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SPECIAL THEME ISSUE:
CHINA’S UNITED FRONT INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES AROUND THE WORLD

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Editor’s note: This is a special theme issue of China Brief, focused on the Chinese government’s “united front work” (统一战线工作, tongyi zhanxian gongzuo) influence operations throughout the world. In a previous [united front theme issue](#) published in May 2019, China Brief offered articles about the theory and practice of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) united front work, institutional reforms in the united front architecture, and

case studies of united front activities around the world. Additionally, other articles from China Brief over the past year have analyzed [efforts to influence state governments in the United States](#), as well as covert CCP influence operations in [Japan](#), [Singapore](#), and [Hong Kong](#).

In this current issue, we offer a series of new analyses and case studies of the CCP's ongoing efforts around the world to influence opinion and exercise leverage through front organizations and third parties. My own contribution examines a united front entity based in Hong Kong, and its role in funding lobbying in the United States. Then, Matthew Robertson, author of a previous two-part series that analyzed China's system of organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience, completes that series with a final installment examining the PRC's efforts to control discourse in international medical organizations. Next, analysts Filip Jirouš and Pär Nyrén each provide case studies—from the Czech Republic and Sweden, respectively—of the Chinese government's efforts to control and leverage Chinese diaspora communities in Europe on matters such as COVID-19 propaganda and the cultivation of government officials. Last but not least, Ryan Fedasiuk presents the results of detailed research into the budgets of provincial united front organizations in China, providing a revealing look into the scale of resources that the CCP invests in united front work.

The Jamestown Foundation modestly hopes that this special issue will contribute towards a greater public understanding of these complex phenomena, which often occur out of the public eye. We also hope that it will benefit policymakers, scholars, business leaders, and others seeking to come to grips with the challenges posed by the Chinese government's global united front efforts.

—John Dotson, Editor, China Brief

The China-U.S. Exchange Foundation and United Front “Lobbying Laundering” in American Politics

By John Dotson

Introduction

The China-U.S. Exchange Foundation (中美交流基金会, *Zhong-Mei Jiaoliu Jijinhui*) (CUSEF), a nominally private civic organization founded in Hong Kong in 2008, first emerged in early 2018 as a subject of public debate in the United States. At that time, controversies emerged over grants made by CUSEF to U.S. universities, to include an endowed professorship in China studies at the Johns-Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies; and a proposed grant (which was ultimately declined) for the China Public Policy Center within the University of Texas at Austin. Critics at the time alleged that CUSEF was a component of the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s broader network of organizations for “united front work” influence efforts ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2019). [1] [2]

CUSEF is indeed a major player in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s organizational apparatus for conducting united front work in the United States, the evidence for which will be discussed in further detail below. Furthermore, CUSEF's controversial funding for U.S. research and academic institutions is only the tip of the iceberg in a much larger, multi-faceted effort to exert influence over U.S. policy. Arguably one of the most impactful—and least noted—lines of effort is CUSEF's behind-the-scenes role as a sponsor of lobbying activities directed at the U.S. Congress, elite opinion, and state and local officials.



Image: Tung Chee-Hwa (center-left, standing), a Hong Kong Chief Executive who later became the founding chairman of the China-U.S. Exchange Foundation, bows to applause upon being appointed a vice-chairman of the CPPCC in Beijing (March 2005). (Image source: [Sina](#), March 13, 2005)

CUSEF as a Communist Party Front Organization

CUSEF officials have consistently denied connections to the People's Republic of China (PRC) government and its united front system, and emphasized the foundation's independent status. CUSEF describes itself as a "privately funded" and "independent, non-profit and non-governmental foundation... [that] builds platforms to encourage constructive dialogue and diverse exchanges between the people of the U.S. and China" ([CUSEF](#), undated). In a letter to the *Washington Post* in 2018, CUSEF Executive Director Alan Wong asserted that the foundation "is supported by private donations," and that it supports "programs [that] aim to provide a bridge for the people of the United States and China to engage, exchange and, more important, promote mutual understanding regarding the world's most important bilateral relationship" ([Washington Post](#), January 22, 2018).

Despite such assertions, CUSEF's ties to the CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD)—and to the CCP's united front system more generally—are hiding in plain sight. CUSEF Chairman Tung Chee-Hwa (董建華) is a former Chief Executive of Hong Kong, and a current Vice-Chairman of the Chinese People's

Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议, *Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi*), or CPPCC ([CUSEF](#), undated). The CPPCC, "a patriotic united front organization of the Chinese people, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party" ([CPPCC](#), May 11, 2011), is the most prominent bureaucratic entity controlled by the UFWD. The CPPCC is used as a stage-managed "consultative" institution intended to lend a veneer of pluralism to the CCP's system of one-party rule, as well as serving as a forum for promoting prioritized CCP propaganda themes ([China Brief](#), April 9, 2019; [China Brief](#), May 29).

The membership of the CUSEF board of governors is filled with other persons in the CCP's Hong Kong united front infrastructure, to include those who hold (or have held in the recent past) positions in the PRC state or CPPCC apparatus. [3] To cite but one example, Liu Changle (刘长乐) spent his early career in the PRC's military media and propaganda system, and in 1996 founded Phoenix Television as a satellite news channel in Hong Kong. Phoenix is partially owned by the PRC state broadcaster CCTV, and is known for its reliably pro-CCP coverage. [4] Liu serves as a standing committee member of the current 13th National Committee of the CPPCC, and was also a member of the previous 10th, 11th, and 12th CPPCCs ([CUSEF](#), undated).

CUSEF-Funded Lobbying and Propaganda Activities in the United States

Over the past decade, CUSEF has been one of the most prominent Chinese entities funding lobbying efforts in the United States: from 2010 to the present, at least seven U.S. firms have maintained contracts with CUSEF for lobbying and public relations services. Lobbying registration documents filed by these firms commonly identify their client as "an independent, non-profit and non-governmental foundation," and generally describe their lobbying activities in vague terms of efforts to improve U.S.-China relations. However, in some instances greater detail is available. Summaries of these lobbying relationships, based on legally-mandated disclosure documents, follow below. [5]

BLJ Worldwide

The U.S.-based public relations firm BLJ Worldwide (originally Brown Llyod James) entered into a business relationship with CUSEF in January 2010. The firm agreed to perform "a broad range of public services in the U.S., including but not limited to defending and promoting China and the key strategic areas in the China-U.S. relationship in the media," for which it was to receive \$20,000 per month plus expenses. [6] BLJ Worldwide's relationship with CUSEF continues to the present, and has grown in value over time. (In 2017, the firm also commenced more direct representation of the PRC by taking on the PRC Embassy as a client.) In the first six months of 2020, the firm collected \$313,200 from CUSEF (in addition to \$144,000 from the PRC Embassy) for "help[ing] CUSEF to engage openly with academic and thought leaders," and "provid[ing] support for delegations visiting China," as well as supporting trips to China for U.S.-based media outlets. Services also included "support [for] the *ChinaUSFocus.com* website and related social media accounts." [7]

Public Relations Firms and Manufactured Think Tank Publications

The *China-US Focus* website, and affiliated social media accounts (such as [Twitter](#)), provide an illuminating example of PRC-sponsored efforts to shape opinion on the internet. Created in 2011, *China-US Focus* is an on-line publication that presents itself as “one of the leading commentary journals of China-U.S. relations” ([China-US Focus](#), undated), and as an independent outlet for both Chinese and international authors to “shar[e] opinions and thoughts on the most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century” ([China-US Focus](#), undated). However, the website’s sponsorship by CUSEF, and its management by a public relations firm, reveal the project’s true purpose as a propaganda vehicle (*see accompanying image*). This practice—of using a public relations firm to manage a synthetic think tank publication, which in turn publishes material that aligns with PRC propaganda narratives—matches a pattern seen elsewhere in the world, as with the *Sinoskop* website launched in the Czech Republic in 2019 ([China Brief](#), January 17).

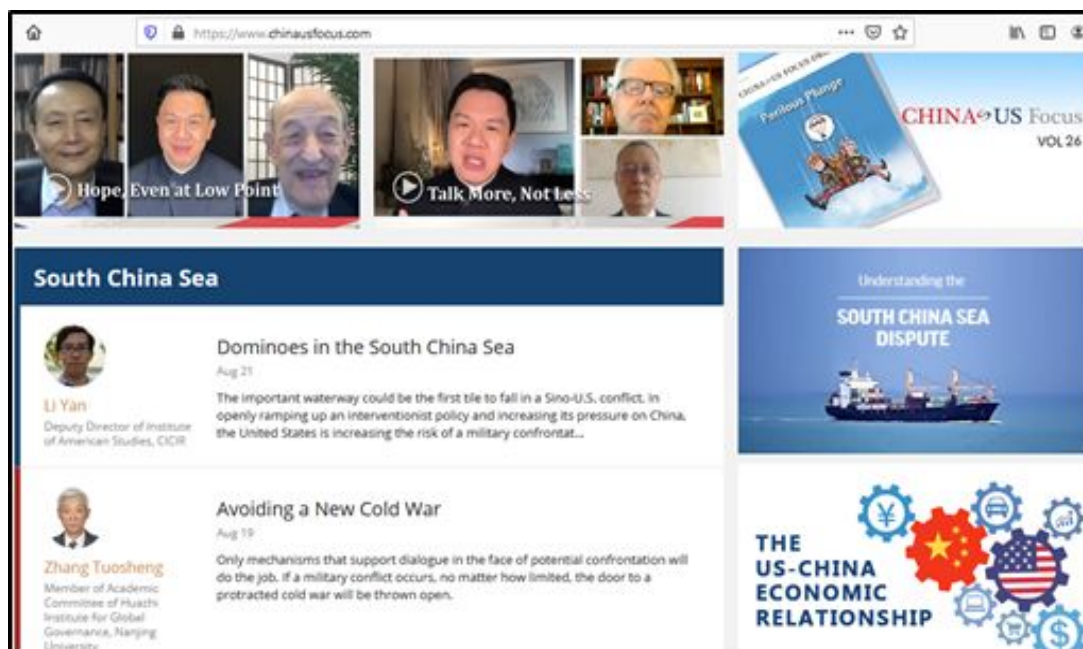


Image: A screen shot from the website of China-US Focus (September 8, 2020). The publication, sponsored by CUSEF and managed by the U.S.-based public relations firm BLJ Worldwide, promotes pro-PRC propaganda narratives. In the top article here, an author from the China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (a state-run PRC think tank associated with the Ministry of State Security) decries the “interventionist policy” of the United States in the South China Sea, which “is increasing the risk of a military confrontation” in the region. (Image source: [China-US Focus](#))

Fontheim International LLC

Fontheim International LLC began work for CUSEF in 2009, intending to perform lobbying services on “All aspects of [the] China/US relationship including: climate change, clean technology, global economy, [and] national security.” The firm’s quarterly revenues from CUSEF have shifted over time, ranging from \$30,000 to a high of \$120,000 (in 2nd quarter 2015). In 2018, the firm collected a total of \$150,000 for lobbying and organizational work in support of “Exchange programs between American and Chinese academics, state/provincial and local officials, and others” and “US-China dialogue programs.” The relationship continued through apparent termination at the end of February 2019. [8]

Covington & Burling LLP

Covington & Burling LLP commenced lobbying for CUSEF in late 2012, reporting \$30,000 in revenue for lobbying House and Senate offices in support of “United States-China relations.” Services continued into 2014; in that year, the firm collected \$110,000 before the relationship was terminated in November 2014. [9] The primary lobbyist identified in these efforts was Martin Gold, and the CUSEF account apparently followed him to Capitol Counsel LLC, commencing in December 2014 (*see below*).

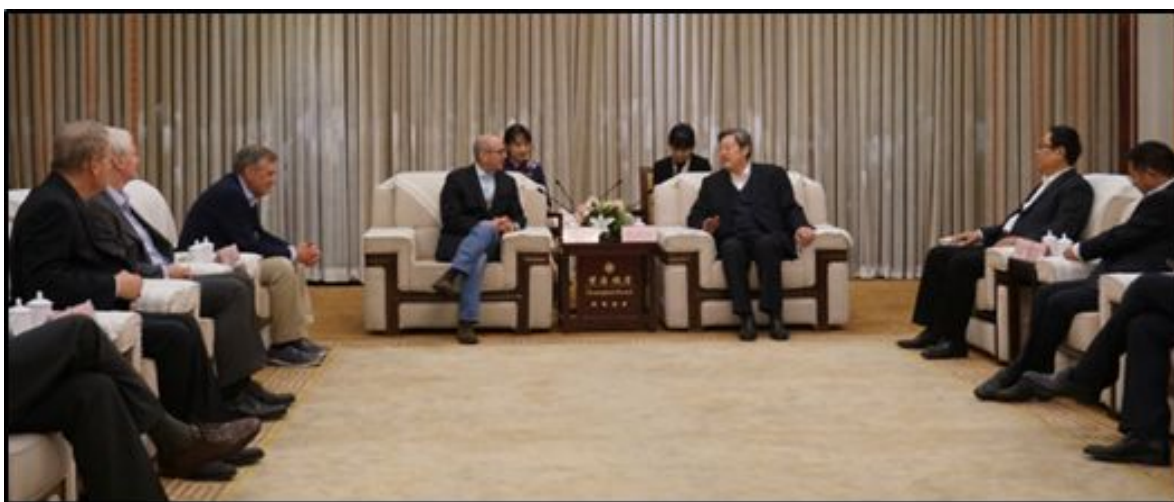


Image: During the course of an 8-day April 2019 visit to China for former members of Congress—a trip sponsored by CUSEF—members of the delegation met in Qingdao with Zhang Jianguo (张建国) (seated center right), former Vice Governor of Shandong Province. Speaking with Zhang is Charles Boustany (seated center left), a former representative for Louisiana’s 3rd District and co-chair of the U.S.-China Working Group in the U.S. House of Representatives (2005-2017), who currently works as a lobbyist with the firm Capitol Counsel. Throughout 2019, Capitol Counsel maintained a contract for lobbying services on behalf of CUSEF. (Image source: [CUSEF](#), 2019)

Capitol Counsel LLC

Capitol Counsel LLC commenced representation for CUSEF in December 2014. Per terms of the initial contract, the firm received \$10,000 per month, plus expenses; in 2017 this increased to \$15,000 per month plus expenses. The firm’s promised services for CUSEF have included: “policy and political intelligence gathering and analysis on China issues;” “substantive advice on China-related legislation;” “arranging meetings and programs on Capitol Hill;” “dissemination within Congress of materials generated or sponsored by CUSEF;” “organization of and participation in CUSEF’s former Members of Congress activities;” and “coalition building with the U.S. Association of Former Members of Congress.” [10] A significant component of Capitol Counsel’s work for CUSEF has been the cultivation of current and former members of Congress, and facilitating meetings and travel for delegations of such persons to China (*see accompanying image*). [11]

The Podesta Group

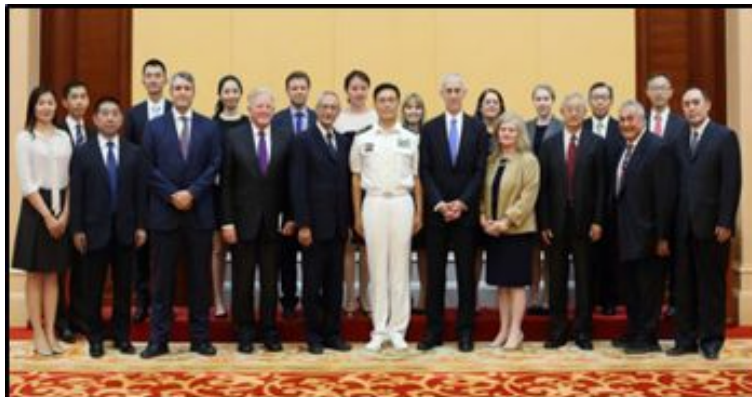
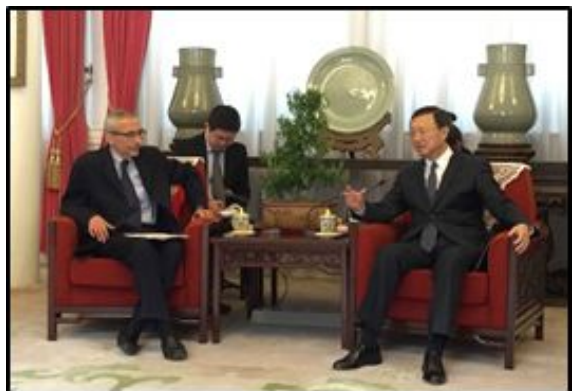
The Podesta Group, once known as one of Washington’s most influential lobbying firms, registered in March 2015 to perform services for CUSEF. In its disclosures, the firm indicated only that it intended to lobby offices in both houses of Congress in support of “China-U.S. relations.” In 2017, its last year of operation, the firm billed a total of \$290,000 for its services on behalf of CUSEF (\$80,000 each quarter, except for \$50,000 in quarter four). The relationship terminated in November 2017 when the firm went out of business ([Politico](#), November 10, 2017). [12]

Lobbying and “Track Two” Dialogues

Exchange trips organized during this period demonstrate how lobbying efforts may intersect with seemingly innocuous “track two” dialogue activities. In 2015 and 2016, CUSEF sponsored trips to China by delegations from the Center for American Progress, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank founded by Podesta Group co-founder John Podesta. The ostensible purpose of the trips was to discuss U.S.-China cooperation on matters of common concern, such as regional security and global climate change. The 2016 trip, for example, offered the opportunity for meetings with PRC officials to include Zhang Gaoli (张高丽), then-PRC Vice Premier and a member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee; Jin Liqun (金立群), President of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; and Admiral Sun Jianguo (孙建国), Deputy Chief of the PLA Joint Staff Department ([CUSEF](#), undated).

The examples of the Capitol Counsel and CAP exchange trips, organized with CUSEF sponsorship, illustrate how nominal track two dialogues may be compromised by lobbying relationships; and how, in certain instances, such dialogues may themselves be a function of lobbying activity. Although an overlap between lobbying and exchange activities does not necessarily negate all potential benefits of such dialogues, it does draw into question the objectivity of some participants—as well as the extent to which others involved may or

may not be aware of the motivations of the trip's sponsors. It also brings into question the extent to which such exchanges may be employed by the PRC for targeted influence and propaganda efforts, as well as to "evaluate the participants for their [potential] future usefulness." [13]



Images: CUSEF sponsored delegations from the Center for American Progress (CAP) to visit China in 2015 and 2016. Image left: John Podesta, a founder of both CAP and the Podesta Group, speaks with PRC State Councilor Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪) during the visit in 2015. CUSEF Chairman Tung Chee-Hwa also participated in meetings during the trip. (Image source: [USC U.S.-China Institute](#), undated) / Image right: During the 2016 trip, members of the CAP delegation meet with Admiral Sun Jianguo, Deputy Chief of the PLA Joint Staff Department. (Image source: [CUSEF](#), undated)

Wilson Global Communications

Wilson Global Communications took on CUSEF as a client in January 2017, indicating that it would "provide communications and public relations services, as well as government relations, including outreach to U.S. public officials and relevant private sector organizations... includ[ing] efforts to build and improve dialogue between China and African American business, education, and civic leaders, and to improve relations between China and the U.S. in general." Additionally, the firm's website indicates that, on behalf of "the Hong-Kong based nonprofit organization, the China-United States Exchange Foundation... Wilson has built and enhanced relationships on Capitol Hill with members of the U.S. House of Representatives" ([Wilson Global Communications](#), undated). The firm has also performed outreach on behalf of CUSEF to state and local government officials in Texas. For its services, the firm initially billed \$13,000 per month plus expenses, increased to \$15,000 per month in 2020. [14]

BGR Government Affairs

The most recent addition to CUSEF's list of representatives is BGR Government Affairs, which accepted the foundation as a client in February 2019. The firm describes itself as "Washington's premier, bipartisan

lobbying firm,” which offers an “international affairs practice to help clients influence decision-makers in political and financial capitals across the world,” to include an office in Beijing ([BGR](#), undated). Per BGR’s registration, its work for CUSEF “will include strategic guidance and counsel with regard to government affairs activity... This may include relevant outreach to U.S. government officials, non-governmental organizations, [and] members of the media,” and “contact as necessary with members of Congress and their staff and executive branch officials.” For its services, the firm receives an annual fee of \$400,000 plus expenses. [15]

Conclusion

The identity of the China-U.S. Exchange Foundation—that of a nominally private entity, which in actuality functions as a *de facto* front organization for the PRC government—allows it to play a valuable role in Beijing’s efforts to sway public opinion and build influence in America. CUSEF’s extensive contracts with U.S. lobbying and public relations firms—contracts involving both sums and a breadth of activities difficult to reconcile with those of a genuine non-profit civic foundation—represent a sort of “lobbying laundering,” in which a nominally independent third-party organization acts as a primary agent for funding and managing lobbying efforts on behalf of the PRC. Coming to a fuller understanding of these disguised and well-funded efforts to sway both elite opinion and U.S. government policy will be a vital component of coming to grips with the CCP’s broader influence efforts directed at the United States, as well as the wider world.

John Dotson is the editor of China Brief. For any comments, queries, or submissions, feel free to reach out to him at: cbeditor@jamestown.org.

Notes

[1] For a general discussion of the controversies surrounding CUSEF funding for SAIS and UT-Austin, see: Elizabeth Redden, “Thanks, But No Thanks,” *Inside Higher Ed* (January 16, 2018), <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/01/16/ut-austin-rejects-funding-chinese-government-linked-foundation>. For background on the role played by Tung Chee-Hwa and CUSEF in funding institutions in the United States, see: Bethany-Allen Ebrahimian, “This Beijing-Linked Billionaire Is Funding Policy Research at Washington’s Most Influential Institutions,” *Foreign Policy* (November 28, 2017), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/28/this-beijing-linked-billionaire-is-funding-policy-research-at-washingtons-most-influential-institutions-china-dc/>.

[2] Among critics speaking out at the time was U.S. Senator Ted Cruz, who stated in a letter to UT-Austin administrators that “I am deeply concerned that collaborating with CUSEF, given its affiliation with the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) united front system and its registration as an agent of a foreign principal, would disseminate PRC propaganda within the Center and compromise its credibility.” (See: letter from U.S. Senator Ted Cruz to UT-Austin President Greg Fennes, Jan. 2, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/r/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2018/01/14/Editorial-Opinion/Graphics/2018.01.02LetterToUTOnCUSEF.pdf?tid=a_mcntx)

[3] A partial list of examples would include: Elsie Oi Sie Leung, an attorney who serves as the current deputy director of the Hong Kong Basic Law Committee in the Standing Committee of the PRC National People's Congress (CUSEF, undated); Payson Cha Mou Sing, a businessman who served as a member of the National Committee of the CPPCC from 1993 to 2013 (CUSEF, undated); and Martin Lee Ka Shing, a property developer who serves as a current member of the Beijing CPPCC Committee (CUSEF, undated).

[4] Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p. 160; and Philip P. Pan, "Making Waves, Carefully, on the Air in China," *Washington Post*, Sep. 19, 2005,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/18/AR2005091801597.html>.

[5] Unless otherwise noted, referenced disclosure documents were obtained from the *Foreign Agents Registration Act* (FARA) database maintained by the U.S. Department of Justice (<https://www.justice.gov/nsd-fara>); the lobbying disclosure database of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives ("House") (<https://disclosurespreview.house.gov>); and/or the lobbying disclosure database of the Secretary of the U.S. Senate ("Senate") (https://www.senate.gov/legislative/Public_Disclosure/LDA_reports.htm).

[6] FARA registration document (Aug. 3, 2010), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5875-Exhibit-AB-20100803-10.pdf>.

[7] FARA registration document (Aug. 31, 2020), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5875-Supplemental-Statement-20200831-31.pdf>.

[8] Fontheim International LLC. For initial registration and 2015 revenues, see: Senate database registration document (Aug. 10, 2009), <https://soprweb.senate.gov/index.cfm?event=getFilingDetails&filingID=F802865F-44C9-4FF7-AAB6-BC229FCE018F&filingTypeID=1>; and Senate database disclosure document (July 15, 2015), <https://soprweb.senate.gov/index.cfm?event=getFilingDetails&filingID=2A93B32D-4F2F-4A5F-AC87-E0D466AB8392&filingTypeID=60>. For Fontheim International LLC 2018 quarterly lobbying disclosures in the House lobbying database, see: quarter one (April 12, 2018), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2018/Q1/300944358.xml>; quarter two (July 6, 2018), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2018/Q2/300962664.xml>; quarter three (Oct. 22, 2018), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2018/Q3/300997687.xml>; quarter four (Jan. 18, 2019), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2018/Q4/301009645.xml>. For the termination report, see: House database termination report (Feb. 28, 2019), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2019/1T/301035674.xml>.

[9] Covington & Burling LLP. For registration, see: House lobbying database (Jan. 18, 2013), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2012/Q4/300535490.xml>. For 2014 quarterly disclosures, see: quarter one (April 17, 2014), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2014/Q1/300639625.xml>; quarter two (July 18, 2014), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2014/Q2/300662815.xml>; quarter three (Oct. 20, 2014), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2014/Q3/300685005.xml>; quarter four (Jan. 16, 2015), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2014/4T/300698480.xml>.

[10] Capitol Counsel LLC. For registration, see: FARA registration document (Nov. 19, 2018), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6328-Exhibit-AB-20181119-6.pdf>. For terms of initial agreement, see: FARA disclosure document (Dec. 10, 2018) (Capitol Counsel letter dated Dec. 15, 2014), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6328-Exhibit-AB-20181210-7.pdf>. For 2019 business terms, see: FARA disclosure document (dated Jan. 15, 2019), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6328-Exhibit-AB-20190115-8.pdf>.

[11] In addition to services for CUSEF, Capitol Counsel LLC also serves as a consultant to the U.S.-China Transpacific Foundation, a Las Vegas-based entity funded by the Chinese government that operates a travel program “intended to provide the Members of Congress and/or the congressional staff the opportunity to enhance their understanding on the cultural, economic, political and social developments of the People’s Republic of China, thus helping strengthen China-U.S. relations.” For its services, Capitol Counsel charged an “initial fee of \$50,000” in September 2017 (FARA registration document dated Sep. 15, 2017, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6328-Exhibit-AB-20170915-4.pdf>); in the period Feb. 2019 to January 2020, the firm collected fees of \$10,000 per month (FARA disclosure dated March 20, 2019, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6328-Exhibit-AB-20190320-10.pdf>).

[12] The Podesta Group. For initial registration, see: House lobbying document (March 2, 2015), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2015/RR/300717876.xml>. For 2017 disclosures, see: quarter one (April 20, 2017), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2017/Q1/300874634.xml>; quarter two (July 20, 2017), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2017/Q2/300894027.xml>; quarter three (Oct. 20, 2017), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2017/Q3/300913143.xml>; quarter four (Dec. 15, 2017), <https://disclosurespreview.house.gov/ld/ldxmlrelease/2017/4T/300920380.xml>.

[13] Peter Mattis, written testimony for “China’s Growing Influence in Asia and the United States,” hearing held by the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and Nonproliferation (May 8, 2019), p. 12. <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA05/20190508/109458/HHRG-116-FA05-Wstate-MattisP-20190508.pdf>.

[14] Wilson Global Communications. For initial registration, information on contacts with the U.S. House of Representatives and officials in Texas, and initial fees, see: FARA registration document (Aug. 31, 2018), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6584-Exhibit-AB-20180831-7.pdf>. For further information, see FARA disclosure document (Nov. 5, 2018), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6584-Exhibit-AB-20181105-8.pdf>; and FARA disclosure document (Feb. 1, 2019), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6584-Exhibit-AB-20190201-9.pdf>.

[15] BGR Government Affairs. For registration, services to be performed, and fees, see: FARA registration document (March 1, 2019), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5430-Exhibit-AB-20190301-72.pdf>.

**Examining China’s Organ Transplantation System:
The Nexus of Security, Medicine, and Predation / Part 3:
China’s United Front Tactics in Managing the Narrative on Organ Trafficking**

By Matthew P. Robertson

Editor’s Note: This is the third and final installment of an article series analyzing China’s policies and institutional architecture for surgical organ transplantation. The first two installments—“[Part 1: “The Growth of China’s Transplantation System Since 2000”](#)” and “[Part 2: Evidence for the Harvesting of Organs from Prisoners of Conscience](#)”—were published in China Brief in May. In this final installment, analyst Matthew Robertson examines how the Chinese government has sought to exert influence over international medical organizations and officials in order to deflect attention from, and control discourse about, the organ harvesting issue.

Introduction

As COVID-19 emerged this year as a global pandemic leading to large-scale economic and social disruption, greater attention has been focused on the World Health Organization (WHO) and alleged Chinese influence over it ([Foreign Policy](#), April 2). Critics are correct to note that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has managed to gain outsized influence over the WHO, although precisely how this happened has received little attention. This article presents China’s domestic organ trafficking and transplantation industry as a case study in how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has achieved “discourse power” (话语权, *huayu quan*)—a word of art in CCP political influence literature—on a topic that it considers to be both important and extremely sensitive.



Image: In a meeting held in Rome in February 2017, Dr. Huang Jiefu—a leading Chinese medical official and spokesman for the PRC on organ transplant issues—speaks with Dr. Nancy Ascher, former head of the Transplantation Society. (Image source: [Xinhua](#), February 15, 2017)

In most developed countries, organ donation and transplantation are largely apolitical. In China it is a heavily politicized field, as a result of the long-term symbiotic relationship between the country's security apparatus, hospital system, and military-medical complex ([China Brief](#), May 1). The CCP has fended off criticism from activists and ethicists about its transplantation system for decades, but in recent years key members of the Chinese medical bureaucracy have taken a much more proactive approach to exerting influence and “telling the China story well” (讲好中国故事, *jianghao Zhongguo gushi*) in global medical organizations. With the exception of a growing contingent of dissenters (this author among them), these efforts have been largely successful.

Scholars of Chinese politics have shown how united front ideas permeate CCP approaches to external relations ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2019). [1] The CCP's engagement with international medical organizations regarding its own state-sponsored organ trafficking industry is an example of their expertise in this set of practices. It showcases many key aspects of political influence work spanning united front activities, propaganda, elite capture, foreigner management, and information falsification and manipulation. If liberal states hope to counter these efforts, they must first become more familiar with how they are implemented.

PRC Influence Over Organ Trafficking Narratives

PRC state goals surrounding organ harvesting narratives are threefold. The party's first goal is to protect the political security and legitimacy of the regime from the accusation that it systematically exploits prisoners of conscience as an organ source. The party's second goal is to ensure the continued availability of transplant organs for members of the party elite. The party's third goal is to bolster China's image on the global stage as a leader in a field of advanced medicine, while maintaining the prestige and access of Chinese surgeons to Western medical journals, conferences, and professional societies. In all of these areas, the CCP's success in achieving “discourse power” has been impressive.

As documented in the previous two parts of this series, the CCP oversees the largest state-run organ trafficking industry in the world—almost certainly deriving a large number of organs from prisoners of conscience who are held in captivity, blood-tested, and extralegally executed on demand for paying customers. Despite this, none of the global medical organizations nominally concerned with organ trafficking—including the WHO, The Transplantation Society (TTS), and the Declaration of Istanbul Custodian Group—have publicly acknowledged or criticized this arrangement. Instead, PRC officials helped to establish the WHO's own anti-organ trafficking task force, and a key Chinese official has served on the ethics committee of TTS, while another has given the keynote speech at its biennial meeting ([TTS](#), May 14; [TTS](#), August 17-23, 2016).

WHO and TTS officials have dismissed concerns about extrajudicial executions while emphasizing the primacy of China's official narrative: that death row prisoners *used to be* the primary source of organs, but since 2015 that has changed and only voluntary, hospital-based donors are used. They have dismissed out

of hand a pattern of evidence, published in a leading medical ethics journal and reviewed by a prominent statistician, that China's current voluntary transplant datasets have been systematically falsified ([Global Times](#), December 8, 2019). [2]

The Construction of “Common Ground” with International Transplant Officials

In the post-Mao era, a guiding framework the CCP has used to manage potentially adversarial relationships with outsiders has been that of “seeking common ground and setting differences aside” (求同存异, *qiutong cunyi*). [3] In the context of global governance for organ transplantation, the “common ground” narrative that PRC officials emphasize is consistent: organs can only be procured via “voluntary donation... by citizens and fair and transparent allocation to the transplant recipients” ([Chinese Medical Journal](#), April 5). All available evidence indicates that PRC officials have not adhered to this ideal, and there are numerous systemic incentives that militate against its realization.

For the last five years, two central themes—the elimination of transplant abuses, and securing sourcing solely from voluntary donors—have been the consistent messages of the most senior PRC transplant officials who interact with foreigners. Two officials in particular have been at the forefront of these propaganda efforts. The first key figure is Dr. Huang Jiefu (黄洁夫), who has held multiple posts: as a former PRC Vice Minister of Health; head of the transplant policy portfolio; Vice Chair of the Healthcare Committee of the CCP (which manages the health of the leadership); a former alternate member of the CCP Central Committee; and former member of the standing committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the party's foremost united front organ. The second figure is Dr. Wang Haibo (王海波), Dr. Huang's protege and director of the voluntary organ donation system.

Over the last 15 years, both officials have built a significant rapport with global transplant experts. Drs. Huang and Wang follow consistent talking points, telling foreign counterparts that they aspire to have a completely voluntary organ donation system, but they simply need help battling corrupt forces inside China to achieve it. Per this narrative, public discussion of organ harvesting from political prisoners would undermine their reform efforts; foreign experts must place trust in them as progressive members of the PRC medical community, and offer their support. [4]

In their engagement with foreign interlocutors, PRC officials are willing to countenance superficial critiques that exclude discussion of the most significant abuses within the PRC transplant system. For example, global transplant leaders have written letters addressed to Xi Jinping stating that China is “scorned by the international community” for using organs from death row prisoners, and that Xi Jinping's fight against corruption in China must target this abuse ([Transplantation \(Journal\)](#), April 27, 2014). Foreign surgeons have also sought to bolster their ethical credentials by highlighting their opposition to the use of death row prisoners ([Committee on Foreign Affairs \(U.S.\)](#), June 23, 2016). Such communications are cited approvingly by veteran transplant insiders like Dr. Ye Qifa (叶启发), who notes that, with this sort of support from the

international community, China will indeed be able to continue the battle against corruption. Dr. Ye noted that the authors addressed their letter to Xi soon after the Third Plenum of the 18th Central Committee, when Xi had specifically emphasized developing the rule of law ([CCTV](#), January 10, 2016).

Foreign medical organizations have thus put themselves in the position of attempting to navigate the vagaries and sloganeering of Chinese politics, much like insiders, in an attempt to bring about their desired policy outcomes. In such exchanges Chinese transplant officials and foreign experts find themselves on a comfortable “common ground.” However, such discussions leave unaddressed the killing of prisoners of conscience for their organs. Criticism of death row abuses is allowed; promises that they have ended are made; but claims of organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience are seen as “anti-China” and are ignored or dismissed ([China Daily](#), August 7, 2017).

“Win-Win” Partnerships with Foreign Medical Officials

As often occurs in CCP political influence campaigns, both parties stand to gain from the interactions, and targeted elites often consent to their co-optation. Ways in which international transplant professionals benefit from their credulity regarding CCP claims of limited abuses and vigorous reforms include the following:

- Being taken on tours across China, at the host’s expense, to visit medical facilities; such events provide opportunities for the CCP to use its extensive experience in exerting influence via hospitality. [5]
- Feeling that they are part of a great enterprise of helping China to reform, while helping vulnerable and valiant reformist officials at the vanguard of that reform. [6]
- The intangible benefits that come from not disrupting the status quo by claiming that crimes against humanity have been committed (which would be tantamount to a demand that Dr. Huang himself be prosecuted).
- Maintaining business relationships: the annual TTS conference is sponsored by pharmaceutical companies who sell immunosuppressant drugs in China (and Roche helped build one of the PLA’s organ registries). [7]

Chinese officials have actively cultivated foreign medical officials: for example, they have singled out for praise Dr. Francis Delmonico, a Harvard surgeon who has served as a former president of TTS, and head of the WHO anti-trafficking task force. Dr. Delmonico has appeared in PRC state media to praise reforms in the organ transplant system ([CGTN/YouTube](#), March 31, 2017), and has been instrumental in holding together a coalition of global transplant leaders supportive of the PRC—including WHO officials, current and former TTS presidents, and figures in the Vatican. PRC state media has publicly denounced Dr. Jacob Lavee, a leading cardiac transplant surgeon and former TTS Ethics Committee member, for publishing (with the author) a scientific paper about falsification of Chinese transplant data. None of his colleagues have come to his defense ([Global Times](#), December 8, 2019).



Image: A still photo of a news clip from PRC state broadcaster CGTN, in which Dr. Francis Delmonico, a Harvard surgeon who has served as a former president of the Transplantation Society and head of the WHO anti-trafficking task force, is interviewed about organ donations in China. Dr. Delmonico praised the PRC's efforts, stating that "China is evolving, organ donation is emerging in China...I would hope that China could be a model for other locations, for an expansion of organ donation... not just in that region, but throughout the world." (Image source: [CGTN/YouTube](#), March 31, 2017)

Other global transplant leaders who have expressed support for China's reforms—and declined to discuss the most serious alleged abuses—include Dr. John Fung of the University of Chicago (formerly of the Cleveland Clinic, where numerous Chinese transplant surgeons trained, and formerly treasurer of TTS) and Dr. Ronald Busuttil, one of the most prominent liver surgeons in the United States. Both of those doctors have shared what could be characterized as friendly ties with Chinese surgeons or have been involved in transplant-related businesses that operated in China. For instance, Dr. Fung served as an advisor to clinical trials of an extracorporeal liver device in China, necessitating the use of transplant organs during a period when China did not claim to have a national voluntary transplantation system. Dr. Michael Millis, another American surgeon who has played a key role in promoting China's reforms, served on the clinical advisory board and held stock options in the company. [8] Dr. Busuttil has been hosted on multiple occasions by Dr. Zheng Shusen (郑树森)—a prolific liver transplant surgeon who until 2017 played a leading role in the CCP's campaign against Falun Gong in Zhejiang province—and may have been involved in a memorandum of understanding between Dr. Zheng's hospital and UCLA Medical Center. [9]

The environment created by these "friendships" filters through to the way that influential media outlets both report the official story and ignore the unofficial story. [10] This trend has been evident in approving views from global medical organizations, and anecdotal media reports that endorsed the reforms as real ([Financial Times](#), March 28, 2017; [PBS](#), May 29, 2017; [Washington Post](#), September 15, 2017). If it were not for a coalition of dissenting ethicists, scholars, and doctors, the CCP may well have succeeded in portraying its simulation of a voluntary transplantation system as the real thing. [11]

The foreign experts cited here are almost certainly well-intentioned, choosing to believe that they are engaged in a constructive project with their professional peers in the PRC. They do not appear to have reflected on the possibility that they may be the targets of subterfuge and cooptation by trained party cadres who are committed to defending the political security of the regime, and to ensuring that they are themselves not held accountable for the abuses in which they have engaged.

Conclusion

PRC influence over international transplantation highlights the difficulty of liberal institutions dealing with the challenge posed by united front political techniques. The techniques themselves may be commonplace—spin-doctoring, psychological pressure, misleading appeals, and outright lies are familiar to many in democracies—but the international regulation of organ transplantation is conducted by non-state actors who operate on premises foreign to the CCP. They assume that all parties want the same outcome, and are similarly motivated to achieve it. The CCP has found great success in appearing to superficially adapt to shared values—of human autonomy and dignity, vouchsafed by information transparency and legal safeguards—but actual observation of its behavior reveals significant discrepancies between the claims and the reality. International organizations have thus found themselves negotiated into a corner by a sophisticated political organization with vast experience in perception manipulation and a great deal at stake. The party is here the beneficiary of a basic role mismatch.

The price foreigners pay to make progress in helping China build an ethical transplant system—the putative “common ground”—is to not discuss the alleged crimes against humanity in which the PRC transplant system, and senior medical officials, are involved. [12] The consequences of this for the global medical establishment have not merely been willful ignorance of alleged crimes against humanity, but along with it the abandonment (at least in the case of the PRC) of the genuine demand that transplantation systems meet the basic requirements of transparency and traceability in organ donation. If liberal states care to correct this state of affairs, they may need to more assertively concern themselves with the substance of the evidence, and be more proactive in shaping how international experts—and likely *which* experts—interface with the PRC on this topic.

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Notes

[1] See: Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic*, 2003; Matt Schrader, "Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries," Alliance for Securing Democracy, May 2020, <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Friends-and-Enemies-A-Framework-for-Understanding-Chinese-Political-Interference-in-Democratic-Countries.pdf>; Alexander Bowe, "China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States," US-China Economic and Security Commission, August 24, 2018; Peter Mattis and Alex Joske, "The Third Magic Weapon: Reforming China's United Front," *War on the Rocks*, June 24, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/06/the-third-magic-weapon-reforming-chinas-united-front/>; Peter Mattis, "China's Digital Authoritarianism: Surveillance, Influence, and Political Control," Hearing Before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, U.S. Congress, May 16, 2019, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IG/IG00/20190516/109462/HHRG-116-IG00-Wstate-MattisP-20190516.pdf>.

[2] See: Matthew P. Robertson, Raymond L. Hinde, and Jacob Lavee, "Analysis of Official Deceased Organ Donation Data Casts Doubt on the Credibility of China's Organ Transplant Reform," *BMC Medical Ethics* 20, no. 1, November 14, 2019, pp. 79; and David Spiegelhalter, "Commentary on 'Analysis of Official Deceased Organ Donation Data Casts Doubt on Credibility of China's Organ Transplant Reform' by Matthew P. Robertson, Raymond L. Hinde and Jacob Lavee," in Submission to The China Tribunal, 2019, <https://chinatribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Commentary-on-Robertson-et-al-Spiegelhalter.pdf>.

[3] Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (2003), pp. 218–220.

[4] Evidence of the internalization of this narrative may be found in the following sources: Jeremy Chapman and Philip O'Connell, "Senate Inquiry into Human Organ Trafficking and Organ Transplant Tourism, Submission 28," Undated, <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=0cec294d-6b4c-4981-b7a4-018170c119ac&subId=561506>; "Organ Harvesting: An Examination of a Brutal Practice," Joint Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations and the Subcomm. on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats of the House Comm. on Foreign Affairs, June 23, 2016, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA16/20160623/105116/HHRG-114-FA16-20160623-SD006.pdf>; P. J. O'Connell, N. Ascher, and F. L. Delmonico, "The Transplantation Society Believes a Policy of Engagement Will Facilitate Organ Donation Reform in China," *American Journal of Transplantation: Official Journal of the American Society of Transplantation and the American Society of Transplant Surgeons*, November 2016; Francis Delmonico et al., "Open Letter to Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China: China's Fight against Corruption in Organ Transplantation," *Transplantation*, April 27, 2014, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24667765/>.

[5] For an example discussion of foreign experts' tours of China see Dr. Ye Qifa's comments in Kuhn, "Closer to China: China's New Organ Transplant System"; for an indication of how these trips are used to bolster China's reforms, see ([Editorial Office 2013](#)); for a statement that these trips are paid for by a government-connected source, see Dr. Delmonico's testimony in "Organ Harvesting: An Examination of a

Brutal Practice, pp. 50–51,
<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA16/20160623/105116/HHRG-114-FA16-20160623-SD006.pdf>.

[6] For the trope in general, see: Richard H. Solomon, *Chinese Political Negotiating Behavior* (Rand, 1983), pp. 10; and in particular see: “Organ Harvesting: An Examination of a Brutal Practice,” pp. 41, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA16/20160623/105116/HHRG-114-FA16-20160623-SD006.pdf>.

[7] See: Kirk Allison, “China’s Execution Transplantation System and International Institutions. A Too-Sticky Wicket?,” in *An Unprecedented Evil Persecution* (unknown, 2016), 132–50; People’s Liberation Army No. 2 Affiliated General Hospital, 中国肾移植科学登记系统 [China Scientific Registry of Kidney Transplants], November 25, 2009, <http://web.archive.org/web/20091125112308/http://csrkt.org/>.

[8] See: Vital Therapies, Inc., “Vital Therapies, Inc. Form S-1 Registration Statement,” Securities and Exchange Commission, October 11, 2013, <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1280776/000119312513398007/d543159ds1.htm>; “PRESS RELEASE: Vital Therapies Closes \$28.1 Million Financing,” FierceBiotech, October 3, 2007, <https://www.fiercebiotech.com/biotech/press-release-vital-therapies-closes-28-1-million-financing>; Zhong-Ping Duan et al., “Interim Results of Randomized Controlled Trial of ELAD (TM) in Acute on Chronic Liver Disease,” in *Hepatology*, October 2007; “Fact Sheet,” Vital Therapies, September 2010, https://archive.org/includes/donate.php?as_page=1&transpiled=0&referer=https%3A//web.archive.org/web/20140716004330/http%3A//vitaltherapies.com.cn/pdf/VTI_Factsheet_0910_FINAL.pdf.

[9] Jin Zhang, “Chinese Liver Surgery Broadcasts Live to US Surgeons,” *China Radio International*, August 17, 2011, <https://archive.is/9gNEM>; “浙医一院与美国UCLA医学中心联合成立肝病中心-浙医一院 [Zhejiang First Hospital and UCLA Medical Center Jointly Established Liver Disease Center - Zhejiang First Hospital],” Zhejiang Health Online, June 2, 2011, http://web.archive.org/web/20200514145820/http://health.zjol.com.cn/05zjhealth/system/2011/06/02/017570978_01.shtml.

[10] For a disturbing account of how *The New York Times* has ignored the unofficial story, see Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Submission to the China Tribunal,” February 23, 2019, https://chinatribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/DidiKirstenTatlow_Submission.pdf.

[11] My claim that China’s organ transplantation system is effectively a “simulation” is substantiated in: Matthew P. Robertson, Raymond L. Hinde, and Jacob Lavee, “Analysis of Official Deceased Organ Donation Data Casts Doubt on the Credibility of China’s Organ Transplant Reform,” *BMC Medical Ethics*, November 14, 2019, <https://bmcomedethics.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12910-019-0406-6>.

[12] Wendy A. Rogers, Matthew P. Robertson, and Jacob Lavee, “Engaging with China on Organ Transplantation,” *BMJ* 356, February 7, 2017: j665.

The Role of Coopted Diaspora Groups in Czech and European United Front Work

By Filip Jirouš

Introduction

As is true in much of Europe, the influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the Czech Republic heavily relies on the cultivation of political elites by party-state organs, overshadowing the role of coopted groups within the Chinese diaspora ([China Brief](#), May 9; [China Brief](#), January 17). However, the Chinese community's previously under-researched interactions with PRC and European politics at the local and national level—as displayed in the CCP's power to mobilize them for COVID-19-themed propaganda—point to a need to better understand the contribution of the CCP's diaspora work to its larger political influence work in the continent.

Managing forces outside of the party—including the international Chinese diaspora—is the core task of one of the major areas of the party-state bureaucracy, the united front system ([ASPI](#), June 9). Coordinated to a large (but not exclusive) degree by the CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD), diaspora work involves key agencies active in “overseas Chinese affairs” (侨务, *qiaowu*), such as:

- The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), whose chair is the system's top cadre;
- The eight CCP-led “democratic” parties ([University of Adelaide](#), December 1997);
- The All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (中华全国归国华侨联合会, *Zhonghua Quanguo Guiguo Huaqiao Lianhehui*) (ACFROC), the primary *qiaowu* organ since 2018 ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2019);
- The China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (中国和平统一促进会, *Zhongguo Heping Tongyi Cujin Hui*) (CCPPNR) and its global network of coopted diaspora organizations ([China Brief](#), February 13, 2018; [China Brief](#), May 9, 2019);
- The China News Service (中国新闻社, *Zhongguo Xinwen She*) (CNS) and its network of Chinese-language media outlets overseas ([ASPI](#), June 9; [Sinopsis](#), October 2, 2019).

The system's partners abroad, for which the term “united front groups” has been proposed ([ASPI](#), June 9), most visibly include the CCPPNR's global network of “reunification” councils. These organizations have become tools for political influence in their home locales, a phenomenon thus far best observed in Australia and New Zealand ([Parliament of Australia](#), 2018; [New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption](#), 2019; [Wilson Center](#), September 18, 2017; [Sinopsis](#), November 16, 2018).

In Europe, the study and scrutiny of CCP elite-capture activity has so far focused largely on the Czech Republic ([Sinopsis](#), March 11, 2019). Unlike in the Anglophone world, CCP-coopted groups within the small Czech Chinese community have kept a low profile, with entities outside the formal united front system—such as the CCP International Liaison Department (ILD) and the PLA-linked company CEFC—leading what has been called “united front work by other means” ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2019). [1]

The united front system’s partners among the diaspora in Europe are involved in CCP influence activities, especially at the local level ([Sinopsis](#), June 19, 2018; [Sinopsis](#), October 2, 2019; [Stockholm Free World Forum](#), May 29; [Yle](#), March 15). [2] However, the Czech case shows that diaspora groups linked to the CCP united front system also help to advance CCP goals at the national and European level, as demonstrated by their involvement in the CCP’s recent pandemic crisis management.



Image: Czech President Miloš Zeman’s April 2019 delegation to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was joined by several Czech Chinese diaspora leaders such as Milan Sun (孙悦新, Sun Yuexin)(first row, first from right side), Zhou Lingjian (周灵建) (blue suit behind the president) and others. (Image source: Czech-China Center, April 30, 2019).

Czech Qiaowu Under the Radar

The recent history of the most prominent Czech Chinese organizations fits a pattern familiar from other countries. Largely composed of recent migrants from the PRC, the Chinese diaspora in the country has offered the CCP ample opportunity for cooption, largely undisturbed by resistance from older diaspora organizations or pro-democracy movements. The recent history of the most prominent Czech Chinese organizations fits a pattern familiar from other countries. While the first lasting diaspora association once managed to keep some distance from PRC politics, [3] it has since been overshadowed by entities with close ties to the united front system. As with much of continental Europe, Chinese migration to the country only

became significant in the 1990s, [4] dominated by arrivals from Zhejiang [especially Qingtian (青田) County, estimated to account for approximately 60 percent of the community] followed by a more recent wave from Fujian ([Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese](#), November 27, 2012). [5]

Smaller, regional-based diaspora organizations tend to maintain exchanges with united front organs connected to their home areas, such as Guangdong or Henan ([Sino-Czech Economic Trade & Cultural Exchange Association](#), September 15, 2018; [Root in Henan](#), April 20, 2018). In the Czech Republic, the most prominent organizations connect to regional associations for Zhejiang and Fujian Provinces.

Zhejiang Diaspora Groups

In the Czech Republic, Qingtian diaspora leaders' ties to the CCP reach the center of the united front system. Zhou Lingjian (周灵建), a businessman and owner of the country's main Chinese-language newspaper, leads the Czech Qingtian Hometown Association (捷克青田同乡会, *Jieke Qingtian Tongxianghui*), established in 1999 ([Economic View](#), September 25, 2018; [China Overseas Chinese Network](#), February 14, 2017). Zhou was invited to the 2018 ACFROC conference in Beijing, attended by the full Politburo Standing Committee ([Prague Chinese Times](#), August 30, 2018). Zhou claims to have been friends with former President Václav Klaus dating back to 2002; and Zhou joined President Miloš Zeman's 2019 delegation to the PRC (see accompanying image) ([Economic View](#), September 25, 2018; [Seznam](#), March 18).

The association's honorary chair Chen Naike (陈乃科), now back in the PRC, has joined the Zhi Gong Party (致公党, *Zhi Gong Dang*) and serves as an NPC delegate, while holding several provincial united front positions including an ACFROC vice-chairmanship ([Zhi Gong Party](#), January 20, 2011; [Qingtian Wang](#), May 27). Another Czech Qingtian leader was a non-voting delegate at a 2017 CPPCC session ([Nouvelles d'Europe](#), March 5, 2017); and several of the association's members hold positions at the Czech reunification council, including its honorary chair Milan Sun (孙悦新, Sun Yuexin) ([Taiwan Scholar Association](#), July 1, 2019; [Qingtian Wang](#), October 17, 2019).

Fujian Diaspora Groups

Among Fujianese personages, James Wu (吴瑞珍, Wu Ruizhen) stands out for his engagement with PRC and Czech politics. Wu, and various organizations he leads both at the Czech and European levels, enjoy close ties with Fujian provincial and lower-level united front organs. Wu has also mediated interactions between Czech business and education circles and a Shaanxi-based, state-run trade association. [6] Wu has held united front positions in the PRC and holds a leadership position in a pan-European diaspora group ([European Federation of Fujianese Associations](#); [Sinopsis](#), June 19, 2018). In the Czech Republic, Wu's contacts have included sub-national level Czech lobbyists and politicians (such as a former mayor of a Prague district), as well as a former prime minister ([Sinopsis](#), June 19, 2018; [Prague Chinese Times](#), December 7, 2018; [CCTV](#), June 22, 2016). He

also mediates relations with the Czech Chamber of Commerce and Czech academia for PRC organs and businesses ([Prague Chinese Times](#), December 3, 2018).

Smaller region-based diaspora organizations likewise maintain exchanges with united front organs in their home areas, such as Guangdong or Henan ([Sino-Czech Economic Trade & Cultural Exchange Association](#), September 15, 2018; [Root in Henan](#), April 20, 2018).

Professional Associations

Beyond the entities mainly linked to one region, some engage with agencies of the party-state on professional, rather than geographically-defined, lines. Wang Wanming (汪万明), a Tianjin businessman first sent to the Czech Republic by the China Youth Travel Service (run by the Communist Youth League), is a former chair of the united front-linked Czech Chinese Business Federation (捷克华商联合会, *Jieke Huashang Lianhehui*) ([People's Daily Overseas Edition](#), July 18, 2019; [Europe-China Today](#), March 10, 2018). Wang currently leads the New Silk Road Chamber of Commerce and holds advisory positions with united front organs in Hunan and Shanghai ([Prague Chinese Times](#), June 2; [Czech Chinese Business Federation](#), November 15, 2018).



Image: The sign from a villa in the Prague 6 municipal district, in which several diaspora organizations have their headquarters. (Source: Author's photo, May 26)

Czech United Front Groups as Vessels for CCP Influence

Although the main Czech united front groups are direct interlocutors of the CCP's united front system, the local political engagement of some of their prominent figures mostly takes place through organizations in which they share leadership posts with Czech nationals linked to politics and media. [7] Often limited to the

local level, their role in Czech-PRC contacts has nevertheless also included participation in high-level delegations to the PRC.

Milan Sun leads the Czech-China Center, focused on cultural and business activities, together with Petr Petržílek, an adviser to the first deputy prime minister ([Deník N](#), November 12, 2018). Its leadership also includes a member of the Revolutionary Kuomintang (KMT), one of the United Front's eight minor parties ([Revolutionary KMT](#), February 28). The organization's leaders have joined two presidential delegations to the PRC, as well as one led by the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (Czech-China Center, [November 10](#), 2018; [April 30](#), [November 11](#), 2019). The group has co-organized several cultural events, which have involved Czech communist politicians and a CEFC-linked entity ([Sinopsis](#), July 20, 2019).

Wang Wanming's New Silk Road Chamber of Commerce includes a Czech media specialist close to the Czech Social Democratic Party and to a "conspiracy theory website" ([Lidovky](#), September 16, 2016). The chamber has mainly focused on educational exchange, leading several Czech university and business delegations to the PRC ([Hebei Normal University](#), January 8, 2018; [Hunan Normal University](#), January 11, 2018; [Czech Chinese Business Federation](#), November 15, 2018; [Prague Chinese Times](#), April 7, 2017). Wang has been appointed an international trade expert at the University of West Bohemia's New Technologies Research Center ([University of West Bohemia](#), undated). The chamber has also established a strategic partnership with Hebei Province ([Hebei Qiaolian](#), August 30, 2018).

"Coronaprop" and the CCP's Global Mobilization of United Front Groups

The success of the CCP's overseas Chinese work was on display in the mobilization of coopted diaspora groups during the COVID-19 pandemic—first organizing shipments of personal protective equipment (PPE) to, and then later from, China. [8] The CCP has conducted a coronavirus-themed propaganda effort that first covered up the epidemic, and then sought to portray the CCP as saving the world from it ([China Brief](#), January 29; [China Brief](#), April 1; [China Brief](#), June 24). This effort, sometimes called "coronaprop" in Europe, has demonstrated the effectiveness of united front tactics. Specifically, PPE donations (or sales) mediated by CCP-friendly figures helped to raise their profile, empower their propaganda, and influence proxies ([Aktuálně.cz](#), May 22).

PRC united front organs played a direct role in European coronaprop, with their Czech counterparts often active beyond the national level. [9] In a case that attracted rare mainstream media attention, Zhou Lingjian's Czech Qingtian Hometown Association was entrusted to deliver rice and PPE to Qingtianese in Italy on behalf of Qingtian united front organs. They failed at the PPE part: invoking emergency state powers, the Czech Ministry of Interior ordered police to raid Zhou's warehouse after discovering that a company had attempted to sell equipment in that warehouse to local hospitals at above market prices ([Aktuálně.cz](#), March

26). Zhou's association later continued distributing PPE among the diaspora, directly entrusted to do so in one case by the Zhejiang UFWD and ACFROC ([Prague Chinese Times](#), May 30).

The operation also involved James Wu, who established a European PPE distribution station with the help of the Fujian Province party secretary and the UFWD ([WeChat](#), April 13). The Czech-China Center and New Silk Road Chamber of Commerce donated PPE to Czech municipalities and institutions. In the chamber's case, the donation was made on behalf of the Hunan party committee and government ([Hlidací pes](#), May 6; [Prague Chinese Times](#), June 2).



Image: An October 2019 meeting between UFWD vice-head Xu Yousheng (许又声) and a European Federation of Fujianese Associations (EFFA) delegation in Beijing. EFFA co-founder James Wu stands first from right. (Image source: WeChat, October 13, 2019)

The European Projection of Czech Qiaowu

Czech united front groups have played an outsized role in some pan-European diaspora organizations, considering the relatively small size of the country and its Chinese community. Participation in European-level *qiaowu* has given these groups enhanced access to both central PRC organs and European politics. For example, Czech Qingtian diaspora leader Zhou Lingjian was among the founders of the Brussels-based European Chinese Youth Federation (欧洲华侨华人青年联合总会, *Ouzhou Huaqiao Huaren Qingnian Lianhe Zonghui*) and has chaired it since 2016 ([Faguo Qiaowang](#), May 18, 2011; [Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese](#), December 13, 2016). The organization's events have been attended by PRC and European political figures, to include: the All-China Youth Federation's secretary-general, a Zhi Gong Party vice-chair, the secretary-general of the European Parliament China Friendship Group, and a vice-chair of the Luxembourg parliament ([Faguo Qiaowang](#), May 18, 2011; [Guangming News](#), October 16, 2019; [Capital News](#), May 5, 2019; [Xinhua](#), May 17, 2017).

James Wu is one of the leaders of the European Federation of Fujianese Associations (欧洲福建侨团联合总会, *Ouzhou Fujian Qiaotuan Lianhe Zonghui*) (EFFA), founded in Italy in 2015. The organization maintains exchanges with agencies such as the UFWD, the ACFROC, and the Revolutionary KMT at the central and lower levels ([Southeastern Network: Hong Kong](#), April 9, 2018; WeChat, October 13, 14 and 17, 2019). In order to raise its “influence and status” in Europe, the EFFA granted honorary chairmanships to a former captain regent of San Marino and a former chairwoman of the Italian Chamber of Deputies ([Fujian Qiaobao](#) via Soubao Wang, October 8, 2015).

The pandemic also provided an opportunity for a European-level projection of the activity of the united front system’s Czech contacts. The EFFA donated PPE to an Italian town, while the European Parliament EU-China Friendship Group (a Czech-led informal organization whose interlocutors across the CCP influence apparatus include united front organs) distributed equipment at the parliament ([Olian News](#), April 17; [Literární noviny](#), April 7; [Sinopsis](#), November 26, 2019).

Conclusion

The CCP united front system’s cooption of diaspora organizations in continental Europe demonstrates how it can engage in political influence activities, even if the results are limited compared to the elite capture achieved through other means. Coopted diaspora groups help insert CCP politics into the Chinese community, with the leaders of the main organizations in regular contact with united front cadres, and local Chinese-language media aligned with PRC propaganda. They do more than this, however: through exchanges with mainstream political and other CCP-friendly figures, local united front groups help manage support for CCP policies, playing an auxiliary role in influence activities affecting the larger society. Under-the-radar interactions between provincial Chinese and local governments; influence on public perceptions of matters sensitive to the CCP, such as the COVID-19 crisis; control over local media in a minority language; and representation of the ethnic community in contacts with top political figures are all aspects of the politics of European countries over which the CCP has gained leverage through the united front system’s diaspora work.

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Notes

[1] Estimates of the number of “overseas Chinese” in the Czech Republic have generally given similar figures to Czech statistics that give the number of PRC passport holders with Czech residence permits, 8263 in 2020 ([Qingtian Wang](#), October 17, 2019; [Czech Interior Ministry](#), May 31). While these figures cannot be equated with the size of the “Chinese community,” one may argue they serve as an indicator of the order of magnitude in the Czech case.

[2] On influence activities at the local level, see [Sinopsis](#), October 22, 2018; China Brief, [June 26](#), [May 9](#), 2019.

[3] The Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic (旅捷华人联谊会, *Lü Jie Huaren Lianyihui*), interview with Dr. Zlata Černá, Prague, June 30.

[4] Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke (eds.), *The Chinese in Europe*, 1998; a handful of Chinese migrants arrived to Czechoslovakia after the Great War ([University of Hong Kong](#), 2002, pp. 224, 226, 230).

[5] Mette Thunø, “Chinese in Denmark”, in Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke (eds.), *The Chinese in Europe*, 1998, p. 180; Pál Nyiri, *Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia: a middleman minority in a transnational era*, 2007, p. 65.

[6] The Shaanxi branch of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (中国国际贸易促进委员会, *Zhongguo Guoji Maoyi Cujin Weiyuanhui*), an organ focusing on business and trade supporting CCP policy goals abroad ([China Brief](#), June 26, 2019; [Sinopsis](#), November 26, 2019).

[7] While not chiefly linked to diaspora organizations, the most prominent entity of this type involved in CCP influence activity also points to the long-term relevance of united front work abroad. The Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation, run by a former minister, supported by a Chinese SOE and a Czech PRC-invested conglomerate and active in the promotion of CCP initiatives within the Czech state ([China Brief](#), January 17), counts among its leaders a former overseas Chinese student once quoted with customary patriotic statements in an article in a magazine published by the Western Returned Scholar’s Association, a united front organ that liaises with students and scholars abroad ([Shenzhou Xueren](#), January 14, 2010). The chamber’s influence activities have included the promotion of CCP initiatives from a BRI “center” embedded in a Czech ministry ([Sinopsis](#), July 28, 2019) and its annual (now suspended) “China Investment Forum”, co-organized by an ILD unit, attended by prominent PRC politicians and the cream of Czech politics and business ([Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation](#); [Seznam zprávy](#), February 26).

[8] Local activities within this global operation were described for the case of Spain and Argentina by Juan Pablo Cardenal ([CADAL](#), May 11).

[9] For examples in Italy, Slovakia and Lithuania ([China Overseas Chinese Network](#), March 17; [Aktuality.sk](#), April 2; [Lietuvoje gyvenančių išėivių iš kinijos asociacija](#), February 16).

The CCP's United Front Network in Sweden

By Pär Nyrén

Introduction

Throughout the last few years, Sweden's relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) has grown more tense. With increasing concerns about trade and technology mirroring discussions in other Western countries, the Swedish-Chinese relationship has been further strained as a result of Beijing's kidnapping and subsequent refusal to release the Swedish citizen Gui Minhai (桂民海) ([China Brief](#), April 1). The PRC party-state has struggled to find support from other segments of Swedish society: according to a Pew poll last year, Swedes had the second most unfavorable views about China among 34 surveyed countries, trailing only Japan ([Pew Research Center](#), December 5, 2019). This presents a challenge for united front work—albeit one ameliorated so far by the general lack of awareness in Sweden of how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) operates at home and abroad.



Image: At a meeting in September 2019, Ye Pei-quan (chairman of the Swedish China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification) (left) presents Wan Gang (chairman of the China Zhigong Party) (right), with the gift of a Dalecarlian horse, a traditional symbol of Sweden.

(Image source: [Nordic Zhigong Association](#), September 10, 2019)

Gui Congyou (桂从友), the PRC Ambassador to Stockholm, has gained notoriety as a forceful defender of PRC policies, often by using threatening language. Despite coverage by domestic and international media of Ambassador Gui's "wolf warrior" diplomacy—as well as coverage of the downturn in Swedish-Chinese relations more broadly—the CCP's active united front work in Sweden has, until recently, avoided public attention. Similar to the functioning of the united front system elsewhere ([Australian Strategic Policy Institute](#), 2020), united front work in Sweden is to a large extent focused on what Ambassador Gui frequently calls establishing "harmonious diaspora associations" (和谐侨社, *hexie qiaoshe*) ([Bei-Ou Zhonghua Wang](#), June 5, 2018; PRC Embassy in Sweden, [December 30, 2018](#); [September 4, 2019](#)).

This concept dates back to the Hu Jintao - Wen Jiabao era, when the then-head of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office Li Haifeng (李海峰) explained that it was necessary to promote "harmonious diaspora associations," due to the fact that the proliferation of overseas Chinese associations had led to "complications" and insufficient "unity" ([PRC Government](#), June 21, 2007). In Sweden a wide variety of groups are affiliated with the united front system in some way or another, including:

- Hometown associations (同乡会, *tongxiang hui*);
- The Stockholm Overseas Chinese Service Center (斯德哥尔摩华助中心, *Sidege'ermo Hua Zhu Zhongxin*), which was founded in 2017 with authorization from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, a united front organ ([PRC Embassy in Sweden](#), October 20, 2017);
- Local branches of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association;
- Professional organizations, media outlets and other networks.

The Reunification Council and Its "Backbone Strength"

The Swedish China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (瑞典中国和平统一促进会, *Ruidian Zhongguo Heping Tongyi Cujinhui*), which was founded in 2005, serves as a central node in the Swedish united front community ([PRC Embassy in Sweden](#), February 1, 2005). The Reunification Council is a local offshoot of the CCP United Front Work Department's umbrella organization of the same name, which maintains chapters around the world and seeks to support both PRC annexation of Taiwan as well as other CCP policy ambitions ([China Brief](#), February 13, 2018; [China Brief](#), May 9, 2019).

Like its parent organization, the Swedish subsidiary is engaged in pro-CCP activism. While receiving a delegation from the PRC National People's Congress Ethnic Affairs Committee, Zong Jinbo (宗金波), one of the Reunification Council's honorary chairmen, bragged that his organization had mobilized protests during contentious episodes for the Chinese government: for example, in 2012 during heated tensions with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and in 2016 when the Hague Tribunal denied China's claims in the South China Sea ([Swedish Chinese National Association](#), May 27, 2019). In 2019, the Reunification Council also co-signed a public letter that condemned *Svenska nyheter*, a satirical news program on Swedish public

television, for allegedly insulting the Chinese people and “maliciously chang[ing] Chinese territory [by showing a map that left out Taiwan] and ridicul[ing] the national flag” ([Greenpost.se](https://www.greenpost.se), October 5, 2018). [1]

The individuals leading the Reunification Council command a broad network of other associations in the diaspora community. The Reunification Council’s chairman Ye Pei-quan (叶沛群) is also chairman of a Chinese language school in Stockholm, committee chairman of the Nordic Zhigong Association (*see below*), and chairman of the Swedish Chinese National Association (瑞典华人总会, *Ruidian Huaren Zonghui*). The above-mentioned Zong Jinbo, a PLA veteran ([Bei-Ou Huaren Wang](#), August 1, 2016), leads the Swedish Tianjin Association ([PRC Embassy in Sweden](#), February 17, 2018). Li Runsheng (李润生), another former honorary chairman, leads the Sweden Cantonese Chinese Association ([Sweden Cantonese Association](#), no date). Ye Kexiong (叶克雄), Ye Pei-quan’s uncle, is in charge of the Qingtian Association of Sweden ([Qingtian Association](#), no date), whose name refers to a Zhejiang county that is the ancestral home for a large portion of Sweden’s Chinese diaspora.

Ye Pei-quan has emphasized that “Chinese associations in Sweden must be united and avoid that some associations affect this unity [negatively] to promote their own interests.” [2] Ye’s own overlapping positions seem to mirror this spirit of “unity.” The nominally apolitical Swedish Chinese National Association (SCNA) has grown close to the Reunification Council, and Ambassador Gui himself has described the SCNA as the “backbone strength” (骨干力量, *gugan liliang*) of the Reunification Council ([PRC Embassy in Sweden](#), December 16, 2019). Despite these connections, the SCNA received 812,000 Swedish kronor (approximately \$93,000 U.S. dollars) in public grants from 2012 to 2017 ([MUCE](#), no date).



Image: A cover page from the Nordic Chinese Times, a Chinese-language newspaper in Sweden. The headline reads “The great cause of peaceful reunification makes the Chinese people powerful” (和平统一大业让华人有力可使, heping tongyi daye rang Huaren youli keshi). (Image source: Nordic Chinese Times, September 8, 2013.)

Party-Building by Another Name: the Nordic Zhigong Association

In September 2015 the SCNA hosted a visit from the Shanghai branch of the China Zhi Gong Party (中国致公党, *Zhongguo Zhigong Dang*), one of China’s eight so-called “democratic parties” that participate in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and join forces with the CCP as “friendship parties” ([CCP United Front Work Trial Regulations](#), September 23, 2015). One of the participants in this event was a man named Zhou Bin (周斌), a Zhi Gong Party member who two years prior had moved to Sweden. Still keen to “protect the organization’s interests,” Zhou suggested that the party should set up an organization in Sweden, a suggestion that reportedly was met with approval ([Shanghai People’s Political Consultative Conference](#), September 24, 2015).

A year and a half later, in March 2017, The Nordic Zhigong Association (北欧致公协会, *Bei-Ou Zhigong Xiehui*) was formally announced in Stockholm; the launch event included representatives from the five Nordic countries, attendees from Air China and ZTE’s offices in Stockholm, academics, and united front figures ([Nordic Zhigong Association](#), March 27, 2017). Although it shares a similar name with the Zhi Gong Party in China, the Stockholm-based organization claims to be an independent organization. Despite this, it maintains an identical slogan—“devote oneself to the public good, overseas Chinese dedicated to serving the country”

(致力为公, 侨海报国, *zhi li wei gong, qiaohai baoguo*)—and has expressed intent to utilize its deep connections with the Chinese party ([Youtube](#), April 8, 2017).

The China Zhi Gong Party's primary characteristic is that it mobilizes overseas and returned Chinese persons on behalf of the Chinese state. Under the leadership of its current chairman Wan Gang (万钢), who served as PRC Minister for Science and Technology in 2007–2008, the party has become increasingly focused on strengthening China's scientific base through foreign connections. Like its unofficial parent organization, the Nordic Zhigong Association (NZA) is also oriented towards the technology and business communities. The association is led by Cao Yihai (曹义海), a professor at the renowned Karolinska Institute, who stated at the time of the organization's founding that their members are "characterized by being highly educated and high quality" ([Nordic Zhigong Association](#), March 27, 2017).

Two years after the NZA's founding it claimed to have "more than 60 members, out of which more than 60 percent have PhDs" ([Nordic Zhigong Association](#), September 10, 2019). In the words of Ye Pei-quan, who is the association's Director General, "numerous science and technology talents are members of the [NZA]. They come from universities and research institutes across the Nordic region and are in charge of various scientific research programs. The [NZA] wants to build a bridge for science and technology between the Nordics and China, to introduce the results and research programs to the Fatherland" ([Nordic Zhigong Association](#), July 13, 2018).

Despite being evasive about its affiliation with the China Zhi Gong Party, the NZA has not shied away from expressing loyalty to the CCP. Following the conclusion of the CCP's 19th Congress in 2017, the association lauded the congress's success and declared that "all members of the [NZA]... firmly believe in the realization of the Chinese nation under the leadership of General Secretary Xi" ([Nordic Zhigong Association](#), October 19, 2017). Subsequently, in early 2018 the association participated in an embassy-organized seminar under the banner of "Studying the Spirit of the Party's 19th Congress, Promoting Sino-Swedish Cooperation in Science and Technology Innovation" ([Nordic Zhigong Association](#), February 3, 2018).



Image: At an event at the China Cultural Center in Stockholm in February 2018, PRC Ambassador Gui Congyou (second from right), Nordic Zhigong Association head Cao Yihai (third from right), and others participated in an embassy-organized seminar titled "Studying the Spirit of the 19th Party Congress, Promoting Sino-Swedish Cooperation in Science and Technology Innovation." (Image source: [Nordic Zhigong Association](#), February 3, 2018)

The Curious Case of the "Belt and Road Institute in Sweden"

Beyond the harmonious diaspora associations, there is one organization—despite its otherwise notorious status in Sweden—that Ambassador Gui can credibly refer to as his "Swedish friends" ([PRC Embassy in Sweden](#), July 28, 2019). This is the Belt and Road Institute in Sweden (referred to in Chinese as 瑞典"一带一路"执行小组 / Ruidian "Yidai Yilu" Zhixing Xiaozu, meaning "the Belt and Road Initiative Executive Small Group"), or BRIX. BRIX is composed of individuals who, on the face of it, make for strange bedfellows with the CCP: its founding members primarily come from the Swedish branch of the Germany-based Schiller Institute, a front organization of the so-called LaRouche Movement. [3]

BRIX's purpose is to promote Sweden's accession to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and to provide what it considers accurate information about the BRI ([BRIX](#), December 17, 2018). The Chinese embassy in Stockholm has developed close ties to BRIX and has financed at least one of their conferences ([Sveriges Radio](#), August 17, 2019). Ambassador Gui has participated in multiple BRIX seminars (PRC Embassy in Sweden, [May 22, 2019](#); [December 5, 2019](#); [April 29](#); [June 11](#)). Ulf Sandmark, chairman of both BRIX and the Swedish section of the Schiller Institute, has been invited as an economic "scholar" to talk about the BRI at a seminar arranged by the *Nordic Chinese Times* ([Bei-Ou Huaren Wang](#), November 28, 2019).

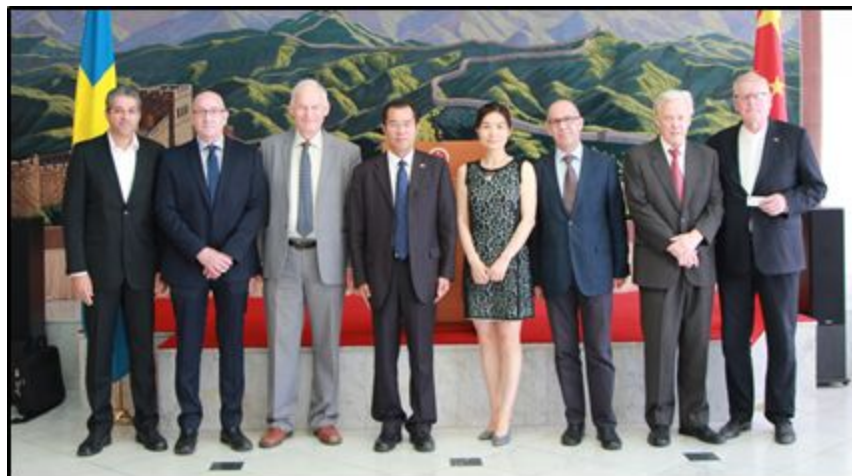


Image: Participants at a July 18, 2019 event held to promote China's Belt and Road Initiative. PRC Ambassador Gui Congyou (center left) attended the event; in this photo, he is flanked by Ulf Sandmark (third from left) and Lydia Liu (fourth from right), both leading figures of the Larouche Movement-associated Belt and Road Institute in Sweden. (Image source: [PRC Embassy in Sweden](#), July 19, 2018)

So far BRIX does not seem to have attracted much support. While the institute reports high attendance by foreign diplomats at its events ([BRIX](#), undated), media scrutiny of the institute has given rise to criticism. In August 2019 Swedish public radio raised public awareness of the institute and revealed that one of its leaders, Lydia Liu (刘芳), had extensive connections with United Front Work Department officials ([Sveriges Radio](#), August 17, 2019). Liu, who is also chairman of the Swedish Hubei and Hunan Association (瑞典两湖同乡会, *Ruidian Liang Hu Tongxianghui*) and a council member of the Stockholm-adjacent Nacka Municipality, was expelled from the Christian Democrats party shortly after the revelations ([Sveriges Television](#), November 9, 2019).

Swedish China observers have generally been baffled that embassy officials have chosen to associate themselves with the Schiller Institute—something widely seen as self-sabotage, given the organization's bad reputation. However, Schiller Institute-affiliated individuals in Sweden have proven themselves overtly willing to go along with the CCP's ambition to "make foreigners serve China" (洋为中用, *yang wei zhong yong*) [4].

A Daunting Theater for the Great United Front

With a high level of popular distrust of the PRC government in Sweden, united front actors have so far struggled to make a mark on mainstream society in the Nordic country. The embassy's choice to cooperate with BRIX—which signals its lack of more well-established partners—has sparked ridicule rather than mobilizing support for PRC policies. Meanwhile, organizations directed toward the Chinese diaspora in Sweden have successfully been "harmonized" by pro-CCP individuals and organizations, something that until

recently took place without attracting attention from the public. Given that united front actors operated without any scrutiny for so long, it would be wise to assume that much of their work has still not been revealed.

Pär Nyrén is a fellow at the Stockholm Free World Forum and non-resident fellow at Sinopsis. This article has been produced as a part of a research project for Sinopsis and is based on a Swedish-language [paper](#) published by the Stockholm Free World Forum.

Notes

[1] *The Green Post* is run singlehandedly by Xuefei Chen Axelsson (陈雪霏), a former Stockholm correspondent for *People's Daily Online* ([Greenpost](#), undated; [People's Daily](#), May 10, 2010), and has previously had an article-sharing agreement with *China News Service* ([Bei-ou Zhonghua Wang](#), April 26, 2019).

[2] *Nordic Chinese Times* operates under the “guidance” (指导, *zhidao*) of *China News Service* and cooperates with the *People's Daily* overseas edition ([Nordic Chinese Times](#), undated).

[3] The LaRouche Movement, named after its founder Lyndon LaRouche, is a political network that traces its origins to the United States in the 1970s. It started out as a far left, Soviet-supporting organization that has consistently been a vehicle for spreading conspiracy theories and has been described by former members as sectarian. The movement has at times been surveilled by the Swedish Secret Service, primarily during the 1970s ([Government of Sweden](#), February 1, 2002). Currently the movement, which nowadays has a meagre following, is animated by questioning climate change and supporting China's Belt and Road Initiative.

[4] Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

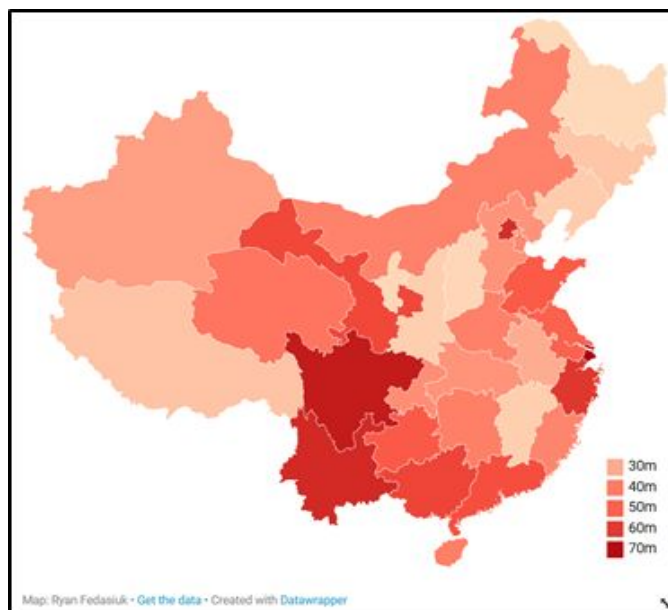
Putting Money in the Party's Mouth: How China Mobilizes Funding for United Front Work

By Ryan Fedasiuk

Introduction

Over the past two years, a series of government and think tank reports have shed light on the united front, the collection of organizations the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leverages to co-opt non-Party institutions and influence minority groups at home and overseas ([USCC](#), August 2018; [ASPI](#), June 2020). Facing heightened scrutiny, People's Republic of China (PRC) officials have repeatedly insisted that there is “no factual basis” to Western reporting on China’s influence operations, and accused foreign analysts of “maliciously hyping up the normal foreign exchanges of the United Front Work Department” ([MFA](#), June 2020; [PRC Embassy in Sweden](#), August 2019).

**Figure 1. Regions That Spend the Most on United Front Work
(2019 USD or Last Year Available)**



(Source: Compiled by the author.)

However, there is a universal truth known to government bureaucrats in every country: budgets speak louder than words. As this paper demonstrates, the scale and scope of funding for the united front system belie the Chinese government’s claims about its importance and function. This article synthesizes information from more than 160 budget and expense reports from national and regional PRC government and Communist Party entities. **[1]** It finds that organizations central to China’s national and regional united front systems spent more than \$2.6 billion in 2019, exceeding funding for China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs ([MFA](#), 2020). **[2]** Nearly \$600 million (23 percent) was set aside for offices designed to influence foreigners and overseas Chinese communities.

Defining the Inner Circle of the United Front System

To carry out united front work, the CCP funds a network of dozens of organizations spanning Chinese government, industry, and civil society. United Front Work Departments (UFWDs) of CCP committees at the central, provincial, and local levels of government coordinate activities in each administrative region, municipality, district, or county in China. But amid a tangled web of state, Party, and nominally non-governmental entities, four organizational bureaucracies stand out for their size and importance to united front work. They are each controlled, directly or indirectly, by UFWDs.

- *Chinese People's Political Consultative Conferences* (中国人民政治协商会议, *Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi* or 政协, *zhengxie*) (CPPCCs) serve as platforms for members of China's eight minor political parties to participate in Chinese government activities in an advisory capacity. CPPCCs are not official Party or government organizations, but political brokerages controlled indirectly by the UFWD. They are also responsible for recruiting non-Party members to take positions in government, so as to lend credibility to the Chinese political system ([Qinghai Municipal UFWD](#), 2012). The Chinese government frequently points to minority party members in CPPCCs to deflect criticism that China is a one-party state ([PRC Embassy in Papua New Guinea](#), undated). In internal discussions, united front leaders are more blunt: selecting non-Party intellectuals to serve in government preserves the appearance of a "reasonable structure of the leadership team, but also helps expand the Party's ruling resources and consolidates the Party's ruling foundation" ([Hexi District UFWD](#), 2017).
- *Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commissions* (民族宗教事务委员会, *Minzu Zongjiao Shiwu Weiyuanhui*) (ERACs) formulate and implement the Communist Party's ethnic and religious policies within China. Specifically, they monitor and censor religious groups banned by Beijing while controlling the appointment of clergy members for sanctioned religious organizations ([U.S. State Department](#), 2019). In the course of united front work, ERACs "resist religious penetration" of Chinese universities by blocking communication channels for evangelical students and missionary workers ([China University of Petroleum UFWD](#), June 2020). ERACs are government organizations, but they also double as Party entities, sharing the same offices, staff, and budgets as the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureaus of UFWDs. [3]
- *Foreign and Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices* (外事侨务办公室, *Waishi Qiaowu Bangongshi*) (FOCAOs) are government offices that coordinate provincial and local Party organizations' outreach to foreigners and overseas Chinese, especially residents of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. [4] The united front's overseas mission is chiefly concerned with promoting the "reunification of the motherland" ([Zhejiang Provincial UFWD](#), 2014). When contacting representatives from the "Three Compatriots" (Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan), the united front "actively promotes China's opening-up policy, introduces preferential policies and procedures for investing in businesses and factories in the mainland, and introduces funds, technology, talents, equipment, and advanced technology..." ([CPPCC Work Manual](#), 2003). FOCAOs coordinate with federations of Chinese students who have returned from overseas study, as well as Chinese student and scholar associations (CSSAs) and Chinese professional associations (CPAs) based abroad ([CSET](#), July 2020).

- *Federations of Industry and Commerce* (工商业联合会, *Gongshangye Lianhehui*) (FICs) are nominally non-governmental organizations, which embed Party committees within private enterprises and mobilize Chinese entrepreneurs' investments in ways that are consistent with the Party's goals. The constitution of the national All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, for example, stipulates that FICs should "guide members to actively participate in China's economic construction" and "recommend political arrangements for representatives of the business community" ([ACFIC](#), 1997, pg. 1,229).

The united front's control of these organizations is evident at every level of Chinese government. They issue joint press releases, co-host events, and release financial documents simultaneously, sometimes as part of the same spreadsheet or PDF file as that of the local UFWD ([Yantian District UFWD](#), 2018; [State Council Press Release](#), September 2019; [Henan Provincial UFWD](#), 2014; [Weihui Municipal UFWD](#), 2019). But perhaps the clearest signal of their importance to the united front system is found in their overlapping leadership structures—a common practice for key Party figures. The ministers and deputy ministers of UFWDs concurrently serve as the directors and secretaries of party committees within CPPCCs, ERACs, FOCAOs, and FICs, as demonstrated in Table 1. [5]

Table 1. United Front Ministers Hold Concurrent Leadership Positions in Government and NGOs

Level of Government	Position in the Communist Party of China			
	Minister of the UFWD	Deputy Ministers of the UFWD		
	Concurrent Position in Chinese Government or NGO			
	Vice Chair of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	Director of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission	Director of the Foreign and Overseas Chinese Affairs Office	Executive Vice Chair of the Federation of Industry and Commerce
Central Government	You Quan	Wang Zuo'an	Xu Yousheng	Xu Lejiang
Shanghai	Zheng Gangmiao	Wang Xiaohan	Wang Jue	Zhao Fuxi
Sichuan	Tian Xiangli	Zhang Fuguo	Su Wen	Chen Quan
Yunnan	Zhang Guohua	Li Siming	Yang Jinkun	Zhao Minghui
Beijing	No Overlap	Zhong Baili	Liu Chunfeng	Zhao Yujin
Zhejiang	No Overlap	Luo Bingwen	Wang Xiaofeng	Chen Hao
Guangxi	Xu Shaochuan	Nong Rong	Shi Donglong	Liu Changlin
Gansu	Ma Tingli	Ma Hucheng	Ji Anyue	Zhao Shaozhi
Guangdong	Huang Ningsheng	Li Xiuying	Pang Guomei	Lei Biao

Adding the budgets of these five organizations (UFWDs, CPPCCs, ERACs, FOCAOs, and FICs) is a conservative, if incomplete way to estimate Chinese funding for united front work, including domestic and overseas influence operations. Dozens of smaller organizations not included in this paper, such as

federations of overseas returnees, schools of socialism, and Confucius Institutes, are also part of the united front system and report to UFWDs ([Foreign Policy](#), October 2019). Nonetheless, contrasting spending among these five organizations nationally and across each of China’s 31 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions (a total of 160 organizations) provides a minimum estimate for united front spending, and clarifies the structures and priorities of organizations behind China’s influence operations.

Central Government Spending on United Front Work

The Ministry of Finance publishes annual budget documents for most Chinese government and Communist Party entities, but not the Central UFWD. Budgets are available, however, for the other organizations that form the inner circle of the United front system. [6] Together, their spending amounts to \$1.4 billion per year—nearly as much as China’s Ministry of Public Security ([MPS](#), 2019).

Table 2. Yearly Central United Front Spending Tops \$1.4 Billion (USD) Per Year

Entity (English)	Entity (Chinese)	Year Available	Public Budget (USD)
Central United Front Work Department	中央统战部	N.A.	Not published, likely over \$400 million
Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference	中国人民政治协商会议全国委员会	2019	\$131 million
State Ethnic Affairs Commission	国家民族事务委员会	2019	\$903 million
State Administration of Religious Affairs	国家宗教事务局	N.A.	Removed
Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council	国务院侨务办公室	2017	\$359 million
All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce	中华全国工商业联合会	2019	\$19 million
Total Budget of the Central Government’s United Front System			At least \$1.4 billion, likely more than \$1.8 billion

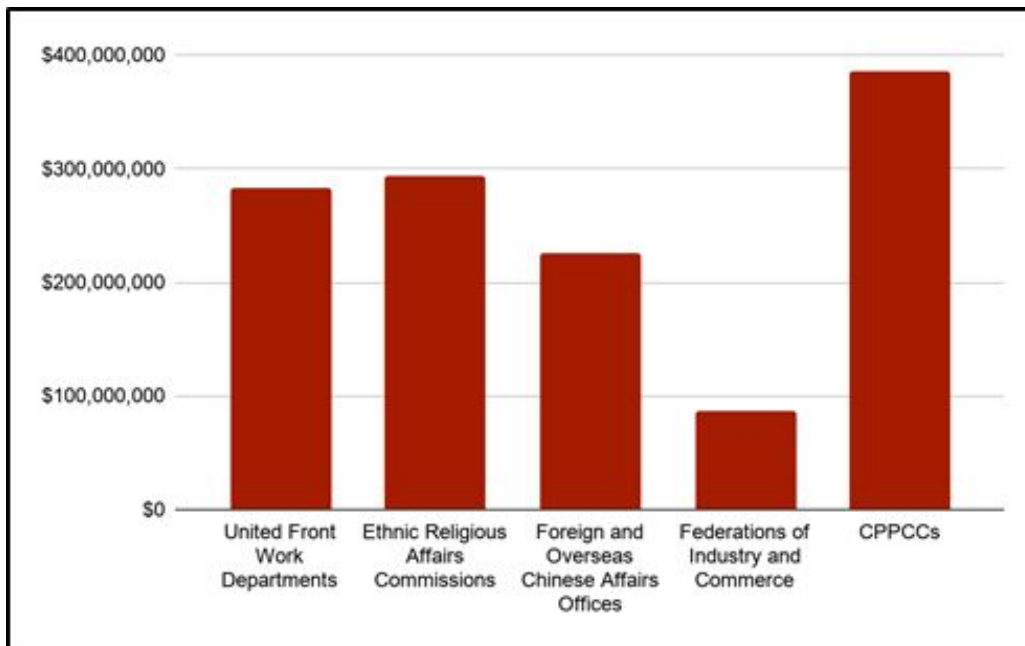
If funding for the Central UFWD mirrors trends in funding at the provincial level, then it likely exceeds \$400 million each year. [7] Adding this estimate would bring the central government’s annual spending on united front work to at least \$1.8 billion. However, the Central UFWD’s budget is likely much higher. The scope of its mission is broader than that of regional UFWDs: it oversees re-education work in Xinjiang and Tibet,

coordinates overseas technology transfer efforts, and is responsible for training the next generation of cadres to fill the ranks of the national Chinese government.

Regional Spending on United Front Work

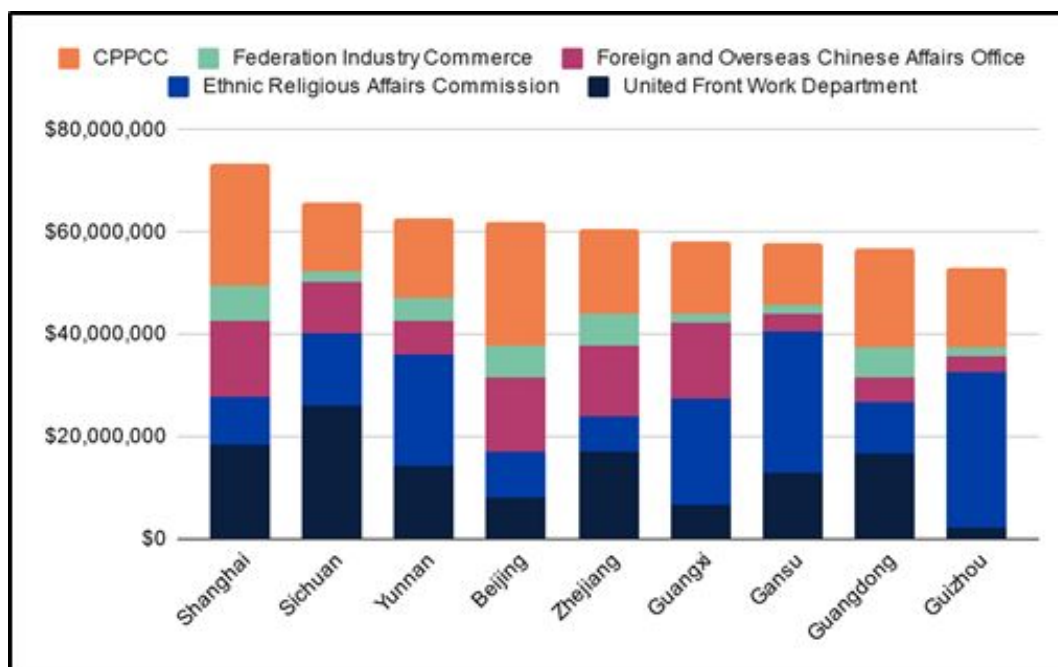
Across China's 31 administrative regions, spending on united front work exceeds \$1.3 billion annually, on par with regional CCP spending on propaganda. CPPCCs spend the most money of any entities in the united front system (\$386 million), followed by ERACs (\$293 million), UFWDs (\$283 million), and FOCAOs (\$226 million). FICs have the smallest budgets, amounting to \$87 million per year.

Figure 2. Provincial Spending on the United Front System (2019 USD or Last Year Available)



Funding for the united front system varies in each administrative region in China, from \$21 million in Heilongjiang to \$73 million in Shanghai. A mix of wealthy, strategically important areas (Shanghai, Beijing, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Sichuan) and ethnically and religiously diverse areas (Yunnan, Guangxi, Gansu, Guizhou) top the list of regions by spending.

Figure 3. Regions That Spend the Most on United Front Work (2019 USD or Last Year Available)



Influence Efforts at Home and Abroad

Ethnic and religious minorities bear the brunt of the united front’s influence efforts inside China. Offices responsible for religious persecution spend upwards of \$1.2 billion on related activities each year. Unsurprisingly, the five regions that spend the most on ethnic and religious affairs (Guizhou, Gansu, Yunnan, Guangxi, and Inner Mongolia) tend to have significantly lower populations of Han Chinese and higher populations of ethnic and religious minorities, relative to national averages. ERACs also play a more dominant role in their united front systems; whereas ERACs accounted for 23 percent of united front spending nationwide, in these five regions they accounted for 43 percent—twice the share—of united front spending. Readers might be surprised at how low Xinjiang (20th; \$5.2 million) and Tibet (23rd; \$4.7 million) rank in ERAC spending. One explanation could be that the Central UFWD has established bureaus dedicated to pouring central government resources into these areas, which likely are not reflected in local budget documents ([Guancha News](#), September 2018).

Foreigners and overseas Chinese are also major targets of the united front. Collectively, the Chinese government equips the central OCAO and regional FOCAOs with \$585 million each year. Wealthy coastal regions such as Shanghai, Beijing, Zhejiang, and Shandong dedicate larger shares of funding to their FOCAOs, relative to other regions.

In their day-to-day operations, FOCAOs are responsible for inviting and receiving prominent foreigners in China, training cadres to carry out united front work overseas, and promoting “overseas Chinese-related propaganda” ([Zhejiang Provincial UFWD](#), June 2020; [Fengtai District UFWD](#), January 2019). The budget

documents of some FOCAOs also confirm that they coordinate with “national security and intelligence departments” (国家安全及保密部门, *guojia anquan ji baomi bumen*) to “supervise and inspect the implementation of foreign affairs discipline and foreign-related confidentiality systems” ([Jiangxi Provincial FOCAO](#), February 2019). FOCAOs also coordinate with Chinese student and scholar associations and overseas professional associations to promote “scientific and technological cooperation and talent development” ([Fengtai District UFWD](#), January 2019).

While FOCAOs attempt to influence communities in other countries, they are also responsible for monitoring and censoring what the Chinese government considers to be foreign interference in China. Published in the early 2000s, a 1,700-page instruction manual for the national CPPCC dictated that united front officials should “resolutely oppose any conspiracy to create ‘two Chinas,’ ‘one China, one Taiwan,’ or ‘Taiwanese independence,’” and detailed explicit strategies and tasks the united front should adopt in the Hu Jintao era ([CPPCC Work Manual](#), 2003, Chapter 3). According to more recent Communist Party work committee instruction manuals, many of the same strategies are still deployed under Xi Jinping’s leadership. [8]

Conclusion

Chinese officials maintain that the united front system is a benign network of administrative organizations, and that the PRC’s foreign policy is based on “mutual respect and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs” ([PRC Embassy in Sweden](#), August 2019; [ABC](#), June 2020). If this really were the case, regional governments probably would not classify their united front spending as secret (涉密部门, *shemi bufen*) or refuse to disclose the structure of government offices ostensibly reserved for public diplomacy ([Jiangxi UFWD](#), February 2018; [Jilin FAO](#), 2020).

At the same time, some Western observers have questioned the importance of the united front system relative to other organizations in China. That regional governments in China budget nearly as much for united front work (\$1.3 billion annually) as they do for CCP propaganda indicates how highly the Party values the united front as a tool for both domestic and foreign influence.

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Notes

[1] In every instance, organizations’ budgets were equal to their spending—a textbook example of the “use it or lose it” nature of government funding.

[2] Budget documents were collected for 2019 or the last year available. About three-quarters of budget figures were from 2019, and all others from 2018. The budget estimates presented in this paper should be considered a floor for United front spending. In reality, funding for China’s United front system is likely much

higher. No data is available for the Central United front Work Department, and some regional governments classify details about the organization and spending of organizations involved in United front work as secret.

[3] For example, the budget documents for the ERAC in Shaanxi clarify it is also the Religious Affairs Bureau of the Shaanxi UFWD [陕西省民族事务委员会(省宗教局)2017年部门决算说明], <http://archive.vn/0V7UI>. Similarly, the Huizhou UFWD website hosts the budget documents of all its constituent organizations, including the Huizhou ERAC/Religious Affairs Bureau [2019年惠州市民族宗教事务局部门预算公开], <http://archive.vn/rB7kL>.

[4] Whereas deputy ministers of UFWDs previously served as heads of OCAOs in every region of China, they are now starting to serve as directors of the new, broader FOCAOs. For example, see Shi Donglong in Guangxi, “Secretary of the Party Group of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Autonomous Region...” [自治区外事办党组书记...], *Foreign Affairs Office of the Guangxi Autonomous Region*, July 30, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20200707220528/http://wsb.gxzf.gov.cn/xwyw_48149/szyw_48151/t1701128.shtml; or Zhou Jing in Ruian, “Leading Member of the Foreign Affairs and Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the People's Government of Ruian City” [瑞安市人民政府外事侨务办公室领导成员], *Ruian Government Information Catalogue*, June 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20200707220500/http://xxgk.ruian.gov.cn/art/2018/6/7/art_1413231_18475094.html.

[5] Duties assigned to Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commissions are split among two entities at the central government level: the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (SEAC) and the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). Wang Zuoran, Deputy Minister of the Central UFWD, heads SARA. Additionally, in the central government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remains separate from the OCAO, which was absorbed into the Central UFWD in 2018.

[6] At the central level of government, SARA is distinct from SEAC. At the regional level, these entities are usually combined into ERACs. However, after it was absorbed into the Central UFWD, SARA removed any trace of its budget documents from its website.

[7] On average, the local UFWD accounts for only about 22 percent of spending on the broader United front system in each province or region.

[8] See example strategies and guidance for carrying out united front work in “Peking University Party Branch Work Instruction Manual (Draft for Comment)” [北京大学党支部工作指导手册 (征求意见稿)], December 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200707231607/http://student.coe.pku.edu.cn/docs/2019-08/20190823134035407054.pdf>.
