人来说,争取祖国统一的早日实现,是每一个人的神圣职责。

Summary

The CCAPPNU is mainly active in the united front work targeting the local OC; interactions with the Czech political system are limited to the Chinese New Year gala, which the association co-organizes, but no direct engagement between the chair and Czech politicians is known to the author. Further understanding of the CCAPPNU's membership and activities is restricted since its members mostly use the organization's title only as secondary, preferring to be named as leaders of their own associations. The CCAPPNU managed to unite most of the OC leaders under its umbrella, though the prominent and relatively large Fujianese community does not seem to be represented here. When it comes to specific Party-state policy mobilization, even this group joins the CCAPPNU's initiatives.

2.1.3 The Federation of Chinese Women in the Czech Republic

The Federation of Chinese Women in the Czech Republic (*Lü Jie Huaren Huaqiao funü lianhehui* 旅捷华人华侨妇女联合会, Sdružení čínských žen v České republice; FCWCR) was established (allegedly rather reluctantly; Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 30, 2020) in 2004 by the veteran Czech OC Tang Yunling Rusková 唐云凌 (now eternal honorary chairwoman of the organization) on the local embassy's initiative, which it remains very close to (ibid.). According to the organization's description on the website of the European Chinese Women Federation (*Ouzhou Huaren Huaqiao funü lianhehui* 欧洲华人华侨妇女联合会; s.d.), the federation's goals include "protecting women's and children's legal rights and benefits",²⁵ helping others during crisis, creating a platform to connect women living and working in the country, but also "educating and guiding sisters to love the fatherland, love the host country, and incessantly increasing political consciousness".²⁶ The federation does not seem to interact much with actors outside the OC community, both on national and European level, despite the prominence of its current chair.

While there is no comprehensive data available on the historical or even current membership, Ren Weihong 任卫红 (now honorary chairwoman) became the second president at some point prior to 2010. In 2011, Chen Jinmei 陈金妹 was elected as the new head, which she remains to be (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Prague 2011). Jia Jianping 贾建平 and Bao Yamei 鲍亚梅 seem to currently hold the title of executive vice-chairs, and general secretaries are Zeng Yunhua 曾云华 and Qin Xiaohong 秦晓红. The organization claims to have wide membership from all parts of China (European Chinese Women Federation s.d.). This short self-description appears to

²⁵ 维护妇女和儿童的合法权益.

²⁶ 教育引导姐妹们热爱祖国, 热爱居住国, 不断提高政治觉悟.

have been translated word by word²⁷ for an event with a Czech youth organization (that had a declared "friendship" with the Chinese embassy and the PRC mass organization All-China Youth Federation; Svaz klubů mládeže 2011) in 2011, but the political parts were redacted (ibid.), in a clear attempt to look apolitical in outward messaging. In 2016, the organization was selected as "one of the top 50 model example Zhejiang overseas Chinese organizations"²⁸ (The Paper 2019). The group has a singing troupe that performs patriotic and folk songs (ibid., Svaz klub mládeže 2011).

The federation has a competing organization – the Association of Chinese Women in the Czech Republic (Lü Jie Huaren Huaqiao funü xiehui 旅捷华人华侨妇女协会). The association also seems to be close to the Chinese political system; one of its prominent members, Zheng Suling 郑素玲, was on the board of the *Prague Chinese Times*, in which capacity she met with the OCAO propaganda cadre delegation in 2012 (Qingtian CPPCC Literature and History Committee 2012) and donated a special edition of the newspaper to the Czech Lu Xun Library on behalf of both the *Times* and the association (Prague Chinese Times 2015). There is no reason to believe that the organization would somehow try to distance itself from Chinese politics, but it certainly does not appear as active as the federation dominated by Chen Jinmei.

The organization's current chairwoman Chen Jinmei 陈金妹 is among the most active OC leaders in the Czech Republic. Originally from Wenxi 温溪 in Qingtian (Ye 2012), she has been in Europe since 1992 and followed her husband to the Czech Republic in 1995 from Germany (ibid.). Chen holds the position of the chair at the Wenxi ACFROC and is the Qingtian ACFROC vice-chair (Qingtian Education Network 2018), which makes her one of the few Czech OC who serve at UF bodies in China. Apart from the federation, she holds an executive vice-chair position at the Czech Chinese Business Federation (Prague Chinese Times 2019c; more in the next section) and at the

²⁷ Most likely by a local with limited Chinese skills, as they translated "a number of vice-chairs and members" 副会长和会员若干名 as "vice-chair Ruo Ganming".

²⁸ 浙江省首批 50 个海外示范性侨团之一.

CCAPPNU, and serves as the head of the Czech Chapter of the World of Traditional Culture Research Institute (Shijie chuantong wenhua yanjiuyuan Jieke fen yuan 世界传统文化研究院捷克分院; Qingtian Network 2019a). She gave several interviews to Chinese media in the past (Ye 2012, Qingtian Network 2019a), attended the CCTV Chinese New Year Gala in 2019 (ibid.), and was invited as a special guest to the Zhejiang CPPCC session that year (Prague Chinese Times 2019c). As the only Czech OC, Chen attended the OC study session at Xiamen University in 2018, organized by the ACFROC (Prague Chinese Times 2018a). She was part of the two-member CCAPPNU delegation to the 30th anniversary of the CCPPNU's foundation (Prague Chinese Times 2018b) and in 2018 she received the "All-China Returned Overseas Chinese and Relatives of the Overseas Chinese Exemplary Individuals Award"²⁹ award as the first Czech OC in history (OCAO 2018).

Jia Jianping 贾建萍, the executive vice-chair of the organization, holds a vice-chair position with the CCAPPNU, but often uses the title of the head of the association called the Grand Europe Association (*Gelante Ouzhou shanghui* 格兰特欧洲商会; Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020b), through which she has established cooperation with James Wu's cluster (more in section 2.2.3) or the Czech-Central Asia Mixed Chamber of Commerce (Česká-Středoasijská smíšená obchodní komora; Česká-Středoasijská smíšená obchodní komora 2015) – Jia went to Harbin with the chamber to attend the China-Russia economic expo and met with the mayor of the city in 2015 (ibid.). While the association claims to be "European", its website is available only in Czech, but it does show photos from meetings with quite high-level contacts – the current Czech minister of healthcare Adam Vojtěch, the current Czech president Miloš Zeman, and the former president Václav Klaus (Grand Europe Association s.d.). In 2017, Grandea held a BRI-themed meeting in Changchun with a local foreign office (*waiban* 外办) and a government-linked business association, discussing the 2022 Winter Olympics among other topics (Changchun City Foreign Office 2017).

²⁹ 全国归侨侨眷先进个人.

Czech interactions

Chen and Jia conducted a study session on the 19th Party Congress in 2018 with the participation of the local OC and some members of the Czech-Chinese Society (Zhejiang China 2018).

In 2020, the organization donated PPE to the town of Třebíč with other OC groups and the delegation met with the mayor (Prague Chinese Times 2020d).

PRC interactions

The group often shows support for the PRC policy, such as towards Hong Kong (Prague Chinese Times 2016c), the South China Sea (Prague Chinese Times 2016a), or Taiwan (EPRCP 2005). Its members interact with incoming Party-state delegations, for example in 2018 during the OCAO vice-director visit (Xiang dong xiang xi 2018) or in 2017, when a Zhejiang delegation, including the vice-party secretary, the UFWD executive vice-head, the chairman of the Zhejiang ACFROC (ZFROC), and the honorary chair of the Czech Qingtian Hometown Association Chen Naike (more in section 2.2.1) arrived to Prague for that year's China Investment Forum (CIF, more in section 2.4), meeting with the minister of interior Jan Hamáček, but also holding a BRI-themed event with the local OC leaders (Overseas Chinese 2017). Chen often figures on top of meeting attendance lists and in honorary position in group photos, showcasing her prominence.

The organization also engages in charity. In 2018, chairwoman Chen delivered money from Czech OC to middle-school students in Wenxi, where she gave a speech about compassion and her life (Qingtian Education Network 2018). During the 2020 coronavirus crisis, the federation was one of the two most visible OC groups donating PPE to compatriots in the PRC (Qingtian FROC 12th Floor 2020).

European interactions

The Women Federation appears to be active in the European Chinese Women Federation (欧洲妇女联合会), which was described as "ridden by political struggles" by the Austrian *Huaqiao* (Kaminski and Xu 2017: 106). The federation was established in 2005, allegedly with the help of Tang Yunling Rusková. The Czech federation is its member and Chen Jinmei serves as its executive vice-chair. The organization's current chair of the 24-strong presidium, Lin Shengqin 林胜琴, is of a Qingtianese origin (Qingtian Network 2019c). The federation's election ceremonies have been attended by several hundred OC representatives – 350 in 2017 (and 30 OC from Africa and Asia; ZFROC 2017b) and 500 in 2019 (Qingtian Network 2019c) – but it appears that the events do not attract any participation of political leaders from neither country, only local OC representatives (ibid.). This suggests that the organization might not be as engaged politically.

Chen and Jia represented the federation at a meeting in Moscow with Russian and South African OC women associations and foreign diplomats, including the wife of the then South African president Bongi Ngema-Zuma (Xinhua Network 2012).

Summary

The Federation of Chinese Women in the Czech Republic is dominated by Chen Jinmei and to some extent Jia Jianping. While the organization appears to have very limited interactions with the Czech political system (though Jia engages in it through her separate association), Chen in particular is one of the most active OC leaders with regards to working with local diaspora and Chinese politicians. The awards, offices and honors bestowed upon her by rather high-level organs show her prominence even in the PRC itself. The federation is active within the European Chinese Women Federation, which was allegedly co-founded by its now eternal honorary chairwoman Tang Yunling Rusková. In summary, the federation's united front work targets local and international OC rather than foreigners.

2.1.4 Czech Chinese Business Federation

The Czech Chinese Business Federation (Jieke huashang lianhehui 捷克华商联合会; CCBF; Česko-Čínská Obchodní Asociace) was established in 2009 in Prague's Sapa Trade Center (CCBF s.d.). The federation unites Chinese trade and service industry businessmen and companies. It focuses on exporting traditional Czech products such as beer and crystal and on importing electronics or textile from China. The organization also aims to create joint ventures in the country in a wide scope of activities – from mining equipment production to organizing summer camps for the youth. The federation (CCBF s.d.) wants to "work to promote constant development of Czech-Chinese relations and to build a communication and cooperation bridge between the two countries' peoples. Above all, [it wants] to offer comprehensive and coordinated service to all levels of the Chinese government, Chinese companies and non-governmental [organizations] visiting Europe, inspecting the Czech Republic, touring, visiting or organizing trade fairs, promotion events, forums or commercial talks.³⁰ For a cross-regional organization, the CCBF shows high-level contacts with the PRC organs and has even Czech political connections, even though they are perhaps only tied to the previous leadership and are not sustained anymore.

The first chair of the federation was James Wu,³¹ who possibly held this position until 2011 at the latest (Yuan 2011; concrete data is lacking), when Wang Wanming 汪万明 was elected the new chair. Wang is a Chinese businessman from Tianjin, who was sent to the Czech Republic as a representative of the China Youth Travel Service (Zhong qing lü 中青旅; is run by the Communist Youth League of China [Gong qing tuan 共青团]; China Youth Travel Service s.d.). After learning English and spending several years

³⁰ 捷克华商联合会致力于促进捷中两国关系不断发展，为两国人民之间搭建沟通，合作的桥梁。尤其是为中国国内各级政府，企业，民间赴欧洲，捷克考察，参观，访问，举办各种展销会，推荐会，举行各种论坛，商务会谈等提供全方位，一条龙的服务。

³¹ More in section 2.2.3.

abroad on SOE business (Liu and Liu 2019), Wang has gained several united front and government positions in China.³²

In 2018, Han Jiaqing 韩加卿 (James Han) became the chairman (Pinhuang 2018b) at a rather lavish election ceremony (especially compared to the modest change of leadership in 2019), which was attended by the embassy person in charge of OC affairs, Xu Jinsong 徐劲松, who proclaimed that Wang was "an important OC leader"³³ who "ha[d] provided a lot of help to the embassy"³⁴. Han did not remain in this position for long, as he was replaced by Zhang Min 张敏 (CCBF 2019a) the following year. Han currently serves as chairman at the European Chamber of Commerce Alliance Association (s.d.), an organization that employs a rather large number of Chinese and Czech nationals, although it remains unclear whether its "European" nature is a mere trademark.

Current leadership (ibid.): Zhang Min 张敏 (chair), Zhang Qiao 张巧 (supervisory head; vice-chair of the China-Central European Traditional Chinese Medicine Association; Prague Chinese Times 2017a), Guan Shaoji 关绍基 (general secretary; executive chair of the Czech Guangdong Chamber of Commerce and vice-head of the *Prague Chinese Times*; Sino-Czech Economic Trade & Cultural Exchange Association 2018), Hu Shilong 胡世隆 (executive vice-chair; executive general secretary of the Czech-China-Europe Industry and Commerce Federation; Prague Chinese Times 2020a), Wang Yan 王滢 (executive vice-chair), Cao Qiping 曹骑平 (executive vice-chair; vice-chair at the Sino-Czech Economic Trade & Cultural Exchange Association [Zhong-Jie jingmao wenhua jiaoliu cujin hui 中捷经贸文化交流促进会]; CCBF 2019b), Qian Hengtong 钱亨通 (financial manager), Pan Jiekai 潘杰凯 (accountant).

Apart from standard leadership structures, the organization has also formed a small leading group some time prior to 2019. It is unclear what role it plays, but it clearly

³² More in section 2.3.3.

³³ 重要的侨领。

³⁴ 给大使馆工作也提供了不少帮助。

copies the PRC structure, perhaps to boost its prestige and smoothen the interactions with the Chinese organs. These are the identified members: Zhang Min 张敏 (temporary chair; Zhang seems to use this title rather than his federation chairmanship), Chen Jinmei 陈金妹 (temporary member), Cao Qiping 曹骑平 (temporary member).

Past members include: James Wu (chair; ZFROC 2010a), Zong Yongwei (vice-chair; People's Network 2012), Zhan Hailing 詹海灵 (Prague Chinese Times 2018e), vice-chair Wang Zhiguang 王志广 (Xie 2019).

Czech interactions

In 2018, Wang led a federation delegation, including Czechs (unfortunately the author failed to identify them), to visit Shanghai's Changning District (*Shanghai shi Changning qu* 上海市长宁区), where they met with the local UFWD, ACFROC and OCAO heads and a local Air China representative (CCBF 2018). A similar delegation of unidentified Czech nationals was led by Wang in 2017 to Tianjin, where they met with the local ACFROC chairman (Prague Chinese Times 2017b).

During the 2018 OCAO visit to the Czech Republic, Wang interacted with Prague 5 local officials (Xiang dong xiang xi 2018). In 2014 and 2015, Wang was part of president Zeman's delegations to China (Liu and Liu 2019) and attended the 2015 CIF, possibly as the only local OC (Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation s.d.).

In 2016, James Wu booked public places in the name of the organization in order to prevent Czech protesters to "interrupt" Xi Jinping's visit in March that year (Synopsis and Lulu 2018a).

In 2020, the organization donated PPE to the town of Třebíč with other OC groups and they met with the mayor (Prague Chinese Times 2020d).

PRC interactions

Their first delegation chose Zhejiang as destination and they had a meeting there with the ZFROC chairwoman. Their debate was moderated by Chen Naike 陈乃科, the then ZFROC standing committee member and already the chairman of the board of the Guohe Shareholding Group (Guohe konggu jituan 国和控股集团), according to the ZFROC (2010). The group members are young and come from various places such as Jiangsu (江苏), Shanghai (上海), Shaanxi (陕西), or Inner Mongolia (内蒙), but the majority is of Zhejiang origin. According to James Wu's bio on the website of the European Federation of Fujian Associations (s.d.), they also visited Shanghai, Jiangsu and the Fujian province/city-level OCAO, ACFROC and UFWD.

In 2017, the federation was visited by the Guangdong Province Department of Public Security (Guangdong sheng gong'an ting 广东省公安厅; Prague Chinese Times 2017c), a rather unusual partner for a business-oriented group.

In 2018, Wang and Chen met with the OCAO vice-director (Xiang dong xiang xi 2018) and helped local OC after their stores burnt to the ground, along with other OC leaders (such as Zhou Lingjian 周灵建) and the local embassy staff (Xu Jinsong 徐劲松). Zhang Qiao and Qing Hengtong both donated 100,180 CZK (ca. 4000 USD) to the victims of fire in the SAPA market (Prague Chinese Times 2018d). That year a Guangdong provincial-level OCAO (Sino-Czech Economic Trade & Cultural Exchange Association 2018a) visited the group, followed by two more delegations from this province led by the provincial-level CPPCC chair (Prague Chinese Times 2019e) and another one led by the provincial ACFROC general secretary (Prague Chinese Times 2019a). This level of engagement with the Guangdong organs is quite unusual considering the small size of the Guangdong OC minority and their relatively low participation in cross-regional organizations.

In 2019, the organization was visited by a Zhengzhou (郑州) delegation including the local CPPCC chairman, the local ACFROC chairman, and the Dengfeng CPPCC chair

(CCBF 2019b). Wang Wanming 汪万明 participated as an honorary chair (ibid.). The same year a delegation led by the Shanghai UFWD vice-director met with the federation and Wang mentioned the "appropriate contribution the organization has made to protect China's image and dignity"³⁵ (Prague Chinese Times 2019d). In May, the group participated in a Czech-China OC investment forum organized by the China Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs (Zhongguo qiaoshang lianhehui 中国侨商联合会) and the Czech Overseas Chinese Youth Federation³⁶ (China Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs 2019). That year the federation organized a new year's party on December 15, attended by almost fifty people even from other groups, such as Zhou Lingjian, the chair of the Qingtian Hometown Association, and Xu Jinsong from the Chinese embassy (Prague Chinese Times 2019). The Hunan UFWD vice-director interacted with the then vice-chair Wang Zhiguang at a New Silk Road Chamber of Commerce meeting (Xie 2019).

The CCBF, same as most of other OC groups in the country, participates in global mobilization events and displays support for the PRC policy in Hong Kong (Prague Chinese Times 2016e) or the South China Sea (Prague Chinese Times 2016a).

European interactions

No relevant engagement has been identified.

Summary

The Czech Chinese Business Federation engages in rather high-level contact with the PRC political system, including non-business sectors. It is strongly tied to Zhejiang and the Qingtian group, while uniting OC from other parts of China, too. Two former chairs were not even from the province. In Czech politics, the chamber has interacted with president Zeman's circles both as part of his delegations to China and at CIF. There are

³⁵为维护祖国的形象与尊严做出了应有的贡献。

³⁶More in section 2.2.1.

no identifiable relevant European connections of the organization. It is the only OC association in the country with a leading small group, a rather strange body for such a small organization. The CCBF belongs to the topmost active OC groups in the country and might be a cross-regional association with the highest-level of contacts both in China and in the Czech Republic.

2.1.5 Summary

The Czech cross-regional Chinese diaspora organizations seem to engage mainly with the Chinese political system and local OC. Participation in European structures and in Czech politics is very limited. In contrast to previous research on OC communities elsewhere, at least the OC leadership show a level of cooperation, and while the Zhejiangese dominate the space, OC from other parts of China are actively collaborating with them. This is most clearly manifested in the Czech Chinese Business Federation, an organization whose first two and longest serving chairs were Fujianese and Tianjinese, despite the majority of members claiming a Zhejiang descent.

2.2 Regional organizations

Regional organizations are groups defined by members' affiliations to regions in the PRC. In the Czech case, the regions are all defined by the administrative system, not dialectical proximity. These organizations seem to be favored by the PRC organs when it comes to high-level contacts, in contrast with cross-regional groups.

In the Czech Republic, Qingtian (Zhejiang) and Fujian groups dominate the landscape. There are others, though, that would perhaps deserve further study, such as the Guangdong Chamber of Commerce (Jieke Guangdong shanghui 捷克广东商会), which seems to engage with Guangdong delegations (CPPCC [Prague Chinese Times 2019e], the OCAO [Sino-Czech Economic Trade & Cultural Exchange Association 2018a], the ACFROC [Prague Chinese Times 2019a]), and the Guangzhou CCPIT (Sino-Czech Economic Trade & Cultural Exchange Association 2018b). The chamber also cooperates with the Czech think-tank Comenius (its president Karel Muzikář participated in the chamber's meetings with Guangdong CPPCC and OCAO), which specializes in high-profile lavish events sponsored, among others, by Huawei (Comenius s.d.b), often with Czech political, business and cultural elite participation. Last year one of their conferences featured the Chinese ambassador, the Chinese director of the local Huawei branch, the Czech minister of industry and commerce, or the mayor of Prague 5 (Comenius s.d.a).

The following section will discuss the most institutionalized and largest diaspora organization – the Qingtian Hometown Association – and the Fujian groups. In the latter, James Wu stands out as the most interesting figure, since his level of united front work activity, mixing business with politics, perhaps exceeds that of any other Czech OC leaders.

2.2.1 The Czech Qingtian Hometown Association

Qingtian County (青田县) is an administration unit under Lishui (丽水市) in the Eastern Chinese province of Zhejiang 浙江. This mostly rural area was home to a registered population of 571,000 in 2019 (Qingtian Statistics Bureau and National Statistics Bureau's Qingtian Survey Team 2019), yet in 2015 nearly 330 thousand of them lived abroad (91.31 percent in Europe,³⁷ 7.39 percent in the Americas; OCAO 2015).³⁸ Qingtian relies heavily on the money that the OC send back home, some of them illegally. As Cardinal and Araújo (2013: 208-9) described, in Qingtian "everybody has family abroad sending them money" with large amounts of EUR in cash accepted every day (up to 10 million at one of the several of local banks) and whole families participating in what can be best described as money laundering and tax evasion (ibid.). The two journalists even described a peculiar scene where two of the bank staffers had to use a wheelbarrow to move the banknotes at the end of the day, as "it is said that there are more 500 euro bills in Qingtian than in entire Spain" (ibid.).

In the Czech Republic, Zhejiang (Qingtian and Wenzhou in particular) migrants have always dominated the OC landscape. In the last decade, their share of the whole OC population has steadily kept between 60 (Ye 2010, ZFROC 2012) and 80 percent (China Today Club 2016).³⁹ These numbers imply political prominence, which explains why these migrants dominate the Czech OC delegations to the ACFROC and other UF organs' events and why one of their returned members appears to be politically the most successful from all of the reviewed groups. It boasts of contacts with the last two Czech presidents, various ministers and local level politicians, but also European-level officials and rather high direct PRC organ involvement. The group's current and former

³⁷ The history of Qingtian and the Qingtianese migration to Europe was discussed in Chapter One.

³⁸ New survey is underway this year (Qingtian Network 2020a).

³⁹ These numbers are purely orientational and perhaps inflated.

membership also includes the only known PRC minority party members and delegates to the central-level NPC and CPPCC.

The Czech Qingtian Hometown Association (Jieke Qingtian tongxiang hui 捷克青田同乡会; CQHA; Občanské sdružení krajanů z čínského města Qing Tian⁴⁰; Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020e) aims to represent this group. According to *China Overseas Chinese Network (Zhongguo qiao wang 中国侨网, COCN 2017)*,⁴¹ the association was established in March 1999 and its

"core principle is to protect the legal rights of overseas Qingtianese in the Czech Republic, its aim is to promote Chinese-Czech cultural exchange and strengthen domestic and international economic contacts; it takes upon itself to defend the fatherland's dignity and image and [has already] done things that ought to be done in that regard."⁴²

The association's website seems to have been out of order since at least October 2017, but its archived version (Czech Qingtian Hometown Association 2017) named several united front organizations such as the central ACFROC, its Zhejiang chapter and the Zhejiang COCN as "friendly links".

The association's first chair was Zheng Chaowei 郑朝伟 from Qingtian's Hecheng (鹤城镇). Zheng, described as an intellectual (Ye 2010), was one of the students sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, but then returned and still managed to finish Zhejiang University of Technology's College of Economics and Management 浙江工业大学经贸管理学院 (ibid.). In 1988, Zheng left (ibid.) the Qingtian County Planned Economy Committee 青田县计划经济委员会 and moved to France for work, but with the financial support of his friends and relatives in Western Europe, he opened a restaurant in 1992 Czechoslovakia. Business was good; allegedly (ibid.) "urged by many

⁴⁰The Czech name of the entity wrongly refers to Qingtian as a city/town.

⁴¹ COCN is a news website operated by the CNS (CNS s.d.).

⁴² 捷克青田同乡会本着维护旅捷青田籍侨胞的合法权益，促进中捷文化交流和加强海内外经济交往为宗旨，以维护祖国的尊严和形象为己任，做了一些我们应该做的事。

Qingtianese living in the Czech Republic"⁴³, he accepted the position of the association's chair and "won the affirmation of both the Chinese embassy and the local government".⁴⁴ In 2009, Zheng participated in a series of events in the PRC to celebrate the country's 60th anniversary (ibid.). In 2012 (while already only an honorary chair), Zheng became an overseas council member of the China Association for International Cultural Exchanges with Overseas Chinese (People's Network 2012). Currently, Zheng still owns a company in the Czech Republic called Hua Ou (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020c) and operating in catering, but otherwise he seems to be rather absent from the public space. The last time he appeared in media coverage was in 2018 during an OC leaders and embassy inspection of the OC businesses affected by fire in SAPA (Pinhuang 2018a).

In 2010, the association elected Sun Yuexin 孙悦新 as the new president with the "OCAO, ACFROC, Zhejiang province OCAO and AFROC, the People's Government of Qingtian County, and the county OCAO and FROC sending congratulatory messages and letters to the newly elected president and council",⁴⁵ while thirty representatives of Qingtian hometown associations from Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Belgium, Austria, France, Hungary, the USA and others including the president of the European Qingtian Hometown Association (Ouzhou Qingtian tongxiang hui 欧洲青田同乡会; EQHA) Fu Chunping 傅春平⁴⁶ attended the ceremony in person (CNS 2010). Sun, sometimes also going by his Czech name Milan Sun, had been a general secretary of the association prior to his election as its head (Xia 2019). As the president, he participated in the first World Overseas Chinese Industry and Commerce Convention (Huaqiao Huaren gongshang

⁴³ 在旅捷众多青田人士的动员下。

⁴⁴ 赢得了驻捷大使馆和当地政府的肯定。

⁴⁵ 国务院侨办、中国侨联、浙江省侨办、侨联、青田县人民政府、县侨办、侨联给孙先生和捷克青田同乡会新任理事会发来贺电或贺信。

⁴⁶ More below.

dahui 华侨华人工商大会), attended by many Qingtianese *qiaoling* and also by the premier Li Keqiang 李克强 and the then State Council member Yang Jiechi 杨洁篪 (Qingtian FROC 2015), and organized by the OCAO and the China International Culture Association (Zhongguo haiwai jiaoliu xiehui 中国海外交流协会; CGPRC 2015). Sun is a calligraphy master and an owner of several Asian restaurants; prior to that, he used to help the incoming OC with visas and renting accommodation (Zhejiang International – Overseas Chinese World 2016). Sun became an overseas council member of the China Association for International Cultural Exchanges with Overseas Chinese in 2012, same as Zheng (People's Network 2012). He held the position of the association's chair until 2017, but still continues "handling OC affairs as the chairman of the Chinese council of the Czech-China Center",^{47,48} while retaining the title of the honorary chairman of the Qingtian Hometown Association (Xia 2019).

In 2017, Zhou Lingjian became the new chair of the group. The rather lavish ceremony (Prague Chinese Times 2017d) was attended by the Zhejiang province OCAO and ACFROC delegations, the EQHA chairman Chen Shaoqi 陈少奇, embassy staff, Czech and European Chinese youth organizations (more below), the CCAPPNU, and other Czech OC organizations. Central-level OCAO, ACFROC and the CPPCC Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, and Overseas Chinese Committee sent their congratulatory remarks (ibid.). This means the three of the "five overseas Chinese" (see section 1.3.3) showed some form of affiliation with the association. According to his interview with the CNS-operated media outlet *Economic View* (2018), Zhou was born in 1973 in Qingtian's Shankou (山口). In 1992 he went to São Paulo, then Austria and finally the Czech Republic in 1996, where he married his boss' daughter and founded the Donghai restaurant in 2000, where the then chair of the Czech Chamber of Deputies, chair of the Civic Democratic Party and soon-to-be president Václav Klaus (in office 2003-2013) became a regular (kept coming even when in office). Zhou claims they became friends

⁴⁷ The organization also uses the broken English names Czech – China Centrum and China Centrum Czech Republic, more in section 2.3.2 (Czech-China Center s.d.).

⁴⁸ 捷克中国中心中方理事会主席的身份继续处理着华侨事务。

and that he even prayed for him to the Buddha Maitreya during the presidential election. Zhou also owns the *Prague Chinese Times* (ibid.), founded the Czech Chinese Youth Federation (Jieke Huaqiao Huaren qingnian lianhe zonghui 捷克华侨华人青年联合总会; CCYF) in 2011 (OCAO 2011), and became chair of the Chinese Youth Federation Europe (Ouzhou Huaqiao Huaren qingnian lianhe zonghui 欧洲华侨华人青年联合总会; CYFE) in 2016 (ZFROC 2016).

Another former prominent member of the CQHA is Zong Weiyong 宗伟勇, currently the chair of the CCYF (OCAO 2020); he has also held the position of a non-voting delegate at the central CPPCC (Kong 2017, OCAO 2020)⁴⁹ and an overseas council member of the China Association for International Cultural Exchanges with Overseas Chinese (People's Network 2012). Zong held the position of an executive vice-chair within the organization by at least 2012, but until no longer than November 2018 (Wang 2018). He still often attends its events and cooperates with Zhou. Zong owns the Summer Palace restaurant (ibid.) in the center of Prague and people allegedly call him the Prague Lei Feng (ibid.), an allusion to the Chinese role model soldier who probably never existed. In 2020, the CCYF donated PPE to the town of Třebíč with other OC groups and the delegation met with the mayor (Prague Chinese Times 2020d).

The most prominent former member and the highest-ranking returned OC from the Czech Republic is Chen Naike 陈乃科. Chen finished his studies at Northwestern Polytechnical University (NWPU) in 1990 and went to Europe three years later (Qingtian government 1993). In the 1990s and early 2000s he started a successful business selling textile, earning himself the title "King of Socks". Chen holds high-ranking positions both at the provincial level (ACFROC; Overseas Chinese 2017), at the central level of the ACFROC (Qingtian government 2011), and at the COFA (COFA 2019), and he has served as the Zhi Gong Party (member since 2009; Rao 2011) delegate to the NPC since 2013 (Qingtian government 2013, Qingtian Network 2020b). During the Zhejiang party delegation's visit in Prague, he moderated the debate with the local OC (Overseas

⁴⁹The only Czech OC to hold such a prominent position.

Chinese 2017), showing that he still had some connection to the community. Furthermore, Chen owns 90 percent of Guohe Holding Group Ltd. (国和控股集团有限公司), a company worth 70 mil USD (Qichacha 2020a). At the CQHA, he was the executive vice-chair (Rao 2011) and now holds the title of a honorary chairman (Overseas Chinese 2017), despite never having served at the top position.

Even though Chen Jinmei often attends CQHA events and originates from the county, she does not appear to have ever had an official function within the association.

Other former members: Ruan Xuguang 阮旭光 (executive vice-chair and general secretary; overseas council member of the China Association for International Cultural Exchanges with Overseas Chinese [People's Network 2012]).

Other current members (Qingtian Network 2019b): Zhang Wenhua 张文华 (general secretary), Han Canlan 韩灿烂 (executive vice-chair), Ye Pengchao 叶鹏超 (vice-chair), Zhan Chenlei 詹陈雷 (vice-chair of the Czech-China Center [ACFROC 2020b] and Revolutionary KMT member [Zhejiang Revolutionary KMT committee 2020]).

Czech interactions

Even though the productivity of these relationships is hard to judge, the organization nevertheless boasts high-level connections, including the last two presidents. Furthermore, Sun's own organization brings the group more local connections (more in section 2.3.2)

President Václav Klaus (allegedly Zhou's friend) and his wife Livie Klausová wrote a congratulatory note to the CQHA's 12th anniversary in hand (ZFROC 2010b) and Klausová also attended the CCYF founding ceremony (OCAO 2011). Zhou also joined president Zeman's delegation to the PRC in 2019 (Nohl and Machová 2020). Klaus first visited China in 1994, then the first PM of the new independent Czech Republic, and was supposedly very intrigued by Deng's reforms (Huo 2019), in 2004 he visited the country again and proudly told Huo Yuzhen 霍玉珍 (who would become ambassador in Prague

two years later; *ibid.*) that the developed cities in eastern China prove his predictions that the country would rise were correct. Last time Klaus traveled to the PRC was in 2019 (*ibid.*), when among other sites, he paid a visit to the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders (Nanjing datusha yunanzhe tongbao jinian guan 南京大屠杀遇难同胞纪念馆), a concrete testament to the PRC politicized history version of the Nanjing Massacre (1937-8).

Senator Jaroslav Doubrava (former Czech Communist Party member) attended the 2017 leadership change gala (Prague Chinese Times 2017d).

In 2019, the association co-organized the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Czech-China relations under the leadership of the embassy at the Prague Zhejiang Silk Road Center (Bulage Zhejiang Silu zhongxin 布拉格浙江丝路中心), attended by Petr Mrhálek, vice-chair of the Smíšená česko čínská komora vzájemné spolupráce (Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation; Czech-Chinese Journal 2019: 11).

Additionally, the CQHA assists and supports the high-profile Chinese New Year gala held in Prague (China-Europe Culture and Arts Exchange Association 2019).

At the local level, the organization represented by Milan Sun seems to have co-organized a meeting of the Lishui Party and the state delegation led by the party secretary (Qingtian Network 2012) with the then Kolín Mayor Vít Rakušan (now MP, chair of the STAN party and deputy in the Central Bohemian Region Assembly), who, according to the report (*ibid.*), has by then "many times engaged with all levels of the PRC administration and OC"⁵⁰. The women federation and the CCYF members were also present (*ibid.*). This is the first identifiable Czech OC mediation between local Czech and Chinese politics.

In 2020, the organization donated PPE to the town of Třebíč with other OC groups and the delegation met with the mayor (Prague Chinese Times 2020d).

⁵⁰ 他同中国各级政府部门和侨民有过多次接触。

PRC interactions

The association's now defunct (Czech Qingtian Hometown Association 2017) website mentions several meetings with Chinese officials, mainly from various local branches of OCAO, but also the participation of the association's then-president Sun Yuexin 孙悦新 (more below) at a conference in Lishui headed by the central OCAO's deputy director Zhuang Rongwen 庄荣文. The website also shows a document proving that the association donated to the areas affected by the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake (ibid.).

The organization has a clear affiliation with the central-level CPPCC, OCAO and ACFROC, and its provincial and local level chapters and events are often attended by the embassy staffers.

The CQHA's Zhou and Zong have featured in Chinese media and official bodies' reports (Zhang and Jiang 2020) as the most prominent organizers of the Czech OC help to China during the initial phase of the COVID-19 crisis.

Qingtian (Qingtian Media Group 2020) and Zhejiang (Prague Chinese Times 2020b) UFWD and ACFROC delegated the organization to distribute PPE and other supplies on their behalf to the OC in Italy and the Czech Republic.

At the 20th anniversary of the organization in 2019, the organization's leadership made patriotic statements, touching upon propaganda slogans and subscribing to the BRI policy (Qingtian Network 2019).

The CQHA regularly participates in political diaspora mobilization to support the PRC policy on issues such as in Hong Kong (Prague Chinese Times 2016c) and the South China Sea (Prague Chinese Times 2016a) and it usually figures as third on the lists of undersigned organizations, after the CCAPPNU and the Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic.

European interactions

The EQHA chairs have attended last two leadership change events of the association, along with representatives of other Qingtian groups in Europe.

The Czech Qingtian Hometown Association has been a member of the EQHA possibly since at least 2010, when its chairman attended the CQHA's leadership change event (CNS 2010). The EQHA is an umbrella organization that currently comprises of at least 21 Qingtian organizations from 16 European countries (Qingtian Network 2019d). When it was established in 1996, the membership included only Benelux, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, but the organization has since expanded to Sweden, Hungary, or the Czech Republic (New OC Power s.d.). Its current chairman Chen Shaoqi 陈少奇 was first elected in 2016 "with the support of Qingtian party committee and people's government" (New OC Power s.d.) and was re-elected in 2019 during the association's 7th electoral conference in Paris (Qingtian Network 2019d), attended by Zhou Lingjian.

Chen is originally from Shankou township 山口镇 (same as Zhou), came to Paris in 1979 and co-founded the French Qingtian Hometown Association 法国青田同乡会 in 1994. He has held leadership positions there, but was only elected chairman in 2014, when his united front career seemed to have been boosted (New OC Power s.d.). Since then he has gained united front and government positions in Jilin, Henan and Zhejiang, but also became a non-voting delegate at the central CPPCC (New OC Power s.d.). Apart from offices in China, he has also joined the leadership of the EFCO and the European Association for the Promotion of Peaceful Unification of China (also its French chapter). He regularly attends European Qingtianese events, mainly electoral conferences (New OC Power s.d.).

In November 2019, Chen led the EQHA delegation to Lishui to unveil the plaque of the organization's "China general headquarters". The ceremony was attended by the Lishui party secretary and both the province and the city-level ACFROC leadership (ZFROC 2020); Zhou joined the delegation.

Zhou Lingjian has been actively involved in another pan-European organization – the Chinese Youth Federation of Europe (CYFE) – since its foundation in 2011 (French Overseas Chinese Network 2011). It was established in 2011 in Brussels (French Overseas Chinese Network 2011) and seems to retain a rather strong Benelux presence (Capital News 2019, Guangming News 2019, Xinhua Network 2017b). Its first chairman Fu Xuhai 傅旭海 (Belgium) remains one of the key figures, despite being replaced as chairman by Zhou in 2016 (ZFROC 2016). The founding members were from Belgium, Netherlands, Russia, Great Britain, Spain, Germany, and the Czech Republic (after he got elected to head the CYFE, Zhou passed on the CCYF leadership to Zong). Current members' list has been expanded by organizations from Slovakia, Italy, Luxembourg, France, Hungary, Romania, Poland, and Croatia (Capital News 2019).

The organization's events are regularly attended by high-level European and Chinese political figures. For example, the founding event was attended by the then general secretary of the All-China Youth Federation or the then EFCO chair and the then EEAS official in charge of the PRC agenda (French Overseas Chinese Network 2011). Their 2019 May 4th Movement centenary conference featured Gai Lin 盖琳 (Capital News 2019), the secretary-general of the European Parliament EU-China Friendship Group⁵¹, and the organization's BRI-themed events were attended by the then vice-president of the Luxembourgian parliament Laurent Mosar, vice-director of the ACFROC overseas friendship department Sang Baoshan 桑宝山 (Xinhua Network 2017b), or the Zhigong Party vice-chairwoman and the CPPCC standing committee member Yan Xiaopei⁵² (Guangming News 2019). These events often feature propaganda phrases such as the "Chinese Dream", "Community of Common Destiny", "win-win cooperation", or the Belt and Road Initiative. After Tsai Ing-wen was re-elected Taiwanese president in January

⁵¹ United front-linked organization mainly headed by the Czech ECR MEP Jan Zahradil; for more, see Lulu 2019.

⁵² See Lulu 2019.

2020, the organization issued a statement against Taiwanese independence (Prague Chinese Times 2020c).

Summary

The Czech Qingtian Hometown Association aims to represent possibly around two thirds of the OC in the country. The CQHA is well-institutionalized and its members and partners dominate the Czech Chinese diaspora landscape. It has been engaging with high-level Czech, Chinese and European politics either directly or via its leadership's affiliations with other Chinese organizations in Europe. The association's current and former leadership have obtained the highest levels of political positions and rewards both in China and in the Czech Republic out of all Czech OC groups.

2.2.2 Czech Fujian Chamber of Commerce

The Fujianese are late-comers and were not particularly trusted by Rusková and her organization in the 1990s and earlier (Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 30, 2020). In Hungary, migrants from Fujian had a reputation for violence among the Chinese community (Nyíri 2007: 102) and as shown in section 1.4, individuals and groups from Fujian engaged in human trafficking. Their numbers have grown in Europe and they soon rose to prominence, to some extent perhaps with the help of the former party secretary of Fujian Xi Jinping, with whom an important Hungarian OC Guo Jiadi is allegedly a "good friend" (Nyíri 2007: 91). Fujianese migrants to Europe originate mostly in areas around Fuzhou (福州) and Sanming (三明; Moore 2002: 129-130). In the Czech Republic, they are most likely the second largest OC community from a single province with 700 to 800 members in 2009 (CNS 2009). The large size of this group was confirmed by Zlata Černá (personal communication, June 30, 2020.). The chamber seems to primarily engage the PRC organs and the local OC, but does not appear very active in Czech or European politics.

The Czech Fujian Chamber of Commerce (Jieke Fujian shanghai 捷克福建商会 registered as Česko-fujianská obchodní komora in the Czech Trade Register with no real details;⁵³ CFCC) is the first organization in the Czech Republic to represent the members of Chinese diaspora from Fujian. It was established in October 2009 (CNS 2009) by Wu Ruizhen 吴瑞珍 aka James Wu,⁵⁴ who called upon his Fujianese brethren in the country to "love the place they now live here more, to diligently learn the Czech language, make more Czech friends and integrate into the society"⁵⁵ (Wu remains the organization's honorary president [Prague Chinese Times 2017e]). The ceremony was attended by Ren

⁵³ It seems to have failed to re-register after a change in designated register for NGOs.

⁵⁴ The news report misspelled him as Hu Ruizhen 胡瑞珍.

⁵⁵ 更加热爱现在居住的这一片土地，努力学好捷克语，多交捷克朋友，融入当地社会。

Weihong 任卫红, the Chinese consul, the political attaché, and few other embassy officials.

Since at least 2014, the chamber's new chair had been Shen Wencan 沈文灿 from Putian (莆田市). According to a report by *Fujian Radio and Television Network* (Zhang 2014), he left China for Hungary as a 19-year-old to help establish a sneakers company. In 1996, he was sent to the Czech Republic to found a subsidiary and since 2002, he has lived in the country permanently. He currently runs a firm called G.S-Sandi s.r.o., established in 1997 (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020g), which is most likely the same as the aforementioned sneaker enterprise, despite lacking a formal mother company. It is possible that Shen and his company are linked to the Hungarian company Sandic (Guoshi Group), owned by Guo Jiadi (see above), also from Putian, (Nyíri 2007: 90); the Czech company is co-owned by Chinese nationals with a registered address in Putian and Budapest (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020g). In 2016, Shen was selected a standing council member of the Fujian province COEA (Fujian OCAO 2016).

In 2018, Shen was replaced by Li Xiaodong 李小东. During his speech at the ceremony (Prague Chinese Times 2018c), Shen reflected upon the past six years of work (this could have possibly meant that he was elected chair in 2012) and stated that "the Czech Fujianese Chamber of Commerce could not do without the care and guidance of the Chinese embassy in the Czech Republic and Chinese OC affairs organs and [without] the understanding and support of the [local] brotherly OC organizations"⁵⁶ and that he is grateful for that. The event was also attended by Zhou Lingjian 周灵建 (ibid.), the embassy general office director Xu Jinsong 徐劲松 (who urged the chamber to support the PRC's Taiwan unification policy), the chamber's chief representative in China Xu Jin 许姮, and the Greek Fujian Chamber of Commerce vice-chair Guo Yiliang 郭益良. Shen is now the chamber's honorary chair (Prague Chinese Times 2018f).

⁵⁶ 离不开中国驻捷克大使馆以及国内涉侨部门的关心指导和兄弟侨团的理解支持。

Other leadership members in the organization include the general secretary (Prague Chinese Times 2018e) or vice-chair (Prague Chinese Times 2018e) Lin Mei 林玫, the general secretary Lin Mingxing 林明星 (ibid.) or vice-chair Li Wei 李伟 (ibid.), and alleged⁵⁷ vice-chairs (Prague Chinese Times 2018g) Hong Jinshi 洪进土, Li Yicong 李奕聪, Qin Xiaohong 秦晓红 (also a member of the women federation), and Li Youliang 李优良.

The chamber seems to be overshadowed by the new Fujianese organizations headed by James Wu and often appears alongside his organizations (Prague Chinese Times 2017e) or co-organizes events with him (Prague Chinese Times 2019f). They also appear to share the same physical space (Prague Chinese Times 2018e).

Czech interactions

In 2020, the organization donated PPE to the town of Třebíč with other OC groups and the delegation met with the mayor (Prague Chinese Times 2020d). Apart from that, the only engagement with Czech entities seems to be in cooperation with or through James Wu and his activities.

PRC interactions

The organization has also had political links back in China from early on. Already in 2010, its president (named in this function) became one of the 65 vice-directors of the World Fujian Youth Federation (Shijie Fujian qingnian lianhe zonghui 世界福建青年联合会总会; WFYF; WFYF 2010), an organization whose goals are, among others, the "peaceful unification of China, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and to cultivate its members' political influence (WFYF s.d.). Its website is on the Fujian province OCAO official page. In 2013, the Fujianese CPPCC chairman Zhang Changping 张昌平 paid a visit to the chamber, discussing its work and possible future development (Komendová 2015: 63). In 2016, the chamber (Prague Chinese Times

⁵⁷ Mentioned only in one source.

2016d) was visited by a delegation led by the Xiamen Foreign and Overseas Affairs Office (Xiamen shi renmin zhengfu waishi qiaowu bangongshi 厦门市人民政府外事侨务办公室) deputy director and the Overseas Exchange Association vice-president (Xiamen shi haiwai jiaoliu xiehui 厦门市海外交流协会). The delegation focused on OC affairs, traditional Chinese medicine and elderly care and the chamber signed an agreement with the association to become "friendly organizations" (ibid.). James Wu was also present with his new FTZCOC organization (more below).

The chamber meets with incoming Party-state delegations (Prague Chinese Times 2018f), for example from Xiamen Taiwan affairs office (Prague Chinese Times 2018e) or the Fujian affairs office-led business delegation (Prague Chinese Times 2018g), often in cooperation with James Wu.

In 2016, in a move to show support for the Party-state's internal policy, the chamber signed a joint declaration alongside many other Czech OC groups to support China's policy in Hong Kong (Prague Chinese Times 2016c) or the South China Sea (Prague Chinese Times 2016a).

European interactions

The chamber does not seem to have any institutionalized engagement with European entities. Occasional meetings include Greek (Prague Chinese Times 2018c) and Polish OC leaders (Prague Chinese Times 2018e).

Summary

The Czech Fujian Chamber of Commerce fits the definition of a united front group. However, it does not appear to engage much with European or Czech politics directly; in these interactions, the chamber is overshadowed by its first chair – James Wu. Similarly, the contacts with the PRC organs seem rather sporadic and do not reach higher levels of the Party-state system.

2.2.3 James Wu's cluster of organizations

The case of James Wu (Wu Ruizhen 吴瑞珍) proves the strength of incentives for obtaining or creating as many titles and positions as possible. He has held dozens of united front offices and, figures in several companies and associations both in China and in the Czech Republic. He has been engaging with local- and central-level Czech politicians and through his pan-European OC activities established high-level contacts in Beijing and Fujian, including the central UFWD and ACFROC. Wu is perhaps the most active Czech OC engaging in united front work and boasts high-level positions within the PRC system.

Wu was born in Xiapu county 霞浦 under the administration of the city of Ningde 宁德, Fujian province (European Federation of Fujianese Associations s.d.). He finished a maritime navigation school in 1990 and then worked at a Hong Kong logistics company Orient Overseas Container Lines, finally arriving to Prague in 1997 (ibid.). His activities caught the attention of Sinopsis, his being one of the few OC in the country (Sinopsis and Lulu 2018a). Sinopsis has described how the businessman selling luxury furniture and shoes engaged in local-level united front work, even establishing a sort of "representative office" of the Olomouc Region in Wu's home province of Fujian. Wu also interacted with and praised the now defunct company CEFC, a major vessel of the PRC united front activities in the country (ibid.). While the PLA-linked conglomerate is history, Wu's career continues to rise, same as the number of his organizations and titles.

His official bio (European Federation of Fujianese Associations s.d.) boasts wide range of low- and high-level recognition and positions. From prestigious positions such as a non-voting delegate at the Fujian CPPCC, a Fujian ACFROC's overseas committee member, and a Xiamen COFA's council member, to lower-level titles such as the honorary chair of Ningde and Xiapu ACFROC, or a vice-chair of the World Fujian Youth Federation (Shijie Fujian qingnian lianhe zonghui 世界福建青年联合总会).

As already discussed above, Wu founded the Czech Fujian Chamber of Commerce and the Czech Chinese Business Federation, making him an important figure both within the Fujianese community and in the Czech OC group as a whole. This might explain why he shares the same building with the *Prague Chinese Times*, possibly the Czech Fujian Chamber of Commerce and many other not purely Fujianese organizations (see Attachment 1).

Already in 2012, Wu established another institution – a private company originally called Shibon CZ s.r.o. (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020a), renamed in 2015 to China – Europe Cooperation and Development Center s.r.o. (Zhong'ou hezuo yu fazhan zhongxin 中欧合作与发展中心). The center is Wu's personal project and claims to have offices in Xiamen and Fuzhou in Fujian province (CECDC s.d.). Wu has been using this organization to interact with local politicians and businesses, appealing to the “apolitical” concept of cooperation and development, while clearly engaging in united front work.

The Czech Fujian Hometown Association (Jieke Fujian tongxiang hui 捷克福建同乡会; Krajané z Fujian v ČR [official name in broken Czech]), registered in 2017 (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020), is headed by James Wu, along with Huang Weiwu 黄为武 and Lin Yan as deputy chairs (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020d) and Wang Zhicong 王志聪 (The Voice of Fujian 2017) in the position of secretary general. The association's founding event (ibid.) featured the Fujian CPPCC deputy chair and secretary general, local embassy political attaché Chen Jianjun 陈建军, the KES chairman Šáral and prominent OC leaders Tang Yunling Rusková, Chen Jinmei and Jia Jianping (as a CCAPPNU vice-chair). One of the possible reasons for the establishment of yet another organization could have been the participation in the European Federation of Fujianese Associations (Ouzhou Fujian qiaotuan lianhe zonghui 欧洲福建侨团联合总会; EFFA), where Wu has figured since the federation's establishment in 2015 (CNS 2015).

In 2017, Wu established the Czech Fujian Guild (Jieke Fujian huiguan 捷克福建会馆; Prague Chinese Times 2017e). The Fujian province office of foreign affairs director attended, along with then-KES chair, the embassy's political attaché, and Jaroslav Liptak, a Czech scientist, alumnus of the KGB-linked MGIMO in Moscow, and possibly an entrepreneur from Plzeň focusing on R&D in areas such as semiconductors or optics (LinkedIn s.d.a). The presence of Liptak signals that Wu and his cluster attempt to participate in the lucrative field of science and tech transfer. In 2018, Wu led discussions with a Fujian affairs office delegation (Prague Chinese Times 2018g) as chair of the guild. Other than that, the organization seems to be an empty nameplate, with Wu using different titles when interacting with his partners.

Another important, yet somewhat opaque organization mixing business with politics that Wu is part of is the China Free Trade Zone Chamber of Commerce (Zhongguo ziyou maoyi shang xiehui lianmeng 中国自由贸易商协会联盟; FTZCOC). The institution officially running it is the Hong Kong firm Overseas Distribution Centres Group Co., Limited (Haiwai cang jituan 海外仓集团; FTZCOC s.d.a), but its true owner is the Shanghai Jiajing Trade Co. Ltd. (Shanghai Jiajing maoyi youxian gongsi 上海嘉井贸易有限公司), a 7 million USD company with two rather mysterious owners Chen Qianhong 陈千红 and Lin Lianqing 林莲清 (Qichacha 2020b).⁵⁸ Wu opened its Czech branch in 2016 (Xu 2016) and the event was attended by the former Czech PM Petr Nečas (ODS), Senator Ivo Bábek (ČSSD, then vice-chair of the Senate), Shaanxi Party Secretary Lou Qinjian 娄勤俭,⁵⁹ embassy political attaché Chen Jianjun 陈建军, representatives of the regions of Southern Moravia and Moravia-Silesia, head of the Czech-Qatar Chamber of Commerce, CEITEC (Central European Institute of Technology) from Brno, and Grand Europe Association's Jia Jianping. Wu's cooperation with the Shaanxi CCPIT under the FTZCOC banner has unexpectedly continued and its delegations have visited at least

⁵⁸ Lin comes from Fujian according to the ID he used as the owner of the Hong Kong company, but he used different spelling of his name – 林联青 (Hong Kong Business Directory, accessed May 21, 2020).

⁵⁹ The delegation included representatives of Shaanxi energy companies.

twice since the founding event, always meeting with Petr Talafús, the deputy director of the Czech Chamber of Commerce – in 2017 (Sina Shaanxi 2017) and in 2018, they had a meeting at the Czech Academy of Sciences' Technological Center (participants included a former Prague 3 mayor – see below) but also with Home Credit's foreign affairs manager Jakub Hladík (Prague Chinese Times 2018i). These interactions show that Wu also cooperates with the academic world and the major players in Czech-China relations.

On March 12 2020, when the COVID-19 was slowly starting to spread in Europe, James Wu established the European Overseas Chinese Anti-Coronavirus Material Supply Station (Ouzhou Huaqiao Huaren kangyi wuzi gongying zhan 欧洲华侨华人抗疫物资供应站)⁶⁰ under the Czech Fujian Guild with the help of the Fujian province party secretary and the province-level UFWD, according to a WeChat post by the European Federation of Fujianese Associations (2020). Wu was to use his strategic position in central Europe to distribute PPE to European OC. The only documented case is the first batch of over 10 thousand masks and 300 hundred bottles of disinfection that he and his "volunteers" distributed among the OC and Chinese students in the Czech Republic (ibid.). Similarly to the guild, this institution appears to be rather hollow, but might be utilized if another pandemic hits Europe for more united front work.

Czech interactions

Wu has cooperated with Roman Spáčil and his Czech – Slovak – Chinese Chamber of Commerce (see below), chiefly playing the role of a middleman between Fujian and Olomouc Region (Sinopsis and Lulu 2018a). Wu regularly interacts with the KES and the Czech Chamber of Commerce, for which he mediates interactions with the PRC organs, such as the provincial-level CCPIT (Sina Shaanxi 2017).

⁶⁰ An alternative version of the name stresses the Fujianese origin of the OC.

He has also engaged in united front work, targeting the former mayor of Prague 3⁶¹ Vladislava Hujová (2010–2018), holding a meeting with her, her business partner, and an unexpected counterpart in the form of a delegation led by the deputy mayor of Huainan 淮南 in Anhui 安徽 (Prague Chinese Times 2018h). They discussed cooperation in many fields, including green technology, and gifted the former mayor with the Chinese version of the classical book Huainanzi 淮南子 (ibid.).

This shows that Wu is active in cultivating current and former chiefly local-level politicians (with the exception of the former PM Nečas) and business-oriented bodies, using knowledge asymmetry to create or strengthen united front relations with entities that are most likely unaware of the true nature of their Chinese partners.

PRC interactions

In 2016, James Wu booked public places in the name of the CCBF in order to prevent Czech protesters to "interrupt" Xi Jinping's visit in March that year (Sinopsis and Lulu 2018a).

Apart from the previously mentioned position within UF organs in China, Wu was additionally selected as standing council member of the Fujian province COEA (Fujian OCAO 2016).

In 2017, Wu met with the head of the ACFROC Wan Lijun 万立骏 at a cross-strait peaceful development forum as vice-director of the FTZCOC, suggesting Wu and the company engage in Taiwanese affairs policies (FTZCOC s.d.b). This theory can further be supported by the visit of the Xiamen Taiwan affairs office director to Wu's Czech FTZCOC in 2018 (Prague Chinese Times 2018e).

⁶¹ One of the largest districts of Prague.

European interactions

At the European level, James Wu is the "(Czech) chairman"⁶² of the European Federation of Fujianese Associations (Ouzhou Fujian qiaotuan lianhe zonghui 欧洲福建侨团联合总会; EFFA; s.d.), an umbrella organization uniting various types of associations with Fujianese leadership (these institutions do not have to comprise only of the Fujianese). The association was established in the Southern Italian town of Madera in March 2015 (CNS 2015). OC groups predominantly from Western Europe were present at the founding event, where the "presidium" of an unknown number of members was elected, along with two rotating chairs – Chen Yunbin 陈云斌, chair of the German Fujian Chamber of Commerce (Deguo Fujian shanghui 德国福建商会), and Weng Wuping 翁武平, chair of the of Southern Italian Chinese Association (Yidali nanbu Huaren Huaqiao lianyi zonghui 意大利南部华人华侨联谊总会), which seems to be based in Madera (Olian News 2020) and could explain the choice of location. The goals of the organization include cultural exchange promotion, but also supporting *druzhba* between Europe and China, or the unification of China (CNS 2015).

The same year in October, the EFFA held a "founding ceremony" in Fuzhou 福州 in Fujian province. The report (Fujian Overseas Chinese News 2015) from this event reveals more members, including Eastern European organizations from Poland, Hungary, Romania but also James Wu as director of the Czech-China-Europe Cooperation and Development Center. In order "to raise the organization's social influence and status", the EFFA granted an honorary chairmanship to Gian Franco Terenzi, former captain regent of San Marino, and Irene Pivetti,⁶³ former chairwoman of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and chair of the Italian-Chinese Friendship Association (ibid.).

In April 2018, the association held its first electoral conference (Southeastern Network: Hong Kong 2018) since its foundation and Hu Jianbing 胡建兵, chairman of the Italian

⁶² (捷克) 主席。

⁶³ For more on Pivetti and the association, see Poggetti 2019.

Fujianese Hometown Association (旅意福建华人华侨同乡总会), was elected as the sole chairman (a change from two leaders to just one). The event was attended (ibid.) by the Fujian province UFWD executive vice-director (present on behalf of the Fujian province UFWD director), provincial-level OCAO and Qiaolian directors, the vice-chair of Fushun's (city in Liaoning) chapter of CPPCC, an official from the NDRC's international development center, the provincial-level CPPCC vice-director of the committee on Hong Kong, Macao and Overseas Chinese, the provincial party secretary of Tailian (All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots) and the provincial-level Zhigong Party vice-chair. A long list of congratulatory notes included one from the central Tailian and allegedly over 600 people gathered at the conference (ibid.).

The presidium comprising of at least a dozen members, including James Wu, swore the oath of office. James Wu is mentioned at a separate event in 2017 as the "EFFA (Czech) chairman", but since he was definitely not elected to that position, it is possible that he has been a member of the presidium since the founding of the organization and presidium members are addressed in this manner.

In October 2019, the EFFA delegation visited the UFWD vice-director Xu Yousheng 许又声 (EFFA 2019b), the Qiaolian chairman Wan Lijun 万立骏 (EFFA 2019c) and the Revolutionary KMT vice-chair Zhang Bojun 张伯军 (EFFA 2019a) in Beijing. This reception by top-level UF organs shows that the EFFA is regarded as important by the PRC.

Contacts with various levels of the UFWD were further cemented in 2020, when the Fujian UFWD's Internal Department Committee member met with the EFFA general-secretary Chen Zhiqiang 陈志强 (China Overseas Chinese Network 2020b) in June. In January, the EFFA organized a New Year tea party in Fuqing for Fujian OC organizations from 30 countries (China Overseas Chinese Network 2020a), suggesting relations with other Fujianese across the globe, beyond the borders of Europe. The organization participated in this year's People's War on Coronavirus as well, when Weng

Wuping donated PPE to the town of Madera on behalf of the World Fujian Youth Federation in April (Olian News 2020).

The EFFA, despite its short existence, has managed to cultivate high-level ties with Fujian and central level united front organs and European political elites, with a clear goal of building influence. The organization, in part due to its Fujianese origin, actively subscribes to the CCP's policies in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. There is no doubt this is a united front group, created as a mass organization with clear political ambitions.

Summary

Wu's cluster clearly fits Joske's definition of a UF group. James Wu shows a very high level of united front work activity: he has founded many OC organizations, both regional and cross-regional, in the Czech Republic. He has held many positions in the PRC UF organs, along with a leadership position at the EFFA, a prominent pan-European OC organization connected to the highest levels of the UFW system.

Wu engages with the Czech political system, as well. Mostly targeting local-level politicians, he has likewise interacted with central-level politicians and perhaps unexpectedly with several representatives of academia, specifically in the field of technology.

Apart from typical PRC contacts from his home province of Fujian, Wu has held several meetings with the Shaanxi CCPIT on behalf of the international company based in Hong Kong and the Shanghai FTZCOC, which is linked to UF organizations and has an opaque leadership structure and portfolio.

The case of James Wu shows that the UF system rewards accumulation of titles and positions regardless of their substance, and similarly to the Qingtian group, his case demonstrates the importance of pan-European organizations from the PRC's perspective, as Wu's involvement with the EFFA brought him the highest-level audiences.

2.2.3 Summary

This section clearly showed that the regional organizations' engagement with the Czech, the PRC and European political structures is much higher than in the case of the umbrella cross-regional groups, which seem mostly confined to interactions with the PRC political system and the local OC. One could argue that the domination of the local diaspora landscape by the Qingtian and Fujian migrants is the cause for this imbalance, but the case of the relatively new and small Guangdong group suggests that the non-central governments themselves prefer to interact with entities originally from areas under their control. Power structures can be confusing and trust harder to achieve with the OC from other parts of China, a country that is so vast and complex, with strong tendencies for regionalism or localism especially in certain areas. Further research would be required to prove whether the Czech OC experience is a part of a general trend or if it stems from the local situation and perhaps the nature of the OC leaders involved.

2.3 Mixed-membership organizations

An important interlocutor between the Chinese diaspora targeted by *qiaowu*, Czech politics and the broader Chinese United Front are the mixed-membership organizations. These organizations have local nationals engaged in politics and OC involved in united front work as members. The mixed-membership organizations are more direct intersections between *qiaowu* and international united front work that in part mimic the PRC international friendship associations, and in part show the ambition of local OC to engage in Czech-Chinese relations more directly.

The following is not an exhaustive list of these organizations; the examples detailed here are selected based on their high-level interactions both abroad and in the PRC and there is enough data available about them to provide an evidence-based summary of their nature and activities. Another mixed group is the Czech-Slovak-Chinese Chamber (Jieke-Siluofake-Zhongguo shanghui 捷克斯洛伐克中国商会) run by Roman Spáčil, an associate (possibly former; Mikel 2020) of James Wu and the pioneer of Olomouc-Fujian relations (Sinopsis and Lulu 2018), where Liu Donghui 刘东辉⁶⁴ figures as vice-chair (Czech-Slovak-Chinese Chamber s.d.).

There are also other, similar organizations declaring friendship with the PRC and attempting to play the role of intermediaries between the Czech and the Chinese political system such as the KES already mentioned above.

⁶⁴ Editor in chief of the *Prague Chinese Times*.

2.3.1 Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation

The first prominent mixed organization was the Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation (Smíšená česko čínská komora vzájemné spolupráce; Jieke youhao hezuo xiehui 捷克友好合作协会)⁶⁵ established in 2009 (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020i). The organization's leadership has featured high-level Czech politicians such as Jan Kohout⁶⁶ or Jan Birke (ČSSD member, MP, mayor of the town of Náchod and a pioneer of the Czech-China lobby), but also top-level management of PPF, company heavily involved in the promotion of Czech-Chinese relations due to its interests in the PRC, which entered the chamber in 2013 (ibid.). Moreover, the Chinese members have included management of major Chinese companies CEFC (CITIC since 2018 [ibid.]) and a Chinese national with links to the UF system, Liu Jielei 刘洁磊 (see below). The organization has become the perfect transmission gear of the united front by other means, stressing empty "apolitical" business cooperation, while assisting with political work including cooperation with ILD targeting (even if unknowingly) Czech political, cultural and business elites (Kroupa and Pokorná 2020), while at the same getting into significant conflict of interest when the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade outsourced the economic cooperation with the PRC onto it (Hála 2017).

The chamber rose to prominence in 2013, under Birke's and PPF leadership, when it took over the China Investment Forum (CIF [*Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation* s.d.]). The forum is a yearly high-level event founded by a group of young entrepreneurs who had recently attended business classes in China under a largely EU-funded project organized by the CCPIT (Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union 2009). This shows the importance of cultivating young professionals for the PRC.

⁶⁵ Note that in Chinese the name includes the obligatory *youhao* (友好) meaning friendship.

⁶⁶ In 2013 Kohout helped initiate the U-turn in Czech-PRC relations as the minister of foreign affairs.

The involvement of PPF (sponsor of the event) and the chamber led to the upgrade of the CIF to a new level with even higher-level Czech and Chinese representation and has since included headliners such as the PM Rusnok, former president Klaus, or the current ILD head Song Tao 宋涛 (then at the PRC MFA [Xinhua International 2013]). The venue itself moved to Prague Castle, the seat of Czech kings and now presidents. The PRC side clearly viewed the CIF as a top propaganda and cultivation event, stressed by the presence of Liu Yunshan 刘云山 (People's Daily Overseas Edition 2017), the head of the propaganda system, in 2017. In 2019 it was announced that Liu's successor Wang Huning (Hála 2019a) would attend that year's edition, but the event has been postponed several times and eventually canceled, possibly due to worsening relations between the two countries.

Since 2014, the chamber has been led by Jaroslav Tvrđík, former Czechoslovak Communist Party member and later ČSSD minister of defense, who became a full-time lobbyist in 2010 after managing the failed ČSSD election campaign that year. Tvrđík speaks no foreign languages and has been involved in several failed enterprises such as then state-owned Czech Airlines that went bankrupt under his leadership (Vorlíčková 2006). Tvrđík also became a manager in the Czech branch of CEFC (Huaxin 华信), the PLA-linked (Stokes and Hsiao 2013: 26) conglomerate dissolved after a major international corruption scandal in 2018, allegedly on the orders of Xi Jinping himself (Ng and Xie 2018). The company was first present at the 2013 CIF, soon became the vanguard of the growing wave of the PRC presence in the country and was famously labeled as the "aircraft carrier of Chinese investment" (Hála 2018) by the Czech president, who hired the company's chairman Ye Jianming 叶简明 as an "honorary adviser"⁶⁷ (ibid). After the dismantling, CEFC's assets have been taken over by CITIC Group Corporation Ltd. (Zhongguo Zhong xin jituan youxian gongsi 中国中信集团有限公司),⁶⁸ the largest PRC state-owned conglomerate (Hála and Lulu 2019: 17).

⁶⁷ Ye has been disappeared since 2018 by the Party-state organs (Ng and Xie 2018).

Since no later than 2015, the CIF has been co-organized by the ILD's China Economic Cooperation Center (Zhongguo jingji lianluo zhongxin 中国经济联络中心 [Guangming Ribao 2015]). Besides sending its leaders as speakers to the event, the center's role has included, according to inside sources quoted by *Seznam zprávy*, “approving all participants” (Kroupa and Pokorná 2020). The ILD alongside with the CPAFFC (Lulu 2019: 21) appear to be the main organs participating in united front work interactions with the chamber, but one of their members, Liu Jielei 刘洁磊 (chamber's vice-chair) has links to the WRSA (Xu and Wang 2010) showcasing even more traditional united front cultivation of the group.

At the end of 2019, the situation looked grim for the chamber as it has suffered from the CEFC bankruptcy and several scandals involving PPF. Even the Czech president, a staunch supporter of the engagement with the PRC seemed critical of the lack of any substance in the relationship (Seznam zprávy 2020).

This has changed dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only was the chamber active in sending PPE to China (Czech-Chinese Journal 2020b: 5), but it was soon promoted by minister Hamáček back into high-level politics (Pospíšilová 2020), when he declared that the country has no choice but to depend on the chamber's connections in the PRC to procure the PPE the country then lacked. This eventually made Tvrdík part of the emergency body responsible for managing the pandemic (Pospíšilová 2020), bringing him and the group around the chamber back from disrepute into the mainstream politics.

⁶⁸ CITIC was established in 1979 as the CCP's "window to the outside world" (Groot 1997: 331-2) by Rong Yiren 荣毅仁 (later became the PRC vice-president), who was entrusted by Deng Xiaoping himself, and other members of the minor party the China National Democratic Construction Association (Zhongguo minzhu jianguo hui 中国民主建国会) making it a company entangled with the UF since its beginning.

Summary

The Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation is a top-down organization rather than an initiative stemming from the local diaspora (which appears to be the case of the two following examples). Its PRC counterparts are chiefly from the foreign affairs system, implying that the united front work through this group targets mainly the Czech elite. The chamber has a very influential position in the Czech-Chinese relations being heavily involved with the chief promoters of the friendship – PPF and CEFC/CITIC. While it cannot be considered a standard united front group by Joske's definition, it still participates in united front work as an ILD inroad into mainstream Czech politics. It could perhaps be better described as part of China's Soviet-style friendship associations' network, performing the role of a transmission gear between the PRC and Czech politics and engaging in united front work by other means.

2.3.2 Czech-China Center

In 2017, around the time when Milan Sun passed the CQHA leadership to Zhou Lingjian, he co-founded the Czech-China Center (捷克中国中心, whose official name is Czech – China Centrum (sic!); Czech-China Center s.d.), through which he "continues handling OC affairs"⁶⁹ (Xia 2019). The center's chairman is Petr Petržílek, a prominent member of ČSSD. He served as chief adviser to former PM Jiří Paroubek (2005-2006), an early Czech-Chinese relations pioneer, as adviser to former PM Bohuslav Sobotka (2014-2017), and currently serves as adviser to the ČSSD chairman and Minister of Interior Jan Hamáček (Mazancová and Zelenka 2018). Unsuccessfully, Petržílek ran for office in both chambers of the Czech Parliament in 2017 and 2018 (ibid.). The center is also member of the Czech Chamber of Commerce (Czech-China center s.d.).

Other members of the center are the executive vice-chair Zhan Chenlei 詹陈雷 (Tony Chen), the vice-chair of the CQHA and the Revolutionary KMT member (Zhejiang Revolutionary KMT committee 2020), and vice-chairs Li Wei (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020j), Daniel Kolman (chair of the Slavia Futsal Club [LinkedIn s.d.b]), and Daniel Frič (Slavia Floorball Club co-owner [Mazancová and Zelenka 2018]).

Petržílek said that the center was established as an alternative to Tvrdík's komora out of the OC initiative to focus on small- and mid-level towns and cities (Mazancová and Zelenka 2018). And indeed, they have taken Zhejiang province and Cixi (city in Zhejiang) delegations to Mladá Boleslav in 2017 (Czech-China Center 2017c) and 2018 (Czech-China Center 2018c), trying to help establish cooperation with the two cities that both feature Škoda (Volkswagen) factories. Similarly, in 2017 they took a Zhejiang and Yiwu (city in Zhejiang) delegation to Milovice (Czech-China Center 2017a), where they discussed building a logistics center in the area of a former Soviet military base. The same year, Petržílek took an unspecified delegation to the spa town of Bohdaneč (Czech-

⁶⁹ 捷继续处理着华侨事务。

China Center 2017g). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the center, in cooperation with their partner company Swonia, donated 10 thousand masks to the town of Náchod (Berger 2020), whose mayor Jan Birke is a key player in Czech-PRC relations and an influential ČSSD politician (see the previous section). Swonia specializes in the PRC import and export, where the center is their main partner (Swonia s.d.). The chief area of expertise is photovoltaics and energetics in general.

However, the center has expanded its contact beyond the local level – already in 2017, Petržílek initiated a meeting between the then chair of the Chamber of Deputies and Minister of Interior Jan Hamáček (Czech-China Center 2017b), to whom Petržílek was an adviser, and an incoming Yiwu delegation, which included a representative of the train cargo company specializing in China-Europe transportation YXE (Yi xin Ou maoyi fuwu jituan 义新欧贸易服务集团 [YXE s.d.]). All center members were present, but Petržílek "does not remember who did his organization represent" (Mazancová and Zelenka 2018). Soon after, they led a Zhejiang and Yiwu delegation to meet with the vice-chair of the Senate Jan Kubera (Czech-China Center 2017f).⁷⁰ Perhaps their most spectacular feat was negotiating a direct train cargo shipment between Yiwu and Prague in 2017 (Czech-China Center 2017d), dispatched by YXE. This deal, same as the majority of such train connections with the PRC, did not turn out so profitable (Mazancová and Zelenka 2018), and mainly served propaganda and publicity purposes. In 2018 they welcomed the new ambassador and presented him with a calligraphy painting (Czech-China Center 2018d) to foster good relations that are needed for their kind of mixture of business and politics.

They joined president Zeman's delegations to China in 2018 to the Shanghai China International Import Expo (Czech-China Center 2018b) and in 2019 to the BRI Forum (Czech-China Center 2019a), where they also celebrated the 70th anniversary of

⁷⁰ Kubera later became the chair of the Senate and passed away in 2020 soon after announcing his visit to Taiwan, allegedly to some extent due to the pressure exerted over him from the Chinese embassy and the Czech president's office (Prchal and Zelenka 2020), who sent him a threatening letter (English translation in Sinopsis and Lulu 2020).

diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Czech Republic at the Czech Embassy in Beijing (Czech-China Center 2019f). The same year Zhan joined the chairman of Chamber of Deputies Radek Vondráček's mission to China (Czech-China Center 2019d). Vondráček met with the ILD head Song Tao during that trip (Lomová 2019).

In 2019, the organization co-organized the Zhejiang party secretary's visit to Plzeň (Sýkorová 2019), during which they also met with Hamáček; and attended the Zhejiang-Czech Republic cooperation forum (Czech-China Center 2019e), where they signed "agreements and contracts in the field of security camera technologies, exports and imports in metallurgy and e-commerce".

The center also organizes cultural events (Czech-China Center 2018a) that feature high-profile Czech politicians, Chinese embassy staff, sinologists, and Chinese artists. In 2018, for example, the group organized a cultural exchange event at the Anglo-American University in Prague, featuring a Sichuanese painter, the Chinese embassy political attaché, but also Benjamín Szakál, an adviser to the Czech Communist Party chairman Vojtěch Filip (Jirouš and Lulu 2019). Szakál is a Soviet-trained Communist-era diplomat who plays a key role in the KSČM's Chinese and post-Soviet exchanges (ibid.). In 2019, the organization was one of the intermediaries of a strange gift to the Czech National Museum just a few days prior to the 30th anniversary of the Tian'anmen Massacre (ibid.). The museum eventually refused the gift, but the Czech National Library and the President's Office accepted comparable presents (Czech-China Center 2019b) from the center and the rather opaque Chinese entities linked to CEFC and CITIC companies (Jirouš and Lulu 2019). In December 2019, the center co-organized a Chinese painting exhibition (with Sichuanese participation), attended by the former minister of culture Antonín Staněk, National Library deputy director, Czech sinologists, and the Chinese embassy staff (Prague Chinese Times 2019g).

Summary

The Czech-China Center has in the three years of its existence become perhaps the most prominent interlocutor between the local united front-linked OC (the CQHA honorary chair Milan Sun, the current vice-chair and the Revolutionary KMT member Tonny Zhan), high-level Czech politics and the PRC organs (even if "only" at the provincial level). The center is a curious case of a possibly bottom-up group indirectly engaging with the Czech political system, despite the still rather low level of integration into the local society. The group has so far participated in united front work by other means stressing business cooperation and other forms of exchange, with more traditional united front organs on the PRC side lacking in direct interaction. This means that it cannot be described as a UF group as per Joske's definition as such; its members nevertheless include Chinese individuals active in united front work, one of them even a member of a minority party, it could thus be argued that it is an example of a united front group by proxy.

2.3.3 New Silk Road Chamber of Commerce

The Tianjin businessman Wang Wanming 汪万明 founded the New Silk Road Chamber of Commerce⁷¹ (Xin sichou zhi lu shanghui 新丝绸之路商会) in 2016 (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020h). In this process, similar to that of the Czech-China Center, he partnered with Czech individuals with political connections and continues in his political business activities. Apart from textiles and bathroom facilities, Wang now works in tech transfer at the University of West Bohemia (New Technologies Research Centre of University of West Bohemia s.d.) and newly runs a joint venture Tianjin Riocath Medical Equipment Ltd. (Tianjin Li'ou yiliao qixie youxian gongsi 天津丽欧医疗器械有限公司 [Qichacha 2020c]), which he also owns alongside with the Czech medical innovation company Riocath Global, and the Tianjin Hanaco Medical Co. Ltd. (Tianjin Ha'nahao yicai youxian gongsi 天津哈娜好医材有限公司). The organization participates mainly in educational and business exchange in Hebei, Hunan and Tianjin, but also Shanghai. Wang himself or the chamber have positions or partnerships in these places showing an unusually wide network for a single OC leader.

Wang has not limited his activities just to business and currently holds positions of the Shanghai Changning district COFA council member (Changning haiwai lianyihui lishi 长宁海外联谊会海外理事 [CCBF 2018]) and the foreign development adviser to the Hunan province CPPCC (Hunan sheng Zhengxie haiwai fazhan guwen 湖南省政协海外发展顾问 [Prague Chinese Times 2018k]). In an introduction published on the Hebei ACFROC website (2018), the chamber declares that as a response to the calls by the NDRC (National Development and Research Committee, a sort of super-ministry) and other relevant organs, it aims to unite Czech local government, academic, industrial and commercial entities friendly towards China under BRI-themed cooperation. In 2018, the chamber was supposed to have over 30 members from those target groups and the website shows it has a strategic cooperation with the province (ibid.).

⁷¹ This institution was brought to the author's attention by Tobiáš Lipold.

Other members of the chamber are Tomáš Král and Jan Tvrdoň (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020h). Tvrdoň is close to Czech political conspiracy theory sites such as Protiproud (Lidovky 2016) but also to ČSSD, as he has helped the party with PR campaigns (iRozhlas 2016) in the past and one of his media agencies conducts controversial political surveys whose results favor a new party called Trikolóra (Valášek 2020a), chaired by Václav Klaus jr., who is a son of the former president. The party is close to the local pro-China lobby. Král lives in the town of Jilemnice (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti České republiky 2020h) near Karlovy Vary, where he seems to be on good terms with the local political establishment and helps facilitate interactions with the chamber, but also comments on the prospects of Chinese tourism (Krajské listy 2017) in a city that is one of the top favorite Chinese tourist destinations. In 2017, Král attended a Czech MFA event he posted about on Twitter, praising the minister of foreign affairs Lubomír Zaorálek, who presided over implementing the turn towards China in the Czech foreign policy (Král 2017).

So far, the organization has mainly engaged in taking delegations, led by Wang and constituted of Czech academics and innovative entrepreneurs, to China. In November 2017, an unidentified group of Czech nationals led by Wang visited Tianjin, where they met with the local ACFROC chairman (Prague Chinese Times 2017b). In January 2018, Wang took a delegation dominated by University of Western Bohemia but with some Charles University participants to Hebei Normal University (Hebei Normal University Center of International Cooperation and Exchange 2018) and Hunan Normal University (Du and Xu 2018). In November 2018, Wang led a delegation including Czechs (unfortunately the author failed to identify them) to visit Shanghai's Changning District (Shanghai shi Changning qu 上海市长宁区), where they met with local UFWD, ACFROC and OCAO heads and the local Air China representative (CCBF 2018).

As for direct engagement with the PRC organs, Wang visited a development area in Hunan in his role as adviser to the provincial CPPCC in September 2018 (Prague Chinese Times 2018k). In 2019, the chamber was visited by a delegation led by the Hunan UFWD

vice-head and including the Changsha (长沙; city in Hunan) UFWD director and cultural organs on their BRI-themed trip to the Hungary, the Czech Republic and the UK (Xie 2019). The meeting was attended by the *Prague Chinese Times*, Li Rujiang, and the vice-chair of the Czech Guangdong Chamber of Commerce Yu Qiwen 余奇文 (ibid.).

In the Czech political landscape, Wang participated in the Chinese ambassador's 2017 visit to Liberec Region, meeting with the region's head, representatives of Technical University of Liberec and visiting local industrial facilities to discuss the BRI/16+1-themed cooperation (EPRCP 2017). In 2018, Wang interacted with Prague 5 local officials during the OCAO visit (Xiang dong xiang xi 2018). During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the Hunan province Party committee and government delegated the chamber to distribute PPE to Pilsen Region (gift received by the region's deputy head), University Hospital Pilsen (accepted by the director), and to Karlovy Vary, where Wang and Král handed the boxes with PPE to the mayor herself (Prague Chinese Times 2020e).

Summary

The New Silk Road Chamber of Commerce represents a similar type of an arguably bottom-up organization such as the Czech-China Center. It also describes itself as targeting mid- and low-level politicians for business cooperation. However, the chamber seems to focus on academics and innovative technological enterprises as well, with Wang regularly leading Czech university and business delegations to China. Curiously, sometimes these groups also meet with UF organs, not only universities and other more natural partners. Technological transfer and cooption of foreign experts ranks among the top priorities of international united front work, which could be the reason for Wang's position with the University of West Bohemia's innovation center and in a medical joint venture in Tianjin with the Czech company Riocath.

2.3.4 Summary

The mixed membership organizations are important interlocutors in internationalized united front work and UF work by other means. Even more than the genuine OC organizations, they stress business cooperation over politics, while at the same time the united front work is always present in their business activities. In comparison, the Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation is clearly a specific top-down entity that plays much more important role than the other united front groups. It is effectively a transmission gear between the Czech and PRC political systems engaging with high-level politicians and businessmen on both sides. The other two organizations provide a good example of the ambitions of OC leaders even in countries with a small diaspora that is not well-integrated. The groups pair up with friends of China most likely already cultivated by other entities and use these connections to build networks both in the local country and in the PRC. While the Czech-China Center engages in united front work by other means similarly to the mixed chamber, the New Silk Road Chamber of Commerce seems active in educational exchange and possibly technological transfer. Both bottom-up organizations declare the aim of cultivating low- and mid-level entities, but especially the center interacts even on the highest-level of both political systems, perhaps because the organization can draw upon influential Qingtianese connections and the fact its executive vice-chair Zhan Chenlei is a member of the Revolutionary KMT, a minor party included in the United Front. Mixed membership organizations are the main interlocutors between the OC, the PRC and target country, and so when researching united front work in a specific region or country, it would be advisable to look for similar examples to those presented in this section.

3.0 Conclusion

This work has presented the thesis that the Czech OC community has been engaged by the united front organs seeking to coopt it, and in most of the cases described above, engaged rather successfully. The Chinese diaspora associations, mostly established after 2000, are mainly modeled as the PRC mass organizations and try to engage with the Party-state organs designated as their counterparts. This mainly includes the OCAO, the ACFROC and the UFWD on a provincial to local level, but also other UF institutions such as the CPPCC or in some cases people's diplomacy organs such as the CCPIT.

The Czech Chinese diaspora landscape is dominated by Qingtian and Fujian groups with some exceptions such as Wang Wanming (from Tianjin) and the Guangdong community. This is in line with the previous research on the European OC. Moreover, the two main diaspora factions have gained the most influence within the cross-regional OC organizations and achieved the highest level of contacts with both the PRC and the Czech political system, as well as within the pan-European OC groupings. Additionally, these two groups show a level of cooperation, despite traditional regionalism of the OC.

The cross-regional organizations are clearly less important than their regional counterparts in regards to political engagement with any of the political system or pan-European OC groups. This includes the Czech chapter of the CCPPNU, which seems to be the most important OC association within the country only nominally. These institutions seem primarily intended for control of the local OC.

The mixed-membership organizations have succeeded in cultivating the highest-level of contacts with Czech politicians, evidencing the assumption that the Czech Chinese diaspora is active in local politics indirectly despite all the existing barriers. While the top-down Tvrđík's chamber plays the role of interlocutor on the top political and business level, the other two bottom-up seemingly genuine OC initiatives focus on regional politics, despite cultivating national-level political contacts, as well. Regional

organizations have been less active in Czech politics, while the cross-regional associations do not show much interest in engaging with the locals.

As for the PRC interactions, James Wu's cluster and the Qingtian faction are unquestionably the most prominent. However, despite Wu's diligence in setting up new organizations and channels, the Qingtian group seems to boast the mass of people it claims to represent, also relying on the patronage of Chen Naike, the only Czech OC who became an NPC delegate. The Qingtianese are the only faction featuring members of the minor parties.

At the European level, the cross-regional organizations do not seem that involved even in organizations where that would be expected. For example, the CCAPPNU does engage with the pan-European branch of the CCPNU. Nevertheless, the Federation of Chinese Women in the Czech Republic is part of the European-level network, but it does not seem to bring any high-level contacts. In contrast, both the Qingtian and even more the Fujian groups' pan-European OC association membership opens the door for their leadership to high-level PRC and European politics. This suggests that the Party-state incentivizes regional groupings both on the country and the pan-European level.

In summary, the Czech OC groups play an important, if auxiliary, role in the Czech-China relations, much more significant than previous research suggested. The same applies to the pan-European organizations that certainly require further study. Such united front work activity in countries and regions with small Chinese communities points to the universality of the CCP's influence work, making diaspora organizations a phenomenon that must be analyzed when researching the PRC's influence in a country or a region.

Since this study is the first of its kind focusing on a European country, the author hopes that further research will follow as the subject becomes ever more important. Similar analyses of united front work landscape in other countries would contextualize the Czech

case, providing a deeper understanding of the CCP's Grand United Front in the "New Era" and its engagement with the world in general.

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5.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Photo of a banner with names of some of the OC organizations residing at Milady Horákové 109/108, 160 00 Praha 6-Bubeneč, mostly James Wu’s cluster. Taken by the author.



Appendix 2 – List of OC organizations known to the author

1. Cross-regional organizations

Chinese name	English name	Source
Jieke Zhongguo heping tongyi cujin hui 捷克中国和平统一促进会	Czech China Association for the Promotion of Peaceful National Unification	MOFCOM 2019: 97
Lü Jie huaren lianyihui 旅捷华人联谊会 会	Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic	MOFCOM 2019: 97
Lü Jie huaren huaqiao funü lianhehui 旅捷华人华侨妇女联合会	The Federation of Chinese Women in the Czech Republic	MOFCOM 2019: 97
Jieke Hua shang lianhehui 捷克华商联合会 会	Czech Chinese Business Federation	MOFCOM 2019: 97
Jieke Huayu daoyou xiehui 捷克华语 导游协会	Czech Association of Chinese Tour Guides	MOFCOM 2019: 97
Jie-Zhong jingmao wenhua cujin hui 捷 中经贸文化促进会	Czech-China Trade and Culture Promotion Association	MOFCOM 2019: 97
Jieke Huayu lüyou lianhe zonghui 捷克 华语旅游联合总会	Czech Federation of Chinese Tourism	MOFCOM 2019: 97
Jieke Zhong’Ou gongshang lianhehui 捷克中欧工商联合会	Czech-Central Europe Industry and Business Federation	MOFCOM 2019: 98
Zhong-Jie “Yi dai yi lu” touzi hezu ojijinhui 中捷“一带一路”投资合作基金 会	China-Czech “BRI” Investment Cooperation Foundation	MOFCOM 2019: 98

Jieke-Zhongdong'Ou jingmao lianhe shanghui 捷克中东欧经贸联合商会	Czech-CEE Economy and Trade Chamber	MOFCOM 2019: 98
Zhong-Jie wenhua yishu keji xiehui 中捷文化艺术科技协会	China Czech Culture and Technology Association	Prague Chinese Times 2017g
Jieke Huaren Huaqiao jinse nianhua youhao xiehui 捷克华人华侨金色年华友好协会	Czech Chinese Golden Age Friendship Association	Prague Chinese Times 2016b
Zhong-Ou wenhua yishu jiaoliu lianhehui 中欧文化艺术交流联合会	China-Europe Culture and Art Exchange Federation	Prague Chinese Times 2016b
Jieke-Zhongguo wenhua yishu jiaoliu cujin hui 捷克-中国文化艺术交流促进会	Czech-China Association for Promotion of Culture and Art Exchange	Prague Chinese Times 2016b
Lü Jie Huaren Huaqiao funü xiehui 旅捷华人华侨妇女协会	Association of Chinese Women in the Czech Republic	Prague Chinese Times 2015
Jieke Huaqiao Huaren qingnian lianhe zonghui 捷克华侨华人青年联合总会	Czech Chinese Youth Federation	ZFROC 2016
Jieke Huaren Huaqiao canyin xiehui 捷克华人华侨餐饮协会	Czech Chinese Catering Association	ZFROC 2017a
Jieke Zhongguo xuesheng xuezhe lianyihui 捷克中国学生学者联谊会	Czech CSSA	ZFROC 2017a
Jie-Zhong wenhua tiyu xiehui 捷中文化体育协会	Czech-China Culture and Sports Association	ZFROC 2017a
Jieke Huaren Huaqiao youhao xiehui 捷克华人友好协会	Czech Chinese Friendship Association	ZFROC 2017a
Jieke Zhongguo meishu jia xiehui 捷克	Czech China Artist	ZFROC 2017a

中国美术家协会	Association	
Jieke lüyou ye lianmeng zonghui 捷克旅游业联盟总会	Czech Tourist Industry Alliance	ZFROC 2017a
Zhong-Jie jingmao wenhua jiaoliu xiehui 中捷经贸文化交流协会	Sino-Czech Economic Trade & Cultural Exchange Association	Sino-Czech Economic Trade & Cultural Exchange Association 2018a
Zhong-Jie fanyi xiehui 中捷翻译协会	China-Czech Translator Association	Prague Chinese Times 2016a
Jieke Zhonghua wushu lianhehui 捷克中华武术联合会	Czech China Wushu Federation	Prague Chinese Times 2016a
Jieke shuhua xiehui 捷克书画协会	Czech Calligraphy Association	Prague Chinese Times 2016a
Jieke huzhu zhongxin 捷克华助中心	Czech Chinese Service Center	Appendix 1
Zhongguo wenhua zhongxin 中国文化中心	Chinese Culture Center	Appendix 1
Zhong-Ou hezuo yu fazhan zhongxin 中欧合作与发展中心	China-Europe Cooperation and Development Center	Appendix 1
Jieke Huawen zuojia xiehui 捷克华文作家协会	Czech Chinese Writers Association	Prague Chinese Times 2017f
Jieke Zhongguo Yi dai yi lu jingji jishu hezuo xiehui 捷克中国一带一路经济技术合作协会	Czech China BRI Economy and Technology Cooperation Association	Prague Chinese Times 2017f

Gelante Ouzhou shanghui 格兰特欧洲商会	Grand Europe Association	Grand Europe Association s.d.
Zhongdong Ou Zhong yiyao xiehui 中东欧中医药协会	CEE Traditional Chinese Medicine Association	Prague Chinese Times 2017f
Jieke qipao xiehui 捷克旗袍协会	Czech Qipao Association	Prague Chinese Times 2018j
Zhejiang “Yi dai yi lu” Jieke zhan 浙江“一带一路”捷克站	Zhejiang “BRI” Czech Station	Czech-Chinese Journal 2019: 11
Jie-Zhong wenhua liyi cujin hui 捷中华文化礼仪促进会	Czech-China Culture and Etiquette Promotion Association	China Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs 2019
Jieke Zhongguo wenhua jiaoliu zhongxin 捷克国际文化交流中心	Czech International Culture Exchange Association	Czech International Culture Exchange Association s.d.
Jieke Zhong’Ou xinwen she 捷克中欧新闻社	Czech Central European News Agency	Chongqing UFWD 2020
Bulage shibao 布拉格时报	Prague Chinese Times	Prague Chinese Times s.d.
Jieke huaren jidujiao hui 捷克华人基督教会	Czech-Chinese Christian Society	Czech-Chinese Journal 2020a: 20
Zhong-Ou wenhua jiaoliu xiehui 中欧文化交流协会	European-Chinese Culture and Exchange Association	Lulu and Jirouš 201

2. Regional organizations

Chinese name	English name	Source
Jieke Qingtian tongxiang hui 捷克青田同乡会	Czech Qingtian Hometown Association	Prague Chinese Times 2016b
Jieke Wenzhou shanghai 捷克温州商会	Czech Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce	MOFCOM 2019: 97
Jieke Fujian shanghai 捷克福建商会	Czech Fujian Chamber of Commerce	MOFCOM 2019: 97
Jieke Fujian tongxiang hui 捷克福建同乡会	Czech Fujian Hometown Association	The Voice of Fujian 2017
Jieke Guangdong shanghai 捷克广东商会	Czech Guangdong Chamber of Commerce	Prague Chinese Times 2019e
Jieke Fujian huiguan 捷克福建会馆	Czech Fujian Guild	Prague Chinese Times 2017e
Jieke Zhongguo beifang shanghai 捷克中国北方商会	Czech Northern China Chamber of Commerce	ZFROC 2017a
Jieke Beijing shanghai 捷克北京商会	Czech Beijing Chamber of Commerce	Chinese Culture Center s.d.
Jieke Zhongguo Jiangxi tongxiang hui (Jiangxi shanghui) 捷克中国江西同乡会 (江西商会)	Czech Jiangxi Hometown Association (Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce)	European Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce s.d.
Jieke Henan shanghai 捷克河南商会	Czech Henan Chamber of Commerce	Root in Henan 2018

3. Mixed-membership organizations

Chinese name	English name	Source
Jieke Zhongguo zhongxin 捷克中国中心	Czech-China Center	MOFCOM 2019: 98
Jieke-Siluofake-Zhongguo shanghui 捷克斯洛伐克中国商会	Czech-Slovak-Chinese Chamber	Mikel 2020
Xin sichou zhi lu shanghui 新丝绸之路商会	New Silk Road Chamber of Commerce	Prague Chinese Times 2017b
Jieke youhao hezuo xiehui 捷克友好合作协会	Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation	Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation s.d.