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CHINA IN CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

## Unified message, rhizomatic delivery

### A preliminary analysis of PRC/CCP influence and the united front in Switzerland

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#### Summary and key findings

This study sets out to trace some of the personal and institutional networks used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to influence society and economic and political circles in Switzerland. These efforts address issues sensitive from a CCP point of view (Tibet, Taiwan, Xinjiang etc.), but also aim to shape the image of China in Switzerland overall. The focus is on Swiss-based actors, who appear to be co-opted, and, in a classic pattern, might or might not be aware of their co-optation. The study highlights the grey zones that these tactics of influence and sometimes interference are conducted in and the rhizomatic manner by which a unified message from various actors in Beijing gets projected into a target society like Switzerland.

We distinguish two different target groups, with China's embassy and the consulate apparently functioning as important nodes of coordination and communication in the effort to silence critical voices and normalize China as a legitimate source of normativity in the global arena despite continuing and even increasing ideological divides. The first is united front organizations and related bodies affiliated with the propaganda system or the external affairs system. These are active in Switzerland targeting and catering to overseas Chinese, regardless of nationality. This part reveals a vivid and active scene in Switzerland. The study highlights two associations that assemble considerable parts of the network. While the Swiss Association of Merchants and Entrepreneurs of Chinese Origin (sec. 1.1) brings together influential individuals with positions in united front organizations, the Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations in Switzerland (sec. 1.2) assembles directly associations and represents an effort to unite the united front in Switzerland. Science, technology and professional associations appear particularly important in the Swiss context and we discuss them at some length, with special attention given to the Chinese Association of Science and Technology Switzerland (sec. 1.3). Linked to the latter are the Chinese student and scholars associations at Swiss universities, which are directly part of the united front system, while

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the more recent establishment of alumni associations of various Chinese universities in Switzerland seems to be guided from their home institutions (sec. 1.4). The hometown associations cater mainly to the respective Overseas Chinese communities. Although there are personal overlaps with united front organizations, they seem, to varying degree but overall, less actively oriented towards shaping the broader discourse in Swiss society than is the case in other European countries. The (Swiss-led) European Jiangxi Hometown Association, however, stands out, since it leads to the platform *EurAsia Info*. This platform has ties to the propaganda system and cooperates with the China News Service, which is directly under the United Front Work Department (sec. 1.5). Brief discussions of two individuals who seem to occupy influential positions, but appear less embroiled with the associations assembled in the Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations in Switzerland, follow (sec. 1.6). The first part ends with selected examples of more local associations, which it is important to mention in order to complement the picture and thereby revealing the spectrum of organizations active in Switzerland (sec. 1.7).

Swiss-based actors who are less rooted in the Overseas Chinese communities, but speak to society, economy and politics more broadly and in many ways more effectively constitute the second target group. The question is to what extent the Chinese party-state co-opts these actors. In this part, the ambition is not to be as comprehensive as possible, but to highlight demonstrable points of contact between some typical actors, on the one side, and entities related to the CCP, on the other side. Here, many different systems of the Chinese party-state involved in influence operations are brought into the picture, the united front being merely one of them and often not the most important one. The positive messaging about China that emerges from these constellations is evident. The selected cases are typical for the range of involved or targeted actors, which includes high-level politicians, national associations, influential civil society actors as well as more local, more bottom-up and often personal initiatives, also revealing different degrees of exposure to PRC/CCP influence. The Swiss-Chinese Association typifies the national friendship organization that one would find in many other countries. It is notable for its connection to what it considers its counterpart in the PRC, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, and its access to high-level Chinese politicians. At the same time, it is well connected into Swiss politics, particularly through the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-China, while the activities of some of its board members' private businesses overlap considerably with those of the association (sec. 2.1). Also intertwined with the Parliamentary Group is the Swiss Trade Association. Across many years, its leadership has engaged with the PRC and struck connections with the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, a united front body (sec. 2.2). Many cantons interact with the PRC and it does therefore not astonish that there are points of contact. The study briefly looks at the Cantons of Schaffhausen and Geneva, focusing on the realms of economic promotion and engagement with the Belt and Road Initiative, respectively (sec. 2.3). Not all points of contact are as official and national as these examples might suggest. We therefore take up one example of a more civil-society dimension that, however, still leads us to interactions with the united front and considerable access to the Swiss embassy in the PRC (sec. 2.4). Finally, the study addresses the fact that several of the largest Swiss-based multinational companies feature individual board members who also are members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The connection promises to provide access to the Chinese market, but research has emphasized how intricately this institution is a part of the united front system, which the Swiss case to some extent confirms given the activities that some of these board members unfold, reaching far into Swiss society and politics (sec. 2.5).

The target groups discussed in the two parts of this study appear to operate largely in parallel worlds, perhaps meeting from time to time at events hosted by the embassy or the consulate, but there are few direct links between them and it is unclear to what extent the two groups are even aware of each other. Still, some such links could be established in this study and, in that case, they would usually come to represent an important node in the rhizome. This is the first-ever study to examine PRC/CCP influence and united front activities in Switzerland. It contributes to the emerging specialist research literature on PRC/CCP influence through a variety of actors as well as on the united front and its global presence in select countries. It might be helpful to provide a summary of the key findings in advance:

1. There is a hitherto little understood lively scene of united front organizations in Switzerland, largely targeting and catering to the Overseas Chinese community, delivering a unified message about the motherland and uniting the diaspora ideologically. The influence thus exerted seems focused and therefore of limited immediate significance for the overall assessment of the Swiss case.
2. Although the phenomenon of rivaling factions within Overseas Chinese communities is known, it is rarer to get a glimpse at publicly documented internal conflict among united front actors such as the subsection on the Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations in Switzerland shows. The Swiss case is also notable for the apparent absence of the Swiss Association for the Peaceful Reunification of China in this attempt to unite the united front in a target society.
3. A sector in Switzerland of obviously considerable significance to the united front is science and technology, which raises questions of knowledge and technology transfer and talent recruitment efforts. More research should investigate this sector in Switzerland, but also its transnational dimension at the level of the European Union.
4. Several Swiss-based actors such as the Swiss Chinese Association or the Swiss Trade Association demonstrably operate under the assumption of a false equivalence, mistaking CCP-controlled bodies for civil-society associations and for their “counterpart.” This finding points to the need for increased awareness building at all levels of Swiss society, economy and politics, and establishing a more solid knowledge base on the structure and functioning of the Chinese party-state.
5. While many of the influence efforts appear to be of minor significance when looked upon in each individual case, the amount of efforts, the systematic though rhizomatic nature, and the unified message hint at larger patterns that are likely to entail serious consequences only cumulatively and over a longer period of time.

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## 0 Introduction

The influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is a matter of concern in many parts of the world. Several recent books and reports discuss the topic. Examples are Suryadinata (2017) for Southeast Asia, Lo et al. (2019) for Hong Kong, Brady (2017) for New Zealand, Hamilton (2018) for Australia and Manthorpe (2019) for Canada.<sup>1</sup> The latest and most comprehensive attempt to document PRC/CCP influence in “Western countries”, with much material on Europe, is Hamilton and Ohlberg (2020).<sup>2</sup> While it is important to learn about the manifestations of PRC/CCP influence operations on the ground in target societies, their descriptions need to factor in the current organizational architecture of the Chinese party-state.<sup>3</sup> Research literature emphasizes the importance of systems in this architecture, notably “external affairs, propaganda and ideology, united front work, military and security, and economic and finance”.<sup>4</sup> Brady (2003) is an early work discussing the external affairs system.<sup>5</sup> The CCP uses all of these systems for its influence operations.<sup>6</sup> Distinguishing between the different systems, however, is crucial for understanding the institutional dynamics of the Chinese party-state, its tension between fragmentation and integration, and how it is organized and what tasks are assigned to its different units.

Hence, the united front work system (统一战线工作系统), or united front system (统一战线系统) in short, ranks as one system besides several others. It is under the guidance of the Central United Front Leading Small Group (中央统战工作领导小组, established in 2015),<sup>7</sup> headed by Wang Yang 汪洋, the fourth-ranked member of the Politburo Standing Committee. Its most important platform is the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中国人民政治协商会议), while much of the day-to-day work is entrusted to the United Front Work Department (UFWD, 中央统一战线工作部), “a CCP Central Committee department that coordinates and carries out united front work.”<sup>8</sup> Like actors in the other systems, the alliance of actors, associations and entities assembled in the system of the united front operates in

<sup>1</sup>Leo Suryadinata, *The Rise of China and the Chinese Overseas: A Study of Beijing’s Changing Policy in Southeast Asia and Beyond* (Iseas Publishing, 2017); Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, Steven Chung-Fun Hung and Jeff Hai-Chi Loo (eds), *China’s New United Front Work in Hong Kong: Penetrative Politics and Its Implications* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Anne-Marie Brady, *Magic Weapons: China’s Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping* (Wilson Center, 2017); Clive Hamilton, *China’s Influence Activities: What Canada Can Learn from Australia* (Macdonald-Laurier Institute, 2018); Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia* (Hardie Grant, 2018); Jonathan Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada* (Cormorant Books, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: Exposing how the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World* (Oneworld Publications, 2020).

<sup>3</sup>To refer to the “Chinese Party-state” is analytically double-edged. As a shorthand, it risks eliding important differences between the party and the state that might be helpful for analyzing the phenomenon in question. Yet, it is useful in that it conveys the primacy of the party over the state in the PRC and emphasizes that party and state organs indeed often conduct influence operations in concert.

<sup>4</sup>See: Mark Stokes, “Chinese Authoritarian Influence in the United States”, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, ed. Hsu Szu-Chien and J. Michael Cole (Eastbridge, 2020), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>See: Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

<sup>6</sup>See: Stokes, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup>For the leading small groups (领导小组) and the greater role they play under Xi Jinping, see Tsai Wen-hsuan and Zhou Wang, “Integrated Fragmentation and the Role of Leading Small Groups in Chinese Politics”, *The China Journal* 82, July (2019), pp. 1–22.

<sup>8</sup>Alex Joske, *The Party Speaks for You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front System*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute: International Cyber Policy Centre Policy Brief 32 (2020), p. 6.



the conceptual space between influence and interference.<sup>9</sup> This includes issues such as cultural and political influence, the monitoring of the diaspora and notably the Tibetan and Uyghur communities, science and technology transfer, and the facilitation of intelligence work. Joske describes the aim of the united front as “co-opting and manipulating elites, influential individuals and organizations” in an attempt “to shape discourse and decision-making.”<sup>10</sup>

The united front is a top priority of the current regime. On 30 November 2020, the Politburo of the CCP Central Committee (中共中央政治局) held a meeting chaired by CCP General-Secretary Xi Jinping 习近平, at which it discussed the “Regulations” (条例) from 2015 concerning the united front.<sup>11</sup> As it has done in the past and in line with corresponding statements by leaders since Mao Zedong 毛泽东, the Politburo quoted Mao’s 1939 reference to the united front as a “magic weapon” (法宝), and added that it is an “inevitable requirement” (必然要求) for the “new era” (新时代). The whole Party, the Politburo made clear, is to pursue united front tactics, while party committees at all levels should study and implement the “Regulations.”<sup>12</sup> The “Regulations” from 2015 unequivocally state that the united front targets influential people outside the Party (Art. 2), spell out the tasks and duties of the central and local party committees (Art. 5–6) and the UFD (Art. 7–9), specify the supervisory role of the Central United Front Leading Small Group (Art. 10), but also include articles specifically regarding science and higher education (Art. 18), industry and commerce (Art. 25–28), or the CPPCC (Art. 38).<sup>13</sup>

There is some research literature on the united front. Van Slyke (1967) and Groot (2004) are classic academic studies.<sup>14</sup> The latter builds on the corresponding, but much more detailed, PhD thesis by Groot, published in 1997.<sup>15</sup> These studies are very helpful for understanding the historical development of the united front from the 1920s onwards, as a tool to fight the enemy; its late 1970s reinvention in concert with the reform and opening up policy; and several of its evolving general working mechanisms. Historically, Groot characterizes its “fundamental principle” as simply to “rally as many allies as possible in order to achieve a common cause, usually to defeat a common enemy.”<sup>16</sup> The defining dividing line between CCP “allies” and “enemies” primarily is the one between friendly non-party members, on the one side, and dissociative or resisting non-party members, on the other side. This is not about PRC citizens versus foreigners, although the Party claims special access to its citizens as well as to overseas ethnic Chinese. The united front has been a central element of the Chinese party-state in one form or another throughout its existence. In the last decade, however, it has under-

<sup>9</sup>For a general analysis on political interference, while not focusing on the united front specifically, see: Matt Schrader, *Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries* (Alliance for Securing Democracy, 2020)

<sup>10</sup>Joske, *op. cit.*, p. 6. See also: Anne-Marie Brady, “On the Correct Use of Terms”, *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information* 19: 9 (2019), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup>See: “中国共产党统一战线工作条例（试行）”, 人民网, 23<sup>rd</sup> Sep 2015.

<sup>12</sup>See: “中共中央政治局召开会议 审议《军队政治工作条例》《中国共产党统一战线工作条例》和《中国共产党党员权利保障条例》 中共中央总书记习近平主持会议”, 人民网, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov 2020.

<sup>13</sup>See: “中国共产党统一战线工作条例”, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup>Lyman P. Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends: The United Front in Chinese Communist History* (Stanford University Press, 1967); Gerry Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Party, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony* (Routledge, 2004).

<sup>15</sup>See: Gerry Groot, “Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Party’s United Front Work, Minor Parties and Groups, Hegemony and Corporatism”, PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, Center for Asian Studies, 1997.

<sup>16</sup>Groot, *Managing Transitions*, *op. cit.*, p. xii.



gone many changes in terms of the scope of its tasks, the inscription of its policy into institutions, and their positioning within the party-state architecture. Under Xi Jinping, the united front has been vamped up considerably in terms of scope, resources (budget, personnel) and importance.<sup>17</sup>

Platforms like *sinopsis.cz* and the Jamestown Foundation's *China Brief* offer analyses for specialists and the interested public and have documented and commented on the recent changes of the united front. This research conveys a strong sense that united front work and respective tactics have to be taken seriously.<sup>18</sup> The united front's actions might seem marginal and far from constituting a threat, but the effects of which are likely to show only in the mid to long term. Along these lines, Tatlow (2020) argues that Hong Kong was not lost through the new state security law that was imposed this summer, but through "a deliberate, decades-long effort" by the CCP "to build a parallel political order for Hong Kong."<sup>19</sup> The upshot of this literature is that united front tactics much like all authoritarian influence aims at and eventually threatens democracy.

The united front work system runs numerous organizations, such as the China Overseas Friendship Association (COFA, 中华海外联谊会)<sup>20</sup> or the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR, 中国和平统一促进会).<sup>21</sup> These organizations all have overseas members and, frequently, overseas affiliates, which are guided through the embassies and consulates. Examining the Swiss case will help build an understanding of the system's connections from Beijing's perspective. There is an interesting imbalance, however. On the Chinese side, we have leaked handbooks for united front personnel, often several hundred pages long, while CCP theoreticians and PRC academics have written extensively on the topic, in work that is publicly and readily available.<sup>22</sup> The relevant organizations within the united front work system, as much as organizations operating from within different systems, frequently maintain internet homepages (often also in English) with mission statements, organizational charts and so forth. The existence of these organizations and their structures is relatively openly indicated, but the mode of operation and particularly its relation to affiliates in the target societies are not. This situation, together with the fact that the united front has no direct counterpart in liberal democracies, might be part of the reason why it is still relatively unknown and its actions often not recognized in target societies like Switzerland. Frequently, its members are mistaken to represent "civil society" associations.

Take, as an example, an event that happened recently in a Swiss village of roughly 4,600 people by the name of Hitzkirch. A Facebook post from 1 June 2020 shows photographs of Master Miao Yi (妙译法师) of the Taiwanese Fo Guang Shan 佛光山 Buddhist organization and Xin Yuhong 辛予鸿, the vice-president of the Swiss chapter of the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA, 国际佛光会). In the photographs, they are handing over Buddhist scriptures and 2,000 facemasks to a

<sup>17</sup>Gerry Groot, "The Rise and Rise of the United Front Work Department under Xi", *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information* 18:7 (2018).

<sup>18</sup>See: Filip Jirouš, "The Chinese United Front in the Czech Republic: Methods, Goals and Organizational Structure", MA thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Sinology, 2020.

<sup>19</sup>Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "How Hong Kong was lost", *Sinopsis*, 12<sup>th</sup> Aug 2020.

<sup>20</sup>See: "中华海外联谊会", COFA.

<sup>21</sup>See: "中国和平统一促进会", CCPPNR.

<sup>22</sup>For an example, see: Chen Mingming 陈明明 and Xiao Cunliang 肖存良, *统一战线理论与实践前沿: 2019* (Fudan University Press, 2019).





member of the local government in Hitzkirch.<sup>23</sup> The *Merit Times* (人間福報), a Buddhist newspaper from Taipei operated by Fo Guang Shan, records the event in more detail. It quotes Hugo Beck, the village government's representative in charge of Health and Social Affairs as opining that his village government should also promote the Three Goods Movement (三好运动) after hearing the Buddhist message, that the Buddha's International Light Association has demonstrated a selfless spirit, and that he looks forward to co-organizing more activities with the association in the future.<sup>24</sup> The donation of the masks seems consistent with BLIA's mission, as the homepage of the International Buddhist Progress Society of Switzerland (IBPS, 瑞士佛光山) describes it.<sup>25</sup> The mission is about Buddhist teaching, intercultural dialogue, the family, and organizing events related to the environment and even human rights, it says.<sup>26</sup>

However, the post on Facebook from the BLIA also gives the source of the facemasks as the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) of the Shenzhen Municipal Government (深圳市人民政府侨务办公室), which considerably changes the narrative and the significance of the donation. Evidently, the OCAO, a nameplate used by the UFWD, had sent the masks to Switzerland and Kha Sanh Lam (柯国强), the supervisor of the Swiss BLIA and president of the Federation of Overseas Chinese in Switzerland (瑞士华人华侨联合总会) forwarded them to Fo Guang Shan.<sup>27</sup> In fact, Kha is a key united front figure in Switzerland, as we will see later in this study. Against this background, the event in Hitzkirch turns into an instance of mask diplomacy by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The anecdote is instructive with regard to the united front and the kind of influence that it seeks to exert. It operates through a network of associations that is sometimes difficult to grasp and disentangle. In the Hitzkirch case, the source of the donation leads to the UFWD under the CCP Shenzhen Municipal Committee, but a multiculturalism-and-human-rights-embracing Buddhist association with roots in Taiwan carries out the action and delivers the message.<sup>28</sup> In the local context, few actors, if any, will understand the relation to the united front and the CCP, let alone have any clue about the purposes of united front activities. Thus, the instrumentalizing character is hidden, while another good story about China is told. It also reveals how broad an understanding of China is sometimes propagated. The united front often works the substrata and fringes of its target societies in this fashion, in a subtle and almost rhizomatic manner that requires considerable expertise to recognize. At the same time it engages actors and institutions in Swiss society. Eventually, the operations and effects of this work and other systematic attempts at exerting influence reach into the

<sup>23</sup>Facebook post: BLIA 國際佛光會世界總會, 1<sup>st</sup> Jun. 2020.

<sup>24</sup>“三好為橋梁 瑞士佛光人送愛”, 人間福報, 2<sup>nd</sup> Jun. 2020.

<sup>25</sup>The IBPS is the layperson counterpart of Fo Guang Shan. Both the BLIA and the IBPS have their global headquarters in California. For the homepage of its Swiss branch, see “Fo Guang Shan Switzerland 瑞士佛光山”, IBPS Switzerland.

<sup>26</sup>“BLIA Switzerland 瑞士協會”, IBPS Switzerland.

<sup>27</sup>Facebook post: BLIA 國際佛光會世界總會, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020. About the federation that has been established in 1998 and stands out for its political involvement, see Marylène Lieber, “Chinese Migrants in Switzerland: From Mutual Assistance to Promoting Economic Interests”, *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 6 (2010), p. 115.

<sup>28</sup>Laliberté (2015, 189–190), discusses the CCP's “cooperative politicization of religion” with regard to Buddhism, mentioning the BLIA and highlighting the contrast of the positive co-optation of Chinese Buddhism (汉传佛教) against the coercive politicization of Tibetan (藏传) Buddhism. See André Laliberté, “The Politicization of Religion by the CCP: A Selective Retrieval”, *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 69:1 (2015), pp. 189–190.



upper layers of the target societies, notably into the realms of culture, education and research, economy, and government.

There is virtually no documentation on PRC/CCP influence and the united front in contemporary Switzerland. Scholarly literature on Swiss-Chinese relations, understood broadly, does exist, but it is scarce.<sup>29</sup> This study therefore breaks new ground. The lack of previous research into the subject matter has consequences for both the available methods and the claims that can possibly be attached to the findings. Methodologically, the study relies on the increasing scholarly literature and works by researchers at think tanks in other countries. Against this background, this study has searched the Swiss scene with the aim of providing, as comprehensively as currently possible, a map of united front activities in Switzerland. The focus is (particularly in the first part of this study) on organizations and individuals that form part of the united front work system, while relevant organizations affiliated with other systems yet clearly involved in influence operations have also been included. Once organizations and individuals were identified, extensive online searches in several languages (Chinese, English, and German, to a lesser degree French) were performed to collect open source information put out by the united front and relevant civil society organizations of the target society, party and government entities, as well as news articles, company websites and social media posts. The research presented here has profited from informal discussions with specialists from around the world. No formal interviews or fieldwork have been undertaken for the purpose of this study. Using social science terminology, the study offers “conceptually rigorous descriptive inference,” which according to King et al. precedes explanation.<sup>30</sup> Further research and more methodological sophistication will be required to move to the level of explanation. This study aims at identifying the phenomenon, at describing it and attempting to properly conceptualize it.

Overall, the picture of PRC/CCP influence operations and united front activities in Switzerland, as elsewhere, reveals spectrums of awareness and co-optation. Who is involved (in the active sense of being incentivized, aware of the incentive and knowingly complying) and who is targeted (manipulated and therefore complying unknowingly) is often difficult to establish. This study is not about judging individuals, neither morally nor legally. Legality and illegality, in any case, are not the most helpful categories for the analysis undertaken in this study – and rightly are the subject of legal

<sup>29</sup>Recently, in the context of a SNSF-funded research project, directed by Claude Hauser (University of Fribourg), on “Sino-Swiss relations during the Cold War: an irreparable breakdown? (1953–1989)”, important publications have emerged. See Ariane Knüsel, “*Small Country – Great Importance: Switzerland and the Chinese Presence in Europe during the 1950s and 1960s*”, *Europe and China in the Cold War: Exchanges beyond the Bloc Logic and the Sino-Soviet Split*, ed. by Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, Marco Wyss, and Valeria Zanier (Brill, 2018), pp. 42–61; Knüsel, “*‘White on the outside but red on the inside’: Switzerland and Chinese intelligence networks during the Cold War*”, *Cold War History* 20:1 (2019), pp. 77–94; Knüsel, “*Swiss Counterintelligence and Chinese Espionage in the Cold War*”, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22:3 (2020), pp. 4–31; Cyril Cordoba and Liu Kaixuan (2019). “*Unconditional Followers of the PRC? Friendship Associations with China in France and Switzerland, 1950s–1980s*”, Schaufelbuehl et al., op. cit., pp. 85–107; Cyril Cordoba, *Au-delà du rideau de bambou: Relations culturelles et amitiés politiques sino-suisse (1949–1989)* (Éditions Alphil, Presses Universitaires Suisses, 2020).

<sup>30</sup>Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton University Press, 1994), chapter 2. Description is of course not value-free, and inference in the present context is even less so. Setting one piece of information next to another creates a constellation that might suggest more of a relation than there is. Bias cannot be methodologically controlled for as it would be desirable in a more ideal research setting. Yet, not addressing the topic because of the lack of quantifiable data or inaccessibility of qualitative research methods is also not a viable option. So, in the end, some assessments will simply be informed and responsible judgments.



expertise and finally of law enforcement agencies and courts, not reports. Understanding the plurality of motivations, agendas and constellations on the ground more fully, however, is helpful for coming up with constructive and effective reactions to the challenges PRC/CCP influence poses. This study, therefore, highlights the grey zones that united front tactics create and exploit and the rhizomatic nature of how a unified message from various, ideologically unified actors in Beijing gets projected into a target, ideologically diverse society like Switzerland.

## 1 Overseas Chinese united front organizations active in Switzerland

There are dozens of organizations registered as associations in Switzerland that are involved in united front work or engage in united front tactics. Some of them seem to operate largely independently from the others; quite a few if not the majority are personally and institutionally interlinked. Some can easily and directly be traced to the UFWD or other institutions in the united front system of the Chinese party-state, while others are linked to other systems or appear to be based on more bottom-up local initiatives. Most of them find themselves at some point invited to events by the Chinese Embassy in Bern or the Chinese Consulate in Zurich. Reports from receptions and gatherings at these official sites offer a good starting point to understand who participates in what capacity and who is likely to meet and know whom. In what follows, I begin by presenting one notable organization, the Swiss Association of Merchants and Entrepreneurs of Chinese Origin, which assembles many of the persons and through them associations that are more clearly involved in united front work in Switzerland (sec. 1.1). I then try to complement the picture to get to as comprehensive an overview as is currently possible, by highlighting the Federation of Overseas Associations in Switzerland (sec. 1.2), science, technology and professional associations (sec. 1.3), students and scholars associations (sec. 1.4), hometown associations (sec. 1.5), two perhaps more autonomously operating individuals (sec. 1.6) and more local associations (sec. 1.7). In the process, I intersperse comments aimed at characterizing the persons involved and/or targeted and the activities pursued in an effort to underline the distinction between the sometimes complex life-worlds of individuals and the party-state agendas their actions help translate into reality.

### 1.1 The Swiss Association of Merchants and Entrepreneurs of Chinese Origin (ASCEOC)

The Association Suisse des Commerçants et Entrepreneurs d'Origine Chinoise (ASCEOC, 瑞士华商会) is an important node in the Overseas Chinese united front network of individuals and, through them, organizations active in Switzerland. These individuals are well connected to united front bodies in the PRC and enjoy good relations to the embassy in Bern. It is against this background that they play a most prominent role in the Overseas Chinese community in Switzerland, hosting and funding Chinese New Year celebrations and making sure that the love for the motherland is equalized with love for the CCP.



Figure 1: Congratulation letters from the Beijing Committee and the Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Overseas Chinese Committee of the CPPCC (left) and the Beijing Chinese Overseas Friendship Association (right) on the occasion of the establishment of ASCEOC in 2008. Source: “瑞士華商會成立賀電”, ASCEOC, 14<sup>th</sup> Oct 2008; “瑞士華商會成立賀電”, ASCEOC, 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 2008.

The association was established on 18 October 2008.<sup>31</sup> The founding ceremony took place in Wynau, a small village between the cities of Solothurn and Aarau, at Bernstrasse 4, which also happens to be the address of a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) office as well as a small consulting company specialized in Swiss-Chinese business relations. Fang Wuling 方武玲 runs the consulting company.<sup>32</sup> She was also one of the founding vice-presidents of ASCEOC, but is no longer listed today in that capacity.<sup>33</sup> Her business partner at the consulting company at the same time heads the TCM office.<sup>34</sup> Later on that day in October 2008, a celebration reception was held in Bern in the presence of Chinese ambassador Dong Jinyi 董津义, whose embassy had helped and supported the establishment of the association.<sup>35</sup> The association does not have a staffed office,<sup>36</sup> but is domiciled in Geneva at Rue Jean Dassier 9, which is also the address of Hantec Europe SA.<sup>37</sup> This is since 2005 a subsidiary of the Hong-Kong-based Hantec Group,<sup>38</sup> founded by the first and continuing president of ASCEOC, Tang Yu Lap 邓予立, who apparently — the description is quoted from a CCP-linked propaganda media outlet — early on had made himself a fortune and a reputation as

<sup>31</sup>The event was reported by national Swiss media: “瑞士首家华人商业团体-瑞士华商会成立”, Swissinfo, 18<sup>th</sup> Oct 2008.

<sup>32</sup>See: “Home”, China Service: China Management & Culture GmbH (中国管理 & 文化有限公司).

<sup>33</sup>The association is listed as ASCEOC in the business registry, “Association Suisse des Commerçants et Entrepreneurs d’Origine Chinoise (ASCEOC)”, Registre du Commerce du Canton de Genève.

<sup>34</sup>See: “Über uns”, TCM Oberaargau.

<sup>35</sup>See: “瑞士首家华人商业团体-瑞士华商会成立”, Swissinfo, 18<sup>th</sup> Oct 2008.

<sup>36</sup>See: “瑞士华商会”, Economic and Commercial Office of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Swiss Confederation.

<sup>37</sup>See: “Hantec Europe SA”, Registre du Commerce du Canton de Genève.

<sup>38</sup>See: “关于我们”, Hantec Europe SA.



the “godfather of foreign exchange” (外汇教父) in Hong Kong.<sup>39</sup> Tang is the towering figure of ASCEOC. The news section of the association’s homepage illustrates his many activities over the years, and additional information is readily available on his personal travel blog.<sup>40</sup> Tang is engaged in a series of united front bodies back in the PRC as well as in Hong Kong.<sup>41</sup> His company homepage lists among his public offices some of the most important united front organizations such as CPPCC, CCPPNR, and COFA, and he is also involved as an “honorary chairman” with a district-level chapter of the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC, 中国人民对外友好协会),<sup>42</sup> a body from within the external affairs system.<sup>43</sup>

The governing structure of ASCEOC is as follows:<sup>44</sup>

President	Tang Yu Lap 邓予立
Vice-Presidents	Zhang Lifan 张力凡, Ma Renhai 马仁海, Tian Yinghua 田英华, Wu Yongmei 吴咏梅, Qiu Xiaojie 邱小捷
Members of Council	Wang Xia 王夏, Wang Wei 王伟, Zhao Jun 赵军, Ma Dawei 马大伟, Ren Chongnan 任崇男, Wang Qiuyun 王秋云, Chen Ruohong 陈若虹
Advisor	Kha Sanh Lam (柯国强)
Supervisory Board Members	Zhu Wenbin 朱文彬, Wang Xiaoguang 王晓光, Zheng Qun 郑群, Jia Kejie 贾克杰

Table 1: ASCEOC leadership.

Besides Tang Yu Lap, there are several other individuals involved in ASCEOC with important united front functions in Switzerland.<sup>45</sup> Vice-President Tian Yinghua 田英华 has held this position since the association’s establishment. Tian is a liver-transplant specialist and professor at the University Hospital Zurich, where he leads the microsurgery research unit at the Department of Surgery and Transplantation. Around 2009, he facilitated the visit of the director of his department to two hospit-

<sup>39</sup>The entire ASCEOC homepage is mirrored on an address pointing to Hantec as IT operator: “[www.hantecau.com/](http://www.hantecau.com/)”. For the godfather quote, see: “邓予立：洪團結黨內貶力 重返執政至少八年”, China Review News (CRN) (中國評論通訊社). For the nature of CRN and other propaganda outlets, see: Kitty W. Chen and J. Michael Cole, “CCP and Proxy Disinformation: Means, Practices, and Impact on Democracies”, Sinopsis, 26<sup>th</sup> Jul 2019.

<sup>40</sup>For the news page, see: “商會動態”, ASCEOC. For Tang’s travel blog, see: “邓予立看世界”, Pixnet Blog. One of Tang’s travel books has been published in Australia by Vivid Publications (Fontaine Press), but the publisher gives a Hantec e-mail address on the book’s homepage, see: *Wandering the Southern Hemisphere: Chile and Peru*, Vivid Publications.

<sup>41</sup>See: “第五屆中華海外聯誼會理事”, Friends of Hong Kong Association 香港友好協進會.

<sup>42</sup>The full list is as follows: “Beijing Committee of The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Advisor of Committee of Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan Compatriot and Oversea Affairs, China Council For The Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification Committee, China Overseas Friendly Association Committee, [Beijing Haidian District – omitted in the English version] Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (Honorary Chairman), Shaanxi Chinese Overseas Friendship Association (Vice Chairman), Liaoning Chinese Overseas Friendship Association (Vice Chairman), Xian Academy of Fine Arts Honorary Curator, Association Suisse des Commerçants d’Origine Chinoise Founder & Chairman, Asia Pacific Taiwan Federation of Industry & Commerce (Honorary Chairman), Hong Kong Association for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of Chin (Committee Member).” See: “Founder of Hantec & Honorable Chairman”, “邓予立”, Hantec Group.

<sup>43</sup>See: Jichang Lulu, “Repurposing Democracy: The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster”, Sinopsis, 26<sup>th</sup> Nov 2019, pp. 20–24.

<sup>44</sup>See: “委員名單”, ASCEOC.

<sup>45</sup>For the significance of chambers of commerce for the united front under Xi Jinping, see: Gerry Groot, “Understanding the Role of Chambers of Commerce and Industry Associations in United Front Work”, *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information* 18:11 (2018).



als in the PRC.<sup>46</sup> His name also appears on the list of the Fifth Council of the China Overseas Exchange Association (COEA, 中国海外交流协会, 2013–2017),<sup>47</sup> formerly under the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (OCAO), which in 2018 was merged into the UFWD.<sup>48</sup> The other person featured for Switzerland is a certain Palden Namgyal Langdun 朗顿·班旦朗杰, given as the president of a Swiss Tibetan Cultural Exchange Association (瑞士西藏文化交流协会).<sup>49</sup> Tian is also on the list of the Fourth Council of the China Association for International Cultural Exchanges with Overseas Chinese (ICEA, 中国华侨国际文化交流促进会, 2015–2020), a sub-unit of the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC, 中华全国归国华侨联合会), itself within the united front system.<sup>50</sup> Again, there are two more names on this list for Switzerland: Sun Likang 孫力康, also once at the University Hospital Zurich and the Tianjin liaison officer to the Swiss Embassy in Beijing for five years,<sup>51</sup> and Jin Lida 金立達, the president of Shanghai Overseas Chinese associations and vice-president of the Swiss Federation of Chinese Tourism (SFCT, 瑞士华人旅游联合会).<sup>52</sup> At one point, Tian was the president of the Swiss Chinese Overseas Chinese Association (瑞士华人华侨联谊会).<sup>53</sup> He is also the vice-president

<sup>46</sup>See Maio Chen, “Striving Toward a Comprehensive Partnership”, *The Bridge: Journal of SwissCham China* 20 (2009), pp. 35–36.

<sup>47</sup>See: “中国海外交流协会第五届理事会理事名单”, 厦门开发区招商引资网.

<sup>48</sup>See: Alex Joske, “Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work”, *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information* 19:9 (2019), pp. 7–13.

<sup>49</sup>No publicly available information could be found about this Swiss Tibetan Cultural Exchange Association, but a possible Belgium counterpart (比利时西藏文化交流协会) and variants within the PRC, e.g. at Xiamen University, are documented: “浙里有爱·天涯共此时”中秋慰侨活动在比利时成功举办 向侨胞赠送 1300 盒月饼”, *Capital News 华商时报*, 30<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020, and “厦大西藏文化交流协会第七届藏文化节宣传视频”, Tencent Video 腾讯视频, 14<sup>th</sup> Apr 2016. Palden Namgyal Langdun is a TCM-practitioner in Zurich and apparently for some time has tried himself in the consulting business. See: “Palden Langdun”, Praxis für Akupunktur Zürich Wollishofen, and “Europe-China Business Development GmbH”, Commercial register of Canton Zurich. Renske Heddema offers an account of his life story: “Troubled history builds a bright future”, *The Free Library/Swiss News*, 1<sup>st</sup> Nov 2005.

<sup>50</sup>See: “中國華僑國際文化交流促進會第四屆理事名單”, *People’s Daily Online 人民网*, 10<sup>th</sup> Oct 2015.

<sup>51</sup>Sun is an alumnus of the Pancreas Research Lab of the University Hospital Zurich, but according to his LinkedIn and Google Scholar profiles is still at the University of Zurich, while his publications in recent years give the School of Integrative Medicine, Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, as institutional affiliation, where he is also the Coordinator of Sino-Swiss Cooperation, see: “Lab Members”, Pancreas Research Lab, University Hospital Zurich; “Li-kang Sun”, Google Scholar. Sun’s LinkedIn profile states the position with ICEA, but also a series of further titles with the Yunnan Province Overseas Chinese Friendship Association and the Overseas Chinese Friendship Association of Tianjin. Apparently, he is also the Head of External Liaison of the Swiss Chinese Overseas Chinese Federation (瑞士华人华侨联合会) / Swiss Chinese Overseas Chinese Association (瑞士华人华侨联谊会). Besides these very clear united front activities, Sun was, as mentioned, the Tianjin liaison officer to the Swiss Embassy in Beijing (2014–2019). It is perhaps in this function that he founded and organized the Sino-Swiss Science Forum in Tianjin, since it was “held by the Research Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine, TUTCM, and assisted by Alumni Association of University of Zurich, while the strong supports were also got from both the Swiss Embassy in Beijing and swissnex China in Shanghai [sic]” See: “Sino-Swiss Science Forum in Tianjin”, *Swissnex China*, 30<sup>th</sup> Sep 2015. The institution of liaison officers was created as a kind of substitute for honorary consuls (which China does not accept) under the Swiss Ambassador Blaise Godet (2010–2012), then continued by his successors and finally terminated by Bernardino Regazzoni in June 2019.

<sup>52</sup>Jin has business and other engagements in Frauenfeld, is president of the Swiss Soong Ching-ling Foundation (瑞士宋庆龄基金会) and the Swiss Chinese Shanghai Promotion Association (瑞士华人上海促进会) as well as the executive director of the European Federation of Shanghai Associations (欧洲上海社团联合会). See: “浦东新侨代表人士海外影响力又有新拓展 - 瑞士宋庆龄基金会成立, 金立达先生当选主席”, 上海市归国华侨联合会, 6<sup>th</sup> Aug 2015; “浦东新区侨联接接待德国、瑞士、丹麦侨团”, 上海市归国华侨联合会, 17<sup>th</sup> Jun 2014. For the position at SFCT, see: “瑞士华人旅游联合会”, Swiss Federation of Chinese Tourism.

<sup>53</sup>See: “驻瑞士使馆临时代办谭对盛出席”亲情中华”2010 年瑞士华人华侨春节文艺晚会”, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Switzerland, 1<sup>st</sup> Mar 2010.



of the already mentioned Federation of Overseas Chinese in Switzerland.<sup>54</sup> Several members of ASCEOC are tied to this federation.

Formerly, Tian was the president of this federation and in that function in 2013 met with Dong Zhongyuan 董中原, at the time the vice chairman of the Overseas Chinese Committee of the National People's Congress (全国人民代表大会华侨委员会) and vice chairman of ACFROC.<sup>55</sup> Kha Sanh Lam is also depicted in a photograph of this meeting, at which Dong set out suggestions on how Overseas Chinese could make full use of their “financial resources and intellectual advantages to promote win-win cooperation between China and Switzerland”, “actively build bridges for overseas talents”, “to endeavor to become a messenger for spreading Chinese culture” and “unite [团结联系] with overseas Tibetan compatriots.”<sup>56</sup> Tian responds to Dong by ensuring him of his desire to cooperate by becoming “a bridge and a link” (桥梁和纽带) between the two countries in the fields of economy, technology, education, culture, law, and – notably, given his professional career – medicine in order to help realize “the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦).<sup>57</sup>

Another vice-president of ASCEOC and it appears the current president of the mentioned Federation of Overseas Chinese in Switzerland is Ma Renhai 马仁海, himself also a TCM practitioner. Ma is involved in several associations for Chinese medicine in Switzerland,<sup>58</sup> in 2018 becoming the president of the newly founded Swiss Society of Chinese Integrative Medicine (SSCIM, 瑞士中西医结合学会), established on the premises of Bern University Hospital with a congratulatory speech from the embassy.<sup>59</sup> In April 2019, in recognition of Switzerland being a “blessed place for the development of TCM in Europe” (欧洲中医药发展的福地),<sup>60</sup> three associations and three institutions joined forces and established the Swiss Federation of Chinese Medicine (瑞士中医药行业联合会) with the “strong support and promotion of the Chinese Embassy in Switzerland” (在中国驻瑞士大使馆的大力支持与推动下) and Ma presiding over the founding ceremony.<sup>61</sup>

Advisor to ASCEOC and the honorary president – as the Hitzkirch event shows, sometimes still simply referred to as president – of the federation is the above-mentioned Kha Sanh Lam. Kha has had a rather eventful life. Like his parents, who had

<sup>54</sup>See: “委員名單”, ASCEOC.

<sup>55</sup>See: “董中原副主席会见瑞士侨领代表团 提出 5 点建议”, *People's Daily Online* (人民网), 19<sup>th</sup> Apr 2013.

<sup>56</sup>See: “董中原副主席会见瑞士侨领代表团 提出 5 点建议【2】”, *People's Daily Online* (人民网), 19<sup>th</sup> Apr 2013.

<sup>57</sup>See: “董中原副主席会见瑞士侨领代表团 提出 5 点建议【3】”, *People's Daily Online* (人民网), 19<sup>th</sup> Apr 2013.

<sup>58</sup>See: “TCM Specialist Renhai Ma”, TCM Gesundheitszentrum Bern.

<sup>59</sup>See: “中西医论坛举行首期论坛”, Swiss Society of Chinese Integrative Medicine, 20<sup>th</sup> Aug 2017; “瑞士中西医结合学会成立庆祝大会暨第三期瑞士中西医论坛”的会议通知”, Swiss Society of Chinese Integrative Medicine, 9<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018; “Switzerland established the association of Chinese and western medicine”, 中国民间中医医药研究开发协会, 12<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018.

<sup>60</sup>Lieber discusses an interesting tension between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” practitioners of TCM in Switzerland, the former emphasizing their “cultural membership” and “Chinese-ness” to assert the superiority of their skills. See: Marylène Lieber, “Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine in Switzerland: competing justifications for cultural legitimacy”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35:4 (2012).

<sup>61</sup>The involved entities besides SSCIM were the Association of Chinese Medical Societies for Chinese Doctors in Switzerland (瑞士华人中医药学会), the Swiss-Sino Association for Traditional Chinese Medicine (瑞华中医学研学会), the China-Swiss centers for Traditional Chinese Medicine (中国-瑞士中医药中心) in Zurich and Geneva and the Swiss TCM Academy (瑞士高等中医药学院). See: “见证瑞士中医药发展的历史时刻—瑞士中医药行业联合会成立大会侧记”, 世界传统医药网, 9<sup>th</sup> Apr 2019.



fled China during the civil war in the 1940s, he had to leave Vietnam, where he was born, as a 27 year old together with his brothers after the end of the war as one of the boat people, later admitting that he did not want to live under the Communist regime.<sup>62</sup> After arriving in St. Gallen, Switzerland, he worked at a local butchery and then opened his first Chinese restaurant in 1982. He would open further restaurants in Rheinfelden and in Basel. At the *Zum Goldenen Drachen* in Basel, Kha hosted not only the famous pianist Lang Lang 郎朗 in 2015, but also Chinese Vice-Premier Hui Liangyu 回良玉 in 2013, reportedly because of his good connections to the Chinese embassy in Bern.<sup>63</sup> Kha is a former president of the Swiss Association for the Peaceful Reunification of China (SAPUC, 瑞士中国和平统一促进会), which is the Swiss chapter of the CCPNR, a central body of the UFWD.<sup>64</sup> Target society chapters of CCPNR are usually a key element in the united front's overall influence operations. The Swiss chapter was established in 2000, with Zhao Yuan 赵元 as president. The current president is Dong Baode 董宝德, who leads a TCM office (and before coming to Switzerland worked at the People's Armed Police Beijing Hospital (北京武警总队医院)). He apparently shares the same address and phone number in Dübendorf as is given on the SAPUC homepage. Kha's involvement in SAPUC is significant. Besides, Kha has been chairman of the Swiss Chinese Association (瑞士华人总会),<sup>65</sup> which in 2010 received Jin Zhiqiang 金志强, the executive deputy head of the United Front Work Department of Hangzhou Municipal Committee (Zhejiang), and a delegation of the Hangzhou Overseas Friendship Association (杭州海外联谊会).<sup>66</sup> He is also listed as a member of the Fujian Overseas Chinese Chamber of Commerce 福建侨商会.<sup>67</sup> These functions also seem to give him prestige in the PRC. For instance, when "returning" to his hometown (presumably the native town of his ancestors) in Fujian, Kha was made the honorary chairman of the Fourth Committee of the Fengze 丰泽 District of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese.<sup>68</sup>

An interesting side note is the fact that two members of ASCEOC indicate working relations to the Swiss Federal Government. The internet ASCEOC homepage presents Zhang Lifan 張力凡 as both a senior analyst at the Department of Finance (presumably the Federal Department of Finance, FDF) and as a Director of the Beijing Overseas Exchange Association (北京海外交流协会). In her short bio, Wang Xia 王夏, a

<sup>62</sup>See: "Bald Lichterlöschen im Restaurant «Zum Goldenen Drachen» auf der Lyss?", barfi.ch, 20<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.; "Chinas Vize-Premierminister dimiert in Basel", *Basler Zeitung*, 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2013.

<sup>64</sup>In 2017, Li Su 李溯 appeared as vice-president and secretary-general and is possibly an executive council member of the Jiangsu Overseas Exchange Association (江苏省海外交流协会). In 2019, Wang Xia was listed as vice-president and Gong Daming 龚达明 as special advisor. The SAPUC homepage mainly features links to recent news, but offers little information on the association itself apart from its charter. See: "瑞士中国和平统一促进会章程", SAPUC. See also: "瑞士统促会举行"庆祝香港回归祖国20周年"座谈会", CCPNR, 3<sup>rd</sup> Jul 2017; "健康医疗专业人士委员会", Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of Jiangsu Provincial Government / Jiangsu Overseas Exchange Association, 29<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018; "瑞士和统会举办"不忘初心、牢记使命"座谈会", China Radio International, 1<sup>st</sup> Jul 2019. Recent activities of SAPUC are well documented. In July 2020, it held a seminar with embassy representatives on "remaining true to our original aspiration and keeping our mission firmly in mind" (不忘初心、牢记使命), which is an educational party campaign triggered by Xi Jinping's corresponding remarks in his report to the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China. In September 2020, SAPUC participated in a symposium co-hosted with ASCEOC, CASTS, the Swiss Fujian Hometown Association and the Swiss Chinese Tourism Federation (瑞士华人旅游联合会), see: "驻瑞士大使王世廷、驻苏黎世总领事赵清华出席旅瑞侨界庆祝中瑞建交70周年暨国庆71周年座谈会", 中华人民共和国外交部, 21<sup>st</sup> Sep 2020.

<sup>65</sup>The ASCEOC homepage lists him in this function. See: "委员名单", ASCEOC.

<sup>66</sup>See: "2010年7月", 中共杭州市委统战部.

<sup>67</sup>See: "福建侨商会第一届成员名单", 马透之窗, 12<sup>th</sup> Mar 2010.

<sup>68</sup>See: "丰泽区侨联看望回乡省亲的瑞士华侨柯国强夫妇", 福建省侨联网, 6<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017.





Chinese-language teacher, is described as formerly a special lecturer of the Department of Economics (presumably the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research, EAER). In 2013, she was appointed as Lanzhou European Tourism Image Ambassador, and she is also the vice-president of SAPUC.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, in the context of concrete initiatives, the members of ASCEOC seem to team up in different constellations. For example, in the World Chinese Entrepreneur (世界华商) initiative, Tian Yinghua, Zhang Lifan and Wang Xia (the first giving his University Hospital Zurich affiliation only, the latter two mentioning the ASCEOC connection and again listing their links to the Swiss Federal Government) constitute the Swiss branch together with Cai Ming 蔡铭 and Li Donghua 李东华.<sup>70</sup> Cai Ming is chairman of Switzerland Infinity Development and Investment<sup>71</sup> and affiliated with the Sichuan Chinese Chamber of Commerce 四川华商会. Li Donghua appears as Chairman of the Swiss Sino [sic] International Cultural Exchange Center (瑞士东瑞国际文化交流中心) and linked to the Chengdu Overseas Exchange Association (成都海外交流协会), a united front body to which he had been elected as an executive member (常务理事) of the Third Council in 2014.<sup>72</sup> He is also involved in the TCM business and is a well-known Swiss public figure, being the 1996 gold medal winner of the Atlanta Summer Olympics representing Switzerland.<sup>73</sup>

To conclude this section, the persons governing ASCEOC link an impressive network of organizations, which includes many more beyond those already mentioned; not all of which will receive closer discussion within the scope of this study.<sup>74</sup> Despite it being quite a notable organization, the governing structure of ASCEOC does not prominently or directly represent all united front bodies active in Switzerland. Indeed, it would go against the rhizomatic mode of how the united front operates if we could identify an umbrella organization that was to offer a single key to all the involved actors and institutions.

<sup>69</sup>See: “委员名单”, ASCEOC; “瑞士和统会举办”不忘初心、牢记使命”座谈会”, China Radio International, 1<sup>st</sup> Jul 2019.

<sup>70</sup>See: “瑞士世界华商主席团委员”, 世界华商.

<sup>71</sup>Although no company with that exact name appears to be registered in either China or Switzerland, the now liquidated Zachary Fournier Infinity Development and Investment, of Port-Valais, was a partner of a Sichuan company chaired by Cai Ming. Fournier was active in Sichuan as a restaurateur. See: “Zachary FOURNIER INFINITY DEVELOPMENT & CONSULTING”, Commercial register of Bas-Valais; “艾迪士四川酒店管理有限公司”, 企查查.

<sup>72</sup>See: “瑞士东瑞国际文化交流中心/眠云听泉茶画阁 Swiss Sino International Cultural Exchange Center, Donghua Li Gallerie”, DEDA Swiss, 16<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017, and “他的故事被收入瑞士初中教材”, 瑞中企业商会 新闻中心, 8<sup>th</sup> Aug 2014.

<sup>73</sup>See: “Über uns”, DEDA Swiss; “Startseite”, TCM Samsara – Sara Lam; and “TCM Donghua Li”, Find Health Clinics. On his personal homepage, Li features a news story that has him interacting with Kha Sanh Lam and Dong Baode 董保德 in their functions as president and vice-president of the Swiss Chinese Overseas Chinese Federation, but the same article also mentions that a mountain trip related to the event was made possible by the Federation of Overseas Chinese in Switzerland (瑞士华人华侨联合总会). See: “宋铁龙拜访瑞士铁力士山天然大佛”, Donghua Li: Pressemeldungen, 15<sup>th</sup> Feb 2008. Note that Dong Baode is also the current president of the Swiss Association for the Peaceful Unification of China (SAPUC), the Swiss branch of CCPNR.

<sup>74</sup>Based on the information given on the ASCEOC homepage, links to the following organizations are indicated: Dongguan Overseas Friendship Association (东莞市海外联谊会), Geneva Students and Scholars Union (日内瓦中国学生学者联合会), Schaffhausen Chinese Association (瑞士沙夫豪森中国人协会), Swiss Chaozhou Hometown Association (瑞士潮州同乡会), Swiss Chinese Association (瑞士华人总会), Swiss Chinese Tourism Federation (瑞士华人旅游业联合), and the Swiss Wushu Association (瑞士武术协会).



Figure 2: Group picture at the inauguration of FOCAS. Source: “驻瑞士大使许镜湖出席瑞士华侨华人社团联合会成立大会”, 中华人民共和国驻瑞士联邦大使馆, 4<sup>th</sup> Nov 2015.

## 1.2 The Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations in Switzerland (FOCAS)

While united front bodies have been active in Switzerland for decades and ASCEOC has brought together various actors attached to several organizations, it is only with the foundation of the Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations in Switzerland (FOCAS, 瑞士华侨华人社团联合会)<sup>75</sup> that a group of organizations have engaged on a shared, institutionalized and officially sanctioned platform. The timing of the establishment, 1 November 2015, is interesting, given that it follows the issuance of the mentioned “Regulations” and Xi Jinping’s “reinvigorating the united front system with new guidance, useful bureaucratic reforms, and an infusion of resources commensurate with the system’s expanded mandate” in a reaction to the hitherto sometimes “poor coordination of work.”<sup>76</sup> This is again not the one key organization, but it assembles important actors now directly representing united front organizations. The federation is noteworthy for the publicly documented internal conflict that followed its establishment and the absence of SAPUC in these efforts, all suggesting that the rhizomatic delivery of the unified message from Beijing runs into problems when facing the realities of local power struggles and diverging agendas. To understand the agency of local actors in united front organizations more fully is important.

The ceremony establishing the federation took place in Bern with more than 160 attendees and under the leadership of the Chinese embassy with the ambassador present.<sup>77</sup> Its founding associations were:

<sup>75</sup>The homepage of the federation was not online at the time of the writing of this report. But it has been archived in early 2019 in the Wayback Machine. See: “Statuten des Dachverbandes der Überseechinesen in der Schweiz”, FOCAS.

<sup>76</sup>See: Peter Mattis and Alex Joske, “The Third Magic Weapon: Reforming China’s United Front”, *War on the Rocks*, 24<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

<sup>77</sup>See: “瑞士华侨华人社团联合会成立大会纪实”, CASTS, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov 2015; “驻瑞士大使许镜湖出席瑞士华侨华人社团联合会成立大会”, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Switzerland, 4<sup>th</sup> Nov 2015.



- The Swiss Association of Merchants and Entrepreneurs of Chinese Origin (AS-CEOC, 瑞士华商会)
- Swiss Chaozhou [Teochew] Hometown Association (瑞士潮州同乡会)
- Swiss Chinese Overseas Chinese Association (瑞士华人华侨联谊会), which is likely identical with the Swiss Chinese Overseas Chinese Federation (瑞士华人华侨联合会)<sup>78</sup>
- Federation of Overseas Chinese in Switzerland (瑞士华人华侨联合总会, also 瑞士华侨华人联合总会)
- Swiss Tourism Association (瑞士旅游协会), which is likely identical with the Swiss Federation of Chinese Tourism SFCT (瑞士华人旅游联合会)<sup>79</sup>
- Swiss China Investment Association (SCINA, 瑞中投资商会)
- Swiss Shanghainese Association (瑞士上海人协会), which is possibly identical with the Swiss Chinese Shanghai Promotion Association (瑞士华人上海促进会)<sup>80</sup>
- Swiss Chinese Scholars Association for Science and Technology (CASTS, 瑞士中国学人科技协会)

At the ceremony, congratulatory letters from the OCAO, then still a State Council institution, and the CCPPNR were read out, the latter emphasizing the Swiss overseas Chinese' "fine tradition of patriotism and love for their hometown" (爱国爱乡的优良传统) and their "enthusiastic support for the great cause of peaceful reunification of the motherland" (热心支持祖国和平统一大业), referring to unification of the PRC with Taiwan.<sup>81</sup> Congratulations were also received from the Swiss Fujian Hometown Association (瑞士福建同乡会) and a Swiss Chinese Medicine Association (referred to as 瑞士华人中医药协会),<sup>82</sup> showing that far from all united front-related associations participated in this umbrella organization at its beginning (the absence of SAPUC is particularly conspicuous), although some more might have joined since. A news entry posted by CASTS (more on this association below) about the establishment of FOCAS mentions that the Chinese Institute Geneva Foundation (CIG, 日内瓦华文教育基金会) has joined FOCAS in the meantime.<sup>83</sup>

The first council of this federation of associations featured seven members: the already mentioned Ma Renhai 马仁海 (president), Yang Yuming 杨玉明 (vice-president) and Wu Hua 吴华 (vice-president),<sup>84</sup> Gao Hui 高惠 (secretary-general), Jia Kejie 贾克杰

<sup>78</sup>Sun Likang 孙力康 is mentioned as head of external liaison under both of these association names, see: "瑞士华人华侨联谊会、对外宣传联络部部长: 孙力康", *People's Daily Online* 人民网, 2016.

<sup>79</sup>Li Yihong 李艺红, the president of SFCT is also mentioned as president of the Swiss Tourism Association, see: "疫情下, 海外华人旅游业前路如何?", 欧华网, 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 2020.

<sup>80</sup>See: "浦东新侨代表人士海外影响力又有新拓展 - 瑞士宋庆龄基金会成立, 金立达先生当选主席", 上海市归国华侨联合会, 6<sup>th</sup> Aug 2015.

<sup>81</sup>The language is interesting here. Groot has made the point about "shifting the terms of debate about the status of Taiwan," writing: "The mere fact of translations into other languages emphasising the notion of 're'-unification helps cement in the minds of the uninformed that Taiwan was indeed once part of PRC China and hence reunification, even on the CCP's terms, is justifiable." See: Gerry Groot, "The CCP's Grand United Front abroad", *Sinopsis*, 24<sup>th</sup> Sep 2019.

<sup>82</sup>It is unclear whether this is an additional association or the same as the mentioned Association of Chinese Medical Societies for Chinese Doctors in Switzerland (瑞士华人中医药学会).

<sup>83</sup>"瑞士华侨华人社团联合会成立大会纪实", *op. cit.*

<sup>84</sup>Wu works at the ETHZ and appears as an advisor to CASTS, see: "Dr. Hua Wu", The Morbidelli Group ETHZ; "瑞士中国学人科技协会理事会第一次扩大会议召开", CASTS, 10<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017.



(treasurer), Chen Ziming 陈子明<sup>85</sup> and Feng Jianhua 丰建华 (Coordination Department). The activities of the federation are only sparsely documented. The homepage is not running, but archived sites dating to early 2019 are available. There are, however, only news entries until 2016. At that time, for example, the federation had issued a statement “strongly condemn[ing]” the “so-called ‘South China Sea Arbitration’” and supporting the Chinese government.<sup>86</sup> According to a summary, seven agenda items were discussed at its third council meeting (that appears to have taken place not even a month after the establishment of the federation).<sup>87</sup> One involved plans to support new Chinese schools so that young Chinese pupils could retain and inherit Chinese culture and in this context to establish a Swiss Chinese School Association (瑞士华裔中文学校联合会, no further evidence of which could be found). Another item related to TCM and, apparently, the specific implementation consisted in forming a working group composed of three members of the board (it does not say which members, but at least Ma Renhai and Jia Kejie are invested in the TCM business and both are active in the SSCIM), and the consular as well as the science and technology departments of the embassy, with the declared purpose of jointly negotiating with Swiss government authorities regarding Chinese medicine policies and legislation. But the sixth and seventh agenda items are particularly interesting and are here quoted in full:

6. 回顾与总结社团联合会成立大会。社团联合会成立庆典的准备和程序安排尚有不周之处, 敬请大家谅解。

7. 自社团联合会成立以来, 也出现了一些不和谐的现象, 联合会的成员协会和侨领受到莫名的恶意攻击和中伤。特别是联合会内有个别人士还从中煽风点火, 别有用心。瑞士华侨华人社团联合会理事会对于这种违背联合会章程, 影响旅瑞华侨华人社团团结的不负责的行为表示愤慨和强烈的谴责。

6. Reviewing and summing up the establishment meeting of the federation of associations. In the preparation and arrangement of the ceremony for the establishment of the federation of associations, there were still some shortcomings, we ask for your understanding.

7. Since the establishment of the federation of associations, there have been some dissonant phenomena. Associations and Overseas Chinese leaders who are members of the federation were subjected to baffling and malicious accusations and slanders. In particular, there were some individuals in the association who with ulterior motives tried to “fan the flames” from within. The Managing Council of the Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations in Switzerland expresses resentment and strong condemnation of this irresponsible behavior, which violates the statutes of the federation and affects the unity of associations of Overseas Chinese in Switzerland.

The phenomenon of rivaling factions within Overseas Chinese communities is of course neither new nor surprising, particularly not to insiders or persons close to them. It is, however, rarer to get a glimpse at such publicly documented inner conflict among united front actors. This specific conflict might be part of the reason why the

<sup>85</sup>Chen was formerly the vice-president of the Swiss Chaozhou Hometown Association, see: “瑞士华人集会严厉谴责” 两国论”, Sina 新闻中心, 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug 1999.

<sup>86</sup>“瑞士华侨华人社团联合会声明”, FOCAS, 13<sup>th</sup> Jul 2016.

<sup>87</sup>“瑞士华侨华人社团联合会第三次理事会会议纪要 2015 年 11 月 29 日”, FOCAS, 10<sup>th</sup> Dec 2015.



homepage is currently down and why the federation does not much appear in the public spotlight.<sup>88</sup>

### 1.3 Science, technology and professional associations

One of the member associations of FOCAS is the Chinese Association of Science and Technology Switzerland (CASTS, 瑞士中国学人科技协会), which, given Switzerland's specific country profile as an innovative life sciences, scientific research, high-tech and finance place, quite naturally assumes a prominent role. The namesake organization back in the PRC presents itself as "a constituent member" of the CPPCC.<sup>89</sup> Stokes presents CAST-USA as part of the economic and finance system rather than the united front system.<sup>90</sup> The exact relation between CAST and associations like CAST-USA and CASTS is unclear. CASTS is notable for its strong connections into the Swiss science and research community and, particularly its joint activities with the Federation of Chinese Professional Associations in Europe (FCPAE). This section contributes to discussions around concerns of technology transfer and the impact of talent recruitment programs.

CASTS was established in July 2004, has a staff of 20 to 30 people in its working department (dealing with general affairs, external liaison and information networks), more than 1,000 members,<sup>91</sup> and boasts various sub-organs, namely the Chinese Association of Materials Science and Energy Technology in Switzerland (CAMSETS, 瑞士中国学人材料科学与能源协会),<sup>92</sup> the Chinese Association of Materials Science and Technology in Switzerland (CAMSTS, 瑞士中国学人材料科学与技术协会),<sup>93</sup> the Chinese Association of Life Science in Switzerland (CALSS, 瑞士中国学人生命科学协会),<sup>94</sup> and the Chinese Association of Finance Professionals in Switzerland (CAFPS, 瑞士中国学人金融协会),<sup>95</sup> plus a Women's Chapter (妇女分会)<sup>96</sup> and a Youth Chapter (青年分会). It is unclear to what extent CAMSETS and CAMSTS overlap or are one and the same.<sup>97</sup> On the homepage of CASTS, the association states that its members are mostly drawn from high-end enterprises, research institutes, universities and the financial industries throughout the bigger cities of Switzerland. Given that it gets its funding from the Education Office of the Chinese Embassy in Switzer-

<sup>88</sup>The last online mention of the federation is from April 2019 in a report on a TCM meeting involving President Ma Renhai, see: "2019 瑞士苏黎世-欧洲中医药论坛", Meipian 美篇, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

<sup>89</sup>See: "Profile", CAST.

<sup>90</sup>See: Stokes, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>91</sup>See: "高燕平总领事会见瑞士中国学人科技协会丰建华主席", Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Zurich, 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016.

<sup>92</sup>CAMSETS operates its own homepage, where it indicates its task to "support the associated Chinese organizations for their talent-seeking missions." See: "协会简介", CAMSETS.

<sup>93</sup>Only an archived homepage dating to 2013 and 2014 could be found. See: "章程", CAMSTS. But CAMSTS is active, with the 2018 and 2019 annual meetings documented online. See: "瑞士中国学人材料科学与能源科技协会 2018 年会通知", Sohu.com, 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov 2018; "瑞士中国学人材料科学与能源协会 2019 年会", WEMP, 6<sup>th</sup> Oct 2019. There seems to exist a CAMSTS WeChat group, which might indicate that the homepage has been scrapped and communication shifted to social media.

<sup>94</sup>See: "About CALSS", 瑞士中国学人生命科学协会 (Chinese Association of Life Science in Switzerland); "瑞士中国学人科技协会十一届年会的通知", CASTS, 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2015.

<sup>95</sup>See: "关于我们", 瑞士中国学人金融协会 (Chinese Association of Finance Professionals in Switzerland).

<sup>96</sup>See: "中国瑞士学人科技协会妇女分会正式成立", Education Office of the PRC Embassy, 25<sup>th</sup> Oct 2017.

<sup>97</sup>The post on the 2019 annual meeting of CAMSTS lists a program with speakers and a lecture hall at ETHZ that is the exact same setting as the one on the poster for the CAMSETS annual meeting of the same year shown in the same post.



land (see art. 5 of its charter),<sup>98</sup> its openly declared purpose to assist the embassy in its effort to have Chinese students return to the PRC “to serve the country” (为国服务)<sup>99</sup> is hardly surprising, a slogan that is according to a new book on the subject also used to support tech transfer.<sup>100</sup> Spear warns us not to mistake efforts at repatriation simply for a countermeasure to unwanted brain drain, since the efforts are “not fixated on recruiting talent physically back to China,” but “welcoming those that return” while also “utilizing those that remain abroad.”<sup>101</sup>

Important figures of CASTS have been its presidents Dai Yong 戴勇 and Feng Jianhua 丰建华. Dai has been a senior researcher in nuclear materials at the Paul Scherrer Institute (PSI) since 1995,<sup>102</sup> a federally funded institution and in its own words “the largest research institute for natural and engineering sciences in Switzerland, conducting cutting-edge research in three main fields: matter and materials, energy and the environment and human health,” that “develops, builds and operates complex large research facilities.”<sup>103</sup> In a news report about a lecture given at the Institute of Metal Research of the Chinese Academy of Science (中国科学院金属研究所), Dai is introduced as a senior researcher of PSI, but also as the president of CASTS and an overseas judge of the prestigious Changjiang (Yangtze River) Scholar award, the highest award for an individual scholar issued by the PRC Ministry of Education.<sup>104</sup> He was president of CASTS between 2007 and 2013 and as recently as 2019 was apparently again referred to as president.<sup>105</sup> Feng Jianhua is his successor since 2013 and is currently registered as the president on the official certificate of registration, even though his company homepage lists him as “co-founder and former president” of CASTS.<sup>106</sup> At the 2018 annual meeting, it was announced that Feng would have to withdraw temporarily.<sup>107</sup> In any case, he is a senior researcher and PD Dr. med. et phil. at the Department for BioMedical Research (DBMR) at the University of Bern, and a former researcher at Novartis and the University Hospital Zurich.<sup>108</sup> He is also on the team of S-Partners, a technology investment firm based in Hong Kong and Switzerland,<sup>109</sup> and the Director of the Sino-Swiss Innovation Center (SSIC, 瑞中创新中心). On the latter company’s homepage, he mentions the following further mandates in

<sup>98</sup>See: “协会章程”, CASTS.

<sup>99</sup>See: “瑞士中国学人科技协会简介”, CASTS.

<sup>100</sup>See: William C. Hannas and Huey-Meei Chang, “Chinese Technology Transfer: An Introduction”, *China’s Quest for Foreign Technology*, ed. by William C. Hannas and Didi Kirsten Tatlow (Routledge, 2020), p. 13.

<sup>101</sup>See: Spear, Andrew, “Serve the Motherland while Working Abroad”, *China’s Quest for Foreign Technology*, ed. by William C. Hannas and Didi Kirsten Tatlow (Routledge, 2020), p. 21.

<sup>102</sup>See: “Dr. Yong Dai”, Paul Scherrer Institute.

<sup>103</sup>See: “The Paul Scherrer Institute in brief”, Paul Scherrer Institute.

<sup>104</sup>See: “瑞士联邦 Paul Scherrer 研究所 (PSI) 戴勇博士访问金属所”, 中国科学院金属研究所, 11<sup>th</sup> Nov 2015.

<sup>105</sup>See: “瑞士中国学人材料科学与能源协会 2019 年会”, CASTS, 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 2019. The first presidents of CASTS were Wang Shaoning 王绍宁 and Yang Zhihong 杨志宏. See, also for a historical account of CASTS: “构筑中瑞科技交流的‘桥头堡’——记瑞士中国学人科技协会”, 神州学人, 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2010.

<sup>106</sup>See: “Chinesische Gesellschaft für Wissenschaft und Technik in der Schweiz (CGWTS)”, Commercial Register of Canton Zurich. The register gives Gao Hui 高惠 and Peng Renwang 彭仁旺 (Bern University Hospital) as vice-presidents, Dahinden-Zhou Qing 周晴 (UBS), Li Xiaodan 李晓丹 (PSI), Wang Yuheng 王宇恒 (previously a researcher at EPFL in Lausanne, today professor at Northwestern Polytechnical University (西北工业大学) in Xi’an) and Wei Xun 魏逊 as Board members. The funding from the Chinese embassy is not mentioned in the registry, where the respective entry merely lists member fees, donations, bequests and fees for events. Dahinden-Zhou was also the President of the Swiss Chinese Enterprise (SCE) association. See: “在瑞华人周晴: 金融合作将助推中瑞关系持续发展”, Sina News, 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017.

<sup>107</sup>See: “2018 年科协年会在苏黎世召开”, CASTS, 31<sup>st</sup> Oct 2018.

<sup>108</sup>See: “PD Dr. med. Jianhua Feng”, Department for BioMedical Research (DBMR), University of Bern.

<sup>109</sup>See: “Team”, S-Partners.



his short-bio: board member of the New Huadu Business School Switzerland (新华都商学院, now the Xinrui Business School (新瑞学院), a cooperation partner of both the University of Zurich and ETHZ),<sup>110</sup> overseas board member of the Western Returned Scholars Association (WRSA, 欧美同学会),<sup>111</sup> overseas vice president of the Beijing Association of Overseas-Chinese Hi-tech Entrepreneurs (BAOHE), overseas committee member of ACFROC,<sup>112</sup> overseas committee member of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese of Jiangsu Province and Beijing Xicheng District as well, and overseas talent advisor for several of China's local governments.<sup>113</sup> The list omits the important position on the Council of FOCAS mentioned above. The short-bio also states that Feng “has many contacts and relations with the Swiss and Chinese government, universities and industries,” which is manifestly true given that the center organizes events e.g. together with the Chinese Consul General and regularly receives delegations from the PRC.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>110</sup>The New Huadu Business School (since 2018 the Xinrui Business School) was funded by Chinese billionaire Chen Fashu 陈发树. Besides Fuzhou, Beijing and Shanghai, there is also a campus in Zurich. See: “About XBS”, Xinrui Business School. The University of Zurich operates a Master of Advanced Studies on European and Chinese Business Management in cooperation with Xinrui Business School. See: “Partners”, MAS European and Chinese Business Management, University of Zurich. The commercial registry lists CASTS and SSIC's Feng Jianhua and Wei Xun in key positions and gives the address of Xinrui Business School in Dübendorf for the period between 2017 and 2019 as c/o Swiss-Sino Innovation Center (SSIC). See: “Xinrui Business School”, Commercial register of Canton Zurich.

<sup>111</sup>The WRSA is an alumni organization. It is under the leadership of the CCP Central Committee and administered by the UFWD. For Joske, it is “the primary united front group for Chinese scientists and scholars who have lived abroad. The association's secretary-general is a UFWD official, and it's described as a ‘united front system work unit.’” The WRSA also operates overseas through “talent recruitment workstations” (海外人才工作站). See: Joske, *The Party Speaks for You*, *op. cit.*, p. 29. See also: Alex Joske and Jeffrey Stoff, “The United Front and Technology Transfer”, *China's Quest for Foreign Technology*, ed. by William C. Hannas and Didi Kirsten Tatlow (Routledge, 2020), pp. 266–267. Since 1992, it has had a Swiss chapter headquartered in Beijing and since 2008 includes a Youth Committee. It is presided over by Tang Zhiyong 唐智勇 (since 19 January 2020) and has seven vice-presidents: Ai Bo 艾波 (the former President), Qu Zhaosong 曲兆松, Yang Zhou 杨洲, Zhang Jianxin 张建新, Chen Xiaofeng 陈晓峰, Jin Jing 金京, and Gao Xiang 高翔. Among its most prominent members is Li Jinghai 李静海, formerly a research associate at ETHZ, and since 2006 a foreign member of the Swiss Academy of Engineering Sciences. In addition, Li holds many important science-related posts in the PRC, including vice-president of CAST and president of the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC, 国家自然科学基金委员会). Among the tasks of the Swiss chapter, the homepage explicitly lists “non-governmental diplomacy” (民间外交). See: “留瑞士分会”, 欧美同学会·中国留学人员联谊会, 30th Aug 2017; “欧美同学会瑞士分会第六届理事会第一次会议在京召开”, 欧美同学会·中国留学人员联谊会, 19th Jan 2020. There are also local chapters in the PRC, see e.g. the Shanghai Overseas Returned Scholars (Swiss Section): “瑞士分会”, 上海市欧美同学会.

<sup>112</sup>As such, he would be invited back to the PRC to receive training. A recent summary of such a training course, mentioning 50 participants from 27 countries (but not explicitly Switzerland) might give some idea of the shape and content. Besides lectures on Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era, explicit purposes of the event are noted as enhancing leadership and developing overseas Chinese community associations (海外侨领社团发展的领导力) and improving the ability of overseas Chinese leaders to tell an objective, true and three-dimensional Chinese story in the new era (讲好一个客观、真实、立体的新时代中国故事). See: “中国侨联举办第七期海外联谊研修班”, 中华全国归国华侨联合会, 20th Oct 2020.

<sup>113</sup>See: “Team”, Swiss-Sino Innovation Center.

<sup>114</sup>See: “Consul General Zhao attended Guangdong – SSIC Innovation Cooperation Symposium”, Swiss-Sino Innovation Center, 3rd Dec 2018. Feng's SSIC assembles a most interesting team (altogether 11 members). Richard Zhi Wang 王致, the executive deputy director, also works for the economic promotion of the Canton of Bern apparently “in charge of investments from China,” and sits on the Advisory Board of the Swiss-Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC), after the Swiss Chinese Enterprise (SCE) association (瑞中企业商会) was absorbed into it in 2018 (Wang was SCE vice-president, the association being founded in 2015 with support of the Chinese Consulate in Zurich, the Embassy in Bern and CASTS among many others). See: “Office & Headquarter”, SCCC; “新闻稿”, SCCC, 5th Mar 2018; “Foundation of the Swiss Chinese Enterprise (SCE)”, EurAsia Info, 4th Oct 2015. He is also on the executive board of Swiss China Consulting GmbH, and serves as secretary-general for the Swiss China Ski Association (瑞中滑雪



The activities of CASTS cover a broad range, from organizing gatherings that feature talks by senior scholars in science and technology, to serving as media partner to the 2019 Swiss-Chinese Career Symposium held in Zurich and co-organized by the Swiss-Chinese Association SCA (Gesellschaft Schweiz China) and the Swiss-Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC),<sup>115</sup> to staging somewhat unrelated events like one held by CAFPS including a talk by Kurt Haerri (Schindler Group and former president of the SCCC) entitled “China – A World Power Comes Back – Opportunities and Challenges for Global Companies” and the educational counselor of the Chinese Embassy reporting on “the major issues concerning comprehensive deepening reform from the Third Plenary Session of the 18<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.”<sup>116</sup> At one of its annual meetings, held in Bern in the presence of the Chinese ambassador, Dai Yong reported on the activities of CASTS explicitly including work done in the realms of “political activities” (政治活动) and “cultural propaganda” (文化宣传).<sup>117</sup> He also mentioned his work regarding the China-Switzerland International Technology Transfer Center (中瑞科技对接中心), which was established in the context of the Free Trade Agreement between Switzerland and the PRC.<sup>118</sup>

CASTS apparently is also involved in some substantial initiatives. Hannas and Chang discuss CAST’s “HOME Program”, i.e. the Haizhi 海智 Plan,<sup>119</sup> which goes back to 2004 and literally is designed to bring back elite intellectual resources to help the motherland. Of the 29 projects officially listed for 2019, one directly bears on Switzer-

协会, initially registered as c/o Swiss China Consulting GmbH). See: “Zhi Wang”, Swiss China Consulting GmbH; “About”, Swiss China Ski Association; “Swiss China Ski Association”, Commercial register of Canton Zurich; “Neueintragung Swiss China Ski Association, Zürich”, *Schweizerisches Handelsamtsblatt*, 11<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018. The latter association has organized skiing races involving speeches by the Chinese consul-general and involving former Swiss skiing aces as well as the above-mentioned Li Donghua. See: “The First Sino-Swiss Du Peak Ski Race and DuPeak Sports Forum”, Evenium. The Secretary-General and, according to his LinkedIn profile, “co-founder” of SSIC is Wu Ke 吴柯, who serves as vice-president of the Peking University Alumni Association in Switzerland (PKUAACH), board member of CAFPS and former president of the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in Zurich (ACSSZ). He is also the deputy director of the Sino-Swiss Docking Center (中瑞对接中心), which seems to come under the purview of CASTS and which might conceivably – in light of the extensive use of the term 对接 in its self-description – refer to the China-Switzerland International Technology Transfer Center (CSITTC, 中瑞技术转移中心), established in the context of the Sino-Swiss Free Trade Agreement (signed 2013, in force since 2014). See: “瑞士中国学人科技协会 2017 年年会在伯尔尼召开”, Education Office of Embassy of PRC, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2017; “China-Switzerland International Technology Transfer Center”, CSITTC; “关于我们”, CSITTC. The CSITTC was exposed for listing partners without their consent, as the case of the SwissCham (the PRC branch of SSSC), which despite its protest is still listed, shows. The list of claimed partners is extensive. See: “Mise en garde de SwissCham sur des sites Internet prétendument affiliés”, Sinoptic, 30<sup>th</sup> Mar 2018; “Partners”, CSITTC. For the issue of technology transfer and CSITTC, see also: Didi Kirsten Tatlow, Hinnerk Feldwisch-Drentrup and Ryan Fedasiuk, “EUROPE: A Technology Transfer Mosaic”, *China’s Quest for Foreign Technology*, ed. by William C. Hannas and Didi Kirsten Tatlow (Routledge, 2020), p. 115. Deputy secretary-general Wei Xun 魏逊 works at Xinrui Business School – “China’s first business school registered in Europe” – and is registered as a member of the committee, clerk and treasurer. See: “About XBS”, Xinrui Business School; “Xinrui Business School”, Commercial register of Canton Zurich. She is also on the board of CASTS and the Swiss China Association SCA (see below). Project manager Deng Yuting 邓雨亭 has also been President of ACSSZ. Finally, Dennis Zhu 朱均, formerly the chairman of the St. Gallen Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) and still the “China advisor” to the St. Gallen Symposium, has an interestingly named function in the team as the “Chief Representative of China.” See: “Team”, Swiss-Sino Innovation Center.

<sup>115</sup>See: “Swiss-Chinese Career Symposium”, together AG.

<sup>116</sup>See: “China - A World Power Comes Back”, CASTS, 4<sup>th</sup> Dez 2013.

<sup>117</sup>See: “瑞士中国学人科技协会 2017 年年会在伯尔尼召开”, Education Office of the PRC Embassy, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2017.

<sup>118</sup>See: “关于我们”, China-Switzerland International Technology Transfer Center.

<sup>119</sup>See: Hannas and Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 11 and also: Spear, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–29.





## 海智计划 2019 年拟资助项目列表

序号	项目名称	实施单位
1	深化中科协海外海智双创基地 2.0	中国科协—FCPAE 欧洲(比利时)海智创新创业基地
2	中欧生命科学联盟创新发展项目	中国科协-FCPAE 欧洲生命科学(瑞士)海智创新创业基地
3	日本海智创新创业基地建设	中国科协日本(东京)海智创新创业基地
4	海归创业联盟创新发展项目	中国海归创业联盟
5	海智拓展新模式探究课题	南宁市科学技术协会

Figure 3: Snapshot of the document listing the Swiss base project (no. 2) for the Haizhi Plan 2019. Source: “中国科协海智计划 2019 年拟资助项目评审结果的公示”, CAST, 24<sup>th</sup> Sep 2019.

land.<sup>120</sup> The project is referred to as the “China-EU Life Sciences Alliance Innovation Development Project” (中欧生命科学联盟创新发展项目) and foresees a joint CAST-FCPAE Haizhi Innovation and Entrepreneurship Base in Switzerland.<sup>121</sup> The base now seems functional. Its director is He Yi 贺毅 and the executive deputy director is Gao Hui (also on the board of CASTS and secretary-general of FOCAS).<sup>122</sup> It is only the second such base in Europe, after the one set up in Belgium in 2016. In the past, Switzerland-based associations like CASTS and ACSES (see below) have participated in activities of the CAST-FCPAE Belgium base.<sup>123</sup>

The FCPAE is the Federation of Chinese Professional Associations in Europe (全欧华人专业协会联合会), founded in 2001 and officially registered in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, notably as a “politically independent and religiously neutral association” (Charter §3.2).<sup>124</sup> It pursues a rather eclectic set of activities. Its academic arm organizes large gatherings such as the International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Manufacturing, held in Dublin from 17 to 19 October 2019, bringing PRC-based and European-based Chinese scholars together.<sup>125</sup> But it also sends out questionnaires about “parental care” reminiscent of a party campaign a few years back on going home often to your parents for a visit (常回家看看).<sup>126</sup> According to recent studies, FCPAE is clearly connected to the united front system and has featured

<sup>120</sup>See: “中国科协海智计划 2019 年拟资助项目评审结果的公示”, CAST, 24<sup>th</sup> Sep 2019.

<sup>121</sup>See: “中国科协海智计划 2019 年拟资助项目评审结果公示函”, CAST. The invitation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sino-European Life Science Forum of June 2016 is available online and gives a good insight into the activities. See: “2<sup>nd</sup> Sino-European Life Science Forum,” FCPAE. See also: Tatlow et al., *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>122</sup>See: “中国科协-FCPAE 欧洲生命科学(瑞士)海智创新创业基地”, FCPAE. Gao Hui is with the Centre Suisse d’Electronique et de Microtechnique (CSEM), and she is also given as a council member (理事) of FCPAE. See: “高惠-瑞士电子微技术中心研究员、中欧生命科学联盟执行主席兼秘书长,” 连云港市人民政府办公室, 1<sup>st</sup> Aug 2019.

<sup>123</sup>See: “中国(长春)海外人才创新创业项目大赛”, FCPAE.

<sup>124</sup>See: “联合会简介”, FCPAE, and for the charter: “Charter”, FCPAE.

<sup>125</sup>See: “会议手册 Conference Program”, FCPAE & AIAM2019: International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Manufacturing.

<sup>126</sup>See: “海外华人《关爱父母》调查表”, Survey Askform. Cf. Ralph Weber, “Konfuzianische Selbstkultivierung als Philosophem und Politikum”, *polylog* 26 (2011), pp. 19–42.



important united front figures as keynote speakers in its conferences.<sup>127</sup> It stresses “relying on the intelligence, financing and technology of overseas Chinese to create resource advantages” and “paying closer attention to Chinese strategic development and opportunities.”<sup>128</sup> Its Swiss branch is the Association of Chinese Scholars and Entrepreneurs in Swiss [sic] (ACSES, 瑞士华人学者企业家协会) under the leadership of Su Qingxiang 苏庆祥. There is not much information publicly available about this association, but Su seems to have held the leadership position since at least 2004 (the association at that time was referred to as the Association of Chinese Entrepreneurs in Switzerland, 瑞士华人企业家协会).<sup>129</sup> He seems to have been working in the past at the Institute of Plant Sciences at ETHZ,<sup>130</sup> and today is involved in the TCM business and in other companies, one in the business of water processing and one at the intersection of consulting and health and medical goods.<sup>131</sup>

#### 1.4 Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA)

CASTS does not only bring together advanced researchers (45%), but also numerous doctoral students (34%).<sup>132</sup> It maintains close relations with the various subgroups of the Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA) in Switzerland. In fact, about half of the staff of CASTS consists of selected members of the student associations and the homepage explicitly refers to the integration of their resources (整合资源).<sup>133</sup> Stokes locates the CSSA in the united front work system, and highlights their role in “generating political leverage within US universities.”<sup>134</sup> Compared with the US case, where the CSSA have received a lot of attention recently, particularly for their special proximity to the Chinese embassies in their host countries, the Swiss subgroups appear less politically active. The most noteworthy aspect perhaps is that leaders of the CSSA are frequently after finishing their studies moving on to take up junior and mid-level positions in the networks of organizations involved in exerting PRC/CCP influence in Switzerland. They might have an important role in talent recruitment, too.

<sup>127</sup>See: Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Mapping China-in-Germany”, Sinopsis, 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct 2019; Ryan Fedasiuk, Ryan and Emily Weinstein, “Overseas Professionals and Technology Transfer to China”, *CSET Issue Brief*, July 2020, p. 9.

<sup>128</sup>See: Tatlow et al., *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>129</sup>See: “华侨华人专业人士受聘石家庄市高级顾问”, Sina 新闻中心, 1<sup>st</sup> Nov 2004. A much more recent association goes by almost the same name, but seems to be entirely unrelated: The Association of Chinese Enterprises in Switzerland (ACES) has been established around 2018. It has been registered since February 2020 and lists Gong (David) Weiyun 龚伟运 (Zurich Branch Office Director of China Construction Bank Corporation) as president, Chen Peichen 陈培琛 (Zurich Branch Office Director Industrial and Commercial Bank of China) and Wang (Andy) Haitao 王海涛 (CEO, Huawei Technologies Switzerland AG) as vice-presidents, with Ge Chen (possibly 葛晨, the general manager of Air China in the Geneva office) as member and secretary. Its address in Geneva is c/o China Patent Agent (Hong Kong) Limited 中国专利代理(香港)有限公司. The director of the Swiss branch of China Patent Agent is Yu Haiyang 于海洋, who appears in a news item of the China Council for the Promotion of international Trade (CCPIT, 中国国际贸易促进委员会) as the deputy representative of “CCPIT’s newly-established trade representative office in Geneva,” opened on 8 December 2017. This seems to refer to ACES. See: “CCPIT Vice Chairman Lu Pengqi met with Director General of WIPO”, CCPIT, 28<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018; “CCPIT Representative Office in Switzerland unveiled”, CCPIT, 26<sup>th</sup> Dec 2017. In 2017, Gong Weiyun signed a strategic cooperation agreement with Feng Jianhua’s SSIC and Swiss Innovation Park (represented by Raphaël Tschanz), see: “瑞中创新中心与中国建设银行苏黎世分行、瑞士创新园签署战略合作协议”, SSIC, 24<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018.

<sup>130</sup>See: “PhD Student Position in Zurich, Switzerland”, China News Digest, 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec 1999.

<sup>131</sup>See: “Qingxiang Su”, Business Monitor.

<sup>132</sup>See: “瑞士中国学人科技协会简介”, CASTS.

<sup>133</sup>See: “组织机构”, CASTS.

<sup>134</sup>See: Stokes, *op. cit.*, pp. 64–65.



Active subgroups with homepages exist in Basel,<sup>135</sup> Geneva,<sup>136</sup> Lausanne,<sup>137</sup> Neuchâtel,<sup>138</sup> and Zurich.<sup>139</sup> Bern, Fribourg, Lugano and St. Gallen<sup>140</sup> seem to have given up running homepages and apparently have shifted operations to WeChat exclusively.<sup>141</sup> The EHL School of Hospitality in Lausanne and CERN have their own student associations.<sup>142</sup>

海外机构		
Overseas Institutions		
首尔大学中国留学生联谊会	在韩中国国家公派留学生联谊会	全韩中国学生学者联谊会
东京大学中国留学生校友会	中国留日同学总会	全日学联
新加坡中国学者学生联合会	贝尔法斯特女王留学生联谊会	利兹中国学生学者联谊会
全法中国学者学生联合会	里昂中国学生学者联合会	中法创业者协会
大巴黎地区中国学者学生联合会	瑞士中国学人科技学会	苏黎世中国学生学者联合会
PSI-Aargau中国学生学者联合会	洛桑中国学生学者联谊会	斯德哥尔摩大学留学生联谊会
意大利中国学生学者联谊会	留德人才交流协会	慕尼黑中国学生学者联合会
中国留德学者学生团体联合会	马德里中国学生学者联谊会	西班牙人文社科学者学人联合会
加泰罗尼亚理工大学学联		

Figure 4: Screenshot of overseas institutions on the homepage of a Chinese talent recruitment plan named Global Talent Network (环球英才网), listing the CSSAs in Lausanne and Zurich, the PSI-Aargau one and CASTS. Source: “[环球英才网](#)”, “[环球好英才-留创好项目](#)” 征集推介活动办公室.

The Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in Zurich (ACSSZ, 苏黎世中国学生学者联合会) mentions on its homepage that it seeks “to promote Chinese culture” (弘扬中华文化).<sup>143</sup> The Chinese Students and Scholars Association Lausanne describe their activities and assistance to the embassy in a contribution to *China Scholars Abroad* (神州学人), a journal engaged in the “patriotic education” (爱国教育) of Chinese overseas students and promoting their return to the PRC.<sup>144</sup> A particularly interesting association in Switzerland is the PSI-Aargau Chinese Student & Scholar Union (PSI-Aargau 中国学生学者联合会), which claims to have around 200 members, most of whom working at the Paul Scherrer Institute, General Electric, ABB and the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW). Its homepage openly states that it is “under domain of the Education Affairs office of

<sup>135</sup>See: “[ACSSB Associations of Chinese Students and Scholars in Basel](#)”, Blogspot.

<sup>136</sup>See: “[日内瓦中国学生学者联合会 Geneva CSSA](#)”, Blogspot.

<sup>137</sup>See: “[洛桑中国学生学者联合会](#)”, EPFL.

<sup>138</sup>See: “[纳沙泰尔中国学生学者联合会 Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in Neuchâtel](#)”, ACSSN Neuchâtel.

<sup>139</sup>See: “[苏黎世中国学生学者联合会 Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in Zurich](#)”, ACSSZ Zurich.

<sup>140</sup>For an insight into the activities, see: “[圣加伦大学 | 中国学联在瑞士](#)”, Sohu, 1<sup>st</sup> Aug 2017.

<sup>141</sup>Their active e-mail addresses (April 2020) are given on the following page: “[暖心! 驻瑞士大使馆面向全瑞留学人员发放防疫“健康包”](#)”, 瑞士君, 网易号, 2<sup>nd</sup> Apr 2020.

<sup>142</sup>See: “[洛桑酒店管理学院中国学生会 EHL CSSA](#)”, Facebook; “[CERN 中国学生学者联合会](#)”, CSSA CERN.

<sup>143</sup>See: “[关于我们](#)”, ACSSZ Zurich.

<sup>144</sup>See: “[洛桑中国学生学者联合会的瑞士情缘](#)”, 神州学人, 10<sup>th</sup> Oct 2019.



the Chinese Embassy in the [sic] Switzerland.”<sup>145</sup> These associations seem to play an active role in talent recruitment plans. More than two hundred PRC talent plans have been documented.<sup>146</sup>

Apparently unrelated to the CSSA, but worthy of mention is the fact that in more recent years several Chinese university alumni associations have formed in Switzerland, e.g. the Peking University Alumni Association in Switzerland (北京大学瑞士校友会) and the Fudan University Alumni Association in Switzerland (复旦大学瑞士校友会), both in 2017.<sup>147</sup> The Education Office of the Chinese Embassy in Switzerland organized a symposium in 2018, at which the heads of alumni associations of Zhejiang University (浙江大学) (since 2014), Tongji University (同济大学), Central University of Finance and Economics (中央财经大学)<sup>148</sup> and East China University of Science and Technology (华东理工大学) participated, besides Peking University, Fudan University and also Tsinghua University.<sup>149</sup> The latter, the Tsinghua University Alumni Association Swiss Branch (THUAACH, 瑞士清华校友会) was established in 2016. It regularly helps organize the “Belt and Road Davos Forum”, which since 2017 has taken place at the same time as the World Economic Forum (WEF).<sup>150</sup> Today, the association boasts more than 250 alumni and alumnae in its WeChat group (清华人在瑞士) and its messaging repeatedly not only mentions the goal of serving one’s alma mater, but also adds that of serving the motherland (为祖国服务), which is a motto that frequently appears in the documents of these alumni associations.<sup>151</sup> In one instance, when the association tried to enlist Swiss Federal Government units as co-host and co-sponsor the “Belt and Road Davos Forum”, the latter declined indicating that the association’s nature would not be a good fit for them.<sup>152</sup> The first president of THUAACH was Ye Haiwen 叶海文, an area sales manager at ABB and the former and first President (2003–2006) and currently still project manager and advisor of the Chinese Union of Zurich (CUZ, 苏黎世中国人协会).<sup>153</sup> At the foundation ceremony of THUAACH in 2003, the embassy’s education officer gave a congratulatory speech

<sup>145</sup>See: “PSI-Aargau 中国学生学者联合会简介”, PSI-Aargau 学生联合会.

<sup>146</sup>See: Alex Joske, *Hunting the phoenix: The Chinese Communist Party’s global search for technology and talent*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute: International Cyber Policy Centre Policy Brief 35 (2020).

<sup>147</sup>See: “北京大学瑞士校友会”, 北京大学校友会版权所有 (Peking University Alumni Association); “复旦大学瑞士校友会”, 复旦大学校友会 (Fudan University Alumni Association).

<sup>148</sup>There is also a European alumni association of the Central University of Finance and Economics, which was established in August 2016 in Geneva with country-level associations in Switzerland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, Italy, and the United Kingdom. At the meeting, the embassy’s education councilor, the councilor to the Chinese Mission at the United Nations, the chairman of the Geneva CSSA and the secretary-general of CAFPS participated. Swiss representative Zhang Xiaoxia 张晓霞 became the first President. See: “欧洲校友会”, 中央财经大学校友总会.

<sup>149</sup>At the meeting, the suggestion was floated to create a Swiss umbrella federation of Chinese university alumni associations, but no evidence of the realization of the plan could be found. Moreover, the embassy’s education councilor confirmed the will to support and assist the associations “within its capacity,” which might suggest that the embassy does not contribute to their funding. They are directly under their home universities. See: “教育处召开部分中国高校瑞士校友会负责人座谈会”, Education Office of the PRC Embassy, 27<sup>th</sup> Apr 2018.

<sup>150</sup>See: “瑞士清华校友会: 助力母校 圆梦达沃斯”, 清华校友会 (Tsinghua Alumni Association), 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2018. The relationship between the WEF and the PRC/CCP awaits further inquiry.

<sup>151</sup>See: “瑞士清华校友会襄助母校第四届“一带一路”达沃斯论坛的台前幕后”, 清华校友会 Tsinghua Alumni Association, 3<sup>rd</sup> Mar 2020.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid.

<sup>153</sup>CUZ states on its homepage that it “works closely with China’s representation in Switzerland and maintains close ties with relevant Chinese governmental organizations.” See: “About CUZ”, Chinese Union of Zurich. CUZ lists as advisors Swiss Olympic champion Li Donghua and FOCAS vice-president Wu Hua mentioned above. See: “CUZ Advisors”, Chinese Union of Zurich. CUZ is closely affiliated with ETH Zurich and at least in its early years hosted its homepage on that public university’s domain (the link is no longer



encouraging the new association to strengthen its ties with Swiss Overseas Chinese organizations, a goal THUAACH lists among its main purposes.<sup>154</sup>

### 1.5 Hometown associations

There are several Chinese hometown associations in Switzerland. Some of them have their origins back in the 1980s, while recently we have seen quite a few new additions. These associations form a particularly strong gateway into the Overseas Chinese communities. A target of the united front, rather than a part of it, they serve to spread CCP talking points and create ideological unity among the diaspora. The link to the united front consists in the double-hatting of some of the leaders, which in this sense are more involved than targeted. In this section, several hometown associations are introduced before the focus is set on a recently established one, which leads to us to a media outlet, *EurAsia Info*, with manifold connections into the united front work system and the propaganda and ideology system.

Historically, the first groups of Chinese immigrants, largely merchants, came from Zhejiang Province (from Qingtian 青田 and Wenzhou 温州),<sup>155</sup> but did not number more than 300 people before 1974. The next groups were composed of Chinese from Hong Kong, Tibetan refugees (who, of course, rarely self-identify as “Chinese”) and migrants from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia identifying as of Han descent, which propelled the number of “Chinese” in Switzerland up considerably. Together, with new migrants from Taiwan and around 3,000 from China, this eventually brought the number of overseas Chinese in Switzerland to around 13,000 in 1998.<sup>156</sup> Since the mid-1990s, the main bulk of Chinese migrants has been students and white collar workers hailing from the PRC.<sup>157</sup>

The case of Switzerland is said to be different from other European countries as regards Chinese migration. Instead of concentrations in specific “ethnic sectors of the economy” or urban enclaves, Chinese migrants in Switzerland are “mostly highly skilled professionals, students or white-collar workers in various sectors of the economy” (Geneva also stands out with its many international civil servants) and generally they are “well-integrated.”<sup>158</sup> Lieber emphasizes the diversity of the “Chinese” community in Switzerland, with “Chinese” being not an “ethnic category,” but the outcome of a process of “boundary-making” and therefore the “non-natural, non-stable result of social processes that involve very broad dimensions.”<sup>159</sup> Lieber’s article from 2010 shows a rise of Chinese associations in Switzerland in the 2000s that goes hand in hand with an increasing ethnic and political identity alignment. After a phase of

functional, but accessible in the archive: “Chinese Union Zürich”, ETHZ). CUZ has co-organized events with ACSZ. There are no evident substantial ties to the united front system. See also: Lieber, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>154</sup>See: “瑞士清华大学校友会成立仪式于苏黎世举行”, Education Office of Embassy of PRC, 28<sup>th</sup> Oct 2016. “瑞士校友会基本情况介绍”, 清华校友会 Tsinghua Alumni Association, 18<sup>th</sup> Nov 2016.

<sup>155</sup>Interestingly, no Qingtian or Wenzhou hometown associations seem to have emerged in Switzerland, although such groups account for among the most active and most political associations in other European countries. For instance, at a recent patriotic rally in Geneva following the call of the European Qingtian Hometown Association 欧洲青田同乡总会, many country-level associations participated, but there is no mention of a Swiss chapter. See: “旅欧青田侨胞：中国人权发展成就有目共睹”, 欧洲时报, 12<sup>th</sup> Nov 2018.

<sup>156</sup>See: “瑞士华侨华人概述”, 百科故事, 30<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018. A more detailed account is offered by Lieber, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>157</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>158</sup>Lieber, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>159</sup>Lieber, *op. cit.*, p. 103.



ROC-PRC rivalry, it seems that the PRC-focused groups have taken over the better part of these associations. Rather than the earlier emphasis on organizing mutual support, these associations (Lieber mentions ASCEOC) work towards defending “their economic interests on a global scale” and co-ordinate more closely with the Chinese embassy.<sup>160</sup>

The Swiss Chaozhou [Teochew] Hometown Association (瑞士潮州同乡会) was established in 1991.<sup>161</sup> In 2004 and perhaps until late 2018, the president apparently was Huang Lihe 黄立和.<sup>162</sup> ASCEOC board member Chen Ruohong 陳若虹 has been in charge of theatrical performances organized by this association, such as the one at the Spring Festival Gala in 2016, a recording of which is available online. This recording appears to show Kha Sanh Lam as the evening’s guest of honor.<sup>163</sup> Since 2000 and at least until 2016, Chen has run a Chinese School in Biel.<sup>164</sup> At the school’s 2008 Christmas and New Year Party, as reported by the embassy homepage news section, the wife of then Chinese ambassador to Switzerland, Sun Guoqin 孙国琴, participated.<sup>165</sup> Similar in age as the Chaozhou association is the Swiss Guangdong Hometown Association (瑞士广东同乡会). At a jointly attended event that took place at the Hotel Sternen in Muri in 2004, Huang Lihe was noted as president of the Chaozhou association and Zhou Jingcheng 周竟成 was named as president of the Guangdong association. Organized by the Swiss Chinese Overseas Chinese Federation’s then vice-president Kha Sanh Lam, this event comprised a symposium against Taiwanese independence. The summary of the event contains the following passage:

大家一致指出，遍布全球的华侨华人从来就支持中华民族的统一与复兴大业的。瑞士华侨华人继承了这一光荣传统，与全球华侨华人站在一起，坚决支持中华民族的统一与复兴大业。瑞士华侨华人坚决支持中国政府为实现国家和平统一所作的努力！

Everyone in concert pointed out that Overseas Chinese from all over the world have been always supporting the great cause of the reunification and revival of the Chinese nation. Overseas Chinese in Switzerland carry on this glorious tradition, stand together with the Overseas Chinese from all over the world, and firmly support the great cause of the reunification and revival of the Chinese nation. Overseas Chinese in Switzerland firmly support the efforts that the Chinese government makes in order to achieve peaceful reunification of the country!<sup>166</sup>

The Swiss Fujian Hometown Association (Association Suisse-Chine des Concitoyens de Fujian, 瑞士福建同乡会) was founded in 2015.<sup>167</sup> Besides representatives of the Chinese embassy, various other prominent overseas figures and representatives from organizations throughout Europe and within Switzerland (notably Yang Yuming 杨玉明 and Li Yihong 李艺红) participated. In 2017, it already had more than 200 members.

<sup>160</sup>Lieber, *op. cit.*, p. 104 and pp. 113–116.

<sup>161</sup>See: “瑞士潮州同乡会”, 海南省潮商经济促进会.

<sup>162</sup>See: “瑞士华侨华人举行国庆反台独座谈会吁中国早统一”, 新闻中心, 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2004; “第五届天下潮商经济年会·北京论坛 12月16日在京盛大举行”, 中华全国归国华侨联合会, 17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018.

<sup>163</sup>See: “瑞士潮州同乡会 (丙申年) 新春联欢会”, 西瓜视频, 7<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017.

<sup>164</sup>See: “Über die Schule 关于学校”, Chinesische Schule Biel - 瑞士比尔中文学校.

<sup>165</sup>See: “驻瑞士大使夫人出席比尔中文学校新年联欢会”, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Switzerland, 19<sup>th</sup> Dec 2008.

<sup>166</sup>See: “瑞士华侨华人举行国庆反台独座谈会吁中国早统一”, 新闻中心, 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2004.

<sup>167</sup>See: “瑞士福建同乡会”, 瑞士福建同乡会 Association Suisse-Chine des Concitoyens de Fujian; “瑞士福建同乡会成立庆典在日内瓦隆重举行”, EurAsia Info, 30<sup>th</sup> Oct 2015.



The first president was Chen Feng 陈峰.<sup>168</sup> Its initial board of directors was exclusively made up of restaurant owners.<sup>169</sup> Currently, Chen Jinpin 陈金品, the owner of the Wok Royal in Prilly, serves as president.<sup>170</sup> In early 2020, the Swiss Fujian Hometown Association, like many such entities in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, engaged in organizing medical supplies and raising funds to be sent to the PRC.<sup>171</sup> An inquiry into the channels used for this operation – extant or newly opened – would be interesting in terms of the possible links to united front actors it might reveal. As with student alumni associations, the messaging most often ties the love for the concrete identity of the association, i.e. the hometown (爱乡), with the broader motto of love for one's country (爱国).

At the founding ceremony in 2015, Chen Feng mentioned that the Swiss Fujian Hometown Association is a “non-profit social organization, which is established in Vaud and legally registered by Swiss Confederation on the initiative of Overseas Chinese Affairs Office leaders in China.” The representative of the Embassy's Consular Department underlined her hope that the “Swiss Fujianese Association will give more support to the embassy and coordinate with our work” and referred to the recent embassy-led establishment of FOCAS, raising the expectation that the Swiss Fujian Hometown Association would join the Federation.<sup>172</sup> There is also a European umbrella organization for the various Fujian hometown associations, the European Federation of Fujian Overseas Chinese Associations (欧洲福建侨团联合总会),<sup>173</sup> which acknowledges the participation of members from Switzerland and representatives of which were also present at the Swiss branch's founding ceremony in Geneva.<sup>174</sup> At its foundation, an impressive array of united front figures participated, such as Chen Fei 陈飞, the deputy head of the provincial United Front Work Department, or Wang Yajun 王亚君, the chairman of the Fujian Federation of Overseas Chinese.<sup>175</sup>

The most recent addition to this array is the Swiss Anhui Hometown Association (瑞士安徽同乡会), which was established on 7 March 2020. Rong Jundan 荣军担 was elected as president and Ye Haiwen 叶海文, mentioned above in the context of THUAACH and CUZ, was appointed to serve as one of three advisors.<sup>176</sup> The (Swiss-led) European Jiangxi Hometown Association (欧洲江西同乡会) should also be mentioned here. Behind the initiative that materialized on 8 October 2017 stands Zhu Ailian 朱爱莲. The association was established in Zurich, in the offices of the

<sup>168</sup>See: “瑞士福建同乡会会长陈峰: 中瑞关系带旺了中餐”, 新华网, 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017.

<sup>169</sup>See: “瑞士福建同乡会成立庆典在日内瓦隆重举行”, EurAsia Info, 30<sup>th</sup> Oct 2015.

<sup>170</sup>See: “在皇家回味舌尖上的家乡记忆-瑞士法语区大型自助中餐皇家 Wok Royal 盛大开幕”, EurAsia Info, 17<sup>th</sup> Jul 2018.

<sup>171</sup>See: “瑞士福建同乡会积极捐款捐物驰援家乡助力抗击疫情”, EurAsia Info, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020.

<sup>172</sup>The Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations in Switzerland 瑞士华侨华人社团联合会, which was officially only founded on 1 November 2015, is mentioned in the speech at the establishment of the Swiss Fujian Association on 25 October in a close variant as 瑞士华人华侨社团联合会. See: “瑞士福建同乡会成立庆典在日内瓦隆重举行”, EurAsia Info, 30<sup>th</sup> Oct 2015.

<sup>173</sup>See: Filip Jirouš, “The Role of Coopted Diaspora Groups in Czech and European United Front Work”, *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information* 20:16 (2020).

<sup>174</sup>See: “中欧侨商情共叙中国梦 - 欧洲福建侨团联合总会成立大会”, Associazione Culturale Della Comunità Cinese di Fujian in Italia, 12<sup>th</sup> Aug 2015; “瑞士福建同乡会成立庆典在日内瓦隆重举行”, EurAsia Info, 30<sup>th</sup> Oct 2015.

<sup>175</sup>See: “中欧侨商情共叙中国梦 - 欧洲福建侨团联合总会成立大会”, 旅意福建华人华侨同乡总会 Associazione Culturale Della Comunità Cinese di Fujian in Italia.

<sup>176</sup>See: “热烈祝贺瑞士安徽同乡会成立”, 华人头条, 11<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020.



Swiss EurAsia Info Group (瑞士欧亚集团)<sup>177</sup> on the fourth floor of Bahnhofstrasse 100, simultaneously, it seems, with the establishment of the European Jiangxi Business Association (欧洲赣商联合会) and the European Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce (欧洲江西总商会). With the support of more than 140 persons from Jiangxi throughout Europe (Switzerland, Austria, Germany, France, Britain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Belgium and Hungary are explicitly mentioned) and congratulatory letters from the Jiangxi Provincial Department of Commerce (江西省商务厅) and the Jiangxi Provincial Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (江西省侨务办公室), Zhu Ailian was elected as president and Xi Guoyan 习国燕 (Cindy Kogler-Xi) from Austria as vice-president of the European Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce.<sup>178</sup> On its homepage, members of the chamber are shown holding up a banner warmly greeting Wang Qishan 王岐山, the vice-president of the PRC, on his visit to Switzerland in January 2019.<sup>179</sup> In September 2019, Zhu was re-elected as president at the Second Council of the European Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce at a meeting held in France, while the European Jiangxi Hometown Association and the European Jiangxi Business Association were merged into the Chamber.<sup>180</sup>

The newspaper *EurAsia Info* (欧亚时报) is bilingual (Chinese and English) and relates news from across Europe and Asia with a good portion of Swiss-China news, which, however, appear to focus often on events involving the Chinese embassy.<sup>181</sup> Zhu is the CEO, Robert J. Mojzes is listed as executive assistant, and Michael Winkler (Zhu's husband) is the chairman. Since January 2020, the three persons also operate the EurAsia Forum for International Cooperation, initially registered in April 2019 as the Connecting China Media Association (CCMA), which aims at helping "to establish and develop successful business interactions between Europe and Chinese companies (in particular the People's Republic of China)."<sup>182</sup> Winkler, who is the CEO of RefinSol Advisory Services (where Mojzes is also employed as Winkler's executive assistant, and Zhu is CFO<sup>183</sup>), has commented in *EurAsia Info* on Xi Jinping's state visit to Switzerland in an article entitled "Xi Jinping: a responsible leader in Switzerland," praising "the depth of his [i.e. Xi's] knowledge on the historic connections between the two countries and the clarity and soundness of his objectives for this visit."<sup>184</sup> Winkler and Mojzes have been embroiled in an alleged disinformation campaign targeting the president of the Czech Senate and his trip to Taiwan that was widely reported upon – and in the wake of which the homepage of *EurAsia Info* has been temporarily inoperative.<sup>185</sup>

Zhu Ailian also serves as a council member at both the World Association of Chinese Mass Media (WACMM, 世界华文大众传播媒体协会),<sup>186</sup> founded in 1998, and the International Federation of Chinese Journalists (国际中文记者联合会),<sup>187</sup> founded by WACMM in 2016. The WACMM and its associated federation emphasize their political independence. In these functions, she formed part of a delegation in 2019 to the

<sup>177</sup> The EurAsia Info Group comprises four units: EurAsia Financial Technology (欧亚金融科技), EurAsia International Office (欧亚国际事务所), EurAsia Travel Agency (欧亚旅行社), EurAsia Times (欧亚时报社). See: "中新社新闻代表团参访瑞士欧亚时报(图)", 中国侨网, 19 Jun 2018.

<sup>178</sup> See: "欧洲江西同乡会、欧洲赣商联合会在瑞士召开成立大会", EurAsia Info, 11<sup>th</sup> Oct 2017.

<sup>179</sup> See: "关于我们", European Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce (欧洲江西总商会).

<sup>180</sup> See: "欧洲江西总商会", European Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce (欧洲江西总商会).

<sup>181</sup> See: "Category: 瑞士中国", EurAsia Info.

<sup>182</sup> See: "About Us", EurAsia-Forum.

<sup>183</sup> See: "欧洲江西总商会", European Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce (欧洲江西总商会).

<sup>184</sup> See: "Xi Jinping: a responsible leader in Switzerland", EurAsia Info, s.d.

<sup>185</sup> See: "Character assassination as the 'heavy price' for visiting Taiwan", Sinopsis, 11<sup>th</sup> Nov 2020.

<sup>186</sup> See: "首页", 世界华文媒体.

<sup>187</sup> See: "本会理事媒体一览", 世界中文记者.





Figure 5: Group photo with CNS's Xia Chunping (third from right), Zhu Ailian (fourth from left) and Michael Winkler (third from left). Source: “中新社新闻代表团参访瑞士欧亚时报 (图)”, 中国侨网, 19<sup>th</sup> Jun 2018.

All-China Journalists Association ACJA (中华全国新闻工作者协会),<sup>188</sup> which is guided by the CCP's Propaganda Department. At the meeting, the representative of ACJA emphasized that the two associations had engaged in “extensive exchanges and cooperation” (广泛的交流与合作) since 1999 and now want to strengthen cooperation further. Wu Zhi'ou 吴治欧, the chairman of the federation, stated that although Chinese overseas media are legally registered abroad, they interact very closely with the ancestral homeland. The ACJA, Wu said, is its “most important and primary counterpart institution” (我们主要的、第一个要对口的机构).<sup>189</sup>

In June 2018, *EurAsia Info* received a visit by a delegation from the China News Service (CNS, 中国新闻社; formerly under OCAO, which in 2018 was absorbed into the UFWD), led by its vice-president and deputy editor-in-chief Xia Chunping 夏春平. Xia also holds an important position in the CCP Propaganda Department 中宣部, being a member of the “Four Batches” (四个一批) talent program and the review team of the “Cultural Masters Project” (文化名家工程),<sup>190</sup> and is also described as a researcher of Overseas Chinese media and a prolific writer. During his visit to Zurich, Xia highlighted the fact that CNS had for many years “cooperated closely” (合作紧密) with *EurAsia Info* and expressed his hopes that it would become “a messenger and bridge of economic and trade cooperation” (经贸合作的使者与桥梁).<sup>191</sup> Joske points out that the UFWD owns or controls “several overseas Chinese-language media outlets” through CNS, with many WeChat accounts by Chinese media outlets registered to a subsidiary of CNS.<sup>192</sup>

<sup>188</sup>See: “国际中文记者联合会主席吴治欧率团访问中华全国新闻工作者协会”, *EurAsia Info*, 20<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017; “国际中文记者联合会受邀访问中华全国新闻工作者协会”, Sina, 20<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017.

<sup>189</sup>See: “国际中文记者联合会主席吴治欧率团访问中华全国新闻工作者协会”, *EurAsia Info*, 20<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017.

<sup>190</sup>For a description of these projects, see: “文化名家暨‘四个一批’人才工程”, 中国文明网, 12<sup>th</sup> Nov 2019.

<sup>191</sup>See: “中新社新闻代表团参访瑞士欧亚时报 (图)”, 中国侨网, 19<sup>th</sup> Jun 2018.

<sup>192</sup>See: Joske, *The Party Speaks for You*, *op. cit.*, p. 12. On CNS, see also: Alex Joske, Lin Li, Alexandra Pascoe and Nathan Attrill, *The influence environment: A survey of Chinese-language media in Australia*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute: International Cyber Policy Centre Policy Brief 22 (2020), pp. 18–21.



In Spring 2019, Zhu Ailian participated as a foreign media reporter at the back-to-back meetings of the CPPCC and the National People's Congress (NPC), where she was captured in a photo with Liu Qi 刘奇, the Communist Party Secretary of Jiangxi Province.<sup>193</sup> She also gave an interview to the *China Daily*, which it seems was interesting enough for the UFDW to post on its homepage. In the interview, she said that she wanted to experience the new outlook of China, that Switzerland actively participates in the construction of the BRI and that the media in Switzerland “actively agrees” (积极赞同) with the BRI and China's version of globalization.<sup>194</sup> She went on to state:

欧洲国家需要中国这样的倡议，来促进和平，阻止战争，促进世界经济的发展与合作，谋求文化的多样性和共同繁荣， ...

European countries need initiatives like those from China to promote peace, prevent wars, promote the development and cooperation of the world economy, [and] seek cultural diversity and common prosperity...

Then, she offered some reflections on the role and purpose of Overseas Chinese and specifically the media:

...不断加强中国文化软实力，把广大海外侨胞作为‘友好使者’和‘桥梁’，积极开展中外文化交流，把报业作为平台，为发展面向现代化、面向世界和未来的中华民族文化的传播...

... [I] will continue to strengthen the soft power of Chinese culture, using the wide circles of overseas compatriots as ‘messengers of friendship’ and ‘bridges’, actively developing cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, and using the newspaper company as a platform to make new contributions to the development of modernization and of the worldwide and future dissemination of the culture of the Chinese nation.

In October 2019, Zhu participated at the 10<sup>th</sup> World Chinese Media Forum held in Shijiazhuang. In a news report by *Nouvelles d'Europe* 欧洲时报,<sup>195</sup> she is referred to as a representative of the Forum, and reiterates her goal to tell “goods stories about China” (中国的好故事) in her media outlet, striving to serve as a “bridge” (桥梁) and presenting herself as involved in “media diplomacy” (媒体外交).<sup>196</sup> In an exhibition in Beijing on “The China Dream and Overseas Chinese in the past 70 years” that opened in December 2019 and that was co-organized by ACFROC and the *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, Zhu is featured in a segment where photos with the Chinese flag are exhibited. Hers is taken in the Zurich Railway station and she comments with the following words, “even though my body is clothed in a foreign dress, my heart is still a Chinese heart” (洋装虽然穿在身，我心依然是中国心).<sup>197</sup>

Starting with a given hometown association and following up on the publicly available record of prominent members will often, though certainly not always, lead one to statements such as those just quoted. The issue then becomes not so much a question of agenda or why someone is saying what they are saying, but more the fact that they

<sup>193</sup>See: “欧洲江西总商会”, European Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce 欧洲江西总商会.

<sup>194</sup>See: “瑞士侨胞在两会：切实感受到中国新时代新风貌” “一带一路” 备受关注”, 中央统战部网站, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

<sup>195</sup>On *Nouvelles d'Europe*, see: Tatlow, “Mapping China-in-Germany”, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>196</sup>See: “瑞士《欧亚时报》社长朱爱莲：努力成为中欧之间的传播使者”, 欧洲时报, 10<sup>th</sup> Oct 2019.

<sup>197</sup>See: “” 追梦中华·侨这 70 年” 网络主题活动成果展在北京开幕”, 中国新闻网, 17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2019.



are saying it. Hometown associations elsewhere have been shown to be likely politicized.<sup>198</sup> They appear to be a target of the united front system, rather than a part of it. In institutional terms, they are more linked to the embassies and consulates than to any straightforward entity in the united front system. In any case, in practice, the embassies and consulates are often the conduits for united front entities and hometown associations are at least to some considerable extent effective multipliers for the message of the CCP. In comparison with some hometown associations in other countries, those in Switzerland seem to be less active in terms of staging protests and addressing the Swiss public at large, but they certainly can be shown to spread talking points of the Chinese party-state to their specific audiences.

## 1.6 Individuals

There are a few individuals remaining who must be mentioned in this study because they wield considerable influence and power by way of their economic wealth and their connections to the CCP and PRC. Some of them have an association running in Switzerland, but these associations appear less enmeshed with the networks described above. The individuals and their networks run largely parallel and possibly autonomously.

An article that ran in 2016 in several Swiss newspapers spotlighted Hon Kwok Lung 韩国龙 in respect of the business empire he had built in Switzerland in the course of a few years. In 2009, he had founded Swiss Chronometric in Lucerne and launched the luxury brand Codex (not to be confused with Rolex), before taking over Eterna in 2011 and Corum in 2014. The author of the article portrays Hon as an active if not intrusive president of the board of these companies, who has made his fortune with businesses in Hong Kong culminating in his Citychamp Watch and Jewellery Group.<sup>199</sup> Forbes listed him until 2018 as a billionaire, and mentioned that Hon is active in the united front body ACFROC.<sup>200</sup> He is also an executive vice-president of the China Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs (CFOCE) 中国侨商联合会, a unit under the leadership of ACFROC and a sub-unit of the CPPCC. The Swiss newspaper article pointed out that Hon had been a member of the CPPCC (the 12<sup>th</sup> national committee). In fact, he boasts an impressive record of CPPCC positions, having been a member of the Standing Committee of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Beijing Haidian District CPPCC, a member of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Beijing CPPCC, and a member of the Fuzhou CPPCC. At one point, he was also the vice-chairman of the Beijing Overseas Friendship Association (北京海外联谊会).<sup>201</sup> Moreover, he is the honorary president of the Hong Kong Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations.<sup>202</sup> Beyond his involvement in the companies, Hon has not been particularly active in Swiss society or politics. In 2016, he bought a private bank in Liechtenstein<sup>203</sup> and Le Mirador Spa, which is a hotel that appeared in a news story in 2019 as one of several Chinese-owned companies in Switzerland for which, it was alleged, the Chinese Embassy seemed to have paid advertisements

<sup>198</sup>See: Li Hangwei and Shi Xuefei, "Home Away from Home: The Social and Political Roles of Contemporary Chinese Associations in Zambia", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 48:2 (2020), pp. 148–170.

<sup>199</sup>See: "Die einflussreichen Verwaltungsräte aus Chinas", *Berner Zeitung*, 4<sup>th</sup> Mar 2016.

<sup>200</sup>See: "#2124 Hon Kwok Lung & family", Forbes, Billionaires 2018.

<sup>201</sup>See: "主席专栏", 冠城大通.

<sup>202</sup>See: "Self-made Success Story: Hon Kwok Lung of Citychamp", *The Asian Entrepreneur*, 1<sup>st</sup> Nov 2015.

<sup>203</sup>See: "Asian Watchmaker Decides to Buy Private Bank in Liechtenstein", *Finews*, 29<sup>th</sup> Mar 2016.



in a Swiss monthly magazine.<sup>204</sup> When Xi Jinping visited Lausanne, he met with Hon Kwok Lung, which documents the high-level access to the center of power that these individuals enjoy.<sup>205</sup>

Another figure that deserves mention is Yang Shanzhong 杨善中. He is the president of the Swiss-Chinese Friendly Exchange Association (瑞中友好交流协会 or 中瑞文化交流协会), founded in Bern in 2003, initially composed largely of Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao Chinese and in 2009 counting around 100 members. His wife is Yi Yamei 易亚妹, and she is referred to as the association's vice-president in a meeting the couple had in September 2011 with the chairman of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese of Jiangxi Province.<sup>206</sup> Both were handed appointment letters as consultants to the Provincial Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese 省侨联顾问.<sup>207</sup> Yang's life story is retold in a TV program called "Overseas Chinese of Hainan" (海南华侨).<sup>208</sup> In the documentary, Yang also tells about his life in Switzerland. In 1986, he relates, he came to Switzerland and studied at the Language Department of Geneva International University (日内瓦国际大学) and thereafter worked at Kraft Foods Company in Bern. It is said that he became "actively involved in the local circles of Overseas Chinese and established a close relationship with the Chinese Embassy in Switzerland," apparently also relying on his mother's fame and reputation as an overseas patriot to attract the attention of the embassy. It was the embassy that suggested he become more active among the Overseas Chinese community in Switzerland. Yang says: "In 2003, I initiated the establishment of the Swiss-Chinese Friendly Exchange Association." He points out that the association is "non-governmental and voluntary," and adds that "regardless of whether it is nongovernmental or political [exchange], we will face it, actively work on it and make contributions to it."<sup>209</sup>

Another source mentions that Yang was recommended in March 1999 by the Chinese Embassy in Switzerland and, on behalf of the Overseas Chinese in Switzerland, welcomed Party-Secretary and Chinese President Jiang Zemin 江泽民, who was on a state visit to Switzerland. In early 2000, he also seems to have co-initiated the SAPUC. Yang's involvement with the united front is amply and variously documented. He was a member of the 6<sup>th</sup> Council of the Yunnan Overseas Exchange Association 云南省

<sup>204</sup>See: "Roger Köppels seltsame Nähe zu den chinesischen Kommunisten", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2019.

<sup>205</sup>See: "Mr. Hon Kwok Lung, Mr. Hon Hau Wong took the part in a meeting with Chinese president Xi Jinping", Citychamp Watch & Jewellery Group, undated.

<sup>206</sup>See: "【华侨大学面相泉州专业】瑞中友好交流协会访问江西 加强联系交往", 武冈资讯网, 13<sup>th</sup> Jun 2020.

<sup>207</sup>See: "周锦主席会见瑞士瑞中友好交流协会会长杨善中", 江西省归国华侨联合会, 21<sup>st</sup> Sep 2011.

<sup>208</sup>See: "《海南华侨》之《一代巾帼 满门忠义——南侨女机工李月美的故事》", Sohu, 11<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018. It recounts the story of his mother, Li Yuemei 李月美 (1918–1968), who became a celebrated "woman hero" (巾帼英雄), in the words of Zhou Enlai 周恩来. Yang's mother, born and raised in Penang, Malaya, had disguised herself as a man in order to join the "overseas Chinese mechanics" (南侨机工), around 3,000 Chinese men from Southeast Asia who had travelled to China to work as drivers and mechanics in the early years of the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), an operation notably organized by an association of overseas Chinese in Nanyang (南侨总会). Due to a traffic accident in 1940, her real identity was revealed and she was hyped by the media as a "contemporary Hua Mulan" (当代的花木兰). She would name her two sons Yang Shanzhong and Yang Shanguo, the two final names forming the word for "China." After the war, Li apparently moved to Myanmar and had 10 children, and reportedly sent eight of them back to China to study. She also later left her husband to return to Guangdong, from where her family originally hailed. She committed suicide (or was tortured to death, the stories vary) in 1968 during the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, to be rehabilitated only in 1979. See: "冒着敌人的炮火前进——烽火中的中国女性", 中华全国妇女联合会, 6<sup>th</sup> Sep 2015 and "腾冲市: 铁血滇缅路 悠悠女儿情", 云南文明网, 14<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018.

<sup>209</sup>The sequences about Switzerland are captured between minutes 11:04 and 13:53. See: "《海南华侨》之《一代巾帼 满门忠义——南侨女机工李月美的故事》", Sohu, 11<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018.



海外交流协会.<sup>210</sup> At some point, he was appointed as “overseas director” 海外理事 of the Jiangsu Overseas Exchange Association 江苏省海外交流协会.<sup>211</sup> Finally, several meetings with united front officials over the years back in the PRC are documented.<sup>212</sup>

### 1.7 Further associations in close contact with the united front system and the Embassy/Consulate

There is a host of associations and organizations in Switzerland that appear to operate in a more bottom-up fashion, but some of them are still in close contact with the united front system and more regularly courted by the Chinese Embassy and the Consulate. Some of these associations are regional. A good example is the Schaffhausen Chinese Association (Chinesischer Verein Schaffhausen CVSH, 瑞士沙夫豪森中国人协会). The President is Jia Kejie 贾克杰, whom we have encountered above as a supervisory board member of ASCEOC and one of the directors of FOCAS.<sup>213</sup> The association was established in September 2018 in the presence of a member of the Schaffhausen governing council, Christian Amsler, and the Chinese Consul General Zhao Qinghua 赵清华 and with congratulatory letters from the provincial government of Hunan (with whom Schaffhausen had signed a partnership agreement in 2018), the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and the China Overseas Friendship Association.<sup>214</sup> In March 2020, the consul general chaired conference calls to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic, among others with representatives of SAPUC, CASTS, SSIC, THUAACH, the Swiss-Chinese Ski Association, the Anhui Hometown Association, and the Schaffhausen Chinese Association.<sup>215</sup> In May 2020, the Schaffhausen Chinese Association was present at a symposium hosted by the Consulate in Zurich on the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the implementation of the Anti-Secession Law (14 March 2005), which is directed against Taiwanese independence and foresees “non-peaceful means” in case of a unilateral declaration of independence by Taiwan. At the meeting, the overseas Chinese leaders (including someone from *Nouvelles d’Europe*, 欧洲时报) “unanimously” (一致) thanked the consul general for his “guidance” (指导) and promised to further “strengthen the construction of the Overseas Chinese group, unite all the forces that can be united, and insist on promoting the Overseas Chinese community to support the unification of the ancestral land (加强侨团建设, 团结一切可以团结的力量, 坚持弘扬侨界支持祖(籍)国统一).<sup>216</sup>

<sup>210</sup>See: “【侨云南】现代花木兰之子回滇忆父母足迹: 南侨机工可歌可泣”, Sohu, 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct 2017.

<sup>211</sup>See: “瑞士瑞中友好交流协会会长杨善中来访我办”, 中共海口市委外事工作委员会办公室, 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 2018.

<sup>212</sup>See: “市委常委、统战部长乐文红会见瑞士瑞中友好交流协会会长杨善中一行”, 南昌统一战线, 16<sup>th</sup> Apr 2019; “老友相聚 其乐融融——广州市侨办宴请海外社团侨领”, 广州市人民政府侨务办公室 Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, the People’s Government of Guangzhou Municipality, 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct 2012; “省海交会杨善中理事: 愿为瑞中交流做桥梁”, Sina Blog, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2009; “瑞士瑞中友好交流协会会长访广东省侨办 加强合作”, Sina 新闻中心, 3<sup>rd</sup> Apr 2013.

<sup>213</sup>See: “组织结构”, 瑞士沙夫豪森中国人协会 CVSH.

<sup>214</sup>See: “沙夫豪森中国人协会成立庆典 苏黎世赵清华总领事及州长阿姆斯勒出席祝贺”, EurAsia Info, 4<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018.

<sup>215</sup>See: “青山一道 同担风雨——驻苏黎世兼驻列支敦士登公国总领事赵清华与领区高层次学者和侨领举行电话会议”, 中华人民共和国外交部, 31<sup>st</sup> Mar 2020.

<sup>216</sup>See: “驻苏黎世总领馆举行纪念《反分裂国家法》实施 15 周年座谈会”, Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Zurich, 1<sup>st</sup> Jun 2020. At these two recent meetings at the Consulate, representatives of a 东瑞华人协会, which likely refers to the Eastern Switzerland Chinese Club (Chinesischer Verein Ostschweiz), which on its homepage goes by the Chinese name 瑞士华人俱乐部, and the Lucerne–China Intercultural Association (Schweizerisch-Chinesischer Interkulturverein Luzern 卢塞恩瑞中跨文化协会)

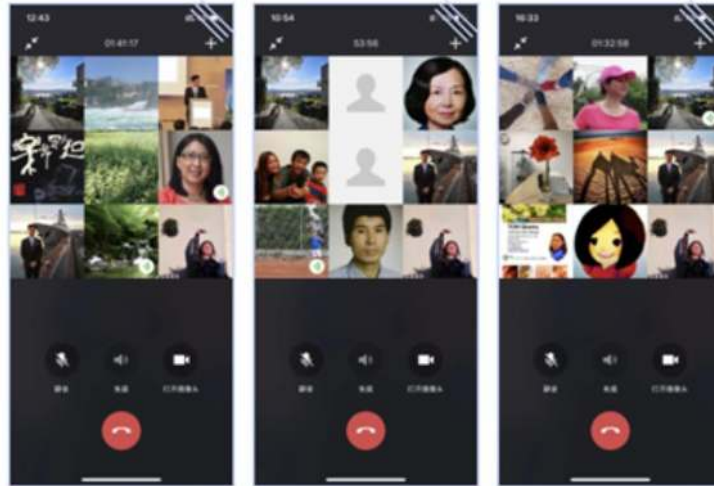


Figure 6: Screenshot of the report on the Zurich consulate general online meeting with various associations in Switzerland, including the Schaffhausen Chinese Association, in March 2020. Source: “青山一道 同担风雨——驻苏黎世兼驻列支敦士登公国总领事赵清华与领区高层次学者和侨领举行电话会议”, 中华人民共和国外交部, 31<sup>st</sup> Mar 2020.



Figure 7: The consul general in Zurich meets with various groups for the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the implementation of the Anti-Secession Law in May 2020. Source: “驻苏黎世总领馆举行纪念《反分裂国家法》实施 15 周年座谈会”, Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Zurich, 1<sup>st</sup> Jun 2020.



Geneva has a whole group of associations that are in one or another way linked to united front tactics. An example is the Chinese Institute Geneva Foundation (CIG). It engages in the teaching of standard Mandarin, the promotion of Chinese culture and facilitating cultural exchange. The founder and current director is Chu Jun 褚峻 and the vice-director Sun Zhimin 孙志敏. According to its homepage, the school has 22 teachers and about 220 students. At the bottom of its homepage, it gives three links, calling them “friendly links” (友好链接). One of these is a platform named Overseas Chinese Language & Culture Education Online (中国华文教育网).<sup>217</sup> This online platform is sponsored by OCAO,<sup>218</sup> which merged with the UFWD in 2018. OCAO awarded CIG the title “Chinese Education Model School” in 2017. Teachers have undergone professional training programs provided by OCAO since 2009. As mentioned above, the CIG is a member of FOCAS. Another, more straightforward example is the Geneva-based Swiss Chinese Culture Promotion Society (瑞士中华文化促进会), the Swiss chapter of the Chinese Culture Promotion Society (中华文化促进会), which is under the PRC Ministry of Culture and Tourism (文化和旅游部) and loosely related to the International Liaison Department (ILD, 中央对外联络部). It is part of the propaganda and ideology system.<sup>219</sup> Some of the provincial societies indicate an affiliation with the provincial CPPCC and the guidance of the provincial Propaganda Department.<sup>220</sup> Li Yihong 李艺红 is the Swiss chapter’s chairman.<sup>221</sup> He is also the president of the SFCT, 瑞士华人旅游联合会, which was established in 2007 and registered in 2014.<sup>222</sup> The SFCT is a member of the European Federation of Chinese Tourism (EFCT, 欧洲华人旅游业联合总会), which in turn is a member of the World Tourism Alliance (世界旅游联盟), itself under the PRC Ministry of Culture and Tourism.<sup>223</sup> The SFCT is, as mentioned above, a founding member of FOCAS.

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also participated. See: “Der Verein”, 瑞士华人俱乐部 and “News 最新动态”, Schweizerisch-Chinesischer Interkulturrein Luzern (SCIL) – 卢塞恩瑞中跨文化协会.

<sup>217</sup>See: “Homepage”, Chinese Institute Geneva Foundation.

<sup>218</sup>See: “网站简介 (About US)”, 中国华文教育网 Overseas Chinese Language and Culture Education Online.

<sup>219</sup>See: “本会”, 瑞士中华文化促进会 Swiss Chinese Culture Promotion Society; “About us”, 中华文化促进会 (Chinese Culture Promotion Society). See also: Stokes, *op. cit.*, p. 58, who also emphasizes “cross-links” with “the PLA political work system and possibly the Ministry of State Security” (MSS, 国家安全部).

<sup>220</sup>See e.g. the Shanxi Chinese Culture Promotion Society (山西中华文化促进会): “关于我们”, 山西中华文化促进会.

<sup>221</sup>See: “瑞士中华文化促进会”, 中华文化促进会 (Chinese Culture Promotion Society).

<sup>222</sup>See: “首页”, 瑞士华人旅游联合会 (Swiss Federation of Chinese Tourism).

<sup>223</sup>See: “关于我们”, 欧洲华人旅游业联合总会 (European Federation of Chinese Tourism, EFCT); “World Tourism Alliance, 世界旅游联盟 2019/2020”, World Tourism Alliance.



## 2 The question of co-optation of Swiss social, economic and political entities

Most of the associations covered above have a limited reach into Swiss social, economic and political circles more broadly conceived. For such influence purposes, a set of different actors is deployed, some of them within the united front work system, but many outside of it, such as the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC, 中国人民对外友好协会), the China International Culture Association (CICA, 中国对外文化交流协会, sometimes given as: Chinese Association for Cultural Exchanges with Foreign Countries, CACEFC), the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC, 中国国际友好联络会), and the China Council for the Promotion of international Trade (CCPIT, 中国国际贸易促进委员会).

The CPAFFC is particularly important for Switzerland. It is officially affiliated with the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). It is part of the external affairs system.<sup>224</sup> On its homepage, it highlights its main task of “people-to-people diplomacy” (民间外交), implementing “China’s independent foreign policy of peace,” and “carrying out all-directional, multi-level and broad-area people-to-people friendship work to serve the great cause of China’s peaceful development and reunification and contribute to the building of a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity.”<sup>225</sup> The meaning of “friendship work” as a united front tactic has been analyzed early on in the research literature.<sup>226</sup> The CPAFFC is among the organs managing friendly relations with regard to local government cooperation and NGOs. It is thus that Grégoire Junod, the mayor of Lausanne, when travelling to the PRC in September 2018, would meet the vice-president of CPAFFC.<sup>227</sup>

In what follows, this study does not and cannot offer a comprehensive picture. Rather, it sets out to describe a series of typical contact points between the Swiss civil and official actors and the CCP’s various systems involved in external influence operations. The rhizomatic mode of operation of the united front makes it, as mentioned above, difficult to judge who is implied in what capacity. It shows contact points where the united front and other systems might be engaged in co-opting these actors. The extent to which the CCP is successful in its attempts at co-optation cannot be conclusively judged on the basis of the facts presented in this study. What, in many cases, can be shown is a considerable overlap between the narratives that the CCP and CCP-controlled organs seeks to spread and the standpoints the mentioned Swiss civil and official actors come to defend in the Swiss public sphere.

### 2.1 The Swiss-Chinese Association

The Swiss-Chinese Association (SCA, Gesellschaft Schweiz-China / Société Suisse-Chine, 瑞中协会) stands out in the Swiss context as a civil society actor in terms of

<sup>224</sup>See: Lulu, “Repurposing Democracy”, *op. cit.*, pp. 20–24; Stokes, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–54.

<sup>225</sup>See: “About us”, Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries; “协会简介”, 中国人民对外友好协会. See also: John Dotson, “China Explores Economic Outreach to U.S. States via United Front Entities”, *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information* 19:12 (2019) and Tatlow, “Mapping China-in-Germany”, *op. cit.*

<sup>226</sup>Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), chapter 2.

<sup>227</sup>See: “Vice President Song Jingwu Meets with Mayor of Lausanne”, Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, 20<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018.





its contacts with the Chinese party-state. This section first introduces the SCA and then discusses it along three axes. The first axis is the one at the core of this study, that is, the SCA's contacts with bodies in the CCP external influence apparatus. The strongest connection by far is to the CPAFFC. The second axis discusses the good access that some board members of SCA have to Swiss politicians, particularly through its official link to the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-China. The third axis concerns the considerable overlap between the SCA and the private businesses of some of its key board members (particularly Thomas Wagner, Andries Diener and Diego Salmeron). The SCA is a good example for an actor that operates based on the false equivalence with a Chinese "counterpart." It enjoys access to high-level politicians in the PRC and Switzerland. The interactions with the Chinese side are also particularly interesting for how some expressions and phrases are absorbed and repeated, thus giving a vivid example of the amplification and unification of some of the Chinese party-state's messages.

The SCA was established in 1945, that is, before the founding of the PRC on 1 October 1949. It published the journal *Sinologica*, which was academically oriented and was produced until 1972. In the past two decades, the association has been shaped by its long-time president Thomas Wagner (2000–2018, who continues to serve as honorary president) and Andries Diener, its new president since 2018. Further milestones in its recent history were the merger in 2010 with the Vaud-Shaanxi Association (est. 1986) as the new Section romande de la Société Suisse-Chine (瑞中协会法语区分会) and the establishment of new chapters (e.g. Fribourg in 2014, on the initiative of former Swiss ambassador to Beijing, Dominique Dreyer, or Central Switzerland in 2018). At the end of 2019, the association counted 620 members.<sup>228</sup> This year, the association has celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Its self-representation across the last few years can perhaps best be grasped on the basis of its publicly available annual reports and the protocols of its general assemblies.

All the annual reports since 2013 bemoan the fact that the association receives no financial support from the federal government. SCA understands the tasks that it pursues as an "important contribution,"<sup>229</sup> squarely falling within the spheres of Swiss foreign policy and Swiss foreign economic policy, which leads its president to say: "A financial contribution from the Federal Government would therefore be more than justified."<sup>230</sup> In line with this self-adopted role, representatives of the association are regularly invited to receptions at the Chinese Embassy in Bern and at the Consulate in Zurich. The focus on economic diplomacy has the association organize various guest lectures that touch on broader cultural, societal and political topics. There are occasionally topics potentially sensitive to the Chinese party-state (e.g. former ambassador Paul Koller on human rights in 2014, Shi Ming 史明 on Russian-Chinese relations in 2015 or Jean-Pierre Cabestan on the future of China as either a democracy or a dictatorship in 2019), but the absence of critical discussions on the South China Sea, Tibet, Xinjiang or the protest movement in Hong Kong is evident.<sup>231</sup>

<sup>228</sup>See: "75 ans Société Suisse-Chine, 75 Jahre Gesellschaft Schweiz-China, 瑞中协会庆祝成立七十五周年", *Ruizhong* 瑞中 1/2020, p. 13.

<sup>229</sup>See: "Jahresbericht 2014", Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 5.

<sup>230</sup>See: "Jahresbericht 2013", Swiss-Chinese Association, pp. 7–8.

<sup>231</sup>An intervention by the Chinese embassy after a guest lecture by the author of this study has been covered in the Swiss press, see: Lucien Scherrer, "Chinas willfähige Schweizer Freunde", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 24<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020.



As mentioned above, the SCA will be discussed along three axes. The first axis is the one at the core of this study, that is, the SCA's contacts with CCP bodies. Over the years, the SCA has interacted with several such bodies. It has cooperated with CASTS repeatedly, helping for example to organize company visits in Switzerland for Chinese students studying at Swiss universities and co-hosting Swiss-Chinese Career Days.<sup>232</sup> At the general assembly of 2017, Wei Xun 魏逊 was elected onto the SCA Board.<sup>233</sup> Wei has already been mentioned above as part of the team of the Feng-Jianhua-directed Sino-Swiss Innovation Center (SSIC) and as a board member of CASTS. An editorial of the SCA's journal from 2017 mentions that the relationship with CASTS has turned into a "good partnership."<sup>234</sup> Moreover, the association entertains a particularly close relationship with the CPAFFC.

Following is a selection of such contacts:

May 2013	The President of the Romandie Section receives Ablet Abdurishit 阿不来提·阿不都热西提, president of the Chinese-African People's Friendship Association (CAPFA, 中国非洲人民友好协会), former chairman of the Xinjiang Government, vice chairman of the CPPCC and advisor to the CPAFFC. Feng Zuoku 冯佐库, vice-president of the CPAFFC, was also a member of the delegation.
Aug 2013	Visit to Xinjiang, Gansu and Ningxia provinces by Swiss wine producers organized by the SCA "with the support" of the CPAFFC.
Nov/Dec 2013	Receptions in Vaud and Zurich of CPAFFC vice-president Li Jianping 李建平.
Dec 2013	The Romandie Section signs an MoU with the Wuxi People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (无锡市人民对外友好协会).
May 2014	Delegation of board members meets Xie Yuan 谢元, vice-president of CPAFFC, in Beijing, then goes on to tour Guizhou Province, <sup>235</sup> and finally participates in 60 <sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of CPAFFC in Beijing, all apparently "at CPAFFC's invitation." <sup>236</sup>
Jun 2014	The Romandie Section receives delegation led by Tang Shengfu 唐圣福, <sup>237</sup> vice-president of the Fujian People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (福建省人民对外友好协会), in Lausanne (a similar delegation under Tang's watch had visited in October 2012).
Nov 2014	Reception of 30 women entrepreneurs under the leadership of CPAFFC and the Chinese Association of Women Entrepreneurs (CAWE, 中国女企业家协会). <sup>238</sup>
Jun 2015	An official delegation of CPAFFC headed by vice-president Hu Sishe 户思社 attends the association's 70 <sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.

<sup>232</sup>See: "Jahresbericht 2016", Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 3; "Jahresbericht 2017", Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 6.

<sup>233</sup>See: "Urbane Utopien", *Ruizhong* 瑞中 1/2018, p. 44.

<sup>234</sup>See: "Kluge Köpfe von morgen", *Ruizhong* 瑞中 1/2017, p. 3.

<sup>235</sup>See: "Vice President Xie Yuan Meets with President of Swiss-Chinese Association", Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

<sup>236</sup>See: "Vice President Xie Yuan Meets with President of Swiss-Chinese Association", Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

<sup>237</sup>See: "省外办领导简历及分工", 福建省人民政府外事办公室, 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2014.

<sup>238</sup>See: "协会简介", 中国女企业家协会.



Aug 2015	CPAFFC vice-president Hu Sishe meets with SCA board member Ueli Merz in Beijing. <sup>239</sup>
Sep 2015	Thomas Wagner gives a speech at a reception of the CPAFFC in Beijing, entitled: “65 years of diplomatic relations between the PRC and Switzerland: a success story.” Board members meet briefly with Li Xiaolin 李小林, the president of CPAFFC, and are invited to brunch with Hu Sishe.
Sep 2015	Study trip of board members to Anhui Province, at the invitation of the CPAFFC. <sup>240</sup>
Nov 2015	First Sino-Swiss Women’s Forum held in Geneva, with a delegation from CPAFFC.
May 2016	Reception of a delegation of the Political Consultative Conference of Anhui Province.
Jun 2016	The Romandie Section and the Ningxia People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (宁夏人民对外友好协会) sign an agreement on friendly collaboration.
Apr 2017	Visit of Xia Deren 夏德仁, chairman of the Political Consultative Conference of Liaoning Province.
Aug/Sep 2017	The Romandie Section receives delegations from the Sichuan People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (四川省人民对外友好协会).
Sep 2017	Sino-Swiss Cities Cooperation Forum on Water Eco Civilization in Jinan (Shandong) co-organized by the CPAFFC and the SCA. The two organizations sign an MoU to declare their intention to continue the forum in 2018.
Sep 2017	Rudolf Schaffner signs an MoU between the SCA and the Guangdong Public Diplomacy Association (广东公共外交协会), under the Guangdong Provincial CPPCC, <sup>241</sup> in the context of the “Guangdong Public Diplomacy Week & 4th Maritime Silk Road International Expo” at the invitation of the Guangdong Provincial Government and the Guangdong People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (广东省人民对外友好协会).
Sep 2017	Gérald Bérout accompanies two experts of the Association vaudoise des établissements médicaux sociaux to the “2017 China (Jiangsu) Summit for International Eldercare Service Industry” at the invitation of the Jiangsu People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (江苏省人民对外友好协会), within the framework of the Canton Vaud-Province Jiangsu partner agreement.
Nov 2017	Second Sino-Swiss Women’s Forum held in Chengdu, co-organized by the CPAFFC.
Apr 2018	The Romandie Section participates in a reception organized for Zhou Weidong 周卫东, the secretary-general of the Jiangsu Province People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.
Jun 2018	At its annual general assembly, the SCA signs an MoU with the CPAFFC, which is represented by vice-president Song Jingwu 宋敬武.

<sup>239</sup>See: “Vice President Song Jingwu Meets Ueli Merz, Vice President of Swiss-Chinese Association”, Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2015.

<sup>240</sup>The 2015 annual report states explicitly that the costs for this trip had been covered by the participating board members themselves, not mentioning the invitation by the CPAFFC. The protocol of the general assembly notes that the study trip had been at the invitation of the CPAFFC. See: “Jahresbericht 2015”, Swiss-Chinese Association; “Protokoll der Generalversammlung GSC 2016”, Swiss-Chinese Association, pp. 2–3.

<sup>241</sup>See: “广东公共外交协会协会章程”, Guangdong Provincial Committee of the CPPCC.



Jul 2019	President Andries Diener and honorary president Thomas Wagner meet vice-president Lin Yi 林怡 at the CPAFFC headquarters in Beijing. <sup>242</sup>
Nov 2019	Gérald Bérout receives the award of “Jiangsu Honorary Citizen” (the title was conferred in 2018) in the context of “2019 Jiangsu International Conference on Township Development” organized by the Jiangsu People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

Table 2: If not referenced otherwise, the information in this table is drawn from SSA’s and the Romandie Section’s annual reports, the protocols of the general assemblies and news reports in the association’s journal *Ruizhong* 瑞中.

It should be mentioned that the many activities of Gérald Bérout, including those listed above in the name of the Romandie Section, may be linked to his business Sinoptic, which holds mandates from the Canton of Vaud and the City of Lausanne for China-related activities.<sup>243</sup>



Figure 8: Andries Diener and Thomas Wagner meet with vice-president Lin Yi at the CPAFFC headquarters in Beijing in July 2019. Source: “Vice President Ms. Lin Yi Meets with the New President of Swiss-China Association”, Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, 12<sup>th</sup> Jul 2019.

In several instances, it is made clear that the CPAFFC is understood to be SCA’s Chinese counterpart.<sup>244</sup> When it is pointed out that the SCA receives no support from the Swiss government, the fact that the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-finances the official delegations of Chinese friendship associations is also highlighted. The congratulatory messages by Thomas Wagner and Gérald Bérout in the context of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CPAFFC and printed in the CPAFFC journal *Voice of Friendship* (友声) record the history between the two actors and give further insight into SCA’s understanding of CPAFFC.<sup>245</sup> Wagner dates his first contact with the CPAFFC to 1987,

<sup>242</sup>See: “Vice President Ms. Lin Yi Meets with the New President of Swiss-China Association”, Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, 12<sup>th</sup> Jul 2019.

<sup>243</sup>See: “À notre sujet”, Sinoptic.

<sup>244</sup>See: “Jahresbericht 2015”, Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 1.

<sup>245</sup>See: Thomas Wagner, “Long-Standing Partnership Between CPAFFC and Swiss-Chinese Association”, *Voice of Friendship* 176, June 2014, pp. 40–41; Gérald Bérout, “A Bosom Friend Afar Brings A Distant Land Near”, *Voice of Friendship* 176, June 2014, pp. 41–42.



which is five years after the city of Zurich (whose mayor Wagner was at the time) entered into its city partnership with Kunming. At that time, Wagner met with Han Xu 韩叙,<sup>246</sup> who “explained the mission of the CPAFFC” to him and gave him “a wonderful bowl of Chinese porcelain as a symbol of our mutual understanding and appreciation.” He mentions the good relations he had with the other former presidents of the CPAFFC, namely Qi Huaiyuan 齐怀远, Chen Haosu 陈昊苏, whom he saw “many times” as they became “good old friends,” and Li Xiaolin 李小林 (in office until April 2020 and succeeded by Lin Songtian 林松添). He then goes on to state the following, showing the perception of the two associations as being equivalent:

The CPAFFC, like the Swiss-Chinese Association, is an organization engaged in people-to-people diplomacy of the People’s Republic of China. The aims of the association are to enhance people’s friendship, further international cooperation, safeguard world peace and promote general and common development. The Swiss-Chinese Association pursues the same objectives.<sup>247</sup>

He ends his congratulatory message in the lofty spirit befitting such occasions, expressing his gratitude “for the confidence which the CPAFFC shows to the Swiss Association as a reliable partner” and assuring the CPAFFC that it “can count on its older counterpart, the Swiss Chinese Association.”

Béroud in turn gives interesting insights into the kind of activities the Vaud-Shaanxi Association and – after the merger – the SCA have entertained with the CPAFFC. He speaks of groups of visitors who had been sent to China with the aid of the CPAFFC as well as of “mutual visits and cultural exchanges,” “exploratory tourist projects” and “special visits to small and medium-sized enterprises, industries, wineries and the building industry.” In addition, the CPAFFC seems to have enabled access to “visit places” that are usually difficult to reach such as “a psychiatric hospital of the social medical center, factories, wine estates and paddy fields, rural sceneries, gardens, museums and natural reserves.” In light of intensified relations between Switzerland and the PRC, Béroud relates that Chinese actors like “autonomous regions and organizations such as the Bureau of Economic Development, professional teams, industrial science and technology parks and arts organizations” have more and more filed “directly applications to the friendship associations in Switzerland,” while “provincial and municipal friendship associations as well as other local cooperative partners of the CPAFFC” have often asked the SCA “to find a suitable friendship city candidate in Switzerland.” Béroud finally points out that the Chinese side attaches “great importance to our associations. For example, during his visit to Switzerland in 2013, Premier Li Keqiang had a personal meeting with members and representatives of the Swiss friendship associations.”<sup>248</sup>

The meeting with Li Keqiang was not an isolated instance. SCA board members have repeatedly interacted with high-level representatives of the Chinese party-state. On 15 January 2017, board members (including Béroud and Wagner) took part in the

<sup>246</sup>Wagner might misremember the exact year, since Han Xu in 1987 was still the Chinese ambassador to the United States, taking up the position of chairman of CPAFFC only in 1989. If it, indeed, happened in 1987, then this would be in itself an interesting finding.

<sup>247</sup>See: Thomas Wagner, “Long-Standing Partnership Between CPAFFC and Swiss-Chinese Association”, *Voice of Friendship* 176, June 2014, p. 40.

<sup>248</sup>See: Gérald Béroud, “A Bosom Friend Afar Brings A Distant Land Near”, *Voice of Friendship* 176, June 2014, pp. 41–42; see also p. 7: “Jahresbericht 2013”, Swiss-Chinese Association.



official state banquet in honor of Xi Jinping in Bern and Wagner subsequently participated as “official guest” at the First BRI Forum in Beijing.<sup>249</sup> In October 2018, a more exclusive meeting was secured with Chen Min'er 陈敏尔, a member of the 19th Central Politburo of the CCP and the party secretary of Chongqing.<sup>250</sup> In September 2019, honorary president Wagner, who had already in 2009 received the Certificate of Friendship Ambassador by the CPAFFC,<sup>251</sup> had the Chinese Government Friendship Award (中国政府友谊奖) conferred upon him, a distinction that he shares with a small circle of Swiss awardees including two federal government officials.<sup>252</sup> Brady, in her classic study, gives the historical background to these awards and the rationale that went with introducing them. They had, she writes, “the benefit of being low cost, highly flattering to the individual foreigners and useful for meeting the goals of both local and foreign propaganda work.”<sup>253</sup>

The second axis has to do with the good access members of SCA have to Swiss politicians. This will be exemplified through the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-China. Explicitly expecting better access to the parliament and the federal bureaucracy in Bern,<sup>254</sup> the association agreed to assist the Parliamentary Group, currently presided over by MP Laurent Wehrli (FDP.The Liberals, Vaud),<sup>255</sup> by administering their secretariat without payment. In return, the members of the parliamentary group promised to help raise funds for the association and accepted to have three board members of the association join their meetings as non-voting participants.<sup>256</sup> The annual report of 2014 expressed regrets about the few activities organized by the Parliamentary Group and announced a plan to organize a study trip to China for the group.<sup>257</sup> Up until 2015, it is repeatedly stated that the Parliamentary Group “intends” to outsource the sec-

<sup>249</sup>See p. 2: “Jahresbericht 2017”, Swiss-Chinese Association.

<sup>250</sup>See: “陈敏尔会见瑞士瑞中协会名誉主席”, 人民网, 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 2018.

<sup>251</sup>See: Thomas Wagner, “Long-Standing Partnership Between CPAFFC and Swiss-Chinese Association”, *Voice of Friendship* 176, June 2014, p. 40.

<sup>252</sup>See: “Höchste chinesische Auszeichnung für Dr. Thomas Wagner”, Swiss-Chinese Association, 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 2019. Among the other Swiss-based awardees are Cellist Albert Roman, ETHZ Professors Lothar Reh and Wolfgang Kinzelbach, Professors Peter Abplanalp and Ruedi Nützi of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland, Beat Künzi of the Swiss Foreign Department’s Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Andreas Götz, Vice Director of the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), and Fredmunk Malik of Malik International AG in St. Gallen.

<sup>253</sup>Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, op. cit., ch. 8, and for the quote p. 224.

<sup>254</sup>See: “Jahresbericht 2013”, Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 3.

<sup>255</sup>Laurent Wehrli is a member of the National Council’s Commission for Foreign Policy and active in several parliamentary groups including Belgium-Luxembourg, Lebanon (as president), Azerbaijan, Tunisia, Turkey (as co-president), USA, Japan, Greece, Kosovo, and Israel (as member). Notably, he is also a member of the group on Taiwan. A Facebook post (dated 23 May 2016) by Taiwanese MP Tsai Shih-Ying 蔡適應 about a meeting with Wehrli in Montreux quotes the latter as saying that he had “only recently learned that Taiwan and China are different countries,” see: “蔡適應”, Facebook, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016. Wehrli’s engagement with China goes back to before his time as a Swiss MP, to his tenure as mayor of Montreux (an office he holds since 2011), as a documented meeting with the Chinese ambassador shows. See: “驻瑞士大使吴晟访问蒙特勒市”, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Switzerland, 7<sup>th</sup> Dec 2007. At a recent event co-organized by the mentioned EurAsia Forum and China FoF, the “Davos Global FoF Summit” of 2020, he conveyed a brief “lead’s oration.” See: “Agenda of the Davos Global FOF summit”, 母基金研究中心, 20<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020. China FoF (Fund of Funds) is the brainchild of Tang Jincao 唐劲草, who is also Vice-Director of the China Venture Capital Committee of the Ministry of Science and Technology. It is unclear whether and to what extent China FoF is part of the united front system, but it has a close proximity to the Chinese party-state and collaborates with united front actors such as the CAST-led China Science and Technology Finance Promotion Association (中国科技金融促进会). See e.g.: “强者恒强! 宏兆基金荣膺 2020 最具投资价值 GP Top100!”, 宏兆集团, 11<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 and “中国科技金融促进会简介”, 中国科技金融促进会.

<sup>256</sup>See: “Jahresbericht 2013”, Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 3 and pp. 14–15.

<sup>257</sup>See: “Jahresbericht 2014”, Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 8.



retariat to the SSC.<sup>258</sup> The situation seems to have changed only in 2016, when MP Laurent Wehrli took over from MP Corina Eichenberger. The annual report lists an invitation to the Parliamentary Group from Geng Wenbing 耿文兵, the Chinese ambassador in Switzerland.<sup>259</sup> At a meeting with Wehrli in Montreux, the formation of an executive committee, two regular meetings per annum and a study trip to China for November 2018 were agreed upon.<sup>260</sup> Another meeting took place on 18 December 2019 in Bern. Gerard Bérout, the vice-president of SCA and the president of the Romandie Section, participated in a Swiss delegation led by Isabelle Moret, the president of the Swiss National Council, to Shanghai, Nanjing and Beijing including several high-level meetings with Li Zhanshu 栗战书, the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and third-ranked member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CCP, and Wang Yang 汪洋, as mentioned above, fourth-ranked member of the Politburo Standing Committee, the Chairman of the CPPCC and the head of the Central United Front Work Leading Small Group. In the 2020 annual report of the Romandie Section, it is mentioned that participating in this delegation was made possible due to the fact that the SCA administers the secretariat for the Swiss China Parliamentary Group.<sup>261</sup>

The third axis concerns the considerable overlap between the SCA and the private businesses of some of its key members. In the annual reports of 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017, president Thomas Wagner expressed satisfaction with what the board has achieved in the year under review adding: "Many doors could be opened for economically, scientifically and culturally active companies."<sup>262</sup> President Andries Diener used the same sentence in the annual report of 2018.<sup>263</sup> This is in line with SCA's mission to contribute to Swiss economic foreign policy, but the line between opening doors for Swiss companies more generally and for a specific set of companies more particularly is at times blurred.

Asia Green Real Estate, of which both Andries Diener and Thomas Wagner are on the board, is a member of SCA.<sup>264</sup> Early in February 2020, when the Covid-19 epidemic was still largely confined to the PRC, Diener sent a letter on official SCA letterhead and in the name of SCA to the governor of Guizhou province, but inserted the address of Asia Green Real Estate underneath his signature.<sup>265</sup> The situation is similar with LEP Consultants, a spin-off from ETHZ,<sup>266</sup> where Diego Salmeron and Thomas Wagner are on the board and Wei Grueber-Wang (also on the SCA board) is listed as part of the team and as a partner. The company's news section features a report about an SCA event of which it is then said that LEP consultants participated. It is about a meeting with an official delegation from Guizhou Province in May 2016, at which SCA signed an MoU. However, given that it was an individual with both SCA and

<sup>258</sup>See: "Jahresbericht 2015", Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 7.

<sup>259</sup>See: "Jahresbericht 2016", Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 9.

<sup>260</sup>See: "Jahresbericht 2017", Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 8.

<sup>261</sup>See: "Rapport d'activités du Comité Juin 2019–Août 2020", Section romande de la Société Suisse-Chine, p. 6.

<sup>262</sup>See: "Jahresbericht 2014", p. 8; "Jahresbericht 2015", Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 7; and "Jahresbericht 2016", Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 10.

<sup>263</sup>See: "Jahresbericht 2018", Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 5.

<sup>264</sup>See: "About us", Asia Green Real Estate.

<sup>265</sup>See: "疫情无情人有情, 患难时刻见真情-国际友好力量积极支持贵州抗击新冠肺炎疫情", Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar 2020.

<sup>266</sup>See: "Unternehmen", LEP Consultants.



corporate affiliations participating, it is unclear in which capacity the participation took place.<sup>267</sup>

The blurring is most evident in the activities SCA engages in in the PRC. For example, when the SCA held a seminar in July 2019 together with the Investment Promotion Bureau of Guizhou Province (贵州省投资促进局), the participants were portrayed by a local Guizhou financial newspaper as a mixture of members of the SCA and representatives of their businesses. Andries Diener was introduced as SCA vice-president, but a further partner of his Asia Green Real Estate, Andrew Goodridge, also participated in the meeting, introducing the company.<sup>268</sup> Diego Salmeron was not listed as a member of SCA but in his role as CEO of LEP Consultants, the company he also introduced in his presentation at the meeting.<sup>269</sup> Johannes Müller of Dätwyler Cabling Solutions has also taken part in several SCA delegations, but his relationship to the association is unclear.<sup>270</sup> At the previously-mentioned Sino-Swiss Cities Cooperation forum on Water Eco Civilization in Jinan in 2017, co-organized by the CPAFFC and SCA, speeches were given by members of the ETHZ and Swiss Federal Government agencies, as well as by someone from Swisswater GmbH,<sup>271</sup> which is a business co-owned by Thomas Wagner together with Kezhen Cao Müller 曹克真 and Hollinger AG.<sup>272</sup> Several of the people involved in these businesses and the SCA have a common history in the context of the sister-city agreement between Zurich and Kunming.<sup>273</sup> When, at the meeting with Politburo member Chen Min'er in Chongqing in 2018, Chen referred to Wagner as an “old friend of the people of Chongqing,”<sup>274</sup> it was not the first time the two had met. Indeed, the first meeting perhaps occurred in November 2014, when LEP Consultants and Swisswater GmbH signed a cooperation agreement in Zurich with the representatives of Guiyang Free Trade Zone during the official visit of then Governor of Guizhou, Chen Min'er.<sup>275</sup>

The reports about meetings between the SCA and Chinese officials are also telling in terms of how language is important in all of this. In the article that appeared in the *Chongqing Daily* (重庆日报) about the 2018 meeting with Chen Min'er, Chen is reported to have addressed the delegation suggesting that the SCA should “give play to the role of the Swiss Swiss-China Association” (发挥瑞士瑞中协会作用) and promote “pragmatic cooperation between the two parties” (双方务实合作).<sup>276</sup> One year later, in July 2019, at a meeting with Chen Yan 陈晏, the mayor of Guiyang Municipal Government and deputy secretary of its Party Committee, covered in the

<sup>267</sup> See: “News”, LEP Consultants.

<sup>268</sup> Goodridge is also observed in a video as a participant in a meeting of the SCA with the Guizhou government in July 2019. All press reports in this case merely mention the SCA and its board members and there is no mention of the involved companies, although Goodridge's presence clearly shows that the companies formed a part of the meeting. See: “陈晏会见瑞士瑞中协会荣誉主席托马斯·瓦格纳和主席狄安一行”, Sohu, 9<sup>th</sup> Jul 2019.

<sup>269</sup> See: “省投资促进局与瑞中协会代表团召开产业招商座谈会”, 天眼, 9<sup>th</sup> Jul 2019.

<sup>270</sup> Thomas Wagner seems to have been advising Dätwyler Cabling Solutions, of which Johannes Müller is CEO, from as early as 2010 with regard to the construction of the airport in Kunming and claims to have opened the doors for them. See: Pu Xiaoping, “Neuer Grossflughafen in Kunming erhält strukturierte Verkabelung”, *Panorama* (Dätwyler Cables) 2 (2010), p. 9; Andy Fischer, “Was macht eigentlich ... Thomas Wagner, Ex-Stadtpräsident?”, *Tagblatt der Stadt Zürich*, 9<sup>th</sup> Jan 2013.

<sup>271</sup> See: “Jahresbericht 2017”, Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 5.

<sup>272</sup> See: “SWISSWATER GmbH”, Commercial Register of Canton Zurich. See also: “中瑞两国水务专家探讨分享水环境治理经验”, 中国水利报社, 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2012.

<sup>273</sup> See: “Bericht des Stadtrates zur Städtepartnerschaft Zürich - Kunming 1982-1999”, Sinoptic.

<sup>274</sup> See: “陈敏尔会见瑞士瑞中协会名誉主席”, 人民网, 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 2018.

<sup>275</sup> See: “News (page3)”, LEP Consultants.

<sup>276</sup> See: “陈敏尔会见瑞士瑞中协会名誉主席”, 人民网, 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 2018.





Figure 9: Thomas Wagner at the seminar that SCA held in July 2019 with the Investment Promotion Bureau of Guizhou Province. Source: “陈晏会见瑞士瑞中协会荣誉主席托马斯·瓦格纳和主席狄安一行”, Sohu, 9<sup>th</sup> Jul 2019.

article of the *Guiyang Daily* (贵阳日报), a very similar sentence (“will give full play to the advantages of the association” (将充分发挥协会优势)) is now reported as having been uttered by Thomas Wagner himself, followed by the same emphasis on “more pragmatic cooperation” (更多务实合作) between the two parties.<sup>277</sup> Chen Yan also expressed his hope that the SCA would continue “to play the role of a bridge-link” (发挥桥梁纽带作用), which now in turn is the almost exact same phrase that Andries Diener apparently used with the new consul-general in Zurich in a meeting of August 2018, when he pledged to further lead the Swiss-China Association “to play the role of a bridge and link” (发挥桥梁和纽带作用).<sup>278</sup> It seems impossible to see through this house of mirrors, but the similarity of expressions, which in some sense points to an almost ritually produced and constantly reproduced unity of message, is noteworthy.

The messaging by the SCA shows an overwhelmingly positive image of the Chinese party-state. In the annual report of 2017, Thomas Wagner highlights Xi Jinping’s “successful” state visit with “his much-noticed speech” at the World Economic Forum in Davos as the dominating event of the year, which passed off “without larger problems” and therefore led to “another high point” in the good and longstanding friendly relations between Switzerland and the PRC.<sup>279</sup> Later in 2017, a report by the German branch of *Nouvelles d’Europe* (欧洲时报) recounts a reception at the Chinese Consulate where Wagner is reported to have said that China would continue to open up and that the BRI spells out a farsighted development strategy and the ambitions of the Chinese government. Switzerland should grasp this historic opportunity and expand its cooperation with China “in all possibly conceivable realms.”<sup>280</sup> In interviews and news reports, Wagner occasionally includes more critical statements, e.g. regarding the legitimacy of probing questions with regard to the BRI,<sup>281</sup> the question of Tibet,

<sup>277</sup> See: “陈晏会见托马斯·瓦格纳和狄安一行 持续深化友谊 推进多元合作 助力贵阳高水平开放高质量发展”, 贵阳市人民政府, 9<sup>th</sup> Jul 2019.

<sup>278</sup> See: “赵清华总领事会见并宴请瑞中协会名誉主席瓦格纳和主席狄安”, Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Zurich, 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2018.

<sup>279</sup> See: “Jahresbericht 2017”, Swiss-Chinese Association, p. 1.

<sup>280</sup> See: “Schweizer loben Chinas Entwicklungsstrategie”, China Info-24, 13<sup>th</sup> Nov 2017.

<sup>281</sup> See: “Wie die Schweiz die «Belt and Road Initiative» mitgestalten könnte”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 31<sup>st</sup> Aug 2018.



the status of minorities and the rule of law,<sup>282</sup> or the increasing state control over society conflicting with the cultural and economic opening of the multiethnic state.<sup>283</sup> Still, such criticism does not belie the possibility of co-optation, given how Chinese propaganda operates. And, overall, the messaging remains by and large positive. The editorials in *Ruizhong*, SCA's journal, include much positive messaging about the PRC. Andries Diener, in a recent volume, writes of the great respect that China deserves for its handling of the Covid-19 crisis and its impressive development leading to the "lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty."<sup>284</sup> When welcoming the new consul-general in Zurich in 2018, Diener reassured him that the SCA will "actively cooperate with the implementation of China's 'Belt and Road' initiative."<sup>285</sup>

## 2.2 The Swiss Trade Association, the Parliamentary Group, and Yang Yuming

The Swiss Trade Association STA (Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband), an umbrella organization headquartered in Bern and bringing together more than 200 specialized national and regional associations representing roughly 500,000 small and medium-sized enterprises, is typical for many economic actors interested in gaining access to Chinese business. The example is remarkable for the continuity across several leaders of STA and the role that Yang Yuming plays in it. As with SCA, the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-China is involved and, again, there is an assumption of false equivalence on the side of key actors. The unified message is exemplified with the actors' take on Tibet.

There have been contacts between the leadership of the STA (Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband) and the PRC for well more than ten years. Bruno Zuppiger (d. 2016), the president of the STA between 2011 and 2012 and MP from 1999 to 2012, had a longer history engaging with the PRC reaching back to the 1980s. When the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-China was established in 2004, Zuppiger was a founding member. In 2010, he participated in a visit by a group of Swiss parliamentarians to Tibet, where, according to a Xinhua/*People's Daily* report of 2011, he "wanted to see the reality in Tibet himself so as to verify the credibility of some Swiss media reports, which said the Tibetan people were living under the pressure of the Chinese government and that their life was difficult."<sup>286</sup> The news report goes on to quote Zuppiger:

The local government and people are open, frank and sincere. I think I found the truth about the so-called "Tibetan issue." That is, the issue has been cooked up by forces outside China. If their opinion is followed

<sup>282</sup>See: "Städtepartnerschaft Zürich – Kunming: Eine Freundschaft mit Höhen und Tiefen", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 11<sup>th</sup> Aug 2016, translated, edited and illustrated by EurAsia Info; "Thomas Wagner: 中国人是非常可靠的合作伙伴, 尤其是对待可以信赖的合作对象", EurAsia Info, undated.

<sup>283</sup>See: "Urbane Utopien", *Ruizhong* 瑞中 1/2018, p. 3.

<sup>284</sup>See: "75 ans Société Suisse-Chine, 75 Jahre Gesellschaft Schweiz-China, 瑞中协会庆祝成立七十五周年", *Ruizhong* 瑞中 1/2020, p. 3. Rob Schmitz, in a short piece for NPR, has described how the language deployed to describe the success of reducing poverty differs considerably across the domestic Chinese and foreign audiences, the "lifting out of poverty"-metaphor being hardly present in the domestic scene, but dominant in international discourse. See: Rob Schmitz, "Who's Lifting Chinese People Out Of Poverty?", National Public Radio, 17<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017.

<sup>285</sup>See: "赵清华总领事会见并宴请瑞中协会名誉主席瓦格纳和主席狄安", Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Zurich, 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2018.

<sup>286</sup>See: "瑞士官员谈西藏之行: 我找到了"西藏问题"真相", 新华网 via 中国网, 7<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010; "Developing ties with China benefits Switzerland", *People's Daily Online*, 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010.



to seek so-called “independence for Tibet,” the region would be severely destabilized.<sup>287</sup>

Zuppiger’s presidency of the STA is also mentioned, and the report states:

The Federation [i.e. STA] has been dedicated to promoting the relations between Swiss and Chinese SMEs and helping eliminate the barriers which are sometimes created by distorted media reports.<sup>288</sup>

While the Xinhua report emphasizes that Zuppiger’s “self-financed” tour had caused a bit of a stir in the Swiss Parliament, the 2011 Work Report of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the CPPCC speaks of an invitation to a group of Swiss parliamentarians to visit Tibet within the context of the Shanghai World Expo and tags the activity as an exercise in “actively promoting the theoretical research and practice of public diplomacy of the CPPCC” (积极推进人民政协公共外交的理论研究和实践) and an effort to “to promote the world’s understanding of the real China, and to further enhance understanding, eliminate misunderstandings, and clarify misunderstandings” (促进世界认识真实的中国, 进一步增进了解、消除误解、澄清曲解).<sup>289</sup>

In 2012, Zuppiger went on another trip to the PRC, reportedly in his role as the president of the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-China.<sup>290</sup> The news report on the meeting by the Zhejiang Provincial Federation of Commerce and Trade (浙江省商贸业联合会) mentioned that the Parliamentary Group occupies more than one third of seats in the Swiss parliament.<sup>291</sup> Meanwhile, Zuppiger also created other platforms to engage with the PRC. Back in November 2011, he had founded the Swiss China Management Group, a private company that was supposed to serve as a contact base and offer consultancy services.<sup>292</sup> The company was registered in the Canton of Obwalden, and the registry reveals Yang Yuming 杨玉明 as the business partner of Zuppiger.<sup>293</sup> Yang has been mentioned above in the more recent context of his position as vice-president of FOCAS and his involvement in an event by the Fujian Hometown Association.

Apparently, Yang has had a much longer history with another former MP (2003–2007) and the mayor of Delémont until 2015, Pierre Kohler, with whom in 2004 he founded Gao Le SA (Gao Le 高乐 being Kohler’s Chinese name),<sup>294</sup> a company (liquidated in 2018) with the registered goal of facilitating education and cultural and linguistic exchanges as well as “the development with China,”<sup>295</sup> and with whom in 2006 he staged the Miss China semifinals in Geneva (later in 2013 eternalized in a movie called *Win Win* with Yang playing the Chinese ambassador).<sup>296</sup> Kohler had been the first president of the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-China (2005–2007) and remained as the Group’s secretary-general for many years. In several Chinese

<sup>287</sup> See: “Developing ties with China benefits Switzerland (2)”, *People’s Daily Online*, 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010.

<sup>288</sup> See: “Developing ties with China benefits Switzerland (2)”, *People’s Daily Online*, 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010.

<sup>289</sup> See: “中国人民政治协商会议全国委员会常委会工作报告”, 中国政府网, 3<sup>rd</sup> Mar 2011.

<sup>290</sup> See: “瑞士瑞中委员会代表团来浙访问考察”, 浙江省商贸业联合会, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>291</sup> See: “瑞士瑞中委员会代表团来浙访问考察”, 浙江省商贸业联合会, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>292</sup> See: “Bundesratsbewerber Bruno Zuppiger plant Swiss China Center”, HZ Das Wirtschaftsportal von Handelszeitung und BILANZ, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011.

<sup>293</sup> See: “SWISS CHINA MANAGEMENT GROUP AG”, Schweizerisches Handelsamtsblatt, 25<sup>th</sup> Jul 2011; “SWISS CHINA MANAGEMENT GROUP AG in Liquidation”, Commercial Register of Canton Obwalden.

<sup>294</sup> See: “瑞士德莱蒙市市长高乐: 做中国的诤友”, 中国政府网, 21<sup>st</sup> Jan 2014.

<sup>295</sup> See: “Gao Le SA”, Commercial Register of Canton Jura.

<sup>296</sup> See: “Pierre Kohler décroche pour Genève une élection de Miss chinoises”, *Le Temps*, 17 Jun 2006; “Win win: l’album du tournage”, Prince Film.



news reports, Yang is likewise given as the secretary-general (秘书长) of the Parliamentary Group.<sup>297</sup>

Yang Yuming is a key figure in contacts of the STA and the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-China with the PRC. His life story has been covered in some detail by a Chinese media report in the *Economic Daily* (经济日报), a paper under the leadership and management of the Central Propaganda Department.<sup>298</sup> According to this report from 2015, Yang went to Geneva in 1980 without a job or much money in his hands, just after China's reform and opening-up policy (改革开放) began, and through extraordinary twists of events came to enroll at the Graduate Institute (IHEID) in 1983 and there ended up writing a lengthy diploma thesis on the Swiss watch industry. The thesis caught the attention of the industry, and Yang started as a China advisor in the Swatch Group and later assumed leadership over several companies in the watch and other industries (perhaps most notably Nouvelle Onivia S.A. starting in the year 2000), many of them located in Porrentruy in the Canton of Jura. From there, it seems, he made important inroads into establishing himself within Bernese political circles as a facilitator for Swiss-Chinese cultural, economic and political relations.<sup>299</sup> In the Chinese state-media coverage of his life, he repeatedly stresses the significance of the reform and opening policy for his success story, describes how the reception of Chinese people in Switzerland has changed to the positive since the 1980s, and — in a line used several times in different accounts — expresses his enthusiasm for the new strength of the PRC: “the stronger the motherland, the straighter the backs of Chinese people abroad” (祖国越强大，华人在国外的腰板就越直). When he came to Switzerland, he is quoted as saying, he did not have any financial capital whatsoever, but the biggest capital was that “I am Chinese!” (我是中国人).<sup>300</sup> The report finally captures Yang's commitment “to let Switzerland know more about China and to change the Westerners' misunderstanding of China,” which is why he devotes a lot of time and energy to promoting political, economic and cultural exchanges, having organized since 2005 four visits to China for members of the Swiss Parliament and having traveled all over Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang. He ends by summarizing Zuppiger's observations about Tibet and the “blindness” (盲目性) in Western media reports.<sup>301</sup> In June 2014, Yang had been invited to a meeting in Beijing hosted by Qiu Yuanping 裘援平, the director of OCAO, as part of what was explicitly referred to as “an invited delegation of European Overseas Chinese involved in public diplomacy” (欧洲侨务公共外交人士访问团).<sup>302</sup>

STA's engagement with the PRC and the activities of Yang Yuming did not end with Zuppiger's term as president, but continued with the new president Jean-François Rime, who took over in May 2012, and the association's director Hans Ulrich Bigler, who had been in office since 2008. Bigler still holds this position today, while Rime

<sup>297</sup> See: “瑞士瑞中委员会代表团来浙访问考察”, 浙江省商贸易联合会, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012; “华人实业家杨玉明: 最大的资本——我是中国人! ”, 人民网, 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan 2015. This might be significant. See the case of Gai Lin 盖琳 in: Lulu, “Repurposing Democracy”, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>298</sup> See: “瑞士德莱蒙市市长高乐: 做中国的诤友”, 中国政府网, 21<sup>st</sup> Jan 2014; “经济日报社”, 中华人民共和国国务院新闻办公室, 25<sup>th</sup> Jul 2011.

<sup>299</sup> Yang was also portrayed in China on a website of the State Council Information Office as the man who holds the golden key to open the Sino-Swiss market. Among his business advice, he warns not to bring China's domestic method and wealth-generating models to the West since they will not work. The reason for this, he states, is that the laws and regulations of Western countries are sound and companies follow them. See: “掌握开启中瑞市场金钥匙的人”, 中国财经, 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 2015.

<sup>300</sup> See: “华人实业家杨玉明: 最大的资本——我是中国人! ”, 人民网, 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan 2015.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> See: “裘援平会见欧洲侨务公共外交人士访问团”, 国务院侨务办公室, 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2014.



Figure 10: Qiu Yuanping, the director of OCAO, meeting in Beijing with European Overseas Chinese “involved in public diplomacy,” among them Yang Yuming, in June 2014. Source: “裘援平会见欧洲侨务公共外交人士访问团”，国务院侨务办公室，20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2014.

finished his term in 2020. In 2014, the Swiss China Investment Platform Association (SCIPA) was established in the Canton of Bern, although its origins seem to go back to the Baselworld Fair in April 2014 involving “representatives of the Chinese watch and clock industry and Swiss SMEs, especially members of the Swiss Trade Association.”<sup>303</sup> The board of SCIPA has a considerable overlap with the STA, featuring among others Bigler (as president) and Yang (as board member).<sup>304</sup> On its homepage, the association claims to have been instrumental in bringing about “the sister region agreement between the Canton of Bern and the city of Shenzhen, which was signed in February 2015.”<sup>305</sup> Yang had established on his own, also in 2014, the Swiss Chinese Investment Association (SCINA, 瑞中投资商会) in Neuchâtel, which is the association through which he got involved in FOCAS.<sup>306</sup> In 2016, the first public appearance of Ambassador Geng Wenbing in front of Swiss parliamentarians and economic actors in Switzerland was organized by STA. At this event, Yang announced the plan for a

<sup>303</sup>See: “Zwei starke Wirtschaftspartner schliessen sich zusammen”, Berne Capital Area, p. 7.

<sup>304</sup>See: “Board Members”, SCIPA.

<sup>305</sup>See: “About”, SCIPA; “Zwei starke Wirtschaftspartner schliessen sich zusammen”, Berne Capital Area, pp. 6–7.

<sup>306</sup>SCINA was dissolved in December 2019. See: “Swiss Chinese Investment Association”, Registre du Commerce du Canton de Neuchâtel. Wang Xiaohua 王晓华, Yang’s wife, is the secretary-general of this association and is part of many of Yang’s other businesses. She was the director of Eusia SA, a travel agency specialized on Swiss-Chinese tourism (she retired in August 2019). See: “Eusia S.A.”, Registre du Commerce du Canton de Neuchâtel; “MutationEusiaS.A.,Val-de-Ruz”, Schweizerisches Handelsamtsblatt. In her function as the association’s secretary-general and as director of Eusia SA, she participated on a trip to Beijing and Xinjiang in 2016 organized by the European section of OCAO, including a meeting with Qiu Yuanping 裘援平, OCAO’s director whom her husband Yang had met in 2014. See: “欧洲侨界精英访新疆 倡议共同讲好中国故事”, 海外网, 13<sup>th</sup> Sep 2016. Eusia SA apparently has organized several aircraft for visits of Chinese leaders to Davos, also on Xi Jinping’s visit in 2017. The homepage highlights the company’s close relationship with the Swiss government and claims that many federal parliamentarians and state government officials have been friends with company leaders for many years. See: “About us”, Eusia SA.



Swiss China Business Council (瑞中商务理事会).<sup>307</sup> This council was described as “affiliated” with the STA and, apparently, Rime was to serve as president, with Yang as vice-president.<sup>308</sup> It is unclear how the plan for the Council developed. In an interview in January 2017, Bilger, commenting on the 2014 Free Trade Agreement between Switzerland and the PRC and on Xi Jinping’s pending visit to the WEF in Davos, specifically mentioned the STA’s China Affairs representative Yang and his services. In this interview, Bilger is referred to as the chairman of the Business Council, while he announced plans for opening a Swiss-China Center in Zurich.<sup>309</sup> The center opened its doors in October 2017 and features Bigler as COO, Jessica Xiaoying Jaun-Li 李肖莹 as CEO and Robert E. Gubler as chairman. It consists of the center itself, a beauty clinic and a TCM office.<sup>310</sup>

A story in the STA’s own newspaper, the *Schweizerische Gewerbezeitung*, reports on a 2015 study trip of Rime, Bigler and Yang to the PRC, where they met with several companies, but particularly also with the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC, 中华全国工商业联合会), which is described as “the link between the ruling Party and the private economy” and a kind of counterpart of the STA, as it is a national association that is like the STA in the Swiss cantons present in all provinces and autonomous regions. The report quotes China-expert Henrike Schneider, at the time head of department at STA, today its vice-director, as saying that ACFIC “is important for the international relations of STA and possibly a door-opener to the Middle Kingdom for Swiss small and medium-sized enterprises.” Bigler gives the goal of the trip as deepening the “traditionally very good relations between the STA and Chinese officials” and a picture shows Rime, Bigler and Yang together with the Chinese Min-

<sup>307</sup>See: “Für weitere Annäherung an China”, *Schweizerische Gewerbezeitung*, 8<sup>th</sup> Apr 2016.

<sup>308</sup>See: “瑞中商务理事会在伯尔尼成立”, *Swissinfo*, 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar 2016.

<sup>309</sup>See: “瑞士专家: 自贸协定促中瑞经贸合作 开放型经济带来双赢”, *中国日报*, 12<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017.

<sup>310</sup>See: “About us”, *Swiss China Center Zurich*. Jaun-Li is also on the Board of the European Business Club Switzerland, which mainly seems to have projects in the PRC, a fact somehow uncaptured by its name or its mission statement in the official registry. See: “[European Business Club Switzerland](#)”, Commercial Register of Canton Zurich; “[Our team](#)”, *European Business Club Switzerland*; “[Gallery](#)”, *European Business Club Switzerland*. In 2018, Jaun-Li and Gubler founded the Economic Forum Beijing Zurich. See: “[Economic Forum Beijing Zurich](#)”, Commercial register of Canton Zurich. Between 2017 and 2018, Gubler was also President of the Swiss China Commerce Group AG, before he made way for Marco G. Heinrich, who also leads a company in Guiyang City. See: “[Swiss China Commerce Group AG](#)”, Commercial register of canton Bern; “[Mutationen: Swiss China Commerce Group AG](#)”, *Schweizerisches Handelsamtsblatt*; “[瑞中宜欣\(贵州\)投资管理有限公司](#)”, 企查查. Since 2012, Liu Bing 刘冰 has been on the board of the Swiss China Commerce Group AG and seems to be the only person who has been constantly involved. She was also with its official predecessor company Leabon Group AG, which in turn was registered as c/o with another business of Liu, the Swiss-Sino Business Cooperation AG (since 2016: *Swiss International Business Investment AG*, with Zhang Wenxia from Beijing as president and the only other person on the board besides Liu). See: “[Swiss International Business Investment AG](#)”, Commercial Register of Canton Bern. Earlier, Liu seems to have been China Project Manager at the Economic Development Bureau of the Canton of Bern and also (albeit for only a month in 2010) a board member of *SBG Swiss Business Council AG*, an appointment which ended in July 2010. See: “[SBG Swiss Business Group AG](#)”, Commercial register of Canton Bern; “[Mutationen: SBG Swiss Business Group AG](#)”, *Schweizerisches Handelsamtsblatt*, 1<sup>st</sup> Mar 2010. In 2009, Liu presented the *Swiss Business Council AG* as being officially in charge of investment promotion in the Chinese market on behalf of the Economic Development Bureau of the Canton of Bern. See: “[图文: 瑞士伯尔尼经济发展局中国项目经理刘冰](#)”, *Sina 新浪财经*, 18<sup>th</sup> Sep 2009. In addition to other business affiliations, since 2012 Liu has been involved in the Euro-Sino Enterprises Association (欧中企业联合会), although her name is apparently not mentioned on the company’s homepage. The executive director is Liu Zhanyan 刘展言. She appears to be the association’s public face. See: “[Euro-Sino Enterprises Association GmbH](#)”, Commercial register of Canton Bern. The association operates the *Swiss Brand Center Beijing* and is an official partner of the *Swiss Venture Club (SVC)*. See: “[Euro-Sino / Swiss international Business Investment AG](#)”, *Swiss Venture Club*. It also appears to cooperate with STA. See: “[瑞士欧中企业联合会执行董事刘展言: 中国冰雪经济需要形成品牌化发展](#)”, *中国民族品牌促进网*, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2019.

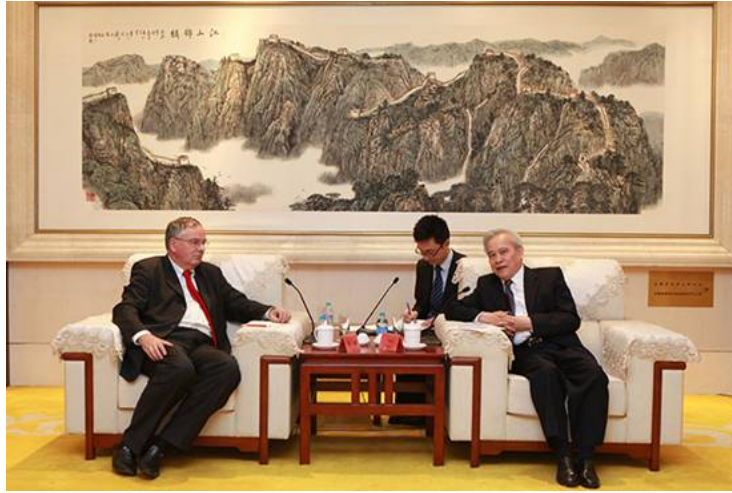


Figure 11: STA president Jean-François Rime meeting with ACFIC chairman Wang Qinmin in March 2015 in the context of an STA study trip by Rime, Hans-Ulrich Bigler and Yang Yuming. Source: “王钦敏主席会见瑞士联邦工商企业联合会代表团一行”, 中共中央统一战线工作部, 8<sup>th</sup> Apr 2015.

ister of Commerce, Gao Hucheng 高虎城, during Li Keqiang’s visit to Switzerland in 2013.<sup>311</sup> The homepage of the UFWD has a news entry on the visit, too, from which it becomes clearer whom from ACFIC the STA delegation met. It was no other than Wang Qinming 王钦敏, the Chairman of ACFIC, vice-chairman of the 12<sup>th</sup> CPPCC, and later that same year elected to the position of vice chairman of the China Association for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification.<sup>312</sup>

The UFWD runs ACFIC.<sup>313</sup> Lulu Jichang refers to a “1990 State Council General Office circular” that conceives of a “division of labor” for ACFIC with an “internal” and the China Chamber of International Commerce (CCOIC, 中国国际商会) with an “external” role.<sup>314</sup> CCOIC, in turn, is controlled by CCPIT. Although CCPIT is “functionally related to the finance and economics system,”<sup>315</sup> it features a CCP committee that mentions as one of its tasks “to implement united front and stability related work” (负责统一战线工作和稳定工作).<sup>316</sup> SCIPA, mentioned above, lists CCPIT Shenzhen as one of its Chinese partners.<sup>317</sup> In 2017 Quan Zhezhu 全哲洙 (Korean name: Jeon Cheol-su 전철수), senior vice-president and party secretary of ACFIC and member of the Central Committee of the CCP, visited Bern. A report in the *Basler Zeitung* with the heading “Alles für die Chinesen” (Everything for the Chinese), the title hinting at Bigler, sums up the visit, which included a meeting with federal councilor Johann Schneider Ammann and then a dinner at which entrepreneurs could present their companies (two minutes each, “speed dating”-mode, the report writes) and at which

<sup>311</sup>See: “Gute Beziehungen ausbauen”, *Schweizerische Gewerbezeitung*, 20<sup>th</sup> Mar 2015.

<sup>312</sup>See: “王钦敏主席会见瑞士联邦工商企业联合会代表团一行”, 中共中央统一战线工作部, 8<sup>th</sup> Apr 2015; “王钦敏”, 中华全国工商业联合会; “中国和平统一促进会第九届理事会副会长王钦敏”, 中国统一战线新闻网, 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2016.

<sup>313</sup>See: Groot, “Understanding the Role of Chambers of Commerce”, *op. cit.*; Joske, *The Party Speaks for You*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>314</sup>See: Lulu, “Repurposing Democracy”, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 sq.

<sup>315</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>316</sup>See: “部门职责”, 中国国际贸易促进委员会.

<sup>317</sup>See: “Partners”, SCIPA.



Bilger gave a speech.<sup>318</sup> What the newspaper article did not mention is that Quan was, at the time of his visit to Switzerland, also deputy head of the UFWD.<sup>319</sup>

### 2.3 Cantons, economic promotion, Belt and Road and cooperation with China

Several cantonal governments in Switzerland have signed cooperation agreements or MoUs with Chinese provinces, cities or other actors. Schaffhausen, and its partnership agreement with Hunan province, has already been mentioned above in the context of the Schaffhausen China Association. But Schaffhausen is also an interesting case since it has mandated a private actor, Generis AG, to oversee its economic promotion towards China. It is a good example for how economic actors dealing with the PRC almost without a choice will come into contact with bodies deploying united front tactics.

Generis AG was established in 1992 and provides consulting services for companies, governments, and institutions in China and Switzerland. In 2004, it was authorized to go to China on behalf of the Swiss Federal Agency for Economic Promotion in order to help Chinese companies go abroad and gain a foothold in Switzerland in the framework of the project “Investment Promotion China.”<sup>320</sup> In 2010, a Beijing branch of Generis was established. On a Chinese internet platform, it presents itself as a “bridge” (桥梁) between Switzerland and the PRC.<sup>321</sup> There are numerous contacts with the Chinese party-state that seem noteworthy. In 2014, Generis board members Thomas Hollenstein and Chen Xia 陈霞 visited the China Public Relations Association (CPRA, 中国公共关系协会).<sup>322</sup> This association is supervised by the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP (中共中央宣传部) and lists among its tasks the organization of foreign exchanges, telling China’s story well (讲好中国故事), and promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.<sup>323</sup> In the same year, Hollenstein confessed to Chinese reporters his confidence in China’s development and remarked that “Chinese government officials have a strategic vision” (中国的政府官员很有战略眼光).<sup>324</sup>

An event facilitated by Generis AG in November 2019 serves to illustrate how points of contact with the united front are readily brought about. The “Sino-Swiss Entrepreneur Forum” held in the Sheraton Zurich Hotel was an evening event. It was officially hosted by the China-Switzerland Business Council Liaison Office (Guizhou) and listed

<sup>318</sup>The report also mentions that everyone addressed Quan with “his excellency,” which is rather odd given that at the time he held purely party positions. See: Alan Cassidy, “*Alles für die Chinesen*”, *Basler Zeitung*, 29<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017.

<sup>319</sup>See: Alex Joske, “*The Central United Front Work Leading Small Group: Institutionalising United Front Work*”, Sinopsis, 23<sup>rd</sup> Jul 2019. On his April 2017 visit to Switzerland, Quan was received by the consul-general in Zurich and participated in a symposium with Chinese companies in Switzerland, among them the Swiss Chinese Enterprise (SCE) association. See: “*驻苏黎世兼驻列支敦士登公国总领事高燕平会见中华全国工商业联合会代表团*”, Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Zurich, 24<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017; “*全国工商联代表团与瑞士中资企业举行座谈会*”, 驻瑞士经商参处, 26<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017. Only days after his visit to Switzerland, Quan was deposed from his UFWD and ACFIC offices. See: “*徐乐江履新全国工商联: 为新型政商关系注入新内涵*”, 华夏时报 via Sina 新浪财经, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

<sup>320</sup>See: “*OSEC Business Network Switzerland / Informationsschreiben: Investment Promotion China: neue Strukturen ab 2010*”, Sinoptic, 14<sup>th</sup> Apr 2009.

<sup>321</sup>See: “*我们只是瑞士和中国之间的一座桥梁*”, 网易, 16<sup>th</sup> Jul 2018.

<sup>322</sup>See: “*普拉福咨询公司、瑞士格尼斯国际商务咨询公司一行到访协会*”, 中国公共关系协会, 26<sup>th</sup> Sep 2014.

<sup>323</sup>See: “*协会简介*”, 中国公共关系协会, 4<sup>th</sup> Aug 2020.

<sup>324</sup>See: “*瑞士格尼斯首席执行官: 发展旅游就是与自然融合*”, 中国经济网, 17<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014.





Figure 12: In 2014, Generis AG founder and board member Thomas Hollenstein and board member Chen Xia on visit at the China Public Relations Association, itself supervised by the CCP Central Propaganda Department. Source: “普拉福咨询公司、瑞士格尼斯国际商务咨询公司一行到访协会”, 中国公共关系协会, 26<sup>th</sup> Sep 2014.

as co-organizers CCPIT Guizhou (Bureau of Expo Affairs of Guizhou Province) and the Guizhou Chamber of International Commerce. Partnering up were the Economic and Commercial Counsellor’s Office of the Chinese embassy, the Representative Office of CCPIT in Switzerland, SCCC and Generis AG itself, although it also functioned as the contact for the event and apparently had organized the entire event as well as the speakers.<sup>325</sup> The keynote speech was given by Marco Jaggi, the chief representative for Switzerland Innovation. Moderated by Marco Rhyner, the CEO of Generis AG, there were additional welcome addresses by Dahinden-Zhou Qing, board member of SCCC and (although not mentioned on the flyer) of CASTS, Wu Jingchun 吴景春, the economic and commercial counsellor of the Chinese embassy, and Zhang Hanlin 张汉林, the president of the Guizhou Council for the Promotion of international Trade. Zhang is particularly interesting. Zhang is the Vice-President of Guizhou CCPIT and the director of the Bureau of Expo Affairs of Guizhou Province (贵州省博览事务局). He also served between 2002 and 2012 as the Dean of the China Institute for WTO Studies (中国世界贸易组织研究院).<sup>326</sup> Finally, Zhang is also a part-time professor at the Central Party School (中央党校) and an accomplished researcher of international economic and trade theory and policy, especially the WTO.

<sup>325</sup>See: “Grosses Interesse an «Sino-Swiss Entrepreneur Forum»”, Generis, 12<sup>th</sup> Nov 2019.

<sup>326</sup>See: “历任院长”, 中国世界贸易组织研究院. The institute has a party branch (党支部) with a united front and disciplinary inspection commissioner (统战委员 & 纪检委员). See: “中国 WTO 研究院直属党支部委员名单”, 中国世界贸易组织研究院. The party group website is particularly well maintained and even features full reports about students who are in the process of becoming CCP members. See: “党务公开”, 中国世界贸易组织研究院. To take one random example. The report about a student mentions that she has been investigated for one year and was found to have a correct political attitude and a strong patriotism, firmly supporting the leadership of the CCP and the party line, as well as its principles and policies. The comrade has the correct motivation to join the party. Even her personality is evaluated and she is considered “to have a good mass foundation” (有良好的群众基础). Some shortcomings are also added. Finally, the report asks for comments about her to be conveyed to the relevant department within a week. See: “中国 WTO 研究院直属党支部关于王晓旭同志发展入党的公示”, 中国世界贸易组织研究院, 6<sup>th</sup> Nov 2017.



The canton of Geneva is noteworthy for its positive attitude towards the Belt and Road Initiative. Pierre Maudet signed an MoU in May 2017 with COFCO International, which then moved its global headquarters to Geneva.<sup>327</sup> In article 1 of the MoU, the two signatories expressed their wish “to contribute to the ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR) initiative in both countries.” The COFCO news item reporting the MoU describes the gala event that followed the signature ceremony.<sup>328</sup> The positive attitude of the canton finds its mirror image in the private sector. The Geneva Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Services CCIG is a private actor that also tries to participate in the Belt and Road. It signed a cooperation agreement as part of a delegation to the PRC led by Pierre Maudet and thus is listed today as a member of the Silk Road Association Alliance, an initiative of the Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce (丝绸之路国际总商会).<sup>329</sup> The chairman of the chamber is Lü Jianzhong 吕建中, a member of the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> CPPCC and currently of the National People’s Congress.<sup>330</sup> The chamber describes itself as a “bridge and link” (桥梁和纽带) between the government and enterprises, and a platform for “pragmatic cooperation” (务实合作) with its members, promoting economic and trade cooperation through cultural exchanges, participating in global economic governance, and promoting the BRI.<sup>331</sup> The alliance is under the supervision of CCPIT, which it also lists as a partner, together with the China Association for Friendship CAFF (中国友谊促进会). The chairman of CAFF is Chen Zhimin 陈智敏,<sup>332</sup> a member of the 13<sup>th</sup> CPPCC and the former deputy director of the Ministry of Public Security (公安部).<sup>333</sup>

## 2.4 The China Switzerland Connection

The China Switzerland Connection CSC (瑞中之桥, literally the “bridge”) is based in Lucerne and has existed since around 2008/09.<sup>334</sup> It is an example for a more civil society and smaller entity that, however, still leads us to interactions with the united front and considerable access to the Swiss embassy in the PRC. CSC was established by Carli Beeli and Wang Xiaojie, assembling a group of young people engaging in Sino-Swiss dialogue and cultural exchange. The homepage offers little information (but shows a picture of them meeting with Li Keqiang in Bern),<sup>335</sup> while the Facebook site is actively maintained. Its messaging is clearly and exclusively positive, as might be expected from a friendship group. Beeli, who has a Computer Science background,

<sup>327</sup> See: “Memorandum of Understanding between COFCO International Co. Ltd. and the State of Geneva”, Öffentlichkeitsgesetz: Das Forum für Transparenz in der Verwaltung, 7<sup>th</sup> Jun 2019.

<sup>328</sup> See: “COFCO International Signed MOU with the State of Geneva, Switzerland”, COFCO, 26<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

<sup>329</sup> See: Vincent Subilia, “Genève, tête de pont de la Route de la soie”, AGEFI, 29<sup>th</sup> Oct 2018 ; “Geneva Chamber of Commerce Partners with SRCIC to Consolidate Ties under B&R”, SCCC, 7<sup>th</sup> Jul 2018; “Silk Road Association Alliance”, Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce.

<sup>330</sup> See: “吕建中代表——调研成果 落地有声”, 中国共产党新闻网, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020. See also: Andréa Worden, “The CCP at the UN: Redefining Development and Rights”, Sinopsis, 17<sup>th</sup> Mar 2019; Nadège Rolland, “Mapping the Footprint of Belt and Road Influence Operations”, Sinopsis, 12<sup>th</sup> Aug 2019.

<sup>331</sup> See: “商会简介”, Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce.

<sup>332</sup> See: “中国友谊促进会理事会”, 中国友谊促进会 China Association for Friendship, 21<sup>st</sup> Feb 2017.

<sup>333</sup> See: Geoff Wade and Jichang Lulu, “The China Association for Friendship (中国友谊促进会) and its links with the Ministry of Public Security”, forthcoming.

<sup>334</sup> See: “China Switzerland Connection”, China Switzerland Connection 瑞中之桥; “The China Switzerland Connection”, Facebook.

<sup>335</sup> See: “China Switzerland Connection”, China Switzerland Connection 瑞中之桥.



is the key figure, signing as the founder and president of the group.<sup>336</sup> He maintains a blog called *8China*<sup>337</sup> and a Youtube channel called *9pandas*.<sup>338</sup>

In September 2018, CSC (Switzerland) launched a Chinese mirror organization, CSC (China), in Beijing at the Swiss Embassy in presence of the ambassador, Jean-Jacques de Dardel, who agreed to serve on the board of CSC China. At the event, which was reportedly attended by 120 guests, Beeli explained that the main purpose of CSC China is to promote ‘Belt and Road’ cultural exchanges and the development of Sino-Swiss friendship. The Chairman of CSC (China) is Qian Gui’an 錢桂安.<sup>339</sup> Qian, it seems, had previously worked at the Paul Scherrer Institute (PSI) for many years (2009–2018) and today is employed at the Institute of Mechanics, Chinese Academy of Sciences.<sup>340</sup> Qian and Beeli met in 2015 at a symposium, initiated by members of the PSI-Aargau Chinese Student & Scholar Union and held at the PSI, where they both gave presentations (Beeli in his function as chairman of CSC apparently talked about “Power Generation in the Swiss Mountains: The History of the Kraftwerke Vorderrhein in the Little Town of Curaglia”). The CASTS leadership Dai Yong and Feng Jianhua as well as representatives of the Chinese Embassy (i.e. the counselor and two secretaries from the Education Office) were also present.<sup>341</sup>

On his blog, Beeli lists CASTS as one of his partners.<sup>342</sup> At the annual meeting of CASTS held in Bern, he was awarded the “2017 CASTS Best Cooperation Prize” (2017 年科协最佳合作奖).<sup>343</sup> Most recently, in October 2020, he participated in an online symposium celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Swiss-Chinese diplomatic relations with the ambassador present, hosted by the Cultural and Educational Section of the Embassy and organized by CASTS as well as student associations. The news report issued by the embassy shows Beeli on a set of screenshots together with Andries Diener (president of STA), possibly Lukas Saul (formerly at University of Bern, now professor at Hefei University of Technology, introduced at a 2018 CASTS-CSC

<sup>336</sup>On her LinkedIn profile, Wang Min 王敏 lists China Swiss Connection as one of the organizations in which she is active, besides her memberships in the Swiss China Association (SCA) and the Swiss Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC). See: “Min Wang 王敏”, LinkedIn.

<sup>337</sup>See: “8china: Der Deutschschweizer China-Blog”, 8china.

<sup>338</sup>See: “9pandas”, Youtube.

<sup>339</sup>See: “China Switzerland Connection Launched in Beijing 瑞中之桥开启中国新篇章”, Sohu, 18<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018.

<sup>340</sup>See: “钱桂安”, 中国科学院力学研究所.

<sup>341</sup>See: “瑞士中国学人能源科学与技术专题研讨会成功举办”, CAMSETS, 20<sup>th</sup> Oct 2019; “科协举办能源科学与技术专题报告会通知”, CASTS, 11<sup>th</sup> Jun 2015.

<sup>342</sup>See: “Impressum”, 8china.

<sup>343</sup>See: “瑞士中国学人科技协会 2017 年年会在伯尔尼召开”, Education Office of Embassy of PRC, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2017.

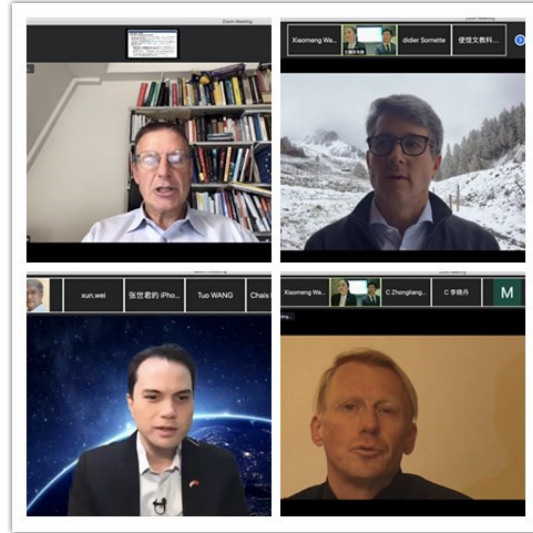


Figure 13: Screenshot shared by the Chinese embassy in Bern in its news report about an online symposium held in October 2020 celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Swiss-Chinese diplomatic relations, showing Didier Sornette (upper left), Andries Diener (upper right) and Carli Beeli (lower left). Source: “全瑞中国学生学者”纪念中瑞两国建交 70 周年座谈会”在线成功举办”, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Switzerland, 25<sup>th</sup> Oct 2020.

co-organized event as a “celebrity in China”<sup>344</sup> and Didier Sornette (ETHZ),<sup>345</sup> who introduced his cooperation with SUSTech.<sup>346</sup>

Finally, Beeli is also reaching across the border to France. In May 2019, CSC (Switzerland) signed a “friendly cooperation agreement” with the Association des Chinois de l’Est de la France (法国东部华人联谊会, Eastern French Chinese Friendship Association) in the presence of the Chinese consul general in Strasbourg, Ling Jun 凌军.<sup>347</sup>

<sup>344</sup>See: “Finance.Women.Career & Blockchain in China”, SCCC, 8<sup>th</sup> Sep 2018.

<sup>345</sup>Sornette holds positions at the ETHZ (Chair of Entrepreneurial Risks Department of Management, Technology and Economics, D-MTEC) and at SUSTech in Shenzhen. In 2019, the Institute of Risk Analysis, Prediction and Management (Risks-X) was established as a pilot cooperation between the two institutions with Sornette as one of two directors. Wu Ke, mentioned above in the contexts of CASTS and SSIC, is a research assistant professor in the Risks-X Institute. Also in 2019, a cooperative arrangement with Xinrui Business School was concluded that aimed at the training of doctoral students. In a recent cameo appearance on CCTV 13, Sornette is featured as one of three foreign experts praising the Belt and Road Initiative, which he sees as a good example of China’s persistence in seeking long-term development and win-win-cooperation, something he says he “strongly supports” (非常支持). See: “Risks-X”, Chair of Entrepreneurial Risks, ETHZ; “全瑞中国学生学者”纪念中瑞两国建交 70 周年座谈会”在线成功举办”, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Switzerland, 25<sup>th</sup> Oct 2020; “About XBS”, Xinrui Business School; “欧洲智库专家:”一带一路”倡议将继续成为全球经济增长引擎”, 人民网, 26<sup>th</sup> Oct 2020.

<sup>346</sup>See: “全瑞中国学生学者”纪念中瑞两国建交 70 周年座谈会”在线成功举办”, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Switzerland, 25<sup>th</sup> Oct 2020.

<sup>347</sup>See: “法国东部华人联谊会与法瑞协会签署友好合作协议”, 欧洲时报, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2019.



## 2.5 Members of the CPPCC on Swiss companies' boards of directors

Finally, the focus is set on the CPPCC, which has had a constant presence with many of the individuals discussed in this study. It is a key institution central to the united front work system, which has long been spuriously viewed as a negligible gathering that institutionally serves the claim of input legitimacy for the regime. Informally, however, it provides a useful network of contacts into the Chinese party-state. Economic actors interested in Chinese market access have readily understood this latter aspect and filled seats on their boards with CPPCC members. The authors of a recent research paper examined 1340 Chinese listed private enterprises between 2004 and 2013 and confirmed that political connections of non-executive independent members on the board of directors, including mandates on the CPPCCs, directly translate into improved access to credit financing. In the PRC, bank loans are allocated through state actors and therefore under the control of government authorities.<sup>348</sup> Joske relates the example of Deloitte China and its deputy CEO Jiang Ying 蒋颖, who is a delegate to the national CPPCC, like seven other “Deloitte China executives” who serve on the national or local CPPCC levels.<sup>349</sup>

Big multinational companies headquartered outside of the PRC have recognized the value of these networks, it seems, as several feature CPPCC members on their boards. In Switzerland, Novartis was early to enlist non-executive member Marjorie Yang Mun-tak 楊敏德 on their board of directors, where she served from 2008 to 2013,<sup>350</sup> while being a member of the National Committee of the CPPCC.<sup>351</sup> Eva Cheng Li Kam-fun 鄭李錦芬 has been on Nestlé's board of directors since 2013.<sup>352</sup> Yet, she has also been a member of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Guangdong CPPCC and served as a member of the Standing Committee of the Guangdong branch of ACFIC, a body directly under the UFWD with the goal of forming closer relationships with foreign commercial and industrial entities.<sup>353</sup> Since 2015, she has been the executive director of Our Hong Kong Foundation (團結香港基金),<sup>354</sup> a think tank established by the first chief executive of Hong Kong and billionaire Tung Chee-hwa 董建華, who today serves not only as vice-president of the national CPPCC,<sup>355</sup> but is also the founder of the China–United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF, 中美交流基金會),<sup>356</sup> a suspected united front body supporting “Beijing's efforts to sway public opinion and build

<sup>348</sup>See: Peng Hongfeng, Zhang Xiao and Zhu Xiaoquan, “Political Connections of the Board of Directors and Credit Financing: Evidence from Chinese Private Enterprises”, *Accounting & Finance* 57 (2020), pp. 1481–1516.

<sup>349</sup>See: Joske, *The Party Speaks for You*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>350</sup>See: “Novartis announces update to company's board of directors”, Post Online Media, 15<sup>th</sup> Nov 2012.

<sup>351</sup>Yang was a member of the CPPCC from 2003 to 2018, see: “Marjorie Yang”, Asia School of Business.

<sup>352</sup>See: “Eva Cheng”, Nestlé.

<sup>353</sup>See: “鄭李錦芬”, 广州市人民政府侨务办公室, 25<sup>th</sup> Sep 2012. On the official Guangdong CPPCC homepage, there is an interesting account of Cheng's life and engagement on the mainland dating from 2009: “鄭李錦芬”, 中国人民政治协商会议广州市委员会, 26<sup>th</sup> Nov 2009.

<sup>354</sup>See: “Mrs Eva Cheng Li Kam-Fun”, Our Hong Kong Foundation.

<sup>355</sup>See: “董建华简历”, 中国人民政治协商会议全国委员会.

<sup>356</sup>See: “The Hon. Tung Chee-hwa”, CUSEF.



Figure 14: Li Shan (first from left), Swiss ambassador Jean-Jacques de Dardel (second from left) and Claude Béglé (second from right). Source: “瑞中世界丝路促进会简介”, 腾讯网, 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2018.

influence in America.”<sup>357</sup> Stokes, however, sees CUSEF as part of the external affairs system.<sup>358</sup>

Currently, several other boards of big Swiss private enterprises feature non-executive independent members who are also enlisted on a provincial or the national CPPCC. Credit Suisse’s Li Shan 李山, on the bank’s board since 2019, is a member of the National Committee of the CPPCC and also the vice-chairman of the Silk Road Planning Research Center (S-PRC, 丝路规划研究中心).<sup>359</sup> The S-PRC is affiliated with the general office of the CPPCC, headed by Chen Yuan 陈元 (a vice-chairman of the CPPCC between 2013 and 2018 and son of no other than Chen Yun 陈云) and managed by Li Xiaolin 李小琳 (the daughter of former premier Li Peng 李鹏).<sup>360</sup> It was as a member of the CPPCC and vice-chairman of S-PRC that Li made an appearance at the Swiss Embassy in Beijing on 14 November 2018 at the launch of the Swiss-China World Silk Road Association (瑞中世界丝路促进会).<sup>361</sup>

<sup>357</sup> John Dotson, “The China-U.S. Exchange Foundation and United Front: ‘Lobbying Laundering’ in American Politics”, *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information* 20:16 (2020), p. 9; Peter Mattis, “The Center of Chinese Influence: The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference”, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, ed. Hsu Szu-Chien and J. Michael Cole (Eastbridge, 2020), pp. 29–37.

<sup>358</sup> See: Stokes, *op. cit.*, pp. 56 sq.

<sup>359</sup> See: “Shan Li”, Credit Suisse; “中国人民政治协商会议第十三届全国委员会委员名单”, 中国人民政治协商会议全国委员会. For a report on the center’s homepage about Li Shan and his views on the BRI, see: “全国政协委员、丝路规划研究中心副理事长李山: 关于创建“一带一路”经济特区的建议”, 千丝网, 7<sup>th</sup> Mar 2019.

<sup>360</sup> See: “丝路规划研究中心简介”, 丝路规划研究中心 and “陈元 (十二届全国政协副主席、丝路规划研究中心理事长)”, 千丝网, 4<sup>th</sup> Mar 2018; “李小琳 (丝路规划研究中心常务副理事长)”, 千丝网, 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2018. Since 2016, Chen Yuan is also the president of the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC, 中国国际友好联络会). Joske refers to it as a “united front-style group” and it is closely tied to the Liaison Bureau of the PLA’s Political Work Department. Deng Rong 邓榕, a daughter of Deng Xiaoping 邓小平, serves as one of the vice-presidents. See: “友联会召开第五届会员代表大会暨理事会第一次会议”, CAIFC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Jun 2016; and Joske, *The Party Speaks for You*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15 sq.

<sup>361</sup> See: Xie Jiayun, “Switzerland vows to further participate in Belt and Road”, *China Watch*, 15<sup>th</sup> Nov 2018.



Then member of the Swiss National Council Claude Béglé, chairman of the Swiss-China World Silk Road Association, introduced the body and the work that it seeks to do with the “joint efforts” of the CPAFFC. There is a history of cooperation between Béglé and the CPAFFC, which has led to the latter having high-level access to Swiss politicians and other elite.<sup>362</sup> At this event, Li is reported to have said that the “establishment of the association was under the support of the Chinese government” and that it is “expected to make great contribution to the promotion of Belt and Road Initiative [sic].”<sup>363</sup> In yet another function, as chairman of the board of the Beijing International Wealth Management Institute, Li was in turn partnering with the Swiss-China World Silk Road Association, and also with private bank Julius Baer with which he struck a deal to train and educate “professionals in the Chinese wealth management industry.”<sup>364</sup> In December 2020, Li made news as one of three people initiating the Bauhinia Party as a new political force in Hong Kong, which the *South China Morning Post* qualified as a “pro-establishment” party led by “pro-mainland Chinese financiers.”<sup>365</sup>

In the above cases, the company homepages actually state the CPPCC mandate. This is different with Fred Hu (Hu Zuli 胡祖六) of UBS, who sits on the Hunan Provincial Committee CPPCC.<sup>366</sup> And the same is true for Raymond Ch’ien Kuo-fung (Qian Guofeng 钱果丰), who is on the Standing Committee of the Tianjin Municipal CPPCC and on the board of Swiss Re.<sup>367</sup> Interestingly, since here one would expect it, the mandate is also not mentioned in the case of Frank Ning (Ning Gaoning 宁高宁), who is the chairman of the board of Syngenta, which was acquired by ChemChina in 2017 in what was the largest foreign takeover in Chinese history.<sup>368</sup> Still, companies might as a matter of fact not see a problem with a CPPCC mandate at all. Quite the contrary, the connections that this mandate gives might be part of the reason why these figures are thought to add concrete value to the board in the first instance. Hamilton and Ohlberg, relying on reporting by Bloomberg News, relate how Credit Suisse – perhaps with similar reasoning – employed “over a hundred sons, daughters and friends

<sup>362</sup>For the cooperation between Béglé and the CPAFFC, see the news reports from the CPAFFC homepage: “文化交流部工作组访问瑞士、英国”, CPAFFC, 14<sup>th</sup> Jul 2018. In one of them, Béglé is reported to have said about an earlier visit of a CPAFFC delegation to Switzerland that it “has given Swiss people an opportunity to get to know the harmonious relations between Tibetan People and Han People as well as Tibetan culture’s philosophy of respecting nature,” see: “Vice President Hu Sishe Meets with Swiss Federal Parliamentarian Mr. Béglé”, CPAFFC, 15<sup>th</sup> Jul 2019. A month earlier, in June 2019, Béglé, in his function as chairman of the Swiss-China World Silk Road Association, had received and accompanied a delegation of CPAFFC’s Cultural Exchange Department (文化交流部) to meet various actors (among them several officials from Departments of the Swiss Federal Government, Members of Parliament, the mayor of Bern, a UN official, the director-general of WWF International, and the chairman of the Lausanne School of Hotel Management). See: “文化交流部工作组访问瑞士”, CPAFFC, 10<sup>th</sup> Jun 2019.

<sup>363</sup>See: Xie Jiayun, “Switzerland vows to further participate in Belt and Road”, China Watch, 15<sup>th</sup> Nov 2018.

<sup>364</sup>See: “Julius Baer announces partnership with Beijing International Wealth Management Institute”, Julius Baer, 20<sup>th</sup> Aug 2020.

<sup>365</sup>See: Phila Siu and Natalie Wong, “Pro-mainland Chinese financiers based in Hong Kong launch new Bauhinia Party aimed at reforming Legco, restraining ‘extremist forces’”, *South China Morning Post*, 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020. It is interesting to note how the news was differently reported in different media outlets. Compare Richard Otsuki, “Credit Suisse Director Launches Party in Hong Kong”, *Finews*, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020 and Kevin Carrico, “The new Bauhinia Party is the next stage of colonization”, *Apple Daily*, 11<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020.

<sup>366</sup>See: “Board of Directors”, UBS; “政协湖南省第十一届委员会委员名单”, 人民网, 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 2013 and “第十二届湖南省政协委员名单出炉”, 湖南省人民政府办公厅, 17<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018.

<sup>367</sup>See: “Our leadership”, Swiss Re; “钱果丰”, 财新传媒, *Lingnan Forum*, 1<sup>st</sup> Apr 2017 and “中国人民政治协商会议天津市第十三届委员会委员名单”, 中国人民政治协商会议天津市委员会, 13<sup>th</sup> Feb 2018.

<sup>368</sup>See: “Board of Directors”, Syngenta; “中国人民政治协商会议第十三届全国委员会委员名单”, 中国人民政治协商会议全国委员会, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020.



of senior government officials,<sup>369</sup> among them the daughter of former premier Wen Jiabao 温家宝.

While there might be solid economic calculation behind these choices of board members, the political ramifications are less clear. With regard to the CPPCC, Groot has offered important groundwork as early as in the 1990s.<sup>370</sup> In the past years, research literature has started to look more closely at the CPPCC as an external influence organ, for example, examining the party-trope of “public diplomacy” (公共外交).<sup>371</sup> More recently, Mattis has described the CPPCC as “the place where messages are developed and distributed among party members and the non-party faithful who will shape perceptions of the CCP and China” and emphasized its use-value for “opening up a channel for the rest of the CCP’s influence apparatus to pass through.”<sup>372</sup> Joske calls it “the most important united front forum.”<sup>373</sup> The CCP itself explicitly describes the CPPCC as a “patriotic united front organization.”<sup>374</sup> Mattis summarizes the character of its activities as “the corporatist co-optation of elites.”<sup>375</sup> Members of the CPPCC not only gain “some level of political protection,” but “become vested in the system.”<sup>376</sup> The homepage of the CPPCC has You Quan 尤权, the head of the UFWD, roundly confirm that “all the nominees had gone through meticulous examinations in terms of their political stance.”<sup>377</sup> All of this suggests that the benefits of the good network of contacts might not come without costs for the companies. The active embrace of business through the united front is a well-established finding in the research literature, for instance, through chambers of commerce.<sup>378</sup> And the risk involved in becoming too invested in the Chinese party-state and a proxy for CCP influence in the target societies has been discussed in view of concrete cases.<sup>379</sup>

### 3 Conclusions

This study has found ample evidence of widespread networks active in Switzerland that are in one or another way linked to the united front system or one of the other systems involved in influence operations. Dozens of individuals with positions in these systems could be identified. Almost every actor engaging in cooperation with the Chinese party-state, it seems, ends up with contacts that lead to the united front or one or several of the other units deploying united front tactics such as the Propaganda Department or the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. The embassy and the consulate function as important nodes in this otherwise rhizomatic (non-)structure. The findings of this study confirm that the united

<sup>369</sup>See: Hamilton and Ohlberg, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>370</sup>See: Groot, PhD thesis, *op. cit.*, pp. 161–163, pp. 289–292, p. 310, pp. 317–320, pp. 362–367, pp. 407–409 and ch. 11.

<sup>371</sup>See: Mareike Ohlberg, “Creating a Favorable International Public Opinion Environment: External Propaganda (Duiwai Xuanchuan) as a Global Concept with Chinese Characteristics”, PhD thesis, University of Heidelberg, pp. 495–497.

<sup>372</sup>See: Mattis, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 sq.

<sup>373</sup>See: Joske, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>374</sup>See: Mattis, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>375</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>376</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>377</sup>See: “Member list of 13th CPPCC National Committee released”, CPPCC, 25<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018. See also: “中国共产党统一战线工作条例”, *op. cit.* (Art. 38).

<sup>378</sup>See: Groot, “Understanding the Role of Chambers of Commerce”, *op. cit.*

<sup>379</sup>See: Martin Hála, “Making Foreign Companies Serve China: Outsourcing Propaganda to Local Entities in the Czech Republic”, *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information* 20:1 (2020).





front is active in Switzerland. The crucial question is how to judge these activities and, if necessary, how to react to them. Neither judgment nor reaction, however, can be responsibly undertaken if the phenomenon is not sufficiently known. The Overseas Chinese community in Switzerland is of course far from a unitary subject. But the lively scene of united front organizations target the community while catering to it. Even if the impact seems at this time limited, the CCP's attempt to deliver a unified message about the motherland and uniting the diaspora ideologically are an important phenomenon to study.

Future research would have to take up the matter and pursue it in more detail and, if possible, with more sophisticated methodology. Almost every aspect raised in this study can be scrutinized further. For instance, as regards the first part of this study, it would be helpful to use the tensions within overseas Chinese groups in Switzerland that Lieber (2010) has identified (different generations, sociocultural backgrounds, claims of "Chinese-ness" and the competition between the ROC and the PRC) to analyze the complex dynamics and development over time of united front activities in Switzerland. The conflict around the creation of FOCAS and the notable absence of SAPUC in it might be expressive of such personal tensions. Given the role that embassies play, changing ambassadors and offices might re-shuffle existing power differentials in the Overseas Chinese community. More systematic network analysis could reveal clusters of cooperation, and in-depth case studies, in turn, processes of social demarcation. This might be helpful for supporting and engaging the Chinese diaspora adequately (one of Joske's explicit recommendations on how to react to foreign interference through the united front system).<sup>380</sup>

In view of the second part, it must be underlined that the given examples cover only a small, but not insignificant, selection of contact points between Swiss-based actors and the united front system and other relevant bodies. One of the key insights gained from the writing of this study has been how every lead quickly led to another one, chasing down one shoot of the rhizome just to bump into the next node. Research on further actors (e.g. on the innumerable business consultancies and some law firms specialized in facilitating mutual market access between Switzerland and the PRC), on sensitive sectors (e.g. pharmaceutical and chemical companies, finance industry, medical appliances, top-level research institutions, applied sciences), on federal, cantonal and communal affairs, and on cultural as well as educational initiatives would thus be most warranted. The activities of CASTS and its alliance with FCPAE have shown up as one of the few instances where the two target groups distinguished in this study have overlapped. These are possibly important nodes in the overall rhizome and deserve further scrutiny. Yet, perhaps, different actors – say, the business sector, government, or small bottom-up personal or civil society initiatives – would require different measures to counter possible influence and interference. The crux of such possible investigations, however, is a narrow focus quickly invites criticism for singling out some actor or institution. It also risks showing the diluted manifestations of an effect that in its full force instead comes about cumulatively and across a longer stretch of time. Exposing the Hitzkirch incident as a case of mask diplomacy by itself might read like a weird anecdote, but if there are many Hitzkirchs, then there is a pattern and possibly an effect that poses a more fundamental challenge to liberal democracy. A more general depiction to hold more focused investigations against is necessary.

<sup>380</sup>Joske, *The Party Speaks for You*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.



This study has aimed at such a general depiction of the phenomenon and, to this end, has worked its way backwards, from the rhizomatic delivery in the target society to unearthing a unified message that otherwise is easily and readily available at the center of action in the PRC. It bears repeating that the message is not enigmatic, but rather openly communicated by the relevant actors in the Chinese party-state and well documented in existing scholarship. While this study has emphasized the difficulty of knowing whether some actor is involved or targeted, there is no such ambivalence about the message. Indeed, the message has been almost uniform and mirroring the CCP talking points about Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, the South China Sea, but also the BRI, the depoliticization of business and trade by focusing on pragmatic cooperation, as well as the even more straightforwardly propagandistic phrases of win-win and a community of shared destiny. Astonishingly, this uniformity has in some few instances even shown at the basic level of sentences that resound through the echo chamber an ever more normalized PRC (and even CCP) despite continuing and even increasing ideological divides. The much-discussed systemic rivalry emphasizes the divide, too, but paints a Cold-War-like image that unduly ignores not only cross-cutting dimensions of global capitalism, but also the transnational realities and increasingly digital life-worlds of our day, which contemporary united front tactics are quick to use and exploit.

Examining Switzerland eventually reveals an unending series of iterations of the same. False equivalences, mistaking CCP-controlled bodies for “counterparts,” is an omnipresent feature of the cooperation between Swiss actors and entities in the Chinese party-state. What is more, cooperation more often than not goes hand in hand with positive messaging or at least effects of self-censorship. A final word about positive messaging is therefore in order. The question of co-optation brings up instances of instrumentalization and of complicity to various degrees as much as of a possibly genuine congruence of political beliefs. In a liberal democracy, it cannot be emphasized enough, actors are of course free to hold positive, even enthusiastic, views and opinions about the PRC and the CCP and voice them in the public sphere. Business actors are largely free to pursue their interests in cooperation with Chinese partners. And many institutions, private and public, it should be admitted, juggle diverging agendas and interests when it comes to whether and how to engage with the Chinese party-state, agendas that are not always easy to reconcile, if it is even possible to reconcile them. Some choices might prove to be dilemmas. But in all of this, it seems, that ignorance is the worst of conditions. The term “positive messaging” alludes to the possibility that actors risk freely repeating what others want them to say and – worse – freely doing what others want them to do. Given that co-optation is a well-documented tactic of the CCP and the considerable resources that go into these influence operations, the thought that one would ever think that one is sufficiently in the know and that one simply does not need to care about finding out what exactly is the case, is discomfiting and, at worst, politically naïve.



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## List of abbreviations

ACFIC	All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce	中华全国工商业联合会	
ACFROC	All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese	中华全国归国华侨联合会	
ACJA	All-China Journalists Association	中华全国新闻工作者协会	
ACSSZ	Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in Zurich	苏黎世中国学生学者联合会	
ASCEOC	Swiss Association of Merchants and Entrepreneurs of Chinese Origin	瑞士华商会	Association Suisse des Commerçants et Entrepreneurs d'Origine Chinoise
BLIA	Buddha's Light International Association	国际佛光会	
CAFF	China Association for Friendship	中国友谊促进会	
CAFPS	Chinese Association of Finance Professionals in Switzerland	瑞士中国学人金融协会	
CAIFC	China Association for International Friendly Contact	中国国际友好联络会	
CALSS	Chinese Association of Life Science in Switzerland	瑞士中国学人生命科学协会	
CAMSETS	Chinese Association of Materials Science and Energy Technology in Switzerland	瑞士中国学人材料科学与能源协会	
CAMSTS	Chinese Association of Materials Science and Technology in Switzerland	瑞士中国学人材料科学与技术协会	
CAPFA	Chinese-African People's Friendship Association	中国非洲人民友好协会	
CASTS	Swiss Chinese Scholars Association for Science and Technology	瑞士中国学人科技协会	Chinesische Gesellschaft für Wissenschaft und Technik in der Schweiz
CAWE	Chinese Association of Women Entrepreneurs	中国女企业家协会	
CCMA	Connecting China Media Association		
CCOIC	China Chamber of International Commerce	中国国际商会	
CCP	Chinese Communist Party	中国共产党	
CCPPNR	China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification	中国和平统一促进会	
CFOCE	China Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs	中国侨商联合会	
CICA	China International Culture Association	中国对外文化交流协会	
CIG	Chinese Institute Geneva Foundation	日内瓦华文教育基金会	Fondation de l'Institut chinois de Genève



CNS	China News Service	中国新闻社	
COEA	China Overseas Exchange Association	中国海外交流协会	
COFA	China Overseas Friendship Association	中华海外联谊会	
COFCO	China Oil and Foodstuffs Corporation	中国粮油食品	
CPAFFC	Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries	中国人民对外友好协会	
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	中国人民政治协商会议	
CPRA	China Public Relations Association	中国公共关系协会	
CSC	China Switzerland Connection	瑞中之桥	
CSSA	Chinese Students and Scholars Associations	中国学生学者联合会	
CUSEF	China-United States Exchange Foundation	中美交流基金会	
CUZ	Chinese Union of Zurich	苏黎世中国人协会	
CVSH	Schaffhausen Chinese Association	瑞士沙夫豪森中国人协会	Chinesischer Verein Schaffhausen
EFCT	European Federation of Chinese Tourism	欧洲华人旅游业联合总会	
FCPAE	Federation of Chinese Professional Associations in Europe	全欧华人专业协会联合会	
FOCAS	Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations in Switzerland	瑞士华侨华人社团联合会	Dachverbandes der Überseechinesen in der Schweiz / Fédération des associations des Chinois d'outre-mer en Suisse
IBPS	International Buddhist Progress Society of Switzerland	瑞士佛光山	
ICEA	China Association for International Cultural Exchanges with Overseas Chinese	中国华侨国际文化交流促进会	
ILD	International Liaison Department	中央对外联络部	
NPC	National People's Congress	中华人民共和国全国人民代表大会	
OCAO	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office	侨务办公室	
PSI	Paul Scherrer Institute		Institut Paul Scherrer / Paul Scherrer Institut
PSI-Aargau	PSI-Aargau Chinese Student & Scholar Union	中国学生学者联合会	
S-PRC	Silk Road Planning Research Center	丝路规划研究中心	



SAPUC	Swiss Association for the Peaceful Reunification of China	瑞士中国和平统一促进会	Association suisse pour une réunification pacifique de la Chine / Schweizer Verband für die friedliche Wiedervereinigung Chinas
SCA	Swiss-Chinese Association	瑞中协会	Société Suisse-Chine / Gesellschaft Schweiz-China
SCINA	Swiss China Investment Association	瑞中投资商会	
SFCT	Swiss Federation of Chinese Tourism	瑞士华人旅游联合会	Fédération Suisse du Tourisme Chinois
SSCIM	Swiss Society of Chinese Integrative Medicine	瑞士中西医结合学会	Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Chinesische Integrative Medizin
SSIC	Sino-Swiss Innovation Center	瑞中创新中心	Schweizerisch Chinesische Innovationszentrum
STA	Swiss Trade Association		Union suisse des arts et métiers / Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband
THUAACH	Tsinghua University Alumni Association Swiss Branch	瑞士清华校友	
UFWD	United Front Work Department	中央统一战线工作部	
WACMM	World Association of Chinese Mass Media	世界华文大众传播媒体协会	