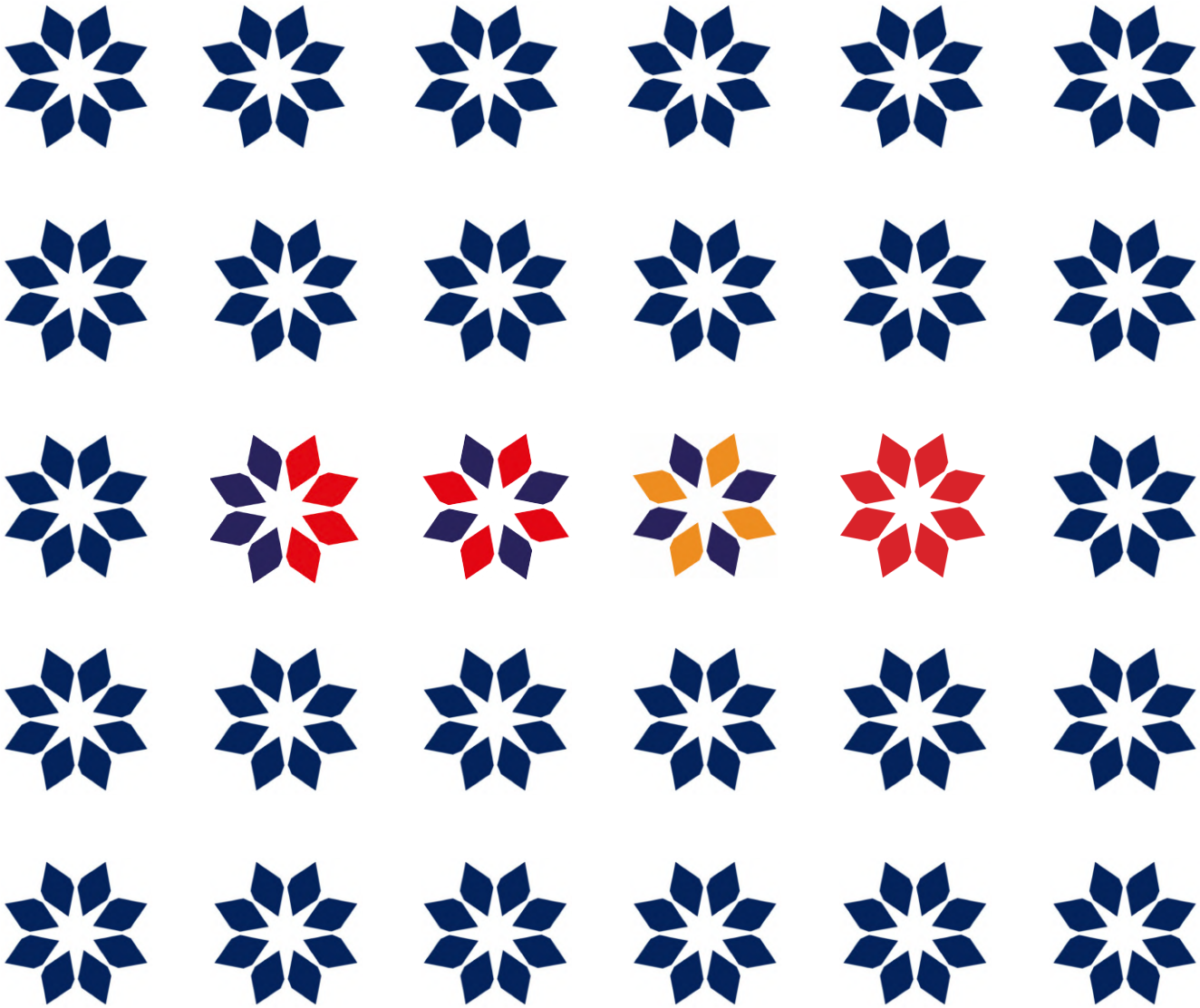
FONDATION
FRANCE-ASIE

Fonds de préfiguration

NOUVEAUX REGARDS SUR L'ASIE



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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AGENDA

September 26, 2025
Asia Pacific Summit at IPEM in Paris

October 9-12, 2025
France-India Young Leaders Seminar 2025 in New Delhi and Mumbai

October 9, 2025
France India AI Initiative x Healthcare Roundtable in New Delhi
« How can cooperation between France and India promote artificial intelligence to accelerate progress in the healthcare and automotive sectors? »

October, 14 2025
France India AI Initiative x Brunswick Roundtable in Paris
« From competition to cooperation: can France, India, and the U.S. build a shared vision for a trustworthy AI? »

December, 9 2025
France-China Track 2 Forum in Paris

More information is available on the Fondation France-Asie website:
fondationfranceasie.org

To participate in events, please write to:
contact@fondationfranceasie.org

Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet
Editorial Director and former diplomat

EDITORIAL

Following a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, every September 15 since 2008 has been celebrated worldwide as the "International Day of Democracy".

The fact is clear: a decline in democracy has been observed across the world.

In 2025, for the first time, the number of autocracies (91) surpassed that of democracies (88), according to the report of the V-Dem Institute, affiliated with the Swedish University of Gothenburg [1].

By breaking away from their NATO allies, Donald Trump's United States dealt them a severe blow when, to cite just one example (among many others regarding his domestic policy), on April 16, 2025, they joined—hardly believable—the voices of Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua, Niger, Russia, and Sudan in opposing the United Nations resolution condemning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Asia has been no exception to this trend.

East Asia has been no exception. South Korea was among the countries at the root of the region's democratic backsliding, following the political crisis sparked by the (short-lived) declaration of martial law by then-president Yoon Suk-yeol (since impeached) in December 2024. While public demonstrations against Yoon Suk-yeol's measures reflected the resilience of local democratic institutions in the face of sudden challenges, the incident highlighted institutional flaws related to presidential power and heightened the risk of political violence and social unrest.

The deep political acrimony between South Korea's political parties will make any resolution difficult in the short term. However, the victory of opposition leader Lee Jae-myung in the presidential election should eventually help restore stability to the political landscape—or so one can hope.

Japan and Taiwan remain the region's only 'full democracies.' Nevertheless, both face significant challenges to their democratic institutions: in Taiwan, the division between the executive and legislative branches has already hindered policymaking, with opposition parties seeking to instrumentalize legislative power against the democratically elected president, notably by paralyzing Taiwan's Constitutional Court.

The approval rating of the government led by Shigeru Ishiba remains low (24% according to an April 2025 poll by the daily Mainichi Shimbun, with a disapproval rating of 61%).

Since the losses suffered in the October 2024 snap legislative election, the executive has governed as a minority. Public trust was notably eroded by a March 2024 scandal involving 100,000-yen gift vouchers given to lawmakers. This disavowal by the electorate (with 58% turnout) was further confirmed on July 20 by the defeat of the ruling LDP/Komei coalition in a by-election for the Upper House, from which the young far-right Sanseito party benefited, achieving a historic result on the basis of a xenophobic electoral platform.

This new defeat precipitated the downfall of Mr. Ishiba, thus opening a new era of instability for Japan in an extremely tense context, both domestically (rising prices, particularly of rice, falling wages, immigration) and internationally (U.S. tariff increases, tensions with neighboring China and North Korea) [2].

In Southeast Asia, a return to dynastic politics is underway—in Cambodia (the Hun family), Indonesia (the Suharto family), Thailand (the Shinawatra family), and the Philippines (the Marcos family).

Hun Manet succeeded his father, Hun Sen, as head of government in 2023, and has since led a systematic campaign of repression against political opposition, journalists, trade unionists, and environmental defenders.

Regional democracy faces uncertain short-term prospects.

Elected president in February 2024, Prabowo Subianto, son-in-law of dictator Suharto (1965–1998), was implicated, in his capacity as head of the special forces, in multiple atrocities in Timor-Leste, in Papua (Indonesia), and during the 1998 anti-Suharto demonstrations that led to his downfall.

Indonesia is facing a resurgence of student activism, reflecting discontent sparked by recent budget cuts, the controversial creation of a second sovereign wealth fund, and amendments to laws aimed at expanding the role of the military in civil governance (which in turn triggered turbulence in stock markets).

In Thailand, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra faces increasingly hostile opposition, accused of acting under the undue influence of her father, Thaksin (himself a former prime minister). Paetongtarn was suspended from office on July 1, 2024, by the Constitutional Court for disloyalty, after a recorded interview with former prime minister Hun Sen called into question the Thai military in the border conflict with Cambodia over Khmer temple ruins from the height of Angkor's splendor.

In the Philippines, the arrest of former president Rodrigo Duterte has intensified the political battle between the Duterte family—his daughter, Sara, who was vice president until she was removed from office in early February—and Prime Minister Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., heir to the Marcos political dynasty (his father Ferdinand and his mother Imelda ruled the Philippines with an iron fist from 1965 to 1986), and ultimately elected president in June 2022, with the hope of rehabilitating his family's grim reputation.

In South Asia, political demonstrations in Bangladesh, following the January 2024 elections (which were considered neither free nor fair), toppled the previous government led by Sheikh Hasina Wajed in August 2024, ushering in a new era of change.

Nevertheless, the country's future political and economic outlook remains uncertain under the current interim government, led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate (2006) Muhammad Yunus, appointed Chief Adviser pending the appointment of a new head of government after general elections, which are expected to take place in late 2025 or early 2026.

The elections in Pakistan, held in February 2023, were marred by allegations of repression and political interference—factors that are likely to persist as long as the country's security situation remains unstable (terrorism, military confrontation with India).

Although Sri Lanka experienced a change of government in its September 2024 elections, with the appointment of Harini Amarasuriya, the political landscape remains unpredictable. The continuation of democratization will depend on the ability of civil society to push for reforms—and on the willingness of political institutions to adopt them.

By contrast, elections in India were judged freer and fairer: despite its strict control over the media, Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed to secure the two-thirds supermajority of 370 seats that would have allowed it to freely amend the constitution, and moreover lost the absolute majority it once held alone, forcing it to rely on its allies within the NDA (National Democratic Alliance). Public concerns over employment and the erosion of social freedoms were reflected in the vote, demonstrating the resilience of the democratic process in the country—allowing the prime minister, appointed for a third term, to proclaim "a new victory for the world's largest democracy," in terms of voters, it must be noted. What can be expected from these developments for Asia?

China may well be the main beneficiary. In East Asia: unlike the pro-American (conservative) People Power Party (PPP) of impeached former president Yoon—whose candidate was

defeated in the recent presidential election (June 2025)—South Korea's Democratic Party (DP) and its newly elected president appear more closely aligned with Beijing than with Washington.

The tariff increases (+50%) imposed on India by the Trump administration, aimed at reducing the $45 billion trade deficit with Delhi but also seen as an American attempt to push Indian authorities to lessen their dependence on Russia —particularly in crude oil deliveries (and likely arms as well)—are likely to lead to an even greater rapprochement between India and China (the first bilateral meeting in five years between Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping in October 2024 on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia; a visit to Delhi in August 2025 by Foreign Minister Wang Yi followed by a meeting in Tianjin between Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit).

All the more so given the preferential treatment granted by the U.S. administration to Pakistan (a White House reception for Marshal Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff)—India's sworn enemy—and vice versa.

Like India, Japan is already seeking to improve its historically strained relations with China, particularly following the tensions between Tokyo and Washington fueled by Donald Trump and his threats of tariff hikes against Asian allies. Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya met with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and Premier Li Qiang in Beijing at the end of 2024.

In addition to his ministerial functions, Wang Yi, also a member of the CCP Central Committee's Politburo, once again met with his Japanese counterpart in Kuala Lumpur in July 2025.

Strengthening ties with Japan and South Korea should consolidate China's regional status to the detriment of the United States—a task likely to be easier with Seoul than with Tokyo.

In Southeast Asia, China's growing role in the region is expected to push most governments to reaffirm the balanced approach they have adopted to national security for decades, particularly with regard to the ten ASEAN countries.

Most of them will likely see this as a win-win situation rather than a zero-sum calculation, as they strengthen their ties with China, Russia, or even other countries, while urging the United States to maintain its strategic and commercial interests in the region—though without being able to count on it, given the unpredictability of the White House occupant.

This balanced approach, particularly with regard to China, is also expected to shape regional dynamics in South Asia. Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka will likely believe their countries can more easily deflect New Delhi's demands or counter its aspirations for regional leadership by maintaining their ties with Beijing.

For its part, New Delhi will likely seek ways to mitigate Chinese influence, given its growing presence in the Indian Ocean. Among other gestures, India will almost certainly continue to encourage Japan to offer economic investments and military cooperation to other South Asian countries, in order to draw them closer to New Delhi and Tokyo. But many uncertainties remain, with the Russia–Ukraine and Middle Eastern crises whose evolution is unknown, and where the role of the United States—despite Trump's bluster—remains, at least for now, preeminent.

One could even say vital for those such as Taiwan, the Philippines, Japan, and South Korea, which can only rely on Washington if they do not wish to end up in the jaws of the dragon at their doorstep.

[1] https://www.v-dem.net/documents/60/V-dem-dr__2025_lowres.pdf

[2] Voir Nicholas Szechenyi, Yuko Nakano, Kristi Govella, « Japan's Upper House Election : Prolonged Instability", CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), July 21, 2025.

Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet

A career diplomat who studied Chinese studies in France and then worked in development aid as an international expert for UNESCO in Laos (1988-1991), Jean-Raphaël PEYTREGNET has held positions including Consul General of France in Guangzhou (2007-2011) and Beijing (2015-2018), as well as in Mumbai/Bombay from 2011 to 2015. He was responsible for Asia at the Center for Analysis, Forecasting, and Strategy (CAPS) attached to the office of the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2018-2021) and finally Special Advisor to the Director for Asia-Oceania (2021-2023).

Asian News

Géopolitique, a podcast offering a perspective on international affairs.

By Pierre Haski sur France Inter

July 3 - Communism and reincarnation: when Beijing wants to control the succession of the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama has warned his disciples against any attempt to appoint his successor outside the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism—a reference to the Chinese Communist Party.

Listen of the podcast

July 10 - Taiwan, strategic target and political symbol.

Taiwan, still under threat of attack from China, has just begun large-scale military exercises. Why are these drills attracting so much attention this year?

Listen of the podcast

July 14 - Indonesia on the Champs-Élysées: a Bastille Day looking toward the Indo-Pacific.

Indonesia is the guest of honor for France's national day. This may seem surprising, yet it is a country that deserves much greater attention.

Listen of the podcast

July 24 - Espionage: the shadow war rages on.

Since the beginning of July, arrests and revelations about the world of espionage have multiplied across the globe.

Listen of the podcast

Pierre Haski

French journalist, former correspondent in South Africa, the Middle East, and China for Agence France Presse (AFP) and then for the newspaper Libération, co-founder of the news website Rue89, Pierre HASKI has been president of Reporters Without Borders since 2017. Since 2018, he has been providing insight into international politics through his morning show "Géopolitique" broadcast on France Inter.

Céline Pajon
Head of Research on Japan and the Indo-Pacific at the Ifri Asia Center

Analysis Nouveaux Regards

Japan and its security alliance under Trump 2: the temptation of autonomy?

By Céline Pajon

When Donald Trump won the presidential election in Washington in November 2024, Tokyo was fairly confident in its ability to manage the relationship with the irascible Republican. After all, his first term had not been so detrimental to Japan, thanks in particular to the leadership of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who had succeeded in building a relationship of trust with the president and in demonstrating strong diplomatic activism.

The U.S.–Japan relationship had even been strengthened, and Japan managed to play a leading role in countering Trump's challenges to multilateralism and the rules-based international order—through the promotion of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific,' the establishment of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and by tightening its ties with like-minded partners, notably European countries.

At that time, when the war in Ukraine had not yet upended the international order, Tokyo hoped that Trump's presidency would be only a brief interlude before the United States quickly returned to its course. Trump 2.0 has turned out to be much harsher.

In Japan, Prime Minister Ishiba, in office since September 2024, enjoys neither the charisma nor the legitimacy of Abe. While rivalry with China remains the priority of the new U.S. administration, Tokyo has sought to present itself as a key strategic partner for Washington, bolstered by historic defense reforms announced in December 2022, including the doubling of the defense budget—from 1% to 2% of GDP by 2027—and the unprecedented acquisition of a counterstrike capability.

Yet the archipelago, like other allies and partners, has not escaped the imposition of prohibitive tariffs nor the pressure to increase its defense commitments. Bruised by an ally whose credibility is eroding, and shocked to see it stray from the fundamental principles of international law by advocating territorial expansion, Tokyo is left questioning.

The debate on greater autonomy is gaining unprecedented momentum. What room for maneuver does Japan truly have, while

remaining so tightly bound to the United States by its security treaty?

Japan under strain from its ally

At first, Tokyo seemed to obtain the security guarantees it was seeking. In February 2025, the meeting between Prime Minister Ishiba and Donald Trump in Washington took place in a cordial atmosphere, with the leaders 'affirming their determination to usher in a new golden age in U.S.–Japan relations.' In March, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth confirmed during a visit to Tokyo the establishment of a joint command for U.S. forces stationed in Japan, intended to coordinate with the newly established Japanese Joint Operations Command (JJOC). This new organization further raised the level of bilateral coordination and integration.

Yet pressure is rising fast, with Washington demanding greater defense efforts from Japan while imposing prohibitive tariffs.

Already engaged in a historic doubling of its defense budget, Japan reacted very coolly to the statements of Elbridge Colby, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, calling for defense spending to be raised to 3.5% of GDP—especially as, at the same time, Washington imposed 24% tariffs on Japanese exports to the United States, its second-largest market after China.

The impact has been particularly severe for the automobile sector, which accounts for more than 36% of Japan's exports to the U.S. market. After laborious negotiations, Tokyo was forced on July 22 to accept a bitter compromise: tariffs set at 15%, coupled with the promise of $550 billion (€471 billion) in Japanese investments in U.S. projects. Despite the agreement, tariffs on steel and aluminum remained fixed at 50%. In response, Japan adopted an unusually firm stance. In June, it decided to postpone the planned '2+2' meeting with the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense.

This decision also aimed to shore up an already weakened Ishiba government: after calling early elections in October 2024, the prime minister lost his absolute majority in the Lower House and failed to retain that of the Upper House in the July 20, 2025 elections. The vote was marked by the rise of populist forces, notably the Sanseito, which advocate a 'Japan First' ideology in reaction to U.S. pressure.

The Trump administration's 'cognitive dissonance' [1] has fueled unease. While asserting that China remains its strategic priority, Trump has adopted a revisionist stance on territorial sovereignty, as illustrated by his statements on Greenland and Panama. The U.S. vote on February 24, 2025, at the United Nations General Assembly against a resolution condemning Russia's aggression in Ukraine symbolized for Tokyo Washington's abandonment of its traditional role as guarantor of the liberal international order.

The conditions for autonomy

In the face of abandonment risks and the erosion of the credibility of U.S. deterrence, Japan is pursuing and intensifying its long-standing hedging strategy: progressively strengthening its own defense capabilities, rebalancing roles within the alliance, and establishing a network of U.S.-compatible strategic partners aimed at durably anchoring the United States in Asia while opening complementary avenues of cooperation for the archipelago.

In December 2022, faced with the rapid deterioration of its security environment and growing tensions with a triple nuclear and authoritarian front (China, Russia, North Korea), Japan endorsed a major shift in its defense posture.

The doubling of the defense budget, the acquisition of an unprecedented counterstrike capability, the strengthening of space, cyber, and electronic warfare assets, as well as improved multi-domain and joint-force integration, are all intended to enhance operational readiness and deterrence.

This military normalization, however, requires deeper integration with U.S. forces, as Tokyo remains dependent on its ally's strike chain (kill chain) for the use of its new long-range strike capabilities. Thus, while becoming militarily more capable, Japan is also becoming more closely tied to its American ally [2].

The diversification of security partnerships in Asia and Europe cannot represent a credible alternative to the alliance, but it does help to put Japan's

dependence on the United States into perspective.

Japan's defense commitments have evolved dramatically, with India, South Korea (the Japan–South Korea–U.S. trilateral summit at Camp David in 2023 and the first joint declaration between Tokyo and Seoul in 17 years following the Ishiba–Lee Jae-myung meeting in August 2025), the Philippines (defense pact signed in July 2024), and Australia (a quasi-alliance and the announcement of the sale of Mogami-class frigates in August 2025).

There has also been a deepening of security cooperation between Japan and Europe (the European Union and member states), particularly in the fields of defense industry and technologies—the most recent EU–Japan summit in July 2025 was dedicated to this. Another example is the GCAP program, under which Japan is developing a supersonic fighter jet with Italy and the United Kingdom. Cooperation with Europe plays a central role in preserving multilateralism and the rules-based international order, especially in terms of free trade.

Japan has thus welcomed the announcement of closer ties between the EU and the CPTPP. Securing supply chains, maintaining stable conditions for free trade, and promoting ambitious standards not only in trade but also in digital and artificial intelligence issues are likewise at the heart of Japan's strategy to reduce its vulnerability to the United States. This pragmatic approach, aiming to gradually expand its room for maneuver, appears the most realistic and effective in the current context. It is this course that should be pursued, rather than focusing on a possible acquisition of nuclear capability by Tokyo to guarantee total independence. While the nuclear taboo has now been broken, at least in public debate, the study of the nuclear option is not on the table.

Japan's priority remains strengthening the credibility of extended deterrence provided by its American ally, including through more regular and better-informed exchanges. The boldest experts advocate easing the three non-nuclear principles, so as to allow, in the future, port calls by nuclear-armed submarines or even possible participation by the Self-Defense Forces in U.S. deterrence missions [3]. But this remains in the realm of ideas.

The alliance with the United States, long regarded as the unshakable pillar of Japan's security, now appears weakened and instrumentalized by Trump as a mere bargaining lever. The debate on greater autonomy in Japan's strategic posture is therefore gaining unprecedented momentum. During his speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue last May, Defense Minister Gen Nakatani became the first member of a Japanese government to publicly raise the concept of strategic autonomy. Japan entered the alliance out of clear self-interest—the alliance was meant to ensure effective deterrence and the country's prosperity—and it will remain in it on those same terms.

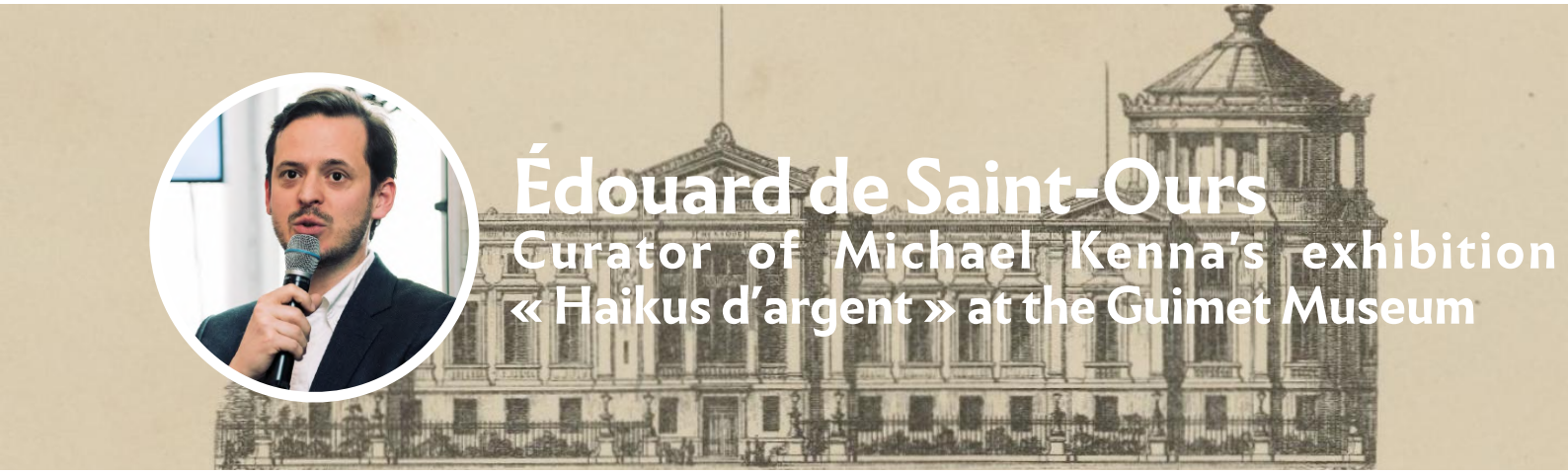
[1] Ayumi Teraoka, « Strategy of Anchoring: Japan, the United States, and the International Order under Trump 2.0", Asian Survey (2025) 65 (4-5): 666–701.

[2] Lotje Boswinkel, "Forever Bound? Japan's Road to Self-defence and the US Alliance", Survival: Global Politics and Strategy, vol. 66, no. 3, 2024.

[3] "Toward Improving the Effectiveness of Extended Deterrence in the Japan-U.S. Alliance - To make the "nuclear umbrella" be real", Sasakawa Peace Foundation, juin 2025.

Céline Pajon

Céline Pajon is head of research on Japan and the Indo-Pacific at the Ifri Asia Center. She also coordinates activities on Oceania. Céline is also a senior researcher at the Japan Chair at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB) and an international associate researcher at the Canon Institute for Global Studies (CIGS) in Tokyo. In 2016, she was invited to the JIIA, the Japan Institute of International Affairs, the think tank of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A graduate of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva and Sciences Po Lyon, Céline also studied for two years in Japan at Waseda University (Tokyo) and Osaka University.



Édouard de Saint-Ours

Curator of Michael Kenna's exhibition « Haikus d'argent » at the Guimet Museum

Interview Nouveaux Regards

The exhibition « Haikus d'argent », Asia photographed by Michael Kenna at the Guimet Museum.

Interviewed by Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet

Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet : Before we talk about the exhibition « Haikus d'argent, Asia Photographed by Michael Kenna,' currently on view at the Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet until September 29, could you tell us more about the photography collection you oversee as curator?

Édouard de Saint-Ours : The photographic collections of the Guimet Museum are very substantial. They bring together nearly 600,000 photographs and were built up starting in the 1920s. At the outset, these archives had a documentary purpose: to serve as a visual resource for historians of Asian art, researchers, teachers, students, but also to support curators in preparing scholarly articles, books, and exhibitions on Asian arts.

Today, this photo library represents about one-third of the museum's collection. It has been supplemented by donations and acquisitions made since the 1940s. A significant part consists of an early photographic archive representative of the very beginnings of photography in Asia, starting in the 1850s. It includes photographs brought back from scientific or archaeological missions, such as those of Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918), or Louis Delaporte (1842–1925), whose collections, assembled for the Musée Indochinois du Trocadéro—notably on Khmer art—were transferred to the Guimet Museum after his death.

We also hold photographic archives that fall within the field of photojournalism. In 2015, the Guimet Museum received a donation from Raoul Coutard (1924–2016) of his photographs taken during the Indochina War, and in 2019, through a bequest, it received the entire collection of Marc Riboud (1923–2016), representing about 50,000 photographs.

Finally, the Guimet Museum has a contemporary photographic archive that has been regularly enriched since the 2010s. For example, a recent acquisition of six prints by Pierre-Élie de Pibrac was made following the exhibition « Ephemeral Portrait of Japan » (September 2023–January 2024), dedicated to his recent work in the Japanese archipelago. The contemporary collection also includes photographs by Pascal Convert of the Buddhist

caves of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, since the destruction of the Great Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001.

We also hold works by Asian photographers, especially Japanese ones, such as the daguerreotypes of Takashi Arai, who worked in Fukushima Prefecture after the earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent nuclear disaster.

Our acquisition policy for photography is thus oriented both toward earlier periods—with particular attention to geographical areas underrepresented in the collections—and toward contemporary creation, this time with a focus on Asian artists

Are the photographs eligible for loans between museums in France and internationally?

As with other areas of its collection, the Guimet Museum readily loans photographs for exhibitions outside its walls. The museum also borrows works. For example, for the exhibition 'Silver Haikus,' the vast majority of the prints were borrowed from the Médiathèque du patrimoine et de la photographie, which received the entirety of Michael Kenna's work as a donation, regularly enriched over the course of his travels.

The exhibition devoted to Michael Kenna is entitled « Haikus d'argent » (Silver Haikus) Why this title? Are you the author of it?"

I did indeed propose this title in order to evoke the poetry of the artist's images, as he interprets the landscape with great talent. Michael Kenna has never sought to produce documentation, as he himself says. He does not aim to copy or record reality. On the contrary, he uses photography as a creative medium and seeks to bring out from the landscape things that cannot be perceived by the naked eye.

The poetic feeling is part of it. Moreover, Michael Kenna's photography has several affinities with haiku [1], which is an art of suggestion.

Kenna's photographs display remarkable conciseness while suggesting much beyond what is represented, just as haiku — constrained by their form (17 syllables) — are compelled to spark the viewer's imagination.

The 'silver' in the title refers to the very substance of the prints, since Michael Kenna works exclusively with the silver-gelatin process, which he greatly values. His work is truly shaped by this technique. He not only takes his photographs with an analog camera but also makes each of his prints himself. Kenna even goes so far as to retouch many of his prints by hand with ink. It is an almost artisanal process, requiring significant expertise.

But for Kenna, all these steps are above all ways of shaping his images in order to capture, as he puts it, the invisible. This element takes several forms in his work. The emotion stirred by the poetry of an image is one of them, but so too is abstraction. To achieve an abstract photograph, reality must be shaped until the elements of the landscape become pure forms, until the viewer can no longer recognize what is represented.

Ultimately, one could almost say that the viewer also participates in the making of Michael Kenna's images, given how important imagination is to him. He explains that he looks in the landscape for places akin to empty theater stages before the performance. Like the moment before the curtain rises, such places invite the viewer to imagine what is about to unfold.

"With this idea of emptiness and fullness, of black and white?"

Indeed, this is an aspect that is not present in the title of the exhibition but is present in the exhibition itself. It is one of the common denominators between Michael Kenna's photography and certain artistic traditions of East Asia—in this case, ink painting (shuimohua in China, sumukhwa in Korea, sumi-e in Japan). In many cases, the monochromy of this technique is coupled with a sophisticated quest for balance between emptiness and fullness, as in Michael Kenna's work, whose photographs are always in black and white.

The art of suggestion I mentioned earlier is also found in Japanese decorative arts, particularly lacquer work. Calligraphy is likewise a field of exploration for Michael Kenna, who often uses dark elements set against a light background to draw in the landscape a staff or an indecipherable text, whose rhythm and musicality nonetheless remain perceptible.

The connections between Michael Kenna's work and the arts of East Asia had never really been explored until now.

The Guimet Museum was the ideal place to do so.

Thanks to the collaboration of my fellow curators, I had the opportunity to select works from the collections to introduce the thematic sections of the exhibition. All sorts of materials are represented: porcelain, lacquer, bronzes, ink painting, calligraphy, and even scholars' rocks. Each work is displayed alongside a large-format print, in a kind of formal conversation evoking the theme of the section.

This thematic journey is divided into nine subsections grouped into three parts. The first presents photographs depicting a primordial nature, untouched by any human presence.

The second shows an inhabited nature, with the different ways in which we populate the landscape. Michael Kenna here focuses on the traces of human activity, but without ever photographing people.

The third part of the exhibition is devoted to what he calls the invisible and offers a progression toward abstraction. This final part is perhaps the most representative of Michael Kenna's talent for distilling reality—like an alchemist seeking to transform lead into gold.

One gets the impression that Japan is very present, that there is an almost intimate relationship between Japan, Japanese art and culture, and photography—whether in Michael Kenna's work or that of others.

There is, in any case, a very strong connection between Michael Kenna and Japan. It was the first Asian country he visited, in 1987, and he has returned there every year since, particularly in winter on the island of Hokkaido, which he loves for its snowy landscapes.

But it is true that Japanese art has greatly influenced European artists since the mid-19th century—and photographers are no exception. I am thinking in particular of the Pictorialists at the turn of the 20th century, such as Alfred Stieglitz, of whom Michael Kenna is in part an heir.

And perhaps also in the other direction?

Absolutely! In fact, in the prints and drawings gallery of the Japanese collections department at the Guimet Museum, there is currently a rotation of prints illustrating how the Japanese imagined the West in the past. Curated by my colleague Estelle Bauer, this display takes the opposite perspective of the 'Silver Haikus' exhibition, which shows photographs taken by a European artist in Asia.

She has selected works showing how Japanese artists represented Westerners living in Yokohama, or fantasized about Europe and North America in the 19th century. This rotation also illustrates how the rules of Western perspective codified by Brunelleschi during the Renaissance influenced Japanese artists as early as the 18th century, thereby transforming their way of representing space.

Michael Kenna draws much inspiration from Asian arts, and especially from Japanese art, because of all Asian countries, it is the one to which he feels closest.

When he first visited in 1987, invited by a Tokyo gallery that organized an exhibition of his work, he says he fell in love with Japanese culture and landscape. Since then, he has become attuned to its art, Zen Buddhism, and Shinto.

The latter is particularly present in his many photographs of torii, the large gates marking the entrance to Shinto shrines and symbolizing the passage from the world of the living to the world of spirits and gods. This idea appeals greatly to Michael Kenna, as does the presence of countless divinities in nature.

It is certain that Kenna has been profoundly touched by Japanese art and that it has reinforced his own artistic explorations. What is interesting is that, for him, this is not a conscious influence. He did not study Japanese art in order to then apply its methods. Rather, it is an affinity, a kinship between what he had been seeking to do since the 1970s and what he discovered in Japanese arts since he began visiting the country.

It is written somewhere in the very rich press kit [2] for the exhibition that the links between Michael Kenna's work and Asia have never been analyzed in their specificities.

Indeed, Michael Kenna's photographs are often exhibited on their own, with little context—on the one hand because they are not intended to document anything, but also because they possess great beauty, and this quality can quite stand on its own.

The photographs he has taken in Asia have been widely exhibited, but most often through a geographical prism, country by country: South Korea, India, China, etc.

Until now, there had been only a single general retrospective on Asia, organized by the Indian gallery Tasveer in 2013, but it was a small exhibition. What was missing was therefore a large-scale exhibition on this subject, as well as a publication exploring these connections in detail. That is what we wanted to achieve at the Guimet Museum and in the catalog, which notably includes contributions from Haely Chang, a specialist in the history of relations between photography and ink painting in East Asia.

On this subject, the podcast posted online by the Guimet Museum is interesting, as the artist comments on some of his photographs there.

This is something fairly recent, but at the Guimet Museum we like to hand the microphone to contemporary artists so they can speak directly to visitors. We did this in particular for the exhibition of Pierre-Élie de Pibrac's photographs in 2023–2024.

For « Haikus d'argent » it was especially important to give Michael Kenna a voice, in order to seek a balance between the narrative I wished to convey in the exhibition and his own vision of the works.

In each podcast episode, Michael Kenna tells visitors the anecdotes behind his photographs, explains what he was looking for, what moved him in a given landscape, or the journey of the image from its creation. The podcast is accessible via QR codes in the exhibition—so it can be listened to in front of the works—but also online [3].

You also speak of affinities between Michael Kenna's photographs and the arts of East Asia.

We have already mentioned Japanese poetry and ink painting, but there are other tangible connections between Michael Kenna's photography and the arts of East Asia. First of all, on the iconographic level.

His photographs indeed feature motifs that are very famous in the history of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese art—for example, mountains. The subsection of the exhibition dedicated to this motif is introduced by a painting by Wang Xuehao (18th–19th century). This work is displayed alongside an extraordinary photograph taken by Michael Kenna in the Huang Mountains in southeastern China.

This mountain range, famous for its beauty and the omnipresence of clouds drifting between its fantastic peaks, has inspired Chinese painters and poets for centuries. By wandering along its paths and photographing its mist-filled valleys, Michael Kenna has, in a sense, placed himself in the footsteps of Chinese artists of the past.

The affinities between Kenna's work and Asian arts also extend to certain compositional techniques. In Japanese decorative arts, and particularly lacquer work, no anecdotal scenes are depicted. Artists often show only fragments —traces of an activity, details that allow the viewer to imagine the action taking place around, before, or after.

For example, one subsection of the exhibition begins with a Japanese lacquer writing box in maki-e, executed by Honami Koetsu (1558–1637), which depicts only the prow of a boat loaded with bundles, cutting through the waves —nothing more.

There is no horizon, and no figures. But at the time of its creation, someone with even a little knowledge of Japanese literature would have recognized the season (autumn), the place (Lake Uji), and perhaps certain stories or poems linked to that site.

This work engages in a very interesting dialogue with Michael Kenna's photographs, which employ the same method of suggestion—with one difference: Michael Kenna does not appeal to the viewer's cultural background, but rather to their imagination.

One thinks of those ancient Chinese landscape paintings—mountains, in general—where a winding path is depicted, prompting one to wonder what lies at its end.

You are absolutely right. In Chinese 'mountain and water' painting, the artist composes the work so that the viewer can traverse it with their gaze, from the foreground to the background, and thus discover a multitude of successive landscapes.

This type of construction in a certain way encourages the participation of the person contemplating the work. Michael Kenna seeks

the same effect—he appeals to each viewer's subjectivity.

Finally, how did you come up with the idea for this exhibition devoted to the work of Michael Kenna, and do you have other upcoming projects for photography exhibitions?

The project for this exhibition goes back several years, before I took on responsibility for the photography collections. The idea gradually took shape. Michael Kenna came to the Guimet Museum to photograph works, and in 2018 he donated five prints to the museum, two of which are presented in the exhibition.

At the same time, he decided to bequeath his entire body of work to France. This exceptional event was announced at Paris Photo in 2022. The exhibition is thus both the result of prior exchanges with the artist and a celebration of this generous donation.

When I took up my position in 2023, I was fortunate to be entrusted right away with this project, with great freedom in how to present Michael Kenna's photographs.

Of course, it was essential to focus on his work in Asia, but the geographical link alone seemed insufficient. It was more interesting to develop a narrative around the style of the photographs themselves, in their connections with Asian arts, and thus with the collections of the Guimet Museum.

Another aspect that seemed essential to address was the many stages of Michael Kenna's process in moving from negative to finished work (contact sheet, test prints, final print, manual retouching). This aspect is rarely discussed for contemporary photographers, yet it is central to understanding what they do and to appreciating the extent of their expertise.

The exhibition devotes an entire section to this question, with numerous unpublished archives and a beautiful film by Richard Bonnet in which Michael Kenna explains his work in detail in the darkroom.

As for future projects, together with my colleague Cécile Dazord, curator of contemporary art, we are preparing an exhibition that will open on October 1 and run until January 12, 2026. It will present for the first time an extraordinary installation of nearly one thousand Polaroids by Nobuyoshi Araki, created over twenty-five years and recently donated to the museum by collector Stéphane André. Araki's work was the subject of a major retrospective at the Guimet Museum in 2016.

The 2025 exhibition will focus on a particular but central aspect of his work: instant-developing photography, better known under the Polaroid brand. Since the 1990s, this technique has enabled Araki to photograph his environment almost continuously, thus building a chaotic and poetic visual diary that makes full sense in its sheer mass.

The Guimet Museum also has research and conservation projects, including one devoted to the beginnings of photography in Japan. This project, called HikarIA [4], launched at the end of 2023 for three years and partly funded by the State under the France 2030 program, aims to highlight a remarkable collection of more than 20,000 early photographs of Japan by developing new artificial intelligence tools for automatic description and iconographic research in this collection, in partnership with the company TEKLIA.

[1] https://www.association-francophone-de-haiku.com/definition-du-haiku/

[2] https://www.guimet.fr/fr/espace-presse

[3] https://podcasts.nova.fr/radio-nova-michael-kenna-haikus-dargent-au-musee-guimet

[4] https://www.guimet.fr/fr/actualites-du-musee/le-projet-hikaria-laureat-de-france-2030

Édouard de Saint-Ours

Édouard de Saint-Ours is curator of the photographic collections at the Guimet Museum. He holds doctorates in art history (University of St Andrews) and contemporary history (University of Le Havre Normandy) and is a specialist in 19th-century photography in Asia. His thesis, defended in 2024, examines the role of photography during the early years of French colonialism in Indochina (1845-1880). He has also worked on the history of early color processes and on the Franco-British networks that contributed to the development of photography in the 1840s and 1850s.

CHEN Yo-Jung
Former French diplomat

Analysis Nouveaux Regards

The sphere of influence of « hanzi » in Asia.

By CHEN Yo-Jung

East Asia is a region full of nuances in all its aspects, yet sharing a culture that borrows, in whole or in part, from the script of the Han ethnicity (Hanzu 漢族/汉族) Chinese hanzi 漢字/汉字, Japanese kanji 漢字, Korean hanja 한자/漢字, and Vietnamese chữ nho 𡨸儒.

In this constellation of countries orbiting around the Chinese star for two millennia, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam each, in their own way and to varying degrees, share cultural traits borrowed from Chinese civilization, transmitted through its writing system.

This is true of Confucianism, Mahāyāna Buddhism महायान—the "Great Vehicle" (dacheng 大承 in Chinese, daijō 大乘 in Japanese)—as well as rice cultivation, administrative systems, and more.

Far from producing uniformity, each of these societies, on the contrary, asserted its own national identity, distinct from that of its neighboring empire.

Writing: the first cultural impacts

- **Korea**

The first impacts of Han culture on Korea appeared around the 3rd century BCE, under the Han dynasty 漢朝/汉朝 (206–220), with the introduction into the peninsula of the writing system locally known as hanja 한자.

At that time, the country was divided into three kingdoms: Goguryeo (37 BCE–668), Baekje (18 BCE–660), and Silla (57 BCE–935). The introduction of hanja gave the elites of these kingdoms access to Han culture and philosophy. The study of writing and of canonical Confucian texts led to the introduction of Chinese political and administrative systems into the country's public life. Under successive Korean dynasties, hanja became established as the official script and was omnipresent in all aspects of public life, while remaining more or less the privileged tool of the elite.

It was not until 1443 that, on the initiative of King Sejong, hangul 한글—a phonetic alphabet designed to popularize reading and writing in Korean—appeared. Hanja and hangul then coexisted in public life in Korea, even if, at first, the elite still tended to favor the use of Chinese characters (hanzi 漢字/汉字).

Today, the concern for simplifying writing has led to the extension of hangul, which has prevailed over the other system. In South Korea, hanja is still taught in schools but only in a limited way, while in North Korea, nationalism has dictated the complete disappearance of Chinese characters in favor of hangul, which in Pyongyang carries the name Josŏn'gŭl 조선글, in reference to the Joseon period (1392–1897), Korea's historical era (hangeul: 조선; hanja: 朝鮮).

- **Japan**

It was through the Korean peninsula that Han culture reached the shores of the Japanese archipelago around the 4th century. Braving the perils of crossing the Sea of Japan, Korean scholars and Buddhist monks—armed with their extensive knowledge of kanji (漢字 Han characters) and Han culture 漢文化/汉文化—came in great numbers to contribute their expertise to the building of the nascent island nation.

The arrival of kanji enabled Japan, which at that time had no writing system of its own, to gradually emerge from its oral culture and to begin, around the 6th century, to record its history in writing. Until then, only ancient accounts from traveler-adventurers—such as those living in the time of the Wei dynasty 魏 (3rd century)—provided the earliest written mentions of a people designated under the name Wa 倭 ("dwarf").

The Wa adopted kanji to transcribe religious texts, administrative documents, and historical chronicles. To popularize reading and writing, they had to adapt Han writing to the moraic language of the country. This process gave rise, around the 5th century, to kana 仮名, a simplified cursive form of kanji (for example, the Japanese morpheme あ derives from the Chinese character "an" 安).

Through multiple evolutions over the course of history, a writing system mixing kanji and kana became the norm in the archipelago. This system survived waves of Westernization (confined largely to the katakana カタカナ script), such as at the time of the Meiji Emperor's restoration in 1868 and the American occupation (1945–1952), and remains in use in everyday Japanese life today.

Whereas the use of kanji alongside kana continues to this day in Japan, the country stands apart from Korea, where Chinese characters are disappearing in favor of the national hangul script. This usage also differs from that of Vietnam, where Chinese characters were entirely replaced by chữ nôm, a script drawing on elements of Chinese characters but designed phonetically to adapt to the local language.

Rather than simply relying on Chinese characters, Japan succeeded in imposing its own writing system. This arrangement is called waseikango 和製漢語 (Japanese words composed of Chinese morphemes reused in Japan). These terms are written in kanji and pronounced according to onyomi 音読み (phonetic reading) coexisting with kunyomi 訓読み (semantic reading), which conveys the meaning (or not) of the character/kanji by borrowing one or several pronunciations from the Japanese spoken language. Some words belong to Sino-Japanese vocabulary, others do not exist in Chinese or have different meanings in the two languages, and still others were re-borrowed into Chinese.

The arrival of waseikango in China saw a particular boom in the 19th century when Japan modernized along Western lines. In their effort to assimilate Western culture, thought, and technology, the Japanese resorted to assembling Chinese characters to create new words or terms representing Western notions and ideas previously unknown in Asia: "democracy" 民主, "revolution" 革命, "communism" 共產主義, "philosophy" 哲學, "international" 國際, "atom" 原子, etc.

This new vocabulary, expressed in Chinese characters but of Japanese creation, was then adopted by Chinese scholars who lacked equivalent terms in their own language. At the time, the sinicized Manchu empire was in full decline, weakened by a corrupt feudal system and subjected to the occupation of Western powers. This situation drew many Chinese students to Japan, impressed by the scientific and technological advances of the empire of the rising sun (riben 日本).

The introduction into China of characters coined in Japan—such as the words "republic" 共和国, "telephone" 電話, "democracy" 民主主義, etc.—was not, however, to the liking of the more conservative elements of the Chinese elite of the time, whose pride was wounded by this reversal of the master–student relationship. Others, more liberal, encouraged it in order to promote the modernization of the country.

• **Vietnam**

Vietnam came into contact with the Chinese language and writing system around 111 BCE following the conquest of the northern part of the country by Han and later Mongol invaders. During its ten centuries of occupation, the Chinese administration introduced Chinese language and writing—locally called chữ nho 𡨸儒 ("scholarly script") or chữ hán 𡨸漢 ("Han script")—into every aspect of life in the country. Like the Japanese and Koreans, the Vietnamese had to adapt Chinese characters to their local language, which is phonologically different from Chinese.

The writing system thus created and developed locally, chữ nôm 字喃 ("southern script"), used both adapted Chinese characters and newly invented ones to transcribe the national pronunciation or quốc âm 國音 ("national sound"). From the 10th century onward, when Vietnam gained independence under the Ngô 吳 dynasty following its victory over the Sino-Mongols at the Battle of Bạch Đằng (1288), chữ nôm gradually became the country's standard script. Chữ nôm perfectly matched the emergence of a new sense of nationhood, serving as an ideal means of affirming a cultural identity distinct from that of China.

By combining, on the one hand, the borrowing of Chinese characters for their phonetic or semantic value, and, on the other, the creation of new characters to represent Vietnamese words without phonetic equivalents in Chinese, chữ nôm was better adapted to the local language and to its use in administration and literature. It therefore became established under successive Vietnamese dynasties from the 13th to the 18th centuries.

It was only around the 17th century that chữ nôm began to gradually give way to the emergence of quốc ngữ 國語 ("national language"). This new romanized writing system, based on the Latin alphabet, was introduced by European missionaries, among them the Jesuit priest Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1660).

The romanized quốc ngữ proved so practical and efficient compared with Chinese characters and chữ nôm that it was officially adopted as the national writing system by the French colonial authorities. Their preference for a script based on the Latin alphabet is easily understood. Its definitive adoption in 1954 by Vietnam, finally independent (1975), testifies to a desire to simplify literacy and facilitate the country's modernization.

Nevertheless, chữ nôm remains a symbol of Vietnamese national identity and cultural resilience in the face of Chinese domination. Today, this cultural heritage is the object of a national preservation effort, and numerous studies on it have been published. Among them is the important contribution of the father of the author of this article, a world-renowned expert in historical and cultural research on former Indochina. The author had the great fortune to work as his father's assistant on the production of one of his finest scholarly works on chữ nôm: A Collection of Chứ Nôm Scripts with the Pronunciation in Quốc Ngữ (Chen Ching-Ho, Keio University, 1970).

Influence of Confucianism and Buddhism

The introduction of Chinese characters inevitably brought with it, in each of the three countries concerned, borrowings from the culture, thought, religion, and political and administrative system of their great neighbor.

More than two centuries of Western influence in this part of the world, as well as decades of Eastern communism hostile to Confucian teachings, have not erased—neither in China nor in Vietnam—the deep imprint left by Confucianism on the societies of this sphere under the influence of Chinese characters.

It was through Chinese characters, but also through Sanskrit writing, that Mahāyāna Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam. While adapting to local social customs, Buddhism often found itself in competition with Confucian doctrine for the favor of the country's political leaders. Yet the two currents of thought ultimately coexisted within the societies of all three countries.

Living at the crossroads of this sphere of hanzi and the heritage of Confucian thought, the author himself experienced within his own family scenes that were at times harmonious, at times conflictual, between a Chinese father (from Taiwan), a Vietnamese mother, and a Japanese wife. Each stubbornly adhered to their own interpretation of the family values and filial piety preached by the thinker of the 5th century BCE.

Matters became even more complicated when they were mixed with the Western Christian

values of the brother and sisters, who had respectively become French and American.

• **Korea**

The first of the three countries to adopt Chinese characters, under the local name hanja, Korea embraced Confucianism during China's Han dynasty. Becoming the country's doctrine, particularly between the 12th and 17th centuries, Chinese thought structured Korean society in terms of family hierarchy, education, and bureaucracy. The Confucian canonical texts were at the heart of Korean education and thus profoundly influenced the society of this country. There was also a strong dose of Confucianism in the administrative structures, modeled on those of China.

Buddhism, which arrived in Korea via China in the 4th century, influenced the art, architecture, and thought of the country. Chinese Buddhist schools such as chan 禪 (seon in Korean, zen in Japanese) left a deep imprint on Korean spirituality.

Despite periods of conflict—such as during the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), when Confucianism was elevated to the status of state doctrine to the detriment of Buddhism—the two currents of thought and belief managed to coexist. This coexistence continues today in the daily lives of Koreans, who participate without contradiction in both Buddhist and Confucian practices.

• **Japan**

The introduction of Chinese characters into Japan was preceded by the importation, via Korea, of rice cultivation and the craft of working bronze and iron between the 3rd and 6th centuries BCE. It was likely through Korean scholars that Chinese characters (kanji in Japanese) were introduced into the archipelago, opening up to the Japanese elite an entire intellectual horizon ranging from Buddhist texts to administrative documents and historical chronicles of Chinese origin.

The Chinese political and administrative system, as well as Confucianism and Buddhism, after multiple adaptations, remained part of Japan's national life until the 19th century.

Introduced into Japan around the year 552 by the Koreans, Buddhism initially had to struggle against the dominance of Shintoism (shintō 神道, or the "way of the gods"), a local shamanistic practice, in order to gain a foothold among the country's ruling elite. It was only from the Nara period, around the year 750, that Emperor Shōmu elevated Buddhism to the rank of state religion, a status it retained until the country's Western modernization beginning in 1868.

In that year, with the Meiji Emperor's restoration, marking the end of the Tokugawa shogunate and the return of state power to the emperor, Japan definitively abandoned the Chinese system—its national model for twenty centuries—to transform itself into a modern Western-style monarchy. While the samurai (侍) were still immersed in Chinese classics such as the Analects (Lunyu 論語, or Dialogues with Confucius) on the eve of this restoration, the Japanese empire turned its back overnight on Chinese cultural and political influence in order to Westernize at breakneck speed. Confucianism was relegated to the background, and Buddhism gave way to Shintoism, which now became the state religion.

It was only in 1952, in the aftermath of Japan's military defeat and its rebirth as a modern democracy, that Buddhism regained a respectable place alongside other religious beliefs. Shintoism then lost its status as state religion, even though it continued to be practiced privately by the imperial family and by more than 90 million Japanese. As for Confucianism—often at odds with the Western modernity shaping today's social norms and values—it has practically disappeared from the forefront of everyday life in contemporary Japan, though traces remain, as seen for example in the enduring Japanese attachment to respect for elders.

• **Vietnam**

Unlike Korea and Japan, which were directly influenced by Chinese culture, Vietnam stands at a crossroads where Chinese culture, coming from the north, met Indian culture, coming from the west (the kingdom of Champa). From China, particularly through more than a millennium of Chinese domination (111 BCE to 969 CE), Vietnam absorbed not only Chinese characters but also, through them, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, as well as the Chinese administrative system, architecture, and agricultural practices. From the west also came Buddhism, Hinduism, and maritime trade. Indian culture, with Sanskrit writing, overlaid what Vietnam had inherited from Chinese culture.

The Chinese and Indian currents blended together to produce a unique culture and a complex cultural identity that nevertheless managed to preserve local traditions.

In particular, Confucianism, introduced as early as the 2nd century BCE under Han domination, profoundly marked Vietnamese culture and society, becoming the ideological foundation of the state from the 13th century onward. Ironically, it was upon regaining independence from China that Vietnam truly integrated Chinese thought into the organization of the state and society as a whole.

Since then, Confucianism has penetrated every aspect of national life—from Vietnam's administrative and political system to its social and family values. These values, preached by the Confucian school of thought, remain relevant in contemporary Vietnamese society despite the influence of Western culture under French colonization and despite the current communist regime.

The Chinese administrative system, for its part, persisted in Vietnam until the end of the Second World War. By way of illustration: even under French colonial rule and Japanese military occupation in the 1930s–1940s, the author's maternal grandfather served at the court of the last emperors of the Nguyễn dynasty (1802–1945) in the very Chinese role of jianyi daifu 諫議大夫 (Imperial Counsellor).

Buddhism entered Vietnam from the north (China) and from the west (India) via Chinese and Indian monks, and coexisted with Confucianism and Taoism throughout Vietnam's history. After Vietnam gained independence from China in the 10th century, Buddhism experienced a period of particular flourishing, becoming the state religion. It shaped art, architecture, and education, and inspired a wave of pagoda constructions ordered by successive emperors.

In the 15th century, the rise of Confucianism, which became the country's dominant ideology, relegated Buddhism to a secondary role. Despite this decline, Buddhism, already deeply rooted in popular life, adapted by incorporating more Taoist practices and local beliefs. From an imported religion, Buddhism evolved to become a pillar of the country's cultural identity. Despite various restrictions under French colonization and its subjection to state control under today's communist regime, it remains an essential religion in the lives of the Vietnamese people.

Relations with China

Despite a profound assimilation of Chinese culture over a period spanning more than twenty centuries, the three countries that borrowed Chinese characters nonetheless remarkably succeeded in protecting themselves from Chinese domination, each managing to preserve a national identity distinct from that of their giant neighbor.

That said, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam remained tributary states of successive Chinese dynasties for more than two millennia.

The Chinese emperor was considered the Son of Heaven (Tianzi 天子) and believed to rule over everything that exists "under Heaven" (tianxia 天下). It therefore seemed natural that all countries situated outside the Chinese empire (including, in principle, Europe) were regarded as subjects of His Celestial Majesty. His vassals were obliged to periodically present their submission to the Son of Heaven and to offer him gifts in exchange for diplomatic recognition, trade rights, and various favors—and, above all, for peace with this threatening empire. All the more reason why the peripheral countries that had benefited from Chinese cultural influence submitted to this ritual.

While outwardly submitting to Chinese authority as vassal and tributary states, the Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese kingdoms at the same time made constant efforts to assert their own national identity and political independence vis-à-vis China. Each in its own way maintained special relations with China without succumbing to outright political and cultural subjugation.

It is interesting to note that in their effort to assimilate the Han Chinese system, these three countries applied within their own borders the notion of tianxia, each being under the reign of its own emperor or Son of Heaven. In Japan, for example, the unification of the country in 1590 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, after decades of internal wars between rival feudal clans, took the Japanese name of the "universalization" of tenka 天下 (the world).

Nowadays...

In the first quarter of the 21st century, the three former tributary states continue to orbit—though in a different way—around a "central empire" that has once again become a global military and economic power. Instead of the unconditional cultural adherence of the past,

there now prevails a general mistrust toward the rising communist giant. At the same time, the three countries, like many others around the world, cannot avoid maintaining a close economic relationship with what is now the world's second-largest economy.

Even though these countries have not forgotten the Chinese cultural heritage upon which their respective nations were built, it is regrettable that China—whose regime inspires fear and suspicion—has not been able to capitalize on this sense of belonging to a shared culture.

As for South Korea, despite ideological and geopolitical rivalry, exchanges do take place between the two countries, carried along by the "Korean Wave" (hallyu 한류 in hangul, 韓流 in hanja), with K-pop embraced by the younger generation and Korean television dramas becoming very popular in China.

By contrast, resentment from 35 years of Japanese colonization was so strong that Japanese culture (language, songs, cinema, manga, etc.) remained banned in South Korea between 1945 and 1998.

For Vietnam, China has historically always been both an object of cultural admiration and of political suspicion—at once a model and a threat. After a thousand years under Chinese domination, independent Vietnam experienced periods of sovereignty that were at times real, at times nominal (such as under French colonization), until the end of the Second World War.

As in Korea's case, a century of French domination did not succeed in erasing local culture nor what remained of Chinese cultural influence in Vietnam. To be sure, locally adapted Chinese characters, chữ nôm, were replaced by the romanized script now in use. But Buddhism continues to occupy a central place, while Confucianism still leaves its mark on contemporary Vietnamese society.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan, for its part, endeavored to erase its Chinese cultural heritage as if it were a shameful burden. Yet the traces from its close neighbor—marked by Buddhism and Confucianism, among others—have nonetheless remained deeply rooted in Japanese society to this day.

CHEN Yo-Jung

Born in Taiwan in 1947, CHEN Yo-Jung grew up in Vietnam and Hong Kong. He completed his higher education in Japan and then served for 23 years at the French Embassy in Tokyo as press attaché and translator-interpreter. Naturalized as a French citizen in 1981, Chen Yo-Jung became a permanent civil servant at the Quai d'Orsay in 1994. He served as deputy consul/press advisor in several French diplomatic and consular posts, including Tokyo, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Singapore, and Beijing, before retiring to Japan in 2012.

ZHANG Zhulin
Journalist for Courrier International

Interview Nouveaux Regards

Amid a crisis of confidence, the new face of Chinese consumption.

Interviewed by Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet

Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet : As the first half of 2025 comes to a close, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Chinese consumer market has settled into a new reality characterized by single-digit consumption growth. Citing the lack of confidence among Chinese consumers and their price-conscious behavior, market analysts continue to raise a series of complex questions: Have the pockets of growth narrowed? Has the decline in confidence dampened spending intentions? Based on what you have observed, how would you respond to these questions?

Zhang Zhulin : Indeed, many economic experts are questioning the narrowing of China's growth pockets, even though the world's second-largest economy delivered an encouraging growth rate of 5.3% in the first half of the year, better than various forecasts.

While Beijing targets consumption as one of its main economic levers, the data published by the Bank of China point to another trend: a rather spectacular increase in savings. In the first half of 2025, household deposit balances exceeded 162.202 trillion yuan, a rise of 7.4%, or 10.7 trillion yuan more than at the beginning of the year.

In sharp contrast to the continued expansion of savings, deposit interest rates are currently experiencing a new cycle of decline. This indicates that the population is more inclined to save than to invest or consume, in order to prepare for future economic uncertainties. These figures also address your second question.

Yes, the decline in confidence is already having a strong impact on household and corporate spending.

Let us look at the PMI indexes, an important economic indicator used to measure economic health. In July, the three main PMI indexes—for the manufacturing, construction, and services sectors—experienced a significant decline. The manufacturing index fell for the fourth consecutive month, to 49.3, below the 50 threshold, indicating a contraction in the sector's activity.

Furthermore, the new orders index in this sector dropped to 49.4%, a decrease of 0.8% compared to the previous month (June), while new export orders also continued to contract (47.1%), reflecting a simultaneous weakening of both domestic and external demand.

Even though Beijing has launched a series of measures aimed at boosting spending—such as subsidies for the renewal of equipment and consumer goods, or reduced down payments for real estate purchases—these do not resolve the root of the problem: weak wage income and insufficient social protection. In 2022, Chinese wage income accounted for only 24% of GDP. This percentage is not only far behind the U.S. level of nearly 57%, but also below that of countries with development levels comparable to China (around 40%).

In addition, the population was traumatized by the drastic handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, which undoubtedly had psychological consequences. Restoring confidence will take time. In the meantime, this lack of confidence—political as well as economic—has dragged the Chinese economy into a vicious circle. This may explain why, in the post-Covid period, there has been no "consumption rebound" (baofuxing xiaofei 报复性消费), so eagerly awaited by the Chinese authorities.

Announcing a radical shift, Premier Li Qiang stated in his work report before the "Two Sessions" (Liang hui 两会) that the absolute priority for 2025 would be to "vigorously stimulate consumption," acknowledging that the national economy was slowing down, with a persistent disinflationary trend that continues to weigh heavily on China's economy.

Do you think the Chinese authorities will be able, or have the capacity, to equip themselves with the means to achieve this ambitious goal—especially in the context of the near decoupling that has begun on both sides between China and the United States, further aggravated by the tariff hikes imposed by U.S. authorities on Chinese products (automobiles, electronics, steel, aluminum, to name only the main ones)?

On several occasions, China's Prime Minister Li Qiang has expressed the central government's determination to "promote domestic demand and stimulate consumption."

On April 15, during a meeting with businesses in Beijing, Li Qiang once again emphasized this goal. The official document mentioned an increase in the minimum wage. Yet, paradoxically, in many sectors, employees are instead complaining of a decline in their pay. Chinese President Xi Jinping himself has repeatedly stated over the past few years that what worries him most is "this segment of the population in difficulty."

In March, when Beijing announced a monthly increase of 20 yuan (€2.44) in pensions for elderly rural farmers, the paltry amount was ridiculed by public opinion. For example, in Hubei Province, in the east-central part of the country, this monthly pension was 172 yuan, barely €21. "With 192 yuan, that's enough for a farmer to enjoy a hotpot,"—this flood of sarcastic remarks on social media led to a total censorship of online comments.

Many Chinese fear that their Premier's promise will not be adequately fulfilled, as the saying goes: "a lot of thunder but little rain" (雷声大雨点小)—in other words, plenty of words but little action. Yet Beijing has clearly indicated that 300 billion yuan in special government bonds would be allocated to subsidizing the renewal of private goods, such as household appliances and automobiles. This enormous figure at first glance is small for a country whose annual GDP stands at 140 trillion yuan.

It should not be forgotten that a significant portion of the Chinese population has extremely weak purchasing power: 600 million people have an average monthly income of only about 1,000 yuan (€120).

This revelation, made in 2020 by then-Prime Minister Li Keqiang (since sidelined by the leadership and deceased), shocked public opinion. Even the Chinese themselves were not fully aware of this "invisible" population. In the U.S.–China trade war, as you mentioned, the Chinese government and state media have advanced the idea of the Chinese people's "resilience," which implies that they can endure a far more severe economic situation without the risk of triggering major social movements, as might happen in the West, should the country engage in a long-term trade war.

While Beijing touts this quality as an asset, does it not mean that this "top priority," according to Li Qiang, could give way to other overriding objectives? As Lew Mon-hung, a Hong Kong entrepreneur often described as "pro-Beijing," has said about China's economic crisis: "the root of the problem is first and foremost political."

According to a study by the international strategy consulting firm McKinsey, the cautious attitude that persists among Chinese consumers is largely driven by their fears and uncertainties regarding the economic and financial outlook—particularly concerning job security and the sharp depreciation

of their real estate assets, in which the population has invested heavily in recent years as part of a speculative approach. Do you share the same analysis?

The discrepancy between official economic data and the figures cited by economists is, at times, quite striking. In August 2023, when the youth unemployment rate for those aged 16–24 climbed to 21.3%, Chinese authorities decided to suspend the publication of unemployment rates by age group. Yet, according to Zhang Dandan, associate professor of economics at the National School of Development at Peking University, the real youth unemployment rate stood at 46.3%. As for the employment rate of Chinese university graduates in 2024, official figures claim it was 56%, but according to Ding Xueliang, emeritus professor at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, at least 60 to 70% of former students who graduated between 2020 and 2024 failed to find a job—already an "army of 30 million" unemployed.

The same applies to economic growth. In December 2018, one year before COVID, when China's economy was no longer growing at double digits, the National Bureau of Statistics still reported GDP growth of 6.5%.

Yet in a speech, Xiang Songzuo, deputy director of the International Monetary Research Center at Renmin University in Beijing and former chief economist of the Agricultural Bank of China, revealed that an estimate by "a group of researchers from a top-level institution" put growth at a shockingly low 1.67%. This information was, of course, censored in China.

Regarding job security, beyond the large waves of layoffs in recent years that have hit many sectors, employees constantly face an endemic issue: once past the "35-year threshold" (35 岁门槛), finding a job becomes nearly impossible.

This age-based discrimination particularly affects qualified workers. It helps explain, in part, why the number of delivery workers and ride-hailing drivers has continued to climb, surpassing 10 million and 7.5 million, respectively, in 2025—despite the lack of social protection in these jobs.

Poorly paid and unstable, these freelance professions, described by Beijing as "flexible employment" (灵活就业), have become the largest "reservoirs" of the unemployed, now absorbing over 200 million workers—about one-third of the labor force. And as many media outlets, including official ones, note, these "reservoirs" are now saturated.

By the end of 2024, a McKinsey survey revealed that nearly one in two Chinese urban residents considered the job market situation to be serious. .As for the real estate industry, once one of the pillars of economic development, it has turned into a true burden. Observers believe it will take five to ten years to recover. This ailing industry is exemplified by the liquidation of the Evergrande group, one of China's largest property developers. Its debts, amounting to 2.4 trillion yuan—2% of GDP in 2020—are roughly equivalent to Portugal's public debt. Its financial collapse has upended the sector, leaving behind "unfinished buildings" scattered across China.

These structures, estimated at more than 20 million apartments, affect millions of homeowners.

Many of them, having purchased properties off-plan, must continue repaying bank loans for apartments they cannot even move into. The problem is that Evergrande is not the only giant in distress. Country Garden, another major player, is also in dire straits. What are the consequences for families who invested in vain? The scenario is unimaginable.

Even though confidence remains low and sentiment levels vary among different groups of Chinese consumers, they appear to be adapting their consumption behaviors to today's tougher economic environment. What do you think?

Yes, Chinese consumers are inevitably adapting — they don't really have much choice. In a WeChat group, a man from Hangzhou who used to work at a major company lamented that, while he could previously go to Starbucks every day, he now has to settle for Luckin Coffee, a cheaper local chain.

The Chinese call this shift in consumption habits toward lower-end products « consumption downgrade » (消费降级).

In the restaurant industry, a vicious cycle seems to have taken hold. A lack of confidence in the economic future, combined with falling wages, has led to a change in consumption patterns: cheaper options. In this context, many restaurant owners face only two choices: either lower their prices or shut down.

This situation may explain why, over the past two years, countless 2-yuan (0.24-euro) bakeries have sprung up, hotpot restaurants now offer dishes for just 9.9 yuan, and once-popular high-end restaurants are closing one after another. In 2024 alone, nearly three million restaurants shut down — an average of 8,000 business closures every single day. These numbers are staggering.

This relentless race to the bottom on prices, described by some observers with the expression "drinking poison to quench one's thirst," risks leading to a lose-lose dead end. Recently, even consumers reacted strongly to the significant price cuts in medicines. In 2024, through "centralized procurement" (集中采购), Chinese authorities succeeded in reducing the prices of 435 listed drugs.

Some saw their prices slashed by 90%. On the surface, this seems like good news for the population. However, even serious newspapers such as Xin Jingbao have called for an end to this price war, warning that it risks undermining the effectiveness of the products being sold.

More recently, the automobile sector — considered by the Chinese government as one of the pillars of economic growth — has also been dragged into this price competition amid sluggish consumer demand.

Chinese experts have warned of disastrous consequences for the industry. This fear has already materialized in the home appliance sector. On August 5, Dong Mingzhu, chairwoman of Gree Electric, denounced this price-driven war, accusing companies in her sector of no longer striving for technological advancement but instead deceiving consumers with attractive prices.

When a country enters deflation, one of the solutions is to stimulate domestic demand. Recently, Chinese authorities have repeatedly reminded economic sectors to put an end to this price competition so as not to sink deeper into the trap of deflation, but so far they do not seem to have succeeded in curbing the phenomenon. In addition, Beijing will also have to address the problem of overcapacity.

Can we say that Chinese consumers are increasingly basing their purchasing decisions on "hard" criteria such as the value of their personal assets or their income — which, moreover, has seen significant declines in wages — rather than on "soft" criteria such as their level of confidence?

That's correct. In fact, the term ping ti (平替, affordable product alternatives) has become one of the most popular new expressions among young Chinese in recent times. Viewed from the West, ping ti are copies of luxury products that replicate high-end designs and finishes. For Chinese consumers, it is about finding better value for money. More importantly, this is a new kind of imitation — without logos — but offering the same quality as luxury brands.

China Youth Daily has described this rush toward ping ti among young consumers as a "more relaxed consumption choice." Of course, the Chinese are still attracted to major international brands, but they do not want to plunge themselves into financial difficulties. A report by eMarketer showed that nearly 71% of Gen Z preferred to buy the ping ti versions of luxury brands.

This explains the meteoric success of brands like Shein. Ping ti is not limited to clothing — its scope has expanded to snacks, coffee, home appliances, and even automobiles. The significant improvement in the quality and design of "Made in China" products — with some Chinese goods such as smartphones and electric vehicles now occupying leading positions globally — is an important factor in this shift in consumption patterns.

According to McKinsey, Chinese consumers are projecting zero growth in the share of consumption in their income, although this represents a slight improvement compared to the -0.5% decline observed previously.

These positive indicators, while promising, are tempered by modest expectations for household income growth, which Chinese consumers forecast to average 1.4% in 2025, compared to 2.5% in 2024. Do the results of this study seem consistent with what you yourself have observed?

Yes, absolutely. The figures from the tourism sector are telling. During the four-day May 1 holiday, 314 million trips were recorded — a sharp increase, 61% higher than in 2019. While the number of travelers rose significantly, spending per person amounted to only 574 yuan, lower than the 603 yuan recorded in 2019.

Moreover, the results of May 2025 are partly the outcome of efforts by many local governments that distributed tourism vouchers to attract visitors. For example, Qinghai Province (in the west) spent 30 million yuan, while Henan Province (in central China) allocated more than

double that amount to tourism, with a budget of 68 million yuan.

Data published by Meituan, a company specializing in restaurant bookings and food delivery, showed a 23% year-on-year drop in average customer spending. Meanwhile, Feizhu (Fliggy), a Chinese travel booking site, confirmed that the number of "backpacker-type" travelers — taking overnight trains with hard seats and staying in youth hostel dormitories — surged by 187% in a single year. These are the new characteristics of consumption in China today: the Chinese are willing to spend, but they are more price-conscious than ever.

ZHANG Zhulin

ZHANG Zhulin, journalist at Courrier International, member of the editorial board of Asia Magazine, author of the book "La société de surveillance made in China" (The Surveillance Society Made in China), published by Éditions de l'Aube..

Yaron Herman

Pianist, composer, and author
Young Leader France-China 2013

Young Leader's Voice

« I believe we all have something unique, and creativity is there so we can express it. »

Interviewed by Thomas Mulhaupt and Agathe Gravière

Fondation France-Asie: Yaron Herman, you are a Young Leader from the very first France-China class of 2013, you are an internationally renowned jazz pianist, and you are preparing for 2026 a new album, Floating, with a quartet and a tour that will notably pass through Asia.

What place does this new project hold in the entirety of your career?

Yaron Herman : This project is the logical continuation of the previous ones because it brings together musicians with whom I have already collaborated in the past, notably Émile Parisien, and it reflects a desire to explore other registers.

In my discography, I have already recorded albums solo, in trio, in quartet, but also with larger ensembles. So, it was the right time to try new things and to venture into musical worlds that can be akin to world music, hence the presence of an Indian influence in the form of percussion, tablas, traditional music. I wanted to seek out and draw from other musical traditions for inspiration.

Around the age of 16, you discovered your instrument while you were destined for an entirely different career, namely basketball, which you practiced at a high level. How do you explain this choice and how did you experience this shift from a sporting passion to music?

The transition happened through a meeting with a teacher who had an exceptional and, to my knowledge, unique methodology. He relied on disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics, and psychology. It wasn't a traditional conservatory curriculum. Thanks to this person, I became passionate and fascinated by the idea that we can be more creative than we think.

What was your relationship to music when you were younger, and why did you choose the piano?

When I was younger, I mostly listened to whatever was playing on the radio. I wasn't immersed in a culture of classical music. Nobody had introduced me to it, so my musical culture was rather general, even if I was sensitive to music.

I would say that I found my instrument, the piano, somewhat by chance.

I believe we all have something unique, and creativity is there so that we can express it. I discovered that through the piano.

Some mathematicians highlight this mysterious aspect whereby the resolution of a problem can be elegant because there are several paths. Is music also a vector of beauty through the search for a form of balance, of accuracy?

Yes, it's a bit the same thing in music,
we can compare creativity to a capacity to produce possibilities. Broadly speaking, mathematics is the play of the infinite. Music combines both play and possibilities, two things that are a priori associated with creativity, but which are unfortunately very little associated with mathematics.

For example, how many melodies can one play with three notes, that is, by applying a productive constraint? With three notes, how many melodies can be made without repeating them? The answer is six possibilities. You can make six melodies with three notes. That is already a beginning of creativity, and if we add four notes, five notes, it becomes exponential.

If we add changes in range, dynamics, rhythm, sound, or instrument, the horizon expands before us without needing to deploy extraordinary creative means. The power of constraint is sometimes more important than anything else.

That said, for me the beauty of music remains mysterious. And I think mystery is essential to life because, the day we know everything, we stop marveling. Mystery, by its very nature, draws all its power from the fact that it cannot be solved, and it is the same with music. You have to live it!

And in this sense, how do you prepare for an improvisation concert? Do you give yourself prior constraints?

I think context determines a lot of parameters. When I am alone, I am freer to make choices without there being "direct repercussions" on other musicians. In that case, I am the only one who sets the limits of the game. So, I try to keep a minimum of things predefined and to go on stage with almost a blank slate. Then, from the first note, I try to build with the tools I have.

Improvisation cannot be improvised. An improviser spends his days trying to imagine new ways to play, to create stories.

We are like architects, responsible at once for the fundamental structure and for the harmony of the edifice we want to build. All of this in real time.

You said that with jazz you sought to reach a state where you disappear. How would you describe this sensation of fullness present in music, but also sometimes in sport?

It's a sensation we all know, when we stop thinking in front of a sunset, when we are truly in love, time flies and we don't notice it passing. As soon as we notice this singular state, we are already outside of it. This very particular feeling of flow is not intellectual, it is as magical as it is volatile.

And so, what is your relationship with time? How do you perceive time when you play?

If everything is working well, I have no sense of time. The goal is for time to disappear so that there is only an extended present moment. It may sound crazy, but it is an attempt to stretch the present moment.

The only temporal reference I have is the intuition I have developed. When I am on stage, I ask myself several questions: is it the moment to change? Is it too long? Am I bored or is the audience bored? All these inner dialogues allow me to situate myself in time intuitively.

This way I can feel if the audience is listening attentively or if it's an empty silence, a full silence... An "active" listening from the audience can really change the way the music manifests. In an improvised music concert, a lot is drawn from silence, it is part of the mystery. It may seem a bit metaphysical, but we experience it every day when we talk with someone—we immediately sense the quality of their listening.

Outside of your musical role models, are there personalities who serve as sources of inspiration or motivation for you?

I have a particular affinity with sports, not so much for the people as "performers" in their field, but for the mindset. I have great respect for that "mindset" in sports; I admire Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant for his "mamba mentality." I believe that to accomplish exceptional things,

sometimes you have to deploy extreme measures, especially when human beings' natural tendency is not necessarily to take the path of greatest resistance.

Regarding your experience in the France-China Young Leaders program in 2013, what memories do you keep and what did the program bring you?

I have exceptional memories of those few days thanks to the quality of the people, the richness of the encounters, the discussions. Spending time together exchanging allowed me to discover other ways of conceiving things, and I consider myself lucky to have been able to represent France.

I am proud to have been included in this wonderful list of people who are accomplishing themselves in various fields. Being able to meet and share our respective passions was moving for me. And afterwards, I was able to maintain relationships with several members of the Young Leaders and the Foundation, both in China and in France. Some of them have become friends, very close in some cases.

For your project Floating, you are forming a quartet notably with Émile Parisien, Prabhu Edouard, and Linda May Han Oh. It is a musical and entrepreneurial project between several personalities with different cultures, in this case Asian. How do you integrate the cultural differences that each brings to the table?

They are very experienced musicians, who have toured extensively and who have lived in Europe and the United States for a number of years. So, there aren't many adjustments to be made regarding communication. The richness comes from playing and sharing something together, where each brings their background, their culture, their knowledge, their know-how, their ideas, allowing us to find a common language. Words are not necessarily that important, because we can communicate without speaking, through glances, by listening, by playing.

Starting in September 2025, you will take on the role of jazz professor at the École Normale de Musique de Paris.
What place does transmission, from teacher to student, hold in your career?

The teaching profession is unfortunately not valued enough in society, and transmission seems to me a duty, when one has things to transmit. At my very first lesson, my teacher told me that he could teach me to play like any musician in any style, but above all he wanted to teach me how to learn. I want to carry on this tradition. I wrote a book on creativity, entitled Le déclic créatif, which has also been translated into Japanese. It reflects this desire for transmission that drives me, to make artists' creative keys accessible to everyone.

Finally, what is your opinion on the future of cultural relations between France and Asia, particularly in music?

It is a field that deserves to be further developed. In my opinion, there aren't enough exchanges between France and Asia at this stage, as there are, for example, between France and the United States. Both institutionally and academically, I believe many things still need to be created, especially for jazz. Developing and maintaining cultural bridges between France and Asia would be an exceptional opportunity for musicians and would allow joint projects to emerge.

A piece to listen to after reading your interview?

No surprises, Album Follow the White Rabbit.

Yaron Herman

Renowned for his unique approach to improvisation, Yaron HERMAN is a pianist and composer at the crossroads of jazz, classical and contemporary music. Passionate about learning and creativity, he developed his own style at an early age, combining virtuosity, spontaneity and a deep melodic sensitivity. The winner of numerous prestigious awards, he notably won the 2008 Victoire du Jazz in the Revelation of the Year category and the Adami Jazz Talent Award. He has been president of the jury for the Montreux Jazz Festival piano competition and a mentor at the Montreux Jazz Academy. He has performed at the most prestigious festivals and concert halls in Europe, the United States, and Asia, captivating audiences with his inspired playing and unique performances.

The France-Asia Foundation's Young Leaders program brings together around 30 prominent figures from France and the Asian country represented by each of the Foundation's "chapter countries" every year. Aged under 45, these individuals are set to play an important role in their countries and in Franco-Asian and international relations. The program includes discussion sessions on current events in both countries, meetings with leading figures, and visits to industrial sites or places of political and cultural importance in the country.

FONDATION
FRANCE-ASIE

Fonds de préfiguration

The Fondation France-Asie is an independent foundation dedicated to relations between France and Asian countries.

Created in 2023, the France-Asia Foundation promotes exchanges between French and Asian civil societies. It encourages dialogue and the development of new partnerships between France and Asian countries, in the service of shared values of friendship between peoples, humanism, co-development and peace.

15 rue de la Bûcherie
75005 Paris
France

www.fondationfranceasie.org

Devenir contributeur, contacter :
jean-raphael.peytregnet@fondationfranceasie.org

ISSN 3077-0556