The studies of the international relations between Argentina and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has been developed extensively in the recent years. Increasing trade, and political contacts in the last decade suggested the scholars to pay attention to longer trends. The book Historia de las Relaciones Internacionales entre Argentina y China, written by Daniel Oviedo (2010), supposed the first systematic approach to the diplomatic history between both countries. His studies were based on primary sources, from Argentina, the PRC, and Taiwan, showing from the first contacts with the Qing Dynasty at the begging of the XX Century to the presidential meetings in 2010. His book is particularly significant for those whose venture in the studies of Sino-Latin American relations. However, it opened the field for other researchs and further question on the diplomatic links between Argentina and China. This paper focused on the network between both countries during the Global Cold War (1949-1972) searching for the geopolitical rationality of the actors involved. To answer this question, we applied Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory looking how was the position in the international field of the Argentine political players towards the relations with the PRC. In this sense, we looked to improve the current knowledge on the diplomatic networks, developed by Oviedo (2010), noting the representations and position of the actor of period.

In the long term, the relations between China and Argentina were closely affected by the status of both countries in the international organization. Argentinian entered into the post-war global system as a middle-income country, under a process of industrialization, occupying a self-contradictory position. On one hand, Buenos Aires led the strongest economy in Latin America and had significant impacts in the region. On the other, this relative influence couldn’t represent an alternative to the growing involvement of USA in the continent. Since 1945, the Argentine political field had to deal with the American pressure, especially evident in foreign affairs, and preserve the national interests at the same time. Several strategies had been adapted regarding the foreign landscape during the Global Cold War, with opposing periods of autonomy and dependency. Therefore, the political instability of the period made impossible a long-term foreign policy, showing how domestic events affected directly the diplomatic service.

Carlos Escudé (2014) has noted that international relations of Latin American countries faced alien pressures, mostly since the USA entered into the World War II and pushed for a continental agreement. He coined the term ‘peripheral realism’ to express the conditions of those states that “played a modest role in the international community” (2014:42). His model replaces the neo-realistic ‘anarchy’ of inter-states networks by a ‘proto-hierarchy’, where few nations rules and the others have no choice but to follow them. From a macro-perspective, Buenos Aires’ peripheral condition affected San Martín Palace’s attitude towards the PRC.

We saw the beginning of these trends, after the American mission in 1945. The American diplomatic envoy, led by the general Ava Warren, arrived in the country to deal the Argentine participation in the San Francisco Conferences. The neutrality during the war implied a weak stance in the new transnational order. Therefore, Warren suggested the vice-president Perón to start dialogues with the USSR, and China, both permanent members of the future Security Council. In result, the first treaty with Chinese representatives was announced few days after the UN was chartered.

In 1946, the Argentine embassy opened in Shanghai and lasted for less than three years when the chancellor Juan Atilio Bramuglia ordered to close the doors. The documents and memories of the officers who stayed in the legation represent a unique way to identify the representations of China during the early stages of the relations. After the office in Shanghai was closed, Argentina didn’t have formal network with mainland China until the government ordered to begin negotiations with the Chinese embassy in Bucharest in September 1971. The period from 1949 to 1971 is characterized by commerce’s networks, and cultural exchange without diplomatic ties. Argentina became the first
country in Latin America to open a line of trade with Beijing, during the last years of Juan Domingo Perón in power.

According to the constructivist scholarship, International Relations have fundamental social roots. Concepts like ‘national interest’ or ‘identity of the country’ are based on the officers and politicians’ perception of the foreign landscape. Therefore, the international orientation of the country, rather than stable in the time, resulted from the inner dialogues, disputes, and negotiations among power actors. We saw that domestic events, transformations of the domestic political field, and reception of foreign events had direct consequences in the diplomatic service.

Taking into consideration Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) model of social action, we divided Argentine political field into two opposing attitudes in foreign affairs.

Figure 1: Autonomy and Dependency regarding the Global Cold War foreign context

We understand that the foreign orientation was another aspect of the domestic political debate that characterized the Latin American post-war period. Political parties, public actors, and power forces had a set of interpretations on the international landscape and the role that Argentina should play. During three decades, there were periods of relative autonomy or dependency from the main power in the region.

Conservative players in Argentina’s political field proposed the alignment with the USA; meanwhile reformist governments suggested an ‘opening to the East’ to overcome the economic dependence with the Western Bloc. The discussion on the foreign affairs expanded into the political arena expressing opposing tendencies. As the constructivist scholarship suggests, diverse actors understood in different ways the Cold War’s international context. In this sense, we identify different behaviors among the military regimes (excluding Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, who restarted diplomatic networks with the PRC) and the elected governments. The Armed Forces tended to identify International Relations with domestic security (like Juan Carlos Onganía’s emphasis on “ideological orientation”) in the meantime, Arturo Frondizi and Arturo Illia applied a foreign policy related to the economic development of the country.

The state should be considered as a ground for competitions, fights, and cooperation among power actors looking to develop their interests into actual decisions. Rather than unified institutions, Bourdieu (1989) provides a social state’s theory, based on highly diverse production’s spaces that interacts with each other. This competition affected the basic orientation of country, as we saw, during one of the most unstable periods of Argentine recent history. All agents had an international agenda that considered the international confrontation among global superpowers, and Argentina’s position in the globe.
In this sense, the Cold War was the ‘horizons of possibilities’ (taking Reinhardt Kosselleck’s concept) for every actor involved in the political system. Rather than a given period, the Cold War should be understood as a production of agents during a certain context. Through their practices, and representations, the global confrontation became actual policies, and affected the domestic institutions. Therefore, basic orientation towards the neighboring countries, Western Europe, and the USA influenced the way that San Martín palace understood the relations with East Asia.

The constructivist interpretation provided a new look to Perón’s Third Position, that still generates debates among Argentine scholars. Peronist foreign policy was understood as an ideological orientation, looking to provide a certain alternative between global powers or, an “Argentine expansionism in other Latin American countries” (Zanatta, 2013: 10).

Rather than a clear and stable strategy in a long term, we understand that the Third Position was shaped by economic circumstances, inner forces, and international events. Perón’s autonomic strategy had hills and downs according to the forces involved during his governments. He claimed that Argentina should occupy a different place among global powers in dispute and opened several representations in communist countries, the Middle East and East Asia. The first line of commerce with China was opened in this period. According to Fernando Bosoer, “it was the most active foreign policy after the creation of Argentine National State in 1880” (Bosoer, 2013:31). In another way, Eduardo Oviedo recognized that the Argentina’s position was “clearly in favor of the Western Bloc” (2010:140), without noting that Perón’s representatives voted in abstention during the first discussions regarding the ‘Chinese question’ in the UN. Apart from the results, the Third Position had other kind of repercussions in the political imagination of Perón’s supporters. The feeling that Latin America and East Asia had a common destiny was introduced for the first time in the political discourse during this time.

Soon after the first trading line was established, the military coup interrupted it in 1955, beginning with a common practice during this period. The Armed Forces stopped the advances, and contacts made by previous democratic governments. The next networks between Buenos Aires and Beijing would have to wait until Arturo Frondizi was elected as a president.

Foreign Affairs from 1958 to 1962 implied a period of insightful pragmatism. During one of the highest moments in the confrontation among global players in Latin America, Frondizi sustained dialogues with Nikita Khrušchev, Fidel Castro, Dwight Eisenhower, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, and John F. Kennedy. His policies looked to improve the Argentine industrial sector, searching for new markets and allies, besides the traditional partners in Western Europe. Few scholars point out that Frondizi’s diplomacy had a clear economic orientation (Escudé, 1992; Rapoport, 2015). However, his commitment to the multilateralism in the Americas extended far beyond the commercial implications. His position on the Cuban Revolution showed how active was the Argentine diplomacy during this moment. Frondizi’s policy sustained contradictories policies regarding the multilateral foreign strategy and domestic political prosecution. This situation showed how the complex system of forces sustained the government, when the Armed Forces actively limited the spectrum of actions.

The multilateral strategy had ups and downs, moments of confrontation, or agreement with the USA and the USSR. The economic situation (for example, the crisis of Argentina in 1958), international events (like Missile Crisis in Cuba), and domestic political affairs affected directly the Diplomatic service. We saw that the increasing participation of the Army on inner security disturbed the attitude with communist countries. After being elected president, Frondizi claimed that Argentina should have diplomatic relationship with Beijing, but, several factors limited the possibilities to reestablish formal networks. During the next years, the ‘Chinese question’ spread among the political landscape and public sphere in Argentina, like the Congress, and the cultural field.

At the end of the 1950s, China considered buying large amounts of grains, and food supplies from Western countries, mainly from Canada, Australia, and Argentina. Toronto had set the precedent for other nations looking to improve trading with Beijing without disrupting the American hegemony in the continent. Argentine officials, and private actors paid close attention to these experiences. The peripheral realism explained why Frondizi had to discuss with Eisenhower, or Kennedy if Argentina
was going to trade with Beijing or not. The Southern government found limits for independent actions in the international, and the domestic field.

However, there were small but actual spaces for indirect connections. Regarding these contexts, the Argentine consulate in Hong Kong became a key institution for the links with the PRC. The consuls, who occupied the legation in the island, recognized that the real interest for the country was beyond the borders of the British administration. The attitude became an actual policy after several meetings. China Resources Company and the National Board started negotiations at the end of 1961, and soon after, they exchanged a dispatch of grains and beef. Looking to the opportunity, the consuls Adolfo Bollini recommended the government to deepen the relations.

Like past times, the network was interrupted. The military uprising, headed by Raúl Poggi, overthrew Frondizi and imprisoned the president. The Armed Forces accused him of being tolerant to the left groups. As in previous opportunities, the military regimes tended to pro-Western alignment. In fact, Guido sent the Navy to support the American blockade to Cuba during the missile crisis.

The pendulum effect, from military coups to democratic governments, restricted the policies towards East Asia. During the long sixties, the militaries became a factor that limited the actions of the entire political landscape.

Regarding the domestic, and international context, Arturo Illia tried to develop a unique foreign strategy to open new markets and generate allies. China, in this sense, became a strategic partner. On one hand, the previous experiences had proved that Argentina could sustain commerce with the PRC through indirect channels with public, semi-public, and private participation. On another, the president sustained a non-interventionist position, following the traditional Argentina’s neutral position in the international organizations.

Illia recommended changing the Argentine vote on the ‘Chinese question’ in the UN. However, a group of militaries stopped him and ordered to follow the American orientation. Tensions among agents, security forces, and social movements were a constant trend during the entire decade and resulted in self-contradictory policies. Illia’s Foreign Affairs office openly encouraged commerce with the PRC; while, the chancellor sustained a pro-American orientation in security issues. The contract signed with the National Board-JNG reached its highest point in 1965 when Beijing became the first single buyer of Argentina’s agricultural products.

These closer relations raised a reaction in the political system, that split in different positions. The conservative actors suggested that the contract signed by the national agencies implied a direct network with Beijing. The question on the diplomatic normalization with the PRC expanded in the Congress, where representatives from different backgrounds suggested that the government should follow the example of Charles De Gaulle in France and exchange ambassadors with China.

However, the relations with USA had been deeply affected since the end of oil contracts in 1963. Chancellor Zavala Ortiz followed a pro-Western orientation, mainly related to security issues. If Frondizi’s alignment with the USA advanced on economic issues, demanding a neutral position in questions like Cuba’s expulsion in the Pan-American System, Illia’s administration had several misunderstandings in foreign investments, but followed American decisions in issues like the economic blockade to Cuba. This self-contradictory policy replicated into tensions inside the government. Commerce and cultural exchanges with the PRC grew during Illia’s presidency, as well as the restrictions made by the Armed Forces. After three tense years, the Armed Forces overthrew the government, setting the third military uprising in a decade.

As we said before, the policies towards the Eastern Bloc had repercussions in the domestic field. The next military government reduced the networks with China and applied an international focus on ‘ideological borders’ with communist countries. The Gen. Juan Carlos Onganía led the regime that plunged the country entirely into the Global Cold War’s confrontation.

During the period 1966 to 1972, there were two clear orientations of Foreign Affairs in the South American country. Onganía’s strong anti-communism affected the domestic social movements and the orientation in the international forums. Founded in the National Security Doctrine, the government followed an exclusive pro-Western alignment, cutting diplomatic ties with Cuba, reducing the agreements with the USSR, and stressing the relations with the neighboring countries. In the same...
way, Onganía removed all commercial contracts signed with Chinese State-Owned Companies, made by the previous administration.

His government put the question of domestic security in the center of the diplomatic service. However, profound modifications in the national landscape changed the military commanders’ geopolitical perception. Massive claims were raising in the entire country since 1969, with Córdoba as the center, and showed how necessary was an open-door policy in every aspect of the institutional life. An inner military coup overthrew Onganía and he was replaced by Roberto Levingston (although he resigned six months after). The strong man of the new period was the Army’s commander-in-chief Agustín Lanusse, who supported a new foreign and economic orientation of the country. Chancellor Luis María De Pablo Pardo overpassed the “ideological boundaries” and restored the good relations with Cuba and the neighboring countries (mainly, with the socialist Salvador Allende in Chile, and the reformist administration of Juan Velasco Alvarado in Perú or Juan José Torres in Bolivia). The ‘ideological pluralism’ of Argentine government coincided with the debate regarding the Chinese representation in the UN. The announcement that the American president Richard Nixon was going to visit Beijing in 1972 resonated in the country and implied a changing foreign landscape.

Our analysis took Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of field to describe the attitude of Argentina’s political players regarding the relations with the PRC. From 1949 to 1972, we identify a series of factors and agents that had affected the networks. The following map resulted from two questions regarding the diplomatic ties and the non-formal networks.

![Figure 2: Attitude towards the PRC in the political system of Argentina](image)

The positions were defined according the actions taken by each government, the position on international forums (like the UN), and the tolerance to private or people to people networks. Only the Argentine Communist Party had a clear and unique orientation towards the reestablishment of diplomatic ties. Other groups had different and opposing interpretations, even between its members. We noted that the entire political system supported different ways to encounter with China, through private and semi-public institutions, or sustaining the neutrality in the UN. On the other hand, the Armed Forces were the most proactive agent against the ties with communist countries. They restricted the movements of democratically elected governments and stopped every trend when they seized the power. In this sense, the Cold War became a general framework for the country’s international
relations, through active participation of different players in the diplomatic service. Rather than an explicit political restriction, we noted constant negotiations between actors, domestic and foreign landscapes that suggest a complex understanding of the period.

The system of positions changed during three decades, leading to the reestablishment of the diplomatic ties in 1971. The dynamic showed different perceptions of China between the Argentine political players:

![Diagram: Lessening of tensions in the Global Cold War after 1971](image)

**Figure 3: Changing position according the domestic and foreign landscape**

In this sense, the changing positions were related to different factors. After years of autonomic policies, Perón faced an economic crisis, and improved the relations with the USA in 1951 (looking to access to strategic supplies, and financial resources). After the 1955’s military coup, his movement supported the normalization of diplomatic ties with the PRC; partly, due to the banishment from the political system. In the same way, the UCR-I (Frondizi’s party) sustained the motion in favor of the reestablishment of diplomatic ties in 1964, after the president was overthrown. Also, the increasing or losing tension in the global landscape affected the perception of domestic actors.

In the long-term, the Armed Forces were the key actors, who restricted the free movements of governments and diplomats, and eventually started the negotiations to normalize the networks. The changing geopolitical rationality among commanders represented a decisive factor for the diplomatic normalization in 1972.

De Pablo Pardo had an active policy since August to impulse the reestablishment of full relations between both countries. The military ruler supported the position of his advisor and asked the Argentine officials to start dialogues with the Chinese representation in Bucharest. On September 3rd, the vice-chancellor Dr. Ruda held the first meeting with the Chinese ambassador Zhang Hai Feng to discuss how to proceed. The reestablishment was delayed due to the Argentine vote in the UN General Assembly.

However, after six months of deliberations, which had started in strict secrecy, Zhang and Ruda signed the first joint statement that announced the normalization of diplomatic relations. The Argentine government announced: “International Relations of the country has to followed only the national interest and the principles of autonomy” of sovereign nations. As we saw, dependency and autonomy represented two opposing ways to answer significant questions about national development, the place occupied by the country in the regional affairs, and the interpretation of the global landscape.

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Lanusse’s military government represented a change of geopolitical rationality among Argentine Armed Forces. Since the military coup in 1955, the militaries linked Foreign Affairs to the country’s domestic security, reducing contacts with the Eastern Bloc.

However, the strict political bias applied by Onganía in power produced a boomerang effect: a group of militaries developed a more pragmatic point of view in diplomacy and economy. We understand that the changing geopolitical orientation implied another aspect in the increasing normalization (and de-militarization) of the country in front of the imminent call for open elections of 1973.

In fact, relations with the PRC became stables in the following administrations, without regarding the domestic ideological orientation. This direction had merged in 1972, after the long story of non-formal economic, cultural, and political links. Since then, the relations had followed several enduring principles, like territorial integrity and Malvinas’ demands.

Despite of the geographical distance, both countries shared a long history together. The sub-national actors, their agencies in the international landscape, showed how complex were the networks during a period of political instability. In this sense, we saw that the Global Cold War left relative space for contacts between East and West, through different agents and practices. Their participation in the international system implied a growing interest in the PRC in Latin America political field, that resulted in the formal relations.

**Bibliography**


