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EXAMINING HISTORY TO EXPLORE THE FUTURE: FRANCE, THE UNITED STATES, AND CHINA 2050

Franco-Chinese Relations from Yesterday to Tomorrow and the Future of the CCP

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Acknowledgments & Disclaimers

The scenarios in Part 3 are fictional. They were developed for this project as speculative illustrations of potential futures, not as predictions.

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What can be learned from the long and eventful history of the relationship between France and China? To what extent does this history affect the beliefs of the actors who formulate and implement France's China policy? What scenarios can be conceived in France about the future of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and relations between France and China? This paper provides the beginning of an answer to these three questions. Our approach is original, combining a historical viewpoint (because nothing perceived or decided today is totally free from the past) with anticipation (because orientations largely rely on constructed images of the future).



Introduction

What can be learned from the long and eventful history of the relationship between France and China? To what extent does this history affect the beliefs of the actors who formulate and implement France's China policy? What scenarios can be conceived in France about the future of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and relations between France and China? This paper provides the beginning of an answer to these three questions. Our approach is original, combining a historical viewpoint (because nothing perceived or decided today is totally free from the past) with anticipation (because orientations largely rely on constructed images of the future).

This paper features three main sections, each of which addresses one of the questions mentioned above. The first section focuses on history. It highlights, mostly from recent history (the 19th and 20th centuries),¹ the foundational events of the Franco-Chinese relationship. These are the legacies from which France invariably builds any of its Chinese policies. The second section maps the main French actors involved in the elaboration or implementation of what we call France's China policy. The focus is not only on official actors but also on all those (researchers, businessmen, etc.) who contribute in one way or another to this policy or to the representations of China that feed these policies. The third section presents two scenarios for the CCP's future, the first being a success and the second rather a failure. The notions of success and failure are particularly fluid and relative. What one actor considers a success will be experienced as a failure by another. It thus seemed to us that success should simply be understood as the Party's ability to perpetuate its hegemony and extend its power, including beyond its borders. For this last phase, we brought together a dozen French specialists on China for an anticipation exercise aimed at generating multiple scenarios. The methodology used is inspired by the structured analytic techniques developed by Richards J. Heuer.²

1 It is during the last two centuries that most elements structuring relations between France and China were implemented.

2 Structured analytic techniques are devices dedicated to fight the cognitive and organizational biases that lead analysts to make erroneous assumptions. They thus aim to help analysts produce more objective judgments; overcome information overload or incompleteness; and make reasoning more rigorous, coherent, and transparent. The technique used here is alternative futures analysis, which, by identifying the various factors, forces, and dynamics at work, helps extract multiple possible futures from a complex and uncertain situation. This method is particularly appropriate for cases involving multiple variables. Furthermore, this approach makes it possible to think about potential strategic ruptures. See Richards J. Heuer and Randolph H. Pherson, *Structured Analytic Techniques* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2011).

Part 1:

Historical Elements of the Franco-Chinese Relationship

The Relationship before the Communist Takeover

France was late to take an interest in China, lagged several of its competitors, and hardly had the means to fulfill its ambitions, even as it tried to carve out a sphere of influence from its springboard in Indochina.

At the end of the 17th century, France sent scientific Jesuit missions to China and created an East India Company long after the Italians, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and British did. Like other Europeans, France was initially fascinated by the Chinese Empire, whose supposed successes served as criticisms of the French monarchy. Then, from the 19th century onwards, France despised China and perceived it to be immobile, sleepy, and semibarbaric (while admiring its art). Criticism of China appeared as early as the 18th century alongside a lasting Sinophilia in intellectual circles. French philosophers of that time, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, would become references for Chinese reformers at the beginning of the 20th century. The participation of France in the opening of China from 1840–1860 (with the Treaty of Whampoa in 1844 as a founding act) happened in the wake of the English, even though France also took part in the looting of the Summer Palace in 1860. The first Chinese diplomat arrived in Paris in 1878. France obtained concessions (especially in Shanghai), but in the race for leased territories at the end of the 19th century, Guangzhou Wan never had a chance to compete with Hong Kong. The French ceded it in 1946, half a century before the Hong Kong handover. The French diplomatic network in China, which grew to encompass some 20 consulates, lacked human and financial resources.

Trade between France and China was negligible, although it might have been important for certain sectors in Metropolitan France (such as the silk industry in Lyon). Financial and banking activity did develop in the Far East, notably through the Banque de l'Indochine, but it was unable to compete with the British and German networks before 1914. France contributed to the Western desire to modernize China, which was itself concerned with “self-reinforcement” in order to join the power game. From its arsenal in Fuzhou, France modernized the Chinese fleet, but in 1884 it defeated the very navy that it had helped to build. France took part in the international administration of Tianjin after the joint intervention of the Eight-Nation Alliance against China during the Boxer War. Many Chinese intellectuals, and the Communists in particular, were interested in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the French Revolution, and the Paris Commune. However at that time, unlike today, the French way of life did not fascinate them, whether it was wines, luxury brands, or historical architecture (neither the Palace of Versailles nor those of the Loire). Catholic missions were the main component of the French presence in Asia, prompting military and diplomatic interventions to support them against persecution. France claimed the right to protect all Catholics in China. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1920s, the Vatican established direct relations with the Republican authorities in China and its apostolic delegates in Indochina. The question of religious freedom is much less important in France than in the United States, but part of the Catholic world today (notably the newspaper *La Croix*) is concerned about the Vatican’s compromises with the Communist regime. France brought in 140,000 low-wage Chinese laborers starting in 1916; China considered them essential to the Triple Entente’s victory. France now pays tribute to them with a statue inaugurated in Gare de Lyon in 2019. Several



prominent figures in Communist history lived or worked in France, including Deng Xiaoping.

Being present in the Far East, particularly in China, was the condition for becoming a world power in the last quarter of the 19th century. A “France of Asia” comprising Indochina and South China would be the equivalent of the British Indian Empire, which was advancing toward western and southern China from the Himalayas and Burma while dominating the maritime heart of eastern China. The *Weltpolitik* of William II worried France: Berlin seemed to push France’s Russian ally to invest more in Asia, leading to its defeat by Japan in 1905. Paris favored reconciliation between Russia and Japan (and between Russia and Britain) through shared spheres of influence from Xinjiang to Korea by way of Mongolia and Manchuria. Thus, after 1907, Germany was isolated in Asia, and the Triple Entente could concentrate on the German challenge in Europe. The Asian question was always perceived through the prisms of France’s status as a global power and of European balances. In the 1970s, Western European states engaged in a bit of a race for China, which sparked rivalries. France could not flirt too much with Beijing lest it angered the Soviet Union, which was important for détente and to contain Germany. Today, France is far behind Germany in terms of trade with China, and thus partly depends on Berlin’s choices. Having been among the first to have an Indo-Pacific policy, France is trying to rally the European Union. Once again, its policy toward Beijing can be understood through inter-European rivalries, relations with the United States, and relations with Russia (separating Moscow and Beijing or hoping Beijing will influence Moscow).

France also took part in the century of humiliation of China, arousing criticism in France itself, such as from Victor Hugo after the sack of the Summer Palace (he accused the government of Napoleon III of being a “bandit”).³ From the 1860s until the 1880s, it seized Indochina by breaking the Kingdom of Annam’s tributary relationship with China. Like Japan with Korea, it proclaimed the equality of states against this tributary system, and then imposed colonization and a protectorate. The Sino-French War of 1881–1885 has less fame than the Sino-Japanese; however, it led to the removal of China from Indochinese affairs and the start of a lengthy process of setting the Sino-Vietnamese border. Indochina was a “balcony” over China and especially over its south, which was the focus of French ambitions. Railroad imperialism was deployed in Yunnan. As late as 1954, the French wanted to stay in communist North Vietnam to turn Haiphong into a new Hong Kong. France pretended to act for Annam by claiming sovereignty over the Paracel Islands in 1931, then claimed sovereignty over nine islands of the Spratlys for itself in 1933. The Japanese and French claims led China to assert its own from the 1930s onwards.

The race between world powers for a sleepy and humiliated China, coupled with China’s admiration for Japan, which had been able to reform itself, are lasting images. Today, Europe and Japan are the ones who seem to be asleep, surrounded by predators (especially Russia and China) and in need of a wake-up call to become global powers once again. As early as 1900, it was feared that European investments in Asia would encourage intra-European rivalries and above all would allow Japan and China, thanks to their low-cost labor, to pour their products into Europe. An equivalent to the American Open Door Policy was taking root in France’s socialist side: Jean Jaurès criticized the dismemberment of China and praised careful penetration of European capitalism and an agreement between Europeans, so China granted to all “the same freedoms and the same trade facilities with full safeguarding of the territorial and political integrity of China itself.”⁴

“The Asian question was always perceived through the prisms of France’s status as a global power and of European balances.”

3 Victor Hugo to Captain Butler, November 25, 1861, “Chronique: Victor Hugo et le Palais Yuanmingyuan,” *People’s Daily*, http://french.peopledaily.com.cn/french/200210/18/fra20021018_57727.html.

4 Jean Jaurès, October 1905 speech, quoted in Gilles Candar, *Jaurès and the Far East* (Paris: Fondation Jean-Jaurès, 2011), 23.

Japanese imperialism was a threat to French interests in Asia, but so was Chinese nationalism. In the early 1930s, Japan approached France for a Franco-Japanese imperialist partition of China, with an anti-Communist, anti-British, and anti-American tone. Joseph Stalin feared that France was pushing for Japanese-Polish aggression against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). German-Japanese alignment in the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936 changed the situation. France was convinced that Germany wanted to divert Paris and London from European affairs by playing on Japanese ambitions for their Asian possessions. Today, the question is whether Moscow is playing a similar game, exerting influence in Africa and the Middle East and relying on China, which would limit France's action in Eastern Europe because of the possible repercussions. Even if France allowed aid to the Nationalists through Indochina, it practiced appeasement of Japan in the Far East. The Indochinese possessions were indefensible, and support from the United States was unlikely. After taking Hainan in 1939, the Japanese occupied several islands in the Paracels and Spratlys, giving rise to a sort of Franco-Japanese condominium during the Second World War. After its defeat in 1940, Vichy France collaborated with Japan in an attempt to preserve its positions in China and Indochina. However, the relationship between Vichy and Free France was complicated in context with the personal policy of Admiral Jean Decoux in Indochina, the governments of Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) in Chongqing and Wang Jingwei in Nanking (Nanjing), the 500,000 Chinese in Indochina who played a major economic role, and of course the ambitions of Japan for which Indochina was essential.

From 1943 onwards, China's international assertiveness and its nationalism sparked fear once again. China seemed to want to rebuild its regional domination. Franklin D. Roosevelt coopted Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), who obtained a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council before France, a larger International Monetary Fund (IMF) quota than France, and the abolition of American and British extraterritoriality privileges. The American president did not want France to return to Indochina. At the Potsdam Conference, it was decided that in Indochina, Japan would be disarmed north of the 16th parallel by the Chinese and south of it by the British. The French wanted to retake Indochina and were ready to play on the fear of a return to Chinese domination in Vietnam. The agreement with Ho Chi Minh in 1946 allowed them to regain a foothold in Vietnam and support him in his fight against the Vietnamese nationalists, who were close to the Kuomintang (KMT). A Franco-Chinese treaty was signed in 1946, which led to the departure of Chinese forces. In return, all French advantages in China were terminated, three years after those of the other allies. The Communist regime put an end to a French presence that had already largely disappeared. The Nationalists developed the 11-dash line in the South China Sea. In this context, a Franco-Chinese confrontation took place in January 1947 in the northern Paracel Islands, leading to a division between a Chinese domain in the north and a Franco-Vietnamese domain in the south.

Early Cold War

From 1949 onwards, the French relationship with China was shaped by the Indochina War (1946–1954), the global Cold War, and above all, the hot war between the United States and Communist China.

The question of the recognition of Communist China in 1949–1950 was linked to the Indochina War, which began in the summer of 1945 in the south and at the end of 1946 in the north. Its ambassador in China was concerned about the last French interests in the country; he thought the Chinese revolutionaries, many of whom had lived in France, loved the country that had conducted the first great revolution. Recognition seemed inevitable under the principle of effectiveness, given that the Chinese government controlled a large part of the territory. On the other hand, the French authorities in Indochina thought recognition would strengthen the Viet Minh. For Paris, French interests in Indochina took precedence over French interests in China. London recognized the new Chinese government on January 6, 1950. Despite his extremely limited powers, President of the Republic Vincent Auriol would constantly be the apostle of recognizing China and negotiating with Beijing to limit its support to the Viet Minh. He thought it would be possible to trade the recognition of China and its entry into the United Nations (UN) for a promise of



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nonintervention in Indochina. But on January 14, 1950, Chinese Communists broke into the American consulate and French barracks in Beijing and seized them. On January 18, the People's Republic was the first state to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). This recognition was not an act of spite following France's slowness and hesitation. It resulted from the interests of Mao Zedong, who wanted the revolution in Asia to triumph, and Ho Chi Minh, who left his diplomatic isolation and obtained strong Chinese support.

Mao thought about taking the fight all the way to Indochina to pursue the Kuomintang troops who wanted to flee there. Stalin advised him not to cross the border lest it provoke the French or even the Americans. But France was involved in the Chinese Civil War. Indeed, it disarmed, interned, and then sent (belatedly) to Taiwan the 30,000 Nationalist soldiers who crossed the Sino-Vietnamese border. It also had to manage confrontations between Communist and Nationalist networks within the Chinese community in Vietnam. The Chinese press and radio stations began a campaign against alleged French atrocities committed against the Chinese in Vietnam. However, France repeatedly refused offers of help from the Republic of China in its anticommunist war, except in the area of intelligence. The ambassador to the Republic of China felt he was on borrowed time, with France ready to choose the People's Republic at the first opportunity. Hong Kong could have become an observation post for Communist China and the revolutionary wars. However, despite the presence of Captain David Galula, a future theorist of counterinsurgency whose work was rediscovered in the United States and France at the end of the 2000s, France was sorely lacking in personnel. Colonel Jacques Guillerma, who would become a famous Sinologist, analyzed China from Bangkok.

The new Chinese regime took charge of the DRV's international representation and equipped and armed the soldiers who fought the French. This task was easy because the border was not controlled after the French defeat at Cao Bang in October 1950. China began to see Indochina as a possible platform from which the imperialist powers, especially the Americans, would launch a military intervention to overthrow the Communist regime. Northern Vietnam had once served as a springboard for the French to enter southern China. Now, it was at risk of becoming the springboard for the communist bloc to dismantle the European colonial empires in Southeast Asia and even take on the West. Westerners remembered all too well the Japanese onslaught during World War II. France risked facing massive aggression from China. As early as November 1949, preparations were made in Tonkin for this eventuality, which revealed the weak defensive capabilities of its Expeditionary Corps.

The official French discourse could now hammer home the point that the Viet Minh rebels were hiding behind the mask of nationalism to advance the interests of Beijing and Moscow, and that they were therefore traitors to the national cause. France, on the other hand, could take up the mantle of Vietnamese nationalism: it would defend the cause of the real Vietnamese against the Chinese and Soviet imperialists. Once again, France claimed to protect the independence of the Indochinese states against a China that would like to recover a territory whose emancipation it never accepted. Ho Chi Minh was cast as a pawn of this “red colonialism,” denounced by countries in Eastern Europe, that seemed to be supported by the powerful French Communist Party's loudly opposition to the war in Indochina.

The Chinese Communists were accused of stirring up and using anti-white racism, as the Japanese had done. Communism was alleged to be the instrument of China's newfound pride but was blamed for tipping into a xenophobic national socialism. This type of thinking still exists today. For General Charles de Gaulle, "the opposition between communism and capitalism is an appearance. At the heart of everything, there is Asia against the world of the white people."⁵ In 1954, Dien Bien Phu was another humiliation, and the opponents of the Geneva Accords saw it as a symbol of the decline of the white man and his civilization. Paris even imagined that the USSR, worried about the rise of China, would favor détente in Europe, just as there has until recently been hope of reaching out to Vladimir Putin by recalling Russia's European identity in the face of the Chinese rise in power.

The fate of white prisoners during the Korean and Indochina Wars led to the denunciation of what was painted as a monstrous intersection of cruelty and fanaticism. The Chinese human waves during the Korean War, which Chinese military advisors urged the Vietnamese to imitate, the thousands sacrificing themselves to transport supplies and weapons to Dien Bien Phu, and youth fanaticized by ideological campaigns in China and Vietnam aroused a great deal of fear but also admiration (as Japan had done in the first half of the century). Indeed, Metropolitan France seemed to lack national resilience and a spirit of sacrifice, and the French found it difficult to mobilize "their" Vietnamese against the Viet Minh. For some, communism seemed to be an acceptable way to control and energize Asian populations, historically and culturally accustomed to authoritarian powers, while the West had failed to "impregnate" a "female" Asia (a term used by General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny).⁶ Others deplored the abduction by a foreign totalitarian ideology of Asia, which would need to be liberated so it could return to civilization. This double interpretation also existed in the United States, where communism after 1949 was sometimes seen as China's means of reaffirming itself and at other times considered an imported ideology from which the real China should be freed.

The Korean War (1950–1953) seemed like a godsend for France. France could say it had been fighting alone since 1946, against the same communist enemy that attacked in Korea in June 1950, and obtain more help from the United States in Indochina. It sent a battalion to fight in Korea to emphasize the link between the two wars. France is still part of the discussions of a hypothetical peace treaty in Korea. But the massive entry of Chinese troops into the war in the fall of 1950 showed what the French could suffer in Indochina. There was great concern when Chinese radio stations accused France of violating the border to attack Chinese aid to the Viet Minh. Today, the CCP's propaganda praises this "war to resist American aggression and help Korea," a Sino-American hot war that is presented as a victory of the new regime against the world's leading military power. At the time, it seemed to the Party that the United States had "stuck three sharp knives into China's body," one in the head in Korea, one in the waist in Taiwan, and one in the feet in Vietnam, where they helped the French.

Because of Indochina, France was torn apart. The firm position of the United States toward China dissuaded it from intervening to help the Viet Minh very much. American aid was decisive in the conduct of the war. Some in France wanted to involve the Americans in Indochina, while others preferred to hand it over to them (as would be done in 1955). By taking part in Indochina in the fight against communism in Asia, France showed it had become powerful again after the weakness of the 1930s against Germany and the 1940 defeat and that it was a world power on par with the United Kingdom. It claimed to be part of a three-way *directoire* (with the United States) of the free world's global strategy. During the Second World War, it had been frustrated about being left out of the interallied cenacles for peace and war. Fighting in Asia was therefore intended to ensure the United States would not privilege Asia; would defend France, especially on the eastern border of the Federal Republic of Germany; and, above all, would not return to isolationism out of spite. Asia was therefore a calling card French authorities used to get the attention of the United States as well as their help and defense.⁷

5 Charles de Gaulle to his nephew Bernard, January 14, 1954, in *Lettres Notes et Carnets* (1951–58), (Paris: Plon, 1985).

6 Jean de Lattre, *La Ferveur et le Sacrifice : Indochine 1951* (Paris : Plon, 1988), 331.

7 Xiaobing Li, *The Dragon in the Jungle: The Chinese Army in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 48.



“France is accused of deluding itself about its relations with Moscow and Beijing, both of which would like to manipulate France’s obsession with rank, its desire to be a balancing power and avoid a race toward new Cold Wars and a new polarization of the world, and its desire to preserve its economic relationship with China.”

France also wanted to adopt the British position on China, which was to use the economic carrot to return to the Chinese market and moderate Beijing. France was reluctant to wage the economic war wanted by the United States through CHINCOM, which was more restrictive than COCOM regarding the USSR. It wished to talk with the Chinese authorities so they would stop supporting the Viet Minh and not invade Tonkin. It was important to contain the bellicosity of the United States in Korea and its anticommunism, brought to a head by McCarthyism. Otherwise, World War III could break out, with the USSR invading Europe. During the winter of 1950–1951, London and Paris feared nuclear escalation. It was risky to become mercenaries in Indochina of the American war against Asian communism while the real challenges were in Europe (the Soviet threat) and in North Africa (anticolonial agitation): Eurafrica should have been the priority. This was all the more risky because the United States was opposed to discussions with China, despite being the only one able to make meaningful concessions to it (e.g., the question of Taiwan or entry into the United Nations).

Thus, according to the dominant political line in Paris in the early 1950s, Asia was essential if France was to retrieve its world power status in the eyes of the United States. The United States helped (diplomatically and militarily) to preserve France’s role while judging it to be powerless. Paris thought it could both obtain support from the United States and influence it in major strategic choices in the face of the totalitarian “red peril.” Against this aligned strategy, another vision of power was born in 1953, which would become the core of the Gaullist strategy after 1962 and would be widely shared on the left. France could emancipate itself from the tutelage of the United States, which embroiled it in its anticommunist crusade but abandoned it at Dien Bien Phu. It could reach out to Moscow and Beijing in the traditional diplomatic game of balance of power, privileging permanent state interests and relations between old civilizations rather than ideological conjuncture. This would be possible thanks to the détente that followed the death of Stalin. It would allow France to get out of the Indochinese quagmire, as the Geneva Conference allowed Communist China to present itself as a great and responsible power. France would become a link between the West and the East, help avoid world war, and regain a more independent role on the international scene.

Because of these reasons of great politics and fascination for the El Dorado that was the Chinese market, France in the mid-1950s was ready to rush to China and reopen its embassy. It did not want to be left behind by the British and Japanese, who were also in the starting blocks. It risked, however, giving in to the sirens of Moscow and Beijing, which, like the pacifist campaigns, aimed to detach France from the United States and isolate it by exploiting the illusion of French greatness. The radicalization of Beijing from 1957–1958 put an end to these hopes.

French debates have not changed much through today, especially about Indo-Pacific policy and toward China. Is France aligning itself with the hard line of the United States toward China to show it has a global role (by valorizing its human and military presence in the Indo-Pacific, like its presence in Indochina in the past); to weigh in on the world choices of the United States; or to obtain its help and support in Europe, Africa and the Middle East? Or does it once again lack the means to do so because of its commitments in these closer regions and its own internal

difficulties? As in the 1950s, France fears a return to isolationism by the United States or that the latter will choose its own priority between Asia and Europe and favor its own interests over those of its ally. At the same time, France is accused of deluding itself about its relations with Moscow and Beijing, both of which would like to manipulate France's obsession with rank, its desire to be a balancing power and avoid a race toward new Cold Wars and a new polarization of the world, and its desire to preserve its economic relationship with China, which is now indispensable to its economic health.

Late Cold War

The recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1964 was a founding moment, but it was excessively mythologized and did not allow the development of economic exchanges between the two countries. Fascination with the Chinese Revolution faded from the 1970s onwards.

France's China policy underwent a turning point under the Fifth Republic, during the first years of de Gaulle's leadership. In the context of the Cold War, de Gaulle wanted to promote France's greatness and independence from the blocs. The French policy of independence, merely declaratory between 1958 and 1962, became truly operational in the aftermath of Algerian independence. China directly helped the National Liberation Front in its fight. In 1958, Beijing recognized the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic, and an Algerian military mission was sent to the Chinese capital a year later. China worked to ensure that a second, very militant Bandung Conference would be held in Algiers in 1965. The coup against Ahmed Ben Bella put a last-minute end to that project. Beijing still believes it has a special relationship with Algeria.

With the Algerian "ball and chain" (a term used at the time) out of the way, de Gaulle's hands were free, and Asia offered him a promising terrain for his policy of greatness, of turning France into a "nation in the middle of the world"⁸—between East and West but also between North and South. The Sino-Soviet rupture in July 1963 was the second major geopolitical event that accelerated the establishment of diplomatic relations between Paris and Beijing in January 1964. The 1963 refusal by France and China to sign the treaty on the partial ban on nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in outer space, and underwater, created a convergence of views between the two capitals, both of which wanted to assert their independence on the international scene. Mao interpreted the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty as further proof of collusion between Moscow and Washington against Beijing to hinder the emergence of China as a nuclear military power. Eager to emancipate France from American tutelage, de Gaulle also saw the treaty as an obstacle to the development of French sovereignty in the area of nuclear deterrence. Therefore, the nuclear issue also played an important role in the rapprochement between France and Communist China.

Both countries refused to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, did not join it until 1992, and conducted a series of nuclear tests that were negatively perceived by international opinion just before joining the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996. France was strongly opposed to any nuclearization of Germany, as was China about Japan. The two countries had similar nuclear doctrine and refused to enter arms control talks until the United States and Soviet Union had considerably reduced their arsenals. The socialization of the two countries to nonproliferation norms occurred at the end of the 1970s for France and 20 years later for China.

Contrary to a persistent legend, French recognition of the People's Republic of China was not the first by a Western country (it occurred in January 1950 by the United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, and the Netherlands). It was set against the backdrop of a serious historical dispute between the two countries. For China, France was associated with the unequal treaties of the 19th century and the century of humiliation; it remained

8 Maurice Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l'Influence ? La France dans le Monde depuis 1958* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), 461.



classified as a capitalist and imperialist country. In the mid-1960s, China was still widely perceived in France as terra incognita and an idealized and fantasized country.⁹ The major phenomenon during 1963–1965 was the appearance in France of a new view of China and of a pro-Chinese current beyond the right–left divide. The Sino-Soviet rupture of 1963 contributed to the establishment of the Chinese model as an alternative to Leninism and Stalinism. The concept of Soviet China gave way to a Chinese model until Mao's death in 1976. The admiration in France for Mao's China was particularly relayed on the left by newly created pro-Chinese communist organizations. The left-wing Chinese model portrayed China as a way out of the impasse of Soviet communism and as the world spearhead of an egalitarian and voluntarist revolutionary model for a Third World in search of a new revolutionary force (the peasantry) to be admired after the gentrification¹⁰ of the Western proletariat. The right-wing Chinese model had a strong Gaullist tinge. Unlike the universality of the left-wing Chinese model, the right-wing model opposed the singularity of the Chinese model, applicable and adaptable only in China. It also underlined the illusion of wanting to export Western criteria on fundamental human rights into the political and social life of a country with a civilization dating back several thousand years. Within the circles of the Gaullist right, the aim was above all to justify what Franco-Chinese political and diplomatic circles regularly described as “privileged relations” between France and China.¹¹

The establishment of diplomatic relations between Paris and Beijing, formalized in a January 27, 1964 communiqué, was the result of a combination of external factors (a new geopolitical situation); internal factors that had become favorable; and the decisive impetus of de Gaulle, who thought the Chinese people were being led from Beijing, not Taipei. Despite his aversion to the values of Chinese communism, the founder of the Fifth Republic decided to pragmatically bet on Mao's China and not Taiwan, which did not even figure in the January 27 communiqué. Shortly before normalization with Beijing, de Gaulle refused to engage in any dialogue with Taipei on the future of Franco-Taiwanese relations.

“Within the circles of the Gaullist right, the aim was above all to justify what Franco-Chinese political and diplomatic circles regularly described as ‘privileged relations’ between France and China. ”

After recognition in 1964, de Gaulle was thus able to reinforce his policy of greatness in Asia, challenge the United States at lesser risk, hold Soviet leaders in check amid a conflict with China, and thus assert his independence by challenging the bipolar logic. Today, by contrast, France is no longer able to play the greatness card in Asia, where it has settled for asserting itself as a power of initiative and balance within the European Union. The EU has become one of Beijing's main interlocutors in attempts to moderate Chinese ardor on the issue of Taiwan and to influence (unsuccessfully) China's stance toward Putin's Russia on the Ukrainian issue. France's voice alone used to resound with Chinese authorities at the time of de Gaulle, but the construction of the EU contributed to diluting France's voice with Chinese authorities and to making it lose some of its singularity.

Having become a nuclear power with the explosion of its first atomic bomb on October 16, 1964, China was able to obtain a resounding international diplomatic victory when Paris committed to supporting Beijing's quest for a

9 Bernard Krouck, *De Gaulle et la Chine: La Politique Française à l'Égard de la République Populaire de Chine* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2012).

10 “Gentrification” (trans: *embourgeoisement*) was used by the Maoists to denounce the accommodation of the Western proletariat with capitalist society.

11 The aim was above all to justify what the Franco-Chinese political and diplomatic circles regularly described as “privileged relations” between France and China. On this topic, see Françoise Mengin, “La Politique Chinoise de la France. Du Mythe de la Relation Privilegiée au Syndrome de la Normalisation,” *Critique Internationale* 2001/3, no. 12 (2005): 89–110.

seat at the UN. The 1964 recognition did not allow the Chinese regime to immediately emerge from its international isolation. But at the time, Beijing thought it could turn France into an outpost to fight pro-Soviet Western European Communist parties¹²

This founding moment is regularly recalled in Franco-Chinese meetings. It is also at the heart of the Gaullist mythology. It alleges that France and China criticized bipolarity and joint global dominion by the two superpowers but obscures the specifics of radicalized Maoism's discourses on the revolution, the Third World, and race in the 1960s. It also suggests a false symmetry: that France had the same position toward the United States as China had toward the USSR. It is true that the two countries had a common goal of promoting the autonomy of the people's democracies from Moscow. But France remained in NATO and had wholeheartedly supported the United States during the Cuban crisis. There were no insults like those between Moscow and Beijing. France did not prepare itself economically and militarily for a possible U.S. offensive, as China did against the USSR, and there was no equivalent to the Sino-Soviet war of 1969 and the dozens of Soviet divisions massed on the Chinese border. The idea that there was a common refusal of the blocs is enduring, and Beijing today plays on a Gaullist myth which, on the right as well as on the left, is considered to be the DNA of French foreign policy. Realpolitik would prevail, especially because the Chinese Communist regime is less murderous than when de Gaulle recognized it and no longer wants to overthrow a capitalist system and international institutions that are favorable to it.

Although the French decision to set up diplomatic relations with Beijing did not raise any major outbursts in France, it was not without its critics in political and intellectual circles. On the right, some argued there were no differences between Chinese and Soviet foreign policies and resurrected a racist myth in the face of Chinese demographics¹³ or the threat of communism's expansion in the world. On the left, some interpreted the 1964 recognition as a solitary exercise of power by de Gaulle in the absence of any parliamentary control over French foreign policy.

With the recognition of Mao's China now official, France sought to develop its relations with Beijing in all areas. At a time when the arms race was in full swing and the Sino-Soviet conflict was escalating, the goal was to establish new political relations between Paris and Beijing in order to set up joint initiatives to restore peace in Southeast Asia (in the context of the Vietnam War) and find common ground on the international level. The result of the first two years of the Sino-French relationship (1964–1966) was however quite meager in terms of political and cultural cooperation.

Starting in spring 1966, when the Cultural Revolution launched by Mao began, all forms of cooperation ceased between Paris and Beijing. In France, however, Maoists were fascinated by the Cultural Revolution, which was seen as a promising revolutionary moment. Within the Association des Amitiés Franco-Chinoises (AAFC), a mass organization created in 1952 by the central committee of the French Communist Party, young militants of the extreme left—who favored the Chinese side since the Sino-Soviet breakup—had organized themselves into local committees at the beginning of 1965. Friendship with China, which had become a political cause identified with Maoism, now took on the aspect of antirevisionist militancy. Within the French left, Sinophilia was exacerbated with the events of May 1968, while the dissemination of Chinese ideological material in France experienced a genuine golden age, largely relayed by part of the French left-wing press.

12 On this topic, see Kaixuan Liu, "Le Miroir Chinois. Les Attitudes Françaises Face à la Chine dans les Milieux Politique, Diplomatique, Intellectuel et Médiaque, de 1949 au Milieu des Années 1980" (doctoral dissertation, Sciences Po, 2019).

13 The racist myth of the "yellow peril" was particularly active in the French press at the end of the 19th century. See François Pavé, *Le Péril Jaune à la Fin du XIX^e Siècle: Fantôme ou réalité?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013). On the use of the myth in the 20th century, see Krock, *De Gaulle et la Chine*.



Contrary to the Gaullist period (1958–1969), when Asia was at the top of the French agenda, French diplomacy in the 1970s focused more on European construction, Africa, and the Middle East in the context of the 1973 oil crisis. What were the implications for Franco-Chinese relations? On the one hand, the relationship between Paris and Beijing had greatly deteriorated. The bilateral relationship had followed a normal course until May 1966, before deeply unraveling during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). As early as spring 1966, all forms of cooperation between the two countries ceased. The honeymoon between the two countries had only lasted two years. Tensions escalated between Paris and Beijing over the fate of French teachers and students in China and the dismissal of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary in late August 1966. The French Embassy's operations in Beijing, headed by Lucien Paye, were greatly disturbed while incidents increased both in France and China during 1967–1969.

On the other hand, Paris always maintained an active diplomatic policy and representation in China, as evidenced by the embassy of Étienne Manac'h (1969–1975) under the Georges Pompidou presidency. This Beijing-stationed diplomat, who was a Gaullist at heart, played the role of intermediary with Prince Sihanouk (who was a refugee in Beijing from 1970 to 1975), and his excellent relations with Zhou Enlai enabled him to work on behalf of France for the pacification of Indochina. The activism of French diplomacy at the time is reflected in the three large volumes of his memoirs, *Mémoires d'Extrême-Asie* (Memoirs of Far Asia), published after 1977.

Nevertheless, the Cultural Revolution and the Sino-American and Sino-Japanese rapprochements of 1972 contributed to the marginalization of the privileged Franco-Chinese relationship. Pompidou did not consider Asia a priority, but he saw it as an expanding market.¹⁴ China's return to the international arena (entry into the United Nations in October 1971 and Richard Nixon's visit in February 1972) was in many ways a posthumous success for de Gaulle. French diplomacy boasted of having been one of the intermediaries who helped engineer Sino-American reconciliation. Instead of China, French diplomacy prioritized former Indochina under the Pompidou presidency (1969–1974), striving to facilitate negotiations in compliance with the principles of neutralization and withdrawal of foreign forces. Nevertheless, the French governments of the 1970s continued to maintain a special and symbolic relationship with China, which was regarded not only as a major Asian enemy of the USSR but also as an indispensable interlocutor for France in the settlement of conflicts in Southeast Asia.¹⁵ However, France had little weight in Beijing's eyes on these issues, as Mao had decided that France was no longer an Asian power after 1954. China, in competition with the USSR, was concerned about its revolutionary credibility with North Vietnam.

High-level Franco-Chinese political talks increased in the first half of the 1970s, but they were mainly symbolic and did not lead to any real coordination or political cooperation. Pompidou's trip to Beijing (the first by a French president under the Fifth Republic) in September 1973 did not change the situation, nor did the December 1973 gift to France by Zhou Enlai of a pair of giant pandas. The issue of diplomatic action in the Indochinese peninsula still separated France and China. Until the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, the successors of de Gaulle preferred to return to a policy more favorable to Saigon than to Hanoi. Moreover, political disagreements persisted. The French delegation refused to condemn Soviet hegemony in the Franco-Chinese communiqué issued after Pompidou's visit to Beijing. China saw that France was seeking détente with the USSR in the Helsinki Accords and that it wanted a special relationship with Moscow in order to balance Germany, avoid a new German-Soviet Rapallo facilitated by Bonn's *Ostpolitik*, and avoid suffering the consequences of direct American-Soviet negotiations on conventional disarmament. France was uncomfortable with Beijing's anti-Sovietism. However, after 1973, it became interested in a policy favorable to Beijing against Moscow and Hanoi in order to avoid Soviet domination of all of Indochina

14 Maurice Vaisse, *La Puissance ou l'Influence?*, p. 912 and Laurent Césari, "Les Relations Franco-Chinoises sous la Présidence de Georges Pompidou," in *Les Relations Franco-Chinoises au XXe Siècle*, ed. Laurent Césari and Denis Varaschin (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2003), 275–288.

15 Liu, "Le Miroir Chinois."

through Vietnam. On the economic front, Franco-Chinese cooperation got its first real boost with the 1973 signing of a contract for the French engineering company Technip-Speichim to supply a ready-to-use petrochemical plant in Liaoyang (Liaoning). France was the world's third largest exporter to China until 1976, behind Japan and West Germany. From the second half of the 1970s onwards, the economic dimension of French diplomacy in China thus became a major element of French lobbying of Chinese authorities, who did not hesitate to capitalize on competition with France's European partners. Paris was trying to improve its trade balance with China, which was often negative.

During the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981), France still considered China an essential partner in Asia and sought to intensify its trade with Beijing, but the French president preferred to turn to India as the keystone of French global development strategy in Asia. The trip of Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping to France in January 1975 was the first by a Chinese leader of that level, but the results in terms of Franco-Chinese cooperation were scant: the establishment of a Franco-Chinese economic commission and the intensification of ministerial dialogues. France was disappointed that Beijing only had eyes for its military and nuclear technology, as it had imagined a great future in culture and education and the Germans were also conducting business. In the context of the expansion of Soviet influence and the Sino-American rapprochement, the goal of French diplomacy was to contain Beijing's power ambitions and visceral anti-Sovietism on the international scene by involving China more in the efforts of the international community to seek political settlements through negotiations. The French president wanted to set his foreign policy apart from traditional thinking. He wanted to promote dialogue and negotiation with all major powers, without exclusion. With the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the American hostage crisis in Tehran, Giscard d'Estaing's awareness of the decline of the American Empire under the Carter presidency led him to take charge, on behalf of France, of the continuation of the dialogue with the East in order to maintain détente at all costs. Paris thus found itself caught in a permanent balancing act between Moscow and Beijing. Accusations of hegemonism made by senior Chinese politicians against the USSR during high-level political talks with their French counterparts were therefore deliberately not relayed by French authorities, who sought to stifle them so as not to offend Moscow. France's Chinese policy of not playing Beijing against Moscow became a means for Paris to contribute to the easing of tensions between the East and the West and within the Communist world itself. France thus equally condemned the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979. This reflected a lack of decision making or even inertia in French diplomacy in Asia. Chinese policy under Giscard d'Estaing was becoming more precise than during the de Gaulle and Pompidou years, when the bilateral relationship was most often reduced to a cordial, and most of the time hollow, understanding.

After Mao's death in 1976, the Chinese government embarked on a policy of reform and opening that required the use of Western technologies. France saw market prospects in China at a time of economic difficulties. Despite the

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myth of a Franco-Chinese privileged relationship,¹⁶ Paris faced China's new economic demands in the context of Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping's revival of the Four Modernizations from 1977–1978 onwards. China wanted to compete at a lower cost and France faced the dilemma of arms sales to China, which the USSR systematically opposed. Despite a revival of France's economic diplomacy in China (symbolized by the trips to Beijing of Prime Minister Raymond Barre in January 1978 and the French president in October 1980), Franco-Chinese trade remained at a low level. France was not very interested in Taiwan's economic potential. At a time when China was moving closer to Japan and the United States, Beijing increasingly perceived France as secondary to its vital interests. Moreover, the development and cooperation program signed by France and the USSR during Giscard d'Estaing's trip to Moscow in April 1979 came up against Beijing's persistent denunciation of Soviet hegemonism. Although the political dialogue between Paris and Beijing remained difficult, Chinese diplomacy favored, out of pragmatism and realism, a rapprochement with French nongovernmental left-wing political forces in the early 1980s. A delegation of the Socialist Party led by François Mitterrand visited China in February 1981 on the eve of the presidential elections.

Despite the ravages of the Cultural Revolution and the absence of joint political initiatives between Paris and Beijing, the Chinese Maoist model continued to shine in France until 1976. The main break introduced by Mao's death was the emergence of a new critical look at China. The totalitarian nature of the regime and the violence of Maoist policies since 1949 were exposed and denounced by French intellectuals and Sinologists after the writings of Simon Leys, as early as 1971. As Chinese authorities began in 1978 a gradual de-Maoization, which culminated in the publication of a second report on the history of the CCP in the summer of 1981, some in France transitioned from Sinophilia to Sinophobia. The Cultural Revolution, once adored and idealized on the left, was now the subject of controversy, and interest in the Chinese model increasingly diminished after 1976. China was thus gradually losing its particularity and attractiveness in part of French opinion, even if the Maoist myth continues to endure among some influential French intellectuals, spearheaded today by philosopher Alain Badiou. This myth nevertheless faded in France. The revelation of the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge, the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam, the war waged by China against Vietnam in 1979, and finally the waves of people fleeing Vietnam by boat permanently tarnished the image of Asian communism. They contributed to the crisis of Third Worldism as well as the media triumph of antitotalitarian intellectuals. Intellectuals once fascinated by Mao's China made their mea culpas but pursued great careers. These events did not prevent the France of Giscard d'Estaing from strengthening its economic and cultural cooperation with Chinese authorities. As exemplified by Hua Guofeng's visit to France in 1979 (the first stop in a long European tour), Chinese authorities were looking for sources of technological inspiration in France in order to complete the Four Modernizations and the economic opening project. The visit to France of Mao's successor in 1979 was the first from such a high-level Chinese leader, who was simultaneously holding the positions of prime minister, chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP, and chairman of the Central Military Commission.¹⁷

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The first presidency of François Mitterrand (1981–1988) was a new turning point in France's Asian policy. The new Socialist president understood that China was an essential partner for France at a time when ultraliberalism was triumphing in the United States, Great Britain, and France and while East-West relations were experiencing renewed tensions after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Mitterrand's interest in the People's Republic of China

16 Mengin, “La Politique Chinoise de la France.”

17 Stéphane Malsagne, *Avec Toi au Pouvoir, Je Suis Tranquille: Hua Guofeng (1921-2008)* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2022).

was long-standing, as evidenced by his first trip in 1961, his meeting with Mao, and his second visit as a Socialist Party candidate for the 1981 presidential election (February 9–14). On the Chinese side, France had become one partner among others and the place it held for Beijing depended above all on the contribution it could provide to the Four Modernizations. Because of the proven limits of the privileged economic partnership between France and India, the socialist government in power after May 1981 decided to rebalance its Asian policy toward India, South-east Asia (formerly Indochina), and China.

French diplomacy's Chinese turn is illustrated by Mitterrand's visit to China in May 1983, in a context where trade relations between the two countries still suffered from real weaknesses. A change of diplomatic staff in France accompanied this new direction. Claude Cheysson, accused by Beijing of pro-Vietnamese sympathies, was replaced in 1984 by Roland Dumas at the Quai d'Orsay, where China was described as an "uncertain partner."¹⁸ While maintaining substantial relations with Vietnam and Cambodia, French diplomacy was therefore playing a balancing act so as not to offend Beijing and thus allow French companies to penetrate the Chinese market. France tried to adapt its trade policy to meet the Chinese government's demands for equipment—China required an agreement on technology transfers as a prerequisite. Mitterrand's trip to Beijing in 1983 led to the acceleration of trade between the two countries, even if it was not until 1985–1986 that major contracts were signed, such as the one entrusting the Daya Bay nuclear power plant to Framatome. The balance sheet of the Franco-Chinese relationship remained mixed. In 1985, France occupied only the 11th place among China's suppliers and had a trade deficit in 1986. Political differences between the two countries over the Vietnamese and Cambodian question persisted. France did not focus on special economic zones until the late 1990s.

In the French representations of the 1980s, China seemed definitively relegated to the rank of a normal communist country.¹⁹ The perception of an original Chinese model, so praised in previous decades, was now a thing of the past. The trivialization of China during the decade in the media and in public opinion was accompanied by a more systematic, critical look cast upon the country by French researchers, far from the Maolatry of the past era. In a new development, China is now viewed in France as a country where political repression can no longer be justified by the singularity of the Chinese civilization, even if it only experienced a brief democratic stint in its history, unlike Western civilization.²⁰ The deterministic model of Chinese despotism conveyed by the French philosophers of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, including Montesquieu, has fizzled out. From the French viewpoint, China is from now on being judged, like any other nation, for its ability to respect democratic values and human rights.

Since Tiananmen

From the 1990s onwards, economic issues took top priority, even if the Franco-Chinese relationship served to give each other leeway in a world that seemed unipolar. However, in political relations, any action that offended Beijing led to a backlash, which encouraged caution.

France's China policy under the second Mitterrand presidency (1988–1995) proved much more complicated than expected—it was a succession of stop and go. From the end of the 1980s, two main factors led to consecutive crises between Paris and Beijing, each followed by repeated normalizations: the violation of human rights in China and French arms sales to Taiwan. The bloody events of Tiananmen (June 4, 1989) were an important breaking point in bilateral relations. France, with its human rights-focused diplomacy, was marking the bicentenary of the French

18 Thibault Chanvin, "La Politique de la France en Asie au Début de la Présidence de François Mitterrand: Trouver un Équilibre entre Inde, Indochine et Chine," *Relations Internationales* 2021/2, no. 186 (2021): 97–113.

19 Liu, "Le Miroir Chinois."

20 On the experience of democracy in China after the republican revolution, see Yves Chevrier, *L'Empire Terrestre (Tome 1)—Shipwrecked Democracy (1895–1976): History of Politics in China in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2022).



“From the French viewpoint, China is from now on being judged, like any other nation, for its ability to respect democratic values and human rights.”

Revolution, and it openly took the side of Chinese democracy activists and denounced Deng’s repression. On June 6, 1989, Prime Minister Michel Rocard announced the freezing of Franco-Chinese relations. On June 27, France joined other European leaders meeting in Madrid to decide on an arms sales embargo to China. Within the G7, Paris and its partners voted in July for sanctions against the Beijing regime. It was not until October 1990 that the Europe of the Twelve officially lifted the sanctions, except for the embargo on arms sales. French diplomats managed to exfiltrate threatened individuals through Hong Kong.

Since the 1980s, some in France had been wondering whether the Gaullist mythology had led to an excessive focus on China, while the Japanese Miracle fascinated the world and the newly industrialized countries defied the traditional developmental theories of the South. The Franco-Japanese relationship remained very disappointing, marked by anti-Japanese speeches by French leaders who opposed the invasion of its industrial products. Stemming from the observation that it would be more interesting to develop economic relations with small and dynamic Asian countries rather than with China—where a conservative turn and a halt to economic opening were feared—and awareness that the democratization of South Korea and Taiwan was finally progressing, pressure was exerted in Paris to bet on Taiwan, much to the chagrin of the heirs of Gaullism, who castigated the pro-Taiwan lobby as business oriented and irresponsible.

Torn between a human rights imperative in China and a market imperative that notably included the sale of arms to Taiwan, France suffered in both cases from the repercussions of Beijing’s answer to its China policy. While at the turn of the 1990s France still avoided comment on the status of Taiwan and the unity of China, the issue of arms sales to the Republic of China divided the French political class, both on the right and on the left. Another serious cooling of the bilateral relationship took place in fall 1991 with the sale by France of 16 Lafayette-class frigates to Taiwan (September), followed in 1992 by 60 Mirage 2000-5s. The sales were decided at the highest level by political decision makers (the Elysée, the Ministry of Defense, Bercy, and the Quai d’Orsay) and by major French arms groups. Unlike Washington, which in August authorized the sale of F-16s to Taiwan, France was severely punished by Beijing: its Guangzhou consulate and economic expansion post were closed in December 1992 and the municipality was banned from using French companies to construct its metro. The sale of the frigates became a state matter in France, and it was not until the second cohabitation and the joint Franco-Chinese communiqué of January 12, 1994, that cooperative relations between France and China were restored.²¹

The communiqué established a new normalization between the two countries in the commercial field, with French companies being allowed “to compete on an equal footing” in China.²² Beijing, however, imposed conditions on Paris, which became hostage to Chinese diplomacy. Contrary to the 1964 communiqué,²³ which remained silent on this point, Paris “recognize[d] the government of the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal government of China, and Taiwan as an integral part of Chinese territory” and “the French government under[look] not to allow

21 Franco-Chinese Joint Communiqué, January 12, 1994, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/133004-communique-conjoint-franco-chinois-en-date-du-12-janvier-1994-sur-le-r>.

22 The term “on an equal footing” appears in Franco-Chinese Joint Communiqué.

23 See Mengin, “La Politique Chinoise de la France.”

French companies to participate in the arming of Taiwan in the future.”²⁴ The 1994 joint communiqué surpassed the positions of many Asian and Western chancelleries, and France thus deprived itself of the room for maneuver it had since 1964, when it avoided comment on the status of Taiwan and the unity of China. The communiqué did not, however, put an end to arms sales to Taiwan, as evidenced by an unpublished list attached to the communiqué that limited French engagement to nonoffensive material. It was in this context that Prime Minister Edouard Balladur made a humiliating official trip to China (April 1–10, 1994), a few days after new arrests of Chinese dissidents. In order not to offend the Chinese authorities, the Prime Minister remained silent on the issue of human rights in China. In the name of the higher interests of the state as well as economic interests, Paris opted for pragmatism and *realpolitik*, even if it meant losing all respect in the eyes of the Chinese authorities.

Under the presidency of Jacques Chirac (1995–2007), Paris’ remonstrances to Beijing on human rights became increasingly minimalist, partly breaking with the Mitterrand years. Faced with Germany’s breakthrough in the Middle Kingdom on cultural and economic levels, France wanted to revive the Franco-Chinese relationship at all levels, even if it meant making important concessions. To give new impetus to the Franco-Chinese trade, which was in bad shape in the mid-1990s, Beijing authorities forbade France from expressing any official criticism related to human rights issues in China (this did not prevent France from presenting behind-the-scenes lists of dissidents whose fate was the source of concern). On this point, Chirac, a sincere lover of Chinese history and culture, preferred to opt for dialogue rather than public condemnation. With the Americans, he acknowledged the history of Western imperialism in China in the 19th century. Moreover, in a world described as unipolar, he advocated for multipolarity, which was not only a new distribution of power that would be more just and stable but also a means of respecting cultural differences.

Chirac’s official visit to Beijing in May 1997 marked the desire to turn the page on earlier tensions and opened a cycle of visits in which French presidents seemed to act as salesmen. This visit resulted in a major commercial success for France: the purchase by China of 30 new Airbus planes. The visit took place amid an electoral campaign for the French legislature. Chirac used the contracts with Beijing as an electoral argument in his favor by tying them to the creation of new jobs in France.

France’s economic diplomacy in China is presented as a way to fight unemployment in France and give a new impetus to growth, even if Chinese investments in France remain modest. Yet France’s trade deficit with China was plunging rapidly (€22 billion in 2008, with imports from China accounting for 7% of total French imports).²⁵ France has little weight in Chinese imports—only in specialized segments such as beverages and perfumes. France’s share of Chinese trade is still declining (1.5%).²⁶ From Chirac to Emmanuel Macron at the Shanghai Fair in 2019, the imperative is to present a modern and innovative France, far from tourist clichés. A correlation is now made between job losses in France and Chinese imports. Giving in to Beijing’s demands, France is accepting massive technology transfers, particularly in the civil aeronautics and nuclear sectors. The big contracts, the flagships of French exports, are threatened by China’s rise in technology.

In Beijing, the replacement in 1998 of Premier Li Peng, who was associated with the 1989 massacres,²⁷ by Zhu

24 Franco-Chinese Joint Communiqué.

25 In 2020, France was China’s third largest trading partner in the EU, its third largest source of real investment, and the second largest exporter of technology to China. China is France’s sixth largest trading partner in the world and Asia’s largest trading partner. However, France’s trade deficit with China remains structural: in 2021, France’s trade deficit with China amounted to €39.6 billion, compared to €38.9 billion in 2020 and €32.3 billion in 2019.

26 Damien Cubizol, Camille Macaire, Mary-Françoise Renard, «Le Commerce Franco-Chinois : Leçons du Passé et Perspectives d’Avenir,» *Monde Chinois, Nouvelle Asie*, 59/3 (2019): 26.

27 Mengin, “La Politique Chinoise de la France.”



Rongji, who was more open than his predecessor and more receptive to Western criticism of China,²⁸ began a period of détente. This was encouraged by the release of the last Chinese dissidents imprisoned after Tiananmen. France, which had in the past supplied military equipment to the Beijing regime, became favorable to lifting the embargo on arms sales to China imposed by the United States and the European Union (EU) after the 1989 massacres. However, this failed because of lack of unanimity among European countries (i.e., British, German, and Dutch hostility). Chirac managed to establish a personal relationship with his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin, but this was not enough to ease tensions between the two countries. This was shown in a presidential trip in 2000, which was marred by the sale of a satellite by France to Taiwan in 1999. France argued that the satellite was for civilian use, while Beijing saw it as for military use, in violation of the Franco-Chinese declaration of 1994.²⁹

Chirac made four official visits to China during his term (1997, 2000, 2004 and 2006), but the results of political cooperation between the two countries remained more declaratory than real. Apart from a “joint declaration for a global partnership” in 1997 (May 16), a “strategic global partnership” was set up in 2004. The establishment of a global partnership in 1997,³⁰ aimed at reaffirming the exceptional nature of Franco-Chinese relations, was only made possible by a clear change of attitude by French authorities on the issue of human rights, both in terms of speeches and actions. France refused to support, for the first time, a resolution proposed by Denmark condemning China on April 15 in Geneva before the UN Commission on Human Rights. By calling for “the particularities of each country to be taken into full account,”³¹ the joint declaration of May 16, signed in Beijing by Jiang and Chirac, presented a culturalist answer to the question of human rights in favor of China. The global partnership was actively implemented by the left-wing government led by Lionel Jospin during the cohabitation (1997–2002).

The minimalism of French diplomacy on the question of human rights and the Chinese tropism of Chirac eventually led to weak results for France in China, both politically and economically.³² Chinese authorities exploited the interest aroused by its immense market to try to obtain new concessions from France and Europe: the lifting of the embargo on arms sales, a total opening of the European market, and benevolence on the issue of nonrespect of industrial and intellectual property.

President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–2012) was hardly sensitive to the culturalism of his predecessor. He claimed to be a member of the “Western family” and to have a bold policy of defending human rights. However, he provoked a crisis by thinking he could separate the economic from the political. This erupted in 2008 when he put his presence at the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing on the line and met with the Dalai Lama in Gdansk while the passage of the Olympic flame was causing incidents in Paris. The management of the crisis fell to the new Chinese ambassador in Paris, Kong Quan, who had been the first Chinese trainee at the Ecole Nationale d’Administration (ENA) in 1983. Perfectly francophone, he would be at the heart of another honeymoon in the Franco-Chinese relationship; President François Hollande decorated him in 2013. The Chinese sanctions were removed. France became silent on Tibet and discreet on the dissidents. Even though the economic damage was limited, the 2010

28 Mengin, “La Politique Chinoise de la France.”

29 Mengin, “La Politique Chinoise de la France.”

30 Mengin, “La Politique Chinoise de la France.”

31 Mengin, “La Politique Chinoise de la France.”

32 Despite the major contracts that France won in China under Jacques Chirac’s presidential term (Airbus and TGV in particular), the trade deficit continued to grow to the detriment of France. While trade was balanced in 1995, by 2005 the deficit became the largest French trade deficit even though it was only Beijing’s ninth largest supplier and seventh largest customer. On this topic, see Jean-Vincent Brisset, “Franco-Chinese Relations: Between Normality and Estrangement,” *Revue Internationale de Stratégie* 2010/1, no. 77 (2010): 133–77. Jacques Chirac remained, however, one of the most beloved French presidents among the Chinese population, not only for his refusal to intervene militarily in Iraq in 2003, but also and especially because of his sincere love for Chinese culture. News of his death in September 2019 sparked significant tributes in China and was one of the most discussed topics on Chinese social media.

visit was glamorized by the presence of the president's new wife and the announcement of the signing of 20 billion dollars' worth of contracts, and France became in 2011 the first European destination for Chinese investments, the lessons learned from the Franco-Chinese crisis of 2008 left a more lasting mark than contrition toward China in the mid-1990s. China represented one third of global growth and Europe had been in a long tunnel of economic and financial crises since 2008. China was essential to recovering growth, and Paris became the apostle of the G20 format while pushing for more audacity on the part of the EU toward China, which is what Berlin wanted.

The environment became a new dimension of Franco-Chinese cooperation after the opening of an environment pole at the French Embassy in Beijing in 2007. Companies, the French Development Agency (AFD), experts, and ministers tried to facilitate the Chinese conversion to these issues and take advantage of it, even if China was quickly becoming a leader in renewable energies. From then on, French authorities at the highest level no longer refused China anything. Those who wanted to do business readily promoted their projects, despite warnings about security risks, risks to intellectual property, and voices that tried to oppose the triumph of the most pro-Chinese officials and politicians. The story of the Wuhan P4 lab, which was started in 2004, resurfaced in 2020 during the coronavirus crisis. It is emblematic of this business orientation and the tug of war between pro-Chinese impulses and the concerns of security experts. However, despite the efforts and concessions of the French, Sarkozy was never able to regain the confidence of Beijing, which did not favor his reelection. In order to not put all its eggs in the Chinese basket, France had been responding to Vietnam's requests since 2009. Franco-Indian relations benefited from the Franco-Chinese tensions of 2008 and became fundamental to France's Asian policy, particularly for the sale of the Rafale.

Hollande's five-year term broadened the Asian focus while seeking to take further advantage of China's economic dynamism, especially in order to get out of the economic crisis. His diplomatic advisor, who died too soon in 2014, was Paul Jean-Ortiz, a diplomat who specialized in China. His priority was to enable Paris to get off on the right foot with Beijing. The trips and visits of the president, the prime minister and the ministers of foreign affairs and defense followed one another in Asia at a rapid pace. They chose not to focus excessively on China. The president's first trip was to Laos, a country that might seem secondary but was where the Asia-Europe Meeting was held. Strategic partnerships were signed with Indonesia in 2011, Singapore in 2012, and Vietnam in 2013, and a roadmap for Japanese cooperation was established for 2013–2018. Franco-Japanese 2+2 (foreign affairs/defense) meetings began in 2014. Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian finalized the sale of the Rafale, and France appeared to be a quasi-ally of India.

At Foreign Affairs, Laurent Fabius was fascinated by China and economic diplomacy but did not neglect Southeast Asia. He announced before the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2013 that France had, like the United States, committed to a pivot to Asia. The Quai d'Orsay absorbed foreign trade and tourism. The goal was to welcome an increasing number of Chinese tourists and students to France, as well as investments that would create jobs. In 2018, Chinese travelers accounted for 7.5% of French tourism revenue. Fabius visited China eight

“The minimalism of French diplomacy on the question of human rights and the Chinese tropism of Chirac eventually led to weak results for France in China, both politically and economically.”



times, opened France's doors to Alibaba, and challenged the discourse on the Chinese threat. With the memory of 2008 still fresh in his mind, Fabius wanted to avoid any criticism from China, which led him to affirm that Beijing had never been expansionist and to wish that France be as neutral as possible in the South China Sea. The 2014 Year of China in France marked 50 years since de Gaulle recognized the People's Republic. The following year, Paris celebrated China's constructive role in COP21, although Beijing had been an obstacle to the Copenhagen negotiations in 2009. Similarly, Bercy was looking for growth where it is. In 2017, China was France's seventh largest export market (4.1% of exports, with a third in aeronautics), and its second largest import market (9% of imports, mainly electronics, IT, and clothing).³³ From the perspective of the Defense Department, Laurent Fabius and the Asia Department seemed too complacent.

33 Cubizol et al., «Le Commerce Franco-Chinois.»

Part 2:

Mapping the Actors in France's Current China Policy

Although the foreign policy decision-making process in France is very centralized at the highest level, it is nonetheless important to have an overview of the interest groups linked to China. We have chosen to briefly examine eight categories: French diplomacy, armed forces, intelligence agencies, economic trade, companies, person-to-person trade, research on or with China, and public opinion and the political class.

French Diplomacy

The Franco-Chinese relationship is often presented as unique by some diplomats, especially Chinese diplomats, because of a number of historical firsts between the two countries. In 1973, French President Pompidou became the first Western head of state to visit China since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. France was also the first major Western country to establish formal partnerships with China, including a global partnership in 1997 and a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2004. In 2001, France was the first to hold a strategic dialogue with China, preceding the United Kingdom in 2004, the United States in 2009, and Germany in 2010. However, despite these historic firsts, France today has no clear advantage over its European counterparts in this regard and these elements of language belong above all to political discourse.

Since his first state visit to China in January 2018, President Macron has sought to underscore his pragmatism and lay the groundwork for a more reciprocal bilateral relationship. Visiting the northwestern Chinese city of Xi'an, which once formed the eastern end of the trade route network, the French president said, referring to China's ambitious global development project—the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—that “the silk roads...cannot be the roads of a new hegemony that would somehow put the countries they cross in a state of vassalage.”³⁴ At that time, the BRI, launched more than four years earlier, was already the subject of some controversy in Europe, with concerns over the transparency of public tenders for infrastructure projects, an influx of Chinese investment into the EU, and other issues. During the 2018 visit, Macron's economic minister added that France would oppose “looting investments.”³⁵

More than a year later, in March 2019, Macron publicly declared, on the sidelines of a European Council meeting, that “the time for European naivety”³⁶ was over when it came to relations with China. His words were a call for greater vigilance, for European states to become aware of the longer term implications of geopolitical or strategic dependence on China. The theme of dependency has been strongly present in the president's comments and criticisms since 2020, as the global COVID-19 pandemic, both a health crisis and an economic crisis, has highlighted Europe's flaws and weaknesses.

34 Alain Offrey, “Macron en Chine: Les Nouvelles Routes de la Soie ‘Ne Peuvent Être Univoques,’” *Libération*, January 8, 2018, https://www.liberation.fr/france/2018/01/08/macron-en-chine-les-nouvelles-routes-de-la-soie-ne-peuvent-etre-univoques_1621135.

35 “Opposé au ‘Pillage,’ Le Maire Dit Refuser ‘Beaucoup’ d’Investissements Chinois en France,” Agence France Presse, January 9, 2018, <https://www.publicsenat.fr/article/politique/oppose-au-pillage-le-maire-dit-refuser-beaucoup-d-investissements-chinois-en>.

36 “Le Temps de la Naïveté de l’UE Envers la Chine Est Révolu,” Reuters, March 22, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/union-chine-macron-idFRKCN1R321X-OFRTF>.



Economic exchanges and the fight against climate change are two priority areas of the bilateral relationship that Macron took on at the start of his presidency. Both are directly linked to the national priorities defined during his first term. On the climate issue, France and China signed the Beijing Call for Biodiversity Conservation and Climate Change, an important document, while Marseille (IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020) and Kunming (United Nations Biodiversity Conference 2020 - CBD COP 15) were scheduled to host two major international conferences on biodiversity in 2020. Both events were postponed, and the Kunming one moved to Montreal. However, the progress on climate between the two sides needs to be put into perspective, as Beijing's commitments, including the recent announcement of plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, come at a time when Chinese companies in the environmental field are increasingly in direct competition with French companies. In any case, such commitments have not been made within the framework of the bilateral relationship. Above all, efforts to publicize cooperation benefited China, which sought to differentiate itself from the United States and take advantage of its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement under the Trump administration. As is often the case, the bilateral relationship is thus being instrumentalized in an asymmetrical way, which seems to favor China more than France in their communications on the international scene.

“The bilateral relationship is thus being instrumentalized in an asymmetrical way, which seems to favor China more than France in their communications on the international scene.”

Macron's pragmatism and his focus on Europe, including reaching a common European position on China, have been notable developments. This is in line with the president's political strategy and his determination to use European institutions to optimize leverage in favor of French interests and ensure that major decisions are taken at the European level so as not to isolate France from China at its own expense. In March 2019, wary of a possible Chinese strategy to divide Europeans through mechanisms such as the 16+1, he sought to show European unity by inviting German Chancellor Angela Merkel and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker to a quadrilateral meeting at the Elysée Palace corresponding to Xi's state visit. Eight months later, during his visit to China in November 2019, he made a point of surrounding himself with people from the European Commission, including Representative Phil Hogan and German Education and Research Minister Anja Karliczek.

Beyond the demonstrations of solidarity, true European unity on a range of China-related political issues is difficult to achieve. Some areas have seen considerable progress, such as the EU investment screening mechanism, which strengthens the surveillance of foreign investment, including from China. Another is the negotiations on the anti-coercion mechanism, a mechanism for reviewing any economic activity subsidized by a third country in the internal market—in particular, an attempt to acquire a European company or in the context of a call for tenders for a public contract. Meanwhile, since March 2019, the EU-China Strategic Outlook presents China as a “cooperation partner,” a “negotiating partner,” an “economic competitor,” and, above all, a “systemic rival.”³⁷

While Sino-European relations have deteriorated in recent years, with unprecedented Chinese sanctions targeting European elected officials and institutions since March 2021, the EU is assuming more responsibility for confrontation with China. At the informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brest in mid-January 2022, “China's attitude toward certain EU member states that are under strong political, economic and trade pressure”³⁸ was on the agenda.

37 “EU-China—A Strategic Outlook,” European Commission and HR/VP Contribution to the European Council,” European Commission, March 12, 2019, <https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2019-03/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

38 Réunion Informelle des Ministres des Affaires Étrangères de l'Union Européenne,” Ambassade de France à Accra, January 13–14,

This was a euphemism for Beijing's unprecedented economic coercion of an EU member state, Lithuania. Above all, the EU–China summit in April 2022, the first since June 2020, highlighted the differences in Sino-European views and the slowdown in the cooperation dynamics. Unlike in 2014, China's attitude toward the Russian invasion of Ukraine is closely scrutinized and followed with concern in Europe. It is therefore essential for France not to appear to be going against this trend of European hardening toward China while at the same time ensuring it does not seem to be fully aligned with the American position.

In terms of communication, France does not avoid issues that anger Beijing and speaks more openly than a few years ago. During his telephone exchange with Xi in October 2021, Macron called on China to lift "the coercive measures taken against EU member states and representatives of the European institutions and parliament."³⁹ He was one of the first European heads of state to broach this subject directly with his Chinese counterpart. In November 2021, in an interview with *Le Monde* ahead of the eighth ministerial conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Foreign Minister Le Drian evoked China's "predation" in Africa, the "fool's market" that China was imposing through its loans, and the risk of seeing some African countries go under Chinese "guardianship."⁴⁰ On its Weibo account, the French Embassy in China has, on several occasions, openly addressed the issue of human rights. In November, the embassy even relayed in Chinese the Quai d'Orsay's concerns about tennis player Peng Shuai and called for a transparent investigation into her sexual assault allegations—the only foreign embassy to do so.⁴¹ This remains one of the only uncensored mentions of Peng on the Chinese social network.

This development is the result of double pressure. One source of pressure is the government, including the Ministry of the Economy, previously very favorable to a reconciliation with China for obvious reasons but whose view of China has profoundly changed in recent years. Pressure also comes from a more critical public that is calling for more open condemnations of certain Chinese policies, particularly in human rights. More broadly, China's image among diplomats has changed considerably, and the romanticism of some generations of diplomats is now giving way to growing concern over bilateral relations coupled with the management of a series of bilateral tensions, including, and perhaps even above all, at the European level.

Armed Forces

French authorities do not officially portray China as a threat. Regarding the Indo-Pacific security strategy, French officials frequently insist that this strategy is not directed against China and that the challenges in the Indo-Pacific region should not be approached from only a confrontational perspective. The aim is to meet the aspirations of most countries in the region, who do not want to be locked into a binary choice. On the political level, the goal is also to play up a difference in approach, partly artificial, with the Anglo-Saxon countries while promoting arms exports to a few countries such as India, the UAE, and Indonesia. These remain the driving forces, albeit unstated, of French foreign policy in the region.⁴²

2022, <https://gh.ambafrance.org/Reunion-informelle-des-ministres-des-affaires-etrangees-de-l-Union-europeenne>.

39 "Entretien Téléphonique avec M. Xi Jinping, Président de la République Populaire de Chine," Elysée, October 26, 2021, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/10/26/entretien-telephonique-avec-m-xi-jinping-president-de-la-republique-populaire-de-chine-2>.

40 "Chine–Afrique: Pékin Voit Rouge après les Critiques de Jean-Yves Le Drian," *Le Point Afrique*, November 21, 2021, https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/chine-afrique-pek-in-voit-rouge-apres-les-critiques-de-jean-yves-le-drian-25-11-2021-2453805_3826.php.

41 Sébastien Berriot, "Droits de l'Homme en Chine: L'Ambassade de France Publie des Critiques de l'UE sur Weibo sans Être Censure," Radio France, December 14, 2021, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/droits-de-l-homme-en-chine-l-ambassade-de-france-publie-des-critiques-de-l-ue-sur-weibo-sans-etre-censuree-7905146>.

42 Antoine Bondaz, "La France, une Puissance d'Initiatives en Indo-Pacifique," Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, November 15, 2022, <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/notes/2022/202237.pdf>.



The result of this communication strategy is the use of some diplomatic concepts that are difficult to understand, and never precisely defined: France offering a “third way,” France as a “balancing power,” or France’s purpose to “defend the freedom of sovereignty” as mentioned by Macron in September. This French discourse is sometimes counterproductive with some of its partners because it can lead them to believe that France has an ambiguous position and, above all, that its ambitions are not in line with its real weight. This ultimately raises questions about the credibility of the strategy. In practice, the French strategy is more explicit and coherent, including on China, in at least three aspects.

For instance, the strategic update of the Ministry of the Armed Forces published in January 2021 mentions China (25 references) more often than Russia (22 references). This is proof of the importance given the country in recent years in French strategic thinking.⁴³ Unlike the European Strategic Outlook on China, the Ministry of the Armed Forces presents China primarily as a “systemic rival,” before describing it as an “economic competitor” and a “cooperation partner,” a change of order that is not accidental.⁴⁴ In addition, the increase in cooperation with the two strategic partners of India and Japan, as well as with many countries in the region like Indonesia, Australia, and Singapore, underlines that the China factor remains at the heart of French strategy in the region.

Above all, the French Navy’s regular deployments, particularly in the South China Sea, make it possible to reaffirm that freedom of navigation and overflight and the right of innocent passage, all provided for by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, must be exercised without hindrance. The messages sent to China are therefore multiplying, and communication by deeds, rather than words, is explicit and understood as such by the partners of France. For example, in 2021, as part of the Marianne mission, France deployed a nuclear attack submarine, *Emeraude*, and a support and assistance vessel, *Seine*, for eight months and up to more than 15,000 kilometers away from Metropolitan France, including in the South China Sea, to carry out a mission of “strategic interest.”⁴⁵ The Navy’s main intelligence gathering ship, *Dupuy-de-Lôme*, also spent long months in the region last year and even transited through the Taiwan Strait in fall 2021, according to an announcement by the Minister of the Armed Forces during a Senate hearing.

Intelligence Agencies

Intelligence agencies have repeatedly expressed their concerns about China and are increasingly communicating explicitly about them. In October 2018, according to *Le Parisien*, a joint note from the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI) and the General Directorate for External Security (DGSE) allegedly sounded an alert about multiple attempts from China, notably via LinkedIn, to contact people working in the public and private sectors.⁴⁶ The DGSI has warned about the Chinese threat several times since 2010. In February 2021, the DGSI published a note on China’s espionage attempts targeting Brittany, where Ifremer and Ile Longue are located, the latter hosting the ballistic missile submarines of the French Navy.⁴⁷ In July 2021, the DGSI, seeing the growing amount of foreign interference in research, decided to strengthen its surveillance system. At the same time, the National Agency for the

43 “Actualisation Stratégique,” Ministère des Armes, 2021, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/dgris/REVUE%20STRAT%2021%2004%2002%2021%20FR.pdf>.

44 “Actualisation Stratégique.”

45 Laurent Lagneau, “Le Sous-Marin Nucléaire d’Attaque Émeraude s’Est Aventuré en Mer de Chine Méridionale,” *Opex360*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.opex360.com/2021/02/09/le-sous-marin-nucleaire-dattaque-emeraude-sest-aventure-en-mer-de-chine-meridionale>.

46 “Espionnage: Comment la Chine Tente de Recruter des Français,” *Le Parisien*, October 23, 2018, <https://www.leparisien.fr/international/espionnage-comment-la-chine-tente-de-recruter-des-francais-23-10-2018-7925739.php>.

47 “L’Ifremer de Brest dans le Viseur de la Chine? La DGSI s’Inquiète,” *Le Télégramme*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.letelegramme.fr/bretagne/l-ifremer-de-brest-dans-le-viseur-de-la-chine-la-dgsi-s-inquiete-25-02-2021-12710528.php>.

“Structural problems in the bilateral relationship clearly persist despite the Elysée’s stated aim of promoting the principles of market access, fair competition, reciprocity, and the reduction of trade tensions. ”

Security of Information Systems warned against Chinese compromise campaigns affecting many French entities.⁴⁸

Above all, two former agents of the DGSE, the French spy service, were sentenced in 2020 to eight and 12 years in prison for “delivering information to a foreign power,” “harming the fundamental interests of the nation” and “intelligence with a foreign power” for the benefit of China. As the prosecution pointed out at the time, this was a rare case of “penetration by a foreign power of French intelligence.” Beyond this case, the desire to communicate, even partially, on the subject and to judicialize it indicates an evolution among French authorities.⁴⁹

Trade

Bilateral trade and investment are the priority areas of the bilateral relationship put forward by Macron at the beginning of his presidency, and they are directly tied to domestic policy priorities. There has been progress, beyond the traditional signing of giant contracts for Airbus. For example, Paris secured the total lifting of the French beef ban introduced by China in 2001. France has also pushed at the European level for an agreement ensuring the protection of 100 European food products in China, including 26 French products, and an equivalent number of Chinese products in Europe. France will also be able to continue to export pork to China if it is affected by African swine fever (from areas still free of the disease), according to an agreement signed in December 2021.⁵⁰

However, structural problems in the bilateral relationship clearly persist despite the Elysée’s stated aim of promoting the principles of market access, fair competition, reciprocity, and the reduction of trade tensions. Key problems are that China’s commitments so far remain nonbinding and abstract and that France is in no position to impose quantified commitments on China. For instance, the 2019 Action Plan for Franco-Chinese Relations only mentions that the two countries “wish to rebalance upwards their bilateral economic exchanges.”⁵¹ In this context, France’s trade deficit with China continues to widen to nearly €50 billion in 2022, which is almost half of the deficit on trade in goods.⁵²

French dependence on China, which is real, must however be put into perspective. It is not comparable to the dependence of some Asian countries. If trade with China reached €88 billion in 2021, it is still within the same range

48 Laurent Lagneau, “L’Agence Nationale de la Sécurité des Systèmes d’Information Met en Garde Contre l’Espionnage Chinois,” *Opex360*, March 11, 2022, <https://www.opex360.com/2022/03/11/lagence-nationale-de-la-securite-des-systemes-dinformation-met-en-garde-contre-lespionnage-chinois>.

49 “Deux Anciens Espions Condamnés à 8 et 12 Ans de Prison pour Trahison au Profit de la Chine,” *Le Parisien*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/deux-anciens-espions-condamnes-a-8-et-12-ans-de-prison-pour-trahison-au-profit-de-la-chine-10-07-2020-8351193.php>.

50 “EU and China Sign Landmark Agreement Protecting European Geographical Indications,” European Commission, September 14, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1602; “France / Chine : accord de zonage pour la Fièvre Porcine Africaine (FPA),” *Culture Viande*, February 14, 2022.

51 “Plan d’Action pour les Relations Franco-Chinoises,” Elysée, November 6, 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/11/06/plan-daction-pour-les-relations-franco-chinoises>.

52 “Le chiffre du commerce extérieur,” analyse annuelle 2022, République Française, February 7, 2023, <https://lekiosque.finances.gouv.fr/fichiers/Etudes/Thematiques/A2022.pdf>.



as trade with Italy (€85 billion) or Belgium (€83 billion), and far behind trade with Germany (€150 billion).⁵³ China now accounts for 5% of French exports and 11% of imports. According to customs, these imports from China “remain mainly composed of products with low local added value,”⁵⁴ with clothing and footwear accounting for one fifth, and electronic and computer goods for one third.

Moreover, Chinese direct investments in France are often overestimated in the public discourse, to the point of obsession for many local elected officials who too often consider China as a key topic worth their efforts. Since 2000, France has attracted three times less Chinese investments than its British neighbor, less than its Italian neighbor, and almost as much as Finland, an economy ten times smaller than that of France.⁵⁵ The stock of Chinese investment in France (€8.5 billion) is equivalent to Danish investments and is much lower than the stock of Swiss (€92 billion), British (€103 billion), or Dutch FDI (€104 billion). Finally, in terms of job creation, Chinese investment had less impact than Spanish investments in 2019 and about as much as Canadian investments in 2020.⁵⁶

Companies

Franco-Chinese economic cooperation at the corporate level is very dynamic in all sectors. At the fourth meeting of the Franco-Chinese Business Council in December 2021, organized by the France-China Committee, the terms that came up most often to describe cooperation were ecology, digital, green growth, and health.⁵⁷ French companies seek to highlight the potential for cooperation on climate issues.

Cooperation projects in third countries exist but are few. The case of Engie with TusHoldings (Qinghua) is worth mentioning, as part of the optimization of intelligent energy services (storage and distribution) in Thailand and Egypt, as are those of Bolloré with China Merchants in Nigeria, Bolloré with China Harbour Engineering Company in East Timor, and CGA-CGM with China Harbour Engineering Company in Nigeria. Most of these projects have strict environmental requirements. During Xi’s state visit to France in 2019, a cooperation agreement was signed between Bpifrance, Qair, CIC, and Shanghai SUS Environment for projects in solar, wind, and waste-to-energy in third markets.⁵⁸

The France-China Committee is a key player. It was created in 1979 at the initiative of the French business community with the support of French and Chinese authorities.⁵⁹ It brings together 51 members who in 2021 represented nearly a quarter of the French GDP and two thirds of the capitalization of the CAC40. The committee coordinates cooperation efforts between the two countries and therefore plays a leading role, notably through five working groups that reflect bilateral priorities: third markets (Suez, CNBM, Airbus, bioMérieux, Sanofi, and Sinomach), finance (Bank of China, BNP Paribas, and China Investment Corporation), green and smart industry (Schneider Elec-

53 “Publication du Rapport 2022 sur le Commerce Extérieur de la France,” Ministère de l’Économie, des Finances, et de la Souveraineté Industrielle et Numérique, February 11, 2022, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Articles/2022/02/11/publication-du-rapport-2022-sur-le-commerce-exterieur-de-la-france>.

54 Camille Bortolini and Estelle Jacques, “Les Relations Commerciales entre la France et la Chine en 2018,” Ministry of Economy, Finance, and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty, April 4, 2019, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Articles/16671c85-d180-452d-8078-ae-555409b06e/files/750f4203-2af0-4cca-a1f3-34256e36c1cf>.

55 «Bilan des Investissements Internationaux en France 2021,» *Business France*, March 14, 2022, https://www.businessfrance.fr/Media/PRODUCTION/PROCOM/M%C3%A9diath%C3%A8que/Bilan_IDE_2021_FR.pdf.

56 «Bilan des investissements internationaux en France 2021.»

57 Le Comité France Chine, “Le Conseil d’Entreprises Franco-Chinois,” <https://www.comitefrancechine.com/presentation>.

58 “Signature du Contrat de Partenariat entre Qair, SUS Environment, Bpifrance et China Investment Corporation en Présence des Chefs d’Etat Emmanuel Macron et Xi Jinping,” Qair, March 25, 2019, <https://www.qair.energy/pt/blog/2019/03/25/officialisation-de-la-joint-venture-composee-de-quadrant-international-du-groupe-chinois-sus-environment-et-des-fonds-souverains-francais-et-chinois-en-presence-des-chefs-detat-emmanuel-macro>.

59 Le Comité France Chine.

tric, COMAC, Air Liquide, Dassault Systèmes, Dongfeng Motor Corporation, and ZTE), consumption and services (L'Oréal, China Poly Group, Alibaba Group, China Mobile Communication Group, Danone, Huawei Technologies, jd.com, LVMH, Sodexo, Sanofi, and Seb), and low-carbon energy (EDF, Orano, China National Nuclear Corporation, and China General Nuclear Power Corporation).

However, beyond the calls for strengthening bilateral cooperation, large French companies have contrasting balance sheets from their Chinese market experience. These exist amid a broader political context in which these companies must reinforce their de-risking logic and ensure greater resilience.

Companies Benefiting from Chinese Demand

Airbus is one of the foreign companies that has benefited the most from the increase in Chinese demand, with Chinese competitor Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC) still unable to meet local demand. The announcement of the sale of 292 A320s in July 2022, an order worth more than €35 billion, is the latest illustration.⁶⁰ Cooperation is multiplying but is the subject of increasingly frequent indirect criticism from American competitor Boeing and, above all, from American authorities. An example is the publication of a "Flying with the Enemy" report that criticizes the links between Airbus and Chinese arms industries.⁶¹

Other French companies whose sales are increasing in China include the luxury groups LVMH and Kering, as the country is on its way to becoming the world's leading luxury goods market, as well as the Accord group, which recently signed a long-term franchise agreement with a subsidiary of the Chinese Country Garden group.⁶² The former, however, are vulnerable to political vagaries that could, because of organized boycotts—such as the ones held in recent years against European brands like H&M that are not essential to the Chinese economy—see their sales collapse in a short time. These companies operate in sectors where businesses are easily substitutable and their activities are less strategic than others. Airbus is in the opposite situation, as it is difficult to replace and is strategic for Chinese ambitions.

Struggling Companies

French car manufacturers are facing significant difficulties in China. The Stellantis Group experienced several years of falling sales in China through 2021, with a market share of about 0.5% and stinging failures like DS Automobiles.⁶³ However, Peugeot and Citroën were among the first European brands to try their luck in China, the first in 1985 and the second in 1992.

Renault renounced its partnership with Dongfeng in 2020 but reinvested with Geely as a partner to produce hybrid vehicles. The French company's role is limited; for example, it will mainly contribute to the strategy and development of channels and services and not to the engine technologies.⁶⁴

In the nuclear sector, Orano retains an important presence in China among foreign actors, but the project to build a

60 "292 Airbus A320 pour Quatre Compagnies Aériennes Chinoises," Air Cosmos, July 1, 2022, <https://air-cosmos.com/article/292-airbus-a320-pour-quatre-compagnies-aeriennes-chinoises-41332>.

61 "Risks of Airbus Ties to China," Horizon Advisory, June 2022, <https://www.horizonadvisory.org/flight-risk>.

62 "Accor et Ennismore Vont Ouvrir Plus de 1300 Hôtels JO&JOE en Chine," Tour Mag, April 22, 2022, https://www.tourmag.com/Accor-et-Ennismore-vont-ouvrir-plus-de-1300-hotels-JO-JOE-en-Chine_a113562.html.

63 Nabil Bourassi, "Stellantis Met Jeep Chine en Faillite et Réduit encore sa Présence," La Tribune, October 31, 2022, <https://www.atribune.fr/entreprises-finance/industrie/automobile/stellantis-met-jeep-chine-en-faillite-et-se-retire-peu-a-peu-du-marche-chinois-938930.html>.

64 «Renault Recentre ses Activités en Chine, Va Mettre Fin à sa JV avec Dongfeng,» AGEFI Dow Jones, April 14, 2020, <https://investir.lesechos.fr/actu-des-valeurs/la-vie-des-actions/renault-recentre-ses-activites-en-chine-va-mettre-fin-a-sa-jv-avec-dongfeng-1835920>.



large-scale reprocessing and recycling plant for spent industrial fuel with a capacity of 800t, on the model of the La Hague plant, is slipping. The negotiations, which started in 2007, may never succeed, because of growing reluctance in France and elsewhere about this project.

Companies Withdrawing, Partially or Totally, from the Market

Several major French groups have recently withdrawn completely from the Chinese market, including distribution companies Auchan and Carrefour. Implanted in China since 1995, Carrefour announced in June 2019 the sale of its local subsidiary and more than 200 stores to Suning, the country's third largest ecommerce platform.⁶⁵ Auchan announced in October 2020 the sale to Alibaba of its shares in the SunArt group, a joint venture founded in 2000 with a local company.⁶⁶

In the 1990s, France Gas established strong relationships with China's gas industries. Engie has been present in the country for more than 40 years. In China, and especially in Shanghai, the company focuses on renewable energy production and on operation and maintenance, mainly in solar, electric vehicle charging, and district energy networks such as district heating and cooling. However, the group is in the process of reducing its workforce in China by 80%, keeping only about 20 employees and a simple representative office.

Person-to-Person Exchange

French presence in China has been declining from its peak in 2014. According to the embassy's register of French people, their number has decreased continuously since 2015, from more than 31,000 people to 29,000 in 2019 and 24,000 in 2021.⁶⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions have only accelerated a preexisting trend. Beyond that, the entire French community's decline is just as important. According to Franck Desevedavy, foreign trade advisor and ICC-Taiwan-Shanghai arbitrator, the French population of Hong Kong was halved in less than five years, Shanghai lost 60% of its French population, and Beijing lost 70%.⁶⁸ Between 2017 and 2022, nearly 40,000 French people left China. Conversely, the number of Chinese citizens in France has remained at around 110,000, with a slight upward trend.⁶⁹

As for university exchanges, the number of Chinese students in France has stagnated since the mid-2010s at around 40,000 students, as has the number of French students in China, at around 10,000, mostly in Shanghai.⁷⁰ To attract Chinese students, France has six Campus France spaces in Beijing and in the five consular cities, and nine branches (Chongqing, Hangzhou, Harbin, Jinan, Kunming, Nanjing, Qingdao, Tianjin, Xi'an) located for the most part within the Alliances Françaises. Chinese students, on the other hand, largely prefer private higher education institutions, such as business schools. The goal set by French authorities, which was to reach 50,000 students in France by 2020, is thus getting closer to being achieved. France ranks second among the European Union destinations

65 Simon Leplâtre, "Carrefour se Désengage de Chine," *Le Monde*, June 24, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2019/06/23/carrefour-cede-80-de-ses-activites-en-chine_5480333_3234.html.

66 Morgan Leclerc, «Auchan se Retire de Chine en Cédant sa Participation dans SunArt», *LSA*, October 19, 2020, <https://www.lsa-conso.fr/auchan-se-retire-de-chine-en-cedant-sa-participation-dans-sun-art,361743>.

67 Franck Desevedavy, "La Chine Est de Plus en Plus Présente dans le Monde, les Français de Moins en Moins Présents en Chine," *Cercle*, January 29, 2022, <https://cercle-k2.fr/etudes/la-chine-est-de-plus-en-plus-presente-dans-le-monde-les-francais-de-moins-en-moins-presents-en-chine>.

68 Franck Desevedavy, "La Chine Est de Plus en Plus Présente dans le Monde, les Français de Moins en Moins Présents en Chine."

69 «L'immigration chinoise en France», *Institut National d'Études Démographiques*, January 18, 2023, <https://www.ined.fr/fr/actualites/presse/immigration-chinoise-en-france/>.

70 "Fiche Mobilité: Chine," *Campus France Ressources*, https://ressources.campusfrance.org/publications/mobilite_pays/fr/chine_fr.pdf.

chosen by Chinese students.⁷¹ The pandemic marked an abrupt halt to the departure of French students to China while the reverse is not true, even if the number of students in France has decreased. One direct consequence is the diversion of students who wish to have an experience in a Chinese-speaking country to Taiwan or Singapore. Others abandon the goal of learning Mandarin and go to another Asian country. Only 0.4% of French students are learning Mandarin, barely more than those who are learning Russian.⁷²

Cultural exchanges between France and China are numerous and ancient. The French Cultural Center, now called the Institut Français, is the oldest foreign cultural center in China; it was inaugurated in 2004. The Year of China in France (2003–2004) and the Year of France in China (2004–2005) were the first times China organized a cultural year with a foreign country. French cultural activities in China are mainly structured around four highlights: French language (Francophonie Month), Franco-Chinese cultural cooperation (Croisements festival), the environment (Franco-Chinese Environment Month), and literature (Fu Lei Prize). The Croisements festival has become the largest foreign festival in China.⁷³ The French cultural network in China is important and was strengthened in the 2000s with, among others, 14 Alliances Françaises. There are also many French educational institutions in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Wuhan, and Hong Kong. In recent years, priority has been given to cooperation in the field of cultural heritage. In 2019, the president of the republic inaugurated, in the presence of Chinese authorities, the West Bund Museum Project, a branch of the Centre Pompidou in Shanghai.⁷⁴

Regarding tourist travel, the number of Chinese tourists in France more than doubled between 2010 and 2019, from 0.9 million to 2.2 million, according to data from the Bank of France.⁷⁵ Although they represent only 3% of tourists, they account for 7% of revenue, with an important downside in the low number of nights per tourist, five nights on average.⁷⁶ Since 2020, the interruption of group travel, the nonissuance of tourist visas (reciprocity), and the suspension of passport issuance by China led to a collapse in the number of Chinese tourists. The French market has had to adapt.⁷⁷

Research on or with China

Cooperation in the field of science and technology developed considerably over the decades before experiencing a slowdown in recent years, caused in particular by growing concerns within Western countries about the diversion of certain collaborations by Chinese partners. However, close to 3,000 researchers from both countries from 600 research units still cooperate within some 60 joint research structures.⁷⁸

The Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) was the first French organization and one of the very first

71 Nathalie Guibert, “47 500 Étudiants Chinois en France, un Fer de Lance pour Pékin,” *Le Monde*, October 5, 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/education/article/2021/10/05/47-500-etudiants-chinois-en-france-un-fer-de-lance-pour-pekini_6097227_1473685.html.

72 “Quelles Sont les 10 Langues Préférées des Étudiants Français?” *VL Media*, March 24, 2022, <https://vl-media.fr/quelles-sont-les-10-langues-preferrees-des-etudiants-francais>.

73 “Festival Croisements en Chine,” Institut Français, <https://www.institutfrancais.com/fr/magazine/portfolio/festival-croisements-en-chine>.

74 “Centre Pompidou x West Bund Museum Project Shanghai,” Centre Pompidou, <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/le-centre-pompidou/a-linternational/centre-pompidou-x-west-bund-museum-project-shanghai>.

75 Agence de Développement Touristique de la France, “Chine,” <https://www.atout-france.fr/notre-reseau/chine>.

76 Christophe Palierse, “Coronavirus: la France Désertée par les Touristes Chinois,” *Les Echos*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.lesechos.fr/industrie-services/tourisme-transport/coronavirus-la-france-desertee-par-les-touristes-chinois-1169048>.

77 Christophe Palierse, «Coronavirus : la France Désertée par les Touristes Chinois.»

78 “Laboratoires et Réseaux Franco-Chinois de Recherche,” Ambassade de France en Chine, June 2014, <https://cn.ambafrance.org/Laboratoires-et-reseaux-franco-chinois-de-recherche-23911>.



international organizations to sign a bilateral cooperation agreement with China. It did so in October 1978, with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, a few months after the framework agreement between France and China on scientific exchanges. This agreement was renewed in 2018. Many agreements with other Chinese institutions have been signed, most of them between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s. Since then, other forms of agreement have multiplied, notably the creation of the Franco-Chinese Institutes of University Cooperation, stemming from the 2003 framework law on Sino-foreign cooperation. These have grown from seven to 17 in the last 10 years in China, and to several dozen in France in more than 20 cities.⁷⁹

Scientific and technological cooperation focuses on the fight against emerging infectious diseases (creation of an Institut Pasteur in Shanghai and an accredited P4 laboratory in Wuhan in January 2017) and space (launch of the CFOSat satellite on October 29, 2018, and the Space Variable Objects Monitor project). Cooperation on the environment and sustainable development pursues three priorities: climate change, sustainable urban development, and water. The AFD has also been working in China since 2004 (24 projects). Now, 140 decentralized cooperation projects involve 60 French local authorities and 47 Chinese local authorities, which makes it possible to deal with concrete topics of common interest.⁸⁰

Social science research on China is structured around university research centers such as the Research Center on Modern and Contemporary China of the CNRS and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS); the CNRS East Asian Civilizations Research Centre, the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, the Collège de France, and Paris Diderot University; the CNRS Institute for Research on East Asia, the University of Paris, and Inalco; and the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China. The latter, based in Hong Kong with a branch in Taiwan since 1994, is placed under the cosupervision of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and the CNRS. However, academic research is not focused on so-called policy-oriented issues, and interactions with French political authorities are very limited. French government support for the establishment in January 2020 of a European Institute for Chinese Studies was a failure: it has no visibility, does not influence policy decisions at the European level, and could delay other initiatives. None of the think tanks has a research team on China with a critical mass of even a dozen researchers, and the main researchers are dispersed between institutions, unlike the strategy deployed by Germany, Australia, and Sweden to structure such efforts. The influence of French Sinologists on administrations, and ultimately on decision making, is therefore limited. This poses a problem both in understanding the country and in directing research toward priority topics for these administrations.

Public Opinion and the Political Class

China's image in France has deteriorated over the past five years. In Pew Research's annual surveys, favorable opinions about China decreased from 59% to 29% between 2015 and 2021, and unfavorable opinions rose from 49% to 66%.⁸¹ These unfavorable opinions have been systematically above 50% for the past 10 years.⁸² A 2020 CEIAS/IFRI poll highlighted that China's image had deteriorated for 53% of French people and improved for only 8% of them.⁸³

79 "Les Instituts Franco-Chinois de Coopération Universitaire," Ambassade de France en Chine, 2022-2023, <https://cn.ambafrance.org/les-instituts-franco-chinois-de-cooperation-universitaire-25891>.

80 Christine Moro, "Les évolutions de la coopération décentralisée franco-chinoise," *La Lettre Diplomatique*, 2019, <https://www.lalettrediplomatique.fr/les-evolutions-de-la-cooperation-decentralisee-franco-chinoise>.

81 Laura Silver, Christine Huang, and Laura Clancy, "Negative Views of China Tied to Critical Views of Its Policies on Human Rights," Pew Research Center, June 29, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/29/negative-views-of-china-tied-to-critical-views-of-its-policies-on-human-rights>.

82 Silver, Huang, and Clancy, "Negative Views of China."

83 Richard Q. Turcsanyi, Matej Simalcik, Kristina Kornska, Renata Sedlakova, Jiří Čeněk, Andrej Findor, Ondrej Buchel, et al., "European

It should be pointed out, however, that China remains relatively unknown in France, even though there is growing interest in the country. Although TV and radio programs on or about China are multiplying and attract a good audience, such as documentaries broadcast on Arte or France 5, general knowledge about the country is still limited. However, there is a very strong mobilization among part of the youth, especially on social media, on a specific issue: the fate of the Uyghurs in China.⁸⁴ The combination of the massive use of social media, the mobilization of leading political figures such as Raphaël Glucksmann and personalities from the world of sport and entertainment, and the issue of discrimination against Muslims, seems to partly explain this mobilization of part of French civil society and the need for the political class to respond to it.

“The French political class mobilizes relatively little on China”

This mobilization resulted in the adoption of a National Assembly resolution in January 2022 on “the recognition and condemnation of the genocidal nature of the systematic political violence as well as the crimes against humanity currently perpetrated by the People’s Republic of China against the Uyghurs.”⁸⁵ It was adopted almost unanimously (169 votes in favor, one against and five abstentions). There is a growing willingness on the part of parliamentarians to deal with China, and above all a change in the tone of information reports on this subject. In 2005, for example, a news report on “Trade between China and France” referred to “considerable opportunities” and sought to present China “no longer as a peril but as an opportunity for companies and therefore for employment.”⁸⁶ Since then, various information reports mostly highlight the lack of reciprocity—far from the win-win partnership touted by the Chinese authorities—and the problems of intellectual property protection and forced technology transfers. In the 2022 report, entitled “The Strategy of France and Europe toward China,” parliamentarians called for a “better defense of France’s interests against foreign powers.”⁸⁷

A 2021 Senate report dedicated to the protection of scientific assets and academic freedom explicitly targeted China as one of the major threats, and a second report on China made a series of recommendations “to address the means implemented by China to deploy its power in Europe.”⁸⁸ The reports therefore insist on the need, from now on, to protect France against Chinese desires, much more than on opportunities for cooperation. This is a major change in the space of 10 years.

Public Opinion on China in the Age of COVID-19,” Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2020, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/european_public_opinion_on_china_in_the_age_of_covid-19.pdf.

- 84 “Proposition de Résolution Portant sur la Reconnaissance et la Condamnation du Caractère Génocidaire des Violences Politiques Systématiques ainsi que des Crimes Contre l’Humanité Actuellement Perpétrés par la République Populaire de Chine à l’Égard des Ouïghours,” *La Voix du Nord*, December 2, 2021, <https://www.lavoixdunord.fr/911212/article/2020-12-21/en-france-les-jeunes-touche-par-le-sort-des-ouighours-surtout-sur-les-reseaux>.
- 85 “Reconnaissance et condamnation du caractère génocidaire des violences politiques systématiques ainsi que des crimes contre l’humanité actuellement perpétrés par la République populaire de Chine à l’égard des Ouïghours,” *Assemblée Nationale*, December 2, 2021, https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/dossiers/reconnaissance_crime_chine_ouighours.
- 86 Tony Dreyfus and Hervé Novelli, “Rapport d’Information...sur les Échanges Commerciaux entre la Chine et la France,” *La République Française Vie Publique*, July 1, 2005, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/27746-rapport-dinfo-sur-les-echanges-commerciaux-entre-la-chine-et-la-france>.
- 87 Bérengère Poletti and Buon Tan, “Rapport d’Information Déposé en Application de l’Article 145 du Règlement, par la Commission des Affaires Étrangères, en Conclusion des Travaux d’Une Mission d’Information sur la Stratégie de la France et de l’Europe à l’Égard de la Chine,” *Assemblée Nationale*, February 9, 2022, https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/dossiers/politique_france_europe_chine.
- 88 «La France Peut-Elle Contribuer au Réveil Européen Face à la Chine?» *Sénat*, September 23, 2021, <http://www.senat.fr/presse/cp20210923b.html>.



More broadly, the French political class mobilizes relatively little on China, unlike in other European countries. China is most often mentioned when human rights issues are addressed, but also, increasingly, when issues of French sovereignty are discussed. However, there is an important development: the number of French politicians with explicit proximity to the Chinese Embassy is in free fall. While increasing interactions with Chinese representatives was previously seen as beneficial to their political careers, as they could present them to their voters as a search for economic opportunities, China's deteriorating image in France and international tensions are changing the situation. Politicians can now score political points among voters by openly criticizing certain Chinese policies.

Many groups aimed at strengthening France-China relations through networks of personalities have been established but are now less visible. Some are also criticized as networks of influence primarily from China toward France and not the other way around.⁸⁹ This is the case, for example, of the France-China Foundation, Fondation France-Chine, China France Investment Dialogue, Club 50, Club Connexion France-Chine, and Comité d'Echanges Franco-Chinois. The gradual awareness in the media and in the administration of Chinese influence strategies in France, and the publication of research on this subject in recent years, has tended to weaken these networks and increase wariness among parts of the authorities and civil society.

89 Bruna Basini, "Qui Sont les Relais de l'Influence Chinoise en France?" *Le Journal du Dimanche*, January 30, 2023, <https://www.lejdd.fr/Economie/qui-sont-les-relais-de-linfluence-chinoise-en-france-3477800>.

Part 3:

Imagining the Future of the Chinese Communist Party

In this third section, we present two scenarios for the Chinese Communist Party: one of success and one of failure. Success in this case is the CCP's ability to maintain its hegemony and increase its power. Failure, on the other hand, is a process that, even if it does not lead to a collapse of the regime, could result in a significant loss of power. It is perhaps best to begin by noting that building scenarios does not mean making predictions. Predictions are the domain of hard science; our domain of fiction is one of anticipation, a hermeneutic, an art of interpretation. This section is not about predicting events but rather about interpreting processes that offer glimpses of a potential future. The use of scenarios allows us to formulate hypotheses, including some that may seem far-fetched, but we may be wrong to dismiss. These pieces have heuristic force in that they allow us to push hypotheses to their logical consequences. This work can be regarded as thought experiments. The indefinite nature of the future makes it possible to alter the sociohistorical conditions that might be encountered. This malleability is important because it allows an exploratory dimension. The two scenarios presented here thus allow for reflection on two possible futures for the CCP and the reactions they could generate on the French side, bearing in mind that despite France's growing willingness to protect its interests in the South Pacific, the asymmetry of power and the distance would probably lead Paris to be very cautious. This has been clearly reflected in the previous sections.

Scenario 1: Asphyxiation of Taiwan

In November 2022, Xi Jinping was invested for a third term: his power was largely reinforced and his enemies eliminated. Many disgruntled cadres grumble but none dare to directly oppose the new Great Helmsman. With his future assured, the general secretary demands a plan from the party and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to bend Taiwan to his will. The renegade island must return to the bosom of China by the centenary of the PLA in 2027. The generals believe, however, that this timetable makes any plan to invade Taiwan impractical, so the island must fall without a shot.

At the start of 2023, the People's Republic of China deploys all its information manipulation capabilities to promote the electoral campaign of the Kuomintang candidate, Eric Chu, president of the Nationalist Party since October 2021, against the candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Lin Chia-lung, former minister of transport and communications in the government of Tsai Ing-wen. Disregarding sociological surveys that unanimously reveal entrenched local identity, the CCP hopes election of the opposition candidate will facilitate operations to bring the two shores closer together. Far from innovating, however, Chinese influencers resort to resources already used toward Taiwan without success. The Chinese media dedicated to disinformation, such as China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation and Voice of the Strait, multiply their broadcasts aimed at the island population and especially at its youth, who must be absolutely conquered. Having failed to take control of the Taiwanese media, the CCP tries to disqualify them. Voters must no longer believe in any one media, and the very possibility of establishing the truth must be annihilated. The CCP also operates numerous local outposts that can launder and disseminate information it has forged in favor of the KMT. These include professional associations, such as those of fishermen and farmers in the south of the island who are largely pro-KMT, and networks of Buddhist temples, business circles, and mafia groups.



Despite these efforts, the DPP candidate, Lin Chia-lung, is elected on January 17, 2024, with 48.4% of the vote. Eric Chu collects only 41.2% of the vote, and the CCP's plan sinks with him. This mediocre result provokes the ire of Xi, who promises a massive purge of the generals if Taiwan is not under control before 2027. This reprieve leads the generals to draw up another, more aggressive plan. Salvation could come from the United States, where the campaign for the presidential election is raging between Donald Trump, again the candidate of the Republican Party, and Kamala Harris, the Democratic candidate endorsed by Joe Biden, who declined to run for a second term. This campaign gives rise to unprecedented verbal and physical violence, as Trump's supporters do not hesitate to threaten, intimidate, and physically assault Democratic sympathizers. Trump builds his candidacy on Washington's supposed media decay, promising to lynch them if he is brought to power. In the November 2024 election, Harris receives 50.1% of the popular vote and a narrow electoral vote margin. Over the months before inauguration, Trump refuses to accept this result and encourages his voters to protest in front of the White House and Capitol. Moreover, the Supreme Court grapples with procedural irregularities, such as some mailed-in ballots allegedly being counted despite arriving after the legal deadline—mailed-in ballots traditionally favor the Democrats. Voters are divided, the United States seems to be literally cut in two, and faith in institutions is shaken as they are paralyzed while waiting for the Supreme Court's decisions. Some states, encouraged by Trump, are proposing a return to the Confederacy. The justices hold the future of federalism in their hands. Many Democrats fear that the deeply conservative court will end up bringing Trump to power.

While Americans are focused on their contested election, China decides to go on the offensive. On December 21, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Wenbin delivers a resounding speech in which he accuses the Taiwanese government of imperiousness in its fight against maritime crime off the coast of Taiwan, endangering part of China's economy and the jobs of thousands of Chinese. To put an end to this "intolerable situation," Wang says Chinese authorities, to which the Taiwanese government is subject, have decided to implement a quarantine around the island. According to Chinese authorities, this is not a military blockade but only a police force measure, whose implementation is entrusted to the PLA. To do this, the Chinese Navy, supported by its Air Force, is deployed around Taiwan. Any vessel to or from Taiwan is now to be controlled by the Chinese forces. Supplies to the island are not to be hindered in any way, but Chinese authorities will seize any contraband or goods sold illegally in Taiwan, including weapons. Wang clarifies that this is not an act of war but simply an enforcement of the law of the PRC, a decision motivated by the failure of the local authorities. Any state that does not respect the measures taken by Beijing will suffer the consequences.

Later the same day, the Chinese Navy begins its deployment, accompanied by hundreds of planes patrolling near Taiwan. Lin immediately asks for the support of the U.S. and Japanese governments, but Biden is reluctant to intervene. American democracy is threatened from within, and China has not invaded Taiwan; without a formal act of war, it is difficult to propose military intervention to an American population plunged into a crisis of exceptional gravity. Faced with Biden's hesitations, the Japanese government refuses to intervene alone despite its concerns. The U.S. president urges the Taiwanese not to make rash decisions, as no U.S. intervention could be justified if the war was provoked by Taiwan. Lin complies despite plans proposed by the Taiwanese military to break the quarantine. In Paris, as a precautionary measure, Macron decides to suspend all freedom of navigation operations in the China Sea and in the Taiwan Strait until further notice. During a telephone exchange with Xi, he offers to act as an intermediary, a proposal rejected by the CCP's general secretary. The French forces present in New Caledonia and French Polynesia are placed on alert and the chief of staff of the French Army (CEMA) urgently requests an assessment of the situation from the DGSE and the Directorate of Military Intelligence.

The Chinese Navy deploys off the coast of Taiwan and blocks access to the island's eight main ports: Kaohsiung and its annex of Anping, Keelung and the annex of Suao, Taipei, Mailiao, Hualien, and Taichung. The PLA also cuts several submarine cables linking Taiwan to the rest of the world; covers the perimeter of Taiwan with thousands of

underwater mines; and launches, in just a few hours, several thousand cyberattacks against Taiwan's administrations, energy and transport distribution infrastructure, financial institutions, hospital system, and major Taiwanese companies. The Taiwanese government's cybersecurity department is overwhelmed by the relentless stream of attacks from the mainland, none of which are claimed by Beijing; officially, these are isolated acts of patriotic citizens. Local institutions are completely disorganized. The U.S. and Japanese governments, as well as the European Union, protest, but do not go so far as to impose sanctions on China for fear of worsening the situation. The French president is notably one of the proponents, alongside the German chancellor, of a nuanced position toward Beijing. The priority, as emphasized by the French Economy and Foreign Affairs Ministries, is to not antagonize China and thus avoid sanctions that could weaken French groups, similar to those imposed by Beijing in 2008. A note, given by CEMA to the president, says that the French Army model does not allow the country to consider any involvement in the conflict that is brewing except on the cyber level, knowing that Chinese retaliatory measures will undoubtedly be severe. Intellectuals, contrary to their posture during the war in Ukraine in 2022, struggle to take an interest in Taiwan, and those who take sides plead for noninterventionism: "Taiwan is too far away;" "France has no interest in this matter, which is the responsibility of the United States;" "It is only the end of a Cold War that has lasted too long;" "After all, the Taiwanese are Chinese, we must not oppose their desire for reunification." Some in the French media deplore China's aggressiveness and Western passivity but seem to consider Taiwan already lost. The prevailing interpretation of others is that the Chinese will not go any further—that Xi has no desire for territorial expansion. His ambition is limited to ensuring the hegemony of the CCP: "As long as we do not provoke them, the Chinese have only pacifist ambitions," says a former French prime minister.

Deeming the attitude of the Chinese government cruel and unacceptable, Taiwanese protest in the streets of the island's main cities to demand respect for their political freedom and intervention from the international community, chanting their slogan: "Remember Ukraine!" Beijing then activates sleeper cells that have been planted on the island. A document revealing that the Japanese and U.S. governments have no intention of fighting for Taiwan is circulated via social media. Presented as authentic, it is actually a forgery by the Chinese Ministry of State Security. Chinese agents on the island, taking advantage of the confusion created by this document, organize counter-demonstrations that target Japan and the United States. Tension is rising, and the Lin government becomes the target of rising criticism for its inability to manage this crisis, failure to defend the island, and even for its duplicity. Confusion takes hold of the population, which feels totally isolated.

As soon as the following month, the material consequences of the quarantine begin to be felt; energy resources melt visibly, electricity is only available for a few hours a day, and some raw materials essential to the Taiwanese economy no longer reach the island. The success of an armed intervention now seems highly probable as China has been able to strengthen its positions. On February 10, 2025, on the pretext of health difficulties caused by a virulent virus on the island of Matsu, a Taiwanese territory located only nine kilometers from the mainland and occupied by some 13,000 people, Beijing sends a detachment of its medical corps accompanied by Marines. They grab Matsu without firing a single shot. This first capture is presented by the Chinese media as a national victory. Morale is at its lowest in Taipei. The political class is torn apart, and a session of the legislature sinks into clashes between deputies of the KMT and the DPP. The anger of the population roars.

In Kinmen, another offshore island, the situation is deteriorating. The quarantine exacerbates the water supply difficulties that the island has suffered for many years. The population draws heavily from groundwater reserves, but this causes an extremely rapid increase in the salinity of the water, which quickly becomes unconsumable. The six leaders of the island's towns, all members of the KMT, sign an agreement to demand immediate intervention by China. Beijing agrees and, like the operation on Matsu, takes possession of Kinmen without firing a shot on the grounds of humanitarian intervention.

On the basis of these bitter failures, the coalition tables a motion to dismiss the head of state before the legislature. A



very large majority demands the departure of Lin. Chu presents himself as the only one capable of calming Beijing and obtaining the survival of Taiwan's de facto independence. Xi, for his part, says he will agree to discuss lifting the quarantine if the KMT candidate becomes his interlocutor. Fearing a humiliating setback, Lin and his vice president resign before the legislative vote. The deputies then form an emergency government; entrust with full negotiating powers Chu; and schedule a new presidential election for April 15, if calm has returned. Xi and Chu agree to meet in Beijing, where Chu flies at once. The negotiations end after several hours with the announcement of the lifting of the quarantine imposed by China in exchange for Taiwan's acceptance of the "one country, two systems" principle. The situation rapidly calms in the Strait and the Taiwanese can resume an almost normal life. The idea of an independent island is definitively abandoned, and an official representation of the government of Beijing settles in Taipei.

In the United States, Harris is sworn in on January 20. The situation seems to have stabilized, but the country's image has collapsed in Asia, where no state seems to trust them anymore. Beijing then launches a New Asia Initiative from which the United States is excluded. Most countries in the region are eager to express their interest. At the Nanjing Summit on August 1, 2027—a century after the creation of the Red Army—to inaugurate the initiative, even Australia and New Zealand are among the founding members. The French government, having initially refused to integrate into this Chinese-controlled organization, joins it in 2029 in order to stop Beijing's influence operations in New Caledonia and French Polynesia. At the same time, Paris tries to produce a reassuring message toward Washington, but French leaders no longer believe in the ability of the United States to play a stabilizing role in Asia or even in Europe.

Scenario 2: Technological Wild West

On January 30, 2022, Wang Jisi, director of the Institute of International and Strategic Studies at Beida University in Beijing, published a study titled "China-U.S. Strategic Rivalry in Technology: Analysis and Perspectives" ("技术领域的中美战略竞争:分析与展望"). In it, Wang developed the idea that China's technological advances are insufficient. They have placed the country in a position of dependence, vulnerable to the decoupling policy of the United States, especially in the fields of semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and aerospace. The diagnosis of the researcher and his team was relentless: China is late, extremely late. Citations of Chinese research work remain too few, its patents are imperfect, and researchers remain insufficiently trained. The next day, judging that Wang's remarks about the Chinese model were too unflattering, the government blocked access to the study and entrusted Jiang Jinqun, the new director of the Central Policy Research Office, with the formulation of countermeasures.

On May 13, 2023, at the end of the session of the 14th National People's Congress, a national technology catch-up plan called "China Can Do It!" (中国能做到!) is launched. The Party's idea is to mobilize all of society's elements in order to position China as the leading scientific and technological power by 2043. Staunch activism is imposed on all cadres of the party, reminiscent of the Great Leap Forward. The plan is not about liberalizing research but about administering it with as much finesse as possible and instilling the desire to develop science in every part of society. A Bureau for the Control of Contribution to Science is established within the Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection; it is tasked with ensuring the involvement of all cadres. This goal becomes a priority, especially as the harmful consequences of U.S. decoupling measures gain momentum and hinder the progress of key players in the Chinese economy. In addition to social stability and economic development, managers are now also evaluated on the number of scientific or technological research projects they have been able to promote in their area of administrative responsibility, much like KGB officers under Yuri Andropov. To respond to these orders, party cadres are forcing many economic players to invest in research; in particular, they condition access to some state services upon a minimum contribution to the development of national research. By the end of 2024, these efforts made have led to a real increase in the resources invested in research. Feedback from the base is excellent: in all key areas, China is catching up, the number of ongoing research projects has grown by nearly 25% in a single year, patent filing forecasts are spectacular, and the architecture for training researchers is completely redesigned. The few black

sheep who refuse to implement this plan without challenging its relevance or its terms are punished. Euphoria grips the Standing Committee, which is quick to realize it could have set even more ambitious goals.

Projects multiply not only in research centers and universities but also within companies and the People's Liberation Army. The researchers who contributed to China's emergence on the international scene are thrust under the spotlight, schoolchildren learn by heart the story of their great discoveries, and songs are written to glorify Chinese science. An ideological fever takes over the country. In 2025, Beijing can boast of some major successes: the development of nanobots able to inject payloads directly into the heart of diseased cells, offering significant advances in the fight against several infectious diseases; the successful cloning of chimpanzees, the species whose genetic heritage is closest to humans, from somatic cells that make it possible to envisage human cloning in the relatively near future; and the success of the Quantum Experiments at Space Scale program, which led to significant advances on an internet secured by quantum teleportation-based cryptography. The China Can Do It! program is so successful that no criticism is allowed. Naysayers who dare suggest dispersion of efforts or the marginal usefulness of certain projects are excluded from any position. Consent is unanimous.

But as early as 2026, the Party's campaign begins to generate a series of problems. Some executives point to dissonances and inconsistencies in the evaluations of the implementation of the China Can Do It! program. The results seem largely overestimated by local cadres. The members of society involved in the program appear more inclined to pursue their interests than those of the Party. However, the risk of sanction forces these far-sighted executives to remain silent. In fact, the mode of governance put in place by Xi since 2013 has placed fear at the heart of the regime's stability. The level of officials' adherence to the Party's projects, already relatively low under Hu Jintao, begins collapsing. The Party cadres, the real backbone of the regime, are paralyzed by fear, and total consent quickly becomes the best way to be promoted. Any bold administrative initiative that could misinterpret the party's ambitions is perceived as reckless risk-taking. The corollary is the reinforcement of a culture of lying already well established at the heart of the system. An era of administrative glaciation gradually emerges and the regime is no longer reliably informed. Not only are executives frightened, but devices for assessing social mood, such as complaints offices, are emptied of their substance. No information that has not been adapted to the expectations of the government can hope to go up the information chain, lying is institutionalized, and the party is intoxicated by its own administration. It is strong, liberticidal, repressive, and blind.

The program set in motion by the Party produces other unexpected effects. The cascading pressures exerted on the entire chain of actors involved in research and the very harsh sanctions imposed on those who do not meet the quantitative objectives push research centers and companies to look for expedients. To accelerate the arrival of results, some research centers and companies mount scientific and technical espionage operations abroad or in China against actors seen as competitors. Cyberoperations aimed at stealing data multiply, as do the instrumentalization of Chinese doctoral students in laboratories working on technologies targeted by the Party and the compromising of operations of foreign researchers. In the early 2020s, espionage operations originating from companies already accounted for a significant share of Chinese espionage acts; this share explodes at the end of the decade. Even worse, research actors, unable to carry out this type of operation alone, entrust them to more competent actors including companies specializing in cybersecurity, consulting firms in economic intelligence, certain units of the PLA, and triads. A process of criminalization of research emerges, whose extent escapes the Party leadership. These measures are accompanied by massive recruiting of the brightest foreign researchers in order to further accelerate results. Universities, research centers, and companies, offering exorbitant salaries, poach researchers from elite institutions in North America, Europe, and Asia. This brain drain turns China into the world's leading research market. This hysterical quest reaches access to scarce resources. Research centers and companies deploy immense resources to acquire rare earth elements and other essential natural resources. To do this, they partner again with triads and the PLA to secure their investments, force producers to sell them their production, and eliminate aggressive competitors.



These new research methods in China lead to a rapid increase in tensions with Europe and the United States. The year 2028 is punctuated by scandals related to espionage cases involving China: a French oceanographer from Ifremer working on energy-producing port breakwaters is accused of having transmitted essential data (for payment) to an intelligence officer working on behalf of a Chinese university; the U.S. government attributes data-hacking operations against several leading semiconductor companies, such as Zilinx and Nvidia, to PLA units; in Japan, the intelligence services reveal that the president of Nippon Steel has been having a relationship for several years with a Taiwanese woman operating for the benefit of the Chinese. Several countries decide to tighten the conditions under which Chinese researchers and students have access to their territory. These measures lead Chinese actors to design increasingly sophisticated operations: Chinese officers no longer act directly and favor the use of intermediaries and false flag operations. This escalation has the effect of further diminishing China's image in the world, which an ever-widening circle of actors describes as a predatory state. China's leaders are increasingly isolated from the international community. At the initiative of the United States, many countries that are victims of Chinese assaults decide to form an entente to promote intelligence exchanges as well as the implementation of joint defensive operations. Beyond the core that constitutes the Five Eyes, Japan, South Korea, Israel, and Germany take part. France, in order not to offend the Chinese government and avoid retaliatory measures to which it might be subjected, decides not to formally adhere to the entente, but directs the DGSE to cooperate with the intelligence services of the member countries. Paris also chooses to limit visas issued to Chinese researchers and doctoral students. In order to not upset Beijing, this policy of restriction is accompanied by comforting messages about the quality of the France–China exchanges and the strength of their strategic partnership.

The PLA's involvement in these research programs reinforces the civil-military fusion policy, which had been a national strategy since 2015. Not only do the military and civilians join forces in multiple projects involving dual technologies, but the role of the PLA goes far beyond that: the army becomes one of the instruments for the acquisition of scientific and technical data abroad. In some regions, PLA units are also called upon to protect certain actors in the program against predation by competitors; others take advantage of their situation to grab data they sell to the highest bidder. The PLA often acts alongside triads, which for similar reasons become key players in the implementation of this program. Powerful centrifugal forces begin to work on the regime, with many local actors seeming able to strengthen their autonomy from the center.

In early 2028, Beida University launches, in collaboration with Baidu, the first Chinese metaverse dedicated to research. The idea is to accelerate, via the metaverse, experimentation processes and, therefore, the filing of patents. This announcement is followed by the creation of multiple research metaverses by competing universities and companies. Quickly, metaverses expand and go beyond the simple ambition of research. Chinese players also see it as a way to capture huge volumes of data. Unbridled competition develops, and various projects race to attract Chinese citizens to their worlds, where they will be encouraged to consume and share their data. In May 2029, Tencent teams up with a criminal group to launch a cyberattack against the servers of the Baidu/Beida metaverse. China's oldest metaverse vanishes, depriving its subscribers of any access for several weeks; many "metanauts" switch to the competition during this time. From then on, metaverses begin to strengthen the security of their systems and engage in identity-building processes to limit the risks of movement of individuals from one metaverse to another. Qinghua University, which has partnered with Xiaomi for its metaverse, is the first to set up a metaverse propaganda department whose mission is to strengthen the "nationalism" of its metanauts, an initiative quickly imitated by competitors. An archipelagoization of identity is underway.

Slowly, a parallel economy is built via metaverses. Individuals spend an increasing part of their free time in these universes animating their avatars. The Party, aware of the risks to its hegemony inherent in this innovation but not wishing to cut off its dynamics, implants cells in all metaverses to hinder any possibility of politicization. But these cells are quickly overwhelmed by the task, and the executives responsible for these missions are unable to keep

up with the almost limitless expansion of these new universes. Although no opposition political party is born in the metaverses, identities emerge there without any real reference to the Party. Some radicalization processes begin to appear which, even if they do not directly challenge the Party, undermine its foundations. The Party has no opponent in the metaverse, but it fails to exist there.

Some CCP cadres start to perceive the dangers presented by the China Can Do It! program. Debates, at first hushed, are brewing. An article published on March 25, 2030, in *Qiushi* suggests the program challenges the Party's ideology and survival. This sets fire to the powder. Tensions arise against those who highlight the scientific and technical successes that have made China a dominant power, one on the verge of surpassing the United States. The clashes are increasingly direct and intensify as the Party's 22nd Congress, scheduled for 2032, approaches. Xi does not concede any power to his competitors, and his control over the Party remains almost total. Aged 79 and weakened, he struggles to measure the extent of the adverse effects on the regime of his scientific and technical modernization program. Many officials begin to fear a collapse of the system.

The CCP moves toward a fratricidal confrontation whose outcome is difficult to predict. Would it strengthen the Xi line or adopt a new policy of opening up? The inability of the European Union countries to build global players in the new technology economy and effectively resist Chinese aggressiveness leads France to push its companies closer to American ones. This development can be seen as a consequence of the Chinese strategy toward Europe. The basis of Chinese strategy in Europe has always been to favor bilateral relations over multilateral mechanisms. This type of relationship places Beijing in an advantageous asymmetrical position, allowing it to obtain more while making Europeans believe they enjoy a privileged relationship with China. This pattern is clear from previous historical developments. But when naivety gives way, thanks to the scenario developed here, the Europeans, having built nothing, have only the United States to turn to. Several agreements are concluded between American companies and flagships of French research, such as Snips (which offers a voice assistant that does not transfer user data to the cloud) and Blade (inventor of cloud computing, in other words a virtual machine). Initially timid about the project of an entente against China, the French government thus inexorably approaches it. Relations with Beijing grow more and more complex and tense. Gradually, the entente and China establish two worlds whose actors, rules, and institutions increasingly diverge.



Conclusion

Several key ideas from the text above deserve to be emphasized:

- France was late to take an interest in China and had less success than its competitors.
- From 1949 onwards, relations between the United States and China have shaped relations between France and China.
- The recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1964 is a founding moment, mythologized to excess, in the relations between the two countries—but concrete results are weak.
- Despite the havoc caused by the Cultural Revolution and the absence of joint political initiatives between Paris and Beijing, the Chinese Maoist model continued to flourish in France until 1976.
- From the 1990s onwards, priority was given to economic issues.
- In political relations, any action that offends Beijing leads to a backlash. This calls for caution.
- In recent years, China has grown more important in French strategic thinking.
- There is an increasing trend in France to see China as a systemic rival.
- France has a growing willingness to defend its interests in the South Pacific but is being constrained by its largely asymmetrical power relationship with China.

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