



CHINA IN CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

The tea leaf prince

Chinese Communist Party networks in French politics

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Abstract

French parliamentarians' links to the Chinese Communist Party's overseas influence agencies have escaped scrutiny. Representing President Macron's party, Buon Tan holds posts in key parliamentary commissions related to China while taking CCP-aligned positions on issues such as Huawei and the genocide against Uyghurs. At the same time, Tan has been a member of several organisations controlled by the CCP's united front system and maintains contacts with the Party's International Liaison Department. Associations with these entities do not demonstrate wrongdoing, but their role in the CCP's efforts to covertly influence foreign politicians is well documented. As this paper represents the first detailed case study of such activities in France, it is likely that more of the CCP's reach into French politics remains to be uncovered.

0 Introduction

Since his election to France's National Assembly in 2017, Buon Tan (陈文雄) has been a quiet member of the ruling La République en marche (LREM) party, rarely exercising his voting power.¹ This January, he broke from that mould by becoming the only parliamentarian to oppose a motion condemning the Chinese government's genocide against Uyghurs.² Earlier, in his capacity as president of the Assembly's France-China friendship group, Tan invited the Chinese ambassador to address the National Assembly on "the spirit of the 19th Party Congress", but the event attracted little attention.³ While known as a China-friendly figure in French politics, Tan's extensive links to the CCP's influence agencies have not been recognised.⁴

Tan appears to maintain the closest relationship to the CCP of any French MP, centred on institutions that engage in foreign interference efforts (figure 1). This paper documents his membership in four organisations managed by the united front system and links to state-backed technology transfer activities. At least two of Tan's united front affiliations appear to be current. We also describe Tan's relationship with the

¹"Buon Tan – Son activité de député à l'Assemblée nationale", NosDéputés.fr.

²"French lawmakers officially recognise China's treatment of Uyghurs as 'genocide'", France 24, 20 Jan. 2022.

³"翟隽大使在法国国民议会宣介中国共产党十九大精神讲稿", Chinese Embassy in France, 8 Nov. 2017.

⁴In 2017, French intelligence services reportedly alerted President Emmanuel Macron about the risk of interference surrounding Buon Tan. See Nathalie Guibert, "Le député Buon Tan, relais d'influence de la Chine à l'Assemblée nationale", *Le Monde*, 27 Feb. 2022.



Figure 1: Buon Tan shakes hands with General Secretary Xi Jinping at a 2019 united front event. Source: CCTV via Sohu.

CCP's International Liaison Department, which seeks to influence foreign political parties.

Although we do not presume to know the full nature of Tan's interactions with the CCP, his connections to the united front system place him alongside individuals governments have accused of involvement in foreign interference, and the organisations he is a member of explicitly promote the Party's foreign policy agenda. Around the world, the Party's united front system, a grouping of Chinese Party and state agencies, builds networks among ethnic Chinese communities and seeks to lean on its associates to advance the Party's interests abroad. For example, this January, counterintelligence authorities in the United Kingdom warned parliamentarians that Christine Lee (李贞驹), a political donor and self-styled community leader, was involved in political interference on behalf of the United Front Work Department (UFWD).⁵ Similarly, in late 2018, the Australian government cancelled property billionaire Huang Xiangmo's 黄向墨 visa because he was allegedly "amenable to conducting acts of foreign interference".⁶ Like Tan, both Lee and Huang are members of united front organisations such as the China Overseas Friendship Association.⁷ These united front ties are markers of involvement in the CCP's activities, but the mechanisms of Party control over such individuals may be clandestine and lie outside of the united front system.

Despite the growing scrutiny applied to the Party's united front networks internationally, Tan's activities have attracted minimal scrutiny. A September 2021 publication by IRSEM, a think tank under the French Ministry of Defence, helped popularise the concept of CCP united front work in French mainstream media.⁸ However, the 600-

⁵Laura Hughes & Helen Warrell, "MI5 warns UK MPs against 'political interference' by Chinese agent", *Financial Times*, 14 Jan. 2022. For earlier analysis of Lee's activities, see Clive Hamilton & Marieke Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: Exposing how the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World*, Hardie Grant Books, 12020, pp. 133-5 and Alex Joske, "The party speaks for you: foreign interference and the Chinese Communist Party's united front system", ASPI, 2020, pp. 26-7.

⁶Su-Lin Tan, Angus Grigg & Andrew Tillett, "Huang Xiangmo told Australian residency was cancelled after moving to Hong Kong", *Australian Financial Review*, 6 Feb. 2019.

⁷"中华海外联谊会第五届理事会人员名单", 中华海外联谊会, 18 Jun. 2019.

⁸Paul Charon & Jean-Baptiste Jeangene Vilmer, "Chinese Influence Operations: A Machiavellian Moment", IRSEM, 2021.



page report does not mention Tan. Similarly, Tan's name is only cited in passing as an example of a pro-China personality, in *France–Chine, les liaisons dangereuses*, a 2019 book on China's influence in France by journalist Antoine Izambard.⁹ A recent article in *Le Monde* examined Buon Tan's relationship with China but did not mention his links to the united front system and International Liaison Department.¹⁰

The objective of this paper is therefore to shed light on Buon Tan's affiliations and contacts with CCP institutions. As Australia's experience shows, transparency is an essential pillar of responding to foreign political interference.¹¹

1 A friend of China in the National Assembly

Since his 2017 election to the National Assembly, Buon Tan has secured positions in portfolios and commissions that relate to the France-China relationship and sensitive security issues. Currently, he is president of the parliamentary France-China friendship group and secretary of the Foreign Affairs Commission. As a member of the Foreign Affairs Commission, Buon Tan has been officially tasked with overseeing work concerning China and Northeast Asia. He has also been named co-rapporteur of an "information mission", which he initiated himself, related to France and Europe's China policy.¹² Tan is secretary of another information mission about national resilience that includes assessing France's ability to resist supply-chain disruption and cyberattacks. Finally, he is the vice-president of a study group on the "expansion of the Taiwanese economy" and a member of a study group on aerospace.¹³

Released in February 2022, a parliamentary report Tan initiated and co-drafted about France and Europe's China policy serves as a recent example of his efforts to counteract critical perspectives on China. The report's drafting process was marked by significant disagreements between the two rapporteurs, such that they contemplated releasing two separate sets of recommendations. In co-rapporteur Bérangère Poletti's words, Buon Tan's vision of China is "more economic than political" and Huawei's situation was cited as an example of divergent points of view between the two. The outcome is an eclectic document staking no clear position, but which nonetheless calls for a "rebalancing of the bilateral relationship with China" and for a more "strategic vision" on France's part when dealing with Beijing. In addition, the report states several times that the European Union would have little to gain aligning its positions with the United States "for a fight which is not its own", in the context of issues such as Taiwan and competition with China. None of the 48 recommendations issued concerns human rights or security issues.¹⁴

Buon Tan refrains from overtly taking up CCP talking points, but his behaviour is largely aligned with Beijing's interests on issues the CCP views as highly sensitive:

⁹Antoine Izambard, *France–Chine, les liaisons dangereuses*, Stock, 2019, Buon Tan's name is mentioned in two chapters: "Huawei, un géant sous étroite surveillance" and "Les prochinois".

¹⁰Guibert, *op. cit.*

¹¹For discussion of this point, see John Garnaut, "Australia's China reset", *The Monthly*, Aug. 2018.

¹²"Bilan d'activité de la commission des affaires étrangères, octobre 2020-août 2021", Assemblée nationale.

¹³"Buon Tan – Son activité..."; "Composition de la mission d'information sur la résilience nationale au 23 février 2022", Assemblée nationale.

¹⁴Bérangère Poletti & Buon Tan, "Rapport d'information sur la stratégie de la France et de l'Europe à l'égard de la Chine", Assemblée nationale, N° 5027, 18 Feb. 2022.



- In January 2022, Buon Tan stood out as the only French MP to vote against a motion recognising the violence perpetuated by the Chinese party-state upon the Uyghur minority as a “genocide”.
- In April 2020, as the world was discussing the origin of COVID-19 and the Chinese government’s early management of the crisis, Tan and fellow LREM member Pierre Person praised China for its “active international cooperation and control of the pandemic”.¹⁵
- In November 2021, Tan abstained from voting on a bill calling for Taiwan’s participation in international organizations and multilateral cooperation forums.¹⁶ Later, when hosting the Chinese ambassador in the French National Assembly, Tan presented the bill as the initiative of “a few MPs” when it had in fact been signed by all but two parliamentary groups and close to 200 MPs.¹⁷

Tan often acts as a go-between the French assembly and PRC government representatives. In October 2019, he invited Lu Shaye 卢沙野, the newly appointed Chinese ambassador to France, to give a speech to the National Assembly where he characterised the United States as “so tyrannical” and asked MPs to be respectful and sensitive about China’s “family affairs”, referring to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang and human rights, which he called a “sine qua non condition” for the bilateral relationship to develop “soundly and regularly”.¹⁸ In 2017, Tan invited the previous Chinese ambassador to address the National Assembly on the “spirit of the 19th Party Congress”.¹⁹

2 Tan and the CCP’s united front system

Buon Tan was appointed to major united front groups well before his election to the National Assembly. These groups are all closely associated with or directly managed by the UFWD, which has always played a central role in the Party’s efforts to influence foreign Chinese community leaders. In 2018, the UFWD subsumed the State Council Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) and was officially given responsibility for exercising “unified management” of diaspora affairs work.²⁰

Tan has been a member of a UFWD-controlled organisation since at least 2008, when he was named to the council of the China Overseas Friendship Association (COFA, 中华海外联谊会). Since May 2019, Tan has been an executive council member of the group.²¹ Founded in 1997, COFA is directly managed by the UFWD and is one of its most important platforms for co-opting and interacting with overseas united

¹⁵“Les dirigeants des partis étrangers saluent le soutien de la Chine à la lutte mondiale contre le coronavirus”, Xinhua, 2 Apr. 2020.

¹⁶“Votes de Buon Tan”, NosDéputés.fr.

¹⁷Poletti & Tan, *op. cit.*

¹⁸“Discours de S.E.M. l’Ambassadeur Lu Shaye devant le groupe d’Amitié France-Chine de l’Assemblée nationale”, Chinese Embassy in France, 25 Oct. 2019.

¹⁹“翟隽大使...”

²⁰“中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》”, Xinhua via gov.cn, 21 Mar. 2018; Alex Joske, “Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work”, *China Brief*, 9 May 2019.

²¹“中华海外联谊会第五届理事会人员名单”, 中华海外联谊会.



front figures.²² As mentioned earlier, united front figures governments have accused of involvement in foreign interference, such as Christine Lee and Huang Xiangmo, are members of COFA. Alongside overseas figures, COFA's members generally include the UFWD's entire leadership and representatives of all 12 UFWD bureaus, which will often use COFA as their affiliation when travelling abroad.²³ COFA's broad political agenda is clearly spelt out in its constitution, which states that the group's objectives include "contributing strength towards the ancestral nation's unification and realising the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."²⁴

Tan was also a member of another key united front group, the China Overseas Exchange Association (COEA, 中国海外交流协会), from 2013 to May 2019.²⁵ According to an official source, COEA aimed to establish "extensive contacts" with overseas Chinese in order to bring capital, technologies, talents and so on into China, as well as to conduct "cultural exchange and external propaganda".²⁶ COEA was taken over by COFA in 2019 after its parent agency, the State Council OCAO, was itself subsumed by the UFWD in 2018.²⁷

In 2013, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office invited Tan, already a COFA member, to attend the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) as a "non-voting overseas Chinese delegate" (figure 2).²⁸ In principle, diaspora members can only receive one such invitation in their lifetime, highlighting the significance of Tan's attendance.²⁹ The CPPCC carries little decision-making power within the Chinese political system but is the premier forum of the united front system. Currently chaired by Wang Yang 汪洋, the CCP Politburo Standing Committee member responsible for united front work, the CPPCC is a microcosm of the Party's efforts to co-opt representatives from outside the Party, bringing together Party officials, intelligence officers, industry leaders, religious figures, academics and so on as delegates. This is intended to enhance the CCP's legitimacy as a ruling Party that nonetheless represents the interests of the full breadth of Chinese society.³⁰

Buon Tan's involvement in the united front system has continued to expand following his 2017 election to France's National Assembly. In September 2018, the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC, 中华全国归国华侨联合会) named him as an overseas committee member, one of twenty from France.³¹ ACFROC presents itself as a peak body for representatives of overseas Chinese and returned overseas Chinese communities, but functions like a Party organ. It is an official con-

²²COFA is officially managed by the UFWD, according to its registration page on the Ministry of Civil Affairs' social organisation information platform (中国社会组织信用信息公示平台). Joske, "The Party Speaks for You..."

²³"中华海外联谊会第五届..."

²⁴"海联会章程", 中华海外联谊会.

²⁵"中国海外交流协会第五届理事会理事名单", 中国海外交流协会.

²⁶"中国海外交流协会", 中国侨网.

²⁷"中华海外联谊会四届六次常务理事会在京召开", 新华网, 25 Apr. 2019; "中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》", Xinhua via gov.cn, 21 Mar. 2018; Joske, "Reorganizing..."

²⁸"陈文雄列席全国政协会议关注中文教育、文化交流", 中国新闻网, 4 Mar. 2013; "陈文雄当选法国历史上第一位华裔国会议员!", 天下潮商传媒集团 via Sohu, 20 Jun. 2017.

²⁹"列席今年全国政协会议的35名海外侨胞都有谁?", 中国侨网, 3 Mar. 2018.

³⁰Gerry Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Party, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony*, Routledge, 2003, pp. 51 sq.

³¹"(受权发布)第十次全国归侨侨眷代表大会聘请中国侨联第十届委员会海外委员名单", 中国侨联, 1 Sep. 2018



Figure 2: Buon Tan, then vice-mayor of Paris's 13th arrondissement, attending the 2013 meeting of the CPPCC. Source: [中新网](#).

stituent unit of the CPPCC, and its staff generally have backgrounds as Party cadres in united front agencies.³²

Like many other united front bodies, ACFROC aims to use diaspora representatives to advance the Party's interests and support its legitimacy. In 2018, the Party Central Committee described ACFROC's function as acting as "a bridge and a belt for the Party and the government to liaise with returned overseas Chinese, relatives of overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese compatriots."³³ Demonstrating its focus on aligning ethnic Chinese with the Party's interest, in 2019 ACFROC's chairman called on members to "guide the masses of the overseas Chinese world in listening to the Party's words."³⁴

Buon Tan's significance within the united front system was again underlined in 2019, when he visited Beijing to attend a meeting of COFA and a major meeting of overseas Chinese community representatives. When General Secretary Xi Jinping visited the hundreds of united front figures gathered for the occasion, Tan was given a position of honour in the first row. Footage of Tan and Xi shaking hands featured on China Central Television's primetime news programme (figure 1).³⁵

³²“中国侨联简况”, 中国侨联, 22 Jun. 2018. For example, ACFROC Liaison Department deputy head Zhu Liu 朱柳 was previously a deputy head of the OCAO Overseas Department. See “第十二期” 侨连五洲·海外联谊研修班”及第四期” 华裔杰青论坛” 在宁圆满收官”, 中国侨联, 16 Jul. 2021; “国务院侨办国外司副司长朱柳一行来松调研”, 松江区侨联 via 上海桥联, 7 Jun. 2017.

³³“中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》”, Xinhua via gov.cn, 21 Mar. 2018.

³⁴“中国侨联召开十届二次全委会议”, 沧州侨联, 2019.

³⁵“习近平会见世界华侨华人代表, 谢国民、陈文雄等多位潮籍华人参加会议”, 天下潮商传媒 via Sohu, 29 May 2019.



3 Tan and the CCP foreign affairs system

Buon Tan maintains connections to the Party's foreign affairs system, including the Central Committee's International Liaison Department (ILD, 中央对外联络部), alongside his united front ties.

While the International Liaison Department was created in 1951 from a bureau of the UFWD, there is no evidence that its work today is guided by the united front system.³⁶ It is mainly associated with the CCP foreign affairs system, along with agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.³⁷

The fact that the ILD isn't part of the united front system doesn't diminish its significance as a source of Party influence. Firstly, the ILD's core role is to develop relationships with foreign political parties, which includes gathering intelligence on them. As Czech intelligence service BIS pointed out in its 2015 annual report, the ILD's "remit includes, besides foreign relations, intelligence activities." Secondly, the ILD uses its connections to attempt to build support for the Party and its international agenda. In particular, it has encouraged representatives of political parties to endorse and normalise CCP talking points such as the concept of a "community of common destiny for humankind".³⁸ While many politicians have taken up this Party phraseology, they may be unaware that the concept encapsulates the CCP's ambition to create a new international order more closely aligned with its own interests.³⁹

Buon Tan attended a key event in the ILD's efforts to influence foreign political parties, the December 2017 "CCP in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting" (figure 3).⁴⁰ Former French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, whose cosy relationship with the People's Republic of China has long been scrutinised by French media, also attended the meeting.⁴¹

The dialogue was a propaganda coup and a major demonstration of the ILD's convening power, claiming to draw representatives of 300 political parties. In official coverage of the event, the *People's Daily* claimed that French representatives "congratulated the Party on the 19th Party Congress's historic achievements," referring to the meeting where term limits on Xi's leadership were abolished.⁴² Chinese state media also interviewed Tan, who was quoted praising the Party's international agenda: "My deepest impression is of the concept of a community of common destiny for humankind. This concept is intimately related to every person: we cannot close the door

³⁶On the ILD's origins, see 中共中央对外联络部 & 中共对外关系史料编辑小组 (eds.), 中联部四十年, 1991, pp. 35-37, 116 sq.; Robert Suettinger, "Intelligence report: The International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party", Central Intelligence Agency, December 1971.

³⁷David Shambaugh, "China's Quiet Diplomacy": The International Department of the Chinese Communist Party", *China: An International Journal* 5:1, 2007, p. 336.

³⁸Jichang Lulu & Martin Hála, "A new Comintern for the New Era: The CCP International Department from Bucharest to Reykjavik", 16 Aug. 2018.

³⁹Nadège Rolland, "Beijing's Vision for a Reshaped International Order", *China Brief*, 26 Feb. 2018.

⁴⁰梁甜甜, 周欣 & 毕秋兰, "这次历史性大会后, 外国政党领导人讲述了这 5 个小故事!", 新华网 via Sina, 4 Dec. 2017.

⁴¹"宣示国际担当 共建美好世界", CCTV, 4 Dec. 2017. For French media coverage of Raffarin's relationship with China, see Brice Pedroletti & Harold Thibault, "Les tribulations de Jean-Pierre Raffarin en Chine", *Le Monde*, 6 Dec. 2019.

⁴²"宋涛会见法国执政党代表", 中国共产党新闻网, 1 Dec. 2017.

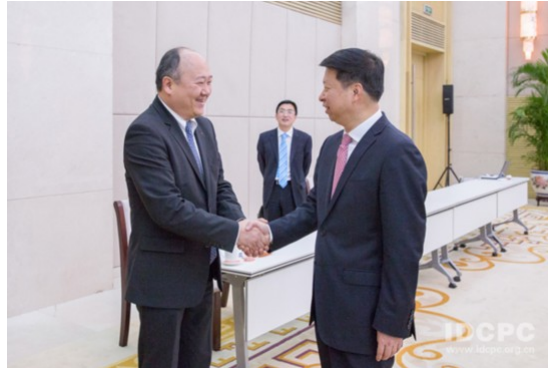


Figure 3: Tan meets with ILD leader Song Tao on the sidelines of the World Political Parties Dialogue. Source: [中国共产党新闻网](#).

and focus on our own problems without concerning ourselves with other countries. This is a concept of historical significance.”⁴³

Afterwards, Tan continued to be involved in contacts between the ILD and French politicians. In July 2019 and again in January 2020, Buon Tan led a delegation of “young members of the French National Assembly” for meetings with key ILD figures including ILD Director Song Tao 宋涛 and Ji Bingxuan 吉炳轩, president of the China Association for International Understanding (CAFIU, 中国国际交流协会).⁴⁴ CAFIU claims to be a “social organisation” but is in fact managed by ILD, which may view the affiliation as a convenient channel for interactions with foreign non-profit and academic entities.⁴⁵ According to Reuters, the Indian government listed CAFIU as an “entity of concern” in 2020 because of security concerns, marking its associates for greater visa screening.⁴⁶

4 Tan and technology transfer

Buon Tan’s links to the united front system also intersect with its efforts to access foreign talent and technology. Tan acts as the “chief advisor” of Développement France-

⁴³“这场全世界政党的盛会结出了哪些成果？亮点、干货，都在这里了！”，中国日报，4 Dec. 2017.

⁴⁴“宋涛会见法国青年议员团”，新华网，7 Jan. 2020; “10e session (Pékin, 9 juillet 2019)”, Assemblée Nationale. “吉炳轩会见法国客人”，新华网，8 Jan. 2020. The first meeting was organised for the 11th session of the so-called “Great Commission”, a yearly bilateral meeting between the National Assembly and China’s National People’s Congress. Interestingly, only that first meeting with Ji Bingxuan was reported on the website of the French National Assembly. Ji Bingxuan is presented as the vice-president of the standing committee of the National People’s Congress and no mention is made of his role as the head of CAFIU. The January 2020 meeting was not reported on non-Chinese websites. On November 29th, Buon Tan had already introduced Hugues Renson, vice-President of the National Assembly and a former member of President Chirac’s cabinet, to Ji Bingxuan during the latter’s visit to Paris. Again, Ji Bingxuan was only presented as the vice-president of the standing committee of the National People’s Congress. See: Hugues Renson, “Rencontre avec le Vice-président du Comité Permanent de l’Assemblée populaire nationale de Chine”.

⁴⁵On CAFIU’s subordination to the ILD, see registration information on 全国社会组织信用信息公示平台 and Livia Codarin, Laura Harth & Jichang Lulu, “Hijacking the mainstream CCP influence agencies and their operations in Italian parliamentary and local politics”, Sinopsis, Nov. 2021, pp. 14 sq. See also “AIIA-ACRI-Chinese Association for International Understanding Roundtable 2016”, Australian Institute of International Affairs, 20 Sep. 2016.

⁴⁶Sanjeev Miglani, “India steps up scrutiny of Chinese influence group”, Reuters, 15 Sep. 2020.



Chine (DFC, 欧洲华创会), a group actively involved in promoting China's talent recruitment and technology transfer efforts.

DFC has a close relationship with and draws part of its Chinese name with the "Conference on Overseas Chinese Pioneering and Developing in China" (华侨华人创业发展洽谈会), an annual convention used by Chinese local governments to identify and attract talent, investment and technologies from abroad.⁴⁷ The event has been organised since 2001 by local Chinese governments and the OCAO under the guidance of the Central Leading Small Group on Overseas Talent Recruitment Work (中央海外高层次人才引进工作小组). According to the official conference website, close to 20,000 overseas ethnic Chinese participated in the 2018 conference, which saw 2300 talent recruitment or technology project contracts signed.⁴⁸

Founded by Buon Tan's brother-in-law, Chun Wong 黄进,⁴⁹ DFC has facilitated Chinese government talent-recruitment and technology-transfer efforts. In 2017 and 2018, it organised a startup competition in Paris as part of a global startup recruitment effort initiated by the government of Guangzhou's Tianhe District, a sister district of Paris's 13th arrondissement.⁵⁰ DFC also signed a strategic partnership with Guangzhou High-technology Industry Group Company Ltd. to establish a "France-China (Tianhe) Technological Industry Park" that aims at creating a "new channel" and a "new model" to introduce overseas talent in China.⁵¹ In 2020, DFC opened an office in Hangzhou and was tasked by a local government with helping recruit talents in Europe.⁵² While governments often seek to attract talent from abroad, the Chinese government's talent-recruitment efforts are strongly associated with misconduct and opaque technology transfer.⁵³

⁴⁷“欧洲华创会”, Développement France-Chine.

⁴⁸“关于华创会”, hch.org.cn.

⁴⁹Formerly a London-based journalist for Sing Tao Daily (星岛日报), a Hong Kong-based pro-Beijing newspaper, Chun Wong is the husband of one of Buon Tan's sisters and a close associate of many of Buon Tan's endeavours.

Working as operations director of the Tan family's KAWA company (嘉华进出口有限公司), he was also the treasurer of Conseil représentatif des associations asiatiques de France in 2014, when Buon Tan, its president, was accused of misappropriating funds and left to found the Haut Conseil des Asiatiques de France. See 鲁佳, “法国亚裔高等理事会举办成立大会, 陈文雄荣任主席”, 战法新闻, 21 Oct. 2015.

In his capacity of publication director of *Vision Chine*, a French-language monthly magazine about Chinese society, Wong was involved in organising a cocktail party held for Chinese media on the premises of the French National Assembly in 2012. In 2018, when President Macron held his first reception for the Chinese New Year, some attendees were informed of the new date of the event via an email sent by an employee of *Vision Chine*. See Gurvan Kristanadjadja & Ismaël Halissat, “Buon Tan, poisson-pilote de Macron dans la diaspora asiatique”, *Libération*, 15 Feb. 2018.

⁵⁰“广州”天英汇”国际创新创业大赛法国赛区决赛成功举办”, 旅法华人战报, 10 Nov. 2018. Many personalities active in so-called “professional associations” in charge of recruiting talent in France attended the 2018 event, such as Gong Dusheng (general secretary of the Association des scientifiques et ingénieurs chinois en France, former president of Union des chercheurs et des étudiants chinois en France) and Dong Changzhi (president of the same association). Buon Tan also attended, having arranged the sister district agreement between the 13th arrondissement and Tianhe district. “巴黎华裔副区长陈文雄: 站在当地人角度推介 Idea”, 中国新闻网, 3 Mar. 2013.

⁵¹“欧洲华创会”

⁵²“2020 第四季度政府工作报告重点任务目标执行情况”, 中共杭州市拱墅区委, 杭州市拱墅区人民政府, 31 Dec. 2020.

⁵³“Harvard University Professor Convicted of Making False Statements and Tax Offenses”, United States Department of Justice, 21 Dec. 2021; Alex Joske, “Hunting the phoenix: The Chinese Communist Party's global search for technology and talent”, ASPI, 2020.



5 The elder Tan

Buon Tan's deep relationship with the united front system may have been inherited from his father, Srun Nguon Tan 陈顺源. Born in Cambodia to a family originating from Puning in the Chaoshan area of China, Buon Tan arrived in France with his family in 1975, aged 8, as a refugee fleeing the Khmer Rouge. The elder Tan, who made his fortune by importing tea through his company TSN, was a notable figure in Paris's 13th arrondissement, where a large part of the French capital's Asian community resides. This heritage earned Buon Tan the nickname "the tea leaf prince" in Chinese state media.⁵⁴

In 1986, Srun Nguon Tan co-founded l'Amicale des Teochew de France (法国潮州同乡会, now 法国潮州会馆) and was elected as its first vice-president before becoming its president in 1995. In 2011, he was named an honorary president of the French Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (法国中国和平统一促进会), one of more than 100 foreign affiliates of the UFWD-run China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (中国和平统一促进会).⁵⁵

Tan's father also helped the CCP's build influence over Chinese-language media by acting as an advisor to *Nouvelles d'Europe* (欧洲时报), Europe's largest local Chinese media group.⁵⁶ Established in Paris in 1983, at an address adjacent to one of the Tan family's main companies, *Nouvelles d'Europe* is in fact covertly owned by the UFWD. Its parent company, Guang Hua Cultures et Média (光华传媒集团) is 90%-owned by a Hong Kong front company for the State Council's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, which is in turn part of the UFWD.⁵⁷

Srun Nguon Tan's community work in Paris' earned him plaudits from both the French government and the CCP. In 1996, when Premier Li Peng visited France, Tan was among the local Chinese community representatives who met with him.⁵⁸ Nearly a decade later, he hosted the visiting director of the State Council Overseas Chinese Affairs Office.⁵⁹ In 2003, he was appointed to the council of the UFWD's China Overseas Friendship Association, of which his son is now a senior member.⁶⁰ Also like his son, the elder Tan was an overseas Chinese delegate to the CPPCC, attending in 2008.⁶¹ When Srun Nguon Tan passed away in 2016, both the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and, on the French side, then Prime Minister Manuel Valls and State Secretary Jean-Marie Le Guen also extended their condolences.⁶²

⁵⁴“法国国会议员陈文雄：马克龙访华团里的华人智囊”，中国侨网，18 Jan. 2018.

⁵⁵“法国中国和平统一促进会名单”，法国侨网，7 Jul. 2011. On reunification councils more generally, see John Dotson, “The United Front Work Department Goes Global: The Worldwide Expansion of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China”, *China Brief*, 9 May 2019.

⁵⁶木槿，“法华各界送别侨领陈顺源 瓦尔斯、勒甘等政要致唁电”，欧洲时报，9 Aug. 2016.

⁵⁷Filip Jirouš & Petra Ševčíková, “Covert propaganda operations in plain sight: The CCP united front system's media network in Europe”, *Sinopsis*, 31 Jul. 2021, pp. 12 sq.; Alex Joske, Lin Li, Alexander Pascoe & Nathan Attrill, “The influence environment: A survey of Chinese-language media in Australia”, *ASPI*, 2020, pp. 22 sq.

⁵⁸张冬冬，“连云港市领导会见法国著名侨领陈顺源一行”，中国侨网，26 Sept. 2008.

⁵⁹梁源法，“陈顺源先生仙逝五周年之际”时光带不走我们深深的怀念”，欧洲时报，30 Apr. 2021.

⁶⁰“第二届中华海外联谊会理事会名录”，COFA.

⁶¹林明江 (ed.), 中国侨联, 人民政协报社, 2010, p. 128.

⁶²木槿, *op. cit.*



6 Tan's political roots: community work in Paris's Chinatown

Encouraged by his father, Buon Tan's political career began around 2008 when he was elected deputy mayor of Paris's 13th arrondissement. That year, the elder Tan told Chinese state media that his son had accomplished something "our generation was unable to do" by entering politics.⁶³

Indeed, Buon Tan laid the foundations for his political career by following his father's activities. In 2005, he took over the youth affairs department of the Chaozhou Association his father had co-founded upon his arrival in France (Buon Tan remains its honorary president).⁶⁴ Between 2011 and 2014, Buon Tan was also the first president of the Conseil représentatif des associations asiatiques de France (CRAAF), a platform aiming at uniting France's Asian community-based associations and contribute to the promotion of persons of Asian descent in French society, economy and politics. Shortly after he was pushed out of CRAAF by members who accused him of misappropriating funds,⁶⁵ Tan founded a rival group, the Haut Conseil des Asiatiques de France (HCAF). Despite a grand founding ceremony held on the premises of the National Assembly, with its then-president Claude Bartolone as an attendee,⁶⁶ HCAF does not appear to be very active.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, President François Hollande attended one of its events in September 2016.⁶⁸

Jean-Marie Le Guen, a long-time councillor of the 13th arrondissement, was also a key backer of Tan's political career. Le Guen served as an MP over three decades and as two-time Secretary of State (Relations with the Parliament, Development and Francophonie) under François Hollande. After leaving politics, Le Guen joined the board of Huawei France in September 2020.⁶⁹ Buon Tan followed in Le Guen's footsteps through his election as deputy mayor of Paris's 13th arrondissement in 2008 and then as a Paris councillor in 2014 on the list of the Socialist Party. During this stage in Tan's political career, he credits himself with having contributed to setting up Chinese-language classes in 13th arrondissement schools, promoted traditional Chinese medicine, and supported the creation of "international tourism zones" (where labour laws are slightly relaxed to allow shops to open later at night or on Sundays) in the neighbourhood.⁷⁰

As his political capital grew, Tan began to play a larger role in France-China relations. Between 2013 and 2017, Tan, not yet an MP, accompanied President François Hollande, Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and several state secretaries for trade on

⁶³“旅法侨领陈顺源：儿子为华人发声比家族产业重要”，羊城晚报 via 中国侨网, 29 Dec. 2008.

⁶⁴“Votre député – Buon Tan”, Buontan.fr; 黄冠杰, “旅法侨界祝贺法国潮州会馆会长蔡汉忠 90 寿辰”, 交通资讯一起看 via Sohu, 29 Jun. 2021.

⁶⁵Romain Lescurieux and Caroline Politi, “Paris : Un candidat La République en marche soupçonné de détournement de fonds », 20 Minutes, 8 Jun. 2017.

⁶⁶“法国亚裔高等理事会举办成立大会，陈文雄荣任主席”，新欧洲战报, 20 Oct. 2015. MPs Bruno Le Roux (then president of the France China Friendship Group) and Jean-Marie Le Guen also attended the ceremony, along with a representative of the Chinese embassy in France.

⁶⁷“HCAF : Haut Conseil des Asiatiques de France”. This platform seems not to be very representative nor active. The membership form that can be downloaded on its website is tailored for 2018; see “HCAF-adhésion 2018”.

⁶⁸“奥朗德光临华商座谈会鼓励华人向主流社会发声”，欧洲商报, 20 Sept. 2020.

⁶⁹“Jean-Marie Le Guen entre au conseil d'administration de Huawei France”, Les Échos, 13 Sep. 2020.

⁷⁰“Votre député...”



Figure 4: Buon Tan, then presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron and Jacques Sun. Source: *Nouvelles d'Europe via Le Parisien*.

official visits to China.⁷¹ French media also reported that Hollande would often consult Tan before setting off for Beijing.⁷² Likewise, Hollande's second prime minister, Manuel Valls, introduced Tan to Chinese premier Li Keqiang as "Paris's most influential Chinese" during Li's 2015 visit to France.⁷³ In 2018, the *People's Daily* described Tan as "an important advisor to Macron on developing relations with China".⁷⁴

In the meantime, Jacques Sun (孙文雄), who succeeded Buon Tan as president of CRAAF, has been suspected of being an intelligence asset by the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI), France's counter-intelligence service (figure 4). An entrepreneur by trade, Sun has led CRAAF since 2014 and was particularly active in mobilising the Asian diaspora to protest Shaoyo Liu's (刘少尧) killing by a policeman in 2017. Before that, he worked for UMP, then France's biggest political party, as a *chargé de mission* in charge of liaising with the Asian community. In this capacity, he accompanied President Sarkozy on various visits to China and was allegedly involved in François Fillon's 2017 presidential campaign.⁷⁵

The exploitation of united front networks by Chinese intelligence agencies has precedents in France. For example, the late French united front leader Han Tianjin 韩天进 was once awarded a medal by China's Ministry of State Security, an intelligence agency, for his "outstanding contributions to state security work" in 1989.⁷⁶ Paris became a refuge for many Chinese dissidents in the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre's aftermath, yet Han had been outspoken in his defence of the crackdown.⁷⁷ Han had been a founding member of one of France's earliest Chinese united front groups, the Asso-

⁷¹ "Buon Tan : l'importance du vote pour les Chinois en France", Mandarin TV, 1 Sept. 2017.

⁷² "Buon Tan, un député LREM à la pointe du business franco-chinois", *La Lettre A*, 4 May 2018.

⁷³ Gurvan Kristanadjadja & Ismaël Halissat, "Buon Tan, poisson-pilote de Macron dans la diaspora asiatique", *Libération*, 15 Feb. 2018. In 2016, Buon Tan received the Legion of Honour (France's highest decoration) from François Hollande.

⁷⁴ "陈文雄：马克龙访华团里的华人智囊", 人民网, 22 Jan. 2018.

⁷⁵ Jean-Michel Décugis and Eric Pelletier, "Ce très influent M. Sun, soupçonné d'être un « espion chinois »", *Le Parisien*, 4 Apr. 2017.

⁷⁶ 温州市鹿城区政协学习文史委员会 (ed.), 鹿城文史资料 第十九辑, 2007, p. 82.

⁷⁷ "郑朝阳副市长来我院看望老侨领韩天进先生", The First Affiliated Hospital of Wenzhou Medical University, 28 Jan. 2013; "瓯海区领导节前走访慰问老侨领", 温州市侨联, 26 Sep. 2012.



ciation des Chinois résidant en France (Association of Chinese Residents in France), which remains close to the united front system today.⁷⁸

7 Conclusion

Buon Tan's case offers a demonstration of the presence of long-term and high-level united front networks in France. While shining light on these connections is an important step towards mitigating the risk of CCP political interference, much more remains to be done. Further research is needed to accurately document the nature of CCP influence in France, which should then inform responses by the government, political parties and civil society. At the very least, Tan would provide much needed clarity on this issue by declaring his united front affiliations to the High Authority for Transparency in Public Life.⁷⁹

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⁷⁸黄冠杰,“法国华侨华人会:中法关系的纽带和桥梁”,欧洲时报,25 Mar. 2019.

⁷⁹Fiche Buon Tan, Haute Autorité pour la transparence de la vie publique. HATVP's form makes it possible to declare any unpaid position likely to create a conflict of interest.