

“New Migrant” Organisations and the Chinese Diaspora State(s) in the Twenty-first Century:

The Case of Japan

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ABSTRACT: In the last two decades, local Chinese governments have become involved in the foundation of “new migrant” voluntary organisations abroad, which have increasingly served economic and diplomatic goals. Using the case study of the establishment of the federation-style New Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese Association in Japan (NOCECAJ) in 2003, this article argues that the main new organisations in Japan have specifically supported regional talent recruitment in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and public diplomacy goals and, more recently, the agenda of the “serving” and “caring” Chinese state. Because of the troubled history of Sino-Japanese relations, these organisations have furthermore worked for the betterment of bilateral relations. This article makes the case that, despite unification and co-optation efforts, the expansion of the immersion of local governments and diaspora engagement offices at provincial and city levels urges us to disaggregate the “diaspora state” in favour of an intricate and shifting set of interactions between a wide range of diasporic actors at multiple levels. Moving beyond both “state-led transnationalism” and “networked governance,” it hence posits that “assemblage” as an approach can better help us grasp the convolutions of Chinese diaspora engagement in the twenty-first century.

KEYWORDS: Japan, new migrants, voluntary organisations, diaspora engagement policies, Chinese diaspora state(s).

Introduction: Background, approach, and contributions

The emergence of the “new migrants” (*xin yimin* 新移民) since economic reform in 1978 has been accompanied by a growing number of new migrant voluntary organisations globally. Whereas the older organisations were constituted along the “intersecting” “segments” of dialect, surname, and region, these newer organisations also include alumni and professional organisations, among others (Crissman 1967). Also, whereas older organisations – long considered one of the three main pillars of Chinese communities, together with schools and newspapers – were created in the context of sojourning under harsh conditions, these new migrant organisations emerged in the setting of China’s economic ascent and globalisation (Zhuang 2010: 10). The older organisations provided mutual aid and

protection, resolved disputes, and mediated between the Chinese community and local rulers. Furthermore, they connected migrants with their hometowns through remittances, funding ancestral halls or schools, or assisting with burials (Crissman 1967: 196-7; McKeown 1999: 320). Some of these older organisations included clan organisations (*zongqinhui* 宗親會), native place organisations (*huiguan* 會館), trade organisations (*shanghui* 商會), guilds (*tongye gonghui* 同業公會), and charity organisations (*shantang* 善堂) (van Dongen 2018: 13).

Given the vastly different environment in which the new migrant organisations have appeared, what are their main functions and how have these evolved in the twenty-first century? Also, whereas these organisations have historically been entangled with Chinese diaspora policies, what has changed since economic reform and, more recently, since the 2000s? This article engages with these

questions through the case study of the federation-type New Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese Association in Japan (*Riben xin Huaqiao Huaren hui* 日本新華僑華人會, hereafter NOCECAJ), founded in 2003 but since 2019 known as the All-Japan Federation of Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese Associations (*quan Riben Huaqiao Huaren shetuan lianhehui* 全日本華僑華人社團聯合會, hereafter AJF) and its eight founding members.¹ The latter represent the range of new organisations in Japan, including a chamber of commerce, specialised organisations in the areas of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), generic organisations, and professional and regional organisations.

Globally, some significant shifts have characterised new migrant organisations since the twenty-first century. Not only have local Chinese governments become more active in their foundation, but these organisations have also increasingly served China's economic and diplomatic goals. Overall, China has been placing more value in the Overseas Chinese organisations and their relations with their ancestral homes (Zhuang 2020: 55). It has also attempted to organise and harmonise the ever more numerous and diverse new organisations. This informal co-option of diasporas has occurred through the establishment of chambers of commerce, business organisations, and organisations for researchers abroad. In addition, more recently, China has legitimised itself as a caring, responsible, and compassionate state following decades of reform and increasing wealth discrepancy (Nguyen and Chen 2017; see Maggi Leung's article in this special feature). As such, it has emphasised serving the Chinese diaspora and ensuring its legal protection through new initiatives such as Chinese service centres (*huazhu zhongxin* 華助中心) that have been established globally since 2014.

Nevertheless, this tendency towards co-opting Chinese diasporic organisations also exists in tension with the strengthened involvement of local Chinese governments and the multifarious interactions between these governments, diasporic organisations, and other actors. Hence, this article aims to focus not only on efforts towards co-option, but also on these very interactions that undermine the notion of a single diaspora state. Liu and van Dongen (2016) have argued for a transnational approach to diaspora engagement that acknowledges both the continued centrality of the state and of networks. However, as Jen Dickinson (2017: 2) rightly notes, both "networked governance" (Cohen 2015) and "state-led transnationalism" (Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003) approaches still remain oriented towards elitist forms of political agency and risk robbing the diasporic population of its agency.

Although Liu and van Dongen (2016) have perceived the Chinese diasporas as actors driven by their own interests rather than as passive recipients of state policies, Dickinson rightly notes that state-led transnationalism nevertheless still preserves the dichotomous framework of the sending and receiving states. The sending state, in the words of Dickinson (2017: 2), does not capture "the range of interplays in and between multiple scales and spaces that underpin the formulation of a states' (sic) diaspora strategies, their evolution, and their variegated material outcomes." Instead, she relies on "assemblage" or "creative bricolage" (Iskander 2015) as an approach to reflect these interplays and the dynamic nature of diaspora policymaking. Building on these insights, this article urges us to disaggregate the diaspora state and to foreground multi-

scalar interactions instead. As Zhang (2019: 123) notes, Chinese cities are crucial nodes in those aspects of Overseas Chinese work that involve economic, scientific, and technological advances. Although officially, diaspora policies at the city level are subservient to national policies, in reality, competing interests exist. Hence, multiple diaspora states are at work, each with their own sets of policies and actors. This process is also perpetually evolving rather than static and coordinated.

This article highlights both the aspects of the incorporation of voluntary organisations in diaspora work – as reflected in the creation of the NOCECAJ itself – and of the multilevel relations between the various organisations and other actors that challenge centralised control. It argues that, firstly, the NOCECAJ/AJF has cooperated with local governments and Overseas Chinese affairs offices at the provincial and city levels to advance the latter's economic agendas. Secondly, it argues that the new organisations in Japan have specifically served talent recruitment in STEM fields, as well as public diplomacy goals, again through interactions with governments and other actors at multiple levels. More recently, in the diplomatic realm, these organisations have carried out the agenda of the serving and caring state via the Tokyo Chinese Service Centre. Furthermore, the troubled history of Sino-Japanese relations has made some of these organisations become more engaged in the betterment of bilateral relations.

The article employs a qualitative content analysis of various types of Chinese-language sources. These include publicly available websites of the main organisations and related bodies, sources pertaining to diaspora engagement policies, and publications on the new migrant organisations in Japan and globally. The analysis of the organisations' websites also offers a glimpse of the "digitised diaspora engagement" of the Chinese state in recent years (Kang 2017). Additionally, the organisations increasingly disseminate information through websites, social media, and mailing lists rather than through in-person meetings, given that they rent office space rather than owning real estate in Chinatowns (Liao 2012a: 25-6; Jia 2019: 143).

Regarding gaps in the literature, the contribution of this article is twofold. Firstly, literature on new migrant organisations remains relatively scarce as compared to literature on older organisations and rarely connects them with diaspora policies. Most research has hitherto focused on older associations in North America and Southeast Asia (Freedman 1960; Crissman 1967; Wickberg 1994). Similarly, Chinese literature on chambers of commerce has mostly investigated their early history in places such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, or the Philippines (Liu 2000; Feng 2001), with some exceptions that concentrate on a contemporary setting (Ren and Liu 2022). Japanese literature has equally covered Chinese trading networks in Asia and the early chambers of commerce in the port cities of Kobe, Osaka, Nagasaki, and Yokohama (Liao 2012b: 20).² Some studies have also analysed the changing functions of

1. This renaming in October 2019 was actually the second renaming. In September 2013, it had been renamed the All-Japan Federation of Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese (*quan Riben Huaqiao Huaren lianhehui* 全日本華僑華人聯合會). This article hence uses NOCECAJ for the period up to 2013 and AJF for the period after the first renaming in 2013.

2. For Japanese sources, see Liao 2012b, footnote 3 on page 29. For research on Chinese organisations in Southeast Asia, see Zhuang 2010: 2.

organisations during this early stage from “traditionally narrow, localised interests” to national concerns (Tien 1983: 275).

Interest in contemporary voluntary organisations has been on the rise, but no standard definition exists. Traits commonly identified are non-governmental, not for profit, and voluntary (Li 1995; Liu 1998; Li 2002; Zhuang, Qing, and Pan 2010; Wang and Liu 2011; Jia 2019; Zhuang 2020). Within this literature, some authors have discussed changing characteristics, transnational aspects, or comparative dimensions (Liu 1998; Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart 2006; Trémon 2007; Zhuang, Qing, and Pan 2010; Fernandez-Kelly and Portes 2015). From the other side, literature on Chinese diaspora engagement tends to prioritise top-down policies and the workings of the main Chinese institutions. Nevertheless, some studies have also covered aspects of Chinese diaspora engagement encompassing migrant organisations in multiple geographical contexts (Pieke 1998; Nyíri 1999, 2001; Thunø 2001; Liu and van Dongen 2016; Giese 2017; DeHart 2021). More case studies are needed on how the co-option of Chinese diasporas works on an organisational level and how this multiscale process challenges that agenda at the same time. Also, more research is necessary on how diasporic actors either support or resist organisation and interaction with Chinese state actors based on whether or not they consider their interests to be served and whether or not they feel represented (Nyíri 2007: 104-22; Giese 2017: 58-9).

A second gap the article seeks to fill pertains to Chinese migrants in Japan. Although the Chinese constitute the biggest immigrant group in Japan (Liu-Farrer 2011: 2), Japan has received less attention than other countries in Southeast Asia or North America. After 2000, together with South Korea, Japan experienced the fastest rise in the number of new migrants, and the latter are behind the foundation of most voluntary organisations in both countries (Zhuang 2010: 10). Some literature covers new Chinese migration to Japan, especially in the form of educational and labour migration, but this mostly excludes new migrant organisations (Le Bail 2005; Liu-Farrer 2011, 2020; Coates 2015). Jia (2019) touches upon new migrant organisations in Japan, but the main concern is not diaspora engagement. The new organisations in Japan have only recently received attention in Chinese-language studies, and mostly by insiders (Liao 2012a, 2012b; Yang 2015). As such, this article adds an organisational dimension to the study of new Chinese migrants in Japan and bridges it with Chinese diaspora engagement.

New migrant organisations and diaspora engagement in the twenty-first century

What is new about the new migrant organisations and their relation with China in the twenty-first century? Answering this question requires a brief historical detour. Chinese organisations have long been involved in diaspora policies and already had a clear diplomatic function in the nineteenth century. For example, during the late Qing dynasty (and until 1925), presidents of American native place organisations were scholars with titles from China who were given diplomatic passports, which turned the native place organisations into “an extension of the Chinese diplomatic service and a channel between the Chinese government and the Chinese in America” (Lai 2004: 48).

After the foundation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), a diaspora engagement apparatus was established, with the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC) under the State Council as the mainstay (Thunø 2001: 911). Discontinued during the Cultural Revolution, the apparatus was reestablished during the reform period and gradually expanded into the five Overseas Chinese structures, namely the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (*qiaowu bangongshi* 僑務辦公室, OCAO; the China Zhigong Party; the Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the National People’s Congress; the Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan Compatriots and Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC); and the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC). Liaising with diasporic organisations constituted and still constitutes a key element of this system (Liu and van Dongen 2016).

Since the 1980s, the three main goals of Overseas Chinese work have been economic modernisation, reunification with Taiwan, and improving ties between China and the world through media, education, and engagement with Chinese organisations abroad (Thunø 2018: 187-8, 193). During the 1990s, when policies shifted from economic development and the rehabilitation of returnees and their relatives toward liaising with the new migrants, this engagement was stepped up with the “going out” and “inviting in” policy. OCAO representatives and ACFROC delegations regularly met with leaders of voluntary associations abroad and invited them to China, often strengthening ties with emigration areas (*qiaoxiang* 僑鄉) (Thunø 2001: 922-5; Liu and van Dongen 2016: 815-9). With the spread of new types of associations globally since the 1990s, China liaised with them more systematically. To this end, the OCAO and the China Overseas Exchange Association (*Zhongguo haiwai jiaoliu xuehui* 中國海外交流學會) established the World Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations (*shijie Huaqiao Huaren shetuan lianyi dahui* 世界華僑華人社團聯誼大會). The biyearly meetings of the latter since 2000 gather representatives of diaspora associations globally. They also meet with Chinese officials to discuss major advances in diaspora policies (Liu and van Dongen 2016: 818). In the new millennium, these liaison efforts have also served knowledge-intensive development, such as the establishment of hi-tech parks, STEM laboratories, and other research and development facilities (ibid.: 816).

A 2018 speech by Zhu Huiling 朱慧玲, the director of the Office of the China Overseas Exchange Association and deputy director of the OCAO, provides relevant insight into recent priorities in diaspora policies and the continued role of diasporic organisations. Eight projects are highlighted, namely: developing Overseas Chinese associations; setting up Chinese service centres; cultural exchange; Overseas Chinese education; establishing high-tech innovation zones under the aegis of the OCAO and local governments; using food to advertise Chinese culture; promoting traditional Chinese medicine; and lastly, building an inclusive and integrated Overseas Chinese affairs information and service platform.³

3. Tokyo Chinese Service Centre website (new), “在日華僑華人必知的海外惠僑工程, 與你息息相關!” (*Zai Ri Huaqiao Huaren bizhi de haiwai huiqiao gongcheng, yu ni xixi xiangguan!* The overseas project benefitting Overseas Chinese that Chinese in Japan must know about is closely linked to you!), 23 March 2018, <https://www.chinesecenter.jp/news20180323> (accessed on 28 July 2021).

Since the 2000s, given their expansion, efforts have been made to integrate Overseas Chinese organisations across areas, countries, and even transnationally. More of the global conventions that mark this integration process have also been hosted in China (Zhuang 2020: 55, 59, 61). At the same time, however, these organisations have also obtained a stronger economic function, and ties with local governments have been bolstered (*ibid.*: 55). Indeed, in the twenty-first century, local Chinese governments are behind the foundation of Chinese organisations abroad, and these organisations serve local or national economic or knowledge advancement agendas. More specifically, whereas organisations such as chambers of commerce used to be founded by local Chinese traders, in the last two decades, homeland Chinese governments at various levels – ranging from provinces to cities – have been the driving force behind their establishment. The latter have also come to function as a platform for foreign trade and trade with local areas in China rather than as a platform to protect trade interests (*ibid.*: 56). Similarly, in a recent study of new business organisations in three Southeast Asian countries, Ren and Liu (2022) note the establishment of business associations cooperating with local Chinese governments.

Another relevant evolution is that some chambers of commerce are no longer founded on the basis of 同鄉會 *tongxianghui* – associations of those from the same town, village, or province. This also demonstrates the clear economic function of some of the new organisations, such as the Shenzhen Chamber of Commerce (*ibid.*: 57). Most new migrant organisations are either *tongxianghui* or chambers of commerce because of divisions in the new migrant community in terms of education levels, beliefs, and interests, which leads the *tongxianghui* to act as unifiers. We should add that the latter are not necessarily based on historical linguistic or geographical divisions, but that, in a more pragmatic fashion, they can also mirror current administrative units in the PRC (Nyíri 2007: 109, 122).

Relevant for our purpose is also that countries or regions with large Overseas Chinese student populations – such as the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, and Europe – have set up chambers of commerce as a platform for foreign trade and information exchange. Also, especially large eastern and southeastern Chinese provinces such as Jiangsu, Shandong, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Fujian, as well as large inner provinces such as Hunan, use them to support the “going out” strategy for economic development (Zhuang 2020: 56-9). Although Zhuang is mostly concerned with chambers of commerce, the same principles also apply to other organisations.

New Chinese migrant organisations in Japan and the NOCACEJ

So how have these shifts unfolded in a Japanese context? To answer this question, we first need to turn to the history of Chinese migration to Japan and the respective community organisations. Chinese had been present in Japan for centuries, but with colonial migration Koreans and Chinese became the two largest immigrant groups (Shao 2017: 148). Chinese maritime traders increased in number after the signing of the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty in 1871. Between 1895 and 1945, the main group consisted of Chinese students and intellectuals eager to learn from Japan

after the Meiji reforms (Jia 2019: 122-4). Hence, during this early period, the main organisations were trade organisations, chambers of commerce, federations, and political organisations established by students and intellectuals (Cui 2010: 295-305; Jia 2019: 120-5). After the foundation of the PRC in 1949, migration from China to Japan virtually ended. Although Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations were normalised in 1972, they formally recommenced in 1978 with the Peace and Friendship Treaty.⁴

In the mid-1980s, with its growing economy but shrinking workforce, Japan welcomed immigrants through traineeships, ethnic return migration, attracting foreign students, and multiplying types of labour import (Liu-Farrer 2011: 10). Drawing international students to Japan functioned as a channel and “side door” for labour migration, since many worked during their studies and remained in Japan after graduation (Liu-Farrer 2011: 2-3, 2020: 47). Liao (2012b: 20-1) notes the change in professions of the Chinese in Japan. In 1959, most worked as chefs, in retail and wholesale trade, and running small businesses. By 1984, some also worked in science and technology or as teachers. The highest rise in numbers, however, was in the category of students: between 1986 and 2018, more than 500,000 Chinese went to Japan for study (Liu-Farrer 2020: 48). Based on data from the Japanese Ministry of Justice, the Chinese community in Japan increased from 48,528 (including Taiwanese) or 6.3% of the total number of foreign residents in 1978 to 694,974 (out of which 40,197 from Taiwan) or 33% of the total number of foreign residents in 2014 (Shao 2017: 163).⁵ As of 2018, the largest groups of foreign residents in Japan were Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino, with the Chinese still making up almost 30% of foreign residents in Japan (Liu-Farrer 2020: 40).

Across Southeast Asia, with the rise in new migrants, improved Sino-Southeast Asian ties, and “re-Sinicization” following China’s ascent, Chinese organisations resurfaced from the 1980s onwards (Zhuang 2010: 10). In Japan, new professional organisations of lawyers, doctors, scientists, or engineers emerged during the 1990s, followed by regional chambers of commerce and district associations during the 2000s and 2010s. According to the 中文導報 *Zhongwen daobao*, there were around 200 Chinese organisations in Japan in 2015, including business, economic, hometown, professional, and alumni organisations (Shao 2017: 156-7).⁶ Since this number reflects only the most influential organisations, the actual number is likely much higher.

Although Japan became an “immigrant country” in practice, it continued to hold an “ethno-nationalist self-identity” (Liu-Farrer 2020: 4, 10). Many Chinese chose to naturalise given the difficult relations between the two countries, but also for pragmatic reasons such as easy cross-border movement (Le Bail 2005: 12). Even as citizens or permanent residents in Japan, numbers of which

4. “Major Issues in China-Japan Relations over the Past 40 Years,” *China Daily*, 15 October 2013, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/China-Japan-Relations/2013-10/15/content_17034457.htm (accessed on 27 July 2021).

5. Shao notes that a distinction is made between the People’s Republic of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in terms of new arrivals, but not in terms of registrations by Chinese nationals.

6. “2015在日華人十大新聞(組圖)” (2015 zai Ri Huaren shida xinwen (zutu), Top ten news items about the Chinese in Japan in 2015 (photos)), *Zhongwen daobao* (中文導報), 1 January 2016, <https://www.chubun.com/modules/article/view/article.php/162772/c11> (accessed on 21 June 2021).

increased after the 2000s, many Chinese still identified as new Overseas Chinese (*xin Huaqiao* 新華僑) rather than as migrants. The term new ethnic Chinese (*xin Huaren* 新華人) was also used for Chinese who had obtained Japanese citizenship. Hence, the name of the new umbrella organisation, the New Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese Association in Japan, reflects that many Chinese in Japan did not consider themselves fully part of Japanese society (Liu-Farrer 2011: 135-6).

In 2003, the NOCECAJ was founded to unite the “big eight” associations in Japan.⁷ Important in its foundation was a sending off banquet in February 2003 for Professors Zhu Jianrong 朱建榮 and Wu Zhishen 吳智深, both Overseas Chinese representatives in the CPPCC who were to attend a meeting in Beijing. Present at the banquet were Chinese consul general Zhang Liguang 張立國 and consul Wu Gang 吳剛 and representatives of new Chinese migrant associations in Japan. They discussed the idea of a federation, after which the preparatory work began. The first event that members of the NOCECAJ attended was the 2003 meeting of the World Federation of Overseas Chinese Associations mentioned above (Yang 2015: 206-7).

Article Four of the NOCECAJ’s bylaws mentions the promotion of the interaction between Chinese associations in Japan and the Chinese globally, the improvement of the social position and reputation of the Chinese in Japan, and advancing friendly exchange and cooperation between the two countries.⁸ Membership of the NOCECAJ/AJF increased from eight founding members in 2003 to 47 member organisations in 2015.⁹ As of August 2022, the website of the organisation listed 91 associations under the following categories: local organisations (10); native place associations (20); chambers of commerce (19); professional organisations (31); academic and scientific organisations (8); and university alumni associations (3).¹⁰ These developments correspond with the broader trend that Zhuang (2020) notes, namely that most new migrant organisations are either native place associations or chambers of commerce. In Japan, however, most numerous are professional organisations, which can be explained by the profile of its highly educated Chinese migrants.

As mentioned above, since the 1990s, diaspora engagement has concentrated on knowledge development and talent recruitment rather than economic development *per se*. This includes both initiatives to encourage the return of highly skilled students and “talents” and initiatives to make them serve China from abroad (Zweig and Wang 2013: 594; Liu and van Dongen 2016: 817-9; Thunø 2018: 189-90). Another noteworthy shift is that, in the early 2000s, accompanying China’s ascent and growing confidence, soft power gained currency in official discourse and this became tied to the goal of utilising Chinese abroad as public diplomats (*gonggong waijiao* 公共外交) serving Chinese foreign policy. This signified a major shift from earlier policies, which had been more prudent given the tumultuous history of the Chinese in Southeast Asia and suspicions of political infiltration during the Cold War (Thunø 2018: 184-5, 189, 193-4). Especially since the 2010s, Chinese abroad have been engaged as public diplomats because of their vast numbers, their improved socioeconomic status, and their transnational profiles and networks (Chen 2012: 58-61).

This evolution in diaspora policies is also reflected in the

agenda of the AJF today, which is to advance China and Japan’s development in “economy, culture, and science and technology,” the latter of which includes supporting the return of Chinese students.¹¹ Additionally, the increasing involvement of local Chinese governments is also visible: the NOCECAJ/AJF has collaborated with Chinese provinces and cities to further economic and talent agendas, and especially so with large eastern provinces. For example, in August 2007, with other organisations and the Jiangsu Province personnel department, the NOCECAJ organised a multiple-day event for over a hundred Chinese PhD graduates from Japanese universities that involved attending specialist fora across Jiangsu Province (Yang 2015: 209). More recently, the Chinese PhD Association in Japan, founded in 2013, selected Chinese in Japan to participate in “talent fairs” in cooperation with the Jiangsu OCAO, such as the Kunshan Day Fair in Jiangsu Province on 25 July 2015 (Jia 2019: 154).

The turn towards public diplomacy in Chinese diaspora engagement is also clearly present in the AJF’s discourses and activities. According to the first president of the organisation, Zhou Weisheng 周瑋生, the new generation of Chinese operate as civil ambassadors (*minjian dashi* 民間大使) for Sino-Japanese relations (Yang 2015: 215).¹² This resembles policies by the Ministry of Education in 2016 to rely on students as civil ambassadors to propagandise the “China Dream” (Thunø 2018: 191). Some events in which the NOCECAJ participated could be more symbolic, such as the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the PRC in 2009 in Tokyo, which was attended by thousands of Chinese, Chinese Ambassador Cui Tiankai 崔天凱, and Japanese politicians.¹³

Other events in which the NOCECAJ took part served diplomatic interactions more directly, such as co-organising a welcome reception for then-President Hu Jintao 胡錦濤 in Tokyo on 8 May 2008. Hitherto, Chinese leaders had been received by the “Seven Japan-China Friendship Groups” (*Ri Zhong youhao qi tuanti* 日中友好七團體), but in 2008, the NOCECAJ and three other Chinese associations were present at the reception of President Hu (Yang 2015: 208-11).¹⁴ Improving China’s image can also involve supporting relief efforts in Japan, such as collecting donations and delivering food to disaster areas following the 11 March 2011 earthquake and nuclear disaster (ibid.: 211-4). In brief, the main shifts in diaspora engagement policies – such as unifying diasporic organisations, advancing technological and scientific development,

7. AJF website, “簡介” (*Jianjie*, Introduction), <https://www.ucrj.jp/about-us/introduction> (accessed on 17 July 2021).

8. AJF website, “中文章程” (*Zhongwen zhangcheng*, Regulations in Chinese), <https://www.ucrj.jp/regulations/cn-regulations> (accessed on 17 July 2021).

9. “2015在日華人十大 (...)” (*2015 zai Ri Huaren shida* (...)), Top ten news items about the Chinese (...), op. cit.

10. AJF website, “團體成員” (*Tuanti chengyuan*, Organisation members), <https://www.ucrj.jp/members> (accessed on 17 August 2022).

11. AJF website, “簡介” (*Jianjie*, Introduction), op. cit.

12. AJF website, “中文章程” (*Zhongwen zhangcheng*, Regulations in Chinese), op. cit.

13. Hao Di, “Japanese Overseas Chinese Celebrate the Anniversary,” *Chinaculture.org*, http://en.chinaculture.org/focus/2009-09/15/content_348925.htm (accessed on 22 July 2021).

14. “President Hu Jintao Attends and Addresses a Welcoming Reception Hosted by Seven Japan-China Friendship Groups as well as Four Overseas Chinese Bodies,” www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t433400.htm (accessed on 22 July 2021). The other three associations were the General Federation of Japan-based Chinese, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Japan, and the Chinese Enterprises Association in Japan.

and public diplomacy – as well as the increasing involvement of local governments, are all reflected in the discourses and activities of the NOCECAJ and later AJF.

The “big eight” founding members of the NOCECAJ

This section takes a closer look at the agendas of the eight founding members of the NOCECAJ, which were established over a period of ten years. According to Liao Chiyang, although some are more symbolic and others more functional, all share these five concerns: exchange between members; the progress of Chinese overseas society; China’s development and unification (two of the three main diaspora policy agendas); Sino-Japanese exchange; and advancing global Chinese networks (Liao 2012a: 10-1, 13). In addition, however, we should also note the often regional economic and knowledge advancement interests that these organisations serve. The eight founding associations or “big eight” are, in order of year of establishment (ibid.: 10):

1. Association of Chinese Scientists and Engineers in Japan (ACSEJ), *zai Ri Zhongguo kexue jishuzhe lianmeng* 在日中國科學技術者聯盟 (established in 1993)
2. Association of Chinese Alumni in Japan (ACAJ), *Zhongguo liu Ri tongxuehui* 中國留日同學會 (established in 1995)
3. All-Japan Chinese Doctoral Association (ACDA), *quan Riben Zhongguoren boshi xiehui* 全日本中國人博士協會 (established in 1996)
4. Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Japan (CCCJ), *Riben Zhonghua zongshanghui* 日本中華總商會 (established in 1999)
5. Association of Chinese Lawyers in Japan (ACLJ), *zai Ri Zhongguo lushi lianhehui* 在日中國律師聯合會 (established in 2000)
6. The Western Japan New Overseas Chinese Association (WJNOCA), *xi Riben xin Huaqiao Huaren lianhehui* 西日本新華僑華人聯合會 (established in 2002)
7. The Hokkaido Overseas Chinese Federation (HOFC), *Beihaidao Huaqiao Huaren lianhehui* 北海道華僑華人聯合會 (established in 2003)
8. The Society of Chinese Professors in Japan (SCPJ), *Riben Huaren jiaoshou huiyi* 日本華人教授會議 (established in 2003)

The agendas of scientific and technological development are noticeable in the mission statement of the Association of Chinese Scientists and Engineers in Japan: it promotes scientific and technological exchange between China, Japan, and other countries guided by “pragmatism,” “bridge-building,” and “dedication.”¹⁵ It has organised academic events and exhibitions to assist both governmental and non-governmental groups, including the Ministry of Science and Technology, the OCAO, the ACFROC, and the Chinese Academy of Science.¹⁶ Its website also lists the China-Japan Organisation for High-tech Promotion (*Zhong Ri gaokeji cujin jigou* 中日高科技促進機構), founded in 2009, which supports Sino-Japanese high-tech exchanges, local government and youth exchange programs, the attraction of overseas talent, and scientific,

technological, and information services.¹⁷

The members of the Association of Chinese Alumni in Japan, 40% of whom have PhDs, work at universities, research institutes, and companies in Japan. Among the ACAJ’s activities are holding award ceremonies for outstanding achievements in research and innovation.¹⁸ It also specifically seeks to strengthen collaboration and talent exchange with local governments in China and functions as a platform for Chinese alumni in Japan to return to China and found companies.¹⁹ Also supporting China’s scientific and technological development is the All-Japan Chinese Doctoral Association,²⁰ founded in 1996. Membership is primarily for those with doctorates working at Japanese institutions or companies related to technology improvement. As of December 2019, the Association had 684 members and branches across China.²¹ The ACDA advances academic exchange and research cooperation among its members through academic conferences, journals, and education.²² It also interacts with other organisations, government representatives, and Overseas Chinese affairs (*qiaowu* 僑務) officials, again often at local government levels, to develop China and Japan’s high-tech science and technology policies. For example, the December 2019 annual meeting of the ACDA in Tokyo was attended by representatives of the Shenzhen Economic and Trade Representative Office in Japan, the former director of SAFEA (State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs), and representatives of the Japan office of the China International Talent Exchange Association. Similarly, it has engaged with diplomats and local *qiaowu* officials to advance Sino-Japanese scientific and technological exchange. For example, between August and October 2015, it interacted with, among others, the Chinese Embassy in Japan, the director of the Bureau of Foreign Experts Affairs in Tianjin, and *qiaowu* officials in Jiangsu (Jia 2019: 154).²³

The mission of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Japan (CCCJ), founded in 1999 in Tokyo, is to boost regional economic development and “to build an economic exchange platform

15. ACSEJ website, “章程” (Zhangcheng, Regulations), www.npo-ohp.com/acsej/cn/page.php?id=22 (accessed on 24 July 2021).

16. ACSEJ website, “科盟歷史” (Kemeng lishi, History of the ACSEJ), www.npo-ohp.com/acsej/cn/page.php?id=13 (accessed on 27 July 2021).

17. China-Japan Organisation for High-tech Promotion (OHP) website, “Daihyō-sha aisatsu” (Greetings from the representative), www.npo-ohp.com (accessed on 29 July 2021).

18. ACAJ website, “中國留日同學會代表拜會中華人民共和國駐大阪總領事薛劍” (Zhongguo liu Ri tongxuehui daibiao baihui Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhu Daban zonglingshi Xue Jian, Representatives of Chinese Alumni Association in Japan meet with PRC Consul General Xue Jian in Osaka), <http://acajapan.org> (accessed on 10 August 2022).

19. ACAJ website, “Kaichō aisatsu” (Chairman’s greeting), <http://acajapan.org> (accessed on 20 July 2021).

20. The English translation on the website is “Chinese Academy of Science and Engineering in Japan” (CASEJ). The literal translation is used here to avoid confusion with the ACSEJ.

21. ACDA website, “協會章程” (Xiehui zhangcheng, Association’s regulations), www.casej.jp/cn/html/xhzc.html (accessed on 18 June 2021); “全日本中國人博士協會2019年會在東京舉辦” (Quan Riben Zhongguoren boshi xiehui 2019 nianhui zai Dongjing juban, 2019 annual meeting of the All-Japan Chinese Doctoral Association held in Tokyo), *Zhongguo qiaowang* (中國僑網), 26 December 2019, www.chinaqw.com/m/hqhr/2019/12-26/241088.shtml?from=groupmessage&isappinstalled=0 (accessed on 18 June 2021).

22. ACDA website, “協會章程” (Xiehui zhangcheng, Association’s regulations), op. cit.

23. “全日本中國人博2019 (...)” (Quan Riben Zhongguoren boshi xiehui 2019 (...), 2019 annual meeting of the All-Japan Chinese Doctoral (...)), op. cit.

between Overseas Chinese in Japan, China, and the world” (Liao 2012b: 24).²⁴ As of April 2019, it had more than 320 members, with more than 70 Japanese companies as supporting members. Besides its Tokyo headquarters, the chamber has regional branches in Kansai and Niigata.²⁵ It cooperates with organisations in various fields and especially with Overseas Chinese economic organisations (ibid.). The Association of Chinese Lawyers in Japan is a professional association whose mission is “to increase professional quality” and “to advance international exchange.”²⁶ It has also been involved in the service agenda (discussed further below) by offering free semi-annual legal consultation meetings to the Chinese in Japan, assisting them with issues pertaining to divorce, visas, or economic disputes. In addition, it also contributes to core policy agendas such as promoting “the construction and reunification of the motherland” and advancing Sino-Japanese friendship.²⁷

The purpose of the Western Japan New Overseas Chinese Association, based in Osaka, is “patriotism, settling down, unity and mutual assistance, and peace and friendship.” Apart from the official diaspora policy goal of peaceful reunification, it aims to unite the various associations in western Japan and to build a “‘harmonious community’ of Chinese overseas.” It also wants to create an exchange platform for the Chinese in western Japan and to advance Sino-Japanese friendship.²⁸ The Hokkaido Overseas Chinese Federation strengthens mutual cooperation and exchange among the Chinese in Hokkaido, the improvement of their social position, and regional economic development. Additionally, it supports China-Japan exchange and both countries’ economic, cultural, scientific, and technological development.²⁹

The agenda of public diplomacy is most clearly manifested in the goals and activities of the Society of Chinese Professors in Japan, founded by Zhu Jianrong 朱建榮, an academic with a background in political science (Liao 2012a: 17). Formed against the backdrop of the complex history of Sino-Japanese relations, Zhu compares the Society to the Committee of 100 (C-100, *bairenhui* 百人會) in the United States, founded in 1989 by Chinese-American elites to advance the social participation of Chinese Americans and Sino-American ties (ibid.: 28-9).³⁰ As of December 2020, the Society had around 110 members from science, engineering, agriculture, and the humanities and social sciences.³¹ Most members have PhDs and are university professors, but some are researchers at think tanks, independent critics, and writers. Although most are mainland Chinese with Chinese nationality, a few are from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Some are “old” Overseas Chinese, second-generation Chinese with Japanese nationality, and ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia (ibid.: 14-20).

The Society has several research committees that reflect its core concerns: Chinese politics and economy, Sino-Japanese relations, the development of western and northern China, Chinese talents, information technology, and Chinese culture (ibid.: 14). Like other associations, it advances unification, as well as Sino-Japanese friendship.³² Since 2004, the Society has organised annual symposia covering contemporary concerns, which included Covid-19, United States-China relations and globalisation, and Sino-Japanese relations in 2020 and 2021.³³ The Society has interacted with major companies such as Toyota, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, former foreign prime ministers, ambassadors, the Chinese embassy

in Japan, and representatives of the State Council. It also sends annual delegations to China, and officials have attended its main events since 2003. The main communication channel is, however, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with which it has held both formal and informal meetings (ibid.: 23-6; Jia 2019: 152).

In brief, the eight founding members of the NOCEAJ/AJF serve scientific, technological, and cultural exchange, the return of talents, and the creation of an information and service platform. Diplomatic involvement is also clearly present in the agendas of some of the organisations, but the extent to which associations such as the SCPJ are engaged in China-Japan relations is unique and tied to the history of Sino-Japanese relations. There is a strong emphasis on Sino-Japanese friendship in the bylaws of the respective associations, and many seek to contribute to Japanese society and to elevate the image of the Chinese in Japan. As noted, although these organisations serve official diaspora engagement agendas, because of their connection to the development of science and technology and knowledge advancement, many of them promote regional or local economic interests and interact especially with local governments and a plethora of other local actors.

Serving the Chinese diaspora: The Tokyo Chinese Service Centre

One final significant change since the 2010s that merits discussion concerns the weight on serving the diaspora in official Chinese discourse and diaspora engagement. This constitutes part of a broader shift since the 2000s towards the protection of Chinese nationals abroad and the various initiatives and actions undertaken during natural disasters and, more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic, in the context of China’s economic rise and its attempts to gain political leverage (Thunø 2018: 191-202; Zhang 2019: 27-50; see Leung in this special feature). Apart from rescue missions since the early 2000s, these initiatives include the protection of businesses owned by Chinese in various locales, and even the protection of Chinese tourists in major European cities (Thunø 2018). Since 2018, with the integration of the OCAO into the United Front Work Department (UFDW), unity and service, and the diplomatic role of Chinese overseas have received even more emphasis.

24. CCCJ website, “關於我們” (*Guanyu women*, About us), www.cccj.jp/?mid=1&lan=zh (accessed on 23 June 2021).

25. CCCJ website, “*Kaichō aisatsu*” (Chairman’s greeting), www.cccj.jp/?mid=8&lan=ja (accessed on 23 June 2021).

26. ACLJ website, “歡迎訪問” (*Huanying fangwen*, Welcome), <https://acljsite.wordpress.com> (accessed on 25 June 2021).

27. ACLJ website, “歡迎訪問” (*Huanying fangwen*, Welcome), op. cit.; ACLJ website, “律師會章程” (*Lüshihui zhangcheng*, ACLJ regulations), <https://acljsite.wordpress.com/aclj%E7%AB%A0%E7%A8%8B> (accessed on 25 June 2021).

28. WJNOCA website, “*Tadashi yaku*” (Terms), <https://www.ocajapan.org> (accessed on 28 June 2021).

29. HOCCF website, “*Kaisoku*” (Regulations), <http://hkdkakyokajin.com/member/constitution> (accessed on 30 June 2021).

30. Committee of 100 website, “Mission and History,” <https://www.committee100.org/mission-history> (accessed on 26 July 2021).

31. SCPJ website, “*Daihyō aisatsu*” (Message from the President), <http://scpj.jp/?p=508> (accessed on 18 June 2021).

32. SCPJ website, “*Kaisoku*” (Regulations), op. cit.

33. SCPJ website, “*Kore made no katsudō*” (Activities so far), <http://scpj.jp/?cat=14> (accessed on 18 June 2021).

For example, in a 2019 speech, Tan Tianxing 譚天星, the deputy director of the UFWD, highlighted the unity between those in China, Chinese overseas, and their relatives, and unified leadership and unified management of Overseas Chinese work. Tan also referred to serving Overseas Chinese and safeguarding their rights and interests. Chinese overseas were further urged to continue to study Xi Jinping 習近平's thought on the UFWD and to become "the doers of Overseas Chinese affairs" (*qiaowu gongzuo de shiganjia* 僑務工作的實幹家).³⁴ As Ding Sheng notes, the very integration of the OCAO into the UFWD itself also "underscores the growing importance of Chinese diaspora as China's new diplomatic leverage and platform" (Ding 2022: 65).

The agenda of serving the Chinese diaspora is also visibly advanced in the Japanese context. In an April 2021 speech, re-elected AJF President He Naihe 賀乃和 referred to "serving the Chinese overseas," and ten new committees were established to serve the Chinese in Japan and "to play a greater role in advancing Sino-Japanese exchanges."³⁵ Similarly, the fourth president of the Federation, Chen Daiheng 陳玳珩, had emphasised earlier that the Federation was a service organisation (Yang 2015: 217-8).

The institutional counterpart of the service discourse are the Chinese service centres that have been established and partly funded by the OCAO and the China Overseas Exchange Association since 2014. The Chinese Service Centre in Tokyo was inaugurated in 2014 and is jointly operated by the AJF and the Tokyo Overseas Chinese Association (*Dongjing Huaqiao zonghui* 東京華僑總會). It was the second such centre globally, after that in San Francisco. According to its website:

The "Chinese Service Centre" is a non-governmental (*minjian* 民間), non-profit service organisation for Overseas Chinese managed by Overseas Chinese (*qiaobao* 僑胞). It relies on Overseas Chinese associations and is geared towards all Overseas Chinese and the participation of all parties. It operates according to the law and is supported by the government (of the country of residence and the homeland). Its mission is: "To adhere to the principles of 'unity, mutual aid, service, and dedication' and to develop the functions of 'care, assistance, and integration.'"³⁶

As can be seen from the above, the centre promotes unity and integration and is oriented towards service and care, which also includes the improvement of the service level of Overseas Chinese agencies.³⁷ In March 2021, He Naihe and Chen Longjin 陳隆進, President of the Tokyo Overseas Chinese Association, were elected as directors.³⁸ Advancing unity and integration, the centre sponsors sports events such as table tennis competitions or commemorative events. It furthermore disseminates information on festivals, symposia, visits of Chinese delegations or *qiaowu* officials, or activities pertaining to Chinese associations in Japan.³⁹ The service agenda includes practical matters such as assisting with visa and passport applications.⁴⁰ Some of the service aspects of the Tokyo Chinese Service Centre involve cooperation with NOCECAJ/AJF members. For instance, in May 2016, the centre assisted the Chinese Lawyers Association in Japan with its free legal consultation meeting for Chinese in Japan on issues regarding visas, real estate,

labour and contract disputes, and accidents.⁴¹ Furthermore, as other articles in this special feature demonstrate, the service agenda is also enacted at the local level, sometimes through virtual service platforms, with local governments functioning as innovators rather than as passive recipients (see Bofulin in this special feature).

Finally, like some of the NOCECAJ/AJF members, the centre supports the creation of an integrated digital platform for diaspora engagement. Often, posts on its website are reposts of articles featured in the leading magazine *Zhongwen daobao*, which, together with 日本新華僑報 *Riben xin Huaqiao bao*, was founded in Japan during the 1980s to inform its Chinese community (Liao 2012a: 26). The centre's website also includes hyperlinks to other media reports, thereby guiding readers towards Overseas Chinese media such as 海外網 *Haiwai wang* or media linked to diaspora policies such as 中國僑網 *Zhongguo qiaowang*. The latter is the main website of the 華聲報 *Huasheng bao* newspaper, which has been integrated into the China News Agency from 2005 onwards. It provides information to Chinese overseas globally and functions as an information platform for Overseas Chinese policies in China (OCAO Overseas Chinese Work Cadre School 2006: 245-8). Apart from these cross-references, however, there is no clear description of how this integrated digital platform is envisioned.

34. Tokyo Chinese Service Centre website (new), "譚天星: 關於僑務工作基本經驗的一些認識" (*Tan Tianxing: Guanyu qiaowu gongzuo jiben jingyan de yixie renshi*, Tan Tianxing: Some insights on the basic experience of Overseas Chinese affairs), 10 December 2019, <https://www.chinesecenter.jp/news20201210> (accessed on 28 July 2021).
35. AJF website, "全日本華僑華人社團聯合會理事會換屆改選第十一屆理事會第一次全體會議 (網絡) 成功召開" (*Quan Riben Huaqiao Huaren shetuan lianhehui lishihui huanjie gaixuan di shiyi jie lishi hui di yi ci quanti huiyi (wangluo) chenggong zhaokai*, First plenary meeting (online) of the eleventh council of the AJF for the reelection of the council successfully held), 10 April 2021, <https://www.ucrj.jp/news20210409> (accessed on 17 July 2021).
36. Tokyo Chinese Service Centre website (old), "關於東京華助中心" (*Guanyu Dongjing huazhu zhongxin*, About the Tokyo CSC), <https://www.chinesecenter-jp.com> (accessed on 23 June 2021).
37. Tokyo Chinese Service Centre website (new), "關於我們" (*Guanyu women*, About us), <https://www.chinesecenter.jp/about-us> (accessed on 23 June 2021).
38. Tokyo Chinese Service Centre website (new), "東京華助中心換屆, 賀乃和任代表理事" (*Dongjing huazhu zhongxin huanjie, He Naihe ren daibiao lishi*, Tokyo CSC election, He Naihe appointed as representative director), 16 May 2021, <https://www.chinesecenter.jp/news20210323> (accessed on 28 November 2022); AJF website, "賀乃和會長連任致辭" (*He Naihe huizhang lianren zhici*, President He Naihe's reelection speech), <https://www.ucrj.jp/about-us/message> (accessed on 23 June 2021).
39. Tokyo Chinese Service Centre website (new), "新聞公告" (*Xinwen gonggao*, News announcements), <https://www.chinesecenter.jp/category/news-center> (accessed on 23 June 2021).
40. Tokyo Chinese Service Centre website (new), "東京華助中心提醒: 關於中國駐日本大使館新年全面實行預約辦證的說明" (*Dongjing huazhu zhongxin tixing: Guanyu Zhongguo zhu Riben dashiguan xinnian quanmian shixing yuyue banzheng de shuoming*, Reminder from the Tokyo Overseas Chinese Service Centre: Explanation regarding the Chinese Embassy in Japan fully implementing visa applications per appointment during the New Year), 9 December 2018, <https://www.chinesecenter.jp/news20181209> (accessed on 28 July 2021).
41. Tokyo Chinese Service Centre website (new), "東京華助中心協辦面向華人的免費法律諮詢會" (*Dongjing huazhu zhongxin xieban mianxiang Huaren de mianfei falu zixunhui*, Tokyo Chinese Service Centre co-organises free legal consultation meeting for Chinese), 29 May 2016, <https://www.chinesecenter.jp/news20160529> (accessed on 28 July 2021).

Concluding remarks

This article has analysed how the broader trend of the growing interaction between local Chinese governments and voluntary organisations – the latter serving economic and diplomatic agendas – and the increasing unification of organisations has played out in Japan. Its main findings are that in Japan, the economic aspect mainly takes the form of supporting talent recruitment in STEM areas, whereas the diplomatic aspect centres around the betterment of Sino-Japanese relations and the image of the Chinese in Japan. As elsewhere, however, there is a clear interaction between local Chinese governments and OCAO offices at provincial and city levels and these organisations. As argued, these multiscale interactions complicate the notion of a singular diaspora state and urge us to move beyond understanding diaspora engagement in terms of passive co-option. Models based on “state-led transnationalism” or “networked governance,” despite their merits, obscure the facet of local agency and especially that of interactions between multiple actors. Hence, “assemblage” (Iskander 2015; Dickinson 2017) is especially pertinent as an approach given the increasing economic and knowledge advancement function of the organisations involved

and the role that cities, provinces, and other locales play in this process. More studies are needed on the multiple other actors involved in the reorientation of Chinese new migrant organisations towards economic and knowledge development and on how this differs from or overlaps with the role of migrant organisations in diaspora engagement in other economic, political, and geographical contexts.

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