

Iran China Business and Financing Co.

January 2023

I. Findings

1. Identity

Iran China Business and Financing Co. (also known as "*Iran-China Business Council*" and later "*Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce*") is one of the primary trade and business coordinators and influencers concerning bilateral business engagement between private and semi-governmental companies in Iran and China.ⁱ This entity, initially named "*Iran-China Business Council*," was created by 65 influential Iranian businessmen in 2001; it later changed its name to "*Iran-China Business Chamber*." To date, Iran's commercial exchanges with China have reached USD 20 billion. During the visit of PRC President Xi Jinping to Iran last year, the two sides set a goal of increasing that to a level of USD 160 billion. Iran is China's top partner in the world in the export of oil, petroleum products, and minerals.ⁱⁱ

2. Suspected kleptocratic connections and activities

One of the key founders of this chamber was *Asadollah Asgaroladi*, one of the most influential and trusted businessmen affiliated with the ruler of the Islamic Republic.ⁱⁱⁱ *Asadullah*'s brother *Habibullah Asgaroladi* was a minister of commerce in several governments after the revolution. He was one of the three people appointed by *Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini* to the board of trustees of the "*Setad-e Emam (EIKO)*." This put him a position of access to and influence with top leaders, which in turn granted him considerable power of his own. *Islamic Mutalfa Party* was/is a conservative party and one of the supporters of the traditional ruling clerics.^{iv} However, they used to have more impact on the system in the early decades of the Islamic Republic than in the last twenty years. The chamber launched with a membership of 65 traders but has expanded over the years and currently has around 7,000 members.^v

Its Chinese counterpart

The Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce works with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) [中国国际贸易促进委员会]; or China Chamber of International Commerce (CCOIC) [中国国际商会]. Founded in 1952, CCPIT is nominally a "nongovernmental organization" engaged in trade promotion that "undertakes relevant work and accepts the guidance of the government," but has also been identified as a United Front organization by the U.S. government since at least 1957.^{vi,vii} CCPIT has been led by former Vice Minister of Commerce Ren Hongbin since January 2022.^{viii} It has a national-level body, regional affiliates within China (which are able to engage foreign partners) and overseas offices (though none in Iran itself).

CCPIT signed an MOU with the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Mines in April 2002.^{ix} Its most recent national-level interaction was the China-Iran Online Economic and Trade Seminar, convened 02 February 2022.^x ICCCI has also engaged CCPIT's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region Committee [中国国际贸易促进委员宁夏回族自治区委员会], most recently in a June 2022 "online matchmaking" event.^{xi} That same month, media reported that the first inter-modal freight train left Ningxia for Iran via the Caspian.^{xii}

Activities and area of work

Based on available information, ICCCI currently provides services to its members and associates in the following areas:

• Maintaining an economic database of the laws and regulations of the two countries; • Holding commercial events and exhibitions with the aim of creating economic opportunities for the two countries; • Communication with the decision-making authorities of the two countries; • Identifying challenges or conflicts in the economic relations between the two countries;	• Providing facilities for joint investment between the two countries; • Identifying and providing solutions to support the healthy development of business relationships; • Improving members' awareness through training; • Increasing mutual understanding communities and society of the parties; • Making continuous quantitative and qualitative improvement of the activities of the entity.
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Internal structure and membership levels

According to its bylaws, the entity is managed by a board of directors elected by the members. Membership in this chamber has three levels—standard member, supervising member, and honorary member. Only standard members have the right to vote in the board election.

There are three steps required to join the entity:

- Presenting a "trade card" (issued by the Ministry of Commerce for businessmen and businesses who want to do business in Iran).
- Payment of the membership fee.
- Acceptance of the entity's bylaws.

In the internal structure of this organization, various committees and commissions are operational that provide services to the members.

The committees and commissions of this entity are as follows:

● Investment Commission ● Industry and Mining Commission ● Transport and Commerce Commission ● Regulation and Arbitration Committee ● Advertising and Publications, Marketing and Exhibitions Committee	● Visa Committee ● Membership Committee ● Hong Kong Committee ● Taiwan Committee
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Leadership and key personnel

The board of directors and its chairman are critical in its primary activities. *Asadollah Asgaroladi* was the chairman of this organization from its establishment until his death in September 2019. Current board members are:

➤ <i>Majidreza Hariri</i> - Chairman ➤ <i>Mehdi Chengizi Ashtiani</i> - Vice President ➤ <i>Mustafa Maliki Tehrani</i> - Second Vice President ➤ <i>Yusuf Bapiri</i>: Treasurer ➤ <i>Roya Waziri</i>: Member	➤ <i>Afshin Amini</i>: Member ➤ <i>Farhad Mansobi</i>: Member ➤ <i>Saeed Eshtiaghi</i>: Member ➤ <i>Bahram Maleki Dalarstaghi</i>: Member ➤ <i>Meysam Saniifar</i>: Inspector
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Other than *Majidreza Hariri*, the other members of this board of directors have very little presence in the media. However, the research team examined a few of these individuals for this investigation to determine what other business entities are involved. The information gathered through open-source data^{xiii} can be a basis for further research.

Majidreza Hariri - Chairman

Majidreza Hariri (National Identification Number 0046365151) has been the entity's chairman since 25 December 2021. He had served the entity as an "inspector" (internal compliance and anti-corruption monitor) since 22 February 2003, and for at least two terms. While at the entity, he became the board chairman of another company named the "*Non-Commercial Institute of Iran Handicrafts Exporters Association*." He has been involved with this company since 18 January 2016. On 13 March 2010, he was chosen as vice-inspector for the "*Chamber of Commerce of Iran and Canada*." Only a little information is available about his activities there, nor how these interconnections might benefit each company. Before that, on 04 November 2004, he registered another company named "*Eastern Trade International Technology Consultants*" and served as the Executive Director.^{xiv} Only a little information is available about his activities there, except for three other names that were his partners in this company.

Yusuf Bapiri: Treasurer

Yusuf Bapiri (National Identification Number 2880320607) is the entity's treasurer. He was also involved in a few other companies. For example, on 12 September 2011, he registered a company named "*Bapiran Noor Company*," in which he served as the board chairman and executive director. Then, on 05 June 2018, he became the board chairman of "*Norin Sepehr Jam Company*." Only a little information is available about his activities in these companies.

More individuals are involved in the subject company's leadership and some publicly available information can be examined. However, the challenge is that the registration system in Iran lacks transparency, and there could be different layers of companies and sub-companies doing other things. Information regarding those subordinate or overlapping entities are generally not publicly accessible.

3. Significance

Public opinion in Iran, in general, is familiar with the name of this institution as one of the organizations linked to national leaders. The entity usually has one individual serving as the face of the entity to the general public. Initially, *Asadollah Asgaroladi* was the face of the entity. When *Asadullah Asgaroladi* was alive and active in the media, public opinion was familiar with the activities of this group concerning China due to the strong connection he had with powerful national institutions. After his passing, the public's sensitivity to these activities decreased. Currently, the organization's chairman (*Majidreza Hariri*) is the public face of the organization and is covered by TV programs, newspapers, and news agencies in Iran.

Notably, in the last two decades, the managers of this company, in their public positions, have at times been critical of the Iranian government's economic policies. For example, they have consistently supported Iran's joining the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which the government is resisting, perhaps because of the requirement that it first reform relevant laws to meet FATF transparency standards so that Iran can be removed from the FATF blacklist. That said, ICCI leaders' motivation is profit rather than reform. They believe sanctions imposed in response to policies of the Islamic Republic have increased the costs of commercial transactions between Iran and China, thus decreasing profits available to ICCI members. They have found workarounds, but these incur costs. It is safe to say that there are undoubtedly corrupt activities at various levels associated with companies that work with China.

II. Methodology

1. Source utilized

Reference sources for this report are open sources. Among them are national and local news agencies and newspapers, official newspapers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and websites of cited companies. In some cases, information from interviews published in domestic media has been used.

2. Source limitations

Financial reports and most of the project contracts of the companies related to the *Iran China Business and Financing Co.* are not available to the public. This restriction causes many aspects of the practices of the people and companies of this network to remain hidden.

If it were possible to obtain some financial reports, contracts, and partners of these companies, that will clarify more aspects of how this network works and who is involved.

III. Appendix

1- List of individuals and companies that work in the field of Iran and China trades.

Entities/Individuals	Other possible spelling/name	Links
Iran China Business and Financing Co.	Iran-China Chamber of Commerce and Industries	https://iccci.ir/
CCPIT is the entity's Chinese counterpart		https://en.ccpit.org/
Majidreza Hariri مجید حریری	Majid Reza Hariri Majid Reza Hariry Majid Hariri Majid Hariry	
Mehdi Changizi Ashtiani مهدی چنگیزی آشتیانی	Mehdi Changizi Mehdi Ashtiani Mehdi Changizy Mahdi Changizi Mahdi Ahstiani Mehdi Changiziashtiani	
Mostafa Maleki Tehrani مصطفی مالکی تهرانی	Mostafa Malekitehrani Mostafa Tehrani	
Yousef Bapiri یوسف بابیری	Yousif Bapiry	
Roya Vaziri رویا وزیر	Roya Vaziry	
Afshin Amini افشین امینی	Afshin Aminey Afsheen Amini	
Farhad Mansoori فرهاد منصوری	Farhad Mansouri Farhad Mansoory	
Saeid Eshtiaghi سعید اشتیاقی	Saeid Ishtiaqi Saeed Eshtiaqi Saeed Ishtiaghi	
Bahram Maleki Delarestaghi بهرام ملکی دلارستانی	Bahram Maleki Bahram Delarestaghi Bahram Delarestaqi Bahram Maleki Bahram Malekidelarestaghi Bahram Malekidelarestaqi	

Meysam Sanieifar میثم صانعی‌فر	Meysam Saneefar Meisam Saneefar	
Ali Wala Trading Company	Ali Vala Trading Company Alivala Trading Company	https://www.alivala.com/
Hossein Javid حسین جاوید	Hosein Javied	
Haj Mehdi Yazdkhast حاج مهدی یزدخواست	Mehdi Yazdkhast Haji Yazdkhast	
Asan Tejarat Trading Company	Asan Trading Company	
Spadana Trading Company	Spanta Trading Company	
Sepahan Hamrah Company	Sepahanhamrah Company	
Vanix Trading Company	Wanix Trading Company	

ⁱ <https://iccci.ir/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.eghtesadonline.com/n/39N5>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191843266.001.0001/acref-9780191843266-e-15;jsessionid=92BE30D460885D38D5553F5F3AD19477>

^{iv} Islamic Coalition Party; <https://irandataportal.syr.edu/islamic-coalition-party-motalefeh>

^v <https://iccci.ir/>

^{vi} "中国国际贸易促进委员会章程," China Council for the Promotion of International Trade official website [in Chinese], 04 January 2021, <https://www.ccpit.org/a/20210104/20210104jm4s.htm>

^{vii} Central Intelligence Agency, "The United Front in Communist China," 01 May 1957, Approved For Release under FOIA 24 August 1999 (CIA-RDP78-00915R000600210003-963), <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R000600210003-9.pdf>.

^{viii} Ren Hongbin [任鸿斌, STC: 0117/7703/2430] is Secretary of the CCPIT's Chinese Communist Party Leadership Group and Chairman of the CCPIT. His bio is located at "Ren Hongbin," China Council for the Promotion of International Trade official website [in English], 10 March 2022, <https://en.ccpit.org/infoById/b7b80d2ea05811eca0a60242ac1c0002/10>

^{ix} The "Agreement between the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade and the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines on the Establishment of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce" 《中国国际贸易促进会委员会与伊朗工商矿业商会关于成立伊中联合贸易理事会的协定》 was signed in April 2004. 对外投资合作国别（地区）指南：伊朗（2021 年版） PRC Ministry of Commerce official website [in Chinese], 2021, <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/dl/gbdqzn/upload/yilang.pdf>

^x "Zhang Shaogang, Vice Chairman of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, attended the China-Iran Online Economic and Trade Seminar" China Council for the Promotion of International Trade official website [in English], 23 February 2022, <https://www.ccpit.org/a/20220223/20220223m2fi.html>

^{xi} "2022 宁夏—伊朗企业线上对接会举办," China Council for the Promotion of International Trade official website [in Chinese], 29 June 2022, <https://www.ccpit.org/a/20220629/20220629trfs.html>

^{xii} Global Times English "Ningxia launches first intermodal freight train to Iran via Caspian Sea," 21 Jun 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202206/1268604.shtml>

^{xiii} <http://www.rrk.ir/>

^{xiv} Analyst Note: “Eastern” is often a reference to a China connection, although it would take additional research to definitively establish that.