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The coupling of 'two intermediate zones': the impact of France's recognition of China on the development of Sino-African relations, 1964–1965

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ABSTRACT

In the early 1960s, China supported African liberation movements, seeing the continent as part of Mao Zedong's first 'intermediate zone' – underdeveloped regions between the superpowers. This created tensions with France, eager to maintain influence over its former colonies. France's 1964 recognition of China marked Beijing's entry into the second 'intermediate zone' – the capitalist states of Western Europe – offering a chance to strengthen ties with Francophone Africa. However, China's efforts faced obstacles from France's policy of 'concerted divergence', aimed at managing African autonomy. Drawing on original Chinese and French archives, this article explores how these dynamics hindered China's African ambitions.

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Introduction

In the early 1960s, Africa emerged as a key battleground in the global rivalry among major powers. The competition saw former colonial metropoles, keen to preserve their waning influence, confronted by newly independent states eager to assert their sovereignty. Simultaneously, the continent became a strategic arena for the two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – each determined to promote its respective ideological model.[1] By 1963, following the formalisation of the Sino-Soviet split in July, China found its position in the Third World significantly weakened. The United States had already expressed serious concern over China's role in inciting revolutionary guerrilla movements in Africa, prompting the implementation of a range of countermeasures.[2] In September, the Soviet Union publicly declared that its primary

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[1]Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Intervention and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[2]Gregg Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry During the Cold War* (Chapel Hill (N.C.), University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 236.

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objective in the Third World was to curb Chinese influence.[3] In response to this growing diplomatic isolation, Mao Zedong advanced the theory of intermediate zones, expanding on the original concept of a vast intermediate zone he had articulated in 1946.[4] While denouncing what he perceived as collusion between the United States and the Soviet Union, Mao sought to rally support from countries situated within the intermediate zones. Moreover, by presenting itself as the 'authentic' embodiment of Marxism-Leninism – in opposition to both Western capitalism and Soviet revisionism – China intensified its efforts to export its revolutionary model and developmental vision to Africa.[5]

From that point onwards, the concept of the intermediate zone was divided into two distinct parts: the first comprised many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, while the second encompassed the capitalist states of Europe and Japan.[6] Mao Zedong further differentiated between two categories of countries within the first intermediate zone. Some, he argued, had attained genuine independence, whereas others possessed only a superficial or nominal form of sovereignty. The second intermediate zone, made up of imperialist countries, was likewise subdivided into two types: those that still maintained colonial holdings – the so-called 'middle imperialist' powers such as Britain and France – and those that no longer held colonies but retained powerful monopolistic capital. According to Mao, the relationship between the two zones reflected that of oppressor and oppressed, although both were ultimately subject to the overarching domination of US imperialism. It is evident that this division was not a simple binary. Rather, both zones were viewed as essential components in the construction of a broader international united front, albeit with differing strategic significance. The countries of the first intermediate zone, having endured similar forms of oppression, were seen as China's natural allies. Meanwhile, the second intermediate zone – despite its imperialist character – could serve as an 'indirect ally', given its conflicting interests with the United States in the developing world.

On 27 January 1964, China and France announced the establishment of diplomatic relations. This event, described as a 'diplomatic nuclear explosion', had a significant impact on world politics and marked a major breakthrough for China in the second intermediate zone.[7] In addition to the works on the negotiations between Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and President Charles de Gaulle's special envoy to China, Edgar Faure,

[3]Jeremy Friedman, 'Soviet policy in the developing world and the Chinese challenge in the 1960s', *Cold War History*, vol. 10, no. 2 (May 2010): 263.

[4]Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi, eds., *Mao Zedong wenji*, Volume 4 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1996), 197. In November 1946, Mao Zedong wrote: 'There are three places in today's world: the United States, the Soviet Union, and the space between them. The people in these three places are opposed to the American reactionaries. Today's world is one of contradiction and opposition between U.S. imperialism and the people of the whole world'. The concept of an 'intermediate zone' was then formally put forward and the idea of constructing an anti-US united front in the coming Cold War emerged as the core of the Chinese Communist Party's international strategy.

[5]Jiang Huajie, 'The International Cold War, Revolutionary Diplomacy, and Foreign Aid: A Re-examination of the Formation of China's Aid Policy to Africa (1956–1965)', *Waijiao Pinglun*, 2016, no. 5: 98-9.

[6]Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi and Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiaobu, eds., *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe and Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1994), 506-7.

[7]Chen Dunde, *Pobing zai 1964 - zhongfa jianjiao shilu* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2000), 241-2; Garret Martin, 'Playing the China Card? Revisiting France's Recognition of Communist China, 1963-1964', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 52-80; Lorenz Lüthi, 'Rearranging International Relations? How Mao's China and de Gaulle's France Recognized Each Other in 1963-1964', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 111-45.

researchers have focused on three main areas.[8] The first explores its impact on the United States and Taiwan, including their reactions and countermeasures.[9] The second broadens and deepens the study by examining other factors relating to the event, such as the Algerian and Indochinese issues, as well as the role of French parliamentarians and entrepreneurs.[10] Finally, some researchers start from the theory of intermediate zones and focus on China's relations with Western Europe, Japan and other countries in the second intermediate zone after 1964, seeking to demonstrate the theory's significant contribution to China's diplomatic breakthrough and the construction of an international united front.[11]

While it has been argued that France's recognition of China helped expand China's influence in Western Europe and Japan, its role in the development of China's relations with Francophone African countries after January 1964 has received less scholarly attention.[12] Bernard Krouck briefly mentions the range of reactions, from sympathy to incredibility, of Third World countries, especially those of Congo-Brazzaville, Niger and Côte d'Ivoire.[13] Pierre-Michel Durand analyses this event in the framework of Franco-US relations in Africa, emphasising the increasing support of the United States for Taiwan through the Operation Vanguard of African Aid program.[14] However, few studies have explored the real impact of Sino-French rapprochement on Sino-African relations, let alone the role of the theory of intermediate zones during this process. By broaching this question, we can not only demonstrate how China benefited from its diplomatic advancement with France to develop relations with African countries, but also gain a deeper understanding of the specific interconnections between the two intermediate zones – connections that were, to some extent, overlooked or underexplored by Mao himself. Of course, the second intermediate zone is hereinafter represented by France, and the first by the countries of the African and Malagasy Union (AMU).[15] To demonstrate the guiding significance and historical limitations of the 'two intermediate zones' theory

[8]See Yao Baihui, 'Adjustment of China's Policy towards France and Edgar Faure's Trip to China in 1963', *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu*, 2014, no. 5: 34-48; Huang Qinghua, *La Reconnaissance de la Chine par la France* (Hefei and Paris: Editions Huangshan and Hachette livre international, 2014); Bernard Krouck, *De Gaulle et la Chine: La politique française à l'égard de la République Populaire de Chine (1958-1969)* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2012).

[9]See Wang Wenlong, 'The severance of diplomatic relations between Republic of China and France and its impacts on ROC's agricultural technical assistance strategy to Africa', *Jindai Zhongguo*, June 2004, no. 157: 125-47; Yao Baihui, 'The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France and the negotiation between Taiwan and France–an investigation based on Taiwan's archives', *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu*, 2016, no. 1: 37-49; Zhai Qiang, 'The reaction of the United States and Taiwan to the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France (1963-1964)', *Shilin*, 2013, no. 2: 136-51.

[10]For example: Gao Jiayi, 'Pathfinders across camps: The role of French parliamentarians in the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France', *Shijie Lishi*, 2021, no. 5: 126-42.

[11]Niu Jun, 'The second intermediate zone: A study of China's policies towards Western European countries from 1955 to 1965', *Zhonggong Lishi yu Lilun Yanjiu*, 2015, no. 1: 134-54.

[12]Li Hongfeng, *Les relations sino-françaises (1949-1980)* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2014), 92.

[13]Krouck, *De Gaulle et la Chine*, 323-4.

[14]Pierre-Michel Durand, *L'Afrique et les relations franco-américaines des années soixante. Aux origines de l'obsession américaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 177-93.

[15]The *Union Africaine et Malgache* was founded in 1961, including Cameroon, Congo (Brazzaville), Côte d'Ivoire, Dahomey (now Benin), Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Central African Republic, Gabon, Chad and Malagasy Republic (now Madagascar). These countries all maintained close ties with France after independence. They opposed the radical Casablanca Group, advocated gradual development, continued to be economically dependent on France, politically supported the Franco-African Community, and opposed communism.

for the development of Sino-African relations, this study mainly uses unexplored archival documents preserved in French, Chinese and Taiwanese repositories.[16]

This article is divided into five parts, aligning with the development of Sino-African relations from 1958 to 1965, with special attention paid to the period of 1964-5. First, the relations between China, France and Africa before 1964 are examined. Second, the Chinese and French estimations of the impact of their possible rapprochement on African countries are discussed to better understand the real involvement of the African countries in the decision-making of Chinese and French leaders. The third and fourth parts examine successively the Chinese and French approaches towards Africa after January 1964 in dealing with the changing nature of their relations. The final part assesses the positive impacts of France's recognition of China on Sino-African relations in the short and medium terms.

I. China, France and Africa before 1964

In the late 1950s, Mao Zedong declared that 'the east wind prevails over the west wind', marking a swift radicalisation of Chinese foreign policy. For China, assisting African people in freeing themselves from colonialism and consolidating the independence of new nation-states became an internationalist obligation.[17] Beijing positioned itself firmly alongside the African people fighting for their national liberation, directly opposing France's colonial policy. Consequently, Sino-French relations became stagnant. Anti-communist forces in Africa seized the opportunity to express solidarity, creating a conducive environment for nationalist authorities on the island of Taiwan to overshadow China in AMU countries.

The first major step by China towards Francophone Africa was to support independence struggles, particularly that of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). From the early stages of the Algerian people's liberation war, China provided significant support. In April 1958, an FLN delegation visited China, and Zhou Enlai pledged military assistance. On 22 September, China officially recognised the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA), just three days after it was formed, despite protests from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During a meeting with an Algerian delegation on 17 May 1960, Mao Zedong firmly stated: 'We are on your side, not de Gaulle's side. We are not afraid of upsetting de Gaulle'.[18]

From 1958 onwards, China showed increasing interest in the revolutionary developments in Sub-Saharan Africa and bolstered its contacts with nationalist parties and progressive organisations in French colonies, such as the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC), the Sawaba Party of Niger, the African Party for the Independence of Senegal and the National Committee for the Liberation of Côte d'Ivoire, among others.[19] Most of these parties sent delegations to China, often received by Mao and

[16]Namely: Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve], French National Archives [Archives Nationales], Defence Historical Service [Service Historique de la Défense], China's Foreign Ministry Archives [Zhongguo Waijiaobu Danganguan], Shanghai Municipal Archives [Shanghaishi Danganguan] and Archives of the Institute of Modern History of Taiwan [Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo].

[17]'Chairman Mao's speech when meeting African friends', *People's Daily*, August 9, 1963.

[18]*Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan*, 418.

[19]For more information on China's strategy towards African political organisation at this time, see Joshua Eisenman, 'Comrades-in-arms: the Chinese Communist Party's relations with African political organisation in the Mao era, 1949-76', *Cold War History*, Vol. 18, no. 4 (2018): 429-45.

Zhou. China generally approved their requests for assistance. The UPC, actively involved in armed struggles against the French colonial regime from 1956, stood out for its resolute anti-imperialism. Official contacts between the UPC and China began at the first Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference in Cairo from December 1957 to January 1958. In October 1959, UPC president Félix Moumié visited China, seeking both ideological and practical assistance.[20] From June 1960 to July 1962, alongside sending students to China, the UPC dispatched four training delegations to learn from China's revolutionary experience, including guerrilla tactics, armed struggle during the civil war, and the manufacturing of weapons and explosives. Throughout their training period in China, UPC militants underwent intense indoctrination. The Chinese side opportunistically conducted a propaganda campaign to build a united front. For instance, they touted changing the understanding of imperialism among members of the first training delegation because 'initially, they were very determined to oppose French imperialism, but they did not understand the nature of American imperialism sufficiently. After visits and training, they attacked French imperialism without sparing American imperialism'.[21]

China's efforts in Francophone African countries also extended to its quest for diplomatic recognition. In 1960, 14 French colonies in Africa declared their independence. Faced with this new situation, the Department of West Asian and African Affairs of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs devised a plan for the region.[22] China decided to adopt a proactive yet discreet approach to launch a vigorous offensive. By the end of 1960, it successfully established diplomatic relations with Guinea and Mali, led by leaders described as 'democratic revolutionaries' who took a firm stand facing the former colonial power after their independence.[23] The aspirations of these two countries to break free from French influence and strive for genuine independence perfectly aligned with Chinese slogans. Bilateral relations deepened day by day. In September 1960, the Guinean president Sékou Touré visited Beijing, becoming the first African leader on an official visit to China. China was determined to assist them on the path to true independence by eliminating the legacy of French colonial domination. Economic and technical cooperation agreements were signed, and China provided interest-free loans and industrial and agricultural aid. In 1963, the Conakry Tobacco and Match Factory marked China's first major aid project in Africa. Following the nationalisation of the *Office du Niger* by the Malian government, China sent agricultural experts to develop crops such as tea, sugarcane and rice.[24]

[20]Agenda, plans, situation reports, situation briefings and reports on the reception of President Moumié of the Union of peoples of Cameroon prepared by the Shanghai Branch of the Chinese People's Committee for the Defence of World Peace, October 1959, C36-2-77, Shanghaishi Danganguan (Shanghai Municipal Archives) (SMA), Shanghai.

[21]Agenda, plan, situation report, list and speech of the conference on the reception of the Training Delegation of the UPC prepared by the Shanghai Branch of the Chinese People's Committee for the Defence of World Peace, June-November 1960, C36-2-102, SMA.

[22]The situation in Black Africa and our task in 1960 (draft), July 13, 1960, 108-00025-02 (1), Zhongguo Waijiaobu Danganguan (China's Foreign Ministry Archives) (FMA), Beijing.

[23]See Manon Touron, 'Le Mali, 1960-1968. Exporter la Guerre froide dans le pré carré français', *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin*, 2017/1 (no. 45): 83-95; Guia Migani, 'Sékou Touré et la contestation de l'ordre colonial en Afrique subsaharienne, 1958-1963', *Monde(s)*, 2012, no. 2: 257-73; Alessandro Iandolo, 'The rise and fall of the "Soviet Model of Development" in West Africa, 1957-64', *Cold War History*, vol.12, no. 4 (2012): 683-704.

[24]*Office du Niger* was an irrigated cultivation area set up on the interior Niger delta in Mali, initiated by the French authorities in the 1920s to meet the cotton supply needs.

For other Francophone countries without diplomatic ties with China, Beijing categorised them into three groups. The first comprised 'hard' countries led by imperialism's 'agents', including Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville and the Malagasy Republic. The second involved those in the 'conspiracy of the two Chinas', like Senegal. The third included countries with which China intended to establish contacts in the near future, such as Niger, Upper Volta, Dahomey, Mauritania, Togo and Chad.[25] Beijing tailored its approach based on these categories. For the 'hard' countries, isolation, support for progressives and condemnation were strategies, with room for future exchanges. For hesitant countries, Beijing aimed at persuasion through concerted efforts. In April and May 1961, Liu Changsheng, president of the Sino-African People's Friendship Association, led a delegation to visit Niger, Upper Volta, Mali, Senegal, Togo and other countries. Considering that newly independent countries often did not clearly know with whom to establish diplomatic relations, China seized every opportunity to explain its opposition to the 'two Chinas' thesis.

Propaganda was also a significant part of China's actions towards Africa. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed the timely denunciation of imperialist aggression in Africa, advocating the propagation of Mao Zedong's thought and China's revolutionary experience.[26] Regarding Francophone Africa, Beijing underscored the shared experience of French colonisation between China and Africa, emphasising the necessity of anti-imperialism, anticolonialism and the 'one China' principle. This involved actively denouncing French colonial crimes, expressing sympathy for the African people and supporting national liberation movements. Articles in *People's Daily* criticised French repression in Algeria, revealing France's role in Félix Moumié's murder.[27] Until the eve of Sino-French diplomatic relations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to insist on denouncing de Gaulle's 'reactionary character' and his policies towards Africa and France, in anti-imperialist propaganda.[28]

The vehement denunciation of France's colonial interests in Africa through Chinese slogans reflected the incompatibility of the two intermediate zones in China's strategy at the time. China's active support for anti-French movements in Africa emerged as a significant impediment to Sino-French relations. In 1960, French concerns were raised over rumours of 'Chinese volunteers' possibly being sent to Algeria, potentially transiting through Morocco or Tunisia.[29] In 1961, during his visit to China, Senator François Mitterrand, defended General de Gaulle's policy on Algeria, expressing worries about China's growing influence in Africa and urging China to avoid conflict with France.[30] China, in turn, firmly adhered to the principle of supporting the national liberation struggle of oppressed peoples. Mao Zedong responded to Mitterrand that 'China and

[25]Report on approaches to African countries which did not establish diplomatic relations with us, April 25, 1963, 108-00365-03, FMA.

[26]Recommendations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China on the steps to be taken in Africa, July 18, 1963, 113-00448-03, FMA.

[27]For example: 'Perspectives on De Gaulle's Algerian policy', *People's Daily*, March 22, 1962; 'The Bloody Red Hand - Revelations of the crimes of a terrorist organization of French colonialists', *People's Daily*, October 29, 1961.

[28]Some suggestions on propaganda reporting on the contradictions of imperialism, May 30, 1963, 110-01189-03, FMA.

[29]Pan Cong, 'La guerre d'Algérie et les relations franco-chinoises' (PhD dissertation in French, Université de Lyon and East China Normal University, 2020), 187-8. In fact, around 1960, Zhou Enlai suggested helping the FLN by training a group of Chinese volunteers in Tunisia, but the Tunisian President Bourguiba rejected this idea.

[30]Report on Mitterrand's visit to China, March 1, 1961, 110-00972-04, FMA.

France will establish diplomatic relations, but only once the Algerian issue is resolved'.[31]France, wary of China's advances in Africa, maintained constant vigilance. The *Quai d'Orsay* believed that although China was a newcomer to Africa, its development model attracted newly independent countries due to shared characteristics such as racial or ethnic affinity and similar stages of economic development.[32] Thus, even though, until the end of 1963, China had diplomatic relations only with Guinea and Mali, French intelligence closely monitored what they perceived as 'Chinese penetration'.

Francophone African countries, compared to France, went through a process from unawareness to consciousness in their attitudes towards China. Although China had presented itself as a model from the Bandung Conference, these countries exhibited reservations in their initial contacts, given China's geographic distance. On the one hand, the understanding of the relationship between mainland China and Taiwan posed a problem. On the other hand, African leaders, having grown up in the colonial system, preferred to maintain ties with the *Métropole*, fearing the political risks associated with the arrival of diplomats from communist countries. As Taiwan's activities in Africa intensified, these nations swiftly transitioned from 'unconscious neutrality' to a preference for Taiwan, as evidenced by their votes on China's UN admission from 1960 to 1963 (see Table 1 below).

The stance of some countries on China was also shaped by the latter's backing of African liberation movements. President Ahmadou Ahidjo repeatedly stated that the reason Cameroon did not recognise China was due to Chinese interference in its internal affairs. Addressing the UN General Assembly in October 1963, Ahidjo highlighted Chinese hostility and firmly opposed admitting China unless the country's behaviour

Table 1: Votes of Francophone African Countries on China's admission to the UN (1960–1963)[33]

Year Country	1960	1961	1962	1963
Cameroon	◎	×	×	×
Central African Republic	√	◎	×	×
Chad	◎	◎	◎	×
Congo Brazzaville	◎	◎	×	×
Dahomey	◎	◎	×	×
Gabon	◎	×	×	×
Guinea	√	√	√	√
Côte d'Ivoire	◎	◎	×	×
Malgasy Republic	◎	×	×	×
Mali	√	√	√	√
Mauritania	/	×	×	◎
Upper Volta	◎	◎	×	×
Niger	√	×	×	×
Senegal	◎	◎	×	×
Togo	◎	◎	×	×

Yes=√ No=× Abstention=◎ Not yet admitted in the UN=/

[31]An Huihou, Huang Shejiao, Chen Dawei, and Yang Jiang, eds., *Silu xinyun: xinzhongguo he alabo guojia 50nian waijiao licheng* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2006), 47.

[32]Africa and the world, undated, 1089 INVA 422, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve (Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (CADLC), La Courneuve.

[33]Information Note - Taiwan and Black Africa, February 19, 1969, 1089 INVA 110, CADLC. Table created by the author.

changed.[34] The relations between China and the UPC irritated the Cameroonian leader so much that he labelled China as his 'number one enemy'.[35]

For France, Communist China posed a threat of revolution in Africa, while Nationalist China's sole objective was to maintain its international status and preserve its seat at the UN. Due to its limited means, Taiwan's activities in AMU countries did not appear to conflict with French interests, gaining France's tacit approval.[36] Nationalist China's ties with France provided great convenience, allowing its diplomats to gain the trust of African countries more easily. Paris, as the capital of the French African Community, eased Taiwanese diplomats' transfers and exchanges with African counterparts. The Taiwanese embassy in Paris thus became a 'natural' dialogue partner for AMU countries. The results of the work of Taiwan's chargé d'affaires in France towards newly independent African countries were proof of this.[37] On 2 September 1963, during the visit of Taiwan's Minister of Foreign Affairs to de Gaulle, the latter was warmly complimented for his support in establishing diplomatic relations between Taiwan and AMU countries.[38] By 1963, Taiwan had diplomatic ties with all AMU countries, and its agricultural teams' activities intensified with the French authorities' approval.[39]

II. Estimation of the impact of a possible Sino-French rapprochement on Africa

Before China and France established diplomatic relations, concerns arose about their impact on China's actions in AMU countries. The key to the question lies in understanding the special relationship between France and Africa. Specifically, it involves asssessing whether the relationship between these two intermediate zones — represented here by the ties between France and AMU countries — would prove beneficial to China following its rapprochement with France.

In February 1962, the Evian Accords ended the Algerian War and removed a major obstacle to Sino-French relations. While Chinese criticisms of French colonialism in Africa persisted, some Chinese diplomats began to reconsider Franco-African relations. Chen Dingmin, the representative of Xinhua News Agency in Paris, stood out by proposing a shift in attitude towards France. In a letter to Chen Yi on 21 January 1963, he outlined eight advantages of actively seeking diplomatic relations with France, two of which were related to Africa. In point four, he analysed the role of establishing diplomatic relations between China and France in promoting the development of Sino-African diplomatic relations, stating that it 'will be beneficial to our country's efforts to establish diplomatic relations with certain African countries that are still dependent on French

[34]Relations between China and Cameroon, French Embassy in Cameroon, 10 January 1962, 119 QO 591, CADLC.

[35]Cameroon's foreign policy, 22 February 1963, GR/10/T/638, Service Historique de la Défense (Historical Service of Defence) (SHD), Vincennes.

[36]Note on 'The two Chinas and Africa', 12 April 1963, AG 5(F) 2398, Archives Nationales (National Archives of France) (AN), Pierrefitte-sur-Seine.

[37]The 'two Chinas' and Africa, 29 August 1963, 119 QO 591, CADLC. Chen Xiongfei, the *chargé d'affaires* of Taiwan in France multiplied his contacts with the newly independent states in Francophone Africa, and managed to secure seats for Taiwanese delegations in the independence ceremonies of these countries.

[38]Minister Shen's meeting with President de Gaulle, 2 September 1963, TD01700, Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo (Archives of the Institute of Modern History of Taiwan) (AIMHT), Taipei.

[39]Wang Wenlong, *Waijiao xiaxiang, nongye chuyang: zhonghua minguo nongji yuanzhu feizhou de shishi he yingxiang (1960-1974)* (Taipei: Department of History, National Chengchi University, 2004), 37. When consulting France on technical aid in Africa, the French authorities approved the motives of the Chinese nationalists, emphasising that the future of Africa lies in increased food production and that the Chinese are more likely to win favour with Africans.

imperialism and thus extend the influence of our country. If we can establish diplomatic relations with these countries, our struggle to expel the Jiang Jieshi clique from the United Nations and restore our legal status will be a guaranteed victory'. In point five, he emphasised the importance of this step for the socialist revolution in Africa: 'Since France is still one of the main centres of activity for the national bourgeois revolution in many African countries, establishing a base in Paris is therefore conducive for us to provide support for the development of national and anticolonial struggles in various parts of Africa. This would promote the national democratic revolutions in African countries to progress correctly on the path of socialist revolution'.[40]

Chen's optimism was evident, but he did not consider the manifest hostility of France and some AMU countries toward the 'socialist revolutionary path'. Leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seemed more aware of this reality. On 24 January 1964, although the CCP Central Committee anticipated a positive impact on some Francophone African countries, it suggested remaining vigilant and realistic, emphasising France's imperialist nature and the reluctance of some African and European countries to follow the French example.[41] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs even anticipated that France might attempt to prevent the thirteen countries of the French African Community from establishing relations with China, in a bid to curb the spread of Chinese influence. Nevertheless, a favourable climate was already beginning to take shape in these countries, and China was eager to intensify its diplomatic efforts.[42]

Contrary to the cautious optimism of the Chinese, public opinion in France feared that recognising China would give it a 'free pass to enter Francophone Africa', allowing China to expand its influence.[43] According to the French press, China was perceived as a greater threat to Africa than the Soviet Union. *Le Monde* observed a steady flow of Africans to Beijing, describing it as a 'pilgrimage', and believed that China sought to replace the Soviet Union as the leader of the Third World revolt.[44] Members of the National Assembly of France were concerned that China's aid to African revolutions might jeopardise French interests, and some strongly emphasised the need to be wary of China's 'drastic' actions.[45]

For de Gaulle, China's capabilities were far from sufficient to challenge France's traditional position in Africa. Instead, he saw the United States and the Soviet Union as the primary menace to French interests, and on a smaller scale, Great Britain. De Gaulle acknowledged China's global ambitions, particularly in Africa, but asserted that France believed that China wanted peace.[46] According to statistics from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China still lagged behind the Soviet Union and the United States in terms

[40]Letter from Chen Dingmin to Chen Yi, 21 January 1963, 110-01984-02, FMA.

[41]Opinions transmitted to the Central Committee on the important matters in relation to propaganda for the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France, 24 January 1964, 110-01998-03, FMA.

[42]The Situation Surrounding the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and France and Related Issues', 1964, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA 110-01998-01, 27-44. Translated by Fan Chao. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119197 accessed 25 April 2025.

[43]Robert Bony, 'Decided: Paris and Beijing will exchange Ambassadors, however Chou Enlai continues his communist propaganda tour in French-speaking Africa', *L'Aurore*, 18-19 January 1964, 1, 5.

[44]Bernard Ullmann, 'Beijing Pilgrimage', *Le Monde*, 1 February 1961; Robert Guillain, 'Beijing wants to take away leadership of the "third world" revolt from Moscow', *Le Monde*, 16 March 1963.

[45]Gao, 'Pathfinders across camps', 135.

[46]Audience granted by General de Gaulle to Mr Hasluck, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia, 5 November 1964, AG 5(1) 795, AN.

of aid to Africa, not to mention France, which maintained a predominant position. When making the strategic decision to recognise China, de Gaulle appeared to deliberately overlook Beijing's growing presence in Africa. Rather, it was the prospect of achieving a political resolution in Vietnam – and thereby reasserting French influence in Indochina – that ultimately 'convinced the French president to act, and act fast'.[47] At the same time, China and France found themselves drawn together in shared international isolation on the nuclear issue, following the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) by the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union in Moscow in early August 1963.[48] Thus, on a broader scale, it was France's pursuit of great power status that propelled de Gaulle towards a rapprochement with China, marking an important step in the emergence of a more multipolar world.[49] In essence, the African issue was not a key element in the establishment of Sino-French relations, nor a real obstacle to their development.

Nevertheless, this did not prevent some Gaullists, committed to the privileged Franco-African relationship, from exaggerating the Chinese threat in Africa. This pretext allowed France to sustain and strengthen cooperation with Africa.[50] The Department of African and Malagasy Affairs at the *Quai d'Orsay* and the General Secretariat for African and Malagasy Affairs, led by Jacques Foccart, did not hide their concerns about the 'Chinese penetration'.[51] In a note on Zhou Enlai's visit to Africa, the *Quai d'Orsay* concluded that Chinese policy could have dangerous consequences in the longer term.[52] Jacques Foccart, de Gaulle's 'Mr. Africa', was a fervent anti-communist and very hostile to China's activities in Africa. In September 1964, when asked about the 'Chinese threat' in Africa, he bitterly complained, saying, 'We have let the wolf into the sheepfold'.[53] Notably, Foccart was not included in de Gaulle's team responsible for the decision to recognise China – a detail that reinforces the view that African affairs were not a priority in de Gaulle's calculus.

Indeed, no specific analysis report on the potential impact of recognising China on French interests in Africa has been found in French archives. Most documents are summaries of the AMU countries' relations with the 'two Chinas'. This absence is due, on the one hand, to only a few high-ranking officials at the *Quai d'Orsay* being aware of the concrete progress of Franco-Chinese negotiations. Therefore, relevant departments did not have enough time to prepare notes. On the other hand, French diplomats believed that African countries would adopt a similar attitude to France and other Western countries facing the 'Chinese threat'. In an August 1963 note, the Asia-Oceania Department emphasised the AMU countries' inclination to establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan.[54] In early 1964, the *Quai d'Orsay* reassessed the issue and estimated that only Mauritania, Congo-Brazzaville and Dahomey could recognise China, and no other country would break its diplomatic relations with Taiwan in the short term.[55] Based on these factors,

[47]Martin, 'Playing the China Card? ', 54.
[48]Lüthi, 'Rearranging International Relations?', 116.
[49]Martin, 'Playing the China Card?', 61-2.
[50]For the French policy of cooperation with its former colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa, see: Frédéric Turpin, *De Gaulle, Pompidou et l'Afrique (1958-1974): décoloniser et coopérer* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010).
[51]For Jacques Foccart and Africa, see Frédéric Turpin, *Jacques Foccart: dans l'ombre du pouvoir* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2015); Jean-Pierre Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart: la politique française en Afrique, de 1959 à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012); Maurice Robert & André Renault, *'ministre' de l'Afrique: Entretien avec André Renault* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).
[52]Chou Enlai's trip to Africa, 18 February 1964, 119 QO 591, CADLC.
[53]*Aux Ecoutes*, 25 September 1964.
[54]The Two Chinas and Africa, 29 August 1963, 119 QO 591, CADLC.
[55]Chou Enlai's trip to Africa, 18 February 1964, 119 QO 591, CADLC.

although US and Taiwanese authorities seized multiple opportunities to warn the French government of the potential 'undesirable chain reactions' in Africa, de Gaulle's decision was not challenged by those directly involved in managing African affairs.[56]

III. Chinese attempts to show solidarity with both Africa and France

In January 1964, the doors of the AMU countries suddenly appeared open to China. This promising development affirmed the continued relevance and validity of the theory of intermediate zones. China's renewed efforts to express solidarity with both Africa and France further reflected its optimism about building an international united front within the intermediate zone.

China initially increased its contacts with countries lacking diplomatic ties, breaking the 'tacit agreement' not to enter countries where Taiwanese diplomats were present. It sent official delegations in the name of friendship, with the most significant led by Lu Xuzhang, then Vice Minister of Foreign Trade. From August to September 1964, Lu visited Congo-Brazzaville, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Dahomey, Cameroon and the Central African Republic, involving four AMU countries. The main objective was to consolidate existing relations and progress towards diplomatic recognition. After participating in Congo-Brazzaville's National Day celebrations, Lu arrived in Niger in late August. Accompanied by the Chinese ambassador to Mali, he visited Dahomey on 8 September. During his meeting with President Sourou-Migan Apithy, Lu sought to convince Dahomey to recognise China. Although the joint communiqué did not explicitly mention diplomatic relations, it emphasised strengthening Afro-Asian solidarity and promoting friendly bilateral cooperation.[57] On 19 September, Lu arrived in Yaoundé, holding discussions with the Cameroonian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The two parties issued a joint communiqué on 24 September, pledging not to interfere in each other's internal affairs and actively promoting bilateral relations. Cameroon promised to send an official delegation to China for further discussions.[58] Lu's stay in the Central African Republic from 25-29 September was fruitful. Besides signing agreements on the exchange of goods, payment and cultural cooperation, a joint communiqué on 29 September declared the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Chinese officials abroad also intensified their activities. After the Senegalese government's refusal in March 1963, Xinhua News Agency reapplied in February 1964 to establish a representative office in Dakar, gaining the approval of President Léopold Sédar Senghor.[59] Meanwhile, Chinese diplomats in Africa increased their travels for liaison work. Chinese Embassy personnel in France, newly arrived in Paris, began frequenting African embassies. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed them to increase their contacts with diplomats and officials from former Franco-African Community countries and to carry out 'appropriate work'.[60] On 26 February 1964, the Chinese Embassy sought instructions on participation in activities

[56]Letter from Chiang Kai-shek to de Gaulle, 21January 1964, 305.22/0007, AIMHT.

[57]'The friendship delegation of our government and the Dahomey government published a joint communiqué', *People's Daily*, 16 September 1964.

[58]Relations between Cameroon and China, 30 September 1964, 319 QO 49, CADLC.

[59]Letter from the French Ambassador to Senegal on 'Popular China: Chinese activities in Senegal', 14 September 1964, 119 QO 595, CADLC.

[60]Work policies and tasks of the embassy in France (draft), 30 May 1964, 110-02002-02, FMA.

related to the Togolese president's visit to France, with Beijing encouraging diplomats to seize opportunities to create contacts and necessary work: tasks included developing bilateral relations, explaining the principle of 'one China', and propaganda against the United States and the Soviet Union.[61] In late August, Ambassador Huang Zhen visited the Malagasy ambassador in France to eliminate 'misunderstandings'. He asserted that Taiwan would eventually return to China, and reunification would be achieved without intervention by the United States.[62] Huang Zhen's wife, Mrs Zhu Lin, also associated with the wives of African diplomats. Zhu Lin's 'ladies' diplomacy' bore fruit, as the wife of the Malagasy ambassador energetically approved the idea of recognising China.[63] In October, the Chinese embassy contacted the Senegalese embassy in Paris and met with the Senegalese Minister of Commerce and Industry to propose strengthening economic and trade exchanges by buying Senegalese peanuts.[64]

It should be noted that France's recognition did not bring about a change in China's policy towards Africa, and China continued to condemn colonialism and neocolonialism in Francophone Africa. For example, China continued to express solidarity with the people of French Somaliland. However, at least at the official level, Beijing began to reduce, if not avoid, direct criticisms towards France. Moreover, Chinese leaders publicly expressed their approval of France's decolonisation policy in Africa.

In reality, upon establishing its embassy in Paris, China sought to engage with France on African issues to eliminate any so-called misunderstandings. On the one hand, China aimed to dispel French doubts by outlining its African policy, including its objectives and the true extent of its aid in Africa, hoping that France could gain a better understanding of Chinese policy. On the other hand, China believed that both parties had common interests in Africa in opposing expansion by the United States. Thus, China sought to form an anti-US united front with African countries through French support.

Chinese diplomats in African countries overcame their reservations and initiated contacts with French embassies in their respective countries. On 4 March 1964, the Chinese ambassador to Burundi visited the French ambassador and discussed aid to Burundi, noting a 'relatively friendly attitude'. The French ambassador expressed hope that both parties would exchange views in the future on aid matters to 'avoid competition'.[65] Compared to embassies in Africa, it was easier for the Chinese embassy in Paris to engage with the *Quai d'Orsay* on the African policies of both countries. In fact, upon establishing its embassy in France, Beijing gave instructions to 'take advantage of relations with France to weaken the position of the United States in the first intermediate zone, especially in Southeast Asia'.[66] Even though the focus was on the Indochina issue, China's intention to leverage France's influence to block US expansion in Africa, which was also an essential part of the first intermediate zone, was evident.

From 1964 to 1965, Song Zhiguang, a counsellor at the Chinese Embassy in France, repeatedly sought to communicate with the *Quai d'Orsay* on African issues. He initially

[61]Request for instructions from the Chinese Embassy in France on participation in activities related to the visit of the Togolese President to France and response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26-29 March 1964, 117-01194-11, FMA.
[62]Letter on 'Madagascar and China', 29 October 1964, 119 QO 593, CADLC.
[63]Zhu Lin, *Dashi furen huiyilu* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1991), 119.
[64]Telegram upon arrival from the French Embassy in Senegal, 2 November 1964, AG 5(F) 2398, AN.
[65]Principles of contact with French diplomats after the establishment of Sino-French diplomatic relations and some relevant situations, 1964, 117-01180-01, FMA.
[66]Work policies and tasks of the embassy in France (draft), 30 May 1964, 110-02002-02, FMA.

expressed his desire to exchange views on African affairs with Etienne Manac'h, the director of Asia-Oceania. On 12 April 1965, he formally exchanged views with Jean-Marie Soutou, the director of African and Malagasy Affairs at the time. Song first expressed hope to strengthen ties in Africa, noting that meetings between the French and Chinese ambassadors proved useful. He stated that both China and France supported the liberation and independence of African countries and provided aid for their development, but China's assistance was insignificant. Now that France had ended its colonial policy in Africa, it was entirely possible for China and France to cooperate in this regard. He expressed China's desire to see Francophone countries maintain close cooperation with France, and that China and France could also cooperate in certain African countries, for example, by jointly assisting the Central African Republic. He insisted that China was dedicated to the economic development of African countries rather than exporting socialist revolution. In response to an article titled 'The "Yellow Peril" in Africa' mentioned by Song, Soutou reassured him by saying, 'There are Chinese without troubles, and troubles without Chinese'. Regarding suggestions for cooperation, Soutou agreed in principle, but noted that things could not progress very quickly. Instead, he recommended that respective ambassadors consult with each other 'to avoid contradictions'. In reality, this was a sidelining of Song's suggestion for Sino-French cooperation in aiding Africa. Moreover, Soutou understood Song was trying to encourage France to join China in condemning US activities in Africa, but he simply avoided following him in this direction.[67]

China's desire to express solidarity with France on African affairs was also evident in conversations between leaders of the Chinese Communist Party and visiting French officials. During a reception for a French parliamentary delegation on 30 January 1964, Mao Zedong expressed hope for France to expand its commitment to the Third World, forming a united front against the United States.[68] In a meeting with André Malraux, the French Minister of Culture, on 25 July 1965, Chen Yi emphasised China's dedication to helping African countries fight poverty, despite being a poor country itself.[69] A few days later, Zhou Enlai discussed the threat posed by the United States in Africa with Malraux, warning against US interference in AMU countries and stressing the need for Asian and African nations to resist US hegemony and to undertake joint actions.[70]

The *Quai d'Orsay* immediately noticed a shift in China's stance toward France in Africa. By March 1964, France's chargé d'affaires in China, Claude Chayet, observed a reduction in official Chinese press criticisms of France's African policy.[71] Consultations of the *People's Daily* revealed few negative articles on Franco-African relations after 1964. Certain signs indicated that, instead of directly opposing Franco-African cooperation, China even encouraged some countries to engage in dialogue with France.[72] French diplomats in Congo-Brazzaville noted China's willingness to accept the presence of the French, distinguishing it from other Western countries.[73] While aware of these positive

[67]Report of Mr Soutou's meeting with Mr Sung Chi-kuang, 12 April 1965 at 11 a.m., 119 QO 529, CADLC.
[68]Liu Zhihua and Xu Jing, 'The basic connotation and development of Mao Zedong's theory of "intermediate zone"', *Dang de Wenxian*, no. 6, 2021: 62-8.
[69]Meeting between Mr Malraux and Mr Ch'en Yi in Beijing, 23 July 1965, 119 QO 532, CADLC.
[70]Conversations between Mr André Malraux and Mr Chou Enlai at the People's Palace in Beijing, 2 August 1965, 119 QO 532, CADLC.
[71]Telegram upon arrival from Chayet, Beijing, 20 March 1964, 119 QO 527, CADLC.
[72]Note, 'China-Africa', 29 January 1973, 752 INVA 2153, CADLC.
[73]Telegram leaving for the Embassy in Brazzaville, 2 October 1964, AG 5(F) 1980, AN.

signals from China, would France approve of Chinese activities in AMU countries? The answer was, of course, negative.

IV. The coupling of the 'two intermediate zones'

Indeed, France opted to coordinate with its African allies on how to navigate the repercussions of recognising China in Africa. The *Quai d'Orsay* initiated communication with African countries, persuading them to adopt a policy of 'concerted divergence' to prevent them from following France's example. French ambiguities about the Chinese presence in Africa were explained by how the Taiwanese issue was handled during Sino-French talks. Instead of a formal agreement, the two countries established an 'implicit agreement in three points', allowing France some freedom to restructure its relations with Nationalist China while maintaining sympathy for Taiwanese interests in France and Africa.[74] As a result, starting from January 1964, Taiwanese authorities expanded their diplomatic activities in AMU countries, increasing exchanges and bolstering agricultural technical cooperation.[75]

Concurrently, the policy of 'concerted divergence' evolved into a coordination mechanism between France and its African allies. On 17 January, the Department of African and Malagasy Affairs dispatched a circular telegram to the French ambassadors in the 13 AMU countries.[76] This telegram, more detailed than those sent to Western countries, examined the consequences of the decision, taking into account the specific issues facing the AMU countries due to Communist China's Afro-Asian policy, its revolutionary influence in Africa and the support it provided to certain subversive movements. Here is a summary of this telegram in six points:

(1) Due to its responsibilities in Africa, France cannot indefinitely ignore a state of 650 million inhabitants with which many Western powers have had normal relations for a long time.
(2) With the Sino-Soviet split, communist action is now unfolding from two centres and in different forms. China has thus become a new and important factor in international politics, with influence and support in Africa. It is therefore in the interests of France and its African friends that France be aware of what is happening in Beijing and make its voice heard there.
(3) Regarding Taiwan, France has made no commitment to China and is not obligated to sever relations with Jiang Jieshi nationalist government.

[74]During the negotiations between Edgar Faure and Zhou Enlai in November 1963, the latter issued a text titled 'Abstract of ideas expressed by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai', becoming a pivotal document of Sino-French rapprochement. The document can be summarised in three points as follows: 1. The Government of the French Republic will send an official note to the Chinese Government, recognising the Government of the People's Republic of China and proposing the immediate establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the exchange of ambassadors; 2. The Chinese Government will respond with a note declaring that, as the only legal Government representing the Chinese people, the Government of the People's Republic of China welcomes the note from the Government of the French Republic and is prepared to establish immediately diplomatic relations between China and France and exchange Ambassadors; 3. China and France will publish, by mutual agreement and simultaneously, the said notes exchanged, will immediately install their embassies and will proceed with the immediate exchange of ambassadors.

[75]Yao Baihui, 'Not a complete defeat: the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France and the US-Taiwanese intervention', *Lishi Jiaoxue Wenti*, no. 6, 2015: 20-6.

[76]Telegram leaving for Abidjan, Bangui, Brazzaville, Cotonou, Dakar, Fort-Lamy, Libreville, Lomé, Niamey, Nouakchott, Ouagadougou, Yaoundé and Tananarive, 17 January 1964, AG 5(F) 2398, AN.

(4) On the admission of China to the United Nations, France has made no promise to the Beijing government, although it may change its position in the future.
(5) France understands that its African friends may take different positions based on their own situations regarding certain international issues. France has no objection to its friendly countries remaining faithful to their current positions and maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan. In summary, it is in the common interest for France and its friendly countries to acknowledge a concerted divergence of behaviour in this area.
(6) France's relations with China will allow it to exert a moderating influence on Beijing when certain extremist movements in Africa turn to China. This will contribute to better defending the interests of African governments.

With these six points, France aimed to discourage African governments from following its example. It believed that it was in their interests not to recognise China and to support the 'two Chinas' thesis. As an appeasement, France committed to standing by African countries and working to mitigate the threat of subversive activities supported by China in Africa.

At first glance, most African leaders expressed their approval of de Gaulle's decision and stated that they would not follow France's example. Many of them emphasised the dangers posed by Chinese activities and agreed with the explanations from the *Quai d'Orsay* regarding the positive effect of the French initiative. President Félix Houphouët-Boigny stated that he was 'neither surprised, nor shocked, nor worried', emphasising, however, that Côte d'Ivoire would not immediately follow the French decision. He wished to 'wait for another year or two' before admitting communist representatives to Abidjan.[77] President Hamani Diori of Niger also expressed concerns about the intensification of Chinese subversive activities. He pointed out that the Taiwanese chargé d'affaires would be arriving in a few days, and Niger was not ready to establish diplomatic relations with China.[78] In February, the *Quai d'Orsay* concluded with satisfaction that 'the French decision should not be expected to immediately change, for most states, the nature of their relations with Beijing'.[79]

These attitudes are primarily explained by the fact that most French ambassadors in Africa shared the same perspective as Foccart and viewed the expansion of Chinese influence with disapproval. As direct witnesses to the 'Chinese penetration', they sought to highlight the danger of the presence of communist Chinese diplomats in their discussions with African leaders. Moreover, some African countries saw adopting a different policy with France regarding the Chinese question as an assertion of their independence from France. Additionally, leaders like Houphouët-Boigny were concerned about the 'Chinese danger' to the extent of believing that China might take the opportunity to 'pour' its surplus population into Africa.[80] However, hesitant countries like Mauritania and Congo-Brazzaville welcomed France's decision. Even if Togolese President Nicolas Grunitzky had no intention of recognising China, he expressed

[77]Telegram from the French Embassy in Côte d'Ivoire, 18 January 1964, 119 QO 525, CADLC. In reality, Côte d'Ivoire did not recognise China until 1 March 1983, being the last country in Francophone Africa to do so.
[78]Telegram upon arrival from the French Embassy in Niger, 18 January 1964, 119 QO 525, CADLC.
[79]Note on the AMU States and the Chinese problem, 24 February 1964, AG 5(F) 2398, AN.
[80]Telegram upon arrival from the French Embassy in Côte d'Ivoire, 12 October 1964, 119 QO 592, CADLC.

concerns about the dilemma that France's decision could create in their relations with Taiwan.[81]

Faced with the uncertainties of some AMU countries, France sought to reassure them through concrete actions. On 11 February 1964, Taiwan was compelled to announce the termination of its relations with France. Despite this official rupture, France committed to protecting Taiwan's interests in its overseas territories against the 'threat' from Communist China. Moreover, some French embassies in Africa continued to maintain close relations with Taiwanese diplomats.[82] On 17 February, former French Prime Minister Michel Debré sent a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Maurice Couve de Murville regarding the status of the consulate of Nationalist China in Réunion. Couve de Murville responded by emphasising the need to protect Taiwan's interests. He specified that in the event of a possible closure of the Taiwanese consulate, 'our intention is to provide Chinese nationals who demonstrate allegiance to the Taipei authorities with all the necessary protection against the intimidation manoeuvres they might possibly face from Chinese communist organisations'.[83] Thus, countries maintaining close relations with France began to understand the 'nuance' of its Taiwan policy, as highlighted by Houphouët-Boigny. After Dahomey recognised China, Diori even went so far as to threaten that this decision could affect Dahomey's position within the *Conseil de l'Entente*.[84]

The increasing awareness of Chinese activities in Africa prompted France to implement various measures to address the situation. On the one hand, it intensified intelligence gathering on Chinese penetration in Africa. In December 1964, Foccart explicitly requested to receive telegrams from the French ambassador in Beijing, considering them on a par with those from New York or Washington, as long as they were related to Africa.[85] On the other hand, France closely collaborated with African countries to counter the Chinese presence, especially with Côte d'Ivoire, a key player in *Françafrique*, playing a pivotal role. In October 1964, Houphouët-Boigny expressed his incomprehension regarding France 'being nibbled at by China in Francophone Africa', which, according to him, would not benefit France in achieving its goals.[86] Thus, with the backing of both France and the United States, Houphouët-Boigny openly took a stand against China.

The success of Mao's theory largely relied on the targeted countries' willingness to adopt an independent or neutral foreign policy. Despite the impact of the French decision, African leaders' deep concerns about the Chinese threat persisted and intensified with China's more radical diplomatic stance. They feared that Chinese diplomatic missions might become centres of subversive activities, posing a threat to their domestic political stability. Consequently, after January 1964, some Francophone African

[81]Telegram upon arrival from Mazoyer, 20 January 1964, AG 5(F) 2398, AN.

[82]Letter from Etienne Manac'h to the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 January 1973, 752 INVA 2153, CADLC.

[83]Reply from Couve de Murville to Michel Debré's letter dated 17 February 1964, 2 April 1964, 12 QO 97, CADLC.

[84]Telegram from the French Embassy in Upper Volta, 5 February 1965, 119 QO 593, CADLC. The *Conseil de l'Entente* was a regional cooperation organisation in West Africa founded on 29 May 1959. It originally consisted of Dahomey (now Benin), Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Côte d'Ivoire and Niger, until Togo joined in 1966. Created for the purpose of economic development through mutual assistance, it was soon dominated by the strong character of Houphouët-Boigny.

[85]Note for the attention of Mr Plantey, 28 December 1964, AG 5(F) 2400, AN.

[86]Telegram upon arrival from Raphaël-Leygues, 12 October 1964, 119 QO 592, CADLC.

countries, led by Côte d'Ivoire, heightened their opposition to China.[87] Houphouët-Boigny criticised China, alleging the use of diplomats, Xinhua News Agency and aid projects as covers for subversive activities. He worked to unite moderate countries to form a common front against Chinese interference in African affairs. These countries maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan, voting against China's UN admission, creating obstacles for China in consolidating the two intermediate zones.

A concrete example of Franco-African cooperation to counter the expansion of Chinese influence was the Nouakchott Conference of February 1965, which marked the reorganisation of the AMU into the African and Malagasy Common Organisation (AMCO). Countries opposed to China's growing influence successfully added condemning China's subversive activities in Africa to the agenda. The *Quai d'Orsay* sent instructions to French ambassadors to clarify France's position. For countries with resolute anti-Chinese stances, such as Gabon, the Malagasy Republic and Côte d'Ivoire, France clearly expressed its support for the solidarity of participating countries against the Chinese threat.[88] Although the conference did not lead to a public condemnation of China due to opposition from some countries that recognised China, the final communiqué recommended 'prudence and vigilance' against subversion, implicitly including that of China.[89]

V. Impacts in the short and medium terms

Certainly, France's recognition of China had a significant positive impact on the development of relations between China and AMU countries. The psychological effect of the French decision was undeniable for hesitant African countries.[90] However, it is essential not to exaggerate this impact. Although China took steps to solidify its ties with both intermediate zones, overcoming historical limitations and achieving more significant results proved challenging. Nevertheless, between 1964 and 1965, China successfully established diplomatic relations with several Francophone African countries. It is worth analysing whether this breakthrough was genuinely affected by the 'diplomatic nuclear explosion' of 27 January 1964, before delving deeper into further analysis.

In Congo-Brazzaville, after the *Trois Glorieuses* in August 1963, the new president Alphonse Massamba-Débat, supported notably by left-wing youth groups, showed a marked inclination towards socialism while maintaining diplomatic relations with Nationalist China. The situation evolved from January 1964. On 22 January, Congolese Prime Minister Pascal Lissouba announced that relations with the People's Republic of China would be normalised as soon as possible.[91] On 9 February, Massamba-Débat declared that 'Communist China is a vast world that must now be taken into account. General de Gaulle understood this very well'.[92] On 22 February, Brazzaville officially recognised China. Like France, the Sino-Congolese joint communiqué omitted details on handling relations with Taiwan. The Congolese Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that Nationalist China ceased to exist from the day Congo recognised the Beijing government.

[87]Note on Popular China and the countries of French-speaking Africa from 1960 to the end of 1966, 7 February 1967, 119 QO 591, CADLC.
[88]Telegram sent to the French Embassy in Gabon, 23 January 1965, 1089 INVA 207, CADLC.
[89]Note on the Nouakchott Conference, 16 February 1965, 1089 INVA 207, CADLC.
[90]Note on the AMU States and the Chinese problem, 24 February 1964, AG 5(F) 2398, AN.
[91]Political life from 18-25 January 1964 (Synthesis No. 4), 25 January 1964, 323 QONT 4, CADLC.
[92]Political life from 8-15 February 1964 (Synthesis No. 7), 15 February 1964, 323 QONT 4, CADLC.

Despite apparent similarities with France, the French decision served as an impetus rather than a decisive factor. The Congolese Minister of Foreign Affairs insisted that the Congolese decision was not an imitation of France but manifestation of its non-aligned policy. In fact, the Congolese decision was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that the country was gradually distancing itself from France. Moreover, following the December 1963 elections, the progressives emerged victorious, leading Brazzaville to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries after recognising China in February.

The process of establishing diplomatic relations between Dahomey and China proved to be an intricate one, primarily driven by internal factional struggles rather than being a direct consequence of de Gaulle's decision. Following Lu Xuzhang's visit in September, Chinese Ambassador to Ghana, Huang Hua, travelled to Cotonou on 9 November to engage with the new president, Apithy, and succeeded in convincing him to recognise China. On 12 November, the Dahomey government informed the French ambassador of its intention to sever ties with Taiwan in favour of China, stating it was 'to be in tune with the times'.[93] Early the next morning, China and Dahomey issued a joint communiqué to exchange ambassadors. However, within the Dahomey government, two factions emerged regarding relations with China. President Apithy supported the 'one China' principle, while Vice President Justin Ahomadegbé preferred the 'two Chinas' thesis. This led to a six-month coexistence of 'two Chinas'. With General Soglo's successful coup in December 1965, the pro-China regime was ousted, and the new government immediately severed ties with China, opting to resume relations with Taiwan.

Besides Dahomey, China succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with the Central African Republic in 1964. Initially, although Bangui expressed its approval of the French decision, the French ambassador believed it would not go as far as severing diplomatic relations with the Taiwanese authorities. However, the French underestimated the Central African Republic's interest in securing substantial aid from China. At the end of August, a delegation led by Ferdinand Bassamoungou, President of the Economic and Social Council, travelled to Beijing, where it was received by Chen Yi. On 29 September, China and the Central African Republic issued a joint communiqué announcing the establishment of diplomatic relations. Under pressure from Bangui, Taipei announced the rupture on 5 November. Following this diplomatic success, China extended an interest-free loan of 500 million CFA francs and provided significant assistance in technology and agriculture to the Central African Republic. Despite this, the Central African Republic closely monitored Chinese activities and postponed *sine die* China's agricultural aid projects due to suspicions of Chinese motives.[94] In January 1966, Jean-Bedel Bokassa announced the rupture of relations with China shortly after his successful coup. In summary, if the Central African Republic hesitated in its relations with China, its unstable political situation and the need to seek development aid were the two most important factors.

Before the Sino-French rapprochement, Mauritanian President Moktar Ould Daddah had already expressed the desire to establish diplomatic relations with China. In November 1963, Daddah met with Chinese diplomats in Guinea and sought to initiate

[93]Telegram upon arrival from Guy Georgy, 12 November 1964, 311 QONT 18, CADLC.
[94]Letter from the French Ambassador in the Central African Republic, 9 August 1965, 119 QO 595, CADLC.

contacts with China. Due to the conflict between Mauritania and Morocco, another friend of China at the time, the two countries contented themselves with initiating economic and trade exchanges. On 22 January 1964, Daddah told the French ambassador that he fully understood the French decision, considering it necessary as no one could ignore such a large country. Furthermore, he stated that he was not concerned about China's activities in Africa and might even recognise China after France.[95] However, given his relations with other Francophone countries, especially as Daddah was presiding over the AMU at this time, Mauritania did not immediately announce its recognition of China. It wasn't until 19 July 1965 – after Daddah was no longer serving as chairman of the AMU – that China and Mauritania established diplomatic relations. It is evident that many factors affected Sino-Mauritanian relations, and France's recognition of China was just one factor among many, far from being the most important.

Stimulated by the French decision, some AMU countries became hesitant on the Chinese question, such as Chad, Gabon and Senegal. In January 1964, Chad and Gabon informed France that they did not intend to recognise China, expressing concerns about the potential disastrous consequences for Africa. Despite this, Gabonese President Léon Mba admitted that sooner or later, AMU countries might follow the French example. Indeed, some countries initiated secret contacts with Chinese diplomats. On 11 October 1964, Huang Hua met the Chadian Minister of Foreign Affairs in Cairo and delivered a letter from Zhou Enlai to Chadian President François Tombalbaye. The Chadian Minister of Foreign Affairs revealed that Chad would vote in favour of China at the United Nations General Assembly.[96] In November, the Chinese Embassy in France reported that 'the attitudes of Gabon and Chad are evolving in a direction that is beneficial to us'. The Chadian ambassador revealed to Huang Zhen at a diplomatic event that his government was ready to recognise the People's Republic of China in January 1965.[97] However, Tombalbaye was not a fervent supporter of this idea. After 1965, with the rapid development of China's relations with neighbouring countries like Congo-Brazzaville and the Central African Republic, the Chadian government realised that it did not have the capacity to 'control the activities of the Chinese'. Persuaded by the *Entente* countries, Chad abandoned the idea of establishing diplomatic relations with China.[98] The same occurred for Gabon. Regarding Senegal, its hesitations were more evident. In January 1964, signs of an immediate rapprochement with Communist China were already apparent.[99] The installation of a representative office of Xinhua News Agency in Dakar reinforced this speculation. On 1 September, Nationalist China's chargé d'affaires was declared *persona non grata* by the Senegalese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the 19th, Dakar severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Nevertheless, Taiwan sought to maintain its presence by agreeing to Senegal's request to expand technical agricultural cooperation, allowing its agricultural team to continue operating discreetly. The idea of establishing diplomatic relations with China was ultimately set aside by Senghor.

[95]Telegram upon arrival from Jean Deniau, 22 January 1964, AG 5F 2398, AN.

[96]The Ambassadors of Ethiopia and Chad to Egypt and our Ambassador to Egypt discussed the 2nd Conference of Non-Aligned Countries and other topics, 113-00405-03, FMA.

[97]Submission of memorandum on our right to representation in the United Nations to France, Sweden, Yugoslavia, Denmark, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland and Switzerland, 1 December 1964, 113-00462-20, FMA.

[98]Sino-Chadian relations, 19 June 1965, 356 QONT 11, CADLC.

[99]'Senegal and the recognition of People's China by France', *Agence France de Presse*, 4 January 1964.

Apart from these short-term stimulations, the positive effects of France's recognition of China were more evident in the medium term, manifesting through the expansion of Sino-African exchange channels and the strengthening of China's international status. In practical terms, the exchanges between China and Francophone African countries in terms of language, travel and interpersonal contact benefited from this recognition. In the early 1960s, a shortage of French interpreters obscured Chinese activities in Africa, leading Chinese workers to create a mixed language incorporating Chinese, French and local languages. The timely development of Sino-French relations provided an opportunity for the teaching of the French language in Chinese universities, with many French departments being established, notably with the assistance of French experts. Moreover, travellers between China and Africa increasingly chose to transit through France. The opening of flights between France and China by Air France in September 1966 further facilitated this trend. Prior to 1964, China could only conduct its activities with Africa through its embassies in Switzerland and African countries like Guinea. After 1964, Paris became a new base for Chinese activities and propaganda in Africa, offering a broader stage. Zhu Lin mentioned in her memoirs that before Beijing had its seat restored in the UN in 1971, there were more than a dozen countries negotiating the establishment of diplomatic relations with China in Paris. Therefore, even though most Francophone African countries would establish or restore diplomatic relations with China only after 1971, the Chinese embassy in France still played an essential role as a channel for Sino-African talks. Finally, in a certain way, for France, its recognition of China provided a window to closely observe Sino-African relations. The friendly exchanges between the Chinese and French embassies contributed to strengthening mutual trust between the two parties regarding their respective presence in Africa.

Although China and France appeared willing to overlook their conflicting interests in Africa when establishing diplomatic relations, the underlying incompatibility between the two intermediate zones in Chinese revolutionary diplomacy remained and was further intensified by China's expanding engagement in Africa. Conflicts of interest arose, particularly in the competing proposal to the Malian government to alleviate its financial crisis from 1965 to 1967.[100] In November 1964, President Modibo Keita visited China, where he was granted an interest-free loan of £7.58 million. Between 1963 and 1967, eight agreements were signed, with China granting the Malian government a total of 9,852,991,000 Malian francs in convertible currency.[101] Concurrently, France was in negotiations with Mali with the aim of bringing it back into the Franc zone. Chinese efforts to assist Mali in achieving financial autonomy and breaking free from French 'neocolonial' influence during the Cultural Revolution posed a significant challenge for France in safeguarding its traditional interests in Mali.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Mao Zedong's theory of intermediate zones was central to China's diplomatic strategy, especially in its dealing with France and AMU countries.

[100]Li, *Les relations sino-françaises (1949-1980)*, 119.

[101]Presentation note from the SDECE on a Malian document regarding loans granted by the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Mali, 24 August 1967, 339 QONT 24, CADLC.

Before January 1964, supporting the newly independent Francophone African countries and developing relations with France were incompatible in China's diplomatic strategy, leading to open conflicts between the two nations. The establishment of Sino-French diplomatic relations strategically shifted the Africa issue from a focal point to a marginal position within the framework of bilateral relations. However, this transformation does not imply that China could leverage this atmosphere to further infiltrate the French sphere, as evidenced by the failure of attempts to show solidarity with both Africa and France. The so-called 'two intermediate zones' theory falls short of forming a genuine anti-US united front in Francophone Africa. The coupling of these two zones often limited the effectiveness of China's efforts towards these countries. From this perspective, the diplomatic breakthrough with several AMU countries from 1964 to 1965 and the positives impacts in the medium term should not be overestimated.

Beyond the oppressor-oppressed dynamic, the relationship between France and Africa is marked by genuine interdependencies, creating barriers to other powers in Africa. Franco-African cooperation against the Chinese threat exemplified this dynamic. On the one hand, under the 'concerted divergence' policy, France disapproved of China's diplomatic efforts in its *pré carré*. It adopted a superficial attitude towards Chinese proposals for cooperation in Africa while discreetly supporting anti-Chinese initiatives. When Chinese activities in Africa compromised French interests and the stability of privileged relations between France and Africa, it often resulted in stringent control of the 'Foccart networks', as seen in the coupling between France, Côte d'Ivoire and other 'moderate' countries during the Nouakchott Conference.[102] On the other hand, while France was cautious of US activities in Africa, it deliberately steered clear of Chinese attempts to forge an anti-US united front on the continent. The ideological difference between China and the countries of the second intermediate zone inevitably manifested itself in their relations. France's desire to counter US influence did not translate into a willingness to cooperate with China. In fact, Chinese communist penetration was perceived as a more destructive threat to French interests in Africa most of the time. This is why Jean-Marie Soutou, in full agreement with his government, set aside Song Zhiguang's proposal for Sino-French cooperation in the Central African Republic.[103]

More fundamentally, Mao's theory was not intended to resolve the complex interconnection between the first and second zones, but rather to rally allies opposed to both the United States and the Soviet Union, while promoting greater recognition of the Chinese path. In this context, China focused on strengthening ties with friendly states, with ideology serving as the principal driver. By contrast, efforts to improve relations with France were part of a broader strategy of great-power competition, aimed ultimately at fostering a multipolar world. Ideological differences were then strongly emphasised in China's approach to Africa, particularly during the radicalisation of its diplomacy in the Cultural Revolution, when China cast itself as the leader of the world revolution. It is therefore unsurprising

[102]Foccart Networks, *Réseaux Foccart* in French, is a multiple intelligence network meticulously put together by Jacques Foccart, backed by leaders of Francophone Africa such as Houphouët-Boigny, Senghor, Bongo, etc., and French ambassadors to Africa, businessmen, agents, veterans and mercenaries, with the goal of maintaining the special relationship between France and its former colonies. See: Jean-Pierre Bat, *Les réseaux Foccart: l'homme des affaires secrètes* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions, 2018).

[103]Jean-Marie Soutou and Jean-François Noiville, *Un diplomate engagé: mémoires 1939-1979* (Paris: de Fallois, 2011).

that China's attempt to build solidarity with Africa and France after French recognition faltered due to an implicit collaboration between France, Africa, Taiwan and the United States.

By the early 1970s, as the threat of Soviet expansion grew, China's global strategy shifted toward greater pragmatism, including a historic rapprochement with the United States. In Africa, this shift compelled China to adopt a more flexible approach, downplaying ideological differences. Against this backdrop, a conceptual transition from the theory of the 'two intermediate zones' to the 'Three Worlds Theory' became apparent in 1974, emphasising China's solidarity with Asian, African and Latin American countries as part of the Third World. This new framework emphasised the shared economic and political challenges facing developing countries, helping to avoid divisions over ideological differences. By classifying Western nations like France within the 'Second World', it highlighted global economic disparities and reinforced the need for unity among Third World countries in the pursuit of a new international economic order. In this context, examining the evolution of Sino-African relations following the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and France provides a valuable perspective for understanding why developed Western countries were no longer grouped with the Third World – and why China increasingly positioned itself as an integral part of it.

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