

HOW CHINA INFLUENCES: INSIGHTS FROM WESTERN EUROPE



BY LUKAS MEJIA
AND MARINE RAGNET

ABSTRACT

Discourse across Western Europe over the past decade mostly reflected dominant security issues such as immigration or the EU's relations to Russia. However, the region has also become increasingly attractive to Chinese influence. More than just an economic hub, Europe is a strategic battleground. Through the lens of the Joint Publication 5-0 PMESII Framework from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, we examine Chinese avenues of influence across the Political, Military, Economic, Societal, Informational, and Infrastructural spectrums in a case study of France. Our aim is to gather and assemble a taxonomy of Chinese influence operations under the context of changing Great-Power relations.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

Discourse across Western Europe over the past decade mostly reflected dominant security issues such as immigration or the EU's relations to Russia. However, the region has also become increasingly attractive to Chinese influence. More than just an economic hub, Europe is a strategic battleground.

2. Research Question

We intend to purpose our research into the answering of the following questions:

- How is China projecting influence in France?
- To what extent should French --if not European Union (EU) policymakers-- be concerned with this influence?

3. Framework

In answering these questions, we utilize the JP 5-0 PMESII Framework, which delves into the Political, Military, Economic, Societal, Informational, and Infrastructural spheres to our information to guide our answers.

Political: Mechanisms of Influence

Military: Civil-Military Blur

Economic & Infrastructural: The New Silk Road

Societal: Qiaowu

Informational: A New World Media Order

4. A Changing Paradigm: Chinese Influence in the era of Covid-19

As the world now confronts the COVID-19 Pandemic, we see evidence that the Chinese state is shifting its influence tactics.

5. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Avenues for Future Research

In a world where China is sufficiently confident of its global narrative to launch an international debate on global health governance, and where the U.S. pronounces its supposed exceptionalism over ally and foe alike -- Many other western democracies find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place.



INTRODUCTION



While recent discourse in Western Europe has mostly reflected dominant security issues such as immigration or the EU's relations to Russia, the region has also become increasingly attractive to Chinese influence. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are now indissociable from the People's Republic of China's (PRC) overall foreign policy as its external diplomacy and activities have become imbued with the state's expansive agenda. In the context of its position as a fast-growing power, and encouraged by the United States' retrenchment, the PRC has been cultivating networks across diverse sectors of the continent's society. In expanding its reach, the PRC seeks to revise the international system into one that reflects its own values and interests.

China's international influence campaigns are largely characterized by a combination of economic, political, academic, media-journalistic, cultural, and

personal relationship-building. They have been creeping their way through the establishments of Western Europe. Contemporary approaches by Russia with regards to influence operations have been well documented since at least 2014; it is, therefore our intent with this work to shed further light into Chinese approaches.

Compared to Russian approaches of targeting grassroots movements, research shows that Chinese approaches tend to single-out decision-makers while at the same time maintaining a relationship with its overseas diaspora. Their information operations are a mix of diplomatic and clandestine initiatives; from increased instances of lobbying both in Brussels and Paris surrounding topics like Huawei, 5G, and cybersecurity; to the targeting of minority groups such as the Uyghurs and Tibetans. In addition, accounts of increased Chinese presence in traditional French news outlets seek to alter the narratives around a number

of key themes, shaping perceptions around China.

Finally, circumstances pertaining to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic provide a unique context for the goals of this project, as we chart Chinese influence operations that have been the norm for the past decade; and allow us to contrast them with a new

paradigm. While further research will be required to gauge the full scope and impact of the pandemic on international relations, it is clear to say that China's work over the past decade has imbued it with sufficient confidence so as to take influence operations into a new direction -- a new direction that is both premeditated and accidental.

Research question

Preliminary outreach to experts based in Europe has shown us that little to no research on the topic at hand has been conducted in this specific region. Therefore, and in creating an overview of Chinese influence operations, we aim to answer the following:

- I. *How is China projecting influence in France?*
- II. *To what extent should French -- if not European Union (EU) policymakers-- be concerned with this influence?*

Through our analysis, this work aims to highlight the complex reach of Chinese influence within Western Europe, and specifically France. We aim to provide an overview of Chinese influence operations -- from covert influence activity to overt public diplomacy, including adversarial propaganda propagation -- by identifying and monitoring the tools of Chinese influence operations employed within the Western European context and analyzing their impact on the French economic, political and societal landscape.



FRAMEWORK



Our project aims to examine Chinese influence in the context of France. By applying the Chinese approach through the lens of the Political, Military, Economic, Societal, Informational, Infrastructural (PMESII) framework¹, which filters our inquiry through Political, Military, Economic,

Societal, Informational, and Infrastructural lenses. Under this scope, we aim to bring together a diverse body of research, work, and all-source information that exists today in the hope of adding perspective to Sino-western relations.

¹ [US Military Doctrinal PMESII framework. \(Joint Publication 5-0\)](#)



BACKGROUND

From emerging country to global power seeking to influence

Following the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989, Deng Xiaoping famously remarked his “24-character” strategy for China, which roughly pertained to “Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.”² For the better part of three decades, these maxims ringed true across most facets of Chinese foreign policy. Not only did the country bring hundreds of millions out of poverty, in doing so, it became a world power.

Under the tenure of Xi Jinping, it is clear there has been a shift of vision at the height of the politburo. In 2017, he announced that it was “time for China to take

² [Pike, Jn. “Military.” Deng Xiaopings “24-Character Strategy”](#)

centre stage in the world and to make a greater contribution to humankind”³. This ‘time of taking center stage’ has been embodied through such policies like the BRI, the China Development Bank (CDB), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and other multilateral trade agreements. And in Europe in particular, it has taken center stage with the 17+1 initiative, seducing states from its central, eastern, and southern flanks. But ‘taking center stage’ has also meant the emboldening of its efforts to influence.

As part of its campaign to expand its influence throughout the world, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been putting forward a wide range of tools, platforms and vehicles as a means to push and amplify a reality that is in line with its values. While this shift has been gradual, encouraged by

³ [Clover, Charles. “Xi Jinping Signals Departure from Low-Profile Policy.” Subscribe to Read | FinFinancial Times, 20 Oct. 2017](#)

China's growing economic importance, the last decade has marked a shift in its assertiveness.

The ascension of Xi Jinping to the premiership of the CCP came as an indication that a major restructuring of China's international posture was due.⁴ His coming to power brought forth a new national strategy through the creation of the New Silk Road, and a soft power aspiration termed the "China Dream". He maintained in 2014 that it was time for a shift outside of domestic economic concerns, and towards external expansion and influence.⁵ Additional changes to the Chinese status quo were seen with the further centralization of power, the cracking down on corruption, and the prevention of dissent. Through the work of a revitalized United Front, which now operates below the umbrella of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China has now strengthened its capabilities to influence outside its borders. This offensive grand strategy has highlighted media control as an imperative for the pursuit of stability both, inside and outside.

As such, to form an understanding of China's global position and aims, one must comprehend its domestic context. According to Sinopsis, a prominent outlet investigating Chinese influence in Europe, "the PRC's unique political system, led by the CCP, must be understood on its own terms rather than as an extrapolated version of familiar Western concepts".⁶ A renewed centralization

of power at the top of the Politburo under Xi Jinping has necessitated the need for external political influence and propaganda as part of the state's interactions abroad.

In that context, CCP leaders undertake active measures to shape the international system in its image in order to ensure state security. The "China model" of authoritarian development is marketed as an alternative to the Western model of liberal democracy.⁷ As a result, Chinese influence operations seek "to shore up legitimacy domestically, reframe international rules of the road, and promote alternatives to widely accepted universal values.

France and the Last Frontier of Chinese Influence

According to Le Monde⁸, Europe is a key market for China, and France remains a European country of major interest in the eyes of Beijing for political and economic reasons: it is a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations, unlike Germany; it has expertise and training capacities in several sectors of interest for China (energy, aerospace, transport, etc.); and as a whole, the French market is strategic for the European development of Chinese companies. According to Antoine Bondaz, a research fellow at the Paris-based Foundation for Strategic Research "China considers Europe the soft belly of the West".⁹ In the context of its rivalry with the US, China

⁴ [Moulin, Christophe. "La Voix De La Chine Ou La Propagande Internationale Du Parti Communiste Chinois." Infoguerre, 29 Dec. 2019.](#)

⁵ ["Full Text from President Xi Jinping's Speech." Full Text from President Xi Jinping's Speech | National Committee on United States - China Relations.](#)

⁶ [Hála, Martin. "Lost in Translation: 'Economic Diplomacy' with Chinese Characteristics." Sinopsis, 11 Mar. 2019.](#)

⁷ [Stokes, Mark, and Russell Hsiao. "The People's Liberation Army General Political Department Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics." Project 2049 Institute, 14 Oct. 2013.](#)

⁸ [Ekman, Alice, and Asie de l'Ifri. "Quelle Importance La Chine Accorde-t-Elle à La France ?" Le Monde.fr, Le Monde, 25 Apr. 2013.](#)

⁹ [Momtaz, Rym, et al. "Beijing Doubles down in EU Propaganda Battle." POLITICO, POLITICO, 29 Apr. 2020.](#)

considers Europe as preferring neutrality, and therefore susceptible to influence. Additionally, China has an interest in gaining economic and military intelligence to make up for part of its technological gap with Western countries. The French industrial and university fabric, whether in aeronautics, health or biotechs, is of great interest to China.

France, while one of the main European actors and upholders of the current international system and its laws, is perceived by Beijing as a potential partner amenable to closer ties, and capable of eventually counterbalancing those with the United States. This theoretical proximity is of secondary importance given that Chinese diplomacy remains above all pragmatic, and is primarily concerned with strengthening interests in France. Furthermore, French overseas departments and territories, especially Tahiti, are also important for the Chinese. Experts also note a growing interest in diplomatic or multilateral issues, including when France returned to NATO's integrated command in 2009. In the same way, the international institutions which have their headquarters in Paris, such as UNESCO or the OECD, are subject to very strong attention from China.

Furthermore, the strong historical and cultural ties woven since the early recognition of the PRC by de Gaulle in 1964 do not only serve as language for official statements, they contribute today to cement bilateral relations.¹⁰ Chinese diplomacy still attaches great importance to it. This historically positive image of France in China transcends that of political parties, including that of the Socialist Party (PS), rather negative in the

eyes of many executives of the CCP, who had bet on Nicolas Sarkozy until the last day of the 2012 presidential campaign, and fear that the PS will take decisions on a more "ideological" basis than the right-wing parties, concerning human rights in particular.

Finally, while France belongs to a group of nations that are not the primary audience of China's BRI, it does belong to a group that has hitherto been part of the transatlantic status-quo. As a result, it is part of a group of nations --which include most of Western Europe-- that belong in the last frontier of Chinese influence.

The Sino-Franco Struggle for the Soul of Africa

France maintains important relations with its ex-colonies, and with a number of French-speaking African countries which were not under its possession. This system, which some refer to as "Francafrrique", is used to designate the special relationship, often described as neocolonial, established between France and its former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, and certain French-speaking African countries. Since his election, Emmanuel Macron has stated his desire to put Africa at the center of French foreign policy, following in the footsteps of his predecessor Jacques Chirac, and stating a desire "to partner with, not dominate African states."

But French efforts have been undercut by China's growing influence in the region, and have in some instances become a point of contention. Between 2005 and 2015, it is estimated that the shares of French companies in exports to sub-Saharan Africa were cut in half, from 7% to 4%, while those of China increased from 8% to 22%. As of 2008, France lost its place as the leading

¹⁰ [Renier, Romain, et al. "Pourquoi La France Intéresse La Chine ?" La Tribune, La Tribune Nouvelle, 26 Mar. 2014.](#)

supplier to the African franc zone, its share in trade dropping from 34% in 1985 to 23.2% in 2005 to settle at only 11.4% in 2015, to the benefit from China but also from India.¹¹

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs sounded the alarm in a note written by its Asia directorate in 2017 and revealed by a specialized letter Africa Intelligence¹². This document summarized a meeting between French diplomats and a group of seven African ambassadors stationed in China (Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Gabon, Mali, Madagascar and Senegal). "Asked about the comparative merits of French and Chinese cooperation, the African emissaries do not have words hard enough to describe French credit policy in Africa: "slowness "," bureaucracy "and" excessive criteria ", not to mention an "degraded image of France", too restrictive in terms of visas... ", reports Africa Intelligence.

In addition, China has thrown its support behind diplomatic initiatives and has contributed around 2,500 troops to UN peacekeeping missions in Congo, South Sudan and Mali. China is also helping with efforts to combat the Ebola epidemic and it even funded the construction of the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, providing it the ability to tune its espionage apparatus and strategic approaches to different countries. The country has also established 49 Confucius Institutes across the continent to promote the Chinese language and culture.

For a number of years now, Beijing has seen France as the ideal gateway to the African continent. The study of the profiles of the main personalities of the Chinese Embassy in France is particularly informative in that regard. Most of the mission's top diplomats made their debut on African soil or in a department dedicated to Africa before reaching the French capital. Lu Shaye, for example, the current Chinese ambassador to Paris, was ambassador to Senegal then director general of the African division within the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His predecessor, Zhai Jun, had also passed through a division dedicated to North Africa in the same ministry.¹³

In addition to diplomats, large Chinese companies also send numerous executives with African experience to France. This is the case of the director-general of Huawei France, Weiliang Shi, for example, who worked for several years in French-speaking Africa. Professor Wang Yiwei, from the department of European studies at Renmin University, sums up China's perspective: "China's growing presence in Africa is a threat to French influence, especially in its former colonies. One of President Xi Jinping's goals is to gain French support for his ambitious New Silk Roads project, which largely concerns the African continent."¹⁴

¹¹ ["Rapport De Force Économique Entre La France Et La Chine En Afrique." Infoquerre.](#)

¹² [Africa Intelligence. "AFRIQUE/FRANCE : Le Quai D'Orsay Tétanisé Par L'activisme De Pékin - 28/05/2018." Africa Intelligence, Africa Intelligence, 28 May 2018.](#)

¹³ [Izambard, Antoine. France-Chine, Les Liaisons Dangereuses: Espionnage, Business... révélation Sur Une Guerre secrète. Stock, 2019.](#)

¹⁴ [Belzic, Sébastien Le. "" Dans Le Pré Carré Français, La Chine Taille Des Croupières Aux Entreprises Tricolores ." Le Monde.fr, Le Monde, 4 Mar. 2019.](#)



POLITICAL: MECHANISMS OF INFLUENCE



I. Background

Historically, parties on both sides of the political spectrum have supported close ties with China.¹⁵ An important distinction, given that in other countries, the political right tends to lend a more supportive view to the US, while the left is open to more tolerance elsewhere. In 1964 France, it was the right which recognized China while criticizing the United States' policy in Vietnam. And

among the European "big three", it has led a more favorable view of China than the United Kingdom and Germany. The CCP maintains strong ties with several French politicians from all parties as well as parliamentary friendship clusters, a heritage of its leninist tradition.

¹⁵ [Diamond, Larry, and Orville Schell. "Chinese Influence Activities in Select Countries." Hoover Institute, 29 Nov. 2018.](#)

II. Strategic Context

Chinese efforts to co-opt foreign élites and shape discourse abroad have been well documented by scholars. As noted by Sinopsis, these efforts are “are as important to the CCP’s foreign policy as state-to-state diplomacy and other modes of international engagement familiar in non-Communist politics” and “rooted in Leninist tradition, adapted to the post-Maoist integration of capitalism into the party-led system and the ongoing expansion of its global power”.¹⁶

“people-to-people diplomacy” or “private diplomacy.”

In a report dedicated to the topic, Anne Mary Brady adds that “in foreign affairs, the Xi administration has revived traditional CCP policies of utilizing people-to-people, party-to-party, and now PRC enterprise-to-foreign enterprise relations in order to co opt foreigners to support and promote China’s foreign policy goals.” She adds that a “strategic alliance tactic originally developed by Vladimir Lenin called the “United Front.” In 2014, Xi reiterated Mao Zedong’s praise of the organization “as one of the CCP’s “magic weapons.”¹⁷ As Deng Xiaoping sums up “the main thing is to bring together all the friends we can. Only after that do we seek to splinter our enemies.”

Alliance for Securing Democracy notes the CCP’s use of coercion to “force potential “enemies” within target elite groups to reconsider the costs of resistance” therefore applying “many of the same pragmatic strategies both at home and abroad under the umbrella of the United Front”. The term used is referred to as

¹⁶ [Lulu, Jichang. “Repurposing Democracy The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster.” Sinopsis.cz, 26 Nov. 2019.](#)

¹⁷ [Brady, Anne-Marie. “The Best Way to Protect against Beijing’s Magic Weapons? Be Proactive.” Power 3.0: Understanding Modern Authoritarian Influence, 17 Jan. 2018.](#)

III. Securing Global Consent

In its efforts to secure global consent, the CCP has pursued the co-opting of French political elites and the development of a number of friendship groups across Europe at large -- aimed with the primary concern of developing the party's influence. In doing so, China has cultivated a stable of former French politicians. The Global Public Policy institute notes that "Chinese leadership has started to leverage its personal ties with EU heads of state and their staff" as a means to "incentivize the marginalization of China-critical voices in European national administrations and support the appointment of China-friendly officials."¹⁸

In France, the "groupe d'amitié France-Chine in the French National Assembly", chaired by Buon Tang (see below), is composed of a large variety of parliamentarians from both sides of the political spectrum. Included among them is notorious left-wing political member, and 3rd place contender for the French presidency in 2017, Jean Luc Melenchon (see below). The same is true about the French Senate where the group France-République Populaire de Chine boasts over 50 members from all over the country. The Hoover institute¹⁹ notes the existence of these "France-China parliamentary friendship groups" as "part of the broader China-Europe parliamentary cluster, and whose members enjoy diverse links with China." acting "as fronts for the CCP in its external propaganda." The report adds that "these endorsements are important in the eyes of the Chinese given the weight

that they can add through the mere weight of the individuals in question, which can help shape local society into accepting an image of China that is both positive and legitimate."

Many sources have also noted the existence of the France-China Foundation. Created in 2013 on the model of the French-American Foundation, the organization was sponsored by former ministers Jean-Pierre Raffarin and Laurent Fabius, and on the Chinese side, by prominent Chinese businessmen including Jack Ma (Alibaba)²⁰. Each year Young Leaders are elected based on their potential to advance Franco-Chinese cooperation and is composed of prominent businessmen, diplomats and public policy officials - including Emmanuel Macron and Édouard Philippe, both former Young Leaders. The France China Foundations is not to be confused with the Foundation France Chine, a partner of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs, set up to promote stronger ties between the two countries.²¹ A look into their publications gives a clear indication of their bias with titles such as "the EU express gratefulness towards China's support" or "the dangerous temptation of finding a scapegoat" (in reference to the COVID-19 pandemic)^{22,23}.

Other friendship groups include the Comité France-Chine of MEDEF, which has always acted as an important link and is most times headed by prominent former

¹⁸ [Benner, Thorsten, et al. "Authoritarian Advance: Responding to China's Growing Political Influence in Europe." GPPi, 5 Feb. 2018.](#)

¹⁹ [Diamond, Larry, and Orville Schell. "Chinese Influence Activities in Select Countries." Hoover Instit and ute, 29 Nov. 2018.](#)

²⁰ [JDD, Le. "Qui Sont Les Relais De L'influence Chinoise En France?" *Lejdd.fr*.](#)

²¹ <http://www.cpifa.org/en/>

²² ["Follow the New Silk Road: China's Growing Trail of Think Tanks and Lobbyists in Europe." *Corporate Europe Observatory*.](#)

²³ <http://fondation-france-chine.com>

French political figures (from Raymond Barre to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Jean-Pierre Raffarin). In addition, an informal "China friendship group" in the European Parliament, composed of European and Chinese members, is reported to be functioning as a medium for the CCP to expand its domestic and external propaganda.²⁴

Former high-level politicians such as Jean-Pierre Raffarin are well-known for their close ties to the Chinese state; their actions aim to increase discussion and engagement between business and political personalities, inciting a more positive outlook of China. Raffarin is undoubtedly the most famous within France and has established himself as "a friend of Beijing".²⁵ In 2003, he refused to cancel a short trip when he was Prime Minister in 2003 amid the SARS epidemic in China. Raffarin is still active in diplomacy, such that "in 2018 Jean-Yves Le Drian, the French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, entrusted a mission supporting French businesses in China to him". Raffarin also Chairs MEDEF's (France's biggest business organization) the annual French-Chinese seminar of the Comité France-Chine²⁶. Another well-known political figure with ties to China is former prime minister Dominique de Villepin, who has regularly made positive remarks to Chinese state media and at other fora regarding the BRI and Chinese cooperation with the EU.

Parliamentary members have also formed blocks aimed at ensuring a positive

policy towards China.²⁷ Buon Tan, for example, member of Macron's La République en Marche and President of the French-Chinese Parliamentary Friendship Group, was criticized for his impartial attitude towards the Chinese State and is one of the several French Parliamentarians that refused to sign a bill calling on the French government to speak in support of Hong Kongers.

Other examples exist, such as Jean-Marie Le Guen who was mayor of the 13th arrondissement in Paris where there is a strong Chinese community and is a member of the board of directors of two Swiss companies owned by a Chinese conglomerate. Bruno Le Roux, ephemeral Minister of the Interior of François Hollande, heads a Franco-Chinese company called Clément Bayard, bought by the Chinese giant CRRC which produces and sells electric buses of Chinese design. Jean-Luc Mélenchon must also be added to that list. A fervent supporter of China, the opposition leader has recurrently praised China and its governance model stating it "as a model that should inspire France and the world."²⁸ In 2008, in the midst of protests in China's Tibetan province, he expressed his support for the CCP and criticized the Dalai Lama.

Others, such as Jean-Louis Borloo are part of the Huawei board of directors and have called on a major French lobbying firm to get its messages across to elected officials²⁹. Observers note that since its

²⁴ [Lulu, Jichang. "Repurposing Democracy: The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster." Sinopsis, 26 Nov. 2019, sinopsis.cz/en/ep/.](#)

²⁵ ["Follow the New Silk Road: China's Growing Trail of Think Tanks and Lobbyists in Europe." Corporate Europe Observatory,](#)

²⁶ ["Follow the New Silk Road: China's Growing Trail of Think Tanks and Lobbyists in Europe." Corporate Europe Observatory.](#)

²⁷ ["Buon Tan : Le Député Dévoué à L'amitié Franco-Chinoise." 欧时网.](#)

²⁸ [Gauthier, Ursula. "Jean-Luc Mélenchon, This 'Frenchman Who Makes Mao Thought Shine.'" L'Obs, L'Obs, 23 Mar. 2017,](#)

²⁹ [France 24. "Jean-Louis Borloo Renonce à La Présidence De Huawei France." France 24, France 24, 9 July 2019](#)

development, skeptical Senators like Jean-Marie Bockel, who was one of the first elected officials to warn of the risks of exploitation of telecom networks by Chinese companies, no longer speak on the subject. In other instances, French media recalls pressures induced by China on certain French officials such as Anne Genetet who "risked losing her visa to China, if ever she opposed Beijing."³⁰

With regards to diplomacy, France has what is mentioned as the "China School, where historical figures such as Etienne Manach, a Gaullist, and more contemporarily, Claude Martin, who has recently published his memoirs, drawn from Chairman Mao's own saying "La diplomatie n'est pas un dîner de gala" or "Diplomacy is not a dinner party"³¹.

³⁰ [Campion, Etienne. "Régis Soubrouillard: Comment La France S'offre à La Chine." Le Figaro.fr, 27 Mar. 2019.](#)

³¹ [Lemaître, Frédéric. "Un Ambassadeur Aux Amours Déçues." Le Monde.fr, Le Monde, 29 Mar. 2018.](#)



I. Background

While overt Chinese military efforts are known primarily through the context of the Asia-Pacific region, and specifically, the South China Sea, its military influence extends far beyond its borders. Overseas, it combines regular diplomacy with military and covert attachés. Individuals who serve to advise local ambassadors, support People's Liberation Army (PLA) foreign policy objectives, or even conduct clandestine operations that oftentimes involves the collection of security and technology information.³² Western Europe has not been immune to such efforts. In conjunction with the political forces of influence, which emphasize the maintenance of influential elites that can serve as power brokers,

China's military has established important relationships with academia world-wide, including in Europe. In recent years, France has shifted its policy towards China to that of rebalancing in Asia. France is a leading arms provider to countries Australia, Malaysia, Vietnam, India, Singapore, and to Japan. It is the leading country—and one of only two EU countries—participating in freedom of navigation naval operations in the South China Sea, albeit with more limited objectives than the United States. It has also taken the lead, with Germany and Italy in calling for investment screening by the EU, a move that clearly targets Chinese attempts to obtain European high technology.

³² ["ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019."](#) Defense.gov, 2 May 2019.

II. Strategic Context

Under the guise of diplomacy, China has been reported to conduct a gray-zone conflict against its economic competitors.³³ Through its main civilian intelligence service, the Ministry of State Security (MSS) --which has close to 200,000 agents at its disposal-- China is blurring the lines of the diplomatic and the covert.³⁴ Sinopsis notes that it is “difficult to draw a clean line between overt activity and covert activity” given that “overt activities such as cultural events may be backed by or used as platforms for covert work”, such as Confucius institutes, for example.³⁵ ASPI further states that the CCP’s military branch, the PLA “is expanding its research collaboration with universities outside of China.³⁶ Since 2007, the PLA has sponsored more than 2,500 military scientists and engineers to study abroad and has developed relationships with researchers and institutions across the globe.”

Furthermore, as noted by the Pacific Council, China’s expansion “includes the strengthening and expansion of China’s military capabilities” tasking “the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to complete military reform and modernization by 2035 and to

become a world-class military by 2050.³⁷ In order to achieve these ambitious goals, the Chinese government has undertaken significant measures both at home and abroad.”

According to the China Power team at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Chinese president Xi Jinping has stressed that military diplomacy is a critical element of how China engages with other countries increasing the “amount of military exercises and exchanges, the number of port calls, and the scope of its humanitarian operations”.³⁸ These diplomatic efforts have been referenced as “the pursuit of foreign policy objectives under the guidance of China’s national grand strategy through the peaceful employment of military resources and capabilities to maintain national interests (both domestically and overseas), security and development.

³³ Q., M. “[Les Espions Chinois Recrutent En France Sur LinkedIn.](#)” [Ladepeche.fr](#), [Ladepeche.fr](#), 24 Oct. 2018.

³⁴ “[ESPIONNAGE : Comment La Chine Pille La France Au Cœur De L'État Et De Son Patrimoine Économique ?](#)” ASAF,

³⁵ Lulu, Jichang. “[The PLA and CCP Influence Abroad: Business, Intelligence, Crime and Interference Enmeshed.](#)” Sinopsis, 6 Dec. 2019, [sinopsis.cz/en/joske-pla/](#).

³⁶ Joske, Alex. “[Picking Flowers, Making Honey The Chinese Military’s Collaboration with Foreign Universities.](#)” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2018, [www.aspi.org.au/](#).

³⁷ Kim, Patricia. “[Understanding China's Military Expansion: Pacific Council on International Policy.](#)” [Understanding China's Military Expansion | Pacific Council on International Policy](#), 19 Sept. 2019,

³⁸ “[How Is China Bolstering Its Military Diplomatic Relations?](#)” ChinaPower Project, 27 Jan. 2020, [chinapower.csis.org/china-military-diplomacy/](#).

III. Securing Global Consent

Europe has been welcoming of Chinese military diplomacy given the extent to which its areas of concern have been stretched thin -- from the security threats posed by recent Russian foreign policy, to the chronic instability that funnels through its southern flank. The EU has therefore engaged with China through a symbiotic relationship that sees the exchange of public security goods and missions, as well as military-academic expertise. Examples of these services have included the expansion of its peacekeeping operations in Africa, counter-piracy operations stretching from the Gulf of Aden to the Indian Ocean, and expanded civil-military cooperation between the two countries.

Given China's growing expansion via the BRI, analysts expect the country is likely to also increase its military presence to protect the development of its infrastructure. This has been the case in Djibouti for example. In 2017, the small Republic of Djibouti attracted attention on the international scene, by welcoming the first Chinese military base abroad.³⁹ Backed by the huge multi-purpose port, also inaugurated in 2017, this base has a contingent of 400 men responsible for protecting the interests and nationals of China in the region. Djibouti has become a point of contention between Beijing in Paris as France perceives with suspicion

³⁹ A., Mahdi. "France, Djibouti, Chine : Des Stratégies Surtout Militaires." *Human Village - France, Djibouti, Chine* : Des Stratégies Surtout Militaires, June 2019, human-village.org/spip.php?article553.

China's growing influence in the horn of Africa, facing Bab el Mandeb, the 4th maritime route for energy supply.

France remains in 2019, one of three nations with a base in Djibouti, with a reassertion through a defence cooperation treaty signed in 2011.⁴⁰ Aware of the challenges linked to this vital strategic axis for the defense and security of the country, the French President paid a visit to the country in March 2019 in an effort to recall the size of its military efforts there (1,450 men), and reassert its defense obligations.⁴¹

But Chinese military operations are not limited to the overt, obvious, expansion of armed forces. Journalist Antoine Izambar revealed in 2017 that a confidential report by the General Secretariat of Defense and National Security (SGDSN) expressed worry regarding the abnormally high number of marriages between Breton soldiers and Chinese students.⁴² The report brought attention to the "repeated approaches of the military by Chinese students at the University of Western Brittany in Brest," said the journalist in an interview in Paris-Normandy.⁴³ In terms of effectives, Chinese students make up the second largest number of

⁴⁰ [Forgues, Claire. "Comment La Chine Est Devenue Un Acteur Incontournable à Djibouti ?" *Infoguerre*, 13 Nov. 2019, \[infoguerre.fr/2019/11/chine-devenue-acteur-inc-ontournable-a-djibouti/\]\(http://infoguerre.fr/2019/11/chine-devenue-acteur-inc-ontournable-a-djibouti/\).](http://infoguerre.fr/2019/11/chine-devenue-acteur-inc-ontournable-a-djibouti/)

⁴¹ [Finnan, Daniel. "France Is a 'Respectful' Partner, Macron Boasts during Djibouti Visit." *RFI*, RFI, 12 Mar. 2019, \[www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20190312-france-respectful-partner-macron-boasts-djibouti-visit\]\(http://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20190312-france-respectful-partner-macron-boasts-djibouti-visit\).](http://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20190312-france-respectful-partner-macron-boasts-djibouti-visit)

⁴² [T, B. "Le Renseignement Militaire S'inquiète Des Mariages Entre Militaires Bretons Et Jeunes Chinoises." *LA VDN*, 22 Oct. 2019,](http://www.lavdn.com/2019/10/22/le-renseignement-militaire-s-inquiete-des-mariages-entre-militaires-bretons-et-jeunes-chinoises)

⁴³ [Chambonnière, Hervé. "Espionnage. La Bretagne Intéresse Au plus Haut Point La Chine" ." *Le Telegramme*, 19 Oct. 2019,](http://www.letelegramme.com/2019/10/19/espionnage-et-la-bretagne-interesse-au-plus-haut-point-la-chine)

foreign nationals in the military academy, which also targeted engineers.

Other instances detail China's infiltration of French university networks. ASPI's China Defense Universities Tracker notes that the University of International Relations in Beijing and Jiangnan Social University in Suzhou -both operated by the MSS to train intelligence officers and carry out research in support of the MSS's work - have ties with Universities in Europe. In France, the University of International Relations has an established exchange agreement with Université Toulouse 1 Capitole. Aspi notes that it is "likely many of these universities are unaware of UIR's ties to the MSS."⁴⁴

In addition, a substantial espionage operation was uncovered by the French press in 2018. According to reports, thousands of executives and employees of the French civil service were approached by China⁴⁵ under the cover of false personas and courted through LinkedIn and its French equivalent, Viadeo. The number of employees affected has been estimated to be around 4,000 by the French Directorate-General for Internal Security (DGSI) and External Security (DGSE). According to French intelligence "several hundred" were successfully compromised and exploited with the main targets being young professionals with high potential or acquainted with French economic policy.

China is also conducting a gray-zone conflict against its economic competitors,

seeking to open markets, develop products and gain economic leverage. A report from the Interministerial Delegation for Economic Intelligence (D2ie) dated 2010 identifies the objectives and methods deployed by China to capture French technological innovations.⁴⁶ In recent years, Chinese acquisitions in France have "raised eyebrows", especially regarding their potential to lead to industrial espionage from China. Antoine Izambard claims that a confidential note signed by the hand of the national intelligence coordinator, Alain Zabulon, had, at the end of 2014, highlighted the risks involved in entrusting the Toulouse airport to the Chinese consortium.⁴⁷ The note mentioned that this purchase was fully in line with the strategy of the Chinese regime, via the "New Silk Roads", that it included more questions than answers and posed a threat of espionage. In addition, In 2013, French aeronautical group SAFRAN was allegedly hit by an attempted Chinese industrial espionage as reported by the DGSI and FBI⁴⁸.

Furthermore, a document from the Interministerial Delegation for Economic Intelligence (D2IE), a government service responsible for monitoring and ensuring the economic security of French companies revealed that 14.3% of the acts of computer enabled espionage against French companies come from China, making Beijing the number one threat before the United States and Germany; Russia, on the other

⁴⁴ ["University of International Relations." Chinese Defence Universities Tracker. unitracker.aspi.org.au/universities/university-of-international-relations/.](https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/universities/university-of-international-relations/)

⁴⁵ [Garnier, Lise. "La France Visée Par Un Gigantesque Programme D'espionnage Chinois." Capital.fr, Capital.fr, 23 Oct. 2018,](https://www.capital.fr/actualites/la-france-visee-par-un-gigantesque-programme-d-espionnage-chinois-1187772)

⁴⁶ [BARANGER, Pierre-François, et al. "LA CHINE SAUVERA-T-ELLE LE NUCLEAIRE FRANÇAIS ?" Ecole De Guerre Economique, Apr. 2016, www.ege.fr/.](http://www.ege.fr/)

⁴⁷ [Izambard, Antoine. France-Chine, Les Liaisons Dangereuses: Espionnage, Business... révélation Sur Une Guerre secrète. Stock, 2019.](https://www.leslignes.fr/actualites/france-chine-les-liaisons-dangereuses-espionnage-business-revelation-sur-une-guerre-secrete)

⁴⁸ [Durand, Corentin. "Espionnage Industriel : Chez Safran, Des Infiltrés Au Service De La Chine." Cyberguerre, 20 Nov. 2018,](https://www.cyberguerre.com/actualites/espionnage-industriel-chez-safran-des-infiltrés-au-service-de-la-chine)

hand, only in ninth position⁴⁹. In that context, Airbus is frequently a victim of industrial cyber espionage, often attributed by the intelligence community to China. Although attribution remains unclear, Cybersecurity experts detected a procedure very similar to the one used by APT 10, a group of hackers operating from China and linked, according to the United States, to Chinese intelligence services⁵⁰.

These attacks highlight the manufacturer's complicated relationship with China. Airbus has made the immense Chinese aeronautical market, one of its priorities since the mid-2000s. In the space of fifteen years, the European group has thus caught up with the American rival Boeing, covering more than 60% of the share of the market in China.⁵¹ It also opened an A320 assembly plant in Tianjin northeast of Beijing. The report also specifies that China is the first aggressor of French companies in the field of energy" highlighting China's desire to expand its energetic knowhow.

Finally, the CCP has also engineered a massive data-collection scheme to help inform its approach in securing global consent.⁵² The research behind this finding has untapped how Chinese Big Data and AI companies have been employed by the party to procure, sort, and make sense of

information at unprecedented scales - information which is transported by well-known companies such as Huawei, its partnerships across the world, and the outreach of Chinese academia in general.⁵³⁵⁴ Wielding such data collection for state-end purposes raises serious implications for not only the EU, but any western democracy - like the shaping of public discourse domestically and internationally, the cataloging of dissenting voices, and perhaps far more than is presently studied

⁴⁹ [Mosca, Marco. "Huawei, Cyberattaques... La France, Terrain De Jeu Des Espions Chinois ?" Les Numériques, 15 Oct. 2019.](#)

⁵⁰ [Lowe, Christian. "Hackers Tried to Steal Airbus Secrets via Contractors: AFP." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 26 Sept. 2019.](#)

⁵¹ [Danao31. "En Chine, Airbus Gagne Contre Boeing Par KO - L'Usine Aéro." Usinenouvelle.com/, 8 Apr. 2019.](#)

⁵² [Doherty, Ben. "China Has Built 'Massive Global Data-Collection Ecosystem' to Boost Its Interests." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 14 Oct. 2019.](#)

⁵³ [Hoffman, Samantha. "Engineering Global Consent: The Chinese Communist Party's Data-Driven Power Brandt, Jessica, and Bret Schafer. "Five Things to Know About Beijing's Disinformation Approach." Alliance For Securing Democracy, 1 Apr. 2020, securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/five-things-to-know-about-beijings-disinformation-approach/.](#)

⁵⁴ [http://www.gtcom.com.cn/en/](#)

⁵⁵ ["Seeds for the Future - Huawei Sustainability." Huawei, 9 July 2019.](#)

⁵⁶ [https://www.aspi.org.au/report/china-defence-universities-tracker](#)



ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURAL: THE NEW SILK ROAD



I. Background

China, for the past decade, has promoted the BRI, which encompasses areas like digital, space, culture, tourism, and more – and which fall under the guise of infrastructure and economics. The material expansion promised by this long-term Chinese initiative aims to secure the party's strategic objectives abroad, which include the diversification of trade flows and trade standards away from traditional United States dominance.⁵⁷ In doing so, it hopes to restructure the present order or world governance – or in other words, a different form of globalization.

While most well known in Asia, the initiative extends to most parts of the world, including Africa, Latin America, The South

Pacific, and even Europe. In the case of the latter, what was once a peripheral creep, centered upon Eastern-European states that were not fully integrated into the EU has now become an increasing reality for even the most core states. Italian rapprochement is perhaps the most well known case, bringing billions in Chinese investment. Recent trends show that such a relationship may not be unthinkable for a country like France.

When it comes to trade, France's relationship to China is conspicuous. France has notably expressed a desire to rebalance trade relations with Beijing⁵⁸ as the country currently represents the largest French trade deficit at 29.8 billion euros. On the other hand, according to numbers shared by the

⁵⁷ [Ngai, Joe, and Kevin Sneader. "China's One Belt, One Road: Will It Reshape Global Trade?" McKinsey & Company, July 2016.](#)

⁵⁸ [Martinet, Xavier. "France-Chine : Quel Équilibre Économique ?" France Culture, France Culture, 4 Nov. 2019.](#)

French Embassy in China, the Hexagon rose last year to seventh place among the ten preferred targets of the Chinese state⁵⁹.

China was notably singled out by French Minister of the Economy Bruno Le Maire, who denounced Chinese "looting" in France, during Emmanuel Macron's visit to Beijing in January 2018⁶⁰. Without mentioning companies or sectors, the Economy Minister had declared that France "refuses a lot" of Chinese investments on its soil. The main concern and urgency of European states remains the conclusion of an agreement on Chinese investment in the EU. These were around \$ 200 billion worldwide in 2016 and the EU is concerned about the takeover of high-tech companies made at that

⁵⁹ ["La France Et La Chine." *La France En Chine*, France Diplomatie, 2019.](#)

⁶⁰ [Izambard, Antoine. *France-Chine, Les Liaisons Dangereuses: Espionnage, Business... révélation Sur Une Guerre secrète*. Stock, 2019.](#)

II. Strategic Context

While infrastructure development may be the main goal of the Chinese BRI, another of its purpose, pertains to the “creation of a new world order in which China thrives and rules” as noted by Nadège Rolland.⁶¹ In setting an investment precedent, the PRC can ensure the cooperation of the host country, while inhibiting any potential criticism towards its effort.

Behind this initiative lies a plethora of motivations, but one as pertinent to China as it is to France is the diversification of commercial routes -- whether maritime, land, or air. Emphasizing the Chinese perspective, Alice Ekman and Françoise Nicolas note that the BRI is a liberating strategy for China in so far that it allows the country to free itself from a historical dependence of Western geoeconomic parameters.⁶²

In recent years, China’s Communist Party’s use of its economic weight to influence cultural, political, diplomatic, and business decisions abroad has become evident.⁶³ As the country’s economy has developed and intertwined with much of the rest of the world, the party has increasingly sought to weigh in its perspective, indicating a change in the balance of power.

According to Liza Tobin at the Texas National Security Review, Beijing’s success “lies in its socialist market economy”. Deng Xiaoping put forward the concept in 1985 by arguing that “there is no fundamental contradiction between socialism and a market economy” and that combining planning and market economics would “liberate the productive forces and speed up economic growth.” This essentially highlights the State’s central position to wield power, deriving its influence from the state-owned and private companies that operate within the country. Xi Jinping, expanded that perspective in 2017 by introducing a new slogan, “Two guidances” (两个引导), to sum the new conditions: in the New Era, the PRC was to “guide” the new wave of globalization (Globalisation 2.0) and the global security architecture.⁶⁴

Audrye Wong, notes that there is no equivalent term in Chinese for the phrase “economic statecraft,” and that the closest is “economic diplomacy” (jingji waijiao 经济外交).⁶⁵ She further highlights that the term has been used by Chinese scholars to signify “first, the use of diplomacy to achieve economic goals and benefits; and second (more directly related to the notion of

⁶¹ [Rolland, Nadège. “Mapping the Footprint of Belt and Road Influence Operations.” Sinopsis, 13 Aug. 2019.](#)

⁶² [Ekman, Alice, et al. “China’s Belt & Road and the World: Competing Forms of Globalization.” Institut Français Des Relations Internationales, Apr. 2019.](#)

⁶³ [Shullman, David. “Protect the Party: China’s Growing Influence in the Developing World.” Brookings, Brookings, 4 Oct. 2019.](#)

⁶⁴ [Hála, Martin, and Jichang Lulu. “Lost in Translation: ‘Economic Diplomacy’ with Chinese Characteristics.” Sinopsis.cz, 10 Mar. 2019. \[sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/lostintranslation.pdf.\]\(#\)](#)

⁶⁵ [Wong, Audrye. “Chinese Perspectives on Economic Diplomacy.” The ASAN Forum, 22 Sept. 2016.](#)

statecraft), the use of economic means in pursuit of political objectives.”

In a report, the Center for New American Security lays out several instances in which China “successfully used this toolset to help shape foreign political and corporate outcomes in its favor and to insert a consideration of, or deference to, Beijing’s priorities in the minds of countries engaged in foreign policy disputes with China”.⁶⁶ For example, there have been numerous instances in which countries were sanctioned for receiving the Dalai Lama. As noted in the political section, the case has become rare and most visits date back to the 2010s.

Sinopsis notes that “the paucity of policy-relevant research informed by an analysis of the recent evolution of the PRC political system available to European decision-makers, especially at the local level, contrasts with the highly coordinated propaganda activities of entities under various degrees of CCP influence or control.”⁶⁷ The researcher further notes that “this allows for the relatively successful installation of CCP propaganda memes, from “economic diplomacy” as a rhetorical cover for political influence to the “multilateralism” that supposedly underlies various Beijing-centred geopolitical initiatives.

⁶⁶ [Harrell, Peter, et al. “China’s Use of Coercive Economic Measures.” Center for a New American Security, 11 June 2018.](#)

⁶⁷ [Hála, Martin, and Jichang Lulu. “Lost in Translation: ‘Economic Diplomacy’ with Chinese Characteristics.” Sinopsis.cz, 10 Mar. 2019. \[sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/lostintranslation.pdf\]\(https://sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/lostintranslation.pdf\).](#)

III. Securing Global Consent

The most noteworthy footprint of the BRI in Southern and Western Europe has been over seaport infrastructure.⁶⁸ Indeed, since the project's inception, French officials have voiced a rather favorable view of the initiative, including figures like Laurent Fabius, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development. In his words, France "welcomed the New Silk Road Initiative".⁶⁹ This widely held view, which extended into President Macron's tenure, has been rooted primarily on the allure of economic cooperation.

Perhaps in apprehension, however, the French government has chosen to term the fruits of the Chinese B&R through the names of individual projects, and not the vagueness of the overall initiative⁷⁰. Furthermore, they have advocated for any cooperation to be transparently labeled and open, more than the actual reciprocity in question. For the French, the B&R is not so much a poisoned good, as is thought in the US, but about how much sense it can make, project per project.

Macron's administration has thus welcomed the B&R on its own terms and agenda. For instance, instead of employing China's preferred acronym for the initiative, the French welcome an Indo-Pacific axis. For

local French stakeholders, any greenlight towards B&R projects boils down to its ability to promote job growth and a boost to the overall economy. For the time being, while Chinese presence has expanded in France, there is no expectation that the local environment may soon resemble that of Italy or Greece.

With the purchase of the Piraeus port in Greece, China made significant gains in what is termed the Maritime Silk Road, which has transformed the status-quo of many mediterranean ports.⁷¹ Whether across Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia, or even the North Sea in Germany, Chinese entry into the European market is broader than ever. Italy --a historically core member of the EU-- has even joined the 17+1, highlighting divisions within the supranational entity. The ports of Venice and Chioggia signed a cooperation agreement with Piraeus in 2019 that would bring them under the management of China COSCO Shipping Group. But the road does not stop at sea, as Chinese President Xi Jinping announced during a visit to Italy further investment by China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) in Genoa and Trieste.

While there is no indicator that France will become part of this Silk Road group, it has entertained Chinese investment across its maritime infrastructure.⁷² In facing competition from these aforementioned ports, and with the precedent set by 'Brexit' the cities of Marseille,⁷³ La Havre, and Dunkirk

⁶⁸ [Albert, Eleanor. "China's Global Port Play." – The Diplomat, For The Diplomat, 11 May 2019.](#)

⁶⁹ [LARÇON, Jean-Paul, and Corinne VADCAR. "Les Nouvelles Routes De La Soie ." CCI Paris Ile-De-France.](#)

⁷⁰ [Ekman, Alice, et al. "China's Belt & Road and the World: Competing Forms of Globalization." Institut Français Des Relations Internationales, Apr. 2019.](#)

⁷¹ [Johnson, Keith. "Pourquoi La Chine Achète-t-Elle Compulsivement Les Ports D'Europe?" Slate.fr, 9 Feb. 2018.](#)

⁷² [Guyader, Hervé. "Pourquoi Les Ports Français Prennent L'eau." Les Echos, Les Echos, 20 May 2019.](#)

⁷³ [Tran, Émilie. "Marseille :: Bientôt Un Comptoir Chinois ?" Confluences Mediterranee, L'Harmattan, 23 July 2019.](#)

⁷⁴ have drawn Chinese investment, which has further improved their economic outlooks, particularly in the eyes of the local populations. Conversely, it is also the Chinese who seek to accomplish new Silk Road metrics, and investing heavily into European port infrastructure allows them authorship over their own globalization.⁷⁵



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This international expansion allows the PRC to circumvent if not overpower traditional Western parameters through the direct ownership of maritime assets. These investments become difficult for host countries, creating a dependency and eventually, acceptance of Chinese streams of influence.⁷⁷ It should also be noted that

⁷⁴ [“Dunkerque Port Views BRI as Springboard to Boost Trade between France and China - The Medi Telegraph.” Themeditelgraph.com, 5 Dec. 2019.](#)

⁷⁵ [“China Merchants to Diversify, Invest in French Port Assets.” International Finance, 23 Dec. 2019.](#)

⁷⁶ [Kakissis, Joanna. “Chinese Firms Now Hold Stakes In Over A Dozen European Ports.” Chinese Firms Now Hold Stakes In Over A Dozen European Ports | WBUR News, WBUR, 9 Oct. 2018.](#)

⁷⁷ [Scimia, Emanuele. “Europe Ignores US Fears about China’s Global Maritime Ambitions.” South China Morning Post, 20 June 2019.](#)

France is a founding member of the AIIB, or Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, along with Germany and Italy. The United States has repeatedly opposed the project which it views as a rival of the World Bank and more generally of the institutional arrangement agreed upon at Bretton Woods.⁷⁸

Perhaps another evident vehicle of China’s influence in Western Europe is through the Economic relationship cluster between China and the EU. In promising to fill investment gaps, Chinese state-owned enterprises and banks have prompted EU political elites to break their unison in favor of accepting a more favorable position towards China.⁷⁹

As noted by a report published by the European Parliament, “As China successfully steers the debate on China in the EU to issues such as the country’s Silk Road initiatives, there is little room for discussion of the impact of alleged CCP-led foreign influence operations on EU norms and values.”⁸⁰ Examples of France and other western leaders suppressing Human Rights to respond to Chinese pressures are multiple. In France, Nicolas Sarkozy was the last president to raise the matter in his mention of Tibet during the 2008 crackdown. The decade since has seen European leaders shy away from delving into the issue, in fear of disadvantaging themselves with regards to economic opportunity. A clear example of

⁷⁸ [Higgins, Andrew, and David E. Sanger. “3 European Powers Say They Will Join China-Led Bank.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 17 Mar. 2015.](#)

⁷⁹ [Wyzycka, Natalia, and Reza Hasmath. “What Drives Contemporary EU-China Strategic Engagement?” SSRN, 27 July 2015.](#)

⁸⁰ [Grieger, Gisela. “China’s Foreign Influence Operations in Western Liberal Democracies: An Emerging Debate.” European Parliament, May 2018.](#)

such dynamic pertains to when Angela Merkel arranged for Nobel Prize winner Liu Xiaobo's wife to come live in Germany -- an negotiation of which no record exists, and no statement was made.⁸¹

European Think Tank Network on China highlights four different reactions from European member-state policy-makers to political values vis-a-vis China; vocal and active; active and discreet; passive; and passive and potentially counteractive.⁸² The report further suggests 3 main reasons that may explain these behaviors and their variety: economic relations with China, Chinese pressure and historical legitimacy. The effect of such has increased acceptance of Chinese positions, such as its territorial claims across the South China Sea, China's Human Rights track record, or reactions to the protests in Hong Kong.⁸³

In the field of technology, the discourse surrounding 5G technology has served as a much-publicized test for European policymakers, often backed by large scale lobbying campaigns funded by the CCP. In France, Huawei employs lobbying firm M&M Conseil to manage its push for 5G, with attempts to co-opt French politicians for support. Huawei has further wooed French parliamentarians via lunch meetings to discuss issues linked to the expansion of 5G and cybersecurity. Attendees of such events have included MPs as well as defense and other government officials.⁸⁴ So far, the UK⁸⁵ and France⁸⁶ have

sided with ambiguous laws and policies that neither bar nor outright invite Chinese tech giants like Huawei into their markets. While the decision has been met with derision in the US, the recent geopolitical developments surrounding Europe has increased sentiment of economic independence, which includes the freedoms to conduct business with Chinese companies.⁸⁷

In addition, France's relationship with China bears the particularity of having initiated a number of cutting-edge technology transfers. Among them is the now famous P4 Lab in Wuhan. The founding of the laboratory was instigated by then President Jacques Chirac in 2004, in efforts to aid China in its research to combat SARS infections⁸⁸. Built in 2015 and opened in 2018, the laboratory was meant to house French and Chinese infectiologists in coordinated research efforts. The French researchers, however, were never invited to join. Other examples exist, such as both nations' planned cooperation on Airbus. "We knew that the Chinese were going to create a mirror factory. And yet we let them loot our information and acquire the critical capabilities they did not have before, for short-term financial reasons, " regrets a

⁸¹ [Campion, Etienne. "Régis Soubrouillard: Comment La France S'offre à La Chine." *Le Figaro.fr*, 27 Mar. 2019.](#)

⁸² ["Contact." *Utrikespolitiska Institutet*, 2018.](#)

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<https://www.ui.se/english/news/2018/new-rep>

⁸⁴ ["Comment Huawei Et Son Lobbyiste Boury Tallon Mènent L'offensive Sur La 5G -](#)

[04/03/2019." *La Lettre A, La Lettre A*, 4 Mar. 2019.](#)

⁸⁵ [Colchester, Max. "U.K. Allows Huawei to Build Parts of 5G Network, Defying Trump." *The Wall Street Journal, Dow Jones & Company*, 29 Jan. 2020.](#)

⁸⁶ [Contributor, AT. "France Will Not Bar Huawei from 5G Network." *Asia Times*, 18 Feb. 2020.](#)

⁸⁷ ["Huawei to Build First European 5G Factory in France to Soothe Western Nerves." *The Japan Times*, 28 Feb. 2020.](#)

⁸⁸ [Reltien, Philippe. "Le Laboratoire P4 De Wuhan : Une Histoire Française." *France Culture, France Culture*, 19 Apr. 2020.](#)

French analyst in Beijing cited by French newspaper *Le Figaro*⁸⁹.

Furthermore, France has the distinct position of being the foremost destination for tourism throughout the world, with the Ile-de-France region, which contains Paris, being the central attraction. This region alone saw 1.1 over million Chinese tourists --from an overall figure of 2 million-- in 2017.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the south and south-western portions of the country, where Wine tourism has traditionally been dominated by British and Belgian travellers, have experienced a boom in both tourism and investment from China.⁹¹ In spurring the economies of various regions of France, the Chinese perception among locals is now more ambiguous than previous years,⁹² with surveys outlining that residents tend to favor "neutral" answers when responding to whether China represented an opportunity or a detriment.⁹³ This latter shift in attitudes contrasts a traditionally negative sentiment towards Chinese tourists in general, who have otherwise been perceived negatively. Conversely, the French government has actively promoted itself on Chinese platforms as a premier destination for tourism.⁹⁴ But as

the Covid-19 Pandemic's repercussions are further understood in the incoming months and years, there appears to be a marked impact from the drop in tourism, most especially from China.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ [Figaro Inter. "Les Inquiétants Transferts De Technologies De La France Vers La Chine." *Le Figaro.fr*, 4 May 2020.](#)

⁹⁰ [Arrivals of tourists from China \(including Hong Kong\) in tourist accommodation in France from 2008 to 2018. Statista.](#)

⁹¹ ["Wine Tourism in France in Numbers." The Greatest Destinations in the Vineyards of France – France's Official Wine Tourism Portal.](#)

⁹² [Le Corre, Philippe. "How the French Are Waking up to China's Rise." *South China Morning Post*, 27 Jan. 2019.](#)

⁹³ [Hasckhe, Paloma; et al. "Les Médias Chinois à L'étranger Au Service Du 'Rêve Chinois.'" *La Revue Des Médias*, 21 Mar. 2017.](#)

⁹⁴ [Daxue Writing. "Chinese Tourism in France: Chinese Perception of French Cities." *Daxue*](#)

[Consulting – Market Research China, 27 Sept. 2019..](#)

⁹⁵ [Blamont, Matthias. "Paris Shops Feel the Pinch as Virus Keeps Chinese Tourists Away." *Reuters, Thomson Reuters*, 30 Jan. 2020.](#)



I. Background

2008 was a decisive year for China, as it hosted its first-ever Olympics.⁹⁶ The event served as a figurative maturation of the CCP governance over the country, which had ushered unprecedented economic growth and development. A signal that China was ready to take leadership in the Indo-Pacific region, while at the same time conditioning foreign actors to acknowledge its narrative on issues ranging from human rights, extraterritorial-maritime claims, and economic programs.

But in the weeks before the event, and as the torch journeyed through other parts of the world, riots by Uyghur and Tibetan activists broke out in Lhasa.⁹⁷ The torch's passing through London and Paris was then marred by further protests. And in facing a reality check of its global image --especially in the eyes of its diaspora-- which was still tainted by oppressions and crackdowns, the Chinese government began to aggressively pursue the monitoring of its diaspora and the laundering of its reputation worldwide. For the Olympics, orchestrating pro-Beijing demonstrations, blackmailing activists, and the threat of excluding foreign actors from

⁹⁶ [Dorfman, Zach, and Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian. "China Has Been Running Global Influence Campaigns for Years." The Atlantic, Atlantic Media Company, 14 May 2019.](#)

⁹⁷ [Yardley, Jim. "Violence in Tibet as Monks Clash With the Police." The New York Times, The New York Times, 15 Mar. 2008.](#)

economic offerings became par for the course in Chinese foreign policy.

The Chinese community in France represents the largest Chinese diaspora among European countries, where they total between six hundred thousand to one million.⁹⁸ A lack of religious and ethnic census in the country prevents the number from being accurately known. Not only is it large, however, it is also diverse, and includes Hoa refugees, Wenzhou immigrants, who are typically apolitical, Dongbei workers, close to the CCP in its values, and more recently, students and affluent Chinese.

⁹⁸ [Laurent, Annabelle. "Chinois De France' Ne Veut Rien Dire." *Slate.fr*, 31 Jan. 2019.](#)

II. Strategic Context

Studies into China's approach towards social and narrative control must be divided into two broad ethnic categories -- one which includes the domestic and Overseas Chinese (OC), and one that includes the rest of the world. Deng Xiaoping was notably quoted saying, in the case of the former, that Chinese residing at home or abroad were "the Children and Grandchildren of the Chinese Ethnicity."⁹⁹ In this respect, Chinese foreign policy over the past 30 years has emphasized with great care the engagement with its diaspora.

Alex Joske, from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute has highlighted the influence that the United Front Work Department has upon overseas populations.¹⁰⁰ Through his research, a reorganization of what was once a multiparty group has instead become the highway upon which the CCP legitimizes the blurring of civil-military affairs and objectives -- at home with religious and societal control, and abroad, with narrative and diplomatic control. The organization's primary focus centers on the projection of influence abroad.

Finally, an important contribution to the societal aspect of Chinese societal control pertains to the Qiaowu. An in-depth

look by scholar James Jiann Hua gives insights into the Qiaowu, or in other words,

the "Overseas Chinese (OC) affairs work".¹⁰¹ A policy that has endured decades of trial and error, it has found effectiveness this past decade in tandem with China's outward economic projection. Not only have OC populations been courted into accepting the PRC's narrative, but the PRC itself monitors and exports it through its United Front Work -- particularly through the weaponization of academia abroad.

To accomplish this, the CCP made a significant reassessment of how it engaged with its diaspora throughout the world. China has efficiently managed to leverage the loyalties of its communities as extensions of the Party's goals abroad.¹⁰² According to Yossi Shain and Ahron Barth, diasporas can serve passive and active roles in a society.¹⁰³ On both accounts, the Chinese diaspora, more commonly known as the Chinese Overseas, encompass these roles to their fullest extent.

⁹⁹ Xu, Ling, et al. "Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships in Chinese Immigrant Families in Los Angeles: Roles of Acculturation and the Middle Generation." *Gerontology & Geriatric Medicine*, SAGE Publications, 17 July 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Joske, Alex. "Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work." *Jamestown*, 9 May 2019.

¹⁰¹ To, James Jiann Hua. "Qiaowu." *Brill, Brill*, 15 May 2014, brill.com/view/title/21636.

¹⁰² <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/qiaowu-extra-territorial-policies-overseas-chinese>

¹⁰³ Shain, Yossi, and Aharon Barth. "Diasporas and International Relations Theory." *International Organization*, vol. 57, no. 3, 2003, pp. 449-479., doi:10.1017/s0020818303573015.

III. Securing Global Consent

The primary foreign propaganda concern of the CCP over the past three decades has centered upon the management of the *Qiaowu*, or the Chinese Overseas' (CO) perceptions towards it.¹⁰⁴ Post-2008, crises such as the Tiananmen massacre and the protests surrounding the Olympics markedly drew outrage and calls for democratic reform in the mainland amongst the populations living abroad. This broad and important target group became a focus as a result of outcry towards repeat crises. Such a predicament raised enough alarm in Beijing to prompt the issue as a crucial matter of national security.¹⁰⁵ In the decades since, the CCP has engaged in an effort to capture the favor of its overseas populations making one of its most pressing goals the engagement with the OC, while highlighting a positive image of China to the rest of the world.

In deploying a multifaceted effort that includes diplomats, business leaders, and attaches from different government ministries --part of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Work-- the Chinese government has become, over the past decade, increasingly successful in the capture of its diaspora. The PRC embassy in Paris, and the consulates of Marseilles and Strasbourg have increased China's outreach to the various Chinese communities in recent years. For instance, demonstrations were mobilized and encouraged --particularly through the use of student organizations-- to counter the

protests against China during the 2008 Olympics. Many of the talking points resorted to the exploitation of racially motivated crimes against Asians, particularly through tourist cases.¹⁰⁶

Mediums for such engagements go from superficially banal institutions like Confucius centers, to more obfuscated organizations like the United Front.¹⁰⁷ Efforts from this latter have incited the mobilization and instrumentalization of Chinese diasporas abroad to influence and disrupt in accordance with the Party's wishes. Reports state that in France, for example, United Front agents used WeChat to mobilize Chinese diaspora in the country during the last presidential election and for protests around issues linked to the mainland. "How the CCP engages with the OC, therefore, remains a significant cause of concern and interest--particularly for countries with large OC populations." The targeting of the OC points towards key goals: improving China's international image, promoting China's domestic and foreign advancement, and raising the status of the OC in their places of residence, such as France. The confident synchronization of the OC's interests across the world is the fruit of a three-decade long effort.

France has been, along with Germany and Belgium, one of the foremost destinations for Chinese minorities. The

¹⁰⁴ [Jiann Hua To, James \(2017\). Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for Overseas Chinese.](#)

¹⁰⁵ [Francesco Ragazzi, Governing Diasporas, International Political Sociology, Volume 3, Issue 4, December 2009, Pages 378–397](#)

¹⁰⁶ [Mahoney, J. \(2013\). The China Journal, \(70\), 208-210. doi:10.1086/671313](#)

¹⁰⁷ [Charon, Paul, and JEAN-BAPTISTE JEANGÈNE VILMER. "Russia as a Hurricane, China as Climate Change: Different Ways of Information Warfare." War on the Rocks, 21 Jan. 2020.](#)

Uyghur population in Paris, for instance, is composed of 500 to 1000 people, stemming from increased demand in asylum requests as well as regular naturalization. Most of them sought refuge there following the 2009 revolt in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, which was marked by violence. Much of this specific diaspora, however, has been immobilized by the close eye of the Chinese state, which includes both, the watchful eye of the broad diaspora, as well as surveillance through technology. As a result, while the Association of Uyghurs in France allows for a safe space of sorts, many Uyghurs themselves cannot voice their grievances without also alerting Beijing. They are often suppressed through the monitoring of Chat applications such as WeChat, or even phones from companies like Xiaomi, which are used by both the Chinese citizenry and intelligence services.¹⁰⁸ In rare instances, these minority populations have also received packages directly to their own addresses, highlighting a new dimension to Beijing's strategy of global monitoring methods.¹⁰⁹

The avenues by which the PRC approaches influence towards the OC abroad, and particularly the marginalized OC, include the use of Social Media, intimidation tactics through phone calls, and outright hacking.

I. Social Media

Much of the OC in France makes use of WeChat and TikTok. Both platforms are

¹⁰⁸ [Brewster, Thomas. "Exclusive: Warning Over Chinese Mobile Giant Xiaomi Recording Millions Of People's 'Private' Web And Phone Use." *Forbes*, *Forbes Magazine*, 3 May 2020.](#)

¹⁰⁹ [Singh, Charanjeet. "\[Update: Toggle To Opt-Out\] Xiaomi Devices Found Tracking And Recording Browsing Data Of Millions." *Fossbytes*, 4 May 2020.](#)

developed by Chinese companies, Tencent Holdings and ByteDance respectively. According to Tenam "many examples of Tibetans who, after using WeChat to send photos of the Dalai Lama for example, are now in prison."¹¹⁰ Using these applications abroad, could have serious consequences for marginalized OC communities.

II. Phone Calls

OC may at times be subjected to phone calls where individuals may be targeted to do such things like dropping by the Chinese Embassy to pick up a package, even when this latter does not serve as a post office. The tactic allows the PRC to seize individuals once they enter the diplomatic soil, where they are allowed to photograph, interrogate, and threaten targets regarding their activities in France.¹¹¹

III. Hacking

OC minorities are also in certain cases the targets of hacking. Thanks in large part to its vast surveillance efforts, Chinese authorities commonly trace communications of minorities -- leading to anonymous messages that may ask for the person in question to come home (to China) for purported reasons such as a relative in need.

¹¹² The Uyghur who have fled to France, as the Tibetans before them, are often subject

¹¹⁰ [Monin, Jacques. "Quand La Chine Exporte Sa Surveillance Des Minorités En France." *France Inter*, 4 Jan. 2020..](#)

¹¹¹ [Monin, Jacques. "Quand La Chine Exporte Sa Surveillance Des Minorités En France." *France Inter*, 4 Jan. 2020..](#)

¹¹² [Allen-Ebrahimian, Bethany. "Chinese Police Are Demanding Personal Information From Uighurs in France." *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Policy*, 26 July 2019.](#)

to the threatening of their families at home¹¹³ ensuring their silence and cooperation.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, some of these surveillance tools have come from those developed by the NSA in the US.¹¹⁵

Finally, at the other end of the OC spectrum, affluent Chinese --who are often vetted and briefed before departure-- partake in an outbound academic stream of influence built upon partnerships between China and global Institutions. For France, this has been reflected in STEM research. In the case of the former, tech giant Huawei established an initiative with more than 350 partnering universities across the globe.¹¹⁶ The program, which invests in the promotion of CSR and ICT knowledge and cooperation, has seen a plethora of prestigious universities, including in France since 2011. It has established cooperation with some of the most notable institutions in the cities of Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, Grenoble, and Lille, and centered around accelerating ICT, Telecommunications, and Chinese culture in general.¹¹⁷ And as previously noted in the Military section above, the PLA often sends its own scientists to pursue such opportunities while at the same time tasking them with covert motives. From the recruitment of foreign nationals, to the

exfiltration of sensitive information related to nre and emerging technologies.¹¹⁸ The OC therefore plays both an active and passive tool for the CCP abroad.

¹¹³ [Haas, Benjamin. "Think of Your Family': China Threatens European Citizens over Xinjiang Protests." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 16 Oct. 2019.](#)

¹¹⁴ [FALLEVOZ, Baptiste, et al. "Focus - How China Keeps a Close Eye on Uighur Diaspora in France." France 24, France 24, 16 Dec. 2019,](#)

¹¹⁵ [Perloth, Nicole, et al. "China Sharpens Hacking to Hound Its Minorities, Far and Wide." The New York Times, The New York Times, 22 Oct. 2019,](#)

¹¹⁶ ["Seeds for the Future - Huawei Sustainability." Huawei, 9 July 2019,](#)

¹¹⁷<https://chinatechmap.aspi.org.au/#/map/f1-France.f5-Research%20partnership>

¹¹⁸ [Joske, Alex. "Picking Flowers, Making Honey The Chinese Military's Collaboration with Foreign Universities." Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2018, www.aspi.org.au/.](#)



INFORMATIONAL: A NEW WORLD MEDIA ORDER



I. Background

The CCP has long hosted the view that in the French-language media, China lacks a strong position. The country has long deplored what it considered to be a negative image within local French media. This has however changed in recent times with China expanding its offering of francophone media sources, such as the very active CGTN and ramping up its presence on social media. Furthermore, as noted by the Hoover institute, the PRC has had much “success with the publishing world, where several books have appeared praising the Chinese model.”¹¹⁹ This is largely due to the large number of pro-Chinese politicians and journalists present in France.

¹¹⁹ [Diamond, Larry, and Orville Schell. “Chinese Influence Activities in Select Countries.” Hoover Institute, 29 Nov. 2018.](#)

II. Strategic Context

The past decade has seen China establish what is informally termed a "new world media order". Under this dichotomy, it aims to rewrite and control the narrative of its past and present affairs. This media order would be one in which "journalists would no longer be anything but aids to state propaganda," notes Reporters Without Borders (RSF).¹²⁰ As stated by the Elsa Kania, China's informational influence is what the party-state calls *huayuquan* (话语权), typically translated as "discourse power."¹²¹ Kania has defined *huayuquan* as "national capability to influence global values, governance, and even day-to-day discussions on the world stage, which Beijing believes should be commensurate with its economic and military might."

Aimed to enhance the development of the Silk and Road initiative, Chinese propaganda aims firstly¹²² to develop the tools participating in the propagation of "the true history of China. Secondly, it seeks "to obstruct the range of the speeches which contravene the line fixed by the Chinese central power". The subjects concerned are well known: the evocation of the independence of Tibet, Taiwan and Hong Kong, respect for human rights in Xinjiang,

the status of the South China Sea or the cult of the personality of Xi.

For a French scholar¹²³, the development projects of Chinese soft power precede the coming to power of Xi Jinping. However, the development of China's policy of influence is driven by the ambition of Chinese leaders to shape the 21st century to their benefit and impose their own values. He notes that "the western world, in search of a new economic breath and whose political unity falters, appears as an obvious target." The Alliance for Securing Democracy¹²⁴ notes several examples in which the CCP's propaganda has been effective "redefining human rights to include a "right to development" and – along with Russia – propagating the concept of "cyber sovereignty."

¹²⁰ [Hoffman, Samantha. "Engineering Global Consent: The Chinese Communist Party's Data-Driven Power Expansion." ASPI, 14 Oct. 2019.](#)

¹²¹ [Kania, Elsa. "The Right to Speak: Discourse and Chinese Power." Ccpwatch, CACR | Center for Advanced China Research, 19 Sept. 2019.](#)

¹²² [Clément, Margot, and Hongkong. "Pékin Investit Pour Étendre Son Influence Dans Les Médias." 24Heures, 25 Mar 2019.](#)

¹²³ [Moulin, Christophe. "La Voix De La Chine Ou La Propagande Internationale Du Parti Communiste Chinois." Infoguerre, 29 Dec. 2019.](#)

¹²⁴ [Schrader, Matt. "Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries." Alliance for Securing Democracy, 2020.](#)

III. Securing Global Consent

Traditional Media

The party's Ministry of Propaganda controls the personnel and messaging of state-run media outlets like *People's Daily* and *China Daily*. It also provides instructions to non-state media (including social media platforms) about how sensitive topics should be censored.¹²⁵ State-run media outlets, such as China Global Television Network, *Xinhua*, *China Daily*, *People's Daily*, and *Global Times*, have long been the direct voices through which the party-state speaks to the outside world. They have all—particularly *Xinhua*—been used as *de facto* arms of Chinese intelligence. All are increasingly seeking new and innovative ways to propagate the party's message globally, while denying space and resources to adversarial narratives. For example, the above outlets are active on foreign social media platforms; five of the six most followed media outlets on Facebook are Chinese state-media outlets.

In pursuing mergers and acquisitions of media outlets abroad, the Chinese state has facilitated its ability to target and engage with whom it wishes in Western Europe.¹²⁶ In seeking to address foreign audiences, the success of the English version of Russia Today inspired propaganda officials of the

CCP to launch CCTV-news in 2010, renamed China Global Television in 2017, and present today in most Western European countries.¹²⁷ Like Russia Today, the news broadcaster has hired foreign journalists and experts, reporting on issues around the world. However, many subjects remain taboo, ranging from Tibet to the Tiananmen movement and including the arrests of human rights lawyers in China. Additionally, media outlets do not hesitate to spin international developments to their advantage, as was the case during the yellow vest protests in France.¹²⁸ Recent actions have seen a development of what may be referred to as “Russianization”¹²⁹ of Chinese information operations with mainland China resorting to negative messaging and Russian-like techniques surrounding topics like Taiwan and Hong Kong.¹³⁰

Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2017, the extent of the restructuring of the media tool through the diversification of the use of economic pressure has been evident.

¹²⁵ Staff, RFA. “China's Central Propaganda Department Takes Over Regulation of All Media.” *Radio Free Asia*, Radio Free Asia, 22 Mar. 2018.

¹²⁶ Clément, Margot, and Hongkong. “Pékin Investit Pour Étendre Son Influence Dans Les Médias.” *24heures.Ch/*, 24 Heures, 25 Mar. 2019.

¹²⁷ “La Chine Lance Sa Propre Machine De Propagande Mondiale.” *Express*, 2 Jan. 2017.

¹²⁸ ParService Actu. “[Vidéo] Quand La Télévision Chinoise Cite La France En Exemple à Suivre En Matière De Répression.” *Les Inrocks*, 21 Aug. 2019.

¹²⁹ Charon, Paul, and JEAN-BAPTISTE JEANGÈNE VILMER. “Russia as a Hurricane, China as Climate Change: Different Ways of Information Warfare.” *War on the Rocks*, 21 Jan. 2020.

¹³⁰ Wallis, Jake, et al. “China and Russia Aren't the Same When It Comes to Information Warfare.” *The Strategist*, 23 Sept. 2019.

In its simplest form, this economic pressure consists, from the Chinese point of view, in paying to have content appear in influential local publications, such as those of the Xinhua agency or of China Daily in the New York Times in the United States. More insidiously, it may involve broadcasting sponsored content from International Radio China in an opaque manner on local radio stations through the support of media groups established abroad and majority owned by Chinese state-owned enterprises, such as the Global CAMG Media Group in Australia, G&E Studio Inc. in North America and the Global Times branch in Finland¹³¹.

In the case of Africa, as mentioned above, France has maintained strong ties with the continent, particularly through its former colonies. As noted by the Brookings Institute "La Françafrique" not only includes 100 million French speakers, it also employs the CFA franc as currency.¹³² Additionally, France maintains a network of popular francophone news outlets that share news in French across the continent. It further maintains a ministry of Francophonie, created to promote the cultural partnerships between France's former colonies and the French state, issuing frequent visits to Africa by French officials. Indeed, even the French Minister of Foreign Affairs has put forth the desire to further French soft power in Africa by stating that "Faced with a generalized competition which is reconfiguring our world and which is no longer limited to its political, strategic and economic dimensions, we must also take into account what I call the new attributes of power -- the battle for culture,

the battle for information and the battle for development". In the context of false news, he added that France cannot sit idly.¹³³

These worries emanate from the growing competition that France has begun to face in Africa from other nations, including Russia, but particularly China. An initiative coordinated by the broadcast group Voice of China and carefully monitored by Communist Party censors has been central to China's Going Out policy in the continent. Furthermore, Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua has become the largest broadcast news entity in the world. With this expansion, *Le Monde Diplomatique* notes that in the past decade, nearly 1,000 African journalists have come each year to participate in training programs in China.¹³⁴ Beijing "is also investing in existing African media," according to Aubrey Hruby, of the Africa Center at the Atlantic Council who maintains that some English-language newspapers in Kenya are full of articles borrowed directly from the Chinese state agency Xinhua, without any quotes.

For CGTN, its Nairobi offices are one of the largest subsidiaries outside of China, placing it as the only television station in the world to broadcast in all six official UN languages. Its 79 million Facebook followers amount to as many as those of the BBC and CNN combined. But the news outlet has proven its lack of independence by removing columns devoted to the plight of the Uyghurs. RSF notes that "CGTN is particularly benefiting from the expansion of telecommunications giant Huawei, which has

¹³¹ ["Beyond the Great Firewall: How China Became a Global Information Power." *Center for International Media Assistance*.](#)

¹³² [Signé, Landry. \(2019\). "France-Africa relations challenged by China and the European Union". *Brookings Institution*. Web.](#)

¹³³ [Servant, Jean-Christophe. \(2019\). "Vers l'Afrique, un « soft power » qui tourne au « hard »". *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Web.](#)

¹³⁴ [Servant, Jean-Christophe. \(2019\). "Vers l'Afrique, un « soft power » qui tourne au « hard »". *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Web.](#)

set up 70% of 4G infrastructure in Africa, which has become a sort of "laboratory for Chinese media presence". There, "under the pretext of revealing to the world the true face of Africa, CGTN takes care above all of the image of China" and refrains from any critical comment. Beijing's influence is also political with the CCP frequently meeting with officials from African Political parties and inviting them to China. As a result, in 2019, 37 African countries defended China's position, in response to a letter sent by some twenty countries, mainly Western, denouncing the interments of Uyghurs in Xinjiang province¹³⁵.

Cinema

2007 was a decisive year for cinema as it marked the last year that major Hollywood productions dared to release pictures portraying China in a negative light¹³⁶. That year, both *Kundun* and *7 years in Tibet* were released, despite much objection from Chinese authorities. "You're not going to see something that's like 'Seven Years in Tibet' anymore," according to Larry Shinagawa, interviewed by the New York times, a professor at Hawaii Tokai International College specializing in Asian and Asian-American studies. Studios that make films critical of China, he said, risk being banned from releasing movies in the country. In addition, China has financed a growing number of productions. According to Orville Schelle, "There is a notion that its propaganda has not worked well enough," hence "a real sensitivity to the blockbuster power of Hollywood."

¹³⁵ [ALVIANI, CÉDRIC. CHINA'S PURSUIT OF A NEW WORLD MEDIA ORDER. Reporters without Borders.](#)

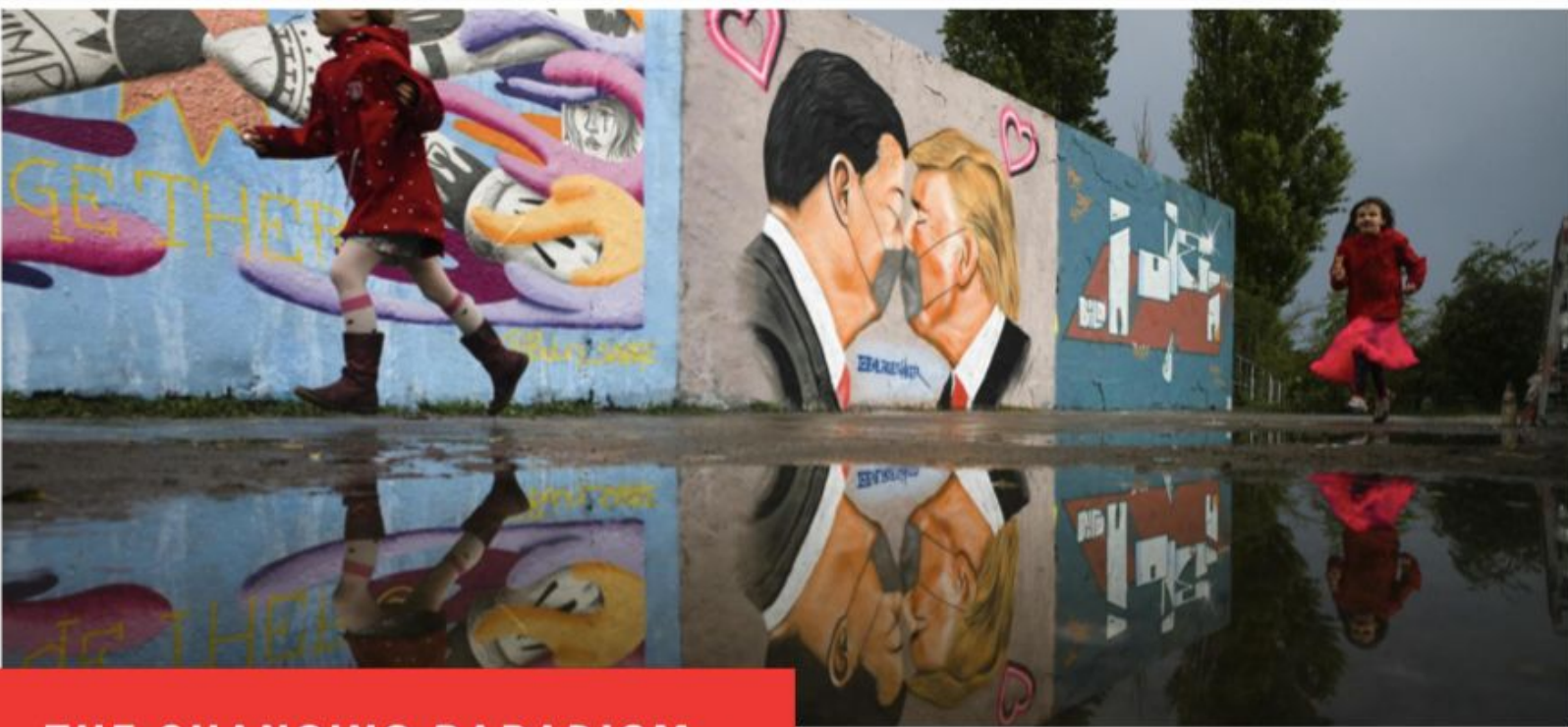
¹³⁶ ["How China Is Rewriting Its Own Script." The New York Times, The New York Times, 18 Nov. 2018.](#)

Social media

Recent years have marked a shift in China's approach to influence on social media with growing reports of coordinated campaigns in Taiwan and in the context of the Hong Kong protests. Analysts have assessed that the CCP's growing presence within its circles of influence, may be the first step towards a generalized, global approach to online propaganda and disinformation¹³⁷. The think tank Alliance for Securing Democracy, known for their research on Chinese propaganda worldwide noted that "China's more confrontational posture on COVID-19 represents a clear departure from its past behavior and signals a move toward a more Russian style of information manipulation".¹³⁸ Our below study will show how the COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted a shift in the way China approaches its disinformation campaigns.

¹³⁷ [Kao, Jeff, and Mia Shuang Lifer ProPublica. "How China Built a Twitter Propaganda Machine Then Let It Loose on..." ProPublica.](#)

¹³⁸ [Team, ASD. "The Alliance for Securing Democracy Expands Hamilton 2.0 Dashboard to Include China." Alliance For Securing Democracy, 31 Mar. 2020.](#)



THE CHANGING PARADIGM: CHINESE INFLUENCE IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

An official press release by the Chinese Embassy in France recently stated that Chinese methods for containing the COVID-19 pandemic in the mainland were seen by French health officials as an 'interesting source of inspiration'.¹³⁹ "It was the 'dictatorship' to which the world first sought help from, and not the American flagship of democracy", the release further read. This language predicated a narrative war currently being waged at the forefront of the epidemic and attempts to discredit the United State's dominance over health governance. These efforts give way to new insights as to how Chinese information operations have begun to shift.

Recent months have seen Chinese government officials' presence on social

¹³⁹ (2020). "Systèmes politiques et lutte contre l'épidémie : le grand dilemme". Embassy of China in France. Web.

media increase exponentially¹⁴⁰ - despite many platforms being banned in the mainland.¹⁴¹ Numbers estimate that Twitter accounts connected to Chinese embassies, consulates, and ambassadors have increased by more than 250 percent.¹⁴² The official account of China's Embassy in France has positioned itself as a model and mediator in the crisis, in an effort to demonstrate the effectiveness of China's political system and showcase itself as a factor of stability, in comparison to the United States.

¹⁴⁰ Kao, Jeff, and Mia Shuang Li. "How China Built a Twitter Propaganda Machine Then Let It Loose on..." ProPublica, 26 Mar. 2020.

¹⁴¹ Uren, Tom, et al. "Tweeting through the Great Firewall." ASPI, 3 Sept. 2019.

¹⁴² Brandt, Jessica, and Bret Schafer. "Five Things to Know About Beijing's Disinformation Approach." Alliance For Securing Democracy, 1 Apr. 2020.

By examining the Chinese government's official tweet sphere, our research has found that narratives being promulgated vary from praising the CCP for its efforts to combat the outbreak, to openly criticizing Donald Trump's handling of the pandemic. A recent public statement from the Chinese Embassy in Paris - and retweeted hundreds of times - goes as far as comparing European political systems with that of China.¹⁴³ These narratives are often retweeted by Chinese embassies based in francophone Africa.

In addition to social media accounts, the CCP also makes use of more traditional sources of information such as TV and press articles.¹⁴⁴ Messages emanating from these outlets aim to put forward China's efforts in combating the outbreak while discrediting the United States. In doing so, CGTN's French channel has disseminated the claim that the United States might be at the origin of the virus, propagating information backed by false academic evidence.¹⁴⁵ CGTN France's podcast series also maintains that Xi Jinping is leading the fight against COVID-19, asserting that he "personally guided and deployed the Chinese people to lead the interception battle, which is also the people's joint battle against the COVID-19 epidemic."

¹⁴⁶ Episodes of the podcast shared on twitter are then retweeted by official Chinese

government accounts such as Consulates or Embassies across France and francophone Africa.

As a consequence for such messaging, the Chinese ambassador to France, Lu Shaye, was summoned by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, citing disparagement of France's treatment towards its elderly population during the pandemic. In spite of this, additional posts were published on the Embassy website, with one in particular titled "Why the Covid-19 epidemic is so politicized".¹⁴⁷ This latter document postulated the view that western countries have become psychologically weak, lessening the confidence in liberal democracy as a whole. The same day, German officials disclosed an attempt by Chinese diplomats to urge for the country to speak positively about China's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Since the beginning of the outbreak, China has demonstrated more boldness, creativity in looking for ways to exploit the pandemic to its advantage. In doing so, China has made Europe the center of its attention and supplied millions of masks and medical equipment to governments in need in an effort to strengthen political ties and divert any criticism regarding its management of the outbreak.

These diplomatic efforts have been coupled with extensive information operations, intended to reinforce China's position on the continent, discredit the United States and strengthen their domestic model of governance.¹⁴⁸ A Russianization of tactics

¹⁴³ (2020). "[Systèmes politiques et lutte contre l'épidémie : le grand dilemme](#)". *Embassy of China in France*. Web.

¹⁴⁴ (2017). "[La Chine lance sa propre machine de propagande mondiale](#)". *Express*. Web.

¹⁴⁵ (2020). "[Selon un virologue américain, une version plus faible du nouveau coronavirus s'est peut-être propagée depuis des années](#)". *CGTN Francaise*. Web.

¹⁴⁶ "[Xi Jinping Mène La Guerre De La Chine Contre Le COVID-19 - Épisode 9.](#)" *Accueil*, 29 Mar. 2020.

¹⁴⁷ [Momtaz, Rym; et al. \(2020\). "Beijing doubles down in EU propaganda battle". *Politico*. Web.](#)

¹⁴⁸ [Wallis, Jake. \(2020\). "China and Russia aren't the same when it comes to information](#)

now permeates information operations in face of shaping the narrative behind the blame, figures, and containment of the virus. Reports highlight Beijing's presence on western social media platforms, taking a more confrontational approach to information manipulation that draws from Russian tactics. The Alliance for Securing Democracy suggests such actions demonstrate that China has "confidence in its brand".¹⁴⁹ This confidence now likens China's methods to those of Russia, with the amplification of conspiracy theories and hoaxes that sow doubt on established facts in an effort to both, acquit itself from any blame and diminishing the appeal of democracy in general. In short, Beijing has begun to shift from mere suppression and censorship, to an outright assault through external information manipulation.

Chinese efforts, however, have prompted mixed reactions from individual EU leaders with Emmanuel Macron calling for more transparency regarding the initial management of the outbreak by Chinese authorities. While the initial press coverage and government reactions seemed positive, the trend seems to have reversed in the latest weeks. Accounts criticizing the CCP for their aggressive diplomacy and management of the crisis are now daily, with *Le Figaro*, for example, titling their 10 page magazine "The Great Chinese Lie" on April 25th¹⁵⁰.

[warfare". Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Web.](#)

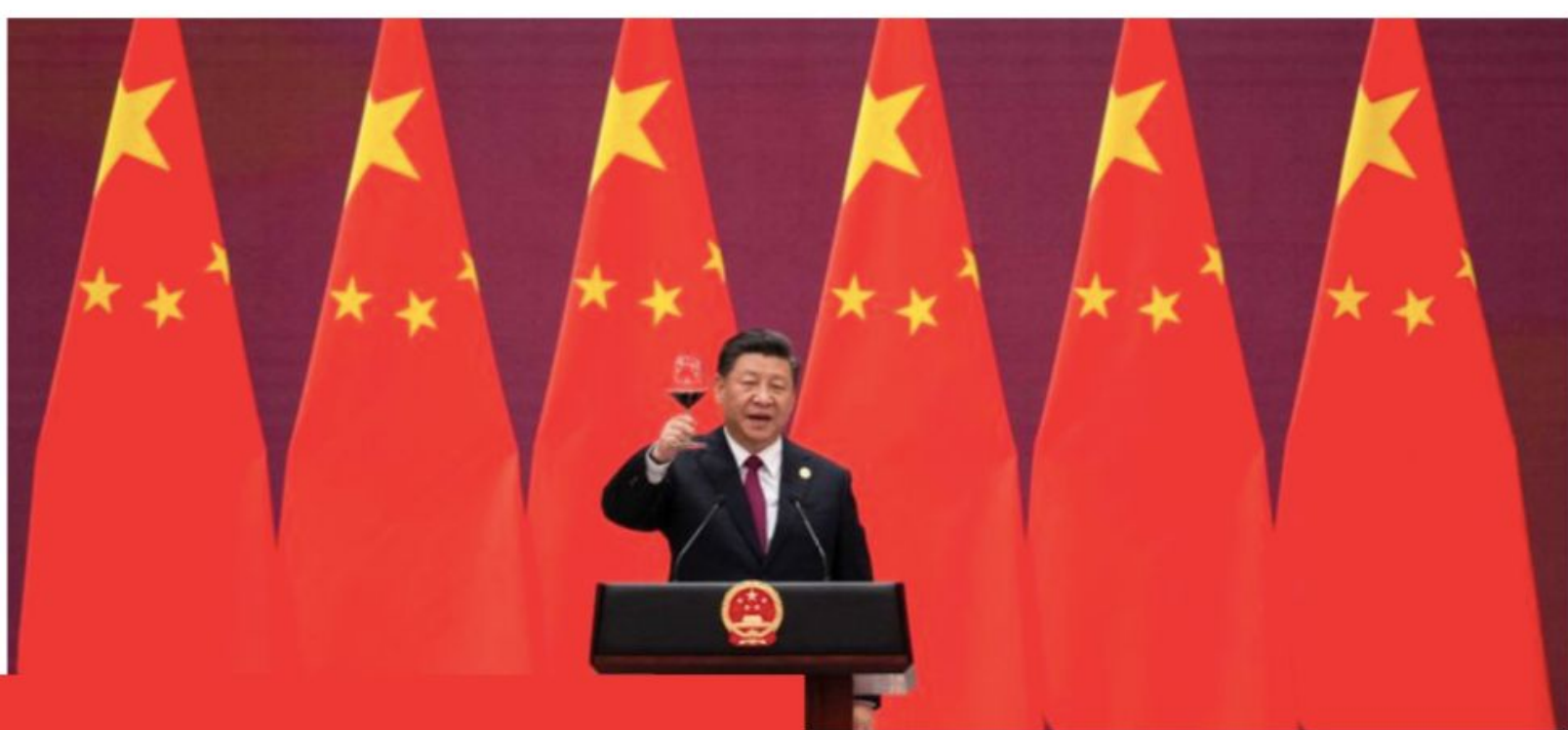
¹⁴⁹ [Brandt, Jessica; Schafer, Bret. \(2020\). "Five Things to Know About Beijing's Disinformation Approach". Alliance for Securing Democracy. Web.](#)

¹⁵⁰ [Tremblais, Jean-Louis. "Coronavirus: Le Grand Mensonge Chinois." Le Figaro.fr, 24 Apr. 2020.](#)

In the midst of the crisis, EU lawmakers have decided to review a report condemning Chinese propaganda to soften its language and tone down accusations against the Asian giant. Context is key to understanding the EU's response. The report comes as the Union is in talks to better the treatment of its companies in China. As mentioned above, the trade balance between China and Europe is still unfavorable towards the Europeans who highly depend on Chinese investments to better their economy. Added to this is the growing uncertainty coming from the other side of the Atlantic as the Trump Administration continues to tarnish the relationship by acting unilaterally.

More generally, China's propaganda push signifies a change in how it perceives diplomacy, towards a more aggressive approach and driven by the party's "wolf-warrior" diplomats. Analysts assess that China's reaction might be the consequence of its current internal vulnerability, pressing for a more frontal external response. Lu Shaye, the current ambassador of China to France is a perfect example of a recently promoted "wolf-warrior" of the party, and is well known for his provocative statements whether in Canada, Africa or presently in France.¹⁵¹ In doing so, however, he risks undermining China's relation to France, and the EU at large. "The aggressive attitude of the PRC embassy in France is a new phenomenon that risks undermining the views of China in France, including within the government" writes Marc Julienne for IFRI "and that could affect bilateral relations. This could, for instance, push France toward banning Huawei from the French 5G market.

¹⁵¹ [André, Jérémy. "Diplomatie, Économie, Grandes Manoeuvres... À Quoi Joue La Chine." Le Point, 30 Apr. 2020.](#)



CONCLUSION AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In a world where China is sufficiently confident of its global narrative to launch an international debate on global health governance, and where the U.S. pronounces its supposed exceptionalism over ally and foe alike – Many other western democracies find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. From one end, they are offered help by a regime that asks little but the consent of its narrative, and from the other, they are annulled aid by a historic ally that has resorted to nationalism. Europe's fragile political context put it in a particularly vulnerable position.

In the absence of a response from the United States, the pandemic has paved the way for China to bolster its ambitions and validate its political values. These Ambitions may lead to the legitimization of authoritative narratives around governance and the materialization of a new form of multilateralism. European countries should remain wary of the price of a revised

multilateralism shaped by Chinese ambitions in remembering that human rights and transparency are likely to be neglected.

If this trend continues, and without a revision to this eastward economic expansion, European countries --and particularly those in the South, including France-- will be faced with an asymmetric relationship. A relationship where Chinese investment will reap dividends due to its capitalization on European critical infrastructure and where the technological landscape may become a battleground for Chinese and American competition. Observers note that in the face of Covid-19, the so-called "mask diplomacy", could spell the end of healthcare as welfare.¹⁵²

¹⁵² [d'Argenson, Pierre-Henri. \(2020\). "Nous entrons dans une nouvelle guerre froide qui pourrait marquer notre sortie de l'histoire". *Le Figaro. Web*](#)

But just as there is closeness, there is also caution and distance. Norbert Röttgen, chairman of the German parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee issued a stark warning on Twitter by saying "Corona should teach us that we must not be dependent on China for critical infrastructure -- not for masks and certainly not for 5G".¹⁵³ A criticism emboldened by reports of faulty Chinese testing equipment, which had hitherto been framed as generosity from China. If European policymakers follow Germany's preference for a native network, it would be a significant blow for companies such as Huawei, and the Chinese state's aspirations in Europe. The European Commission has also become increasingly aware of China's attempts to embed itself within European infrastructure.¹⁵⁴ A proposal for European countries to buy stakes in companies, instead of succumbing to outright takeovers, was drafted by the Union's Competition Commissioner, Margrethe Vestager.¹⁵⁵

Our research aimed to provide a glimpse of an issue that has hitherto been overlooked in favor of more obvious issues like Russian influence campaigns. In light of our findings, we would like to formulate a series of recommendations that may aid French policy makers to better evaluate their relationship with China:

- *Improve financial transparency within the academic sector in France.*

¹⁵³

https://twitter.com/n_roettgen/status/1254688076657549313

¹⁵⁴ [Bratberg, Erik; Le Corre, Phillipe. \(2020\). "The EU and China in 2020: More Competition Ahead" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Web.](#)

¹⁵⁵ [Espinoza, Javier. "Vestager Urges Stakebuilding to Block Chinese Takeovers." *Subscribe to Read | Financial Times, Financial Times*, 12 Apr. 2020.](#)

- *Implement more media literacy programs to counter Chinese disinformation, particularly in the context of Covid-19.*
- *Improve protections for Chinese minorities residing in France in face of potential harassment from the Chinese government.*
- *Conduct stricter assessments of bi-lateral partnerships on cutting-edge technologies.*
- *Improve transparency within its political and governmental institutions, to highlight any foreign ties.*
- *France should incentivize further media literacy in and other counter-propaganda initiatives in Africa.*
- *Within the EU, France should reassure and show its support to other member states that are particularly vulnerable to Chinese influence.*

We aim to broaden our research in an effort to offer a broader overview of Chinese influence across Western Europe in general through the form of a tracker. Recent events have shown a change in Chinese information operations. And in the advent of an increasingly problematic US-China contest at the world stage, we further pose the following:

1. *In light of Covid-19, what other mechanisms of mechanisms of power can we expect the Chinese state to put forward in the coming years?*

II. What would the EU's relationship with the United States and China look like over the mid-term future?

III. How would conflicting narratives emanating from either side shape perceptions within Western Europe?

IV. As China further develops its propaganda and disinformation tactics, what counter-efforts can be implemented by European, and more specifically French policymakers?

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Executive Summary

I. Introduction

Discourse across Western Europe over the past decade mostly reflected dominant security issues such as immigration or the EU's relations to Russia. However, the region has also become increasingly attractive to Chinese influence. More than just an economic hub, Europe is a strategic battleground.

II. Research Question

We intend to purpose our research into the answering of the following questions:

- *How is China projecting influence in France?*
- *To what extent should French --if not European Union (EU) policymakers-- be concerned with this influence?*

III. Framework

In answering these questions, we utilize the JP 5-0 PMESII Framework, which delves into the Political, Military, Economic, Societal, Informational, and Infrastructural spheres to our information to guide our answers.

- Political: Mechanisms of Influence
- Military: Civil-Military Blur
- Economic & Infrastructural: The New Silk Road
- Societal: Qiaowu
- Informational: A New World Media Order

IV. The Changing Paradigm: Chinese Influence in the era of Covid-19

As the world now confronts the COVID-19 Pandemic, we see evidence that the Chinese state is shifting its influence tactics.

V. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Avenues for Future Research

In a world where China is sufficiently confident of its global narrative to launch an international debate on global health governance, and where the U.S. pronounces its supposed exceptionalism over ally and foe alike -- Many other western democracies find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place.

