

# The art of making friends

How the Chinese Communist Party seduces  
political parties in Latin America

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# The art of making friends

## How the Chinese Communist Party seduces political parties in Latin America

Juan Pablo Cardenal\*

### 1 The Chinese Communist Party deploys its diplomacy

In April 2020, a few weeks after COVID-19 began to wreak havoc across the length and breadth of the globe, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) hurriedly pressed parties from around the world to make a joint statement promoting international cooperation against the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Behind its constructive rhetoric, the ten-point note drafted by the CCP displayed its true purpose. On the one hand, it emphasized both China's "open, transparent and responsible attitude" and the assistance offered by the Asiatic country in the form of "medical supplies to the affected countries."<sup>2</sup> On the other, it rejected "stigmatization" and "discriminatory comments and practices" an implicit reference to the international criticism that the Chinese communist regime was already receiving for covering-up the virus.

It wasn't the only CCP initiative regarding the pandemic crisis. Within the framework of the global propaganda campaign launched by Beijing to evade its responsibility,<sup>3</sup> the CCP shared its health experience in those weeks and held virtual communication with 400 political parties. According to *Qiushi*, the CCP's bi-monthly political

theory periodical, these exchanges were intended to enable foreign parties to "impartially evaluate China's sacrifices and contributions in the global fight against epidemics and refute the false claims by a few political forces."<sup>4</sup> The CCP's efforts to propagate its version abroad bore fruit with the previously mentioned joint statement since, according to the official media, it was supported by 240 parties from 110 countries. A remarkable endorsement that is at odds with the fact that the list of signatories was never made public.<sup>5</sup>

Of them, "more than 40 political parties and organizations" from Latin America had signed,<sup>6</sup> headed by communist and leftist formations including the São Paulo Forum.<sup>7</sup> An allegiance, sometimes bordering on Kowtowing,<sup>8</sup> which Beijing wraps in a perfectly calculated rhetoric of friendship: "In difficult times true friendship is proven," said Fu Jie, vice-director of the Latin America and Caribbean Bureau of the Central Committee's International Department. She went on to say, "The exchanges have deepened friendship, understanding and mutual support" with Latin American political parties. In the language of the Chinese regime, friendship is always political and means a strategic relationship, not a personal or a disinterested one.<sup>9</sup> An asymmetry that is not always evident to its Latin American interlocutors.

COVID-19 has allowed the CCP to consolidate a prominent relationship with its regional peers.

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However, even though these links take place below the radar and go largely unnoticed by many of Latin America's political, academic and journalistic elites, contacts have existed for decades. The first was with the Brazilian Communist Party in 1953, just four years after the founding of the People's Republic, which initiated a trickle of visits from Latin American communist delegations leading to about twenty of them establishing relations before the end of the decade. Ideological affinities aside, the CCP's current closeness to its Latin American comrades dates back to that time when, thanks to that connection, China was able to partly circumvent its isolation from the Western world.

However, with the Sino-Soviet schism and the consequent split in world communism, most of those same Latin American parties unreservedly aligned themselves with the Soviets and broke with the CCP. From this emerged mutual reproach: the Chinese party accused its former Latin American allies of being "revisionists" and they accused the CCP of being "heretics."<sup>10</sup> It wasn't until 1979, on its foundation's 50th anniversary, that the Mexican Communist Party reestablished relations with its Chinese coreligionists, although it took almost another decade before a second regional Communist party, the Cuban, did the same in 1988. Likewise, in the context of the political and diplomatic thawing that followed the visit of President Nixon to China in 1972, non-communist parties also establish links with the CCP.

The first to do so, in 1979, was the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of Mexico, followed a year later by the Democratic Action Party (AD), which has a social democratic tendency, and the Independent Electoral Political Organization Committee (COPEI), which has a Christian democratic tendency, both of Venezuela, and, shortly after, by the Colombian Conservative Party. Since then, and as a consequence of China's growing economic and political importance as a global player, the CCP has managed to consolidate its strategic diplomatic position in Latin America.

Today, without any kind of ideological distinction, it has formal relations with some 130 political parties<sup>11</sup> and organizations. Its political affinity

with the progressive Permanent Conference of Political Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPPAL), the leftist São Paulo Forum, and the Socialist International's Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean, has not prevented it from also establishing relations with the Liberal-Conservative Union of Latin American Parties (UPLA) or with the Christian Democrat Organization of America (ODCA), which together represent 226 political parties and regional organizations.

The CCP's institutional relations with its Latin American counterparts are mainly channeled through delegations of political party members making visits to both sides of the Pacific, as well as by invitations to travel to China with expenses paid. It was also a Chinese initiative to organize conferences and seminars on priority issues on Beijing's agenda, reciprocally attend each other's party congresses and promote the training of young Latin American leaders and cadres in China, also with Chinese funding. In the context of COVID-19, most of these initiatives have been replaced by virtual bilateral or multilateral meetings, which have increased in frequency and in the number of participants.

By the very nature of video conferences, the scope as well as the media visibility of CCP's events are now significantly greater, helping to satisfy two of the main motives for its inter-party diplomacy. On the one hand, to project a positive image of China abroad and, on the other, to internationally legitimize the party that monopolizes power there. According to data from the Central Committee's International Department, the CCP held at least 326 meetings with political parties and legislators from Latin American parliaments between 2002 and 2020, an average of 18 per year. At the height of the pandemic, 24 contacts and meetings took place between January and October 2020 (see Annex).<sup>12</sup> Holding 400 organized activities worldwide with other foreign formations every year, it is difficult to imagine another party in the world making such a colossal effort.<sup>13</sup>

## 2 Cultivating influence to legitimize the CCP

Propagating a friendly image of China and promoting moral equivalence between the CCP and Western democratic political parties are two of the incentives that, along with supporting its foreign policy goals and helping lay the foundations for an eventual change in the world order, explain the CCP's diplomatic efforts with respect to its counterparts in Latin America and the rest of the world. That said, it is important to understand that this impetus is part of a wider strategy whose purpose is for the Asian country to gain political influence abroad. The case of Latin America is a typical example.

At the beginning of the century, with its international *Going Out* strategy, China was a rather secondary economic player on the continent. Two decades later, it has in its own right become the main trading partner of a large number of Latin American countries with respect to investment and trade, source of loans and the construction of infrastructure. Let's not forget that this economic offensive is mainly led by state companies thanks to the State's financial resources. That is why the Asian giant is perceived by the Latin American economic and political elites not only as unavoidable but also as a source of opportunities that others cannot offer. This economic power is already consolidated and that is not going to change.

Beijing adds the thrust of its soft power strategy with Chinese characteristics to the political influence resulting from its economic supremacy. Although this power is partially based on persuasion and attraction, according to Joseph Nye's classic definition of the concept, other authors specify that it is really *sharp power*, since it incorporates the noxious and unbenign values that emanate from its authoritarian system.<sup>14</sup> The goal of this plan is to correct negative perceptions stemming from China's meteoric global rise, while also striving to counter what Chinese leaders believe is a discourse of hegemonic values by the West aimed at furthering its own interests and projecting a negative image of China that is then

spread by the Western press.

The strategy, executed with the power of the checkbook, is implemented through programs that favor the creation of personal networks and links, whether by establishing lasting institutional links in political, academic, media and cultural spheres or by seducing and attracting the local elites to support China's cause and interests. Although inspired, supervised or executed by the CCP, other State bodies and entities in the state-party structure are also engaged in this effort. The organizing of the summit in Beijing, which hosted more than 300 political representatives from 120 countries in late 2017, is a good example of the efforts and resources the Communist authorities are prepared to invest in political diplomacy. Xi Jinping announced that the CCP will invite 15,000 politicians from around the world to China in the next five years.

The fundamental purpose of these invitations is to expose foreign visitors to the regime's propaganda in order to obtain their legitimizing endorsement. This is what happened at the above-mentioned summit, when the democratic parties took part in the propaganda ceremony and signed a flattering joint statement, drafted by the CCP. The document reads, "We highly praise the great effort and major contributions made by the CCP with Secretary General Xi Jinping as its core leader to build a community of a shared future for mankind and a peaceful and fine world."<sup>15</sup> Six months later, 500 representatives from 200 parties from a hundred countries attended another, similar political staging, this time in Shenzhen. Although the foreign parties believe they risk very little political capital by attending and signing,<sup>16</sup> it serves Beijing as ammunition to create a favorable global consensus and to counter those who view the growing international influence of the Asian giant with reservations.

It also occurs on a Latin American scale. The Second Political Parties Forum of the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was integrated into the program of the meeting held in Shenzhen, with the participation of 80 representatives from 58 regional parties. In



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the official statement, the Latin American signatories expressed their “appreciation” for China’s commitment to annually inviting 200 CELAC party cadres between 2019 and 2021.<sup>17</sup> There was another precedent to this pledge: in 2015, during the first meeting of the China-CELAC Political Parties Forum, organized together with Ecuador’s Alianza PAIS Movement, the host proclaimed that China would invite 1,200 Latin American cadres on study and exchange missions.<sup>18</sup> This took place at the same time as the Communist Youth League of China organized forums and strengthened ties with young cadres of Latin American parties.<sup>19</sup>

Those invited to visit China cover the entire political spectrum, but they are very strategically selected: from active and former rulers to members of parties in power or in opposition, active parliamentarians, leaders of local governments or

young politicians destined to play relevant roles in the future. According to a Latin American scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the links are so close that certain Latin American political party leaders have even been “invited to spend their vacations in China.”<sup>20</sup> In fact, this strategy’s effectiveness in attracting political elites seems irrefutable based on another illustrative fact published in 2012. On that date, China had invited about twenty South American political leaders who were later elected presidents of their countries.<sup>21</sup>

Those trips to China with all expenses paid have hypnotic effects on many of the guests. They fly business class, are accommodated in five-star hotels, and are regaled with the best of legendary Chinese hospitality. But what really strikes them is the combination of, on the one side, the

grandeur of China, with its neon skyscrapers, its vibrant commercial atmosphere, its mythical monuments and enigmatic culture; and, on the other, the figures involved in the so-called *Chinese miracle*, including the story of the transition from Maoism to the present day, the imposing infrastructure, its perceived success in eradicating poverty and, to top it all, the Chinese millionaires and China's forthcoming arrival on the Moon. "They buy mediocre people by taking them to China, where they show them the country's majesty. If you're not very worldly, you fall to your knees," noted a Latin American political representative who went on one of those trips.

Similarly, one of the guests at the China-CELAC Second Political Party Forum, in Shenzhen, describes as "awe-inspiring" all they were able to see and all they were told, in perfect Spanish, starting with the evolution of the city that hosted the Forum, which, in just three decades, went from being a small fishing village to a modern metropolis with 13 million inhabitants, across the border from Hong Kong. They also visited one of Shenzhen's engineering gems, the almost 34-mile-long bridge that connects Hong Kong with Macao, as well as the Tencent company headquarters and one of the first *laboratories of capitalism* (called *special economic zones*) in Zhuhai. "It was impressive by comparison with our countries. They sold us their development model implicitly through all the wonderful things they showed us; they didn't need to make it explicit but they projected the idea that things can be done if the political will is there," she explains.

This fabulous network of informal friendships provides the Chinese communists with strategic treasure in the form of loyal and influential interlocutors throughout the continent. The Latin American political class' honeymoon with its Communist counterparts is not unrelated to the ignorance of the regional elites, with a few exceptions, regarding China, its history, its State capitalism and development model and the nature of the CCP's *modus operandi*. This knowledge gap provides the CCP with the opportunity to monopolize the narrative of today's China with little interference. They disseminate it through an ambitious program of visits so that the regional

political leaders receive training in China. It is an apprenticeship that, in the words of Javier Miranda, president of Uruguay's Broad Front, one of the CCP's regional allies, "enabled us to understand the construction of a nation" and conclude that "the CCP is a trustworthy party." This camaraderie was forged in his three trips to China in just two years and in his dealings with various Communist delegations that visited Montevideo.<sup>22</sup>

Paradoxically, different studies note that the Latin American people have a more critical view than their elites, since they perceive that China's role in the region may result in a new dependency, rather than in growth and sustained prosperity.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, the fact that the Latin American political class sees its relationship with Beijing through the prism of political realism and through the opportunities that may arise translates inevitably into an almost total lack of criticism regarding the Chinese regime's authoritarian nature, the human rights violations, the abuses behind regional investments, the conditions of its loans or the asymmetry in trade relations. Not objecting to any of the above implies a tacit legitimization of the Chinese one-party system.

### 3 Objective: to support China's foreign policy

Legitimizing the CCP so that it is seen as a respectable international player and propagating a positive image of China are not the only reasons why the CCP actively engages with its Latin American peers. Another, no less important, incentive is to support the diplomatic and foreign policy objectives of the People's Republic. This role is not subordinate. On the contrary, since Xi Jinping took power and especially since the XIX CCP National Congress in 2017, the party has more direct control over the foreign agenda, to the detriment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other State bodies. In this context, it also gives greater prominence to the relationship with foreign political parties, so that they understand and respect the interests and values that the regime considers inalienable.



As a result, the deployment of the CCP's diplomatic influence throughout Latin America has been considerable, although uneven. It has established stronger and more frequent relationships with the countries that are more important to Beijing, in the same way that it has globally prioritized its attention to Japan, Russia, Vietnam, India and other countries on its periphery and dedicates greater efforts to them because the relationship with all of them is often uneasy. This is why the relationship with Cuba, the only country on the continent ruled by a classic Communist party, is valued for historic and geopolitical reasons and why it has had the most contacts with the CCP in the last two decades (see Annex). There have also been periodic contacts with the region's economic powers and with countries rich in natural resources, especially Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, while the intensity of contacts with Venezuela is the result of economic ties and geopolitical affinity with Caracas.

An example of how the CCP's international inter-party activity serves to shore up its geopolitical interests is the close relationship it has cultivated with the parties of Central American countries allied with Taiwan. Because of the significance for Beijing of having international recognition for its *One China policy*, these meetings, although discreet, were particularly important during the years when Beijing actively pursued the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan. To that end, the CCP held working sessions with the main parties of Bolivia, Nicaragua and Uruguay when they forged their diplomatic relations with China in the 1980s. Chinese academics report that, on returning to their countries, many of the leaders who were invited to China "pressured their governments to recognize the People's Republic." The same pattern was repeated during the following decades.<sup>24</sup>

The CCP has held at least 38 meetings since 2002 with the four Central American countries that, successively since 2007, decided to break with Taipei and establish diplomatic links with China: Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama. At the time, these contacts served to cement the diplomatic shift, led by the Costa

Rican president Óscar Arias, and later helped consolidate the new relationship. In Panama, a key country for China due to its trade and geo-strategic interests there, the CCP maintains "very close and affectionate ties" with the ruling Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) that date back to before the establishment of diplomatic relations.<sup>25</sup> In the context of COVID-19, they held a three-day bilateral virtual seminar, attended by 60 members from both parties, in which there was no shortage of Chinese donations in the form of face masks and medical supplies.<sup>26</sup>

The CCP's political relationships on the Latin American continent are also relevant in Paraguay, the only South American country that recognizes Taipei. Because there are no formal relations between Paraguay and China, any dialogue is via their parties. In April 2020, in the midst of the pandemic wave, the leftist Guasú Front (FG), the third national party led by former President Fernando Lugo, urged the Paraguayan President to establish "immediate diplomatic relations" with Beijing and propose an agreement with the Asian country for "cooperation and trade of Chinese goods and services to deal with the coronavirus epidemic in exchange for agricultural raw materials and surplus food from Paraguay." The formal motion in the Senate, the first of its kind presented in Paraguay, was rejected. But it left a clear footprint: "There is a direct connection between Lugo's close relationship with the CCP and the legislative initiative presented by the FG," noted a political source in Asunción who spoke on condition of anonymity.<sup>27</sup>

It is therefore clear that the CCP's interparty relations are not merely formal, but assume the role of supporting, albeit in a more flexible and informal environment, China's international objectives and interests. The strategy pays off: in 2016, in an article published in *Qiushi*, the CCP took credit for the success of the support that 240 political parties and 280 think tanks and NGOs gave to China's position in its dispute over sovereignty in the South China Sea.<sup>28</sup> In June 2020, in the framework of a video conference about COVID-19 with several Latin American Communist parties, the head of the CCP's International Department, Song

Tao, took advantage of the controversy generated a few days earlier by the approval of the Hong Kong National Security Law to convey the party's version and emphatically conclude that the CCP "is resolutely opposed to any interference in China's internal affairs."<sup>29</sup>

## **4 The temptation of the elites: An effective development model without democracy**

Political messages of this nature, both domestically and internationally and adapted to the different foreign audiences to which they are addressed, are in fact increasingly common. The aforementioned multilateral conference organized by the CCP with its Communist comrades, which revolved around the supposed "superiority of the values of the Communist parties" in the fight against COVID-19, perfectly illustrates the ideological weight the CCP tries to instill in its interparty activities in Latin America. The CCP leaders acclaim China's authoritarian model and the strengths of the single party, extending it also to the struggle to eradicate poverty. This narrative has an indubitable trajectory in Latin America and the rest of the developing world.

This format was repeated in the virtual-face-to-face mixed summit held in September 2020, in which 200 representatives of 70 political parties from 16 Latin American countries participated. In it, the CCP referred to Beijing's desire to share its experience and poverty alleviation programs to help Latin American countries with this challenge. Heavenly music for the ears of their interlocutors that, just three weeks later, was played again in another seminar for 400 political, diplomatic and media representatives from a hundred developing countries. Insisting on the idea that "CCP leadership is the fundamental guarantee" to alleviate poverty, Song Tao referred to "China's wisdom" in praising China's contribution to the world for its ability to reduce poverty.<sup>30</sup> Xi Jinping himself pointed out in a 2017 speech that socialism with Chinese characteristics "opens a new path for the modernization of other developing countries."<sup>31</sup>

This very direct speech praising the Chinese model for its Latin American counterparts contrasts with the ideologically much more prudent messages it spreads in other regions, especially in the Western world. This is the case in Central Europe, where the CCP intentionally avoids any reference to the benefits of communism, poorly remembered in so many countries of the Soviet orbit. Instead, it chooses to link its dialectic to ties of friendship, economic cooperation, and cultural knowledge. Long ago, the CCP and Chinese diplomacy strove to articulate a polite style of speech that was not perceived as political by its interlocutors. They were even receptive to learning about the political systems and development models of other countries. In self-defense, they only insisted on the idea that "there is no universally applicable development model in the world"<sup>32</sup> and on the need to avoid outside "interference."

Now, after four decades of vertiginous growth under the cover of the so-called red capitalism, the Communist leaders are not only convinced that their model is appropriate, but also that the Western one is no better. Thus, as the regime subliminally promotes its model, increasingly explicit criticism is making its way against the "antiquated" Western-democratic party system that "only represents a selective few" and whose flaws are tearing Western societies apart.<sup>33</sup> The alleged successes of Beijing in its battle against COVID-19 and poverty serve as an excuse for the CCP to show others this good exercise of responsibilities and "enlighten the whole world." Much of Beijing's growing rejection of Western recipes occurred with the coming to power of Xi Jinping in 2013 and was reflected in an internal Central Committee circular of that year. Also known as Document Number Nine,<sup>34</sup> it is in fact an explicit rejection that includes increasingly aggressive rhetoric.

Western ideology, including constitutional democracy, universal values and human rights, civil society or freedom of the press, are rejected outright as "false" in this circular, and its support by the party cadres is not allowed.<sup>35</sup> This document, corroborated by the actions and narratives of both the CCP and the Chinese State, is a clear indication that the second largest economic power on

the planet will not be a liberal democracy, at least in the medium term. In Latin America and the developing world, and even in certain areas of the West, there is no shortage of elites who see clear evidence in the modernization of China over the last 40 years that development without democracy is possible. Added to this idea is the perception that democracies are not proving able to provide answers to the challenges of our time.

It is precisely in this context that it becomes necessary to decode the CCP's desire to promote the star project of Xi Jinping's diplomacy: The Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the New Silk Road. This initiative, which contemplates the construction of large-scale infrastructure to create commercial corridors in the developing world, is officially presented as a collaborative global development project with opportunities for all. What is not said is that, with its Beijing-ruled financial institutions, it is also a plan to lay the foundations for a new alternative world order under the orbit of China.

In the language of the Communist regime, it is Globalization 2.0. Or, which means the same: "a community for a shared future for humanity," according to the joint declaration cheerfully adhered to by the foreign political formations that attended the aforementioned 2017 forum of political parties in Beijing. For that reason, since the XIX Communist Congress, the party's International Department is pulling out all stops to promote the New Silk Road and add supporters to the initiative. It is doing so, first, through a multitude of ad hoc conferences organized by the China Center for Contemporary World Studies (CCCWS), its organic think tank, and by other entities with an academic profile which, though they appear to be civil society as much as they can in the eyes of their foreign interlocutors, are under the direct control of the party.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, they are addressing this issue "on an unprecedented scale" in bilateral meetings with their counterparts in Latin America and other developing regions.<sup>37</sup>

All these efforts, led by the CCP and aimed at convincing the developing world of the project's benefits, is seen by some observers as a contem-

porary version of the Maoist tactic of surround the cities from the countryside. An allegory of the cornering of the enemy that would have the aspiration to use its allies in the developing world to surround and defeat the Western enemy.<sup>38</sup>

## 5 The International Department: At the front of the CCP's diplomacy

At the third seminar held in 2020 between the CCP and the Argentine Justicialista Party (PJ), Jorge Taiana, the former foreign minister of Cristina Kirchner and current president of the Senate Foreign Relations Commission, informed the head of the Chinese party's international department that the former national president will negotiate Argentina's adhesion to the Belt and Road Initiative. The announcement is not so surprising for two reasons. First, the decision of Buenos Aires to join the Chinese alliance, which already seems to have been in favor given the course of the bilateral relationship in recent years. Second, the fact that it was made in the context of an inter-party meeting. This highlights the leading role of the International Department in promoting the Initiative and, more generally, its guiding role in support of China's foreign policy objectives.

The International Department is one of the four bodies that branch out from the CPC Central Committee. Among its responsibilities is to establish diplomatic ties with political parties around the world, which it spares no effort or resources to fulfill and does so in accordance with the motivations described in the preceding paragraphs. The most visible of its activities are without doubt the summits, conferences, seminars, visits and multilateral and bilateral meetings it organizes to establish a close relationship with its foreign counterparts. An example in Latin America of how fruitful these political ties can be is precisely their honeymoon with the Argentine PJ. A friendship established in recent years and reinforced with multiple meetings between the two in 2020, including the donation of 50,000 masks. All of this shows, in the words



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of the PJ itself, their agreement on a multitude of issues: from their conception of social justice to multilateralism.

It is an exemplary harmonic friendship in that it fully served what the CCP expects from its international political allies, especially as regards the legitimacy they offer the regime. It was carved out over the years but received a decisive boost in 2016, when the PJ's national legislator José Luis Gioja took over its presidency. Since that year, six delegations from the Argentine party have traveled to China at the invitation of the CCP and with its funding, to learn about the singularities of its political-economic system in situ. It is in this atmosphere of political camaraderie between the two formations that the frequent public white-washing done by the PJ leaders of their authoritarian ally must be understood. Senator Taiana, a frequent traveler to the Asian country, pointed out the theory that the virus "circulated long before" the outbreak in Wuhan, thus exempting China from its alleged responsibility. His colleague Gioja went even further, saying: "China is a

democracy in its own way."<sup>39</sup>

It was not a slip: his co-religionist Francisco Caffero, current Secretary of International Defense Affairs with a long connection to China that dates back to his presidency at the CLEPEC think tank and his vice-presidency at COPPAL, justified his party's ties with the CCP: "The political line of the PJ is to cooperate with the different democratic parties of the world". Despite the good relationship with the ruling party, the Chinese Communists, masters in the art of forging complicities with parties from across the ideological spectrum, also built bridges with the center-right Republican Proposal (PRO) formation. Amid the mutual acclamations, delegations from both parties flew over the Pacific at least seven times between 2016 and 2018. PRO president Humberto Schiavoni refuted in an article in Argentine newspaper Clarín titled "China, compass for our development" those who questioned the link between these two ideologically incompatible parties: "There is no such contradiction. This kind of discourse arises from prejudice," he wrote.

The example of Argentina is not the only one in Latin America, but it is one of the most revealing of the International Department's capacity to approach the local political class. The head of this department, Song Tao, does not hide that the party's external work has played an "outstanding and effective role" in Chinese diplomacy, exhibiting "unique advantages" in guiding international politics in the service of the central interests of the CCP and of the nation.<sup>40</sup> This does not constitute an obstacle for this Communist body to enjoy a non-aggressive and even benevolent image in the eyes of its foreign counterparts, since it bases its interaction with them on persuasion and courtesy. However, it is important to understand that their work cannot be separated from the repertoire of activities of international influence, some much less friendly, that are conducted by the party. That it is not obvious to its interlocutors does not mean the International Department doesn't participate in these activities.

Although the visible tip of the iceberg is its public interaction with its foreign political allies, below the water line the CCP engages in authoritarian influence activities. Abroad, the so-called united front operations have the mission of manipulating the political and other actors to gain legitimacy, manage potential threats or mobilize their sympathizers for the benefit of the party.<sup>41</sup> The target of its operations are, on the one hand, the Chinese diasporas in the recipient countries, who are conveniently encouraged to participate actively in support of the CCP; and, on the other, influential national figures with special attention to political actors, although not exclusively. Taken into the political arena, these activities focus on building relationships in order to coopt and manipulate elites, influential individuals and organizations to shape discourses and decision-making.<sup>42</sup>

Since Xi Jinping took power, it is not only the International Department that has come out stronger to carry forward its mission of forging a consensus favorable to Beijing among foreign political parties. The work of the united front, done specifically by the United Front Work Department (UFW) even if it is also a "fundamental task" of

all the organs of the CCP and of any militant, has also consolidated. Charles Burton, CCP specialist at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute says that the International Department's diplomatic work in support of the party's UFW strategies was notably successful under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, but it is with Xi Jinping that there is "an aggressive and blatant policy to further China's geostrategic ambitions of the Belt and Road Initiative and the common destiny of mankind" dominated by China. This policy has been reinforced with their wolf warrior diplomacy, he adds, referring to Beijing's growing diplomatic assertiveness. "China no longer plays nice in its international engagements. Chinese leaders have abandoned soft power in favor of sharp power. The era of reciprocal friendship visits has ended with Xi Jinping," he concludes.

## 6 Friendship associations, the other pillar of influence operations

In addition to the CCP's International Department, an organization that is more difficult to decipher but has become another pillar of the political operations of the *united front*, also plays a determining role in forging tactical alliances with foreign politicians. It is known among a complex network of friendship associations of all kinds as the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC). Its mission is to establish relations with both friendship groups with China created in foreign parliaments and local governments, as well as other functions.<sup>43</sup> It is a hybrid entity. On the one hand, it is under the Council of State and managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although not subordinate to it; and on the other, as befits a "people's organization," it is very close to the CCP.<sup>44</sup>

Proof of this is that the CPAFFC has traditionally been led by the so-called young princelings, the descendants of the historical CCP leaders, which makes it a hard-core entity of the party. Analyst Jichang Lulu defines it as "the main 'people's diplomacy' organization within the CCP's foreign affairs system", whose modus operandi runs through in-

formal channels to promote official diplomacy. The most visible part of its activity, which is part of the united front's work, is identifying, cultivating and coopting foreign political elites to disseminate party narratives, deflect negative criticism of China's image and display the virtues of the CCP. In the heat of these objectives, the focus in the political arena is on maintaining a close relationship with the friendship groups mentioned above. This work is shared with a range of Chinese organizations that also interact, although not necessarily in a coordinated manner, with foreign parliamentarians.

In Latin America today there are twelve friendship groups with China.<sup>45</sup> And despite the fact that their proceedings are usually easygoing and discreet, sometimes cases come to light in which the assertiveness with which the communist country acts is displayed, usually through its diplomatic staff, when things do not go the way expected. One such case occurred in Peru during the 2016 APEC summit, when Xi Jinping was awarded the Medal of Honor of the Grand Cross from the Peruvian Congress. Marco Arana, a congressman for the leftist Broad Front, objected to the distinction due to the political nature of the Chinese regime and "the risks of Chinese neocolonialism." Amid the unanimity of the Peruvian political class in favor of China, the congressman's unruly stance provoked the reaction of the Chinese ambassador, who in a meeting "excessive in protocol" accused him of "not adequately assessing the importance of Chinese investments in a difficult time for the Peruvian economy," and demanded he not interfere in China's internal affairs.<sup>46</sup> The relationship with Beijing is strategic for Peru: this Asian giant is at the same time its major commercial partner and largest investor, dominating mining and the oil sector, among others.

The episode did not end there, as the Chinese diplomat demonstrated with another subsequent action the exact measure of the value that China attaches to the relations it cultivates in the legislative sphere. Hand in hand with Alan García, late former Peruvian president, the Peruvian Aprista Party (APRA) had become the main interlocutor and ally of the CCP in Peru. Thanks to the cultivation of this relationship, members of APRA and

the think tank linked to that party were periodically invited to China, while also receiving donations from the CCP.<sup>47</sup> An antecedent the ambassador took advantage of to send APRA a clear warning, despite the fact that the one who had threatened to protest against Xi was the Broad Front bench. If any incident occurred in Lima, he warned, none of the APRA allies would set foot in China again and the projects scheduled between them would remain suspended in the air.<sup>48</sup>

In the Chilean Parliament, another in the region that constituted a friendship group with China, Chinese diplomacy has managed to establish very close ties with the entire political class, including the formations whose anti-communism is clearly evident. For Beijing, if they do not question China's political system or hamper its economic interests, ideology takes a back seat. But "if you point out something about the internal political situation in China, about serious human rights violations or how dangerous the penetration of Chinese capital in Latin America can be, then you fall from grace," explains Jaime Naranjo, Socialist legislator in the Chilean hemicycle and fierce critic of the Chinese dictatorship. Naranjo denounces the "complicit silence" of the Chilean political parties, which he links to the "fluid parliamentary tourism to China that existed before the pandemic."<sup>49</sup>

But he warns: "Nothing is free. The Chinese take their toll later. It is an investment that seeks to neutralize dissident voices, a diplomacy that seeks to silence critics and they have been successful because every time there is a draft resolution against China in the Chilean Congress, for example, due to the situation in Hong Kong, the Chinese ambassador quickly calls the parliamentarians. And, it is worth noting, the fact that many of those legislators who went to China then abstained or absented themselves from the vote," Naranjo concludes. The meticulous diplomatic work of the CPAFFC and other party-state players, on the one hand, and the perception of local elites that China is economically irreplaceable, on the other, explain the scarcity of critical public opinions of Latin American political parties towards the Beijing regime. The combination is fatal.

## **7** By way of conclusion: The mission to decipher China

It has been mentioned previously that public opinion in Latin America has a far less friendly view of China than the regional elites do. However, this has not prevented China from having achieved certain success in its strategy of seducing regional elites. These elites have been convinced not only of the positive effects of the strength and attributes of the Asian giant without paying due attention to the side effects, but also of the core idea - elevated to the category of dogma - that the political climate must be optimal for Beijing for the business relationships to bear fruit.

In order to persuade the political class, the CCP leaders have been especially adept at adopting attractive positions both on the left and on the right of the ideological arc, thereby building their influence in the region without much resistance.<sup>50</sup> All of this occurs in a context of political parties' crisis of representation and loss of relevance in Latin America, where the so-called new politics is increasingly linked to specific actors and individuals rather than to party platforms. In the midst of political corruption and growing dissatisfaction with democracy, the ghost of caudillo political leaders in Latin America looms. Hence, there is an environment of confusion in which Chinese diplomacy moves like a fish in water.

In this new political era that can be seen in the region, China is perfectly placed. This is corroborated not only by the rampant activity of the CCP described in these pages. Different organs of the State and countless Chinese institutions of all kinds have stable ties with their Latin American counterparts. It is a deployment and a variety of efforts, led by the CCP, that are complex and difficult to decipher, but whose workings and effects it is imperative to understand. Amid the diplomatic push of the CCP and the Chinese State, unparalleled in the region, this mission to understand this phenomenon should predominantly be led by political parties and institutions.

## Annex. Meetings of the Chinese Communist Party with political parties in Latin America – 2002 to 2020<sup>a</sup>

	2020 <sup>b</sup>	2019	2018 <sup>c</sup>	2002-2017 <sup>d</sup>
Argentina	3	5	2	14
Bolivia	0	1		5
Brazil	3	8	1	40
Chile	1	8		10
Colombia	0	2		20
Costa Rica	0	0		19
Cuba	2	7	2	47
Ecuador	0	1		14
El Salvador	0	1		4
Guatemala	0	0		1
Honduras	0	0		1
Mexico	2	1		19
Nicaragua	0	0		0
Panama	3	1	1	4
Rep. Dom.	0	2		3
Paraguay	0	0	0	2
Peru	1	2	1	14
Uruguay	1	1		18
Venezuela	5	2		12
Others <sup>e</sup>	3	5	1	
Total	24	47	8	247

a Compilation of a minimum number that includes meetings with members of the CCP and representatives of Latin American political parties and organizations, as well as with representatives and Latin American parliaments. This excludes meetings with elected officials of the State, ambassadors and academics.

b Compilation through October 2020.

c The website of the International Department of the CCP does not reflect the meetings with foreign political parties in 2018. The data included in the table correspond to news published in different media and are only a small fraction of those that were held.

d The website of the International Department of the CCP does not reflect the meetings with foreign political parties in 2018. The data included in the table correspond to news published in different media and are only a small fraction of those that were actually held.

e Includes: 1) Multilateral initiatives in which unidentified Latin American political parties participated; 2) Regional summits such as the 2018 China-CELAC Dialogue of Political Parties, to which representatives of 60 political groups in the region attended; and 3) Meetings with regional organizations of political parties such as ODCA and COPPPAL.

### Sources:

- Website in English of the CCP International Department (years 2019-2020), accessible at <https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/news/> The information published by the CCP International Department should be considered as a minimal compilation, the website for this department does not collect the information from all the meetings that actually occurred.
- Supplemental information from the report “The Struggle for Minds and Influence: The Chinese Communist Party’s Global Outreach” (years 2002-2017), by Christine Hackenesch y Julia Bader, Accessible at <https://academic.oup.com/isq/article/64/3/723/5855278> The 247 meetings counted by the authors between 2002 and 2017 are in reference to all the meetings in which the affiliation of the political party as mentioned, including those held with legislators had their affiliation recorded.
- Compilation of news by the author based on data published by the International Department of the CCP and journalistic sources. It includes the meetings of the International Department of the CCP with Latin American party delegations and meetings with legislators of national parliaments in the region.

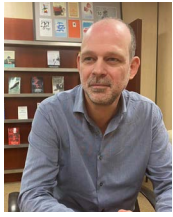


## Notas

- 1 A Joint Open Letter From World Political Parties Concerning Closer International Cooperation Against COVID-19 is available in English [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/02/c\\_138941592.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/02/c_138941592.htm)
- 2 Regarding this, Hu Zhaoming, director and spokesperson of the Public Information and Communication Bureau for the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee, posted on his Twitter account in April 2020 that the CCP "donated health supplies and humanitarian aid to 70 political parties in more than 40 countries."
- 3 On China's propaganda campaign regarding the pandemic, see "Chinese propaganda for a post-COVID-19 scenario," by Juan Pablo Cardenal, published by CADAL on May 11, 2020, <https://www.cadal.org/researchreports/pdf/Chinese-propaganda-for-a-post-Covid-19-scenario.pdf>
- 4 "Uniting Political Parties Worldwide to Cooperate in the Global Fight against COVID-19 Pandemic," *China Insight*, Special Issue on CPC 99th Anniversary, 2020. This article, the source of which is an article published in Qiushi, mentions that "600 people from more than 300 political parties and organizations in more than 130 countries have expressed their support for Xi Jinping and the CCP's Central Committee via telegrams, statements, etc." Accessible in <https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/chinainsight/202007/P020200702609287552834.pdf>
- 5 Close examination of sources in Spanish, English and Mandarin leads to the conclusion that the complete list of political parties that signed the joint declaration is not available on the Internet. That it has not been made public fuels speculation about the minor profile of many of the signatory parties, if not about the veracity of the data, especially when the letter sent by the CCP to obtain international support expressly mentions its intention to make public the names of the signatory parties.
- 6 The figure was divulged by Fu Jie, deputy director of the Latin American and Caribbean Bureau of the CCP's International Department, in an interview on Chinese state television. Source: "Intercambios en la nube: Fu Jie afirma que es en tiempos difíciles cuando se comprueba la amistad verdadera entre amigos," *CGTN*, September 22, 2020, <https://espanol.cgtn.com/n/2020-09-22/EBICIA/fu-jie-afirma-que-es-en-tiempos-dificiles-cuando-se-comprueba-la-amistad-verdadera-entre-amigos/index.html>
- 7 From the compilation of fragmented information published, at least the following Latin American political parties have signed the joint declaration sponsored by the CCP: in the Dominican Republic, United Left Movement; in Argentina, the Justicialista Party, the Radical Civic Union, Republican Proposal (PRO), the Solidarity Party and the Communist Party; in Brazil, the Democratic Movement, the Workers Party, the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and Democratic Labor Party; in Chile and in Cuba, the Communist Party; in Uruguay, the Broad Front; and in Paraguay, the Guasú Front. Various sources, among others "El comunismo chino, el peronismo y partidos políticos de todo el mundo piden la unión global contra covid-19," *Sputnik Mundo*, April 4, 2020.
- 8 Alberto Anaya, president of the Labor Party in Mexico, stated that China's fight against the epidemic enabled the world to find time for the prevention and control of the global epidemic, in addition to having "actively shared its experience with the international community and generously extending a helping hand to many countries, for which we express our sincere thanks." Source: 中联部有关负责人同墨西哥劳动党主席阿纳亚通电话, website of the International Department of the CCP Central Committee, April 15, 2020, <https://archive.vn/zfOsn>. Another example is the note from the Dominican Republic's United Left Movement issued on October 1, 2020, on the occasion of the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, which begins as follows: "October 1, 1949, is a memorable date that marks a historic and relevant event for the brave Chinese people and for the world, an occasion when, under the leadership of President Mao Zedong and the wise leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, together with the People's Liberation Army, achieved victory and the great goal of founding the People's Republic of China." Accessible in <https://www.facebook.com/RDMiu/>
- 9 Anne-Marie Brady, "Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic," Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003. In this work, the author points out that China's foreign relations system "is characterized by friends and enemies, insiders and outsiders, reflecting a deep distrust of and discomfort with the outside world."
- 10 Shicheng Xu, "Evolución de las relaciones entre el PCCh y los partidos de América Latina." *Amigos de China*, Number 11, October 2012.
- 11 Shicheng Xu, "Evolución de las relaciones..." op. cit.
- 12 Due to the fragmented available information and the nature of the main source, the data referred to in the above paragraph, as well as that included in the Annex, should be considered a minimum compilation. The "meetings" refer to appointments, interviews and events held between the International Department of the CCP's Central Committee and representatives of Latin American political parties or elected legislators.
- 13 Data from October 2017 to October 2018. Source: Julia G. Bowie, "International Liaison Work for the New Era: Generating Global Consensus?," Party Watch Annual Report 2018, Center for Advanced China Research, <https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/2018/10/18/party-watch-annual-report-2018>
- 14 About China's sharp power, see "Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World," by Christopher Walker, Jessica Ludwig and other authors, published in December 2017 by National Endowment for Democracy. Accessible in: <https://www.ned.org/sharp-power-rising-authoritarian-influence-forum-report/>
- 15 Ting Shi, "China Gets 300 Political Parties to Endorse Xi as Peacemaker," *Bloomberg*, December 4, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-12-04/china-gets-300-political-parties-to-endorse-xi-as-peacemaker>
- 16 Sebastian Grundberger and Thomas Schaumberg, "Los partidos latinoamericanos en el foco de China," *Diálogo Político*, September 30, 2020, <https://dialogopolitico.org/agenda/los-partidos-latinoamericanos-en-el-foco-de-china>
- 17 Source: "Declaración del Segundo Foro de Partidos Políticos China-CELAC," held in Shenzhen May 27, 2018, <http://pa.china-embassy.org/esp/sgxx/t1565002.htm>
- 18 The Forum meeting was held on December 8 and 9, 2015 in Beijing attended by 58 representatives of 27 political parties from 26 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Source: "Partido Comunista de China se compromete a formar líderes políticos en América Latina," *La República*, December 9, 2015, <https://www.larepublica.ec/blog/2015/12/09/parti>

- do-comunista-de-china-se-compromete-a-formar-lideres-politicos-en-america-latina/
- 19 Among other programs aimed at young leaders from the region, the Latin American Center for Political and Economic Studies on China (CLEPEC), a foundation based in Buenos Aires linked to that of Kirshner, has received scholarships and funding from Beijing since its creation in 2013 to train its young politicians about China. One of those who received training and cultivated a very close relationship with China was Francisco Cafiero, vice president of COPPAL, former president of CLEPEC and current secretary for International Affairs for the Defense of Argentina. In that same country, representatives of the Contemporary Foundation, informally linked to center-right parties, received training in China to form the next generation of Argentine leaders. Source: Juan Pablo Cardenal, "El poder incisivo" de China en América Latina y el caso argentino," *CADAL*, March 12, 2018, [https://www.cadal.org/libros/pdf/El\\_Poder\\_Incisivo\\_de\\_China.pdf](https://www.cadal.org/libros/pdf/El_Poder_Incisivo_de_China.pdf)
  - 20 Shixue Jiang, "A New Look at the Chinese Relations with Latin America," *Nueva Sociedad*, issue 203, 2006.
  - 21 Shicheng Xu, "Evolución de las relaciones..." op. cit.
  - 22 "Líder del Frente Amplio de Uruguay cree que AL debe 'aprender' política de alivio de la pobreza de China," *Xinhua*, September 20, 2020, [http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2020-09/20/c\\_139381943.htm](http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2020-09/20/c_139381943.htm)
  - 23 A. Bohigues and S. Morgenstern, "Covariance of Latin American Elite Attitudes Towards the USA and China." In M. Alcántara M., M. García Montero and C. Rivas Pérez (eds.), *Politics and Political Elites in Latin America. Latin American Societies (Current Challenges in Social Sciences)*, Springer, Cham, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51584-3\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51584-3_9)
  - 24 Shixue Jiang, "A New Look at..." op. cit. According to that author, when Nicaragua reestablished diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1990, the CCP broke relations with that Central American country. On the other hand, the CCP maintained relations with more than 20 parties in 10 of the 12 Latin American countries that in 2012 recognized Taiwan.
  - 25 "China destaca nexos con Panamá en donación de mascarillas para enfrentar covid-19," *Xinhua*, July 3, 2020, [http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2020-07/04/c\\_139187803.htm](http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2020-07/04/c_139187803.htm)
  - 26 In the context of COVID-19, China announced the donation of face masks in different Latin American countries. Together with embassies, State and private companies, municipal or provincial governments and friendship associations, one of the alleged donors was the CCP. Part of the donations were destined for Latin American political parties. In Costa Rica, five political formations were investigated by the judiciary for having accepted 5,000 face masks each, something banned by that country's electoral legislation. Source: Luis Manuel Madrigal, "Fiscalía y TSE investigan donación china de mascarillas a partidos políticos y diputados," *Delfino*, August 6, 2020, <https://delfino.cr/2020/08/fiscalia-y-tse-investigacion-donacion-china-de-mascarillas-a-partidos-politicos-y-diputados>
  - 27 Two days after winning the elections in 2008, former President Lugo announced his intention of establishing diplomatic relations with China. However, the source consulted by the author points out that his rapprochement with Bolivia and Venezuela prevented him proceeding with the idea, in a country with a sociologically conservative political opinion that would have objected and resisted the abandonment of democratic Taiwan and the recognition of communist China. This didn't prevent Lugo cultivating "a closer relationship with the CCP now than when he was president." Currently "there are stakeholders in all parties, also in the Colorado Party, who are promoting diplomatic relations with China," concluded the referred source.
  - 28 Julia G. Bowie, "International Liaison Work for..." op. cit.
  - 29 Song Tao, "Ponencia del Partido Comunista chino," *Cuadernos Marxistas*, special edition "El pueblo primero: superioridad de valores de los partidos comunistas en el combate contra covid-19," June 2020, <http://www.elcefma.com.ar/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Cuadernos-Marxistas-Ed.-Especial-China-AL.pdf>
  - 30 The titles of the two seminars are representative of the ideological veneer that the CCP puts on its international activities. The first was held on September 22, 2020, under the title "The History of the Chinese Communist Party: Xi Jinping's Path from Socialism with Chinese Characteristics to the Philosophy of a 'New Age' in Guizhou." In this seminar the Chinese communists assured that "by the end of this year rural poverty will be completely eliminated" from China. The second, held on October 12, 2020, was titled "Eradication of poverty and responsibility of political parties." Sources: *Weekly reports* 3/47 and 4/1, from the Center for Advanced China Research, accessible respectively at: <https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/2020/09/28/weekly-report-347-9192020-9262020> and <https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/weekly-report-4-1-10-10-2020-10-16-2020>.
  - 31 Cited in "Move over, America. China now presents itself as the model 'blazing a new trail' for the world," by Simon Denyer, *The Washington Post*, October 19, 2017.
  - 32 "Declaration of the Second Forum..." op. cit.
  - 33 Sheng Zhong, "China's new type of party system enlightens the world," *People's Daily*, March 12, 2018. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0312/c90000-9435991.html>
  - 34 More information on the Document Number Nine in D. Matthew Johnson, "Safeguarding socialism: The origins, evolution and expansion of China's total security paradigm," *Sinopsis*, June 11, 2020. <https://sinopsis.cz/en/johnson-safeguarding-socialism/>
  - 35 Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, "Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World," *Oneworld Publications*, 2020.
  - 36 For a detailed description of the Chinese entities organizing and promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, see Nadège Rolland, "Mapping the footprint of Belt and Road influence operations," *Sinopsis*, August 12, 2019, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/rolland-bri-influence-operations/>
  - 37 Christine Hackenesch and Julia Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence: The Chinese Communist Party's Global Outreach," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 64, Num. 3, September 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqaa028>. The authors counted 390 encounters between the CCP and political parties around the world in which, between 2014 and 2017, the issue of the Belt and Road was addressed.
  - 38 Clive Hamilton y Mareike Ohlberg, "Hidden Hand: Exposing..." op. cit.
  - 39 "José Luis Gioja: 'We have been chatting with the Chinese Communist Party,'" *Radio Rivadavia*, August 16, 2020, <https://rivadavia.com.ar/noticias/incorrectamente-politicos/jose-luis-gioja-venimos-charlando-con-el-partido-comunista-chino>
  - 40 Interview with Song Tao published September 28, 2019, in the *People's Daily*, in which the reference to

- the weekly report is made 3/1 of the Center for Advanced China Research. Accessible at: <https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/2019/10/07/Weekly-Report-31-9282019-1042019>
- 41 More information on the work of the united front in "Exploit Every Rift: United Front Work Goes Global," by Anne-Marie Brady, published in the 2018 *annual report* of the Center for Advanced China Research, [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/183fcc\\_5dfb4a9b2dde492db4002f4aa9of4a25.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/183fcc_5dfb4a9b2dde492db4002f4aa9of4a25.pdf)
  - 42 Alex Joske, "The Party speaks for you," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/party-speaks-you>
  - 43 Another of its main functions is to build bridges with local governments abroad. This is a very political relationship, which often serves to open doors to national political bodies and, eventually, to influence national governments. One of the activities in which the CPAFFC participates is the twinning of Chinese cities with other foreign cities. Currently, there are 77 Chinese city twinings with 63 cities in 10 Latin American countries, specifically, in Brazil (27), Mexico (15), Argentina (10), Chile (8), Ecuador (5), Peru (3), Costa Rica (3), Uruguay (2), Cuba (2), Bolivia (1) and Colombia (1). Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_twin\\_towns\\_and\\_sister\\_cities\\_in\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_twin_towns_and_sister_cities_in_China)
  - 44 For more information on the Chinese friendship associations and their link to the work of the united front see "Repurposing democracy: the European Parliament China friendship cluster," by Jichang Lulu, *Sinopsis*, November 26, 2019, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/ep/>
  - 45 According to the author's compilation, the following Latin American countries have established friendship groups with China in their legislative headquarters: Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Costa Rica, Panama, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay, Peru and Ecuador.
  - 46 Juan Pablo Cardenal, "El poder blando de China en Perú," *CADAL*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.cadal.org/informes/pdf/El-poder-blando-de-China-en-Peru.pdf>
  - 47 The Peruvian press reported that the Chinese Communist Party donated amounts close to 100,000 dollars to the ruling Peruvian Aprista Party in 2008, the year in which Peru and China strengthened their ties and sealed a free trade agreement. More information in: "Partido Comunista China financia a partido en el poder en Perú," *El Economista*, January 21, 2009, <https://ecodiario.eleconomista.es/global/noticias/982961/01/09/Partido-Comunista-China-financia-a-partido-en-el-poder-en-Peru.html>
  - 48 Officers from APRA and members of the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies traveled periodically to China for years at the invitation of the Chinese authorities, as a result of the close relationship of its leader Alan García and the rest of the party with the CCP and with other organizations and entities, politicians, academics, and diplomats of the party-state. These were trips with all expenses paid, including amounts of money for expenses, and they were attended by officials and young leaders of APRA, the center-right Christian Popular Party and other political groups, as well as journalists, members of the judiciary and academic institutions, among other personalities, according to information entrusted to the author by sources close to APRA.
  - 49 Source: Interview granted by Jaime Naranjo to the author.
  - 50 A. Bohigues y S. Morgenstern, "Covariance of Latin American Elite..." op. cit.



## Juan Pablo Cardenal

Juan Pablo Cardenal is a Spanish journalist and researcher specializing in the internationalization of China. He is the co-author of three books on the topic published between 2011 and 2015, works that have been translated into twelve languages, among other books and chapters. He is an associate researcher at the Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL). He is also the author of several studies on China and Russia's sharp power in Latin America.

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