# NOUVEAUX REGARDS SUR L'ASIE

A fresh perspective on Asia and the diversity of its issues and cultures, combining the views of experts and high-level players.

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## EDITORIAL

**by Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet**
Director of Publication, former French Diplomat

The 47th president of the United States had warned even before returning to sit in the Oval Office of the White House. He would engage in a race against time to rid himself of the burden of the Ukrainian question in order to focus on what mattered most for the United States: maintaining their dominance in the Asia-Pacific region and countering Beijing's attempts to drive them out.

On March 12, Washington, to the Europeans' dismay, announced a telephone conversation—without clarifying who had called whom—described as "most cordial" between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, aimed at ending the Russo-Ukrainian war. The details of the discussion were later relayed to Volodymyr Zelensky, who was also presented with a fait accompli.

The next day, to everyone's surprise, the new Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth—who had been unable to name a single ASEAN member country during his Senate confirmation hearing—told European allies in Brussels that the United States had more important tasks to focus on elsewhere. He stated that Ukraine would have to relinquish the territories conquered by Russia and abandon any aspirations of joining NATO. Finally, it was revealed that negotiations had begun between the American and Russian presidents regarding the resolution of the Ukrainian issue. But without any plans for the

Europeans or Ukrainians to participate, at least initially. On March 18, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, met in Riyadh to attempt, in a way, to initiate the normalization of relations between their two countries... A development which, if realized, would undoubtedly upset Putin's quasi-ally, China, as well as North Korea—the only true ally of Beijing—supporting Moscow alongside the Chinese capital in its war effort in Ukraine.

And what about Asia in all this?

The American president made his stance clear by hosting, before these announcements, from March 6 to 8 in Washington, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba for the first U.S.-Japan summit of Trump's second administration, thus becoming the second foreign leader received by Donald Trump since taking office, right after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This sequence highlighted the priorities of the new American administration: the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific.

The new Japanese head of government returned to Tokyo fully satisfied with his meeting: confirmation (as was already the case under the Biden administration) that Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan security treaty, which obliges the United States to defend Japan in the event of an attack, would indeed also apply to the Senkaku Islands—administered (by American decision) by Japan but claimed (under the name Diaoyutai) loudly by China and also, though more discreetly, by Taiwan. The U.S.-Japan alliance remained "the cornerstone" of peace and security in the region. The United States reaffirmed its full commitment to the security of its Japanese ally, and Washington would continue to develop its deterrence (against China and its North Korean ally).

What remained was Trump's usual refrain about the U.S. trade deficit with other countries.
Donald did not fail to remind his Japanese counterpart that it had continued to widen, reaching $72 billion in 2023 (compared to $68 billion in 2022, an increase of +12.8% compared to 2021). Mr. Ishiba sought to reassure his closest ally by reminding him that Tokyo was leading as one of the top foreign investors in the United States over the past five years. Moreover, the Japanese capital was prepared to invest "at an unprecedented level," with $1 trillion allocated to the U.S. market, supplemented by record Japanese imports of clean liquefied natural gas through a pipeline project originating in Alaska.

While Trump upheld his predecessor's decision to block the acquisition of U.S. Steel by Nippon Steel, the businessman-president did, however, approve a Japanese investment in the Pittsburgh-based company, where he personally pledged to get involved.

Between Presbyterians—like Mr. Ishiba and some 200,000 of his compatriots—understanding was eventually reached. India was also given priority, with the United States inviting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for an official working visit on March 13. Modi arrived in Washington with renewed confidence, following recent electoral victories by his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, right-wing nationalist), in the states of Haryana and Maharashtra, as well as a historic win in early March in the Delhi legislative election against the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP, social-democratic populist), which had governed India's capital territory for the past 10 years.

It is worth noting that the first official meeting in Washington for the new Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, was with India's top diplomat, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. When he was still a senator, Rubio—of Cuban origin and known for his staunch anti-communist stance—had introduced a bill placing India on equal footing with several U.S. allies in terms of defense cooperation.

Once again, trade relations were on the table (with a U.S. trade deficit of approximately $32 billion in India's favor in 2024), as was the issue of illegal immigration (two forced deportations of Indian migrants, handcuffed and shackled, took place around the same time). These two topics have not overshadowed the relationship between the two countries, which has never been stronger as Trump returns to the White House for a new and final five-year term.

The U.S.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), concluded in 2023 to counter China's advancements in this field, has not been questioned by the Trump administration. This is all the more unsurprising given that both Republicans and Democrats share a unified stance in favor of their Quad partner (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), which also includes Tokyo and Canberra, in an alliance aimed at countering China's hegemonic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific.

It is worth recalling that Indian immigration is the second-largest in the United States, after Mexican immigration. Of the approximately 265,000 H-1B visas issued in 2023 to highly skilled migrants in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), 78% went to Indians (compared to 45,000 for Chinese nationals). Additionally, Indian students in the U.S. outnumber their Chinese counterparts by a significant margin (331,000 vs. 277,000 for the 2023/2024 academic year alone).

During his speech at the end of the first day of the Summit for Action on Artificial Intelligence (March 6-11), co-chaired in Paris by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Macron urged Europeans to take decisive action on AI and to implement fast-track procedures in the sector. [4]
Indeed, beyond China, several Asian countries, along with the United States, are far ahead of Europe in this field, which has become one of the most significant technological developments of recent years. AI is expected to increasingly transform industries and businesses, particularly in the areas of cybersecurity, transportation, and marketing.

Today, South Korean companies Samsung and SK Hynix are at the forefront of an industry reshaped by the AI boom, making them highly competitive. Meanwhile, Chinese microprocessor manufacturers lag at least two to three generations behind their South Korean, Taiwanese, and American counterparts. And due to the sanctions policy imposed by Washington, in its effort to block exports of the most advanced chips and even more so their manufacturing in China, has given Seoul a comparative advantage in this field. While South Korean exports to Beijing are declining, the United States became the top destination for South Korean FDI in 2023, driven by incentives from the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act[5] and the CHIPS and Science Act.[6]

A major winner in the diversification of electronic equipment supply chains, driven by the de-risking policy aimed at reducing dependency on China as an economic and industrial competitor, Vietnam has become a prime destination for South Korea's Samsung, Taiwan's Foxconn, and the U.S.'s Intel. These companies have invested tens of billions of USD in Vietnam's telecommunications and electronics sector, making it the country's top export category.

Since 2023, SpaceX founder Elon Musk has encouraged Taiwanese manufacturers supplying components for his Starlink satellite system to relocate due to "geopolitical risks" (read: China). Vietnam, where several of his Taiwanese subcontractors are already established, has become the primary beneficiary of recommendations from the new head of the U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), who, like his boss in the White House, is no stranger to contradictions—especially given that Tesla, the cornerstone of Musk's fortune, relies heavily on China, one of, if not the, biggest U.S. rival in the coming years.

In October 2024, Washington nevertheless imposed punitive tariffs on Vietnam, as well as Malaysia, Thailand, and Cambodia, on all their exports of polycrystalline silicon photovoltaic cells, citing suspicions that these products had been manufactured in China and rerouted through these countries to the U.S.

As for China, Trump's phone call with his Chinese counterpart on January 17—just three days before his inauguration—to discuss key concerns of the new U.S. administration, including trade, fentanyl (see Emmanuel Véron's analysis), and TikTok, does not seem to have yielded much progress. On March 4, Beijing announced its response to the application (taking effect on March 10) of an additional 10% tariff on Chinese products exported to the United States.

This did not stop the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs at the State Department from removing, on March 13, a statement from its fact sheet on its website that read: "We do not support Taiwan independence," sparking Beijing's ire. (This mention had already been removed by Washington in 2022, only to be reinstated a few weeks later after Chinese protests.)

As with Moscow and the European Union,

the standoff with Beijing is also clearly underway, as highlighted by Marco Rubio during his tour of Latin America from March 1 to 6. His visit aimed "to counter the influence of the Chinese Communist Party in this hemisphere, where it constantly uses diplomatic and economic leverage—such as its involvement with the Panama Canal—to oppose the United States and turn these sovereign nations into its vassal states." The Chinese reaction to these remarks, as well as the apparent shift in the U.S. position on Taiwan, was swift. [7]

The year 2025 is off to a strong start on the American side. It was to be expected.

[1] https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/02/united-states-japan-joint-leaders-statement/;https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000121770.pdf

[2] https://in.usembassy.gov/united-states-india-joint-leaders-statement/

[3] https://www.indianewsnetwork.com/fr/20250106/nsa-sullivan-announces-us-efforts-to-delist-indian-nuclear-entities;https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/10/the-us-india-initiative-on-critical-and-emerging-technology-icet-from-2022-to-2025-assessment-learnings-and-the-way-forward?center=india&lang=en

[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtWs8szxAb0

[5] https://www.vie-publique.fr/en-bref/292447-loi-americaine-sur-la-reduction-de-linflation-les-inquietudes-de-lue;https://www.democrats.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/inflation_reduction_act_one_page_summary.pdf

[6] https://france-science.com/un-an-apres-le-chips-and-science-act/

[7]https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/202502/t20250207_11550838.html

**Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet**

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Entretien Nouveaux Regards

# Jean-Pierre Cabestan, professor, Baptist University of Hong Kong and research Director at the CNRS, attached to IFRAE at INALCO

**Interview by Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet**

**Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet: Judging by the very few biographies published in France about him before the recent release of your book [1], it seems that Deng Xiaoping's figure has not attracted much interest from Sinology or the French public. This is surprising, especially since sinologists Geneviève Barma and Nicole Dulioust, in their article "Les années françaises de Deng Xiaoping" [2], emphasize the importance of France in his education and, later, in his remarkable career as a party leader. Do you see an explanation for this, particularly in comparison to Mao Zedong, who has generated far greater academic and media interest in France and worldwide?**

Jean-Pierre Cabestan: Deng Xiaoping has been the subject of numerous publications in English, including those by Ezra Vogel, as well as earlier works by David S. G. Goodman [3] and more recent studies by Alexander V. Pantsov and Steven I. Levine [4] or Michael Dillon [5]. None of these have been translated into French.

In French, the only available work was a translation of a book originally written in German by Uli Franz, published in 1989 [6], just before the Tiananmen massacre. This gap is due to several reasons. Mao's figure is far more dominant than Deng's, who remained subordinate to Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai for years before becoming China's de facto leader in late 1978. Deng's years in France played a role in his conversion to communism, but we must not forget that he was very young at the time: he arrived in France in 1920 at the age of 16 and left in January 1926 at the age of 25. Later, the enthusiasm for the man who opened China to the world and initiated its true modernization faded after Tiananmen, tarnishing his image. He passed away in 1997, at a time when the world was trying to understand whether his successors, such as Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, would continue his work.

Finally, Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012 directly contributed to pushing Deng into the shadows in official literature, downplaying his role, and even introducing a certain level of criticism of his policies—both for what was deemed excessive openness to the outside world and for his tolerance of corruption and growing social inequalities. Today, Xi presents the history of the People's Republic as a unified whole, minimizing the significance of the shift that took place at the famous Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee in December 1978.

**Apart from the official biography published by Chinese authorities in 2014 to commemorate his 110th birthday, the only available biographies were either works by his favorite daughter, Deng Rong, better known by her nickname Maomao (a sign of admiration for the man?), which took a more affectionate and admiring tone (Deng Xiaoping, My Father), or studies by foreign sinologists, mainly American. Among them, the extensive biography by sinologist Ezra Vogel (1930–2020) [7], which has never been translated into French, is one that you describe in your introduction as "indulgent" toward the "Little Helmsman." What leads you to make this assessment?**

These two biographies are useful as they are full of information about Deng. However, Deng Rong's work is inevitably hagiographic, especially the part covering the pre-1949 period. The volume on Deng during the Cultural Revolution, in my opinion, provides more insight into the hardships he had to endure. Vogel's biography, on the other hand, has two major shortcomings. First, it is far too brief regarding Deng's career and life before his first return to power in 1973.

In this regard, Pantsov and Levine offer a much more comprehensive and critical overview of Deng's development—from his time in France and then in the Soviet Union, to his rise within the Party, both in the guerrilla zone established by Mao in Jiangxi and later in Yan'an, as well as the key role he played between 1949 and 1966. As a result, Vogel downplays just how much of a Maoist Deng was—whether in the Taihang Mountains in Shanxi during the Sino-Japanese War, in Sichuan in the early 1950s, or later in Beijing, where he actively participated in the repression of the Hundred Flowers Movement in 1957, supported the disastrous Great Leap Forward (1958–1960), and assisted Mao in his denunciation of Khrushchev and the so-called "revisionist" Soviets.

Secondly, and surprisingly for an American committed to democracy and liberal values, Vogel is far too understanding and even indulgent toward Deng's policies. It is undeniable that Deng had a strong will to modernize and open China's economy—whether in 1974–1975, after 1978, or again in January 1992, when he traveled to Shenzhen specifically to restart reforms. However, what stands out is how Deng was consistently opposed to any form of political reform. This explains his dismissal of Hu Yaobang in 1987 and then of Zhao Ziyang two years later, just before the Tiananmen massacre—both considered too liberal.

Yet, Vogel both minimizes the impact of Tiananmen and refuses to acknowledge the political logic and consistency of Deng: an anti-democrat who believed that only the Communist Party should rule, and thus monopolize power. In this sense, there is a strong continuity between Mao, Deng, and Xi.

**You write in your conclusion that, I quote you "Deng was at various times an authoritarian communist, a Maoist, and then a critic of Mao... You even described him as anti-Maoist." Is this entirely accurate, considering that he seems to have behaved, at least until Mao's death in 1976, as a mere servile executor of the lowly tasks commanded by Mao, such as during the anti-rightist campaign of 1957, which he led with extreme brutality (just as with the bloody repression of the youth movement in Tiananmen Square in 1989)?**

Deng evolved throughout his career. I believe the tragedy of the Great Leap Forward led him, at least domestically, to distance himself from Mao and to collaborate with Liu Shaoqi and others, such as Chen Yun, in restoring the economy between 1961 and 1966. As we know, this shift brought him trouble: Mao removed him in 1967, calling him "the second figure who took the capitalist path" after Liu Shaoqi. Later, at the end of 1975, Deng became increasingly at odds with the radicals who were putting obstacles in his way; furthermore, he refused to recognize the positive aspects of the Cultural Revolution, which led to his second fall from grace.

But, unlike Liu, and despite the pressure from radicals (Lin Biao and Jiang Qing in particular), Mao never accepted excluding Deng from the Party, either in 1968 or in 1976, showing the depth of the ties between the two leaders until the death of the former.

However, where Deng truly became anti-Maoist was after he became the de facto number one in the Party. From then on, he abolished mass movements and campaigns, rehabilitated hundreds of thousands of victims of Maoism who had been languishing in reeducation camps, some since 1957 or even earlier, ended all personality cults, dismantled the People's Communes established during the Great Leap Forward, and introduced unprecedented economic reforms, gradually allowing private entrepreneurship.

He restored the principle of collective leadership, seeking to establish safeguards against any new abuse of power and the triggering of another Cultural Revolution. In this regard, did he truly succeed?

He consulted more than Mao, particularly his peers like Chen Yun and Li Xiannian; he also delegated more responsibilities, especially to Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, and later to Jiang Zemin. But for all major decisions, he was the one who made the final call: this was the case during the democratic spring of 1989, which he decided to suppress by force with the help of the People's Liberation Army; it was also the case when he confirmed Jiang Zemin in his position and established the system of "three positions for one leader" (sanwei yiti) to ensure that his successor could, like him, make the most important decisions and resolve issues when the Party leadership was divided.

Deng was therefore, from the 1970s and even to some extent from 1961, somewhat anti-Maoist and even anti-totalitarian. However, he was never a democrat. He was an authoritarian politician who was always willing to use force to protect the stability and survival of the one-party regime he had helped establish in 1949.

**Doesn't Deng Xiaoping present himself as the anti-Mao, in the sense of his antithesis, by adhering to the pre-Cultural Revolution political line (1966-1976), focusing on modernization, the rehabilitation of "experts," and the restoration of the rational-bureaucratic functioning of the regime?**

I have already partly answered this question (cf. above). I believe that in the early 1960s, Deng tested reforms that he would generalize or allow to be generalized from 1977 onwards, notably the system of family-run land exploitation (chengbao daohu). But at that time, the Chinese economic system was still very Soviet-style and very closed; any idea of restoring private ownership of the means of production, particularly in industry and services, was excluded.

In fact, this remained the case until the early 1980s, and only gradually did it develop and gain acceptance by the majority of Chinese power structures, against the views of some conservatives like Chen Yun. Any opening to capitalist foreign interests, marked by the establishment of Special Economic Zones was completely excluded in the 1960s and even before 1979. So yes, Deng restored many institutions and organizational methods that existed before the Cultural Revolution (Constitution, socialist legality, state administrations, people's assemblies, etc.); but after 1978, he went much further, especially in the economic sphere, with openness and legal reforms that allowed China to develop and later join the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, and to globalize, with the known limits and asymmetries.

**Deng Xiaoping was sidelined two or three times (1968-1973, 1973-1975, 1976-1977) and then made a comeback, but he was never really persecuted as was the case with President Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969) or Marshal Peng Dehuai (1899-1974), nor even excluded from the CCP, thanks to the intervention of President Mao, against whom Deng opposed, at least in his political line that led China into chaos (the Great Famine of the Great Leap Forward, then the ten years of anarchy of the Cultural Revolution). How do you explain this sort of benevolence from the strong man of the time toward the "little man," as Mao described him to foreign interlocutors? In the opposite direction, looking through the interview Deng gave to Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci[8] in 1980, it is clear that he shows great indulgence toward the Great Helmsman. He acknowledges his faults, but never crimes, and yet... Doesn't this indirectly raise the question of de-Maoization, which never took place in China, unlike the de-Stalinization carried out by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956? What do you think?**

Since the late 1950s, Mao had two possible successors in mind: not Liu Shaoqi, with whom disagreements were already appearing, but Deng Xiaoping and Lin Biao. Due to the rapprochement between Deng and Liu in the early 1960s, Mao initially chose Lin, but soon realized he wouldn't do. He marginalized him in 1970; Lin, scared, and on the advice of his son, who had tried, without his knowledge and in a rather hasty manner, to assassinate Mao, fled to the Soviet Union in September 1971. As we know, he perished in the accident downfall in Outer Mongolia.

By 1972, Zhou Enlai was already suffering from incurable cancer, so Deng was the only viable leader left, which led to his return to power. The closeness between Mao and Deng also played in Deng's favor. However, let's not forget that Mao ultimately sidelined Deng in favor of Hua Guofeng, a former provincial official whose importance has often been underestimated. Did Mao know that Hua would only be a transitional president? No one knows. In any case, I also think Mao always showed a certain indulgence toward Deng, and for good reasons.

As for Deng's assessment of Mao, it had a key purpose: to protect the legitimacy of the regime and Mao's role in the Chinese revolution. Unlike the USSR, the People's Republic of China only had one hero—Mao, not two, like Lenin and Stalin. It was therefore easier for Khrushchev and later Brezhnev to revert to Lenin and de-Stalinize than for Deng to "de-Mao" China. Hence, the choice made by Deng and the CCP leadership at the time to accuse Mao of "serious errors" toward the end of his life, starting in 1958 and especially from 1966.

But in reality, there was de-Maoization, a movement quite similar to Khrushchev's thaw: the release of thousands of political prisoners, the exclusion and condemnation of the radicals—the "Gang of Four," Lin Biao's supporters, and even posthumously of Kang Sheng, sometimes referred to as China's Beria—an openness to liberal ideas and economic reforms. In fact, economically, the de-Maoization introduced by Deng went much further than de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union. However, the term "de-Maoization" remains taboo for the CCP because it would undermine the legitimacy of the political regime established in 1949.

**Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, and particularly during his second and current third term, the new leader of China seems to have continuously been "unraveling" the reformist and modernizing work of Deng Xiaoping. Are we witnessing today a great return of triumphant Maoism and a pure and hard socialism, a fierce enemy of the "paper tiger" as Mao once referred to the United States in order to downplay their dangerousness?**

Xi Jinping has questioned several important reforms introduced by Deng, particularly regarding the functioning of the Party and the system of succession. He has brought back a certain cult of personality, although it remains quite modest compared to the hysterical nature of Mao's idolization from 1966 onward.

He has concentrated multiple powers in his hands, undermining the principle of collective leadership, consulting and delegating less power (although one must be cautious regarding the way Deng understood and applied this principle). And above all, he has undermined the system of succession introduced by Deng at the end of his life: each top leader was to hand over power after two five-year terms as both general secretary of the Central Committee, chairman of the Party's Military Commission, and president of the Republic. In 2018, Xi revised the Constitution to remain head of state for as long as he wishes, which, due to the institutional and political link between the three positions he holds, allows him to delay succession as long as his health permits.

Furthermore, unlike Deng, Xi seeks to strengthen the role of the Party at all levels, including within private companies and all authorized NGOs. Finally, the end of the Cold War had a structural consequence that appeared only very gradually: the emergence of a new bipolarity between the United States and China, which replaced the U.S.-Soviet bipolarity. One may wonder whether Deng would have adopted a different foreign policy stance than Xi.

As is known, after 1989, he advised his successors to maintain a low profile internationally (taoguang yanghui). But at that time, China was weaker both economically and militarily than it is today. Perhaps thirty years later, he too would have been tempted to assert his country's power and decided to enter into a strategic, technological, and ideological competition with the power that the People's Republic aims to surpass today.

Finally, in your opinion, what remains today of Deng Xiaoping's legacy and his "theory," as it is enshrined in the constitution?

Chinese alongside the "thought" of Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping? Will it survive him?
It is paradoxical that the CCP refers to Deng's writings as "theory" because Deng was much more of a pragmatist than a theorist. For example, does the formula "one country, two systems," initially applied to Taiwan, then later to Hong Kong and Macao, constitute a theory? I doubt it. But the ideology of the CCP has gradually accumulated successive layers that have settled: after Marxism-Leninism and "Mao Zedong Thought," Chinese official texts have added not only Deng's "theory" but also Jiang Zemin's "three represents," Hu Jintao's "scientific approach to development," and of course Xi's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new era. All of this doesn't mean much.

Nevertheless, eliminating any official reference to Deng and his successors would cause a political rupture and thus a factor of instability that is better avoided. That is why Xi prefers to play along with continuity and protect the legitimacy of all historical periods of the People's Republic. However, today, it is clearly Xi's thought that dominates; and Deng, without being forgotten, is placed on hold in order to downplay the importance of the December 1978 turning point and to legitimize the regime as a whole, since its foundation in 1949.

This is Xi's message, a Xi who, unlike his two predecessors, has never made the pilgrimage to the village of Paifang in Sichuan to visit Deng's birthplace. A powerful symbol.

[1] Jean-Pierre Cabestan, « Deng Xiaoping – Révolutionnaire et modernisateur de la Chine », éd. Tallandier, 2024 , 427 pages.

[2] https://www.persee.fr/doc/xxs_0294-1759_1988_num_20_1_27937

[3] Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese Revolution : A political Biography, Routledge, London/New York, 1994, 209 pages.

[4] Mao : The real story, éd. Simon and Schuster, 2013, 755 pages.

[5] Deng Xiaoping – The man who made modern China, éd. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, 336 pages.

[6] Deng Xiaoping, éd. Compagnie 12 : Fixot. Paris, 1989, 353 pages.

[7] Ezra Vogel, « Deng Xiaoping and the transformation of China", Harvard University Press, 2013, 928 pages.

[8] https://redsails.org/deng-and-fallaci/

**Jean-Pierre Cabestan**

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Interview Nouveaux Regards

# Antoine Tesnière, General Manager, PariSanté Campus, Professor of Medicine and YL France China 2016

## Interview by Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet

**Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet: You are the originator of this remarkable project, PariSanté Campus.[1] Since the launch of your project, have any inventions emerged from this cradle of the digital health of tomorrow, at the heart of research and innovation in digital health in France?**

Antoine Tesnière: Since the creation of PariSanté Campus, we have welcomed a total of around one hundred innovative startups focused on developing new products in the field of digital health. In terms of research, the activities of our institutes have resulted in numerous scientific publications and led to new, very promising inventions. This dynamic has been significantly strengthened by the substantial funding programs set up by the State, specifically dedicated to research in the digital and health sectors. These investments have played a crucial role in accelerating our ecosystem of innovation and scientific production.

**Could you mention a few?**

Many of the laboratories present at PariSanté Campus are dedicated to work in the field of artificial intelligence, particularly in creating language libraries (LLMs) specifically tailored to the needs of health. Among the notable projects, we also have an institute working on imaging, producing tools using ultrasound waves that could be used to stimulate the brain and treat depression, or be directed at rigidified heart valves to make them more flexible, thus opening up possibilities for these applications.
On the startup side, some have developed technological solutions accessible via smartphones that allow remote measurement of physiological parameters such as heart rate or respiratory rhythm, or algorithms that enable the use of very large quantities. These examples illustrate the added value of PariSanté Campus, which provides entrepreneurs with the tools and resources to accelerate the development of innovative projects, often more quickly than in other environments.

Our role is precisely that of a catalyst, creating an ecosystem that fosters the emergence and acceleration of these projects. This dynamic also pushes us to analyze how other regions of the world approach access to and development of innovations, such as in India or certain Asian countries where innovation and regulatory environments are quite different from those in France or the European Union.

**In these areas of innovation in digital technology and artificial intelligence, are synergies between these three main hubs—the United States, the European Union, and Asian countries—possible?**

Our international strategy aims to establish collaborations in various regions while considering the specific challenges related to data sovereignty. Our approach is to explore all areas, and we are in discussions with everyone. The goal is to identify potential partnerships and opportunities.

of knowledge sharing. There is a specific challenge, particularly with regard to health data, which is a matter of sovereignty. We face particular constraints, especially when it comes to actors outside the European Union and major tech companies, whose approach to data handling can differ significantly from that of Europe.
India and China present distinct models of digital health development, which are

always interesting to analyze and understand. On the one hand, India demonstrates great agility in the digital field, as illustrated by the creation of a digital identity card for all its citizens. This initiative, part of India's broader digitalization strategy, shows the country's ability to respond to challenges with considerable agility. Health is part of this.

China presents a different stage of development, with specific demographic and health data. The challenges related to the overall level of development and the issues to address in the healthcare system are slightly different. The country has enormous, highly structured health centers in major cities, such as the Guangzhou hospital, which is as large as all 35 hospitals in the APHP, which is quite impressive. In major cities, healthcare systems are quite well organized. The authorities, like in India, are addressing the issue of access to care in rural areas, which is a challenge for almost all countries worldwide. And this comes with a very particular issue: the absence of a social protection system comparable to that of France, raising questions about financial accessibility to healthcare.

In terms of digital and AI, China is among the leading nations in terms of the volume of scientific publications on the subject. It competes with the United States not only in quantity but also in quality. China is significantly ahead of India in this field, with a very strong integration of digital technologies.

A crucial aspect of the evolution of digital health concerns the management of personal data. There are very different approaches in Europe and Asia, particularly regarding the perception of data ownership and the issue of these data serving individual or common good.

In China and India, the sharing of personal data for the benefit of society is generally well accepted, unlike in Europe where personal data protection is strictly regulated by the GDPR. It is in light of this observation that the European approach of overseeing and regulating the management of personal data through the GDPR is justified, especially in the field of healthcare. In India, for example, a law was passed in 2023, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, to regulate the use of personal data from the population. However, this law has yet to be implemented.
On issues relating to innovation and potential collaborations between France and Asia, China has gained experience and now expertise by dedicating considerable efforts over several generations in producing scientific results, whether in biology or genetics. Furthermore, India has immense industrial power, particularly in the health sector. India now hosts the largest global pharmaceutical production sites and also aggregates major players in medical equipment and biotechnology. I witnessed this firsthand during my recent trip to Bangalore and Hyderabad, which are becoming strongholds in innovation and health product manufacturing.

Regarding the conception of individual and societal issues, regulatory phenomena are much less significant. And what is true for the treatment of data is also true for market access issues concerning medications. This explains why India has considerable development agility, both in the design of clinical studies, which is a key factor when testing a medication, and in market access rules, and the internationalization of these products.

This leads to challenges for Europe to maintain its competitiveness while preserving quality and safety standards regulations and also financing, which are currently very different.

**Do you have concrete projects with these Asian countries?**

Yes. During my recent trip to India, I visited various innovation centers to explore possible partnerships. I toured hospitals that have digitized their tools and organizations, innovation centers supporting research and startups, as well as incubators like T-Hub in Hyderabad, which is India's equivalent of Station F. These initiatives, on the massive scale of India, offer immense potential.

My mission is to explore potential collaboration opportunities with these players at various scales and levels. We also want to give startups privileged access to the Indian market if they wish, and similarly, we aim to welcome Indian startups that want to expand or gain expertise in France.

We also have the opportunity to work directly with hospitals to open evaluation cycles for some of our startups, and then think about design, strategy, and organization in connection with the digitization of our healthcare systems. For example, the widespread deployment of telemedicine in

France or India. The development of these new technologies and mobile tools is an area we have started discussing, and for some of them, the projects will come to fruition quite quickly, particularly around artificial intelligence, with this year's summit in France co-chaired with India on AI Action.

**You mentioned China and India, but are there other Asian countries that are also remarkable in these areas?**

Yes, they all have their own particularities. For example, South Korea and Taiwan are especially remarkable in digital technology and artificial intelligence. South Korea, with Samsung, which obviously goes far beyond phone manufacturing: the company is heavily invested in healthcare, with its own hospitals, integrated healthcare systems, ultrasound machines, and complete digital solutions ranging from expert tools to mobile applications. Taiwan, though smaller in scale, is extremely dynamic and innovative in these areas.

With Japan, the situation is a bit different. We have collaborations with this country that share challenges and ambitions similar to those of France, particularly related to the aging population and the digitization of healthcare systems.

**And what about the startups you bring together on your campus?**

Currently, there are 80 startups, and we will be able to double our capacity after we move into the former Val de Grâce hospital, by 2030.

**Do you plan to eventually host foreign startups on your campus, from Asia?**

We are already hosting international startups on our PariSanté Campus. These are mostly European startups, due to the relatively recent nature of our project. My mission during my travels abroad is, on one hand, to promote our initiative so that PariSanté Campus becomes a welcoming ground for foreign startups, and on the other hand, to find capital by presenting PariSanté Campus to investment funds and key players in each field.

In India, I met with the government of the State of Telangana, whose capital Hyderabad is very interested in France's approach to deploying its healthcare system modernization strategy. Similarly, last year when I visited Delhi, I met with the Niti Aayog think tank, which is a large innovation program, somewhat equivalent to our France 2030 investment plan, and healthcare is obviously part of it.

Finally, we received a delegation from the Indian Ministry of Health this week, who wanted to explore PariSanté Campus ahead of the global AI summit.

**Does this require heavy investments to bring these projects you have in mind to fruition, both from the French and Indian sides?**

What is interesting is that the collaboration is supported on both the French and Indian sides. There is a real desire to develop cooperation in the field of healthcare. This is very important for us because both political and financial support helps catalyze collaboration efforts focused on common challenges. On both the Indian and French sides, I see a genuine openness and determination to succeed.

**You played an important role in managing the Covid pandemic in your previous positions.**

We exchanged a lot with Asia on this topic. Both on scientific issues and with diplomatic actions, such as sending supplies to China and also to India, at the time when these countries needed them. We also closely analyzed the epidemic management strategies of Asian countries.

**Was it this relatively successful experience in managing Covid, at least regarding France and the European Union compared to China, which perhaps handled the episode less well, that led you to go further into the digitalization and AI project in healthcare?**

The entire digital transformation dynamic was accelerated before Covid, notably through a government strategy introduced in 2017 as part of the Ma santé 2022 plan, which I participated in. With Covid, we had the tools that allowed us to speed up our response to the pandemic. PariSanté Campus was part of a strategy that existed before Covid and, following the pandemic, it helped strengthen and demonstrate the French state's commitment to enhancing its actions in healthcare innovation.

The actions we took internationally were crucial diplomatically, especially regarding

China and India, with the exchanges we had at that time concerning medical supplies. Healthcare has become both a key element of diplomatic and international strategies.

**Does this also involve questions of sovereignty?**

Indeed, there are significant sovereignty issues in international collaborations around health innovation, particularly regarding data management and intellectual property. On this subject, France and Europe have the necessary elements to engage in balanced international collaborations that protect the interests of healthcare stakeholders.

**Antoine Tesnière**

*Antoine Tesnière is a French medical professor, researcher, and entrepreneur, specializing in crisis management and public health innovation policies. A professor of medicine specializing in anesthesiology and intensive care at the European Georges Pompidou Hospital, Antoine Tesnière is deeply involved in research and training issues, areas in which he has internationally recognized expertise. He has successively been President of the pedagogy council of the Paris Descartes Faculty of Medicine and Vice-President of the University of Paris. Driven by a long-standing interest in innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital technologies, he co-founded and directed iLumens, France's first innovative health simulation department, developed at the University of Paris. Starting in 2016, alongside his hospital-university activities, he became involved in public policies. Initially, he was a health and scientific advisor at the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, then in March 2020, he joined the Minister of Health's office and was also appointed Deputy Director of the Interministerial Crisis Center with the Prime Minister to coordinate the fight against Covid-19. In April 2021, he was appointed Director of PariSanté Campus upon joint proposal by the Ministers of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Solidarity and Health. More recently, he founded French Care with BPIFrance, aiming to bring together all health sector stakeholders, facilitate synergies, and accelerate innovation to improve the healthcare system.*

Analysis

# The fentanyl crisis: another aspect of U.S.-China tensions

**By Emmanuel Véron**

During the phone call preceding Donald Trump's inauguration last January, the two presidents discussed numerous topics in the bilateral relationship, with the issue of fentanyl at the heart of American concerns. This reflects the devastating health impact in major and mid-sized U.S. cities and the recent creation of an interagency task force by Congress to combat transnational opioid trafficking.

Fentanyl will be on the agenda of the new Republican administration, both from a domestic and diplomatic-strategic perspective. U.S. public policies appear to be improving the situation, with fentanyl-related mortality lower than in 2022. However, alongside the still severe health crisis (around 90,000 deaths per year in 2023 and 2024), there remains the issue of U.S. border vulnerabilities and the complex relationship with Beijing.

The announcement by Mexico's President, Claudia Sheinbaum, of a record seizure of fentanyl (M30)—over one and a half tons—at the end of 2024(1) sent a strong signal in relations with the U.S. administration.

On the American side, particular efforts will focus on money laundering, especially within banks, as well as coercive measures. Starting in 2022 and particularly in 2023, the U.S. Congress introduced and passed numerous bills aimed at combating opioids. Many of these bills were introduced by various Republican Party members, with some receiving bipartisan support from Democratic Party members. Most legislative efforts were carried out during the 117th and 118th Congresses, including the Fentanyl Border Crossing Prevention Act, the Murder for Lethal Distribution of Fentanyl Act, the END FENTANYL Act (Eliminating Narcotics and Developing New Tools for Effective National Annual Loss Reduction), the 2023 Justice Against Illicit Fentanyl Promoters Act, the HALT Fentanyl Act (Halting All Lethal Trafficking), and the FEND Off Fentanyl Act (eradication of fentanyl and deterrence of narcotics).

However, the opioid trade remains particularly lucrative, fueling a reorganization of the routes and logistics of the cartels linked to Chinese organized crime, more broadly in Asia. Numerous observations in recent months have highlighted clandestine laboratories in Southeast Asia (Thailand, Myanmar) for the production of fentanyl and previously for precursors. Thus, the historic "Golden Triangle" is increasingly interconnected, through Chinese and Indian traders, with Latin American drug trafficking.

Finally, the continuous rise of the Sino-Mexican economic relationship will indirectly ensure a continuity of business ties between trans-Pacific criminal groups and a payment method in cryptocurrencies, particularly via the dark web. The evolution and diversification of synthetic opioid products from fentanyl to nitazene or xylazine, along with the efforts of American public policies, will lead to rebounds and the emergence of new consumption spaces in Latin America and Europe.

**Between Sino-American geopolitical rivalries, globalization, and transnational organized crime, the fentanyl crisis has for several years been a key point of tension between Beijing and Washington.**
**It also constitutes today a real vector of weakening American demographics and a serious challenge for American authorities.**

With more than 120,000 fentanyl overdose deaths estimated in 2023, for the United States alone, the health and security crisis now extends to all of North America.
A topic regularly on the agenda and a source of tense and complicated relations between Washington and Beijing—though to a lesser extent with Mexico—fentanyl has

now become for the United States a mirror of what opium was in China from the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century.

**What is fentanyl?**

Used in medicine, this substance is an opioid analgesic(2) that interacts with the brain's morphine receptors, as well as with the spinal cord and the smooth muscles of the digestive system. It also has a sedative therapeutic effect. Extremely potent, its analgesic effect is rapid and short-lived. One hundred times more powerful than morphine and fifty times stronger than heroin, fentanyl was first synthesized by the Belgian doctor, Baron Paul Janssen, in the late 1950s, and its use has since been highly regulated. It is classified as a narcotic substance.

Its diversion and the expansion of the black market have led to what is now recognized as the American "opioid crisis." Once almost unknown to the general public, fentanyl has, within a decade, become a widespread narcotic in North America, causing the most significant health and security crisis since the heroin (and other narcotics) epidemic of the 1970s and 1980s. Several celebrities have lost their lives due to fentanyl overdoses and/or the combined use of other drugs.(3)

Indeed, fentanyl consumption rapidly induces both respiratory depression and rigidity of the respiratory muscles and larynx, which can lead to death depending on the dosage.

As a powerful painkiller called OxyContin (or Oxycodone) became widely prescribed across the United States, part of the population developed a dependence on its morphine derivatives, leading to a parallel search for a potent substitute. Combined with social distress and poly-drug addictions, fentanyl consumption has skyrocketed over the past decade.

Major North American cities, such as San Francisco, have seen some of their neighborhoods turn into true humanitarian and health disasters(4). Easy to produce and highly profitable, fentanyl has rapidly become—alongside cocaine—the preferred product of Mexican drug traffickers targeting the North American market(5).

Are there any solutions to this crisis?

Beyond medication like naloxone, which neutralizes the toxin in receptors, a new antibody against fentanyl offers potential protection(6). However, it must be administered regularly and at the right moment based on the level of addiction, and its effectiveness may be limited depending on drug use patterns.

**A major factor in U.S.-China rivalry**

It is now widely acknowledged that Beijing is Washington's top strategic priority—and vice versa.

The U.S.-China strategic rivalry plays a significant role in shaping global dynamics. Structural tensions exist in every domain—economic, military, technological, and diplomatic. As bilateral relations reach their lowest point since the Cold War, with numerous contentious issues on the table (strategic-military matters, technology, trade, Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, human rights)(7), fentanyl has, over the past decade, become a defining aspect of this relationship, embodying both interdependence and competition.

During Donald Trump's presidency, the U.S. administration had already initiated discussions with Chinese authorities on this issue. Even earlier, at the end of Barack Obama's second term, during the 2016 G20 summit in Hangzhou (China), U.S. authorities announced reinforced measures in collaboration with Chinese officials to combat fentanyl supply and its analogues, placing fentanyl on the list of controlled substances. At the same time, bilateral trade was rapidly expanding due to economic interdependence.

Despite Washington's statements, the Chinese government remained discreet, as trafficking routes from China to Canada, the U.S., and Mexico were still developing. In response, U.S. authorities continued their investigations to confirm that China was the primary source of chemical precursors—key ingredients used to produce methamphetamine consumed in North America. The majority of fentanyl and its analogues imported into North America by drug traffickers originate from China(8).

Today, fentanyl represents a public health crisis of unprecedented scale, likely the most severe opioid-related crisis in the history of the United States and Canada.

The numbers speak for themselves: one person dies every five minutes. According to data from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the number of fentanyl-related deaths has surged from a few hundred in the early 2010s to more than 70,000 in 2021, and over 120,000 deaths in 2023 (9), with the 20-45 age group being the most affected. While some in the United States thought they had managed this new crisis(10), U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin reminded in 2018, following the G20 summit and ongoing U.S.-China trade talks, that the fentanyl issue "is a very, very important part of the agreement between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping on trade."

Since then, while cooperation between the U.S. and China on the issue has remained limited, Beijing suspended its cooperation with Washington following Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in the summer of 2022. Since then, fentanyl has been on the agenda of every official U.S.-China meeting. (11)

While a U.S. Senate report demonstrated that Beijing denied the role of several pharmaceutical companies, Chinese organized crime (triads), and the export of the product to North America, U.S. authorities(12), led by the DEA, uncovered a wide range of actors involved in the manufacturing, trafficking, and illicit sale of fentanyl, fueling a systemic black market.

The U.S. government has taken several unilateral measures to address China's role in the fentanyl and its precursor chemical trafficking. The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has sanctioned more than 65 individuals based in mainland China or Hong Kong for the illicit trafficking of fentanyl, xylazine, or nitazenes(13). These sanctions block assets under U.S. jurisdiction, prohibit U.S. persons from conducting financial transactions with designated individuals, and bar these traffickers from entering the United States.

In June 2023, the Department of Justice (DOJ) indicted three China-based companies and their employees for crimes related to fentanyl trafficking. In September 2023, the DOJ indicted eight additional Chinese chemical companies and 12 of their executives for crimes related to fentanyl trafficking, other synthetic opioids, methamphetamines, and their precursor chemicals. Later that month, President Biden added China to the U.S. list of major illicit drug-producing and trafficking countries.

Most recently, 28 individuals and Chinese companies involved in the fentanyl trade were blacklisted by the U.S. Treasury and are now subject to sanctions.

**A financial windfall**

Today, according to the DEA, between 60 to 90% of the fentanyl sold in the United States originates from China(14). In the 2000s, quantities were relatively small, with some neutralized by federal state tools. However, the intensification and acceleration of production from China around the turn of the 2010s coincide with a geopolitical and geo-economic restructuring of transnational criminal groups on one hand, and the rise to power of Xi Jinping on the other.

Furthermore, while fentanyl use as a drug in China is limited, even almost negligible, this period also corresponds to an unprecedented rise in China's pharmaceutical sector. After welcoming several international groups, enforcing technology transfers, and eventually mastering the entire industrial chain, many large regions of China—home to more than 5,000 pharmaceutical groups and 15,000 associated chemical industries—now position the country as the world's leading pharmaceutical producer.

Although the profit margins on the resale of fentanyl are lower than those of cocaine (>3,000%), it remains extremely profitable (2,400%). Fentanyl has thus replaced heroin or crystal meth (methamphetamines) and, more importantly, generated substantial amounts of cash over the past decade. These large sums of money are(15), on one hand, laundered and, on the other hand, reinvested into the expansion of clandestine drug production sites and into corruption to fuel the trafficking.

According to Bertrand Monnet (who has conducted several investigations into the cartels), on the streets of New York, a fentanyl dealer selling it in various forms (tablets called M30 or in powder form) earns $30,000 a week for a kilo sold. According to a recent investigation(16) in January 2024 by El Pais Semanal, the cartel pays around $800 per kilo for Chinese chemical precursors.

Once synthesized, it yields four kilos of fentanyl. The profit margin is 200 to 800 times the initial purchase price, amounting to $160,000 to $640,000 per kilo. This suggests even higher margins than those indicated by previous investigations.

**A Different Face of Transpacific Relations**

At the heart of the spread of clandestine fentanyl production and storage sites, Mexican cartels dominate, especially the Jalisco New Generation (JNG) and Sinaloa cartels. Thus, the geography of fentanyl presents another side of transpacific relations—a geography that resembles a siege of American power. While this perception is sometimes politically leveraged for electoral purposes, it remains a territorial reality of connected and transnational networks, blending opportunism, criminal networks, and strategic state power methods.

According to the DEA, China is by far the primary supplier of precursors to the Mexican cartels, who then transform the product into colored pills (M30 blue pills) and distribute them in the U.S., primarily to major cities, but also to a network of secondary cities across the country.

Additionally, fentanyl is shipped in various forms (patches, powders, pills) from China and its port cities (Canton, Shenzhen, Shanghai, Xiamen, Qingdao, Tianjin, and Dalian) to Canada, the U.S., and Mexico(17). There are also mail shipments, with the product available for purchase online or via the Dark Web.

Chinese production has exploded, largely unchecked by Chinese authorities. The proliferation of fentanyl derivatives and variants has made administrative control increasingly difficult between the U.S. and China. DEA investigations have identified several Chinese provinces as sources for the production of fentanyl precursors and related money laundering (including Hebei, Anhui, Henan, and the coastal city of Xiamen).

While China has implemented stricter drug laws since 2017, this has only gradually altered fentanyl trafficking routes.
In recent years, Mexico has seen a sharp rise in the clandestine (or even legal) importation of precursors from both China(18) and India. Fentanyl pill-making machines are also imported, indicating both continuity and collusion between Chinese, Indian, and Mexican actors—despite the significant strategic rivalries between China and India—and transnational criminal group connections via Asian metropolises. The product from China is now synthesized in the clandestine labs of Mexican cartels(19).

Just before the Covid-19 pandemic, a real geography and international division of labor had been set up on both sides of the Pacific Ocean: Chinese pharmaceutical production, shipment to Mexico for synthesis and transformation into colored pills, then distribution across the U.S.-Mexico border, and finally sales in the streets of the United States.

**Criminal collusion at the heart of trafficking**

American federal investigations have thus uncovered an overlap and collusion between Chinese mafias and Mexican cartels. The latter benefited from a low-cost product, the geographical proximity of the captive North American market, and their link with Chinese triad networks to launder vast sums of money (several hundred billion dollars per year).

More recently, another actor in transnational organized crime and terrorism has emerged alongside traditional fentanyl trafficking players: Hezbollah, which in the 1980s had developed links with Colombian cartels, but also with Brazilian organized crime (Primeiro Commando da Capital – PCC and Commando Vermelho), the Venezuelan political regime, South American Lebanese diasporas, and Italian mafias.

A new development today concerns Canada and its connection with Chinese mafias. The role of these mafias is crucial for understanding this systemic organization. Embedded within the large Chinese diasporas in North America, particularly in Canada (British Columbia and Ontario) or the United States (along the Pacific coast and in major metropolitan areas), Chinese mafias or triads(20) have developed both illicit and legitimate activities for decades.

Vancouver, a primary target of the triads, has become the entry point and hub for Chinese transnational organized crime, itself connected to Chinese intelligence services and the United Front Work Department, which organizes political influence operations and money laundering(21). It is from Vancouver that a significant amount of fentanyl is sold and distributed eastward to Canada, supported by triad operations in Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto.

In Canada, a network of secondary cities in the center of the country, such as Calgary and Winnipeg, is increasingly involved.

**An encirclement strategy?**

This situation forms a northern front aimed at reaching the primary target: the U.S. market. A southern front through Mexican cartels suggests a geography of encirclement for the networks and trafficking(22), targeting a large dependent population within the logistics web and transnational organized crime networks.

This geography becomes even more complex with powerful, highly diffuse, widely scattered, and efficient logistics shared between Mexican, Chinese, and other mafia groups. A junction from the transborder space known as "Mexamerica" (Tijuana-San Diego, Nogales, El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, or Laredo-Nuevo Laredo) to the gravity centers of Chinese mafias (notably Vancouver) structures the geography of fentanyl trafficking and the laundering of its profits (casinos, real estate, various shell companies).

On a global scale and in a networked way, mafias interact with each other to diversify trafficking routes, explore new markets, but also and especially, multiply money laundering points in the North American, Middle Eastern, and East Asian(23) metropolises. In echo to this networked and polycentric geography, China is also active in expanding its influence through the BRICS+ and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
These two non-Western international organizations have become, for the past decade, a priority for Beijing, especially after the end of the Covid-19 crisis and the accelerated deterioration of the country's attractiveness toward Europe and the United States. Within these international organizations, away from Western powers, state actors, linked to criminal organizations, find support to reshape their activities and develop their profits.

Competing criminal networks have found in fentanyl a logistical and commercial complementarity within which Chinese mafias can expand their market in correlation with Mexican logistical networks, offering new outlets, including for money laundering. Thus, the fentanyl routes in Latin America largely intersect with migration routes to the United States, through the mercantile logic of human traffickers, also linked to cartels and transnational criminal networks.

Just like the human and public health devastation caused by opium in China from the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, which enslaved a significant portion of the population andallowed the triads to thrive in collusion with the political power, fentanyl today is a lethal strategic (and lucrative) tool for Beijing in its rivalry with Washington.

The refusal to cooperate and contain the production of precursors, on the contrary allowing this activity to thrive through mafias in collusion with the regime, represents a key and efficient vector of a war that does not yet have a name.

While the American market remains the primary target, Mexican cartels are testing and expanding potential markets in Europe, Latin America, and even Africa(24).

A development that can be facilitated by the increasing Chinese participation or investments in international ports.
Thus, fentanyl trafficking constitutes the other face of international structuring between state actors and sub-state criminal groups in the structural rivalry between China and the United States. Another reality of the West/non-West antagonism.

**This article by the author was previously published in areion24 news and is presented here in its revised form by the author.**

(1)https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/drogues-le-mexique-realise-la-plus-grande-saisie-de-fentanyl-de-son-histoire_225286

(2) The author would like to thank his colleagues, friends and family for their advice and clarification.

(3) Derived from phenylpiperidine.

(4) Like “speed ball”, a mixture of fentanyl, cocaine and heroin used by singers Prince and Coolio, other rappers and professional skateboarder Jeff Grosso.

(5) https://www.lexpress.fr/monde/amerique/drogues-criminalite-et-pauvrete-san-francisco-cite-mythique-a-la-derive-DVIGXX2IN5FIXII5DYSLS3NYAQ/

(6) If reliable sources are lacking, Mexico is also particularly affected by fentanyl consumption, which has become a public health issue there in recent years, in addition to the logics of corruption and the institutionalization of a narco-state, all exacerbated in time for the 2024 elections.

(7) https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/avec-sciences/crise-des-opioides-une-vaccination-passive-contre-le-fentanyl-8738890

(8) https://www.cairn.info/la-politique-internationale-de-la-chine--9782724637908-page-269.htm

(9) https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-eight-indictments-against-china-based-chemical-manufacturing

(10) https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates

(11) https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT497/RAND_CT497.pdf

(12) From the G20 in Bali in 2022, to Xi Jinping's visit to California for the APEC summit at the end of 2023, via the visits of Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Beijing in June 2023, and US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen a few days later.

(13) https://digital.areion24.news/qut

(14) Nitazenes are powerful synthetic opioids of the benzimidazole-opioid class. Some nitazenes are estimated to be several times more potent than fentanyl. These products are also known as "zombie drugs".

(15) https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10890

(16) https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/translations/reports/Blanchiment-produits-trafic-fentanyl-opioides-synthetiques.pdf.coredownload.pdf

(17) https://www.courrierinternational.com/long-format/reportage-mexique-etats-unis-chine-le-voyage-mortel-du-fentanyl

(18) https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/8_Felbab-Brown_China_final.pdf

(19) https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-08/Illicit_Fentanyl_from_China-An_Evolving_Global_Operation.pdf

(20) The Sinaloa cartel's activities are concentrated in the states of Sinaloa (Culiacán), Sonora (Hermosillo), Baja California (Tijuana) and Durango; the JNC cartel's activities are located in Jalisco (Guadalajara, Manzanillo), Nayarit, Colima and Guanajuato. They compete for Baja California and Michoacán.

(21) 三合会 sanhehui – 14K, Sun Yee On, Bambou Uni, Fédération Wo, la Bande des Quatre mers ou le Grand Cercle.

(22) https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-08/Illicit_Fentanyl_from_China-An_Evolving_Global_Operation.pdf

(23) https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2022/11/acs-2022-americas/

(24) https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/8_Felbab-Brown_China_final.pdf

(25) https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/drogues-le-fentanyl-se-repand-peu-a-peu-dans-le-monde

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