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Research Report

China's diaspora policy under Xi Jinping: Content, limits and challenges

SWP Research Paper, No. 10/2022

Provided in Cooperation with:

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Suggested Citation: Schäfer, Carsten (2022) : China's diaspora policy under Xi Jinping: Content, limits and challenges, SWP Research Paper, No. 10/2022, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2022RP10>

This Version is available at:

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SWP Research Paper

Carsten Schäfer

China's Diaspora Policy under Xi Jinping

Content, limits and challenges



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for
International and Security Affairs

SWP Research Paper 10
November 2022, Berlin

- China estimates the number of people of Chinese origin outside the People's Republic to be 60 million. Beijing considers them all to be nationals of China, regardless of their citizenship.
- Xi Jinping views overseas Chinese as playing an “irreplaceable role” in China's rise as a world power. Beijing is working hard to harness overseas Chinese resources for its own goals in the fields of economics, science and technology, as well as diplomacy and soft power.
- Beijing also expects people of Chinese origin in Germany to deepen relations between China and Germany. But not only that: As “unofficial ambassadors”, they are also expected to spread China's narratives to the German public, defend China's “core interests”, and help with the transfer of knowledge and technology to China.
- Nevertheless, there are limits to China's diaspora policy: Chinese migrants' reactions to China's ambitions are heterogeneous. They range from willingness to cooperate to disinterest or open rejection.
- German actors should develop a comprehensive understanding of Chinese diaspora policy and the goals and practices associated with it. Just as in Beijing, diaspora policy should be perceived as an important component of Chinese foreign policy.
- Only on this basis can answers to China's ambitions be found wherever German interests, legal principles, or social values are affected — without at the same time exposing people of Chinese origin to general suspicion. German actors should also expand their engagement in communities of people with a Chinese migration background instead of leaving this field to Chinese authorities.

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SWP Research Paper 10
November 2022, Berlin

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ISSN (Print) 2747-5123
ISSN (Online) 1863-1053
DOI: 10.18449/2022RP10

(English version of
SWP-Studie 9/2022)

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China's Diaspora Policy under Xi Jinping: Content, limits and challenges

The number of people of Chinese origin living outside the People's Republic of China is estimated to be about 60 million; this is roughly equivalent to the population of Italy. Many of them do not have Chinese citizenship and – as descendants of Chinese immigrants – have never lived in China; they are extremely diverse socio-culturally and politically. Nevertheless, Beijing sees them as a homogeneous unit and part of the “great Chinese family” under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Since the beginning of the reform policy (1978), the CPC has seen “its diaspora” as an important resource for the development and rise of the country as a world power. Accordingly, Beijing initiated a diaspora policy in the late 1970s that seeks to connect overseas Chinese to China. In the meantime, this policy has become highly institutionalised and is shaped and implemented by a multitude of authorities.

This political apparatus has the task of linking overseas Chinese associations and media worldwide to the Chinese party-state and harnessing them to China's goals. In line with the tightening of Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping, new directions in Chinese diaspora policy are also discernible. First, this is evident on a content level: For a long time, diaspora policy was exclusively concerned with access to the financial and intellectual capital that China saw in the Chinese abroad – and still sees today. Under Xi Jinping, diaspora policy was integrated into the “united front” policy, which aims to create a favourable international environment for China's ambitions. As a result, diaspora policy is now more closely linked than ever to China's central foreign policy goals – such as Beijing's efforts to “build international discourse power”, strengthen foreign propaganda, realise the Chinese Dream, and protect China's “core interests”. Second, diaspora policy has also changed organisationally under Xi Jinping. Since 2018, it has become more centralised and is now under the direct leadership of the Party's United Front Work Department (UFWD).

With Chinese immigration to Germany having steadily increased over the past two decades, this policy is now also being felt in this country. Institu-

tions of the Chinese party-state are regularly active in Germany in building relationships with Chinese migrants' associations and media. Today, the Chinese state maintains numerous contacts with actors within communities of people of Chinese origin in Germany. Most Chinese-language media in Germany have turned into mouthpieces of the CPC. Even if the reasons for China turning to people of Chinese origin around the world are understandable and attempts to profit from the financial capital of Chinese abroad are legitimate, China's diaspora policy *can* also run counter to the interests of the countries of residence: China uses the existing communication channels in Germany to persuade ethnic Chinese abroad to support the CPC's objectives and spread Chinese nationalism. China's authorities not only declare all people of Chinese origin — that is, also German citizens — to be members of China by propagating ancestry and blood relations as the essential categories of affiliation; the country also expects these people to support its own foreign policy and foreign trade policy interests. Chinese students in Germany are called upon to transfer know-how to China, if necessary through espionage; entrepreneurs are mobilised to invest their resources in China's economic development; associations are called upon to strengthen China's image and influence German public opinion in China's favour. Protests and rallies organised by people of Chinese origin in Germany in recent years — for example, in support of China's Hong Kong policy — were due to associations linked to the Chinese party-state, which itself, however, always remained in the background. In short, Beijing has managed in recent years to build relationships with people in Germany who are loyal to the regime.

Examples from other countries such as Australia lead to the conclusion that Chinese attempts to influence people of Chinese origin will also increase in Germany. It is therefore important for German decision-makers to be aware of China's diaspora policy, including its actors, objectives, and consequences, and to address these issues — not only because Beijing sees it as a cornerstone of its own foreign policy ambitions, but also because it can run counter to interests and fundamental social values in Germany. Even if not all of China's diaspora policy measures are problematic and some can have a positive effect on economic relations between China and Germany, the following still applies: For Beijing, people of Chinese origin are first and foremost stakeholders of the CPC; their financial and entrepreneurial as well as intel-

lectual and political resources must first be put at the service of the People's Republic, according to the unmistakable message. More than that: By openly stating its claim also to Germans of Chinese origin and by disseminating official political positions, the CPC is deliberately exporting racial and illiberal ideas to Germany in order to advance its own interests.

From Germany's point of view, it should be insisted that China respect the political independence of overseas Chinese media and associations in Germany just as much as the heterogeneity of the "diaspora" — and that it does not misuse them as pawns for the CPC. At the same time, people of Chinese origin must not be subjected to general suspicion from the German side and misunderstood as Beijing's "fifth column" — even if Beijing deliberately exports this narrative to Europe. The majority of the heterogeneous group of Chinese migrants do not cooperate with the Chinese state and cannot be won over by the often simplistic affiliation patterns of Chinese diaspora policy; some groups even fight it. In turn, those who do seek contact with the Chinese state do so partly for motives that are not in line with those of Beijing. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of China's increasing diaspora policy engagement, actors in Germany, including for example the Federal Foreign Office with its "Citizens' Dialogues", should themselves begin to show a stronger presence among associations of people of Chinese origin in Germany — not least in order to actively promote the bridging function between China and Germany, which many people of Chinese origin can assume thanks to their transnational connections.

Introduction

The question of where the Corona virus originated remains unanswered. It has long been a political issue — at the latest since Beijing imposed punitive tariffs on Australia in November 2020 after the country demanded an independent investigation into the question of origin. In a curious way, Germany also felt China's influence on this issue. In June 2020, the Hamburg-based Carlsen Verlag published the children's book *Ein Corona-Regenbogen für Anna und Moritz* (*A Corona Rainbow for Anna and Moritz*), which contained the sentence: "The virus comes from China and has spread from there all over the world." From Beijing's point of view, this was a provocation: In March last year, China's state media accused the publisher of racism. Even more, according to the official website *German.china.org.cn*, which is close to the CPC, "the Chinese community [in Germany] demanded a recall of the book."¹ At the same time, the Chinese Consulate General in Hamburg published a similar statement — and just one day later, the "Chinese community" in Germany also reacted. Within a few hours, almost 40 negative reviews appeared on Amazon, unanimously accusing the publisher of "racism". The reaction of the Carlsen publishing house? It gave in to the pressure and withdrew the book; it has since been sold without the sentence on the origin of the virus.²

China's diaspora policy is also a reflection of its new foreign policy.

Even though little is known about the background, the coordinated action of the "Chinese population" in Germany, the Chinese state media, and the Chinese Consulate General against a book that had already

been on the market for nine months at the time of this obviously orchestrated outrage is remarkable. The incident is symptomatic of a policy that has taken on new proportions under Xi Jinping: the attempt to control discourses abroad. This policy is, in turn, part of Beijing's goal, declared several years ago, to "step into the centre of the world stage" (*zoujin shijie wutai zhongyang*). During Xi's tenure, China's foreign policy underwent a structural and conceptual transformation: Structurally, a centralisation of decision-making can be seen, and conceptually, a departure from the old foreign policy restraint. China is now actively pursuing the reshaping of the international order in an effort to create an environment conducive to China's rise. One consequence of this is also the country's increasingly loud and sometimes aggressive posturing at the diplomatic, economic, and military levels. The estimated 60 million people of Chinese origin living outside China are seen by Xi Jinping as a central "force" for these ambitions of China. Today, even more than in previous years, the CPC is trying to exert influence on "its diaspora" in order to use it for its own goals. While diaspora policy has long been about access to economic and intellectual resources within the framework of the reform policy, under Xi Jinping it also became part of China's "discourse power" ambitions. Diaspora policy is thus more than ever a mirror of the new foreign policy.

Nevertheless, the topic has received little attention in Germany so far.³ This is partly due to the still recent history of Chinese migration to Germany: The first Chinese immigrants came to Germany as early as the mid-19th century. But the overall immigration figures remained low for a long time, amounting to only about 1,800 people by the mid-1930s; in the course of the Second World War, almost all of them had to leave the country again (and some were deported). Even after the war, the numbers rose slowly;

1 "Chinesische Gemeinde verärgert über deutsches Kinderbuch", *German.china.org*, 8 March 2021, http://german.china.org.cn/txt/2021-03/08/content_77286813.htm (accessed 21 November 2021).

2 There were also accusations of racism from the German side that could have influenced the decision of the Carlsen publishing house. For example, sinologists also critically intervened in the debate via Twitter.

3 A short study is by Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Mapping China-in-Germany", *Sinopsis. China in Context and Perspective*, 2 October 2019, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/mapping-china-in-germany/> (accessed 17 September 2021).

only in the last two decades has immigration increased at a rapid pace. Currently, 215,000 people with a Chinese migration background live in the country, 164,000 of them with their own migration experience.⁴ About 145,000 have Chinese citizenship. Whereas most Chinese worked in the catering industry until the 1970s, business people and students came to Germany for the first time with the reform and opening-up policy in the 1980s; the last group in particular makes up a considerable proportion of Chinese citizens in the country today with 43,500 people.

Although the discussion of China's diaspora policy has long been a marginal phenomenon in international China research,⁵ political think tanks in individual countries have recently been paying increasing attention to it (e.g. in the Czech Republic,⁶ Australia⁷ and Sweden⁸); especially in the United States, Australia, and Canada, China's diaspora policy has simultaneously become the focus of political attention. China's actions in these states show that political influence on the "diaspora" will also be expanded in Germany. For German policy, it is important to perceive and classify this policy field, its actors, the objectives and effects associated with it, and to find strategic responses to it where necessary — not only

because Beijing sees diaspora policy as a cornerstone of its own foreign policy and foreign trade policy ambitions, but also because these ambitions can affect German interests and fundamental values as well as questions of international law.

The research paper uses exemplary cases to outline China's diaspora engagement policies and Beijing's attempts to expand its own influence with the help of "overseas Chinese in Germany".⁹ The aim is to broaden our view of Chinese foreign policy through the lens of diaspora policy, and at the same time to illustrate how broad the spectrum of actors has become that shape China's foreign policy and foreign trade policy.

The paper is based on the evaluation of overseas Chinese media, Chinese state media, political speeches, Chinese cadre textbooks, Chinese studies on the overseas Chinese, and official announcements from China. In the first part of the paper, Chinese diaspora policy and its underlying discourses, objectives, institutions, and methods are presented. In the second part, the migrants as a target group of diaspora policy move into the centre of attention. It is analysed to what extent the intended appropriation succeeds — and where it reaches its limits. Finally, the risks associated with Chinese diaspora engagement policy for Germany and recommendations for action for political decision-makers are outlined.

4 Federal Statistical Office of Germany, "Bevölkerung in Privathaushalten nach Migrationshintergrund im weiteren Sinn nach ausgewählten Geburtsstaaten", *Destatis*, as of 12 April 2021, <http://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Tabellen/migrationshintergrund-staatsangehoerigkeit-staaten.html> (accessed 13 June 2022).

5 Exceptions include Elena Barabantseva, "Trans-nationalising Chineseness: Overseas Chinese Policies of the PRC's Central Government", *Asia* 96 (2005): 7–28; James To, "Beijing's Policies for Managing Han and Ethnic-Minority Chinese Communities Abroad", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, no. 41 (2012): 183–221; Mette Thuno, "China's New Global Position: Changing Policies towards the Chinese Diaspora in the Twenty-first Century", in *China's Rise and the Chinese Overseas*, ed. Bernhard Wong (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 184–208.

6 Filip Jirouš, "The Role of Coopted Diaspora Groups in Czech and European United Front Work", *China Brief* 20, no. 16 (2020): 20–27.

7 Alex Joske, *The Party Speaks for You. Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party's United Front System*, Policy Brief Report 32/2020 (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020).

8 Oscar Almén, *The Chinese Communist Party and the Diaspora. Beijing's Extraterritorial Authoritarian Rule*, FOI-R-4933-SE (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, March 2020).

9 Terms such as "overseas Chinese" or "(ethnic) Chinese abroad" are not without problems, as they can implicitly suggest a closeness to China or an identification with the Chinese nation, which, however, is not the case for many people of Chinese origin. If the terms are nevertheless repeatedly used here as a synonym for people with a Chinese migration background — especially because it is usually not possible to differentiate between people of Chinese origin with or without Chinese citizenship on the basis of Chinese sources — this is explicitly not intended to imply any particular affiliations.

Contents of Chinese Diaspora Policy

China's official discourse: Who belongs to the “Chinese diaspora”?

To understand Beijing's diaspora policy ambitions, one must grasp the Chinese government's guiding principles underlying them and illuminate the discourses that accompany them. China does not recognise dual citizenship; as a consequence, an estimated 80 per cent of all ethnic Chinese living outside China are nationals of other states. Nevertheless, Beijing counts them as part of the “Chinese nation”: The politically most common Chinese term for overseas Chinese (*hualiao*) includes both Chinese citizens abroad (*hualiao*) and ethnic Chinese with non-Chinese nationalities (*hualiao*). Xi Jinping calls them all “members of the great Chinese family” who would “never forget their homeland China” and “never deny the blood of the Chinese nation in their bodies”.¹⁰ In other words, Beijing defines membership of the Chinese nation not in legal terms, but primarily in ethnic and racial terms; accordingly, *all* overseas Chinese are considered part of the People's Republic of China – no matter what passport they hold or how many generations their families have lived abroad. In line with this, Chinese diaspora policy, according to one cadre textbook, is directed not only at “Chinese citizens abroad, but also ethnic Chinese with foreign citizenship”.¹¹

Consequently, the Chinese consulates in Germany also propagate notions of belonging based on blood relations and ancestry. At a reception for the New Year in Düsseldorf in January 2018, the consul general claimed in front of 300 assembled overseas Chinese that “no matter how passports have changed”,

they are still “members of the big Chinese family”.¹² A year earlier, he had declared that overseas Chinese “do not forget their homeland any more than they forget the blood of the Chinese people that flows in their veins”. Germany, in turn, he described as a “foreign country” for people of Chinese origin.¹³ Germans of Chinese origin – according to the message of the Chinese state – are Chinese, not Germans. The legal criterion of citizenship is *de facto* not recognised by China; instead, “ancestry” and “race” are regarded as central markers of belonging when it comes to assigning people of Chinese origin in Germany.

Why diaspora engagement policy? China's interests and goals

Diaspora policy has always been closely linked to China's reform policy; the absorption of overseas Chinese has been an essential part of the Chinese modernisation process since the late 1970s. This is hardly surprising when one looks at the figures: The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) under the Chinese State Council estimates, as mentioned above, that there are 60 million people of Chinese origin living outside China; about 10 million are said to have left China

¹⁰ Xi Jinping, *Tan zhiguo lizheng* [The Governance of China] (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2014), 63f.

¹¹ Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (OCAO), *Qiaowu gongzuo gailun* [Outline of Overseas Chinese Work] (Beijing: Zhongguo zhigongdang chubanshe, 2006), 2.

¹² Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Düsseldorf, “Zhu dusaierduofu zonglingshi feng haiyang zai 2018 nian lingqu qiaojie chunjie zhaodaihui shang de zhici” [Consul General of Düsseldorf Feng Haiyang addresses overseas Chinese from the region at the 2018 Chinese New Year Reception], 29 January 2018, <http://dusseldorf.china-consulate.org/chn/zlszl/zlszs/t1530052.htm> (accessed 17 September 2021).

¹³ Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Düsseldorf, *Rang zhongguomeng yu shijie jieban tongxing* [Let the Chinese Dream Go Hand in Hand with the Whole World], 10 January 2017, <http://dusseldorf.china-consulate.org/chn/zlszl/zlszs/t1429215.htm> (accessed 17 September 2021).

after the reform policy began in 1978.¹⁴ For official China, they were and are a “stroke of luck” (Deng Xiaoping), a “treasure trove” (Jiang Zemin), and an “important force” (Hu Jintao) to be integrated into the Chinese modernisation project. The goals that Beijing associates with diaspora policy have thereby also successively broadened in the course of the expansion of the reform and opening-up policy and the ambitions associated with it. Today, China’s concrete interests extend to three fields.

Economic aid

First, Beijing hopes for help for “economic construction”. This is the original core of the diaspora engagement policy that was initiated in the late 1970s: With the beginning of the economic reforms, the overseas Chinese, who until then had been defamed as “capitalist spies”, also came into the focus of Chinese politics. In particular, Beijing tried to ensnare the wealthy ethnic Chinese in South-East Asia; the first “special economic zones” were accordingly established in Chinese emigrant regions in order to access overseas Chinese capital. Although Beijing initially aimed at remittances, in the 1980s the focus soon shifted to foreign direct investment and the import of management know-how. Today, the Beijing think tank Center for China and Globalization estimates the capital of the “diaspora” to be US\$5 trillion, which would make it the “third largest economic power in the world”.¹⁵ At the same time, Beijing hopes for support for Chinese companies abroad¹⁶ and for deepening economic cooperation between China and other states.¹⁷ Since

Xi Jinping came to power, diaspora policy has been explicitly linked to the realisation of the New Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative, BRI).¹⁸ Here, overseas Chinese are expected in particular to support Chinese companies in becoming active abroad.

Technology transfer

Second, Beijing’s diaspora policy is about access to modern technology, know-how, and “talent” (*rencai*). Especially since the beginning of the 21st century, Beijing has been pushing for a transition to an economic model guided by technological innovation in order to maintain sustainable economic growth.¹⁹ Diaspora policy has also been aligned with these new political ambitions since Hu Jintao’s time in office and has since been directly shaped by these objectives. Four million overseas Chinese are now said to be working in high-ranking positions in sectors such as science and high technology; almost 1.5 million are studying abroad. Accordingly, Beijing is making greater efforts to attract skilled workers and import modern technologies with the help of this part of the “diaspora”. Although the diaspora policy initially aimed to attract Chinese students and researchers back to China, the strategy was adjusted under Xi Jinping, at a time when it had become clear that the majority of them were not returning to China. In October 2013, Xi Jinping demanded of China’s overseas students in this spirit: “If you come home, we welcome you with open arms. If you stay abroad, we will help you serve the country in many different ways. One thing you must keep in mind: No matter where you are, you remain the sons and daughters of China.”²⁰

14 Gu Yimin, ed., *Blue Book of Overseas Chinese. Annual Report on Overseas Chinese Study* (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2017), 214.

15 *Report on Development of World Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs*, Special Report 2 (Beijing: Center for China and Globalization, November 2016), 1, <http://en.ccg.org.cn/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Report-on-Development-of-World-Overseas-Chinese-Entrepreneurs.pdf> (accessed 10 October 2021).

16 Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Düsseldorf, *Zhigongdang zhongyang daibiaotuan yu deguo beiweizhou zhongzi qiye xiehui zuotan* [Informal Discussion between a Delegation of the Zhigong Party and the Association of Chinese-Financed Enterprises from NRW], 15 June 2016, <http://dusseldorf.china-consulate.org/chn/rdzt/zdcxhz/t1372627.htm> (accessed 10 October 2021).

17 Ministry of Commerce of the PRC, *Di si jie zai de huaren shangmao xiehui daibiao zuotanhui chenggong juban* [4th Conference of Chinese Trade Association Representatives Successfully

Held in Germany], 7 April 2019, <http://de.mofcom.gov.cn/article/i/201907/20190702878969.shtml> (accessed 10 October 2021).

18 Gu, ed., *Blue Book* (see note 14), 247.

19 Jost Wübbeke, “Übergang zum innovationsgetriebenen Wirtschaftsmodell”, *Informationen zur politischen Bildung – Volksrepublik China*, izpb 337 (Bonn: Federal Agency for Civic Education, 2018), 67–70.

20 “Xi jinpings zai oumei tongxuehui chengli 100 zhounian qingzhu dahui shang de jianghua” [Xi Jinping’s Speech at the Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Western Returned Scholars Association], in *Renmin Ribao*, 21 October 2013, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/1022/c64094-23281641.html> (accessed 10 August 2020).

“Telling China’s story well”

In 2011, “public diplomacy” was defined for the first time as a new core task of diaspora policy.²¹ After Xi Jinping came to power, this conceptual reorientation of diaspora policy gained more weight. Although only adjustments were made in the two previously mentioned areas under Xi Jinping, the clearest change in the content of diaspora policy can be seen here. Today, diaspora policy is also about breaking through the “discourse sovereignty” of the West, improving China’s image, and protecting Chinese “core interests” and “China’s unity”.²² These political goals are not new; what is new under Xi Jinping, however, is that Chinese discourse positions are to be disseminated to Western publics beyond official channels with the help of overseas Chinese.

The CPC sees itself in an “ideological struggle” for “discourse power”.

Under Xi, the CPC sees itself in an “ideological struggle” for “discourse power” in which “hostile Western forces” are the opponents.²³ Xi Jinping himself demanded in June 2021 in the Politburo that China must create “a favourable international environment of public opinion for China’s development” and expand its own discourse power. Therefore, it would be important to expand foreign propaganda and win the “battle for public opinion”. In this sense, it would be a matter of “telling China’s story well”.²⁴ This guiding principle has now moved to the centre of diaspora policy; Xi Jinping accordingly

called for overseas Chinese to “make China’s voice heard”.²⁵

The three points make it clear that diaspora policy is given the highest priority in the Chinese modernisation project. Under Xi Jinping, this policy has gained further importance. In October 2014, Xi stressed that overseas Chinese would play an “irreplaceable role” in China’s rise by the middle of the century.²⁶ Unlike his predecessors, the current Party and state leader has therefore explicitly integrated the “diaspora” into the guiding slogan of his term in office: the “Chinese Dream”. For its realisation, the Chinese abroad represent, according to Xi, a “precious resource”. This also means that whereas diaspora policy in the first decades after 1978 had a primarily economic thrust, under Xi Jinping it took on a more political accent; in the past decade it has become an increasingly important component of China’s international influence work.

Restructuring of the diaspora apparatus under Xi Jinping

The conceptual changes under Xi Jinping are also reflected structurally and organisationally. The political apparatus entrusted with the elaboration and implementation of the diaspora policy was (re-)established in the late 1970s. For a long time, the two most important authorities were the OCAO under the Chinese State Council (whose role is comparable to that of the cabinet in Germany) and the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC), which is attached to the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, a body designed to provide non-CPC members with opportunities to participate in the formation of political opinion in China. Both agencies have been responsible for establishing direct links with overseas Chinese organisations worldwide in order to be able to advance cooperation between China and the “diaspora”.²⁷ In addition, they are active in policy advice and practice-oriented research. The OCAO maintains its own research institutions (*Qiaowu lilun-yanjiu*) in various provinces and is closely linked to university research in China. With the cooperation

21 Huang Ping, *Huaqiao huaren zai zhongguo ruanshili jianshe zhong de zuoyong yanjiu* [Study on the Role of Overseas Chinese in China’s Soft Power Building] (Beijing: Economic Science Press, 2015), 192.

22 Gu, ed., *Blue Book* (see note 14), 263.

23 Liu Yazhou, “Xifang didui shili wangtu yi hulianwang bandao zhongguo” [Enemy Forces in the West Are Trying to Use the Internet to Bring Down China], *Sina*, 15 October 2013, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2013-10-15/0945744480.html> (accessed 5 September 2022).

24 “Xi Jinping zai zhonggong zhongyang zhengzhiju di sanshi ce jiti xuexi shi qiangdao jiaqiang he gajin guoji chuanbo gongzuo” [Xi Jinping Stresses the Need to Expand and Advance International Propaganda Work at the 30th CPC CC Collective Training], *Xinhua*, 1 June 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-06/01/c_1127517461.htm (accessed 11 October 2021).

25 Xi, *Zhiguo lizheng* (see note 10), 64.

26 Ibid.

27 Qiu Jin, ed. *Blue Book of Overseas Chinese. Annual Report on Overseas Chinese Study* (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2012).

of the OCAO, an *Annual Report on Overseas Chinese Study* is published that compiles analyses on overseas Chinese communities worldwide and recommendations on diaspora policy. Since the 1990s, this apparatus has successively grown to include a dozen other institutions that are also concerned with the institutional connection of overseas Chinese to China and the development of diaspora policy guidelines, including the China Overseas Exchange Association (*Zhongguo haiwai jiaoliu xiehui*) and the Zhigong Party.²⁸

Under Xi Jinping, the diaspora apparatus was fundamentally restructured.

A fundamental restructuring of this diaspora apparatus then took place under Xi Jinping; this is directly related to the new conceptual focus on the struggle for discourse power described above. In 2018, the OCAO was incorporated into the United Front Work Department of the CPC. This restructuring is also part of wider changes to the UFW, which has become more influential under Xi. The UFW reports to the CPC Central Committee and serves to build relationships with actors outside the Party (at home and abroad) in order to secure their support for Party agendas.²⁹ Xi Jinping declared the UFW in 2015 to be the “magic weapon” on the road to realising the Chinese Dream. Under his leadership, the department grew from six offices to fifteen today. Two of the new bureaus are responsible for diaspora policy: the Overseas Chinese Affairs General Bureau and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau; they have taken over the functions of the OCAO (whose name, however, is still used to some extent in communications with overseas Chinese). In addition, other bureaus are also involved in diaspora policy tasks — for example, the newly established Xinjiang Bureau. On the one hand, the restructuring aims at a higher degree of coordination and centralisation of diaspora policy under the direct

leadership of the Party (and no longer the state), and on the other hand, it is supposed to intensify the connections between Beijing and the “diaspora”.³⁰

All of this is an expression of the growing strategic importance of diaspora policy, which is receiving an institutional upgrade here. The key elements of the “united front work” under Xi Jinping include the “protection of Chinese core interests”, the “dissemination of Chinese culture”, and the “preservation and promotion of China’s unity”, especially with regard to Taiwan and Hong Kong.³¹ Diaspora policy today is directly subordinated to these interests.

Co-opting practices: The structures and instruments in Germany

The aim of the Chinese diaspora apparatus is to ensure China’s direct influence in overseas Chinese communities, to pursue identity politics, and to guarantee loyal behaviour.³² For this reason, the People’s Republic tries to institutionally link overseas Chinese organisations or rather the chairpersons of such associations — who are referred to in Chinese as “overseas Chinese leaders” (*qiaoling*) — closely to the Chinese state; in doing so, it is assumed that “overseas Chinese leaders have an immense influence on other overseas Chinese” and must be won over as supporters accordingly.³³ Despite the partial innovations in content and organisation under Xi Jinping, little has changed in the methods of diaspora policy: The attempts to bring people of Chinese origin in Germany closer to the Chinese state are similar to those that have proven

²⁸ For an overview, see Barabantseva, “Trans-nationalising Chineseness” (see note 5). Confucius Institutes, on the other hand, which sometimes — and usually only marginally — offer courses specifically for descendants of Chinese immigrants, are not included in this study; they are an important element of China’s united front policy, but focus primarily on non-Chinese foreigners.

²⁹ “Die Einheitsfront (China regieren)”, *German.china.org*, 3 December 2018, http://german.china.org.cn/china/china_stichwoerter/2018-12/03/content_74235044.htm (accessed 10 October 2021).

³⁰ PRC Central Government, “Zhonggong zhongyang yinfashenhua dang he guojia jigou gaige fangan” [Central Committee Releases Plan to Deepen Reform of Party and State Authorities], 21 March 2018, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2018-03/21/content_5276191.htm#1 (accessed 11 October 2021).

³¹ “Zhonggong zhongyang yinfazhongguo gongchandang tongyi zhanxian gongzuo tiaoli” [Central Committee Publishes Provisions of CPC’s United Front Work], *Xinhua*, 5 January 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-01/05/c_1126949202.htm (accessed 11 October 2021).

³² Barabantseva, “Trans-nationalising Chineseness” (see note 5), and Thuno, “China’s New Global Position” (see note 5), for example, have shown this for various countries.

³³ “Xin zhongguo chengli qian zhonggong qiaowu gongzuo qi yuan yu fazhan” [Origin and Development of Diaspora Policy before the Founding of New China], *Renmin Wang*, 16 July 2021, <http://www.chinaql.org/n1/2021/0716/c419651-32159550.html> (accessed 13 June 2022).

successful in other countries since the 1990s. This becomes clear in four areas; understanding these is important in order to be able to adequately grasp the scope for movement of Chinese actors in Germany.

Area 1: Establishment of overseas Chinese associations

One element of Chinese diaspora policy is the establishment of overseas Chinese organisations with the aim of having direct communication channels to communities worldwide. In Germany, too, numerous associations of people of Chinese origin were supported or guided by Chinese authorities when they were founded. This policy had already begun before Xi Jinping, but it was advanced further under him. In cooperation with Chinese authorities, associations have been set up in Germany whose objectives are based on Chinese political guidelines; these include the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification in Germany (in 2001, *Deguo huaqiaohuaren zhongguo heping tongyi cujinhui*), the Overseas Chinese Public Diplomacy Association in Germany (2013, *Deguo huaqiaohuaren gonggongwaijiao xiehui*) – which aims to “positively guide” German society to see the “democratic and open”³⁴ China – and the Association for the Promotion of Silk Road Trade in Germany (2018, *Deguo zhongde yidaiyilumaoyi cujinhui*). In addition, there are numerous “hometown” associations – such as the Association of Chinese from Hubei (2017, *Deguo hubei shetuan lianhehui*)³⁵ – and various professional associations, for example the Association of Chinese Restaurateurs (2015, *Deguo zhongcanpengren lianhehui*).³⁶ Chinese consulates gen-

eral were usually present at the founding ceremonies. Institutions such as the OCAO or the ACFROC were either also present or sent congratulatory letters that were read out at these ceremonies. In some cases, the founding is also done under the direct guidance of the ACFROC. These overseas Chinese organisations (or rather their chairpersons) repeatedly appear openly in ethnic Chinese communities in Germany as supporters of the CPC and also demand this role from other people of Chinese origin in Germany.

Area 2: The role of the embassy and consulates

A key role in implementing the diaspora engagement policy is played by the Chinese embassy and consulates in Frankfurt a. M., Hamburg, Düsseldorf, and Munich, which maintain close relations with diaspora associations. Firstly, this is done through events such as the Chinese New Year, which are also used to pursue identity politics and call on overseas Chinese to contribute to the realisation of China’s political and economic goals. In January 2018, for example, at a ceremony organised by the consulate in Düsseldorf, the consul general spoke to 300 assembled overseas Chinese of the “wise leadership” under Xi Jinping and of the “unified standing together of the sons and daughters of China at home and abroad”. It would be “expected”, he said, that overseas Chinese “will fight for the realisation of the Chinese Dream”.³⁷ Official guidelines and objectives are also propagated at these events. At said celebration, the topics included the BRI and building Chinese discourse power; at a New Year’s meeting at the Düsseldorf consulate a year earlier, the topics included “defending China’s territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests”, “protecting China’s unity”, and “telling China’s story well”.³⁸

34 “Deguo huaqiaohuaren gonggong waijiao xiehui zhengshi chengli” [Overseas Chinese Public Diplomacy Association officially established in Germany], Homepage of ACFROC Zhengjiang, 8 April 2013, <http://www.zjsql.com.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=13&id=17042> (accessed 9 October 2021).

35 “Hubei zhengxie zhuxi wei deguo hubei shetuan lianhehui jiepai” [Chairman of CPPCC in Hubei Unveils Nameplate for Hubei Association in Germany], *Haiwaiwang*, 27 July 2017, <http://de.haiwainet.cn/n/2017/0727/c457022-31041281.html> (accessed 13 October 2021).

36 Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Düsseldorf, *Tuidong zhongguo yinshi wenhua zouchuqu, zhongguopengren xiehui fangde* [Promoting the Spread of Chinese Food Culture, Chinese Cuisine Association Visits Germany],

12 October 2015, <http://dusseldorf.china-consulate.org/chn/rdzt/rwjlhz/t1319818.htm> (accessed 17 September 2021).

37 Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Düsseldorf, *Deguo beiweizhou huajie xiyong zhongguonian, gonghua xinshidai* [Overseas Chinese from NRW Delightedly Welcome the Chinese New Year and Discuss the New Age], 29 January 2018, <http://dusseldorf.china-consulate.org/chn/xwdt/t1530046.htm> (accessed 9 October 2021).

38 “Zhongguo zhu dusaierduofu zonglingshi feng haiyang zai 2017 lingqu huajie xinnian zhaodaihui zhici” [Düsseldorf Consul General Feng Haiyang Delivers Speech at New Year’s Reception of Overseas Chinese from the Region], *China Daily*,

The overseas Chinese should “fight for the realisation of the Chinese Dream”.

Some of the New Year celebrations organised by the diplomatic missions abroad are aimed at specific groups. At a New Year celebration organised by Chinese students in Berlin in January 2019, for example, Chinese Ambassador Shi Mingde made it clear to his audience which students China would like to see: They “bring a positive China image to the fore” and “bring advanced educational concepts and science and technology from abroad back home to promote China’s economic construction”. He said he hopes China’s “students in Germany will not prove unworthy of the glowing expectations of General Secretary Xi Jinping and all the people of the motherland”.³⁹ These appeals are a response to the Party and state leader’s call in 2015 for overseas students to be made “the new focus of ‘united front’ work as an essential part of our talent pool”.⁴⁰

Secondly, events are organised on politically topical issues. At a symposium on the South China Sea in July 2016 at the Düsseldorf consulate, for example, the arbitration ruling in this matter handed down in The Hague was rejected; the tenor of the conference was that the overseas Chinese should stand up for the protection of China’s “sovereignty and territorial integrity”.⁴¹ At an event on the Taiwan issue in Janu-

ary 2019, in turn, 20 “representatives” of overseas Chinese associations “studied” a corresponding speech by Xi Jinping with the Frankfurt consulate; again, overseas Chinese were called upon to “influence even more foreigners”.⁴² Such conferences, which are usually only attended by association leaders, often take place in reaction to debates in the German public whose basic tone runs counter to China’s “core interests”.

Thirdly, celebrations to bid farewell to and welcome embassy staff are part of this context; they are regularly held when there is a change of leadership at the authority. In March 2019, the outgoing ambassador, Shi Mingde, appealed to the “historical sense of mission and national honour” of overseas Chinese in front of 71 association representatives gathered in Berlin and called on them to work for “the unity of the homeland and the German-Chinese relationship”.⁴³

Area 3: “Going out” and “inviting”

Also beyond its overseas missions, the Chinese party-state is trying to show a presence abroad and to establish institutional relations between diaspora authorities and associations worldwide.⁴⁴ This has become increasingly noticeable in Germany in recent years.

A number of Chinese institutions that are part of the “united front work” have been active in Germany in recent years.

On the one hand, this is reflected in the regular sending of delegations from the OCAO, the ACFROC, and other authorities to Germany. The OCAO, for example, hosted a symposium at the Düsseldorf consulate in February 2017, with representatives from

12 January 2017, http://world.chinadaily.com.cn/2017-01/12/content_27937645.htm (accessed 9 October 2021).

39 “2019 nian bolin ji bocitan diqu zhongguo liuxuesheng chunjie lianhuan wanhui chenggong juban” [Chinese New Year Celebration of Chinese Exchange Students in Berlin and Potsdam 2019 Successfully Organised], *Department of Education of the Embassy of the PRC in the FRG*, 1 February 2019, <http://www.de-moe.org/article/read/12014-20190201-5137> (accessed 9 October 2021).

40 “Xi Jinping: gonggu fazhan zui guangfa de aiguo tongyi zhanxian” [Xi Jinping: Consolidating and Developing the Largest Possible Patriotic United Front], *Xinhua*, 20 May 2015, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-05/20/c_1115351358.htm; see also Gerry Groot, “The CCPs Grand United Front Abroad”, *Sinopsis. China in Context and Perspective*, 24 September 2019, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/the-ccps-grand-united-front-abroad/> (both accessed 9 October 2021).

41 “Zhu dusaierduofu zonglingguan juxing hanwei nanhai zhuquan zuotanhui” [Consulate General in Düsseldorf Hosts Conference on Protecting Sovereignty over the South China Sea], *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC*, 13 July 2016, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/zwbdt_673032/jghd_673046/t1381074.shtml (accessed 9 October 2021).

42 “Falankefu qiaojie juxing zuotan biaoda heping tongyi xinsheng” [Overseas Chinese from Frankfurt Hold Conference and Express Their Desire for Peaceful Reunification], *Ouzhou Shibao*, 25 January 2019, <http://mobile.oushinet.com/qj/qjnews/20190125/312187.html> (accessed 9 October 2021).

43 “Deguo qiaojie longzhong juban shi mingde dashi he furen liren zhaodaihui” [German Overseas Chinese Solemnly Host a Reception for Ambassador Shi Mingde and His Wife to Mark His Departure from Service], *Chinese Commercial Newspaper*, 29 March 2019, <https://bit.ly/3FGOMvS> (accessed 9 October 2021).

44 See Barabantseva, “Trans-nationalising Chineseness” (see note 5); Pal Nyiri, *Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia. A Middleman Minority in a Transnational Era* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).

the Association of Fujian Chinese in Germany (*Deguo fujian tongxiang lianhehui*), the Association of Chinese Professors in Germany (*Deguo huaren jiaoshou lianhehui*), and the Association of Overseas Chinese in Germany (*Quande huaqiaohuaren lianhezonghui*).⁴⁵ In October of the same year, an ACFROC delegation met in Berlin with representatives of eight associations of German overseas Chinese – including the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification in Germany.⁴⁶ In addition, a number of other Chinese institutions that are part of the “united front work” have been active on the ground in Germany in recent years. Some examples:

The International Liaison Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (*Zhonggong zhongyan duiwai lianluobu*), which works to influence actors outside of China, met with representatives of various associations at different stops in Germany in December 2019 to discuss, among other things, issues of economic cooperation.⁴⁷

The China Overseas Friendship Association (*Zhonghua haiwai lianyihui*), a mass organisation from China that seeks to cooperate with overseas Chinese, visited Germany in October 2018 and met with associations such as the German-Chinese Business Club (*Deguo zhonghua zongshanghui*). The Friendship Association formulated the “expectation” that overseas Chinese promote Sino-German cooperation and friendship, act as “unofficial ambassadors”, and “participate in China’s construction and development”.⁴⁸

The Zhigong Party, one of the eight so-called bloc parties in China that claims to be the mouthpiece of overseas Chinese, toured Germany in June 2016 and met with, among others, the Chinese Enterprise Association in NRW (*Beiweizhou zhongcan qiye xiehui*) to discuss the BRI and China’s “national going out strategy”, which Beijing has been using since 1999 to help Chinese companies invest abroad and open up markets.⁴⁹

Conversely, regular trips to China are part of the profile of many overseas Chinese associations. Often, the OCAO, the ACFROC, and now the UFWD act as inviting authorities; the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification also plays a role.⁵⁰ In terms of content, the tone of such meetings is usually the same as that of the meetings on German soil described above.

In addition, overseas Chinese are repeatedly invited to the Political Consultative Conference in Beijing as non-voting delegates. At the conference in March 2019, the chairman of the Association of Qingtian Chinese in Germany (*Deguo qingtian tongxianghui*)⁵¹ was among those present from Germany. Such participation does not entail political co-determination. Invitations to overseas Chinese therefore have primarily a symbolic function: They serve to demonstrate the closeness between the state and the “diaspora”.

Political involvement takes place in yet another way: The ACFROC has set up a so-called Overseas Chinese Committee, which includes overseas Chinese as “advisors”. A number of overseas Chinese from Germany are also active in this role, including the

45 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Guowuyuan qiaoban daibiaotuan yu deguo beiweizhou huaqiaohuaren daibiaojuxing zuotanhui” [Delegation of the OCAO Holds Conference with Overseas Chinese Representatives from NRW], 3 February 2017, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/zwbdt_674895/t1435548.shtml (accessed 13 October 2021).

46 “Deguo yaoqing beijingshi qiaolian daibiaotuan canguan” [Germany Invites ACFROC from the city of Beijing to Visit], *tzjedu.com*, 23 October 2017, <http://tzjedu.com/3g/display.asp?id=2938> (accessed 1 October 2021).

47 ACFROC Jiangsu, “Suzhushi qiaolian jingke wenhua jiaoliutuan fangwen deguoxiangqingmou hezuo” [ACFROC Cultural Exchange Delegation from Suzhou City Visits Germany to Talk about Affection for Hometown and Seek Cooperation Opportunities], 13 December 2019, http://www.jsq.cn/gdql/szql/hdly/201912/t20191213_6441813.shtml (accessed 10 October 2021).

48 “Zhonghua haiwai lianyihui fuhuizhang tan tianxing fangwen deguo yu qiaobao zuotan” [Tan Xianxing, Vice Chairman of the China Overseas Friendship Association Visits Germany and Discusses with Compatriots], *Zhongguo*

Qiaowang, 1 November 2018, <http://www.chinaqw.com/zhwh/2018/11-01/207043.shtml> (accessed 13 October 2021).

49 Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Düsseldorf, 15 June 2016 (see note 16).

50 China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR), “Guizhou tongcuhui jiedai fu qian canfang de deguo, hanguo, mosangbike deng haiwao tongcuhui renshi” [CCPPNR from Guizhou Receives CCPPNR Members from Germany, Korea and Mozambique], 12 June 2019, http://www.zhongguotongcuhui.org.cn/hnwtchdt/201906/t20190612_12173289.html (accessed 10 October 2021).

51 “Deguo qingtian tongxianghui mingyu huizhang zheng guangmin liexi quanguo zhengxie huiyi” [Zheng Guangmin, Honorary Chairman of the Association of Qingtian Chinese in Germany, Attends the CPPCC as a Non-voting Member], *Ouhua Lianhe Shibao*, 2 March 2019, <http://www.ouhuatimes.cn/m/view.php?aid=2786> (accessed 10 October 2021).

head of the Association for Public Diplomacy.⁵² Although these functions also have a symbolic component, they can be used to make political proposals. Mostly, however, it is not known how overseas Chinese fill their “advisory posts” in concrete terms.

Invitations to China are also regularly extended on the occasion of major and minor conferences held by Chinese authorities. For example, representatives of the *Deutscher Zhejiang Unternehmen Verein* (*Deguo zhejiang zongshanghui*) attended the ACFROC’s annual “Study Class for Overseas Chinese Leaders” (*Haiwai qiaoling yanxiuhui*) in Nanjing in July 2019 with 60 other overseas Chinese from 28 countries; the guests were urged to support the BRI, to tell China’s story well, and to create a good international environment for China’s development.⁵³ Major annual events include the OCAO-organised Chinese Overseas Businessmen’s Conference (*Shijie huaqiaohuaren gongshang dahui*), at whose second annual meeting in June 2016, China’s Premier, Li Keqiang, welcomed 600 guests from 105 countries — including Germany.⁵⁴

In addition, ad hoc meetings on specific hot topics are organised. For example, in September 2021, overseas Chinese from Germany participated in an online conference on Xinjiang organised by the Xinjiang Overseas Friendship Association (*Xinjiang haiwai lianyihui*); participants were briefed on China’s official narratives while being warned against “anti-Chinese forces in the West” who did not believe that “people in Xinjiang have a wonderful life”.⁵⁵

Although Xi Jinping has issued the guiding principle that Chinese students abroad can also “serve

China from abroad [...]”,⁵⁶ at the same time, the state has created legally favourable conditions for researchers in particular to return. In January 2018, China adopted corresponding visa regulations: Since then, ethnic Chinese with foreign citizenship have been able to apply for special visas, which allow multiple entries over a period of five years. China hopes that this will attract young talent “with an innovative and entrepreneurial spirit”.⁵⁷ Since enacting regulations like these, China no longer treats China-born and non-China-born foreigners the same legally. So-called pioneer parks are also intended to attract overseas Chinese experts from science and industry to China. The benefits fixed by law also include support for the relatives of returnees. Children will be given easier access to the education system, and spouses to the labour market. Tax benefits are also envisaged,⁵⁸ as well as preferential treatment with regard to import duties, or start-up financing assistance.⁵⁹

Area 4: Control of Chinese-language media

China’s presence abroad is also reflected in its efforts to “establish channels of communication between overseas Chinese media and Chinese authorities”⁶⁰ in order to be able to steer Chinese-language discourses abroad and create a base from which overseas Chinese can influence debates on the ground. Most Chinese-language press products and online media in Germany today are in contact with the Chinese diaspora apparatus. This is done, firstly, through meetings in Germany. At a meeting at the Chinese consulate in Frankfurt a. M. in January 2016, 16 Chinese and overseas

52 “Deguo huaqiao cheze meiguo cubao ganshe zhongguo neizheng” [German Overseas Chinese Harshly Criticise US for Rude Interference in China’s Internal Affairs], *Sohu*, 25 November 2019, https://www.sohu.com/a/355837641_162758 (accessed 10 October 2021).

53 The German Zhejiang Enterprise Association, *Wangqi huodong baogao yilan* [General Overview of Past Activities], 2019, <https://bit.ly/3FF3nbc> (accessed 13 October 2021).

54 “Bafaliya qiaoling shouyao canjia shijie huaqiaohuaren gongshang dahui” [Overseas Chinese Leaders from Bavaria Accept Invitation to Overseas Chinese Business Conference], *Haiwaiwang*, 16 June 2017, <http://de.haiwainet.cn/n/2017/0616/c457022-30971158.html?nojump=1> (accessed 10 October 2021).

55 “20 guo huaqiaohuaren shetuan fuzeren jujiao xinjiang” [Persons in Charge of Overseas Chinese Associations from 20 Countries Focus on Xinjiang], *China News*, 28 September 2021, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2021/09-28/9575890.shtml> (accessed 13 October 2021).

56 “Xi Jinping: shi xiuxue renyuan huiguo you yong wu zhi di” [Xi Jinping: Ensuring That Returning Students Are Given Ample Scope for Their Abilities], *Xinhua*, 21 October 2013, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-10/21/c_117808372.htm (accessed 26 August 2018).

57 An Baijie, “Overseas Chinese Can Help Build Belt, Road”, *China Daily*, 13 June 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-06/13/content_29719481.htm (accessed 1 September 2021).

58 OCAO, *Qiaowu gongzuo* (see note 11), 108.

59 “China Will Intensify Efforts to Encourage Return of Overseas Talent”, *Xinhua*, 4 April 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/04/c_137088728.htm (accessed 11 October 2021).

60 Qiu Jin, ed., *Blue Book of Overseas Chinese. Annual Report on Overseas Chinese Study* (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2011), 342.

Chinese media professionals were present — including representatives of the Chinese-language print and online media *Nouvelles d'Europe* (*Ouzhoushibao*), *Europe Times* (*Ouzhouxinbao*), *Chinese Commercial News* (*Huashangbao*), and *Kaiyuan*.⁶¹ In turn, during its visit to Germany in December 2017, the China Overseas Friendship Association expressed to assembled media representatives the hope that overseas Chinese media would “spread China’s voice in international society” and “convey the voice of the central government to overseas Chinese”.⁶²

Overseas Chinese media should “spread China’s voice in international society”.

A second means of exerting influence are media conferences organised by Chinese institutions that bring together overseas Chinese media professionals with politicians of the People’s Republic in China. These include the biennial Forum on Global Chinese Language Media (*Shijie huawen chuantu luntan*). At the 10th World Forum in October 2019, 10 of the 427 overseas Chinese media representatives from 61 countries were from Germany.⁶³

Thirdly, some media in Germany that were originally founded independently of the Chinese state now work together with Chinese state media. This applies, among others, to the weekly newspaper *Nouvelles d'Europe*, which is considered the newspaper with the highest circulation and is now distributed free of charge in Asian supermarkets and Chinese restaurants throughout Germany. The weekly cooperates with the CPC newspaper *Xinmin Wanbao* from Shanghai,⁶⁴ from which it receives its content, and is

linked to the Chinese consulate in Düsseldorf.⁶⁵ In recent years, it has developed into an organ for political propaganda. Although the newspaper repeatedly calls on overseas Chinese to integrate into the majority society, it always assumes that they belong to China in principle. Some of the embassies of the People’s Republic in Europe style themselves in articles in the newspaper as advocates of people of Chinese origin, whose safety they are concerned about (issue from 26 June 2020, p. 6). Cooperation with the *Nouvelles d'Europe* allows the CPC to react to debates in the German public sphere and to influence ethnic Chinese abroad in Beijing’s favour — whenever China sees its own interests hurt by public discussions in Germany. In the past two years, the topics of Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and the Covid crisis accordingly dominated the newspaper’s reporting and commentaries. Readers were presented exclusively with an uncritical reproduction of official Chinese positions: The virus did not originate in China (8 May 2020, p. 6), criticism of China for its information policy in dealing with Corona was “mendacious” or “pure nonsense” (22 May 2020, p. 2); instead, a UFDW representative in the paper expressed her hope that “overseas Chinese would do a good job of propagating the story of China’s struggle against Covid and tell the story of systemic superiority of socialism with Chinese characteristics” (29 May 2020, p. 9).

The example shows that the Chinese-language newspaper has now become primarily an organ of the Chinese embassy — and thus of Chinese foreign policy. Its readers are addressed as members of the Chinese nation; at the same time, the paper symbolically demonstrates to its readers the constant presence of the Chinese state in Germany as well. As a consequence, critical reporting that deviates from China’s official narratives reaches overseas Chinese less and less in Germany.

Interim conclusion

In recent years, Beijing has gone to great lengths to develop relations with people with a Chinese migra-

of the *Xinmin Wanbao* and to Discuss with Overseas Chinese Media], *Ouzhou Shibao*, 13 December 2019, 5.

⁶⁵ Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Düsseldorf, *Ouzhou shibao shezhang zhang xiaobei baihui zhu dusai zonglingshi* [Zhang Xiaobei, Editor-in-Chief of *Nouvelles d'Europe*, Visits Consulate General in Düsseldorf], 30 March 2015, <http://dusseldorf.china-consulate.org/chn/xwd/t1319886.htm> (accessed 13 October 2021).

⁶¹ “Hanwei nanhai zhuquan zuotanhui” (see note 41).

⁶² “Zhonghua haiwai lianyihui yu falankefu qiaojie juxing fan du cu tong gongyuan zhongguomeng zuotanhui” [The China Overseas Friendship Association Holds a Conference with Overseas Chinese in Frankfurt to Fight Separatism, Promote Unity as well as Jointly Realise the Chinese Dream], *Sohu*, 7 December 2017, https://www.sohu.com/a/209074062_542480 (accessed 12 October 2021).

⁶³ “Di shi jie shijie huawen meiti luntan jingwai jiabin renyuan mingdan” [List of Participants of Guests from outside our border at the World Forum of Chinese Language Media], *Sohu*, 10 October 2019, http://www.sohu.com/a/345976856_123753 (accessed 13 October 2021).

⁶⁴ “Xinmin wanbao chuankuan 90 zhounian ji haiwai meiti hezuo zuotanhui lundun juxing” [Conference Held in London to Commemorate the 90th Founding Anniversary

tion background in Germany. Research for this paper revealed that at least 140 associations and media in Germany are in contact with Chinese authorities; Didi Kirsten Tatlow even came up with 230 associations in a study.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it is not easy to assess these lines of connection: Only some of these associations actually seem to have a close relationship with the Chinese state – among them, for example, the Fuzhou Chinese Association in Germany. It is even more difficult to assess the relevance of these associations within Chinese-speaking communities in Germany. In most cases, no reliable membership figures are available. It is true that some associations present figures of several hundred people. However, meetings are rarely attended by more than a dozen people. It is often unclear what the members think of the statements made by their chairpersons. At the same time, the structures of these associations have not developed over a long historical period, as many of them were founded more recently. Moreover, because some foundations were initiated directly from China rather than through democratic grassroots processes, many associations lack the necessary legitimacy. There are no recognised umbrella organisations.

China is also trying to suppress open opposition in Germany.

Nevertheless, the links with overseas Chinese organisations aim to bring people of Chinese origin into line with the CPC, to channel their financial, intellectual, and political resources into the Chinese modernisation project, and to prevent assimilation. The central slogans and narratives of Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping all play an important role in communicating with overseas Chinese. The purpose of this discourse communication is to expand Beijing's ability to act abroad and mobilise ethnic Chinese abroad in the interest of the People's Republic.

In doing so, China is not only trying to find potential allies in Germany to enforce its own interests, but also to suppress open opposition wherever it presents a threat.⁶⁷ This includes the targeted intimidation of Hong Kong Chinese who were filmed by Chinese loyal

to the regime during a demonstration in Hamburg in August 2019.⁶⁸ Cases from abroad are even more drastic: A Chinese student studying at the University of Minnesota in the United States, for example, was sentenced to six months in prison during a visit to China in July 2019 for allegedly sending critical tweets about Xi Jinping in the United States beforehand.⁶⁹ Such cases show: Chinese citizens abroad are now at risk of being punished after the fact at home for activities that are actually lawful in their country of residence.

66 Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Das chinesische Streben nach Einfluss: verdeckt und vor aller Augen", *Zentrum Liberale Moderne*, 20 December 2019, <https://libmod.de/tatlow-china-einheits-front-einfluss-europa> (accessed 9 October 2021).

67 This can also be seen in other countries. See To, "Chinese Communities Abroad" (see note 5), 202 – 04.

68 Peter Burghardt and Lea Deuber, "Warum Hongkonger in Hamburg Angst vor dem Protestieren haben", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30 August 2019, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/hongkong-hamburg-protest-1.4580538?reduced=true> (accessed 10 August 2020).

69 "Chinese Student Jailed over Cartoon Dig at Leaders in Tweets Posted in US", *South China Morning Post*, 23 January 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3047379/chinese-student-jailed-over-cartoon-dig-leaders-tweets-posted-us> (accessed 14 October 2021).

Impact and Effectiveness of Diaspora Policy

The “diaspora” as Beijing’s “fifth column”?

The effectiveness of the diaspora policy is not easy to evaluate. If one is to believe the statistics from China, and if one looks at diaspora policy from a global and historical perspective, some aspects certainly speak for the success of the policy. This becomes clear in three areas.

Economic and financial affairs

Overseas Chinese have played a key role in China’s modernisation since 1978.⁷⁰ Their enormous capital as well as their technological, administrative, and entrepreneurial know-how have repeatedly been of decisive benefit to the reform process. For example, China is considered the world’s largest recipient of migrant remittances after India. According to Chinese sources, around US\$47 billion was remitted to China in 2008, and as much as US\$64 billion six years later in 2014.⁷¹ The World Bank estimates the figures to be somewhat lower; it calculated just under US\$30 billion for 2014 and US\$33 billion for the following year. In the two pandemic years, remittances fell but were still around US\$20 billion in each, according to World Bank calculations.⁷² Investments are also rising massively: Until 2000 alone — that is, before China joined the World Trade Organization — total overseas

Chinese investment volume was about US\$350 billion. This corresponds to up to 80 per cent of total foreign direct investment during this period.⁷³ In absolute terms, overseas Chinese investment has continued to grow since then. In 2016, it is said to have amounted to US\$126 billion.⁷⁴ For a long time, the bulk of the investment was made by ethnic Chinese from South-East Asia; today, overseas Chinese from the United States and Europe are also playing an increasingly important role. Figures and calculations are not available for Germany; however, the contribution made by people of Chinese origin from here can be considered comparatively small due to the short history of Chinese immigration.

Economically oriented overseas Chinese associations in Germany also help less in bringing investment to China than implementing the aforementioned “going out” strategy, whereby investments by Chinese companies abroad are to be promoted. The task profile of such associations includes first and foremost their function as a contact point for companies from China that want to find out about Germany and establish business relations. Many associations organise information events in this context to which German business experts are sometimes also invited; the Technology and Commerce Association of Chinese in Germany (*Deguo huaqiaohuaren keji gongshang xiehui*), for example, informed Chinese chambers of commerce and industry as well as companies about investment opportunities in Germany in March 2018.⁷⁵ In addition, overseas Chinese associations receive Chinese

70 Jin Chongji, *Ershi shiji zhongguo shigang, di si juan* [Outline of the History of China in the 20th Century, vol. 4] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009), 1168f.

71 Carsten Schäfer, “Chinas kostbarste Ressource? Die chinesische Diasporapolitik und die Rolle der Auslandschinesen im Reformprozess”, in *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung*, ed. Felix Wemheuer (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2020), 71–88.

72 “Personal Remittances, Received (Current US\$) — China”, *The World Bank Data*, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?locations=CN> (accessed 1 June 2022).

73 Schäfer, “Chinas kostbarste Ressource?” (see note 71), 80.

74 *Ten Features and Trends of World Chinese Entrepreneurs*, Special Report 11 (Beijing: Center for China and Globalization, November 2017), <http://en.ccg.org.cn/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Ten-Features-and-Trends-of-World-Chinese-Entrepreneurs.pdf> (accessed 10 October 2021).

75 “Zhongde shenru hezuo” [Deepening Sino-German Relations], *Sohu*, 30 March 2018, http://www.sohu.com/a/226623187_487708 (accessed 1 June 2022).

business delegations in Germany; the Chinese Association for Economic and Cultural Communication, for example, reportedly hosted 180 delegations in Germany between 1999 and 2019.⁷⁶ Associations in which people of Chinese origin are involved can also be important in the context of Sino-German city partnerships; this applies, for example, to the Association of Chinese Scientists and Students (however, it is mostly non-Chinese Germans who are usually active in such associations).⁷⁷ Yet, there is no reliable data on the number of Chinese companies successfully brought to Germany or the profits generated.

Secondly, the task profile of such overseas Chinese “chambers of commerce” includes accompanying German delegations to China within the framework of the Chinese “inviting in” strategy (*qing jinlai*). The Chinese Association for Economic and Cultural Communication has organised 12 delegation trips to China in the past 20 years.⁷⁸ The Deutscher Zhejiang Unternehmen Verein travelled to China in October 2018 with a business delegation from the city of Cologne to explore cooperation with Chinese companies in the fields of digitalisation, e-mobility, and hybrid drive technology, among others.⁷⁹ Thirdly, overseas Chinese business associations handle fundraising activities in Germany, most recently in the context of the Covid crisis, for example.

Science and technology

Scientific and technological innovation is a decisive factor for economic growth in the long term. Accord-

ing to official Chinese figures, mainly due to waves of returnees in the past 10 years, a total of nearly 84 per cent of all Chinese students abroad — that is, around 3.1 million out of 5.2 million people — returned to China between 1978 and 2017.⁸⁰ Their contribution to innovation and technological know-how is highly valued in China: The 300 so-called pioneer parks for overseas returnees that existed in China in 2017 were said to be home to around 24,000 companies employing about the same number of returnees.⁸¹ Sixty per cent of today’s Chinese university rectors are repatriated overseas Chinese.⁸² The same is true for 81 per cent of all staff in science academies and 50 per cent of department heads in the Ministry of Science and Technology.⁸³ In areas such as telecommunications, e-commerce, aerospace, and pharmaceuticals, returnees have brought important innovation initiatives to China.⁸⁴

Germany’s importance in this area has grown continuously in recent years: Students from China now form the largest group of foreign students in the country. In the winter semester 2019/20, a total of 319,902 foreign students were enrolled in Germany; of these, 44,490 — approximately one in seven — came from China; that is about five times as many as in 2001.⁸⁵ According to a study conducted by the Mercator Institute for China Studies in 2015, the majority of the Chinese students at that time were enrolled at technical universities. Almost 80 per cent of students return to China after their studies.⁸⁶ Even if the reasons for this are not to be found in the dias-

⁷⁶ Website of the Chinesischen Vereins für wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Kommunikation, <https://dcwkv.de/ueber-uns/> (accessed 1 June 2022).

⁷⁷ According to a study by the Service Agency for Municipalities at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the total number of Sino-German municipal partnerships is 132. For at least 60 per cent of the German municipalities involved, the engagement of civil society associations is a key factor in shaping partnerships. Half of the associations mentioned in the study have both German and overseas Chinese members, see Anja Goette and Qianlan Gao, *Deutsch-chinesische Kommunalbeziehungen*, Digital Global 19/2018 (Bonn: Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt [SKEW], 2018), 10 and 42.

⁷⁸ Website of the Chinesischer Verein für wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Kommunikation (see note 76).

⁷⁹ *Deguo Zhejiang Zongshanghui. Wangqi huodongbaogao* [German Zhejiang Enterprise Association. Report on Past Activities] (2018), 8.

⁸⁰ Ministry of Education, *Brief Report on Chinese Overseas Students and International Students in China 2017* (1 April 2018), http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/201901/t20190115_367019.html (accessed 1 June 2022).

⁸¹ “‘Brain-Gain’ statt Brain-Drain: China erlebt größte Heimkehrerwelle seit Jahren”, *Beijing Rundschau*, 24 February 2017, http://german.beijingreview.com.cn/China/201702/t20170224_800088253.html (accessed 9 October 2021).

⁸² Qiu, ed., *Blue Book* (see note 60).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁸⁴ *Report on Development* (see note 15).

⁸⁵ Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, *Ausländische Studierende in Deutschland: Anzahl & Entwicklung* (2020), <https://www.daad.de/de/der-daad/was-wir-tun/zahlen-und-fakten/mobilitaet-auslaendischer-studierender/> (accessed 13 October 2021).

⁸⁶ “Zhongguo liuxuesheng biye weihe daduoshu likai deguo” [Why Do Most Chinese Exchange Students Leave Germany after Their Studies], *Haiwaiwang*, 8 September 2018, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1611083026471322158&wfr=spider&for=pc> (accessed 13 October 2021).

pora policy alone, the Chinese state is actively working towards this: Since 2003, for example, the Chinese embassy has been awarding scholarships to “excellent overseas students” in a ceremony every year, with the aim of encouraging them to “repay the kindness of the home country”. China’s Ambassador, Wu Ken, called Chinese students in Germany “fresh troops for China’s development and the nation’s upliftment” at the ceremony two years ago. The scholarship was awarded to 467 Chinese PhD graduates in Germany between 2003 and 2019; 300 of them have returned to China.⁸⁷ Overseas Chinese organisations such as the Association for the Promotion of Chinese Culture in Germany (*Deguo zhonghua wenhua cuxinhui*), which is linked to the UFDW and the ACFROC, also advertise in the community to provide China with “skilled workers and talents”.⁸⁸

If there is a lot of potential for transnational and international cooperation between China and foreign countries in the field of economics and finance – for example, in terms of trade prospects that can be expanded by migrants – the situation in the field of science and technology is more complex: It is true that here, too, there is room for fruitful cooperation in which overseas Chinese can play an important role; moreover, China’s attempts to counteract the brain drain trend of the past are understandable. However, economic espionage and the theft of intellectual property may also be relevant here. This is not only a major issue in trade disputes between China and the United States; Germany’s Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution also explicitly warned against such activities by China in its most recent report in June 2022.⁸⁹ In Germany, there have been few studies on this so far. However, individual cases are known in which Chinese students were

asked to spy.⁹⁰ They show how difficult it can be to make a clean distinction between legitimate policies serving Chinese interests – such as the reversal of the brain drain – and illegal activities such as economic espionage in the context of Chinese diaspora policy.

Foreign propaganda and discourse power

The past decade has seen a noticeable increase in protest activities by overseas Chinese groups, sometimes coordinated globally. In August 2018, for example, Chinese loyal to the regime took to the streets worldwide in support of China’s Hong Kong policy.⁹¹ China is also trying to influence public debates in Germany by using the “diaspora”. The Chinese state itself remains in the background of these disinformation and propaganda campaigns.

The Chinese state tries to influence public discourses abroad with the help of overseas Chinese loyal to the regime.

In December 2017, during a conference on the occasion of the China Overseas Friendship Association’s visit to Germany, the Chinese Deputy Consul General in Frankfurt a. M. said that the consulate wanted to “guide” overseas Chinese organisations in their “anti-separatist” activities “in the future”. He hoped that they would “resolutely protect the unity of the motherland together and propagate China’s policies”.⁹² The Association of Fujian Chinese in Germany, which was also present at the conference, was later among the named supporters of a rally of 300 Chinese in Frankfurt on 24 August 2019 in support of Beijing’s Hong Kong policy. The main organiser was the New Association of Overseas Chinese and Overseas Chinese Businessmen in Germany (*Deguo xinhuaqiaohuashang lianhehui*), which has contacts with the ACFROC and the OCAO.⁹³ This was followed by

⁸⁷ People’s Government of the PRC, *Zhongguo zhude dashiguan xiang youxiu zifei liuxuesheng banfa jiangxuejin* [Chinese Embassy in Germany Awards Scholarships to Outstanding Self-Paying Students Studying Abroad], 6 May 2019, https://china.gov.cn.admin.kyber.vip/xinwen/2019-05/06/content_5389022.htm (accessed 14 October 2021).

⁸⁸ “Deguo qiaoling yixing dao fang fuzhou changle lianyi” [A Group of Overseas Chinese Leaders from Germany Travel to Changle in Fuzhou], *Zhongguo Qiaowang*, 8 May 2019, <http://www.chinaqw.com/qx/2019/05-08/222224.shtml> (accessed 10 October 2021).

⁸⁹ Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2021* (Berlin: BMI, 2022), 285f.

⁹⁰ Tatlow, “Das chinesische Streben nach Einfluss” (see note 66).

⁹¹ Wang Qi, “Overseas Chinese Rally against Hong Kong Secessionists and Violence”, *Global Times*, 18 August 2019, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1161827.shtml> (accessed 13 October 2021).

⁹² “Zhonghua haiwai lianyihui” (see note 62).

⁹³ Website of the Neuer Verband von Auslandschinesen und auslandschinesischen Geschäftsleuten in Deutschland, “Aiguo huwang heping jihui” [Patriotically Protect Hong

another demonstration in Berlin on 11 September 2019, in which about 100 Chinese took part. It was directed against “individual German politicians and media who send the wrong signals to radical, separatist forces in Hong Kong” — meaning the meeting of the then German Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, with Joshua Wong, one of the spokespersons of the democracy movement in Hong Kong. A letter of protest was handed over to the German Foreign Ministry.⁹⁴ One of the speakers during the demonstration was Yang Qianghua, who is also a member of the overseas committee of the ACFROC.⁹⁵ Both rallies were declared as events organised by independent persons; in fact, however, actors who maintain a close relationship to Chinese authorities were behind them. Similar activities have taken place in Germany several times in recent years. Most of the time, such protests have been met with little response from the German public. However, they show that the Chinese state is trying to covertly influence public discourses with the help of Chinese loyal to the regime.

Even more problematic than these activities is the so-called Canzheng work, in which people of Chinese origin are expected to represent Chinese interests in influential political positions abroad. In Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, it has come to light that people with ties to the Chinese state apparatus occupy active political posts in their countries of residence.⁹⁶ In Germany, such activities are not yet known, but cannot be ruled out either. In 2018, for example, Yang Ming, who was born in China and naturalised, stood for the office of mayor of Frankfurt a. M. Although he did not win the election, he is now a member of the Frankfurt Foreigners Advisory Council and Vice-President of the Senate of Economy Europe.⁹⁷ One func-

tion, however, is missing from German-language listings: In 2019, one year after his candidacy in Frankfurt, Yang became a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.⁹⁸ There, among other things, he introduced a motion asking for support so that more people of Chinese origin could become politically active abroad. In the CPC’s organ, the *People’s Daily*, he is quoted as saying that every overseas Chinese “must tell good stories about China in a way that the West understands”. The “common responsibility of all compatriots abroad” would therefore be to “propagate China’s policies”.⁹⁹ Although the motives of Yang Ming’s connection to the Chinese state are unclear and may differ from those of the Chinese state, Beijing’s approach to a person with a Chinese migrant background who aspires to political influence is nevertheless in line with a diaspora policy pattern that is now becoming increasingly clear in other countries.

China’s diaspora policy can look back on sustained successes. This is true with regard to all three of the goals Beijing associates with this policy. During a meeting with overseas Chinese in Beijing in June 2014, Xi Jinping himself praised their historical achievements over generations for the “strengthening of the Chinese people”.¹⁰⁰ Western media and parts of Chinese scholarship subscribe to this view: Sinologist James To, for example, called overseas Chinese a “highly coordinated ethno-nationalist force” that not only serves China as a “financial and professional resource” but is also available to the country as a “ready supply of soft power”.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, voices warning against China’s diaspora policy have also become louder in Europe.

Kong, Peaceful Assembly], 20 August 2019, <https://bit.ly/3NjU2o> (accessed 13 October 2021).

⁹⁴ “Bolin huaren youxing kangyi dewaizhang yu luangang-fenzi jianmian” [Overseas Chinese in Berlin Demonstrate against German Foreign Minister’s Meeting with Hong Kong Troublemakers], *China Central Television (CCTV)*, 14 September 2019, <http://m.news.cctv.com/2019/09/14/ARTIPjqIcpXEJjxEullmBVP2190914.shtml> (accessed 13 October 2021).

⁹⁵ “Deguo huaqiao cheze meiguo” (see note 52).

⁹⁶ Almén, *Beijing’s Extraterritorial Authoritarian Rule* (see note 8), 38.

⁹⁷ Ilse Romahn, “KAV-Mitglied Ming Yang in Präsidium des Senate of Economy Europe gewählt”, *Frankfurt Live*, 13 November 2020, <https://www.frankfurt-live.com/kav-mitglied-ming-yang-in-praumsidium-des-senate-of-economy-europe-gew-aumlhl-126731.html> (accessed 9 October 2021).

⁹⁸ “Rongru deguo zhuliu shehui, jianghao zhongguo gushi” [Integrating into German Majority Society, Telling China’s Story Well], *NetEase*, 2 March 2019, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/E99J10S6054650GV.html> (accessed 10 August 2021).

⁹⁹ “Rongru deguo zhuliu shehui, jianghao zhongguo gushi” [Integrating into German Majority Society, Telling China’s Story Well], *Renmin Ribao*, 2 March 2019, <http://lianghui.people.com.cn/2019cppcc/n1/2019/0302/c425500-30953887.html> (accessed 10 August 2021).

¹⁰⁰ “Yi qiao jia qiao. Xi Jinping zheyang tan qiaowu gong-zuo” [Building a Bridge with Overseas Chinese. Xi Jinping’s Contributions to Diaspora Policy], *CCTV*, 29 May 2019, news.cctv.com/2019/05/29/ARTI9uVgvrYlUb6XLtIXWiW8190529.shtml (accessed 15 June 2022).

¹⁰¹ To, “Beijing’s Policies” (see note 5), 220.

A closer look at existing state-“diaspora” connections, however, reveals far more complex patterns of relations, which show that *the* overseas Chinese are by no means “highly organised”. In order to classify diaspora policy, it is therefore important to become aware of the thoroughly heterogeneous reactions of a socio-economically, culturally, and politically diverse “diaspora” to China’s attempts at appropriation.

Limits and unintended side effects of diaspora policy: The “diaspora” communities and their agency

Apart from Beijing’s supporters, five other positions or groups can be distinguished in the attitudes of overseas Chinese towards Chinese diaspora policy. This spectrum alone makes it clear that the intended appropriation does not succeed so easily: firstly, the group of those who do not attach any importance to diaspora policy (or do not perceive it); secondly, the group of dissidents who actively fight the CPC; thirdly, the group of those who manipulate China’s policy in their own interest; fourthly, hypernationalist groups; and fifthly, groups who, for their part, demand services from the diaspora state.

1. The “indifferent”

China’s diaspora policy is geared towards reaching the entire “diaspora community” through organisations and their chairpersons. This is precisely one of the weaknesses of the diaspora policy: Beijing’s policy does not reach the majority of people of Chinese origin who are not represented in overseas Chinese associations and do not read state-controlled newspapers. This is confirmed again and again in conversations with Chinese migrants. Also, the numbers of 100 to 300 people at the aforementioned protests or reports that often only 10 to 30 people turn up for meetings with representatives of the Chinese state indicate that the Chinese state’s grip on the Chinese communities in Germany is limited. What is more, many of the associations listed in the German register of associations do not maintain any relations with the Chinese state or deliberately avoid Chinese attempts at appropriation; some make important contributions to the inte-

gration of newcomers or towards the strengthening of cultural relations between China and Germany.¹⁰²

The intended appropriation of people of Chinese origin often goes astray.

It is also important to note that there are considerable differences between the 140 associations with regard to the density and quality of contacts with Chinese authorities, which is why an exclusively quantitative recording of connections is not expedient. The majority of the associations maintain only sporadic relations with Chinese authorities, often in the context of symbolic festivities such as the New Year celebrations at the Chinese embassy. Such associations should not be equated with those that actively represent China’s interests time and again.

2. The dissidents

In addition, there are groups that are in direct opposition to China. Beijing calls these groups the “five poisons”, against which overseas Chinese are regularly told to act: These are groups that advocate the independence of Taiwan, Tibet, and “East Turkestan” (Xinjiang), Falun Gong supporters, and democracy activists.¹⁰³ All of these groups are also organised in Germany. The Tibetan independence movement is represented, among others, by the Verein der Tibeter in Deutschland, which is involved in the Tibet discussion group of the German Bundestag (since January 2022 “Parliamentary Group Tibet”). The association is not only in contact with the Tibetan government in exile, but also with other non-governmental organisations, including the Tibet Initiative Deutschland, in which mainly German Tibet supporters are active and which is one of the largest Tibet support groups worldwide. Falun Gong, a religious-political group whose number of followers in Germany is not reliably known, runs the Falun Dafa Informationszentrum, which denounces human rights violations in China in its public relations work; with the Chinese-language weekly newspaper *Epoch Times*, the organisation also has one of the world’s most influential dissident magazines, which is distributed in Germany, too. Taiwanese associations in Germany –

¹⁰² These include associations such as the Deutsch-Chinesische Gesellschaft Braunschweig (<http://www.dcgbs.de/>); the author owes this information to Andrea Frenzel.

¹⁰³ Huang, *Zhongguo ruanshili* (see note 21), 191.

where about 9,150 Taiwanese citizens live today — include the Deutsch-Taiwanische Gesellschaft, which aims to promote German-Taiwanese relations; members of the German Bundestag are represented here in addition to overseas Taiwanese.¹⁰⁴ The group of democracy activists, on the other hand, is relatively heterogeneous. Some well-known Chinese dissidents have settled in Germany, such as the human rights activist Liu Dejun, whose blog, “Free in China”, is read by tens of thousands of users; the writer and activist Liao Yiwu; and the artist Liu Xia (the wife of the late Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo).

The exiled Uyghur diaspora in Germany plays a special role: With 2,000 people, it is the largest in Europe; it has also grown in recent years due to the significant increase in asylum applications (in 2020, there were 193). There are 800 Uyghurs living in Munich alone. The city is the seat of the World Uyghur Congress, which campaigns for the independence of “East Turkestan”. The Congress acts as an umbrella organisation for several smaller groups, including the Uigurischer Frauenverein München. The East Turkestan Union in Europe is also active in the city and regularly holds protests in front of the Chinese consulate. The three groups see themselves as representatives of the Uyghurs in China and often appear together at protests and cultural events.¹⁰⁵

By exporting internal Chinese conflicts, China’s diaspora policy has consequences for social peace in Germany.

In addition to these five groups, democracy advocates from Hong Kong are also active in Germany and prominently represented by civil rights activists Glacier Kwong and Ray Wong, among others, who were granted asylum in Germany. In response to China’s Hong Kong policy, the Verein Hongkonger in Deutschland was founded in 2019 and regularly organises protests. That China’s narratives, which disparage any opinions that differ from official positions as “anti-Chinese”, can have a polarising effect here is shown by the aforementioned protests by Hong Kong activists in Hamburg — the protests were

disrupted by counter-marches and intimidation by Chinese loyal to the state.¹⁰⁶ Something similar happened at a Berlin memorial event for the regime critic and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo in August 2018; here, people appeared to photograph the Chinese guests at the event.¹⁰⁷ In these cases, China’s diaspora policy has direct consequences for social peace in Germany by exporting internal Chinese conflicts.

3. The “one-man associations”

Although some overseas Chinese work with or seek contact with the Chinese state, they pursue goals that are not in line with diaspora policy. In particular, China’s strategy of building relationships with association leaders makes the Chinese state vulnerable to exploitation by individuals. For years, Chinese authorities have complained about “business card chairpersons” (*mingpian qiaoling*)¹⁰⁸ or “one-man associations” (*yirenhui*), through which Chinese migrants abroad seek the “status of overseas Chinese leaders”. Such bogus associations are “instruments for achieving personal interests” by providing access to high-ranking persons from the Chinese state.¹⁰⁹

Through the public “patriotic” reproduction of official positions, for example vis-à-vis Chinese officials, such “business card chairpersons” try to accumulate symbolic and social capital that can play an important role in business with partners in China. Edgar Wickberg has called this skilful use of expectations to achieve one’s own goals “identity performance”.¹¹⁰

There are also indications of this phenomenon in Germany: For example, not all political activities of overseas Chinese associations are directed at a Ger-

¹⁰⁶ Burghardt and Deuber, “Warum Hongkonger in Hamburg Angst vor dem Protestieren haben” (see note 68).

¹⁰⁷ Conversation with Didi Kirsten Tatlow, September 2021.

¹⁰⁸ “Jianshe hexie qiaotuan shi shixian hexie qiaoshe de guanlian” [Building Harmonious Overseas Chinese Organisations is the Key to Building Harmonious Overseas Chinese Communities], *Overseas Chinese Affairs Studies* (online), no. 3 (2008), <http://qwgzyj.gqb.gov.cn/bqch/142/1151.shtml> (accessed 15 June 2022).

¹⁰⁹ “Qiaotuan guanli ruhe zouxiang guifan” [How to Normalise the Management of Overseas Chinese Associations], *Renmin Ribao*, 12 June 2017, <http://www.chinaqil.org/n1/2018/0802/c419650-30201039.html> (accessed 15 June 2022).

¹¹⁰ Edgar Wickberg, “Global Chinese Migrants and Performing Chineseness”, *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, no. 3/2 (2017): 177–93.

¹⁰⁴ Federal Statistical Office, *Ergebnis 12521-0002*, 31 December 2021, https://bit.ly/3frHPUi_Destatis (accessed 19 August 2022).

¹⁰⁵ Website of the World Uyghur Congress, <https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/> (accessed 15 June 2022).

man audience. In August 2019, for example, 69 overseas Chinese associations published a “statement” on Hong Kong, the wording of which reflects Beijing’s official positions.¹¹¹ However, the statement is only available in Chinese; it is addressed to China, not to Germany. Some of the associations listed in it have no public profile whatsoever and do not seem to exist. Another example is the Association for Public Diplomacy, which also articulates itself exclusively in Chinese; at the same time, a Chinese trading company run by the association’s chairman can be found at the association’s address.

Even if “one-man associations” — whose existence thus contributes to the high number of associations in Germany — amplify the voice of the Chinese government among overseas Chinese in Germany and circulate Chinese discourse positions, they do so mostly in a Chinese-language echo chamber. Beyond embassy and association officials, they are hardly heard.

4. The “hypernationalists”

Overseas Chinese protests are not always in line with what the Chinese state wants. Relatively well-researched are the overseas Chinese reactions to the 2008 Tibet crisis. The case is now several years old, but it remains exemplary of the difficulty of pushing through political agendas with the help of people who cannot be directly influenced and directed. In April 2008, Chinese migrants took to the streets around the world in support of Beijing’s Tibet policy. Riots had broken out in the Chinese province the month before, which the CPC was quickly able to bring under military control. While Western media loudly criticised the suppression of the Tibetan uprising, Beijing responded with a massive propaganda campaign claiming that the protests were directed by the Dalai Lama and “European and American forces”. It has been widely suggested that the worldwide demonstrations by Chinese migrants against the alleged “lies” of Western media were state-organised. In some places, such as Vienna, the situation was more complex, although here, too, the Chinese embassy was

behind the protest of 500 overseas Chinese in April 2008. A few weeks earlier, the Chinese embassy in Vienna had prevented a demonstration “for the protection of the fatherland”, which Chinese students had announced for the Austrian capital on a Chinese-language internet platform run by them. Before the embassy’s interference, the same students had been racially insulting Austrians and Tibetans in this forum for days. Some had also called for violence against Tibetans in exile and Austrians. Only when the anger of the students began to be directed against the embassy itself after the embassy intervened did the embassy decide to do a U-turn — and then announced a rally itself. In a public posting on the students’ forum, the Chinese student association, which is associated with the embassy — obviously concerned about the Han nationalist tendencies of many students — gave detailed instructions regarding permitted chants and posters, and it formulated precise language and behavioural rules that prohibited participants from speaking to Austrian media representatives during the demonstration.¹¹²

The events show how quickly Chinese authorities abroad can become driven by their own propaganda when protest groups adopt the nationalist narratives with which the Chinese state tries to ensnare them. At the same time, the incident reveals that overseas Chinese nationalism is not necessarily an expression of loyalty to the Chinese diaspora state, but that it can also be directed against it. This also shows the undesirable side effects of diaspora politics.

5. The “demanders”

Diaspora policy also includes the promise to protect the interests of overseas Chinese. Against this backdrop, Chinese migrants repeatedly complain that the Chinese authorities fail to provide support when it is actually needed. For example, in February 2014, the Verein Chinesischer Rentner in Europa, founded in Germany, made a public appeal to the Chinese government to pay pensions to those overseas Chinese who had spent part of their working lives in China before the introduction of the Chinese pension sys-

¹¹¹ “Lüde huaqiaohuaren ji shetuan daibiao dui dangqian xianggang shitai fabiao lianhe shengming” [Overseas Chinese and Association Representatives in Germany Release Joint Statement on the Current Situation in Hong Kong], *hinabian.com*, 20 August 2019, <https://www.hinabian.com/theme/detail/7975525573810783900.html> (accessed 13 October 2021).

¹¹² The internet forum is now offline; for more information on the events in April 2008, see Carsten Schäfer, “Mobilität als zweischneidiges Schwert: Die chinesische Diasporapolitik und die Auslandschinesen”, in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Vereinigung für Chinastudien* 15, ed. Sigrun Abels et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2021), 188–91.

tem in the 1990s, but who today receive no support from the Chinese state. What is special here is not so much the issue itself but the way it was presented: In its appeal, the association skilfully played with narratives of the official diaspora discourse and referred to the “patriotic” services of overseas Chinese for China on the one hand, and the “social injustice” opposing them on the other, “which significantly damage the image of the Chinese government”.¹¹³

Social welfare and other assistance are not part of the diaspora policy.

This demand hits the Chinese diaspora policy at a sensitive point, as social welfare and other assistance are in fact not part of diaspora policy.¹¹⁴ Instead, China comes close to what Alan Gamlen called an “exploitative state”, one that “extract[s] obligations without extending rights”.¹¹⁵ Gamlen continues: “I argue that if [states fail to extend civil and social rights to their diasporas] and expect to leverage shared national identity in order to get something for nothing from emigrants, they are playing against the odds. [...] The strength of states’ claims to legitimately extract benefits from ‘their’ diasporas arguably flows from their reciprocal provision of benefits.”¹¹⁶

In fact, the institutional infrastructure of the Chinese diaspora apparatus largely lacks feedback possibilities, which could be used to meaningfully process the articulations of migrant needs. So far, Beijing has not responded to the demand of the pensioners’ association: China’s diaspora policy primarily follows the logic of foreign and economic policy interests of the state — and not the interests of migrants. For China, they are not actors in their own right, but a source for manoeuvring power. The effectiveness of diaspora policy suffers as a result.

Interim conclusion

Chinese diaspora policy only has a limited effect on migrants of Chinese origin. Many ethnic Chinese abroad ignore China’s diaspora policy practices, fight them, or adopt them in order to push through their own agendas — sometimes against the Chinese state; they all make it clear that the impression of a “diaspora loyal to the fatherland” is too one-sided. The Chinese state therefore does not have absolute access and mobilisation possibilities with regard to overseas Chinese. China’s paternalistic, *top-down* approach to overseas Chinese runs counter in many respects to the transnational realities in which the addressees of diaspora policy often operate. A far-reaching propagandistic impact cannot be developed with the instruments used so far. If the expectations of overseas Chinese can be fulfilled through cooperation with Chinese partners — for example, with regard to economic activities in China — then people of Chinese origin may quickly agree to the goals of the Chinese party-state. But if expectations are disappointed, such groups can turn against the Chinese state just as fast.

113 Ibid., 191f.

114 Elena Barabantseva and Tao Wang, “Diaspora Policies, Consular Services and Social Protection for Chinese Citizens Abroad”, *Migration and Social Protection in Europe and Beyond* 3 (2020): 93 — 108 (95).

115 Alan Gamlen, *Diaspora Engagement Policies: What Are They, and What Kinds of States Use Them?* Policy and Society, Working Paper 06/32 (Oxford: University of Oxford, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, 2006), 13 (“extracting obligations without extending rights”).

116 Ibid., 13 and 19.

Conclusions and Recommendations

China's diaspora policy must be understood as a component of Chinese foreign policy. For all the potential advantages that can arise from subnational relations for Germany as well, and despite its limited effectiveness to date, Chinese diaspora policy also harbours risks for Germany.

1. *China in effect is putting forward an alternative definition of belonging to a nation-state and creating a de-territorialised nation-state.*

Not only Chinese citizens abroad, but also ethnic Chinese with foreign citizenship are understood by Beijing as belonging to China. The approach of regarding all people of Chinese descent as Chinese, irrespective of their nationality, and appropriating them accordingly runs counter to the principle in Germany of defining nationality in terms of citizenship rather than race/ethnicity.¹¹⁷ When representatives of the Chinese state on the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany call on German citizens of Chinese origin to serve China's interests, Beijing is at the same time abolishing the territorial boundaries of the People's Republic of China. In connection with the redefinition of belonging, China thereby represents a conception of the state that deviates from the principle that a government is responsible for a legally defined people on a delimited territory.

2. *China's diaspora policy runs counter to Germany's integration policy.*

The identity politics being directed towards Germans of Chinese origin is just as antithetical to German integration policy as it is to the anti-racist basic values of Germany's immigration society. By making use of German citizens with an immigrant background and

exporting racial ideas as well as outdated notions of ethnically homogeneous nations, Chinese diaspora policy spreads notions of belonging that are explicitly rejected in the most recent *Bericht der Fachkommission der Bundesregierung zu den Rahmenbedingungen der Integrationsfähigkeit*.¹¹⁸ Ultimately, China is thus endangering social cohesion in Germany. At the same time, Beijing presents an alternative conceptual understanding of integration. The Chinese concept does not focus on "participation and involvement in the central areas of society with as much opportunity as possible"¹¹⁹ in the country of residence — as defined by the German Federal Government — but on the premise of aligning the participation of overseas Chinese in Germany with the interests of the CPC.

Last but not least: Beijing's activities can have negative consequences on the perception of Chinese immigrants. In the past, voices have also been raised in the German public that the Chinese abroad should generally be treated with scepticism and seen as an extension of the CPC. Such debates show how susceptible the topic can be to stereotyping and general suspicions. Beijing's diaspora policy runs the risk of reinforcing such tendencies.

3. *China's diaspora policy exports illiberality*

With its discourse power activities — which also include the justification or non-recognition of human rights violations (for example in Xinjiang), breaches of international law (in Hong Kong), and the violation of the international Convention on the Law of the Sea

¹¹⁷ At the same time, this interpretation of belonging is by no means specific to China. See Rogers Brubaker and Jaeeun Kim, "Transborder Membership Politics in Germany and Korea", *European Journal of Sociology* 52 (2011): 21 – 75.

¹¹⁸ Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit, *Gemeinsam die Einwanderungsgesellschaft gestalten. Bericht der Fachkommission der Bundesregierung zu den Rahmenbedingungen der Integrationsfähigkeit* (Berlin, 2021), <https://www.fachkommission-integrations-faehigkeit.de/resource/blob/1786706/1787474/fb4dee12f1f2ea5ce3e68517f7554b7fbericht-de-data.pdf?download=1> (accessed 14 October 2021).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

(in the South China Sea) — China exports ideas of law and the rule of law that are incompatible with the political values and principles of Germany. In line and in coordination with the diaspora state, supporters of the regime in Germany, in turn, claim civil liberties for themselves in order to support the Chinese government in denying or depriving dissenters or minorities, for example in Tibet or Hong Kong, of these very liberties.

At the same time, China's presence in Germany affects the opportunities of dissident Chinese to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and political participation. The Chinese government has various means at its disposal to limit the scope of criticism; with regard to Chinese-language media, it has already largely achieved this goal. Here, too, China's diaspora policy runs counter to the values on which Germany's free democratic political order is based.

4. China's diaspora policy promotes covert activity in the interests of the CPC.

This risk relates to different areas — from public relations to science to political activities. For example, Beijing encourages overseas Chinese to transfer technology and know-how to China by means of nationalist appeals, and in some cases even by encouraging them to engage in espionage. At the same time, the CPC is covertly trying to recruit political decision-makers of Chinese origin. If it succeeds, it can directly influence political decision-making processes abroad. Demonstrations during conflicts such as the one in Hong Kong, on the other hand, show that the Chinese state has a network of pro-regime people in Germany that can be activated for disseminating propaganda if necessary. The problem here is that Beijing tries to spread a one-sided, often false image of China's past and present abroad in order to legitimise its own political goals — for example in the South China Sea. Narratives then become instruments of foreign policy.

5. China's diaspora policy expands China's disinformation policy.

The latter point is also significant in another respect: The German Federal Foreign Office regards disinformation campaigns as “a foreign policy challenge”. In the “competition of narratives” brought about by this, it strives to promote its own policies and values through “strategic communication” and various

channels of mediation.¹²⁰ Beyond the government's communications as well as state-sponsored media channels, China is now increasingly working to use actors for external communications who do not have the (negative) image of China's governmental public relations: Overseas Chinese are expected to play a key role here as “unofficial ambassadors” without the state becoming visible. China's diaspora policy thus changes the definition of “strategic communication”, in which ultimately every private person of Chinese origin is to be involved.

Recommendations and countermeasures

In view of China's changed political ambitions under Xi Jinping and the ensuing increasingly aggressive appearance of the People's Republic on the international stage — as well as bearing in mind the experiences already acquired in other countries in attempts to exert influence on the “diaspora” — it is to be expected that Beijing will also intensify its diaspora policy in Germany. Given the current situation in Germany, and in view of the already more advanced diaspora policy activities in traditional Chinese immigration countries such as the United States, Australia, and Canada, four recommendations can be identified that should be used to respond to China's diaspora policy.

1. Strengthen problem awareness and China competences

Firstly, political actors in Germany should engage more intensively with Chinese diaspora policy and its methods, means, and implications than has been the case to date. The present overview by no means fully maps the current structures and actors, but it is a first step in this direction. Therefore, further studies on the topic are needed that firstly critically examine the different diaspora policy goals, secondly trace existing diaspora structures in Germany, and thirdly assess their effectiveness. In this context, regular monitoring of Chinese-language media such as the *Nouvelles d'Europe* is also useful for keeping an eye on China's diaspora activities in Germany.

For a security policy assessment of diaspora policy and especially the activities of associations of overseas Chinese, the available findings do not offer simple

¹²⁰ Federal Foreign Office, “Außenpolitik strategisch kommunizieren — Werte und Interessen gezielter vermitteln”, 25 May 2018, <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/themen/-/2089138> (accessed 15 June 2022).

formulas. The following indicators (building on Alex Joske's work on China's "united front system")¹²¹ can suggest links between associations of people with a Chinese migration background and the Chinese diaspora apparatus:

- 1) Members maintain regular contact with the embassy and consulates in Germany;
- 2) Members receive party-state delegations from China or attend meetings held by them in Germany;
- 3) Members visit diaspora authorities in China;
- 4) Members participate in one of the numerous global conferences held annually in China by the Chinese party-state;
- 5) Members hold positions within party-state structures in China;
- 6) Members publicly represent and disseminate CPC positions;
- 7) Associations include "core interests" of the Chinese state – such as unification with Taiwan – or guiding slogans of the regime – such as the Chinese Dream – among their goals.

These indicators provide important clues to possible diaspora policy cooperation – although no *clear* assessments should be made on their basis alone (this holds true especially for the first four points). Because the reaction of the overseas Chinese to China's diaspora policy is very heterogeneous, assessments should be made in a second step on a case-by-case basis. For example, economically oriented associations are by no means problematic a priori; they can take on an important bridging function in German-Chinese relations. Explicitly political associations, on the other hand, can quickly turn out to be "one-man associations". And radical nationalist groups in particular are not necessarily part of the diaspora's political "orchestrations"; sometimes they even run counter to China's image campaigns.

2. Strengthen "plurality competences"

Critical engagement with China's diaspora policy requires a high degree of sensitivity to the ambivalences that arise from this policy. The political will of the People's Republic to control overseas Chinese, which has grown under Xi Jinping, is clear. However, Beijing's policy must not lead to the misunderstanding that "the Chinese abroad" are at Beijing's disposal –

as sometimes happens in the German debate.¹²² Of course, not all people of Chinese origin are "loyal to their fatherland". That is why it is important that Beijing's narrative – namely that the CPC represents all ethnic Chinese people worldwide – is rejected in Germany just as assertively as the false image that the overseas Chinese in Germany are a homogeneous, even patriotic unit.

Secondly, the same applies to the relationships that people of Chinese origin maintain with China; these too are often shaped by transnational agendas of the overseas Chinese themselves. They therefore do not represent an obstacle to integration. For Germany, in turn, such transnational lifestyles and multiple affiliations – which must be regarded as normal in a migration society – result in many advantages. Mediators and "bridge builders" who are familiar with or feel at home in several cultures will gain in importance in our era of growing global interdependencies, be it in the economic, diplomatic, or cultural field. Even if elements of China's policy run counter to the interests of immigration countries, the transnational activities of people with a migration background do not. In this respect, a critical examination of China's diaspora policy must not amount to a blanket rejection of the transnational practices of people with a migration background.

In this sense, diaspora policy is not reprehensible *in principle* as long as it is not conducted at the same time against the respective host countries – as happens in part in the case of China. However, the *reasons why* China turns to overseas Chinese are understandable and comprehensible. In some respects, they are similar to those cited in Germany by advocates of immigration legislation: Although in different ways, both approaches are about accessing human capital that lies outside one's own national borders for one's own interests. Awareness of this can help inform a debate on China's diaspora policy. China's cooperation with migrant associations is therefore not problematic as long as their political autonomy is respected. China must recognise the diversity of the "diaspora". This also means not reproducing internal Chinese conflicts (which are sometimes difficult to keep under control, even for the diaspora apparatus) in Germany. German foreign policy in particular can help to con-

¹²¹ Joske, *The Party Speaks for You* (see note 7).

¹²² See, e.g., Wolfgang Hirn, "Die fünfte Kolonne", *Manager Magazin*, 16 February 2012, <https://www.manager-magazin.de/politik/die-fuenfte-kolonne-a-48e70497-0002-0001-0000-000084027430> (accessed 10 August 2020).

vey to the Chinese side what kind of diaspora policy is considered problematic and even unacceptable (such as calls for espionage and the export of racism) and what is not (such as economic exchanges and technology cooperation, in which both states have an equal interest).

3. Formulation of countermeasures

Where German interests are affected, political decision-makers should take appropriate countermeasures. Here, experiences with the diaspora policies of other countries, such as Turkey, can be helpful. It is also advisable to intensify the exchange with countries that have more extensive experience with China's diaspora policy and whose countermeasures are more advanced — such as Australia and the United States. At this point, it would also make sense to expand Germany's analytical capabilities with regard to disinformation. Ultimately, it should be a matter of coordinating corresponding measures within the European Union.

Especially with regard to China's economic and technological interests, on the other hand, it is not always easy to distinguish between legitimate and problematic concerns. For Germany, it must be clear where the line is drawn between desired or necessary cooperation within the framework of diaspora policy and the protection of German economic interests.

4. Strengthen state and civil society engagement in Chinese communities

German policy-makers should become more involved in the local communities of people of Chinese origin to be able to counter China's diaspora policy activities at an early stage. This includes authorities and politicians specifically seeking proximity to associations of people with a Chinese migration background and actively supporting the founding of new associations. So far, this field has often been left to Chinese authorities; the Chinese party-state can then pursue its propaganda activities unhindered.

For their part, German authorities should produce Chinese-language information materials and organise events that not only provide information about German integration policy and basic rights in Germany, but also address China's influence operations. In this context, it is not only important to clearly elaborate the differences between German and (official) Chinese legal and social concepts and to actively reject Chinese blood and ancestry rhetoric as being incompatible with the basic principles and realities of an immi-

gration society. Targeted support for Chinese-language media in Germany would also be desirable. Media must not, as is currently the case in parts, function as propaganda instruments of the Chinese state. Especially authorities with integration responsibilities could use Chinese-language media more than before as platforms for their own agendas. Conversely, dialogue forums could create a space in which people of Chinese origin can articulate needs to German actors. The strategic communication of the Federal Foreign Office also offers opportunities for such activities, for example within the framework of the “citizens' dialogues” already being practised; these could be used to specifically promote democratic values in Chinese-speaking communities and explain Germany's policies. Last but not least: The civil liberties of Chinese citizens and Germans with a Chinese migration background must be guaranteed and protected against interference by Chinese authorities.

China's diaspora policy under Xi Jinping must be taken seriously. This requires a detailed analysis and recording of Chinese influence activities and capabilities — also in order to absolve the majority of people of Chinese origin in Germany, who do not cooperate with Beijing, from any suspicion. They are not Beijing's “fifth column” — even if that is precisely what China is aiming at with its diaspora policy.

Abbreviations

ACFROC	All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCPPNR	China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification
CCTV	China Central Television
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
NRW	North Rhine-Westphalia
OCAO	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council
PRC	People's Republic of China
UFWD	United Front Work Department

