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#41 Chinese Civil Society in the Netherlands and Europe: Trends, Influences, and Challenges

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Key Takeaways

- **Emergence and motivations:** After two decades of implementation and transformation, this is a critical moment to reassess what CDF is becoming and how it supports countries seeking to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.
- **Structural and operational features:** These organizations vary widely in scale and formality, from officially registered NGOs to informal, volunteer-based groups. Despite their diversity, CCSOs tend to operate through decentralized, horizontal structures and emphasize flexibility, care, and internal trust over bureaucratic growth.
- **Networking:** CCSOs form dense interpersonal and transnational networks through multi-role participation, shared activities, and digital platforms. Algorithmic exposure also plays a growing role in outreach. Digital media are both enabling tools and sources of risk, shaping how organizations build visibility while managing security concerns.
- **Civic impact:** CCSOs contribute to social integration, civic education, and the well-being of Chinese migrants. They also reshape European perceptions of Chinese communities and participate in international human rights advocacy. Their impact extends beyond ethnic enclaves into broader civic and transnational spaces.
- **Challenges:** Key barriers include limited access to funding, high turnover, political risks, difficulty navigating European institutional systems, and a shrinking civic space in increasingly nationalist host societies.

Recommendations

1. **Enhance funding access:** Lower entry barriers for immigrant-led and unregistered groups by offering flexible, operational, and small-scale funding opportunities tailored to CCSOs.
2. **Promote organizational continuity:** Support capacity-building in volunteer management, hybrid staffing models, and civic infrastructure development.
3. **Improve legal and digital security protections:** Address the specific needs of civic actors from authoritarian regimes by safeguarding personal privacy, resisting unnecessary surveillance, and fostering safe environments for expression.
4. **Bridge administrative knowledge gaps:** Develop bilingual, community-based resources and training on legal registration, tax compliance, and public participation for new migrant groups.

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5. **Affirm civic inclusion:** Recognize CCSOs as integral to integration and diversity policy, and resist securitizing Chinese civic engagement based on geopolitical tensions.
6. **Support translocal solidarity:** Facilitate cross-community partnerships and co-designed platforms for civic engagement, dialogue, and mutual learning between migrant and host-society actors.
7. **Address structural misrecognition:** Acknowledge the internal diversity of the Chinese diaspora and avoid essentializing or Cold War-style framings of Chinese communities and activism.

Executive Summary

This report examines the emergence, structure, networks, impact, and challenges of new Chinese civil society organizations (CCSOs) in Europe, with a primary focus on the Netherlands. It explores how these organizations—distinct from traditional Chinese diaspora associations—have developed since the 2010s in response to shifting migration patterns, political pressures, and digital infrastructure. Based on 32 in-depth interviews with CCSO initiators and participants, this study provides a grounded account of the civic landscape shaped by Mainland Chinese migrants in contemporary Europe.