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**Note Gérard de la Villesbrunne to the Foreign
Minister, 'New Interest of Western Diplomacy
towards China: Hopes and Illusions'**

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Summary:

The French Consul General in Hong Kong notes a spike in China's diplomatic activities with Western Europe, Japan, and the U.S., but concludes that China, "still concerned by internal questions, does not seem to be willing to respond to the openings of non-communist countries with as much enthusiasm as hoped for in the West."

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Gérard de la Villesbrunne

French General Consul in Hong Kong

to

His Excellency the Foreign Minister

Asia-Oceania Department

New interest of Western diplomacy towards China: hopes and illusions

The perspective of the end of the active phase of the Cultural Revolution, and an international détente in South-East Asia that could allow for the peaceful settlement of the Vietnamese problem, has pushed certain Western countries to pursue a policy of 'open arms' towards Communist China. The Italian government, for domestic reasons, is on the verge of recognizing the Beijing regime. According to the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Brussels should also follow suit soon. For its part, Canada, which already has important trade exchanges with China, has been considering for the last few months the possibility of a formal recognition of the Beijing government.

This spike in diplomatic activity is accompanied by a certain thaw in the Chinese policy of the great powers that have direct interests in Asia. Thus, during the Japan-America conference held from the 24th to the 26th January in Santa Barbara (California), Americans and Japanese seemed hopeful that tensions with Beijing could be lowered, and they reached an agreement on the means to use to renew contacts with Communist China (cultural exchanges, freedom of movement of private citizens, ending the embargo of continental China). Admittedly, President Nixon did find it necessary to cut short the rumors, which suggested his intention of pursuing a more flexible policy towards Beijing, by claiming on 27th January during a press conference that the United States was not willing to let China join the United Nations. But, he did not exclude a change of attitude from his government in the future, if Beijing changed its own policies.

In Japan, the 'thaw' is even clearer amongst political leaders. Under the pressure of the opposition, especially the Socialist Party, M. Sato was compelled to make certain declarations in front of the Japanese Diet on 27th January. Stating his hope that China would relax its positions in the future, he expressed his support for an 'open door' policy towards Beijing. Observers noted that, for the first time, the Japanese Prime Minister abstained from referring to the need to treat political and economic questions separately when talking about China. Tokyo's review of its Chinese policy will in all likelihood be the main theme of discussion during the meeting of Japanese diplomats, which will take place in Hong Kong on the 13th and 14th February.

All this diplomatic agitation even found an echo in the Philippines: President Marcos, speaking to the Congress on 27th January, made a plea in favor of 'peaceful co-existence' with China in the perspective of a withdrawal of American forces from the Asian continent.

Speculation is rife in Hong Kong, where the press is happy to give excessive attention to any sign of thaw observed in the attitude of non-communist countries towards China. Lauding the Italian and Canadian initiatives that are described here as 'realist', the local newspapers are wondering whether these countries will be compelled to break all ties with Taiwan if they recognize Beijing, or if the time has come for the international community to accept the 'two Chinas' theory. Some commentators underline the fact that the persistence of abnormal situations in the world (Germany,

Korea, Vietnam) has not prevented many countries, be they communist or not, from maintaining relations with two state authorities from the same nation. To then believe that we can do the same with the 'two Chinas', this is a step taken too quickly by some.

There is no evidence from Taipei or Beijing that can confirm these speculations. Taiwan strongly condemned the openings made by Rome and Ottawa to the 'regime of the bandit Mao'. In Beijing, the press agencies have remained silent for the moment. But the communist newspapers of Hong Kong quickly denounced the 'two Chinas conspiracy' that the Italian and Canadian leaders are supposedly trying to pursue ('Hsin Wan Pao' [Xin wan bao] of 25th January). As for the Japanese government, it is very concerned by the threat of a growing commercial competition from Italy and Canada, and is facing strong pressure from its public opinion, which is pushing for the recognition of Communist China ("Ta Kung Pao" [Dagong bao] of 26th January). These reactions, even if local, do not foreshadow any change of attitude from Beijing that could be interpreted as a softening of its traditional position.

The idea that China and Taiwan could be compelled, through the maneuvers of Western diplomacy, to one day adopt under the guise of 'realism' the 'two Chinas' policy, is an illusion and a form of 'wishful thinking'. The diplomatic groups in Hong Kong most concerned by these rumors do not give them any credit. At most, it seems wise to them not to raise this problem immediately and to cautiously proceed with the renewal of contacts with China. Thus, the first stage of recognition would be followed by a second stage of exchanging ambassadors. A certain delay could take place between the two stages. Neither the Italians nor the Canadians are in a hurry in their current process, careful neither to rush Beijing nor to disappoint Taipei.

In any case, the stir among the small colony of the China observers, and which is feeding the most far-fetched speculations, can mostly be explained by the international context, which is showing signs of détente since the opening of talks on Vietnam and the announcement of the renewal of Sino-American contacts in Warsaw on 20th February. But China, still concerned by internal questions, does not seem to be willing to respond to the openings of non-communist countries with as much enthusiasm as hoped for in the West.