

Zeng Jize: The Qing's Resident Minister to France as Seen Through the French Press

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Abstract: In 1878, Zeng Jize was appointed as China's minister to Britain and France, becoming the first Western-educated Chinese aristocrat to serve as a professional diplomat in the late Qing dynasty. His activities in Europe frequently featured in the French press, catering to Western curiosity about the Orient and sustaining public fascination. During his tenure, he engaged in several critical diplomatic events of the late Qing era, particularly during the Sino-French negotiations over Vietnam, where he proactively adapted Western diplomatic practices by leveraging press influence to advance China's interests. Centered on *Le Figaro*, the French press's portrayals of Zeng evolved significantly along with the shifting dynamics of the Sino-French negotiation over suzerainty in Vietnam and the changing military situation. The shift in this evaluation essentially reflects how Western public opinion served its own national colonial strategies amidst the advancement of French colonial ambitions. More profoundly, it reveals the historical predicament faced by late Qing diplomats from a weak nation navigating an international arena dominated by imperial powers.

Keywords: Zeng Jize; Sino-French relations; Diplomats in the late Qing Dynasty; Public opinion diplomacy

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1. Introduction

In 1875, Guo Songtao was appointed as minister to Great Britain, marking the beginning of the Qing government's practice of dispatching resident ministers abroad. Guo Songtao officially assumed his post in Britain in 1877 and concurrently became the minister to France the following year. In 1878, Zeng Jize was ordered to succeed Guo Songtao, taking up the position of Minister to Britain and France. Holding the title of Marquis of the First Rank (Yiyonghou), Zeng began a five-year diplomatic career as Minister. Until the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the Qing government dispatched a total of eleven ministers to France. Before the First Sino-Japanese War, all ministers to France served concurrently; only after the war were dedicated ministers to France gradually appointed. Among these, Zeng Jize — except for the last appointee, Liu Shixun — served the longest tenure. During his term, Zeng Jize participated in major diplomatic events of the late Qing period, including the Sino-Russian negotiations over

Ili and the Sino-French negotiations over Vietnam. His diplomatic style and acumen left a profound impression on Western society.

Academic research on Zeng Jize has yielded substantial results, primarily focusing on his identity as a minister, his diplomatic strategies, and his involvement in major international negotiations such as those concerning Ili and Vietnam. These studies have examined his role from multiple perspectives. However, studies examining this Eastern diplomat from the viewpoint of European society remain relatively scarce. A representative contribution is Li Hao's study, which explores Zeng's interactions with the British press and public opinion centered on Britain ^[1]. This article takes *LeFigaro* as a key historical source and examines how Zeng Jize, during his tenure as Minister to France, was represented and evaluated by the French press, and how he, in turn, consciously utilized the power of public opinion to advance his diplomatic objectives.

2. *Le Figaro's* initial impressions of Zeng Jize

On August 25, 1878, the Qing government officially appointed Zeng Jize as Minister to Britain and France, succeeding his predecessor Guo Songtao ^[2]. One month after receiving his appointment, Zeng departed from Shanghai by ship and eventually arrived in Paris on January 4, 1879.

Even before Zeng's arrival in France, the French press had already shown great curiosity toward this newly appointed minister. On December 21, 1878, while reporting on the Chinese mission to Russia led by Chonghou, who had reached France ahead of Zeng, *LeFigaro* briefly announced the forthcoming arrival of the new Minister to France. Moreover, *LeFigaro* conducted a brief investigation into Zeng Jize's personal background, noting that he was fluent in both spoken and written English and had some knowledge of French. The report also briefly mentioned the size of the mission and the relationships among its members. Particular emphasis was placed on Zeng Jize's aristocratic status:

"His Excellency Tseng, the head of the mission, is the son of the famous General Tseng Kuo-fan, who distinguished himself by suppressing the rebellions that devastated the Empire from 1858 to 1870. The remarkable services rendered by this man of war—who was also one of China's foremost scholars—earned him the hereditary noble title of Ho, which English translators render as *Marquis*." ^[3]

Subsequently, *LeFigaro* repeatedly referred to this title and its origin in later reports, and Zeng Jize thus became widely known in European public discourse under the appellation "Marquis de Tseng."

After presenting the letter of credence to the French President, Zeng Jize remained in Paris for a little over twenty days before departing for his post in Britain. During his stay in Paris, in addition to paying courtesy calls on the French President and foreign ministers stationed in France, he frequently spent his leisure time visiting local attractions and attending theatrical performances to gain insights into the French military, industry, and cultural arts.

On January 23, 1879, *LeFigaro* reported on Zeng Jize's visit to the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris. According to the report, the Chinese delegation, consisting of fifteen members dressed in formal attire, toured the museum's collection of exquisite French industrial artworks. The museum management extended a warm reception and provided a guided tour throughout their visit. The report included detailed observations of Zeng Jize himself: the minister, approximately forty years old, appeared lively and intellectual, speaking fluent English. He showed great interest in the museum's fine porcelain collections, inquiring in detail about their craftsmanship and expressing admiration for the techniques. While passing before the lace exhibits, the minister explained how

young girls in his country were taught to do such needlework. The presence of the Chinese delegation attracted large crowds of curious French citizens. People gazed in particular astonishment at the minister's peacock-feather plume, which, together with the coral button and the ornate official robe, is the distinctive insignia of a representative of the Emperor of the Celestial Empire ^[4]. Through its vivid account of the visit, *LeFigaro* documented the delegation's activities and interactions, and conveyed recognition of his personal knowledge and cultivation. Simultaneously, by depicting public reactions, the article vividly illustrated the curiosity and attention that French society directed toward this Chinese minister.

During his tenure as a diplomatic envoy abroad, Zeng Jize not only actively attended various diplomatic events but also took the initiative to study international diplomatic etiquette. On March 15, 1880, he hosted the first official reception at the Chinese legation in Paris, which *Le Figaro* described as "the first formal reception held by a Qing dynasty's foreign envoy in accordance with Western diplomatic norms" ^[5].

The event drew considerable attention. Several days before it took place, *Le Figaro* had already announced the news, noting that many members of Parisian high society and the diplomatic corps had received invitations, with the guest list personally prepared by Zeng himself ^[6]. On the evening of the reception, *Le Figaro* promptly followed up with detailed coverage of this grand occasion:

"Beautiful decoration in the reception rooms: flowers everywhere. The view of the conservatory is marvelous. The ambassador, dressed in a splendid yellow ceremonial costume, receives his numerous guests with great charm. By midnight, more than twelve hundred people have already arrived. The entire diplomatic corps is present. All the ministers are there, along with their secretaries. The staff of the Foreign Affairs Ministry is in full attendance. The Marquise de Tseng, dressed in Chinese style, is seated in the blue salon with her son, while her daughter remains in an upstairs salon reserved for ladies only. An excellent orchestra, conducted by Mr. Henri Natif, makes the European guests dance, and a few Chinese students from the School of Mines join in the quadrilles. The buffet is splendidly stocked and eagerly visited between each dance. Judging by the lively atmosphere in the salons, one may predict that the festivities will continue until a rather late hour" ^[7].

On March 17, the day after the reception, *LeFigaro* published a follow-up report providing additional details about the grand event. It was particularly noted that "it was the first time so many distinguished Chinese figures—military officers, civil officials, and scholars—had been seen gathered together." The report also highlighted Zeng Jize's "exceptionally courteous and gracious" demeanor as host: each time a guest arrived, he warmly welcomed them with a European-style handshake before escorting them to the Marchioness, who, dressed in splendid ceremonial attire, would rise and bow with her hands joined in the Chinese manner. In addition, the article mentioned that one of these officials explained to journalists the hierarchical and noble significance of the buttons and plumes adorning the headwear of the legation members, thereby promoting cultural understanding ^[8]. In the days that followed, *LeFigaro* announced another preview, noting that Marquis Zeng planned to host a second grand ball at the Chinese legation in Paris the following month ^[9].

Clearly, the first official reception organized by Zeng Jize in Paris succeeded in drawing significant attention from European public opinion. *LeFigaro* not only provided continuous coverage of the event's details but also portrayed him in positive terms, such as "courteous" and "graceful", breaking through the stereotypical image of Chinese officials in the European press. From a diplomatic perspective, Zeng's deliberate adoption of the Western etiquette embodied an attitude of "proactive engagement." By demonstrating respect for local customs, he effectively reduced Western perceptions of distance and unfamiliarity toward Chinese diplomacy. At the same time, Zeng consciously preserved elements of Chinese cultural symbolism: his wife's traditional Chinese attire,

the customary joined-hand greeting gesture, and the detailed explanation of the headwear of the legation members. These gestures went beyond mere cultural display—they communicated China's own logic of ritual and cultural values within a framework of equal Sino-Western dialogue.

This fusion of Chinese and Western diplomatic practice not only established a positive image of the Chinese minister within Parisian society but also laid a valuable foundation of public goodwill and interpersonal networks for Zeng's subsequent involvement in critical diplomatic matters. It vividly demonstrated his strategic acumen and cultural confidence as a professional diplomat of the late Qing.

In summary, during the early period of Zeng Jize's tenure as Minister to France, *LeFigaro* maintained heightened attention toward him, demonstrating a keen interest in exploring the Chinese cultural symbols he embodied. In its reports on his participation in various social and diplomatic events, the press often depicted his manners and demeanor in positive and refined terms. These accounts not only reflected the French media's curiosity about this Chinese diplomat but also attested to Zeng Jize's success, through his diplomatic engagements, in dispelling European stereotypes of Eastern officials as "conservative and arrogant." It can be argued that during this period, *LeFigaro* helped construct a relatively favorable public image of Zeng Jize in France through its relatively positive portrayal.

3. Zeng Jize's public image in French opinion during the Sino-French negotiations over Vietnam

During Zeng Jize's tenure as the Chinese minister to France, his most significant diplomatic engagement was undoubtedly the Sino-French negotiations over Vietnam between 1882 and 1885. At that time, under the leadership of Prime Minister Jules Ferry—known for his assertive expansionist policies—was actively pursuing colonial expansion abroad. Driven by this aggressive foreign policy, France continuously expanded its overseas colonial territories. In the case of Vietnam, France sought to extend its control northward from Cochinchina (southern Vietnam), where it had long been entrenched, aiming gradually to dominate Central and Northern Vietnam and thereby enlarge its sphere of influence in the region.

Faced with France's escalating encroachment in Vietnam, Zeng Jize maintained a firm diplomatic stance. He repeatedly engaged with French authorities, emphasizing China's long-standing suzerainty over Vietnam and lodging strong protests against France's military aggression. However, the French side generally responded with procrastination and evasiveness. By 1882, the situation in Vietnam deteriorated further. On April 25, French forces captured Hanoi, revealing their clear intent to annex the whole of Vietnam. Zeng Jize met with the French foreign minister three times, demanding negotiations on the Vietnam issue. The French government initially dismissed the matter by claiming "lack of awareness", then cited the "Treaty of Saigon" as grounds to refuse discussions with Zeng regarding Vietnam. Subsequently, France's attitude escalated to complete avoidance, ignoring all diplomatic notes sent by Zeng Jize.

The Sino-French dispute over Vietnam gradually entered the focus of French public opinion. On October 20, 1882, *LeFigaro* published an editorial titled "The Marquis Zeng", which opened with the remark: "No one could have predicted that China would become a topic of current interest...Our government is once again seriously discussing a new expedition in which all the talk would be of Tonkin, Haiphong, the Red River, and Commander Rivière's gunboats." This statement clearly indicated a shift in French media attention—China was no longer merely a distant "exotic symbol" but had become a direct diplomatic counterpart affecting French colonial

interests. At that time, Zeng Jize had just completed the Sino-Russian negotiations over the Ili crisis, which had earned him considerable international fame. The article described him as a “skillful diplomat”, noting that “his eyes reflect a keen intelligence and an animated curiosity uncommon among his compatriots. His black eyes—bright, piercing, and alert—fix their gaze more directly than Chinese eyes usually dare to do....this minister, come from the farthest reaches of the Orient, carries himself with a certain grandeur, and imposes respect by the distant and mysterious world he represents.”^[10]. Such comments subtly conveyed an evolving perception of Chinese diplomats, acknowledging the emergence of Chinese officials with modern diplomatic competence. This evolving public perception laid a relatively favorable foundation for Zeng Jize’s subsequent negotiations with France over the Vietnam issue.

On December 20, 1882, Zeng Jize proactively granted an interview to *Le Figaro*. The conversation took place in the afternoon in English. The journalist said that Zeng Jize is always modest and somewhat mistrustful of his own English, which is, in fact, excellent. Zeng asked the journalist to return in the evening. He then arranged for an interpreter to reproduce the statements in Chinese and in French. This careful arrangement reflected his deep concern for the accuracy and precision of China’s diplomatic message. *LeFigaro* skillfully framed the interview with an introductory narrative: the journalist first recalled the reception Zeng had hosted in Paris the previous winter, remarking that “That event proved that the Chinese minister, unlike many of his compatriots, is by no means an enemy of European civilization.” Based on this perception, the journalist confessed, “I was therefore certain in advance that I would meet an enlightened diplomat, who would not fail to share with a French journalist the impressions aroused in China by our government’s planned expedition to Tonkin”^[11]. This introduction, built upon a preexisting positive perception, made Zeng’s words more readily acceptable to French readers. Presented in the form of a dialogue transcript, the article objectively conveyed China’s core position and demands, thus providing Zeng—who at the time faced diplomatic deadlock in official negotiations—with an alternative channel to articulate China’s views through the medium of public opinion.

On June 18, 1883, Zeng Jize returned to Paris after attending the coronation of Tsar Alexander III in Russia. The following day (June 19), *LeFigaro* reported that he was likely to meet with Jules Ferry, who was temporarily serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs. According to Chinese sources, the French government was in no hurry to advance the negotiations and had hardly replied to the diplomatic notes sent by Zeng. The press pointed out that if the Chinese dissatisfaction was indeed justified, the breakdown of the talks should not be attributed to Marquis Zeng but rather to the French Foreign Minister’s refusal to engage in dialogue. However, it also noted that the two sides’ demands were “extremely difficult to reconcile”: “Zeng strongly asserts that China would never renounce the suzerainty it has always exercised over Vietnam, while the French government refuses to recognize China’s claims, which essentially means that France intends to replace them with its own.” The article also quoted Zeng as saying that the Chinese legation was still seeking “a solution honorable for both nations” and that he for his part, would “do everything possible to avoid war, on the condition, however, that France show more willingness to reconcile than it has so far”^[12]. Through this report, *LeFigaro* clearly conveyed China’s stance of “upholding suzerainty while seeking peace.” By presenting the fact that Chinese diplomatic notes had long gone unanswered, it indirectly exposed the French government’s evasive attitude in negotiations to public scrutiny, prompting readers to consider where responsibility for the deadlock truly lay. Yet, the article concluded with a disclaimer that “the information has not yet been verified and is presented here merely as a summary”, revealing *LeFigaro*’s cautious editorial stance. At that time, France was still weighing its strategy in Vietnam, and the press neither took sides nor sought to inflame tensions. Instead, it presented a balanced picture of the situation and expressed a “hope

for amicable negotiation” to convey a rational perspective, thereby preserving discursive space for subsequent diplomatic maneuvers between China and France.

On August 25, 1883, France and Vietnam signed the Treaty of Huế. Subsequently, the Vietnam issue became the core focus of French public opinion. *LeFigaro* dedicated front-page columns, “AFFAIRES DU TONKIN” and “AFFAIRES DE CHINE”, to report developments in real time. Meanwhile, the signing of the Treaty of Huế forced a shift in the focus of Marquis Zeng’s negotiations with the French government, from asserting absolute suzerainty over Vietnam to the delineation of the spheres of influence in Vietnam between China and France.

During this period, Zeng Jize frequently traveled between Paris and London. On one hand, he continued to argue fiercely with the French government and pushed the negotiation process forward; on the other hand, he actively leveraged public opinion to create a deterrent. On September 8, 1883, *LeFigaro* reported that the Chinese Minister, who had just returned to Paris, had held a long meeting with Foreign Minister Challemeil-Lacour the previous day ^[13]. On September 10, the press followed up with a report disclosing that the two sides had engaged in a second round of talks.

Regarding the direction of Sino-French negotiations, *LeFigaro* assessed that China was more inclined to “sign nothing and maintain the status quo.” The core justification for China’s stance was the indisputable fact that “it was not China that declared war.” Zeng Jize explicitly stated that “China will never declare war”, but the press suggested that China would leave France to struggle with the Black Flag Army on its own. The article also highlighted France’s military difficulties: “If France insists on controlling Tonkin, it would need to deploy 50,000 troops to the region, but currently, France has fewer than 5,000 troops stationed there; in contrast, the Black Flag Army ‘sees death as pleasure’, not fear, demonstrating formidable combat strength.”

During the negotiations, Zeng proposed establishing a neutral zone based on the consideration that China did not share a direct border with France, but this was rejected by the French side, leading the talks to part ways without reaching an agreement. The report concluded with news that heightened tensions: “The ongoing negotiations have not halted the dispatch of reinforcements; two Algerian battalions are being dispatched to Tonkin.” This military reinforcement by France further escalated the situation ^[14]. On September 13, *LeFigaro* quoted Zeng Jize’s statement: “Any dispatch of reinforcements would compel the Chinese government to order its troops to cross the Tonkin border.” The Press also cited commentary from the *LeSoir*: “The Chinese Empire is vast... from this immense and densely populated empire, each province could send forth an army—or at least a legion—whose sheer numbers would be formidable for our expeditionary corps.” This commentary indirectly underscores China’s potential military advantage ^[15]. As the frontline military situation continued to evolve, China and France remained unable to reach an agreement on the demarcation of their spheres of influence in Vietnam. *LeFigaro* summarized the situation as: “Irreconcilable claims make implacable enemies” ^[16].

The negotiations between China and France made no progress, and French public opinion, represented by *LeFigaro*, grew increasingly impatient. On September 25, the newspaper bluntly remarked: “The mandarins of France and China are handling the matter with the slowness characteristic of Eastern traditions. The goal is less to reach an agreement than to bring to the talks the greatest possible force of inertia, in order to exhaust the opponent’s energy. Whoever loses patience first will lose the game” ^[17]. On October 10, *LeFigaro* once again voiced its frustration: “For more than six months, the Chinese question has appeared in the press. What we have had are only confused and contradictory reports. And the whole affair drags on in an exasperating way” ^[18]. On October 30, *LeFigaro* went further, declaring: “Even the cleverest deceptions eventually grow tiresome. The government ought to put an end to this one, in the best way possible for our interests” ^[19].

Amidst such a shift in public sentiment, Zeng Jize, as the Chinese representative in the negotiations, consistently upheld China's core interests while frequently using the press to convey China's position. His resolute posture in defending national rights was perceived by the French side as a "direct obstacle" to their colonial ambitions. Consequently, *LeFigaro's* assessment of Zeng underwent a complete reversal. On November 10, *LeFigaro* cited a misleading claim from *Le Moniteur Universel*, radically changing its previous view of Zeng and launching an unfounded attack on his marquis title: "The title of Marquis is completely unknown in China. This Chinese diplomat to take a gold stripe to throw dust in the eyes of the French, whose reputation in China is that they are easily taken in by appearances" ^[20].

By November 18, the publication openly ridiculed Zeng Jize in an editorial:

"The Marquis de Tseng will have made the trip between Paris and London as many times as an omnibus driver makes the run from the Odéon to the Batignolles... He doesn't seem to realize the danger there is, even for a diplomat, in occupying Parisian attention so much. Parisian opinion follows its usual course; attentive at first, then overexcited, it is starting to tire of the Marquis's eternal travels. The Marquis has interviews all day long and tells tall tale to everyone who comes along. China is ready, fully-ready!... His role is to maintain to all reporters that the Chinese army is the best of armies. Our role is to no longer blindly swallow a publicity method that has already succeeded for chocolate...He sends press releases as if the Chinese were already reported in the vicinity of Viroflay...The Marquis is abusing the attention of the Parisians, and his confidences to reporters are becoming monotonous." ^[21].

While the Sino-French negotiations were deadlocked, the French army did not halt its advance northward. On December 21, 1883, French forces attacked Sơn Tây (Shanxi). The Black Flag Army and the Qing forces resisted for three days under intense artillery fire, but Sơn Tây unfortunately fell. On December 26, *LeFigaro* quoted a correspondent from *Times* regarding an interview with Zeng Jize, claiming that: "it appeared to me that he was very troubled by the news of the capture of Sơn Tay, and that he had lost the lucidity and diplomatic sense that usually distinguish him." *Le Figaro* immediately commented: "Zeng Jize's anxiety is easily understood. He has realized that his threats won't prevent the French from taking Bắc Ninh, just as they didn't prevent them from taking Sơn Tay...He is well aware that, from a military point of view, China has little to hope for." ^[22]. Following the fall of Sơn Tây, key strongholds in northern Vietnam, including Bắc Ninh, Thái Nguyên, and Hưng Hóa, were successively occupied by French forces. With the outcome decided on the battlefield, Zeng Jize had entirely lost his bargaining chip in the diplomatic negotiations.

On March 26, 1884, *LeFigaro* cited a telegram sent from London that disclosed the rumor of Zeng Jize's impending recall. When a reporter inquired about this with Chinese officials, the response was, "Absolutely not, the related news has not been confirmed" ^[23]. It was not until April 18 that *Le Figaro* confirmed the news of Zeng Jize's recall, with a tone permeated by the smugness following French military victories: "The latest successes won by our troops at Hưng Hóa will no doubt have the effect of making the Court of Beijing understand that the period of bluster is over. Here is every reason to suppose that this unusual diplomat's mission is drawing to a close" ^[24]. On May 3, *LeFigaro* further reported on Zeng Jize's diplomatic actions before his departure: "The Chinese Minister to France, the Marquis Zeng Jize, was received yesterday at two o'clock by Mr. Jules Ferry, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to whom he came to announce the conclusion of his mission" ^[25].

The following day, *Le Figaro* published a satirical poem titled "The Farewells of the Marquis Tseng", which laid bare both its mockery of Zeng Jize and its deep-seated prejudice against Chinese culture. Written from Zeng's imagined perspective, the poem adopted a tone of "reverse irony" throughout its "farewell": Farewell, land of

barbarity! Farewell, backward city! The poem then heaps up prejudices through a series of specific details: it mentions “the audacity of the people here to look directly at their ‘Son of Heaven’”; it also mocks “mandarins in lounge coats who have decreed: ‘no chopsticks are needed for rice, and tea must be sweetened.’” These stereotypical imaginings of Chinese customs expose the disdain for Chinese customs. Furthermore, expressions like “yellow skin is no honor” and “embroidered shoe clamping the foot” fully demonstrate the “civilizational superiority” inherent in the Western colonial context ^[26]. The entire poem shapes Zeng Jize’s departure as the “shameful flight of a frustrated man.” In essence, it sought to dismiss and ridicule all his diplomatic efforts during his tenure in France, starkly exposing how media discourse, within the Western colonialist framework, ultimately served as a mere appendage to colonial interests.

4. Conclusion

From 1879 to his departure in April 1884, Zeng Jize, as China’s minister to France, remained a consistent focus of French public discourse. Zeng—renowned for his mastery of both Chinese and Western learning and his aristocratic background—was seen by the French press as a vivid embodiment of “the Orient observed up close”, perfectly fitting the Western world’s curiosity and imagination about Eastern civilization. Through a series of public social activities, Zeng’s proactive integration and cultural respect won him favorable coverage and high public regard. This positive foundation in public opinion allowed him, when official channels were blocked in the early stages of Sino-French negotiations, to successfully utilize the press to communicate China’s stance and articulate its core demands. At that time, as France was still weighing its colonial strategy regarding the Vietnam issue, press coverage of related issues maintained a relatively objective and rational stance.

However, as the Sino-French negotiations reached a deadlock and the French military advantage in Vietnam became increasingly apparent, the French press’s attitude toward Zeng Jize completely reversed. At this point, French public opinion fully evolved into a mouthpiece serving French colonial interests. By deliberately blackening Zeng Jize’s reputation and undermining his elite image, the press comprehensively negated his diplomatic efforts, thereby weakening the legitimacy of the Chinese position to justify French colonial action.

The shifting evaluation of Zeng Jize in *LeFigaro* was never simply a matter of personal aptitude or failure, but rather a revealing microcosm of the evolving dynamics in Sino-French relations—from tentative divergence to overt confrontation. The French press, serving as both a mirror and an instrument of imperial ideology, increasingly aligned its narratives with the exigencies of colonial expansion and the sensitivities of public opinion. Zeng Jize’s transformation from an “enlightened Eastern elite” to an “object of press ridicule” essentially epitomizes the inevitable predicament faced by diplomats from weaker nations. His rhetorical marginalization in the French media underscores not only the asymmetries of power shaping nineteenth-century international relations but also the epistemic constraints that defined weak-state diplomacy in a Eurocentric world order.

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