

**FRANCO-CHINESE DIPLOMATIC
RELATIONS: 60 YEARS
OF AMBIGUITY**

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Synopsis in English, [Chinese](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#)

The year 2024 marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France. In 1964, France was the first major Western power to place its bilateral relations with China on a normal footing. For China and France, this date is seen as a symbol of France's independent foreign policy and the birth of a privileged relationship between the two countries. This anniversary takes place amid an apparent honeymoon in bilateral relations under the leadership of Xi Jinping and Emmanuel Macron. For France, it is driven by a desire to resuscitate France's "third way" on the international stage in a reconfigured international order marked by the strategic rivalry between the United States and China. As in recent decades, both countries are seeking to exploit this new momentum to serve their own interests and reap political and economic rewards. However, if the history of the bilateral relationship is any indication, and as the hardening of positions in Europe and China crystallises, particularly in the face of the Ukraine war, the diplomatic impetus between France and China may not last.

Chinese:

法中外交关系：雾里看花的 60 年

2024 年是中法建交 60 周年。1964 年，法国成为第一个与中国建立正常双边关系的西方大国。对于中法两国来说，这被视为法国独立外交政策和两国特殊关系诞生的一年。今年这一周年纪念日正值习近平和马克龙领导建立更亲密的双边关系。对法国来说，与中国友好是希望在以中美战略竞争为标志的国际秩序重构中重振法国在国际舞台上的“第三条道。如同近几十年，两国都依据自己的利益希望利用这一新势头获取政治和经济的回报。然而，从双边关系发展的历史脉络来看，随着欧洲和中国对特定事件相反意见的强化，特别是在乌克兰战争的立场，使法国和中国的外交蜜月期可能很难持久。

French:

LES RELATIONS DIPLOMATIQUES FRANCO-CHINOISES: 60 ANS D'AMBIGUÏTÉ

L'année 2024 marque le 60e anniversaire de l'établissement des relations diplomatiques entre la Chine et la France. En 1964, la France fut la première grande puissance occidentale à placer ses relations bilatérales avec la Chine sur un plan normal. Pour la Chine et la France, cette date est considérée comme un symbole de l'indépendance de la politique étrangère française et de la naissance d'une relation privilégiée entre les deux pays. Cet anniversaire a lieu au milieu d'une apparente lune de miel dans les relations bilatérales sous les leaderships de Xi Jinping et d'Emmanuel Macron. Pour la France, elle est portée par la volonté de ressusciter la « troisième voie » française dans un ordre international marqué par

la rivalité stratégique entre les États-Unis et la Chine. Comme au cours des dernières décennies, les deux pays cherchent à exploiter ce nouvel élan pour servir leurs propres intérêts et bénéficier de gains politiques et économiques. Cependant, si l'on en croit l'histoire des relations bilatérales, et alors que le durcissement des positions en Europe et en Chine se cristallise, notamment face à la guerre en Ukraine, l'élan diplomatique entre la France et la Chine pourrait ne pas durer.

Spanish:

RELACIONES DIPLOMÁTICAS FRANCO-CHINAS: 60 AÑOS DE AMBIGÜEDAD

El año 2024 marca el 60º aniversario del establecimiento de relaciones diplomáticas entre China y Francia. En 1964, Francia fue la primera gran potencia occidental en normalizar sus relaciones bilaterales con China. Para China y Francia, esta fecha es vista como un símbolo de la política exterior independiente de Francia y el nacimiento de una relación privilegiada entre los dos países. Este aniversario tiene lugar en medio de una aparente luna de miel en las relaciones bilaterales bajo el liderazgo de Xi Jinping y Emmanuel Macron. Para Francia, está impulsado por el deseo de resucitar la “tercera vía” de Francia en el escenario internacional en un orden internacional reconfigurado marcado por la rivalidad estratégica entre Estados Unidos y China. Como en las últimas décadas, ambos países están tratando de aprovechar este nuevo impulso para servir a sus propios intereses y cosechar recompensas políticas y económicas. Sin embargo, si la historia de la relación bilateral sirve de indicación, y a medida que cristaliza el endurecimiento de las posiciones en Europa y China, particularmente ante la guerra de Ucrania, el ímpetu diplomático entre Francia y China puede no durar.

Executive Summary

1. In 2024, France and China celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations. General de Gaulle's recognition of the People's Republic of China in the midst of the Cold War has given rise to a legend of independent French foreign policy and a privileged relationship between the two countries.
2. The anniversary comes at a time when bilateral diplomatic relations under the leadership of Xi Jinping and Emmanuel Macron seem to be enjoying a honeymoon period, marked by intense exchanges between the two leaders. Xi Jinping was in France to celebrate the event in May 2024, a little over a year after Emmanuel Macron's four-day visit to China in April 2023.
3. Amid the strategic rivalry between China and the United States, the revival of the French "third way" and the privileged relationship between China and France can be explained by a form of congruence between the two governments' respective international strategies, notably around the role that the European Union (EU) could play on the international stage.
4. This new dynamism in Franco-Chinese diplomatic relations may come as a surprise due to the growing tensions between a number of European countries, and more generally the EU and China, over trade issues, human rights and recently, over the form of China's support for Russia in the Ukraine war.
5. It may also come as a surprise given the unstable bilateral relations over the last few decades, largely due to the contradictions in French foreign policy between business and universalist human rights diplomacy. The current stability seems to reveal a lasting shift in French diplomacy towards a more pragmatic, pro-business approach.
6. This historical perspective also reveals that the bilateral relationship has never been at the heart of either country's international priorities, and has always been used to serve a foreign policy of grandeur and independence on the French side and to divide the Western camp and weaken the United States on the Chinese side.

7. Today, the two countries are once again seeking to capitalise on this diplomatic momentum, both politically and economically. While a certain dynamism can be observed at the latter level, trade is severely constrained by the rise of a new development paradigm based on security, both in China and within the EU.
8. Economic exchanges between China and France have never matched the level of their diplomatic relationship. These are marked in particular by an imbalance in trade, mainly reflecting the structure of French capitalism and the internationalisation strategy of its multinationals.
9. The current impetus is increasingly affected by the conflicts and reconfigurations at work in the international order, and the differing interests of the two countries. The Ukraine war and trade tensions between the EU and China are just two of the many challenges threatening the stability of bilateral relations.