



Speech by Consul General Alexandre Giorgini at the Bastille Day reception in Hong Kong

12 July 2019

Honourable Chief Secretary, dear Matthew Cheung,
Dear representative of the Office of the Commissioner of the People's Republic of China, Honourable Secretaries and Members of the Legco,
Ladies and gentlemen, Mes chers compatriotes,

Let me first thank you, dear Matthew, for officiating at our traditional Bastille Day in spite of your heavy schedule. I wish to thank also the Choir for its wonderful performance of our national anthems, and all our sponsors, that you can find featured behind me.

I am very pleased to see so many friends of France gathered here tonight, in this beautiful Bauhinia Hall, thanks to the generosity of our faithful major partner, William Doo, Chairman of Fung Seng Prosperity Holdings Limited and Vice-Chairman of New World Development Company Limited, in which you will enjoy the champagne and drinks generously provided by Pernod Ricard.

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The last months were not easy ones, neither for France nor for Hong Kong, with an increasing need to renew and consolidate trust and confidence within our societies. Trust and confidence. Trust and confidence are indeed at the very core of the relations between France and Hong Kong. No matter how challenging times can be: we remain close partners. Close partners with a common goal: build certainty and goodwill in a context of global uncertainty.

Yes, Hong Kong loves France and France loves Hong Kong. France wants to keep contributing to the Hong Kong economy, cultural dynamism and

specific way of life. It is not a mere coincidence but the confluence of a shared spirit of openness on the world. The new and spectacular bridge between Hong Kong, Zhuhai and Macao - opened in October last year – may be the longest in the world. But each year, we build together an even longer bridge! A human ten thousand kilometres-long bridge between us, thanks to our common projects for the future and to our dynamic expat community. I do not know any French resident who does not feel at home in Hong Kong. It is my duty, Dear Matthew, to express you my deep gratitude and the gratitude of the four elected representatives of the French community, here tonight, for the hospitality of the Hong Kong Government.

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In the cultural field, we have just completed a very successful *French May Arts Festival* and we are already working hard on the next edition. We are also preparing the second edition of *Lumières Hong Kong*, the great light show which will be displayed at the end of November, thanks to the support of the Hong Kong Government - a period during which the Alliance Française also launches the *French Cinépanorama*, the oldest Cinema festival in Hong Kong.

In terms of economy, Hong Kong was last year the third bilateral trade surplus of France in the world, and the first months of 2019 are more than encouraging. Almost four hundred subsidiaries of French companies are established in Hong Kong, including ninety-two regional headquarters. France is the first supplier of wines, but also of airplanes.

As the 6th largest economy in the world and one of the largest domestic markets in Europe, we are also a welcoming destination for Hong Kong investors and talents. Twenty two thousand foreign-owned businesses are registered today in France, among which over eight hundred are controlled by a Chinese or Hong Kong investor.

As you know, France is a country of tradition. One of our core tradition is innovation.

Our country is home to around ten thousand startup companies. The biggest international startup campus in the world, STATION F, opened in Paris in 2017 and Chief executive Carrie LAM visited it last year.

Last April we were very proud to relaunch our Hong Kong-Shenzhen French Tech Community, which aims at bringing closer our tech ecosystems, in all fields :

- Regarding the fintechs, a memorandum of understanding was signed last Friday between our regulators, HKMA and the French Central Bank.
- When it comes to smart city, our business community organized a special event, the “So French So Innovative” Festival - right here in the Convention Center three months ago. French companies have been able to demonstrate their high level of expertise in transports, energy efficiency, waste and water treatment. As building sustainable cities is a key priority for both French and Hong Kong Governments, we are willing to work even more with you on these issues: that’s why next Wednesday a memorandum of understanding will be signed to confirm our common interest.

Preparing the future means also preparing the youth. I would like to thank all the Hong Kong universities actors for our exceptional cooperation. I am always wrong when I mention the number of our bilateral academic partnerships because it is always increasing. The last figure is one hundred sixty-three, with an increasing number of double diplomas, in all fields, including business, political science or air traffic management. We have also new iconic research projects, such as the one launched in the field of immunology by the HKU-Pasteur Research Pole.

Opening the way to the future for our younger will remain a key priority in our cooperation.

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Dear friends,

I just said that France is a paradoxical mix a secular traditions and innovation. Eight hundred and fifty years ago, our ancestors built the most innovative cathedral in Europe, Notre-Dame. Today one of the most passionate debate in our country is: how will we rebuild Notre-Dame ; what

were the secrets of the old carpenters ; which techniques will we use? I was deeply touched by the numerous and generous marks of compassion of Hong Kong people following the disastrous fire - and I would like to thank you all for that.

Talking of historical buildings and landmarks, behind me is the “place Vendôme” in Paris. This place is a symbol of Paris as a centre for luxury and fashion design. This is where the iconic Ritz hotel is located, this is where our ministry of Justice is located, next to the flagship stores of the most prestigious brands of fine jewelry and timepieces. Place Vendome is indeed a showcase for the French excellence in craftsmanship.

...and yes, I know you are waiting for that, this leads me to talk about Napoleon! 2019 marks the 250th anniversary of his birth. It is in “Place Vendôme” that Marie Etienne Nitot, the founder of Chaumet, set his workshop before being appointed as Napoleon’s official jeweler (he’s the one who made the Emperor’s coronation crown!). Maybe you also know that in 1805, after the battle of Austerlitz, it was decided to erect a column at the centre of the square, a monument to the glory of Napoleon’s army. The column was crowned with a statue of the Emperor in Roman dress. As France went through trouble times in the 19th century, it had been knocked down several times - but as you can see, it is still standing!

All year long, the Consulate General has been running a campaign to promote Napoleon’s legacy. Today, as we celebrate Bastille Day, we have a unique opportunity, thanks to one of our most inspired art collectors, Pierre-Jean Chalençon, and to the Kraemer Gallery whom I warmly thank: the opportunity to have, as special guests, some exceptional pieces that belonged to Napoleon. In this display next to the stage, is exhibited one of Napoleon’s “bicornes” (his iconic hats). This is the one he wore during the battle of Essling in 1809. After attempting to cross the Danube river near Vienna, Napoleon had to withdraw most of his forces in front of the Austrian forces. For sure this hat witnessed some challenging moments! After having seen it, please do not say anymore that you are facing difficulties in life. Also exhibited here are Napoleon’s medal and sash of the Legion of Honor, the national order he created in 1802 to reward outstanding merits. We will also have other surprises this year: a conference on Napoleon’s legacy will be held in October by another great connoisseur, former Prime Minister

Dominique de Villepin ; events at HKBU ; and may be more thanks to Mr Chalençon.

Dialogue is part of our identity and we are lovers of Hong Kong culture. I would like to thank artist Chow Chun Fai for his wonderful work of art building bridges between Chinese culture and French history : you can see the Kwan Kung figure on the one hand, and Napoleon's legend on the other hand, with a reference to a very famous French historical painting.

Culture and history have the power to inspire and unite people. I hope that these unique objects will inspire you to visit some new places in France that you may not have visited yet: the place Vendôme of course, but also Napoleon's residences near Paris, as the castles of Fontainebleau or Malmaison. And why not, two magic French islands: Corsica, where Napoleon was born, and the Martinique, in the Caribbean Sea, the birthplace of the empress Josephine.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

I hope that you will enjoy this evening's reception. The most important is champagne. As Napoleon said "*Champagne! In defeat, one needs it! In victory, one deserves it!*".

In the name of all persons and organizations involved in bringing France and Hong Kong closer together, let me now propose a toast and celebrate together: Vive la France! To the people of the People's Republic of China and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region! Long life to our friendship!

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