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Silk Belt between Lion and Dragon: Lyon (France)–China ties

Abstract

In 1964, diplomatic relations between the Government of Charles de Gaulle of the French Fifth Republic and the People's Republic of China (PRC) were established at an ambassadorial level. This decision was made in the context of the Cold War and embodied in a French geopolitical strategy. At that time, China (PRC) had been isolated by the majority of the Western Powers, and its diplomatic engagement with France had allowed access to some new industrial products and technologies China had particular need of these as the Soviet Union (USSR) had withdrawn all of its technological investments in China during the Sino-Soviet Split in 1960. Some industrial contracts have been signed between the French and Chinese governments since the mid-1960s. Among these contracts, the contributions of the industrialists of Lyon were the most numerous. Paul Berliet (1918–2012) exhibited Berliet trucks in Beijing in 1965, and this was the origin of the first French technology transfer in China. In 1978, Alain Mérieux (1938–) presented in China human and veterinary vaccines from the Institut Mérieux.

It is worth mentioning that these Lyon-China relations had originally been initiated by the silk industrialists of Lyon in the 18th century, and were further developed with the first commercial mission between 1843 and 1846. It was the first time since the 15th century, that missions referring to “New Silk Route” had been operated between Europe and China. Since the 19th century, the Lyon-China ties have also extended to many other industrial and technological fields, as well as to the field of education, with the establishment of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon (Institut Franco-Chinois de Lyon) in 1919 in Lyon.

These Lyon-China relations persisted and evolved over the centuries, and covered periods of chaotic relations between France and China, notably The Opium

Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860), the Second World War (1939–1945), the Cold War (1947–1991) and the Sino-Western Diplomatic Crisis in 1989.

Despite politically divergent ideologies and situations of conflict (particularly between Western countries and the Chinese world following the Cold War), some exchanges have been maintained between Lyon and China, because of the implementation and continuation of Gaullist policy. The aim of this article is to analyze the impact of Gaullist diplomacy on Franco-Chinese industrial and educational exchanges, and to try to reveal the issues and challenges in relations between Lyon and China, in particular in the current political and economic world situation, if Lion (in the Lyon armories) and Dragon (China) ties are to continue to prosper.

Keywords: China, France, Silk Road, Lyon-China relations

1. Initiation of the Gaullist diplomacy towards China

In the two press releases dated January 27, 1964, in Paris and Beijing, a joint announcement (*Le Monde* and *The People's Daily*) stated that France and China formally established diplomatic relations:

The government of the French Republic and the Government of Republic Popular of China have decided a common agreement, to establish diplomatic relations. They agreed to appoint ambassadors within a period of three months. (*Le Monde*, January 28, 1964).

Figure 1. Joint announcement published in *Le Monde* and *The People's Daily* on January 28th 1964



Photo credit: internet.

This declaration broke the traditional diplomatic dogma and created a possible alliance between two historically “colonial-colonized” countries, despite differences of political ideologies between a Western world that France belongs to and China. This new alliance wiped out the USA/USSR bi-dominance in the context of the Cold War and created a third line in this bi-domination sphere. This unexpected phenomenon embodied the geopolitical strategies of the two countries, marking diplomatic innovation for France, and a diplomatic turn for China, allowing China to seize the opportunity to enter the international arena.

From the perspective of Charles de Gaulle, the decision to establish ties with China was an indication of his willingness to break the relationship of vassalage that the USA maintained with Western Europe. This clearly characterized the initiation of Gaullist Diplomacy towards China, as stated by (Lenoir 1964):

France, in fact, is pursuing only the permanent line of Gaullist diplomacy: it attempts to break the Soviet-American condominium on the world, by engaging a separate part with China. Together, Paris believes, these two countries may have enough weight to loosen the American-Soviet vise and to make the world's diplomacy a bit more fluid.

At the time of the decision of the de Gaulle government, despite the recognition of China by the French National Assembly, (particularly supported by the French Communist Party), De Gaulle nevertheless made a statement at the press conference¹ held at the Elysée Palace on January 31, 1964, in order to obtain understanding from the French population:

It is not excluded that China will re-become in the next century what China has been for centuries, the greatest power of the universe... In tying with this country, this state, official relations, as many other free nations have done before, and as we have done with other countries that undergo similar regimes, France only recognizes the world (the country and its population) as it is. (De Gaulle 1964)

At this press conference, De Gaulle explained the reasons behind this diplomatic decision to the French public and to the world. This discourse was marked by a historical approach and characterized by a civilizational, human, geographical, historical, economic and diplomatic analysis.

1 The press conference the Elysée Palace on 31 January 1964, during which General de Gaulle tackled several important points: the institutions, Europe, France's cooperation with other countries in the world, and the opening of standardized relations with China.

His speech began with a civilizational recognition:

China, the great people, the most numerous of the earth... since millennium... from a very particular and a very deep civilization. A very vast country, geographically very compact, yet without unity... a state older than history, always resolved in independence.

He also made a historical recall of the conflictual events and common agreements between France and China, and noted that both countries had lived from the Second Opium War (1856–1860) to the Geneva Conference (1954), claiming that the Chinese people are *people humiliated but proud... China was in conflict with the powers of modernity*. He also discussed sensitive issues concerning the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party, GMT) and its Taiwan government, clarifying his respect for Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) for his commitment and contribution to the victory of the Second World War, as leader of China before settling on the island of Formosa (Taiwan) in 1949. On the other hand, he criticized the system that Mao had installed in China over the past 15 years and denounced the human suffering caused by the regime. Nevertheless, after a thorough analysis, he concluded that *France recognizes the world as it is*. He also referred to the Soviet holding on China in the fields of industry, education and research, with the aim of controlling China etc. This speech laid the first foundation on Gaullist diplomacy with respect to China.

As for Beijing, this decision occurred at the end of the Korean War and the Geneva Conference in 1954 (ending the conflict in Indochina and the French presence in Vietnam), constituted a first step towards the resumption of diplomatic relations with France. Zhou Enlai (周恩来 1898–1976), Prime Minister, as well as Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, was particularly involved in the implementation of these agreements, which allowed China to orient its foreign policy to “non-aligned States.” Furthermore, this enabled China to position itself as a leader of the third-world countries, right after those states entered the international arena after the Conference of Bandung in 1955.

2. Setting up a privileged relation between France and China since Gaullist time

Intellectual-political marriage of the de Gaulle government

French sympathy and fascination for post-1949 China have been strikingly apparent since the 1950s. This phenomenon occurred during a period of intellectual and philosophic “Existentialism.” Due to some historical reasons as well, the French Gauche (left wing), composed mainly of French intellectuals and artists, formed a premier group of sympathizers. Nevertheless, some of them belonging to the *Open Stream* opposing the *dogmatic stream* (Kesler 1978) guided by their humanist consciousness changed their opinion about China after discovering the political reality and the human conditions of the country. Some others would continue in their blindness or “convictions,” such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980). During the “May 68” movement in France, the Maoist movement appeared and was derived into an imaginary utopia totally out of the reality towards the communist China. This Maoist fever only gradually ceased at the end of the 1980s.

In this context, the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s was a period of great fascination for French intellectuals towards China, especially André Malraux (1901–1976), who played a key role in the de Gaulle government from 1959 to 1969, as Minister of State (Ministre d’Etat), then Minister of Culture (Ministre de la Culture).

Prior to this period, these two men, (de Gaulle/Malraux) representing two different political movements had come together to engage in a common movement, “The Liberation of France” (La libération de la France), a political party called “Rassemblement du Peuple Français” (RPF, Rally of the French people).

Malraux’s involvements within the RPF had a clear objective: *Gaullism is part of a vast attempt whose reason is not simply political, but meta-physical* (Hoffmann & Mossuz 1970). That was one of the fundamental perceptions leading him later to devote himself to Gaullist political engagement, both culturally and diplomatically.

Despite the communist tendency that Malraux once had, after discovering the reality of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union (USSR), he became a militant against the totalitarianism of Stalin. However, with regard to China under Mao’s regime, he acted differently, and even made an official visit to Beijing in 1965.

Malraux's personal encounters and his relationship with the Chinese intelligentsia of the early 20th century certainly contributed to his particular view towards the history and culture of China and Chinese society. His relationship with the Chinese world began during his second stay in Indochina in 1925. He established close ties with the Chinese community of Cho Lon, and with the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) who became the main source of funding for his newspaper entitled "Indochine" (Indochina). These links also allowed him to obtain information on the problem of the communist tactical alliance with the Kuomintang, before and after the death of Sun Yat-Sen (1866–1925) in 1925 (Larrat 2006).

On his return to Paris, Malraux nurtured relationships with French intellectuals such as Pierre Loti, Victor Segalen and Paul Claudel who had once lived in China. Malraux was passionate about the classical philosophies of India and China. During this period, he continued conversing with Chinese intellectuals, including his frequenting with the famous writer Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 (1905–1950) in the 1930s during Dai's time in France (student at the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon).

Malraux began to cite China in his bi-approach writings, regarding Classical and Contemporary China, which left traces in his novels "The Conquerors" (1928) and "The Human Condition" (1933). In both books, Malraux dealt with the political and social struggles that took place in Canton (Guangzhou) in 1925 and in Shanghai in 1927. The latter was based on a historic event: the violent repression in 1927 in Shanghai of the first generation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) composed mainly of emerging intelligentsia. The crackdown was carried out by military forces commanded by Chiang Kai-shek and conservative factions of the Kuomintang.

The influence of Malraux in the de Gaulle government might be important, despite the fact that we could not measure the effects of his influences on Gaullist diplomacy following his joining the cabinet.

Of more concern to civilization than politics, the role of Malraux in de Gaulle's government shows that there is an intellectual-political marriage in French political life. French intellectuals have influenced the political world and their views have had an impact on the French political decision-making process. It is clear that French Gaullist diplomacy vis-à-vis China, in addition to the motive of the geopolitical strategy, has been of philosophical and existential concern, placing it on a civilizational and historical horizon. This marked an originality of French diplomacy and this originality is linked to an intellectual debate.

Figure 2. August 3, 1965, André Malraux, Minister of Culture, met Mao Zedong in Beijing during an official trip to China



Photo credit: Agence France Press.

3. Forging industrial links between a Western Power and the Communist China

Industrial-political alliance since de Gaulle's government

Since the middle of the 1970s some industrial and research conventions have been initiated and signed between the French and Chinese governments, on the basis of a mutual agreement that France and China together build a "Privileged Relationship."

Direct governmental intervention (of both France and China) in initiating industrial contracts was strikingly evident between the 1970s and the late 1980s and has been partially maintained from the late 1990s in order to guarantee a "privileged relationship between France and China," both in terms of industry and in the development of research.

In the early 1970s, China was still in the phase of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Therefore, industrial links between France and China were limited to importing of some French equipment, particularly French trucks to China, thanks to contracts discreetly signed between the two governments with the participation of some French industrial

manufacturers. The sphere was described as such by Jaques Marsouin (1994, p.17):

We had poor friends in the distance, but worthy, they had in Europe rich friends, but sincere. (...)

The peculiarity of the Franco-Chinese relationship was reduced to a formula of Zhou Enlai which was in place for nearly twenty years: At equal price and quality, we will choose French products.

In the 1980s, France, responding to the demand of China, played a key role in the development of the nuclear, energy and telecommunications sectors. Following the Tiananmen incident in 1989, France partially participated in Western sanctions imposed on China. Despite the changes, Lyon's industrial involvement in China never seemed to be absent.

Among common contracts that have been realized, the contributions of the industrialists of Lyon are the most significant. Paul Berliet who exhibited Berliet trucks in Beijing in 1965, and in the following years, had been devoted to the technology transfer, aiming also at educating a new generation of Chinese engineers in the relative field.

In 1978, Alain Mérieux presented in China human and veterinary vaccines, beginning a progressive and deep implantation of the Institut Mérieux in China.

This phenomenon points to another aspect of the originality of French diplomacy, in addition to intellectual-political marriage, an industrial-political alliance also plays its full role. In order to understand this approach, I would like to make a historical analysis as below.

4. The diachronic: Lyon–China ties

Tradition of the French Catholic-Bourgeois with Imperial China

It should be emphasized that these Lyon-China relations were initiated by silk manufacturers and traders in the 18th century and then got developed in a very pronounced way during the first Lyon commercial missions between 1843 and 1846. For the first time since the 15th century, those trade missions were referring to the maritime "New Silk Route" between Europe and China.

Missions referring to the maritime “New Silk Rout” (Maritime) between Lyon and China

The “New Silk Route” refers to the historic maritime route linking Europe to China via Chinese Mediterranean (South China Sea), notably for the silk trades. This maritime “New Silk Route” was partly parallel to the continental “Silk Road” that began in the 2nd century BC and ended in the 14th century AD, it definitively replaced the “Silk Road” from the 14th century.

The Chinese maritime trade on the Chinese Mediterranean (South China Sea) has become important since the Tang (唐 618–690, 705–907) and Song (宋 960–1279) periods and it reached its peak with the Zheng He (郑和 1371–1433) maritime expedition during the Ming period (明 1368–1644). Nevertheless, Chinese important maritime expeditions ceased just after the 7th expedition of Zheng He in 1433, and this phenomenon occurred in the Age of Discovery initiated by Europeans (Cyrille P. Coutansais, 2016).

Despite the cessation of major official Chinese maritime expeditions, maritime trades on the South China Sea have not been condemned radically. The maritime silk trade in particular remained an important activity between China and the other regions of the world, including Europe. Henri Cordier (1908, p. 756) described this situation as follows:

It was only when the Portuguese, at the end of the 15th century, had crossed the Cape of Good Hope and reopened the route of India and China, that the great Empire of East Asia and its industry began to be generally known in Europe, though antiquity did not ignore silk commerce... The trade of the Portuguese, valuable soldiers, but poor traders, landed in Canton in 1514, brought only a slow spread of Chinese goods in the west;... But when the Dutch entered East Asia, considerable traffic was established across the Indian Ocean, and business flourished until then.

Historically, the Rhone Valley, covering Dauphine, Provence, Lyon and Languedoc, was an important pole of sericulture. Pierre Clerget (1929, p. 1) explained the origins of sericulture in the Rhône valley regions, and stated that the silk commerce and tissue manufacturing had significantly exceeded sericulture in these regions.

...sericulture was introduced to the 6th century in the Byzantine Empire;² it was soon spread by the Arabs to Egypt, North Africa, Sicily and Spain, as a result of their

2 If is the case that means the sericulture was introduced to the 6th century in the Byzantine Empire, from China via the continental “Silk Road.”

migrations. In France, the sericulture came from Italy, or probably from Spain; its date of introduction is uncertain. The first sericulture trials in Provence appeared since the 14th century, or, possibly from the 13th century, according to Natalis Rondot. This chronological uncertainty stems in particular from the fact that the silk trade and tissue manufacturing have significantly outpaced sericulture. The sending to Queen Jeanne of Burgundy, in 1345, by the seneschal of Beaucaire and Nîmes, of 12 pounds of silk of Provence, bought in Montpellier 76 sols tournois la livre, is one of the first historical testimonies of a national production, to which may be added the mulberry plantations made in the Comtat Venaissin by Pope Clement V after the transfer of the Holy See to Avignon.

Figure 3. The “Mulberry Tree Tavern” (“La Taverne du Mûrier) in Avignon (Provence), France was later renamed “The Breeze House” (la Demeure de l’Atmosphère), after the acquisition of the Baroncelli family from Florence in 1469. The former name probably reflected the knowledge of sericulture in Avignon, Provence, already dated at that time



Photo credit: the author.

According to Mau Chuan-Hui (2006), beginning from the arrival of the Portuguese in China in the early 16th century, they developed an active maritime trade of silks, spices and silver between China and South

America, Japan, Southeast Asia, Europe. At the same time European governments, particularly in France, worried about large quantities of money which were leaking abroad for the import of silks. Those countries made attempts to advance their sericulture.

Jean Peyrot (2001) has irrefutably demonstrated commercial ties which brought together the silk businessmen of Lyon and the silk-producing regions of China such as Jiangnan (Suzhou, Hangzhou), Canton, etc., since the 18th century.

This offered a base enabling the significant emergence of silk trade between Lyon and China following the middle of the 19th century. The commercial marine traffic of Lyon, which historically was a European silk capital importing raw silk from China, multiplied starting from the 2nd Opium War until right after the unequal Treaty of Whampoa signed in 1844. Lyon silk merchants henceforth conducted successive “Lyon Missions” (Commercial Exploration Mission to China) via the South China Sea. Among traders who participated in those missions, are Isidore Hedde (1801–1880) and Natalis Rondot (1821–1900) from the Chamber of Commerce of Lyon who participated in the first expedition, the Mission of Lagrené,³ from 1843 to 1846.

**Figure 4. View of Canton circa 1800, water color and gouache on paper.
Unknown Chinese artist**



Photo credit: La revue Musée des arts et métiers, février 2006.

3 In 1843, French diplomat Théodore de Lagrené undertook a long journey which took him to Qing China at a moment in which the country was opening to trade with West. He was heading a delegation of four members, appointed by the Chambers of Commerce and Industry with a mandate and mission to collect not only business information and contacts, but also samples of raw materials, finished products, tools, and information about the technical know-how. One of its delegates, Isidore Hedde, brought back a relatively large collection of objects related to the silk industry (Demeulenaere-Douyère 2017).

Figure 5. The former site of the Weaving Bureau of the Imperial Court in Suzhou, the office of the imperial administration to oversee the official manufacture of textile reserved for the Qing court



Photo credit: the author.

Figure 6. Map of China and Indochina. Colonel Niox, Eugène Darsy, Atlas of Geography, circa 1900



Photo credit: the author.

Figure 7. Embroidery Roll (excerpt): Fluvial traffic scene on the Grand Canal in Suzhou of the Qing period. Collection of the Silk Museum of the Suzhou New District, Suzhou



Photo credit: the author.

Two fluvial derivations of the silk trades continued to develop during Qing epoch. The Grand Canal ensured the delivery of the best fabrics including silks from Jiangnan (Suzhou, Hangzhou) to the north (Beijing) and silks of Jiangnan were transported from Shanghai to Canton (Guangzhou) by the maritime route, via the East China Sea. Then together with silks of Canton, from Canton the Chinese silks were finally expedited to Europe via the South China Sea, that was the maritime “New Silk Route” from which the Lyon Missions were operating.

Lyon commercial exploration mission to China and creation of the political-business network by Ulysse Pila

Reveneau Louis (1899, pp. 62–63) provided some detailed information on this Commercial Exploration Mission to China, conducted by Lyonnais during post-Opium War, corresponding with the French Indochina period. In spite of the author’s colonial point of view, from his narrative we can note the importance of the silk commerce between Lyon and China via Tonkin.

The Lyon Commercial Exploration Mission to China organized by the Lyon Chamber of Commerce left Marseilles on September 15, 1895, six months after the signing of

the Simonoseki Treaty inflicted on the Japanese winners by the Chinese Protecting Powers... By the diversity of its industries, by the boldness of its capital, the city of Lyons could have sufficed for itself. It maintains the most active relations with the Far East: more than half of the exported greige silks of Chang-hai (Shanghai), – 36,862 bullets on 70,690 in 1897, – take the road to France, that is to say of Lyon. But the Chamber of Commerce preferred associating the other Chambers with its project. Marseilles, Bordeaux, Lille, Roubaix, Roanne answered his call. The ten technical delegates, who formed the bulk of the mission, represented what is most open and most innovative in the great trade of France.

The fragment shows that the Chamber of Commerce of Lyon had employed a policy to associate with some French partners, a policy of network. It was also during the same period (1843–1906) that the Lyon silk merchants developed influence networks and colonial strategy.

Lyon silk merchants and financiers who created networks destined to better compete with their British counterparts on the Asian markets. Their initial goal was to build an integrated System that went from a depot bank to the installation of vast communication and transportation networks in Southeast France in order to link up Lyon and Shanghai. These liberals, strongly influenced by the philosophy of Saint-Simon, gradually took an interest in Tonkin, planning to make it the springboard for conquering the markets of southwest China. To achieve their goals, these businessmen, anchored in a liberal, center-left tradition, created numerous political desires with Republican opportunists. In doing so, they created the basis for what would later be known as the Colonial Party, and the result was an important network known as the 'linocracy'.

Jean-François Klein (2005, p. 21) claimed:

...It is always a question of setting in motion the subtle and complicated interplay of strengths and weaknesses of each individual, and using them to establish the effective links that make up the networks. In the end, we find that what gives entrepreneurs their strength, power and solidity is 'linocracy', the power of networks.

Among them, Ulysse Pila (1837–1909) was a key character in this strategic conquest of Lioncracy. Born in Avignon in 1837, Ulysse Pila studied in Béziers and moved to Lyon at the age of 18. In 1863, he entered silk trading circles and left for Shanghai and afterwards to Japan. It was the beginning of his extreme-Oriental vocation, which was reinforced in 1867 with the creation of a brokerage firm in Marseille dealing with silk trade, which was transferred to Lyon in 1876. A quarter of a century later Ulysse Pila was working in the service of Lyon's interests in East Asia, particularly in French Indochina. At the end of the 19th century, as a member

of the Chamber of Commerce of Lyon, he stayed several times in Tonkin, where he became an adviser to the General Government. He was working, among other things, on the preparation of the colonial exhibition of 1894 in Lyon and at the same time, he was active in Yunnan.

Ulysse Pila can be characterized as an ambitious person, expansionist, colonialist, liberal and the advocate of free-trade who against the autarchy, was the founder of the spirit of Lyon industrialists. He attempted to connect the business world with the political world, or directly create networks in which the business world could engage in politics. At the beginning of this political-business network, he aligned himself in particular with the spirit of Saint-Simonian Utopia.⁴ Today, the tradition according to which the business world connects to the political world in order to influence political decision, remains active in French political life. This represents the inheritance of Pila.

Silk trade between Lyon and China, in relation with Saint-Simonian Utopia (Liberalism with human face)

In 1968, when Alexander Dubček (1921–1992) announced the construction of “Socialism with Human Face” in Prague, it was a political attempt of Dubček and the other reformers to liberalize the communist government, in order to improve the economic and social situation in Soviet regime. However, on the other way around, more than a century ago, there was an endeavor of “Liberalism, Industrialism with Human Face,” conducted by the French Catholic-Bourgeois under the guidance of Saint-Simonian utopic ideas.

Born of a Catholic culture, at the beginning of industrialization, the doctrine of St Simon accentuates: *Universal love of men, universal brotherhood* (Frick 1988).

The activities of the silk trade increased the wealth of both Lyon, and its silk merchants which led to the emergence of the bourgeois society of Lyons in the 19th century. The Lyon bourgeoisie was able to integrate

4 Saint-Simonism is an ideological current originally based on the socio-economic and political doctrine of Claude-Henri de Rouvroy of Saint-Simon (1760–1825) from which it takes its name. This founding thought of industrialism, published through rather scattered writings and summarized according to Saint-Simon in the *New Christianity* (unfinished work published in 1825 at the death of Saint-Simon), was often reformulated by his disciples after his death finally to exert a decisive influence in France at the time of the industrial revolution, and the development of industrial society in that country. (source from Wikipedia)

liberal ideas with Saint-Simonian utopian doctrine, further elaborate and put it into practice. The St-Simonian doctrine, opened to the world and imbued with a certain humanism (Klein 2005). This Saint-Simonian doctrine, which I would describe as Socialist-liberalism or Liberalism with a Human Face, influenced by a tradition of Christianity, embodied the desire to find a balance between the pursuit of profit and the pursuit of humanism, at the time of the Industrial Revolution in France.

The booming Lyon Industry of the Belle Epoque and its industrial-cultural-politic heritages

The implementation of Saint-Simonian utopia is the result of the industrial and commercial prosperity obtained by the Lyonnais. By entering the 20th century, the Saint-Simonian utopia continued to inspire and its practice has been further developed. The Lyonnais had the idea to associate industry and commerce to art, science and the economy.

Historically, Lyon became a commercial city and an important financial center during the French Renaissance. Its economic prosperity was built successively by the silk industry, then by the emergence of industries including textiles, following which it hosted in the south of the city, many petrochemical industries along the Rhone, named the corridor of chemistry.

Following the departure and closure of the textile and chemical industries, Lyon gradually refocused on the sectors of advanced technology, such as pharmaceuticals and biotechnology. Starting from the 20th century, industrial and technological inventions and innovations have marked the major spirit of the industries of Lyon. Inventors like Lumière,⁵ who invented the technique of cinematography, Berliet⁶ who devoted his life to designing and

5 The company Lumière, previously a company Antoine Lumière and his sons, then anonymous society of photographic plates and papers Antoine Lumière and his sons, is a former major French world industry in photography and cinematography of 1884, founded and directed by Antoine Lumière, his sons Auguste and Louis Lumière (the Lumière brothers), grandson Henri Lumière, and heirs...

6 Berliet was a French manufacturer of automobiles, buses, trucks and military vehicles among other vehicles based in Vénissieux, outside of Lyon, France. Founded in 1899, and apart from a five-year period from 1944 to 1949 when it was put into "administration sequestre" it was in private ownership until 1967 when it then became part of Citroën, and subsequently acquired by Renault in 1974 and merged with Saviem into a new Renault Trucks company in 1978. The Berliet marque was phased out by 1980.

manufacturing trucks, Mérieux⁷ who excelled in the field of biomedicine, made considerable contributions to the history of industrial innovation. It is important to claim that these industries have been trying to develop academic links with various institutions using an interdisciplinary approach. For example, Leon Bérard (1870–1965), oncologist working together with Auguste Lumière (1862–1954), inventor of cinematography, set up a scientific cooperation bearing interdisciplinary characteristics, which gave rise to new inventions and made progress in the field of medical care in oncology.

Figure 8. Léon Bérard with the Bérard Insitute. Photo above right: Léon Bérard with Auguste Lumière on a boat at the Côte d’Azur, France

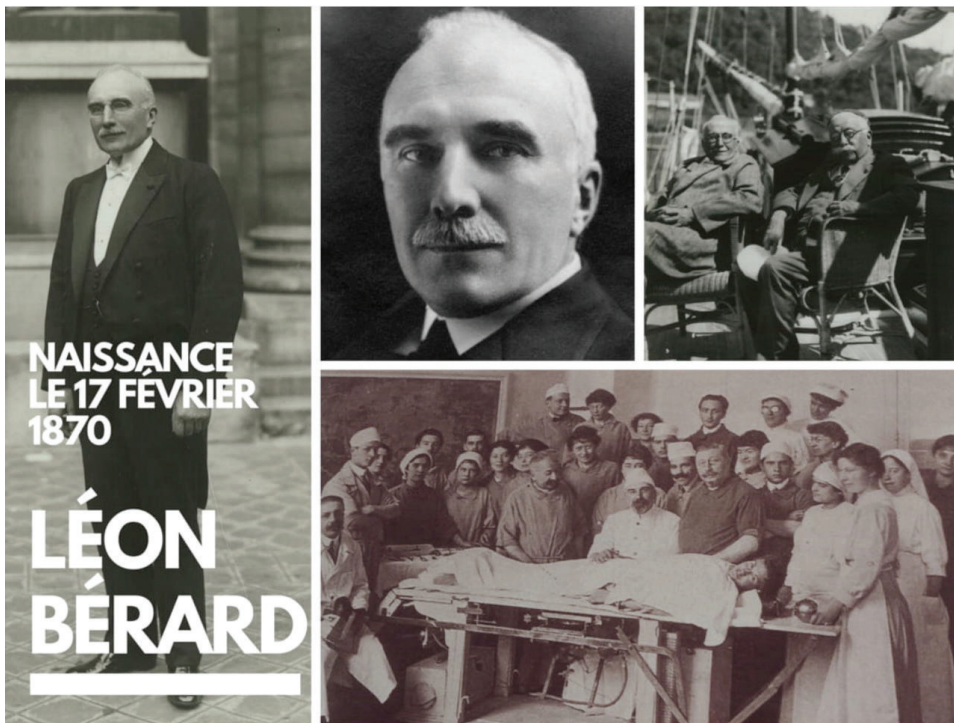


Photo credit: Center Léon Bérard.

⁷ It was created by Marcel Mérieux in 1897 under the name Institut Biologique Mérieux (Mérieux Biological Institute). The vaccine development branch of the institute was separated early on and is now part of Sanofi Pasteur. (Above sources from Wikipedia.)

5. Modern time, the French-Chinese Institute of Lyon and the Work-Study Movement for Chinese student

The 20th century Lyon-China ties have also extended to the field of education, with the establishment of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon (Institut Franco-Chinois de Lyon) in 1919 in Lyon. One of the reasons for the choice of Lyon is stated as follows:

Undoubtedly, the Lyonnais were also influenced by cultural and economic relations between Lyon and China, linked to centuries-old religious and commercial missions (Lyon is often considered the most western point of the Maritime Silk Road). Another advantage of Lyon, is the presence of a university and many specialized schools, a large faculty and quality. In addition, Lyon was probably preferred in Paris for reasons related to its less revolutionary political climate. (Museum of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon)

The creation in 1921 of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon stems from China's policy of openness to "Western studies" (Xixue 西学). Born in the last decades of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) this reform was a prolongation of Xixuedongjian 西学东渐 (Propagation of Western studies in the East) dating back to the Ming Period (1368–1644). In the middle of the 19th century, following the Opium Wars, China was forced to open to the Western world. This reform strategy attacked a society suddenly confronted with the West and struggling to adapt to a changing, modern world. In this context, a new educational model, modern education, namely Western education appeared necessary. Sending students abroad to assimilate Western knowledge is one of the responses to this need and demand. The first contingent of thirty people left for America as early as 1872; others went to Japan, Europe and especially France.

Lyon had a long-standing relationship with China, mainly related to the silk industry and trade. A museum was founded by Emile Guimet, collecting objects of art from the Far East. There was a cultural environment favorable to China with the teaching of Chinese language and culture since 1900, reinforced at the highest level by a Professor's Chair at the University of Lyon (l'Université de Lyon) created in 1913. Lyon enjoyed a rich academic fabric and diversity conducive to the training of young Chinese, with many institutions of higher education in all disciplines, scientific, medical, technical, literary, artistic and offering broad opportunities for guidance. Thanks to the Mayor, Edouard Herriot, convinced

of the benefit of intellectual relations with China, the city enjoyed a favorable political context. The idea of creating a Franco-Chinese university in Lyon was welcomed in China where three universities (Beijing, Canton and Amoy) agreed to be involved in this work by immediate or future subscriptions. Li Shizeng (李石曾 1881–1973) and Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868–1940) were appointed to help morally and materially the work undertaken by the University of Lyon.

Figure 9. Entrance of the former site of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon



Photo credit: the author.

There were approximately two thousand Chinese who participated in the Work-Study Movement⁸ in France. Nevertheless, this movement took

⁸ The Work-Study Movement (Le Mouvement Travail-Etudes (French); Qinggong jiangxue yundong 勤工俭学运动 (Chinese), literally the movement of “diligent work-studies in frugality”) will concern several thousand young Chinese people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Studies abroad (liuxue) – Japan, United States, Europe – aim to create an intelligentsia likely to make China access to modernity. (definition given by the Museum of History of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon.)

place in a crucial and difficult social-political-economic circumstance: The passage of the last Qing dynasty to a first republican experience caused confusion and instability, as well as fighting between warlords which gave rise to abuses. A disastrous economic situation added to disorder and uncertainty, paralyzing the country and complicating the building of a new society, the intelligentsias.

The principle of the Work-Study Movement was developed by Li Shizeng, born to a Chinese traditional mandarin family, but who in his young age studied in France. From 1902, Li Shizeng began his studies at the Practical School of Agriculture, Montargis and the Pasteur Institute. The influence of anarchist ideals, widespread in France at the time, his deep admiration for the culture of his host country, as well as the vast network of relationships he had woven with important representatives of political, cultural French economics and diplomacy certainly helped to realize his project, allowing many of his compatriots to finance their studies in France through their work.

On July 8, 1921, the "University Association Franco-Chinese" (l'Université Association Franco-chinoise) was founded. The term "university" was chosen to affirm the French and Chinese will to establish a higher education institution. In its first meeting, the association created the Franco-Chinese Institute. On August 9, 1921 the declaration relating to the Institut Franco-Chinois (The Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon, IFC-Lyon) appeared in the *Journal Officiel*. The institute was named in Chinese "Li'ang zhongfa daxue 里昂中法大学" and nicknamed LIDA.

The Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon operated in two phases. The first phase was accompanied by the application of the Work-Study Movement. Due to the constant increase of living cost and economic degradation in France since 1909, the implementation of this movement caused difficulties and ended following the strike of Chinese students in 1921.⁹

The second phase took place from 1921 to 1949. During this period, the application of the work-study movement was almost nonexistent. Starting from 1946 the recruitment of Chinese students from China was difficult. In 1949 China entered into the communist era, a phase of isolation of China from the world resulted in the closure of the institute.

9 The March on Lyons of 1921 is known as LiDa Yundong 里大运动 in the Chinese Communist Party's historiography. This event is important because it marks the end of the Work-Study Movement. The student-workers who are then in France live in a great material distress, victims of the economic crisis which does not allow them to provide for their needs.

Of the 473 students enrolled at the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon between 1921 and 1946, a quarter defended a doctoral thesis. Having become doctors, these Chinese returned to China with the highest grade of French faculty. While some students only briefly stayed at the Institute for several months, others stayed for more than ten years. Many of those students continued their studies in other French cities, or even in other European countries.

Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in 1979 and his previous French years (1920–1925)

The history of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon (IFC-Lyon) remains one of the central elements of Chinese students' studies Movement in France between 1921 and 1946. It reflected the attempt of Chinese education reform to modernize and create a new 20th Century Chinese intelligentsia that the country needed. The administration of IFC-Lyon insisted that this institution encouraged only student academic activities, not political ones. Nevertheless, the economic, social and political context in France and Europe, led to a situation in which Chinese students were involved or influenced by leftist political tendencies of that time.

The French years of Deng Xiaoping are connected with the Chinese students' studies in France Movement. On October 19, 1920, Deng Xiaoping arrived in Marseille (France) with a group of student-workers, under the organization of the French-Chinese Education Society (SEFC)¹⁰ probably with the idea of one day being able to contribute to the salvation of China by acquiring Western sciences and techniques (Barman & Dulioust 2017).

He continued his French studies, which he already had started at the French preparatory school of Chongqing in China, at the Bayeux College in Normandy for 5 months. However, due to the living costs in France, which had been steadily increasing since the spring of 1919, the SEFC, that paid the pension for student workers with limited funds, offered students who could not afford to continue their studies to work-at the factories. Deng Xiaoping entered Schneider du Creusot factory in Creusot on April 2, 1921, but he abandoned the exhausting work after three months. Later he arrived at the Hutchinson plant in Chalette on February 13, 1922, where gradually he began to participate in the political movements organized by the left-wing students.

¹⁰ La Société d'éducation franco-chinoise (Society of Franco-Chinese Education).

Until the end of 1925, during the short period of working in the Renault factory, he was involved in different students' politic groups like China Socialist Youth League Tour Europe Branch¹¹ which was a forerunner of the China Youth Communist League,¹² and Guomindang (GMD) in Europe, created in Lyon at the end of 1923. He was involved in the political engagement of anti-international imperialism groups during the last period of his French years, before he became an activist in the Chinese Communist Party.

Figure 10. The shipping liner Des Messageries Maritimes that once transported Chinese students from Shanghai, Canton to Marseille. Images showed at the Museum of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon



Photo credit: the author.

This has clearly marked the evolutionary transformation of Deng Xiaoping, who has turned from a university student into a politician, motivated by his consciousness of social and human equality. He might not have expected it, but the epoch in which he lived made this transformation. Nevertheless, Western technological modernity had never been

11 Zhongguo shehuizhuyi qingniantuan lüou zhibu 中国社会主义青年团旅欧支部

12 Zhongguo lüfa shaonian gongchandang 中国旅法少年共产党

absent from his political conviction, which undoubtedly influenced and contributed to the policy of the Four Modernizations (sigexiandaihua 四个现代化)¹³ being part of his Economic Reform policy (Gaigekaifang 改革开放) announced in 1979, just after his return to power in the central government and when he became president of China. At that moment, Communist China had just started to recover from the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) which had caused political, economic and human disaster with incalculable loss in all these aspects.

At the end of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping once opposed a conservative extremist:

Modernity exists, and I saw it when I was a teenager, I took a huge ship to arrive in France and this ship was made of modernity!¹⁴

On May 12, 1975, at the end of the Cultural Revolution he presided over a Chinese delegation during an official visit to France. The first Sino-French industrial contracts between the two countries were negotiated and signed during these years, including the contract signed with Lyon industrialist Paul Berliet. This preceded Deng's policies of Opening Up China in 1978 and Four Modernizations in 1979.

6. Setting up of scientific-industrial links between France and China

Scientific-industrial-political alliance since de Gaulle's government in France

On October 6th and 7th, 1960, De Gaulle was visiting Grenoble and stayed at the castle of Vizille¹⁵ for an unknown reason. However, he visited two companies from the hydraulic technology sector and the French

13 Those of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and the military.

14 From a documentary film diffused in the Chanel of Phenix.

15 The Departmental Domain of Vizille is a park of one hundred hectares in which is located the castle Lesdiguières sheltering the museum of the French Revolution since 1983. The castle of the 17th century stands on the town of Vizille in the department of Isere and the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region. Following the Day of Tiles in 1788, this castle was the venue of the meeting of the State's General of the Dauphiné that would spawn the French Revolution. It is the subject of a classification as historical monuments by the list of 1862.

Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission, CEA). He also met the scientific researchers from the Grenoble Institute of Technology (Institut Polytechnique de Grenoble, Grenoble INP) and from the CEA.

De Galle's visit to Grenoble evinced his goal of focus on the strategy of high technology development and his willingness to establish scientific and political connection. He was accompanied by Louis Néel,¹⁶ the French scientist. De Gaulle questioned Louis Néel: *Mr. Néel, what do you think of the future of France?* (Ballu 2006). De Gaulle's visit to Grenoble has certainly encouraged Grenoble to become France's center of science and innovation. Grenoble was then named the French Silicon Valley. Grenoble is a French Alps city bordering Lyon, located in the Rhône valley, belonging to the Rhône-Alpes region.

Figure 11. Charles de Gaulle in the Castle of Vizille on October 6, 1960



Photo credit: Musée de la Révolution Française (Vizille).

¹⁶ Louis Eugène Félix Néel (1904–2000) is a French physicist. He is interested in the magnetic properties of matter since 1938. He is notably at the origin of the discoveries of antiferromagnetism and Ferrimagnetism for which he will be laureate of the Nobel Prize of physics of 1970. During the Second World War, he is involved in work to protect ships against magnetic mines, saving the lives of hundreds of people. (Wikipedia)

Figure 12. Louis Néel and Charles de Gaulle at the CEA, Grenoble on October 7, 1960



Photo credit: Yves Ballu, De Mélusion à Minattec, Editions le Dauphiné Liberté, 2006.

The two prominent scientific personalities, Louis Néel and Michel Soutif, made an important contribution to the scientific development of Grenoble.

In 1945, at the end of the 2nd World War, Louis Néel decided finally to settle down in Grenoble, desiring to create a scientific center in Grenoble, capable of competing with Parisian scientific institutions, and promoting a multidisciplinary (scientific-industrial) approach. This decision was for two reasons: there were preexisting advantaged and available academic premises, especially those of the Institut Fourrier (Grenoble). In addition, Grenoble offered an industrial environment conducive to cooperation with academia. In the same year he succeeded in creating a university chair in applied physics at Grenoble, as well as three master's degrees in electrical engineering, physical metallurgy, and magnetic and mechanical engineering. Louis Néel then became a professor at the Faculty of Sciences of Grenoble. (Wikipedia)

In 1951, Néel invited Michel Soutif (1921–2016), a young doctoral graduate from the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Paris (ENS) to join him in Grenoble. While accepting the invitation from Louis Néel, Michel Soutif refused an offer proposed by de Gaulle to be a scientific counselor in the De Gaulles's government.¹⁷ He moved to Grenoble where he installed

¹⁷ "I thought he was not a democratic man, so I refused him. But only at his death I realize that de Galle was a great man." Memory entrusted by Michel Soutif to the author.

the Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Department, provided the first teaching of atomic engineering in 1955 and participated in the creation of the CENG (current CEA Grenoble). As a university professor, he was open to industry (he was an adviser to Alcatel), he founded the Laboratory of Physical Spectrometry in 1961 and directed it until 1976. He was the first president of the Scientific and Medical University of Grenoble from 1971 to 1976. Together with Néel, he established interdisciplinary links between different scientific fields, as well as elaborated links between academic world and industry, which clearly marked the originality of the scientific-industrial vision of Néel-Soutif.

Both men, Néel and Soutif, understood the importance of the relationship between industry and fundamental research, and of the consequent need to attract new industries to the surrounding region. (Wikipedia)

In the 1970s, Michel Soutif visited Japan, where he encountered an Asian cultural world that was still unknown to him. Under the influence of one of his Japanese counterparts, he became interested not only in the history of Japan, but also in that of China. Following his visit, he has deepened his knowledge of China's cultural and scientific history and

Figure 13. Michel Soutif in Beijing, September 1983



Photo credit: the author.

has become a connoisseur of China. He had made an intellectual contribution to the study of China's cultural and scientific history: he had achieved several books on the scientific history of classical China and initiated conferences in this field, along with his scientific dedication in the field of physics.

Soutif-Mérieux alliance for the French-Chinese scientific and academic cooperation

The scientific contribution and initiatives of Michel Soutif are numerous and significant, among these, the “marriage” between medical studies and physical studies realized after a merger of two faculties into a single Grenoble university is one of the most important elements. In addition of all his scientific contribution, since the late 1980s, Michel Soutif being the president of the University conducted a series of scientific exchanges with China, particularly with Shanghai, in the field of medical education.

Figure 14. Aurore University located in the former French concession. Unknown – Book of the World Geography, Part Ninth, Monsun Asia, Part One, General Description, China, Japan. Published by publishing house Aventinum in Prague. Map of Shanghai after the First World War. The descriptions are in Czech

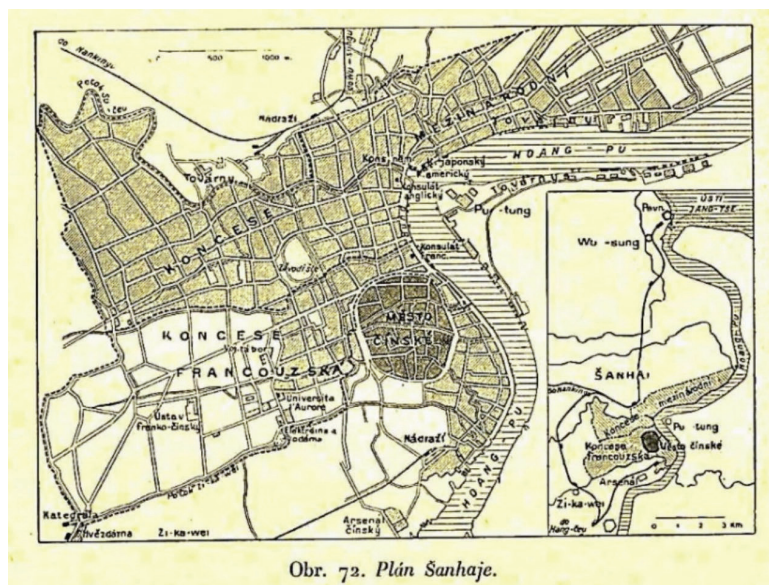


Photo credit: Wikipedia.

In 1988, Michel Soutif was contacted by the Chancellor of the Shanghai Medical University No. 2, to restore academic ties with French universities. This establishment is the former Aurore University (Univeristé l'Aurore 震旦大学), founded in 1903 by the Chinese Jesuit Joseph Ma Xiangbo (马相如 1840–1939) and his French confreres. Historically, the University of Aurore remained active until 1952. Michel Soutif perceived the importance of this demand, with many strategic aspects, and made effort to respond favorably to this request. Then, a series of academic exchanges between Shanghai and Grenoble has been established anew since 1989.

Figure 15. Photo of the former French Concession in Shanghai in 2018, near to the site of the Aurore University



Photo credit: the author.

However, at the time, the decision of the French side faced many criticisms following the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. In a publicized wave, the boycott of China by the West was not in favor of continuing this project. Michel Soutif thus asked for the political support of Alain Mérieux, a well-known figure in the biomedical sector in Lyon, whose institution had been investing in China since the end of the 1970s, (as mentioned earlier in this article). At that time, Alain Mérieux also held a political position as vice-president of the Rhône-Alpes region (Lyon and Grenoble are part of it) and was in charge of international affairs.

The two men (Soutif/Mérieux) finally made a constructive decision concerning this Franco-Chinese university cooperation in the field of medical studies in 1989. The cooperation was launched in 1990. This institution, Shanghai Medical University No. 2, merged within Shanghai Jiaotong University since 2016, has retained the prestigious Sino-French Medical Education Program, which offers 8 years of medical training ranging from undergraduate to doctorate, in French and Chinese languages, with parallel studies and internships in France.

At the time of the decision, some French academics considered that China was “retrograde,” incapable of modernity on the political and scientific levels and that it was therefore not necessary to cooperate with Chinese institutions. Michel Soutif refuted:

No, China is an intellectual country and the world owes a lot to China, notably to its classical scientific inventions and contribution to humanity.¹⁸

His refutation embodied in a historical approach (view on the history) shows a consideration of humanism and equality.

As for Alain Mérieux, China was not an unknown world. Since 1978, he has presented in China the human and veterinary vaccines with the Mérieux Institute (Institut Mérieux). His father-in-law Paul Berliet had been involved in Franco-Chinese industrial cooperation since 1965. Paul Berliet nurtured a conviction to help China to build an industrial research team in the automotive sector. There is no doubt that Alain Mérieux has the same conviction and affection for China, as he has affirmed below:

I have a lot of esteem for China, and we must not forget a tradition of the (maritime) Silk Road between France and China...¹⁹

More recently, during an interview in China,²⁰ Alain Mérieux has expressed his opinion on the Belt and Road Initiative: *This initiative can bring China’s medical team to countries and regions that are in dire need of assistance due to diseases, especially infectious diseases. This is a global issue.* He also told the reporter of the First Financial Affairs: *The Mérieux Foundation has established P3-level laboratories in Tajikistan, Lebanon and Belarus, and will soon establish P3 laboratories in Tunisia. These countries are located on the passage of the “Belt and Road Initiative,” which implies significant cooperation in the future.*

The key issue, which Michel Soutif and Alain Mérieux had to face in 1989 was the Western embargo on China and the question of whether French-Chinese academic cooperation should continue. In taking a constructive decision, Alain Mérieux elucidated his point of view, which was applauded by Michel Soutif:

18 Conference given by Michel Soutif in October 2015 in Grenoble.

19 Alain Mérieux, speech on “Homage day to Michel Soutif” at the University Inter-age of Dauphiné, March 20, 2018 Grenoble (France).

20 “China Net”, viewed 8 May 2018, www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-05/02/c_1122774029.html

Boycotting China is to isolate China, it will aggravate the situation in China... it will make the hardest ones even harder, and will make the most vulnerable suffer the most.²¹

Alain Mérieux's statement echoed De Gaulle's diplomacy, just as he affirmed his Gaullist political tendency.²² In historical, civilizational and human terms, *France recognizes only the world as it is*, said Charles de Gaulle, it is also breaking an ideological dogma, rejecting the ideology of isolating a nation, broadening and guaranteeing the meaning of human rights, so that another population under a different regime can also benefit from existential equality and receive the influences of modernity.

7. Conclusions

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was initially proposed by the Chinese government to France and Germany in Europe. The French government did not respond favorably to this cooperation project (Mierzejewski 2017).²³ The decision was made during the term of François Hollande. Despite a long history and tradition of cooperation between France and China described in the article, it was not taken into consideration by the French government of Hollande. The experience of previous cooperation on the Maritime Silk Route between the merchants and industrialists of Lyon, who established important industrial and commercial links with China were ignored in the decision-making process on the Belt and Road Initiative.

The China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) finally found a moderate echo in French politics and was applauded by Emmanuel Macron during his official visit to Beijing in January 2018. In November 2018, the Municipality and the Chamber of Commerce of Lyon organized a forum entitled "Les Confluences Franco-Chinoises" (Franco-Chinese Confluences), an event to discuss the issues of Franco-Chinese cooperation in the context of BRI.

21 Alain Mérieux, speech on "Homage day to Michel Soutif" at the University Inter-age of Dauphiné, March 20, 2018 Grenoble (France).

22 This could echo with a Chinese idiom: *Hua gange wei yubo*, lit. to exchange weapons of war for gifts of jade and silk; fig. to turn hostility into friendship.

23 Evoked by Dominik Mierzejewski at the Center for Asian Affairs Seminar, Europe-China: Security, perceptions and money. 31st May, 2017, Lodz.

Figure 16. The venue of the Confluences Franco-Chinoises held in the Chamber of Commerce of Lyon, Lyon in November 2018



Photo credit: the author.

In March 2019, prior to Xi Jinping's official visit to Italy and France, the European Union presented a proposal calling for a common agreement among European states to react together vis à vis China's BRI. During Xi Jinping's visit to Paris, the Elysée Palace organized a forum entitled "*La gouvernance du monde*" (The governance of the world). Will France regain its strategic and influential role, and continue the privileged partnership with China, initiated at the time of de Gaulle?

The centrality of De Gaulle's diplomacy with China is a civilizational and humanistic consideration based on equality. The legacy of De Gaulle's diplomacy shifted from a simple geopolitical motive to a privileged industrial and technological partnership based on academic and educational exchange.

In the current climate of trade war between the United States and China, it may be useful to revisit this history of Franco-Chinese diplomacy to reflect on an independent diplomatic policy, which operated outside the dominance of the leading powers.

Franco-Chinese relations range from "love and hate"²⁴ accompanied by divergences but also similarities. Mutual understanding and reciprocal respect can break a judgmental dogma that focuses solely on political and

²⁴ "*Je t'aime, moi non plus*", the title of a French song written and composed by Serge Gainsbourg.

economic factors. Since de Gaulle, the impacts made by influential men and women (hommes et femmes d'influence) from the intellectual and industrial circles are significant for the French politic. This should not be neglected nor left forgotten.

As Victor Hugo declared: *Freedom begins where ignorance ends*. This could lead to a new approach to world diplomacy.

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