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## **A Cultural Diplomacy for the Other Side of the Pacific. Notes on the Relations between the People's Republic of China and Colombia during the Cold War, 1952-1976**

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On September 25th 1959, Li Chin, head of the Republic of China's (ROC) legation in Bogotá, informed the Colombian government in a diplomatic note, about an invitation that the People's Republic of China (PRC) had extended to

certain leftist elements in Colombia to send a cultural delegation to the Chinese continent, to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the communist regime, and to [...] organize an exhibition of [Chinese] contemporary arts and crafts in some Colombian cities with the purpose of spreading Marxist ideology.<sup>1</sup>

The diplomat warned, too, that the flow of Colombians going to communist countries, and in particular to the PRC, had increased in the previous few years. Those travelers had not only created false images among Colombians about the social advantages of communism, but had also allowed the communists to spread an ideology that was contrary to Colombian 'democratic and religious traditions'.<sup>2</sup>

The note was accompanied by two letters<sup>3</sup> written some months earlier in Beijing, in which Chu Po-Shen, vice-president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), asked the Secretary and the President of a Colombian-Chinese Friendship Association (CCFA) for support to strengthen the cultural links between the PRC and Colombia.<sup>4</sup> These letters, obtained somewhere in

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<sup>1</sup> Archivo General de la Nación, Bogotá, Colombia (AGN), Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Diplomática y Consular (MINREX), Legación de China en Colombia, 1954-1959, F=167, C=3, CJ=214, Li Chin to the Minister of Justice Germán Zea Hernandez, ff. 144-145.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>3</sup> AGN, MINREX, Legación de China en Colombia, 1954-1959, F=167, C=3, CJ=214, Chu Po-Shen to Alfonso Romero Buj, Beijing, 1/08/1959, ff. 132-133; Chu Po-Shen to Senator Horacio Rodríguez Plata, Beijing, 3/08/1959, ff. 134-135.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*. The CPAFFC was founded in May 1954 to promote civic exchanges with countries that did not have diplomatic relations with the PRC. See Sullivan, Lawrence R. *Historical Dictionary of Chinese Foreign Affairs*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. 85; Brady, Anne-Marie. *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 90-91.

the Pacific by the ROC intelligence services,<sup>5</sup> highlight both the Taiwanese government's efforts to stem the development of relations between the PRC and Latin American countries, and the PRC's interest in establishing closer links with supporters of the Chinese Communist Revolution around the world.

The ROC's legation in Bogotá had been careful to build a relationship of trust and mutual benefit with the Colombian government since 1951, when the Chinese nationalists had been forced to leave Mainland China to settle in Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> For the ROC, Colombia was an interesting ally on a distant continent: the South American country had coasts along both the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans, which allowed ROC diplomats assigned there to easily access the Andean and Caribbean countries alike.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Colombia had been the only Latin American country to participate in the US-led coalition in the Korean War (1950-1953), which underscored its status as a reliable ally in the fight against international communism.<sup>8</sup> Abundant historical evidence shows that the ROC diplomats had built powerful lobbying influence around some of the most powerful political and economic circles in Colombia, in order to maintain a naval and diplomatic blockade against the PRC. ROC diplomats had acted to prevent any kind of cultural or political cooperation between the Chinese Communists and their potential supporters in Latin America and the Caribbean (fig. 1).<sup>9</sup>

This concern about the cultural ties that the Chinese Communists were establishing with Colombia and other countries in the Pacific basin—such as Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia—remained at the fore of Taiwanese preoccupations for at least three decades. This policy came in response to the persistent and vigorous attempts by the PRC to break the diplomatic blockade created by Taiwan and the US and supported by various other states. A country under constant threat, lacking international recognition and increasingly dependent on the USSR, the PRC sought to export and exchange

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<sup>5</sup> The letters were probably intercepted somewhere in the Pacific Ocean by the National Security Bureau, the organization created in 1955 by a Presidential Directive from Chiang Kai-shek, to supervise and coordinate the military security of Taiwan.

<sup>6</sup> Those efforts were answered by the Colombian government, which in 1954 sent a Colombian consul from Yokohama on an official visit to Taipei. The documents from that official visit are in AGN, MINREX, Legación de China en Colombia, 1954-1959, F=167, C=3, CJ=214.

<sup>7</sup> Members of the ROC legation in Bogotá moved permanently to Panama, Ecuador, Cuba, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic.

<sup>8</sup> Rojas, Daniel. "Una geografía global del Combate. Asia y América Latina en los orígenes de la Guerra fría." *Contemporánea. Historia y problemas del siglo XX*, Año 8, Volumen 8, 2017, pp. 55-71.

<sup>9</sup> AGN, MINREX. Another element that must be taken into consideration, but that I will not be able to develop here, is the link that existed between the Catholic archbishoprics of Taipei and Bogotá, an old link that could also be exploited by ROC diplomats to approach Colombian politicians and jointly oppose international communism. The documents of the visit of the Archbishop of China to President Laureano Gómez are quite revealing. AGN, MINREX, Legación de China en Colombia, 1947-1949, F=123, C=1, CJ=214.

ideas and ideologies, information, art and other aspects of culture and society in an effort to build broad support for the new Communist regime.

In this article, I will present some historical evidence of the PRC's cultural diplomacy towards Colombia between 1952 and 1977. This period covers the years between the Peace Congress of Asia and the Pacific Rim of 1952 (the first international event organized by the PRC after 1949) and the beginning of the Reforms and Opening-Up policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1976, a period of transition in the PRC's history that is seen as a foreshadowing of the 1978 economic reforms. In the first part of the article, I will focus on the spread of Maoism in Colombia and in the creation of the CCFA. In the second part, I will examine the construction of a network of foreign experts working in the PRC and Latin America. Next, I will contextualize the creation of the Xinhua Chinese Radio (XNCR) satellite in Bogotá and discuss the radio program *Pekin Informa*, broadcasted from Beijing to eleven Latin American countries. Finally, I will emphasize the role of the *Pekin Informa* magazine in building a trans-pacific information network and examine the local-level impact of this network by highlighting the case of the Bogotá bookstore *Cinco Continentes* (Five Continents).

The evidence I present on the following pages has two purposes: first, to provide certain elements for studying a little-known chapter of the connections between two peripheral countries during the Cold War, and second, to judge the effectiveness of the PRC's cultural diplomacy as a means of ensuring the internal security of the Communist regime.

## **A Soft Power Strategy from across the Pacific**

In the early 1960s, the PRC's efforts to approach the Latin American countries became more apparent. After the Sino-Soviet Split (1962) and the outbreak of the Sino-Indian War (Oct. 1962-Nov. 1962), the PRC found itself isolated from other Asian countries and without the backing of its most powerful ally, the USSR. The break with the Soviets forced the PRC to implement a radical shift in its foreign policy and to seek new ways of formal and informal participation in the post-WWII world order. One of these new ways was a soft power strategy based both on the appeal of Maoist ideology to the rest of the world and on the creation of friendship associations that strengthened the cultural ties between the PRC and other countries.

## *The Spread of Maoism*

The Sino-Soviet Split coincided with a series of peasant revolts in the Philippines, Colombia and Peru, and with protests by miners in Bolivia.<sup>10</sup> While these protests did not have a single cause, they did have a common claim base: access to land, better wages, the right to unionize and education for children. In the case of Colombia, for different groups of intellectuals, students and unionists belonging to the urban upper and middle classes, Soviet Communism was unable to transform countries such as Colombia because of its radical conception of industrial and urban workers as being the *avant-garde* of the revolution. Conversely, Maoism and the Chinese Communist Revolution provided a more tangible alternative to the Russian Revolution, by offering an interpretation of Marxism-Leninism for countries in which the proportion of peasants was greater than that of industrial workers. The PRC represented an alternative modernization model to those of the USSR and western industrial democracies.

Maoism was not totally new in Latin America in the early 1960s. In Colombia, the first Maoist texts had been translated, printed and disseminated within the Colombian Communist Party (CoCP).<sup>11</sup> The advances of the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949) and the establishment of Mao Zedong as the undisputed leader of the Chinese communists were known through newspapers such as *El Tiempo* (Col.) and *El Espectador* (Col.), which published news and chronicles based on information from international news agencies such as *Havas*, *Reuters*, *BBC* and *Agence France-Press*. However, the rapid spread of Maoism in Latin America took place some decades later, at the world juncture that was created between the triumph of the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the Sino-Soviet Split.

On the one hand, the Cuban Revolution demonstrated that there was an alternative way to build communism in the Caribbean, other than the Soviet and Chinese approaches. In various circles of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the fact that there was a new Latin American alternative for building socialism meant that sooner or later the Chinese experience would lose its appeal. For this reason, despite the supposed camaraderie that existed between the Chinese Communists and the Cubans, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution prompted the PRC to co-opt Latin Americans and

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<sup>10</sup> Interview of William Calvo by Arturo Alape, in Alape, Arturo. *La paz, la violencia: testigos de excepción*. Bogotá: Editorial planeta, 1985, p. 303; Rothwell, Matthew Daniel. "Influencia de la revolución china en América Latina: México, Perú y Bolivia". *Fuentes. Revista de la Biblioteca y Archivo Histórico de la Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional*, 2010, pp. 5-11; Kerkvliet, Benedict John. *The Huk Rebellion. A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, [1977] 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Ortiz, Rodolfo Antonio. *Los orígenes del maoísmo en Colombia: la recepción de la Revolución de Nueva Democracia, 1949-1963*. Doctoral thesis, Universidad nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Departamento de Historia, 2016, p. 21.

to start a campaign to demonstrate that the Chinese Revolution, not the Cuban alternative, was the true path that the countries of Latin America and Africa should follow.

On the other hand, the Sino-Soviet Split created a global divide within communist parties that allowed for the emergence of Maoism. In Latin American Communist Parties, in particular in Colombia and Peru, the divide in the global communist movement resulted in a series of internal breaks that produced new “Marxist-Leninist” groups, or in other words, groups of communists who following Mao Zedong’s 1964 declaration against Nikita Khrushchev, in which he argued that Soviet Communism was a betrayal of the fundamental principles of Marx and Lenin.<sup>12</sup> For the new “Marxists-Leninists”, the PRC path toward communism not only represented the possibility of massively integrating the peasantry, but also meant abandoning the postulate of peaceful coexistence between Communism and Capitalism that Khrushchev had announced at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the USSR in 1956. As interpreted in Colombia, Maoism represented the possibility of seizing power through armed struggle.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Friendship Associations*

A second pillar in the PRC’s cultural diplomacy was the creation of a network of friendship associations around the world led by the CPAFFC. In 1959, the year in which certain members of the CCP established contact with Colombian representatives for the first time, Chu Po-Shen, author of one of the aforementioned letters, was the general secretary of the CPAFFC, while the famous calligrapher Chu Tunan was its president.<sup>14</sup> Founded in May 1954 to promote civic and cultural exchanges with countries that did not have diplomatic relations with the PRC, the CPAFFC was the central core of the relations between the PRC and Colombia until 1980. In that year, the Colombian government—on the advice of many influential Colombian businessmen, journalists, artists and politicians belonging to the CCFA—sent its first ambassador to Beijing.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> The armed way to take power required waging a protracted people’s war, which consisted of maintaining the support of the population and attracting the enemy to the rural areas, where it could be defeated through a mixture of mobile warfare and guerrilla warfare. The protracted people’s war sought to take power in a country by laying siege to its cities from the countryside.

<sup>14</sup> AGN, MINREX, Legación de China en Colombia, 1954-1959, F=167, C=3, CJ=214, Chu Po-Shen to Senator Horacio Rodríguez Plata, Beijing, 3 August 1959, ff. 134-135.

<sup>15</sup> Gómez de Moreno, Graciela. “Los primeros pazos y la consolidación de las relaciones.” *China y Colombia. 35 años de travesía diplomática*. Bogotá: La Imprenta Editores S. A., Embajada de la República Popular China en Colombia/Cancillería de la República de Colombia/Asociación de la Amistad Colombo-China, 2015, p. 78.

The creation of the CCFA remains unclear. In a 2006 article, some influential current CCFA members suggest that the association was created in September 1977 by a group of Colombians with different political tendencies, but united around the common purpose of strengthening the bonds of friendship with the PRC.<sup>16</sup> However, the letters that Chu Po-Shen addressed to the lawyer and intellectual Alfonso Romero Buj and to Senator Horacio Rodríguez Plata<sup>17</sup> in August 1959, as well as certain oral interviews, provide evidence that an early version of the CCFA may have been created unofficially during a visit by a Colombian parliamentary delegation to Beijing in the final weeks of June 1959.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the Colombian political elites were Catholics, anti-communist and aligned with US foreign policy in the Pacific. They viewed the Chinese Communist Revolution as one more threat caused by the Communist Bloc. The active propaganda campaign of the ROC's diplomats in Bogotá and Cartagena against the new authorities of the PRC further strengthened the poor image that Communist China had among the Colombian elites. However, it is quite likely that before 1977, a nucleus of people in the Colombian Liberal Party, who had contacts with the PRC, had advocated for establishing ties with Beijing without necessarily promoting the establishment of communism in Colombia.

## **Experts, Radio and Reviews in PRC-Colombian Relations**

The PRC's soft power strategy was based on a cultural diplomacy that used tangible methods of action to establish ties of friendship and influence with Latin American countries, in particular those in the Pacific Rim. This cultural diplomacy united a network of domestic and international institutions such as the PRC's universities and news agencies, and had different means of communication such as reviews and radio broadcasting.

### *Foreign Experts or Foreign Specialists*

"We have met in Beijing to talk about peace", Colombian writer and intellectual Jorge Zalamea wrote in 1952 with an optimistic tone.<sup>19</sup> Along with 400 other delegates from around the world, Zalamea participated in the Asia and Pacific Rim Peace Conference of that year, the first international meeting organized by the PRC, which

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<sup>16</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>17</sup> Helguera, J. León. "Horacio Rodríguez Plata (1915–1987)". *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 71 (1), 1991, pp. 145-147, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-71.1.145>.

<sup>18</sup> Franco Burgos, Joaquín. "Viaje parlamentario a China." *China y Colombia, op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Zalamea, Jorge. *Reunión en Pekín*. [s.n.], 1952.



coincided with the commemorations of the fourth anniversary of the Chinese Communist Revolution.<sup>20</sup> Along with Zalamea were other Colombians such as painter Alipio Jaramillo, renowned writer and anthropologist Manuel Zapata Olivella, and politician and intellectual Diego Montaña Cuellar. The event, which was to serve as a peace conference to counterbalance the international power of the western belligerents of the Korean War, also counted the participation of Mexican painter Diego Rivera and poets Nicolás Guillén, of Cuba, and Pablo Neruda, of Chile.<sup>21</sup>

The conference allowed a whole generation of Latin Americans and representatives of the entire world to unite around a pacifist movement, whose goal was to avoid the outbreak of a Third World War. Incidentally, the conference made members of the CCP aware of a practical problem: the fact that, at the end of the Chinese Civil War, all Spanish speakers of Mainland China had followed Chiang Kai-shek to the ROC, and thus virtually none of the conference organizers spoke Spanish. This made interactions with the Latin American delegates difficult. On the eve of the event, the conference organizers desperately started looking for someone who spoke Spanish and

[..] found Meng Fu, a retired diplomat who, during a post in Chile, had learned some basic expressions and was now in the provinces, working with the Agricultural Commission. Meng was appointed dean of Spanish studies and tasked with training a dozen students who could help [the delegates] from Latin America.<sup>22</sup> (See also Fig. 2)

After 1952, some Soviet teachers began to use Soviet textbooks and dictionaries to teach foreign languages to Chinese youth promotions in Beijing, in particular Russian but also German, French and Spanish. This initiative laid the foundations for a first generation of Chinese and Latin Americans who began working on translation and editing of news and texts. Among this first generation were Fausto Cabrera and

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<sup>20</sup> Hao, Zhang and Arana, David Ignacio Ibarra. “Peace Conference of Asia and the Pacific Region (October, 1952): An Approach between China and Central America.” *Revista Estudios*, 33, 2016, dossier Estudios sobre China desde (Latino) América en conmemoración de los 160 años de la llegada de los chinos a Costa Rica.

<sup>21</sup> Bermudez, Andrés Lopez. *Jorge Zalamea: enlace de dos mundos. Quehacer literario y cosmopolitismo (1905-1969)*. Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Rosario, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Macarena, Vidal Lit. “Los duros comienzos del español: ‘un francés mal hablado’ en China.” *El País* On line, Pekín- 19 September 2018 08:27 CEST, consulted on 19 September 2018, [https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/09/18/actualidad/1537294866\\_533527.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/09/18/actualidad/1537294866_533527.html).

Ricardo Samper Carrizosa, who in 1979 would be the first Colombian *chargé d'affaires ad interim* in Beijing.<sup>23</sup> This early core of specialists and experts in foreign languages gathered around the Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), an institution of great importance to the PRC government's domestic and foreign policy. The BFSU was affiliated with the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs from its establishment in 1941. The Chinese system of foreign experts or foreign specialists<sup>24</sup> was copied from the USSR, which consisted of bringing in or sending out advisors or experts in various areas such as health, agriculture, engineering, education and translation. It was a special phenomenon in the internal relations of the Communist Bloc and between the Communist Bloc and the countries of the Third World throughout the Cold War.

As tensions between Beijing and Moscow mounted in the early 1960s, the Soviets began to leave the PRC and the number of specialists from other nationalities (including Latin Americans) increased. Some of them came from communist parties that had Maoist groups. Others, who did not necessarily belong to communist parties, came to support the construction of socialism in the PRC. Yet regardless of where they came from, foreign experts began to play a key role in coordinating the PRC's soft power efforts in the Latin American countries of the Pacific Rim. The case of Francisco Posada Cano exemplifies the journey of many Latin Americans who came to the PRC in the years prior to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Contacted at the PRC embassy in Havana, Posada Cano arrived with his family in Beijing to work at XNCR. The authorities of the CCP gave him accommodation at the mythical Beijing Friendship Hotel, on South Zhongguancun Street, where he met other Latin Americans who were staying there and who also worked at the BFSU or at the Editorial of Foreign Languages.<sup>25</sup> Some first-hand accounts coincide in pointing out that the Beijing Friendship Hotel had enough free rooms due to the mass departure of the Soviets in 1962.<sup>26</sup>

Political violence was another factor that prompted several Latin Americans to travel to the PRC. In the case of Colombia, the development of the guerrilla movements in the late 1960s increased the pressure of the state security organizations on movements of students, peasants and trade unionists. Faced with state persecution and to guarantee their own personal safety, some young students chose to travel to the

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<sup>23</sup> In this first group were Afonso Graíño, Gustavo Vargas and their wives. See Posada Cano, Enrique. "Mi larga travesía con los Chinos." *China y Colombia, op. cit.*; Posada Cano, Enrique. *Historias del Hotel de la Amistad*. Beijing: New World Press, 2010, p. 158.

<sup>24</sup> *Foreign specialists* or *foreign experts*, both terms appear in the sources I have consulted. See Bernstein, Thomas and Yu-Li, Hua (eds.). *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949—Present*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, Harvard Cold War studies book series, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> "Fútbol, periodismo y acupuntura: coctel en las relaciones colombo-chinas", *Revista Amigos de China*, Separata Especial de febrero de 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Lilia Rodriguez\* (name changed at the interviewee's request), Paris, 10 October 201.

PRC.<sup>27</sup> Lilia Rodriguez, a young Colombian with Maoist sympathies, had to travel to Beijing in the early 1970s upon learning of the murder of a union leader with whom her husband had close contact. Upon arriving in Beijing, Lilia was given accommodation at the Friendship Hotel and entered the BFSU to study Chinese and translation. Her husband went directly to work at XNRC as an announcer on the Spanish-language broadcasts of *Radio Peking* to which I will refer to later on.<sup>28</sup>

At the BFSU, Lilia also met several young Chileans who came to Beijing after General Augusto Pinochet's *coup d'état* that overthrew the socialist government of Salvador Allende in 1973.<sup>29</sup> The PRC did not break off diplomatic relations with Pinochet's government, since he recognized Mainland China as the only legitimate government of China (the One China Doctrine). Pinochet's decision not to recognize the government of Chang Kai-shek in Taipei, paradoxically, made the Chilean post-*coup* military government one of the friendliest toward the PRC.<sup>30</sup> It is not clear whether there was an agreement between the Pinochet government and the PRC so that the exiles could leave South America and travel across the Pacific, but many young Chilean students arrived in Beijing after 1973.

The relationship between migration, foreign experts and the spread of Maoism in Colombia or other Latin American countries on the Pacific basin is not yet clear, but the development of the Maoist guerrillas from the 1960s provides sufficient reason to question it. Between 1949 and 1976, nearly a thousand Latin Americans visited the PRC.<sup>31</sup> It is plausible that some young Latin Americans who visited the PRC as experts became ideologues and active militants of the guerrilla groups.<sup>32</sup> The example of the Peruvian guerrilla leader Abimael Guzmán, founder and maximum leader of *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path), who visited the PRC on at least two occasions before and during the Cultural Revolution, raises questions and the need to explore more archives.

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<sup>27</sup> To this we must add that the Maoists who maintained contacts with clandestine guerrilla organizations were not only persecuted by the state security organizations, but also did not have the support of the networks of the Colombian Communist Party because they had been expelled from it since 1964.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Lilia Rodriguez\*, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Lilia Rodriguez\*, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Montalva, Juan Diego and Navia, Patricio. "Chile and China: Building Relations Beyond Trade?" Center for Hemispheric Policy, University of Miami, March 6, 2007, On line, [https://web.archive.org/web/20151229101131/https://umshare.miami.edu/web/wda/hemisphericpolicy/Final\\_Draft\\_Formatted-Navia.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20151229101131/https://umshare.miami.edu/web/wda/hemisphericpolicy/Final_Draft_Formatted-Navia.pdf), consulted on May 14, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Rothwell, Matthew Daniel. "Influencia de la revolución china en América Latina: México, Perú y Bolivia." *Fuentes. Revista de la Biblioteca y Archivo Histórico de la Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional*, vol. 4, n. 9, 2010, pp. 5-11.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Lilia Rodriguez\*, *op. cit.*

## *Radio: Peking Informa and Xinhua Chinese Radio*

During the Cold War, radio was one of the most powerful instruments of cultural diplomacy. Between the 1950's and the 70's, radio programs were an effective way to disseminate political messages and notions of official culture in real time. In addition, as had occurred during WWII, radio made it possible to mobilize the population around the world. As with other nations' external broadcasters such as *The Voice of America* from the US, *BBC World Service* and *Radio Australia*, Chinese radio played a significant role in the Chinese's soft power strategy to expand the influence of the PRC in the world.<sup>33</sup> Radio was introduced in China in the 1920's and 30's. The CCP used radio for the first time in March 1940, with a transmitter imported from Moscow. The radio station of the Communist Party (XNCR) went on the air from Yan'an in December 1940. After 1945, it transmitted to a larger geographical area, with its programs becoming more regular and formalized with broadcasts of news, official announcements, war bulletins, art and literary programs. The English service started in September of 1947, broadcasting from a cave in the Taihang Mountains (when China was in the midst of civil war) to announce newly-conquered areas and broadcast the communist political and cultural perspective of China to the world at large. The station moved from the Taihang Mountains to Beijing during the Red Liberation Army's Pingjin campaign and announced the creation of the PRC in 1949. Its name was changed to Radio Beijing in April 1950. In September 1956, broadcasts began formally for Spain and, a year later, on December 17, 1957, broadcasts for Latin America started.<sup>34</sup>

By 1963, the new program entitled *Peking Informa* broadcast four daily programs for eleven Latin American countries. Broadcasts were made from Beijing, by longwave and were heard between six in the afternoon and eleven at night.<sup>35</sup> The precise content of these programs remains unclear today, but some interviews allow me to argue that the transmissions of the era had three different kinds of content: news about China, news about the world, and short reports about aspects of cultural, political and industrial life in China. However, as the PRC's archives are closed, it is impossible to conduct a thorough analysis of the *Peking Informa* broadcast in Colombia or throughout Latin America during the Cold War.

It is important to highlight that the XNCR, the producer of *Peking Informa* in Spanish, was the platform that permitted the first official contacts between the PRC

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<sup>33</sup> Ding, Sheng. *The Dragon's Hidden Wings: How China Rises with its Soft Power*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> "Breve historia del Departamento de Español." *China Radio International (CRI)*, <http://espanol.cri.cn/1/2005/01/27/1@52094.htm>; Chang, Won Ho. *Mass Media in China: The History and the Future*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989; Howkins, John. *Mass Communication in China*. New York: Longman Communication Books, 1982.

<sup>35</sup> *Peking Informa. Revista de noticias y de puntos de vista de China*, No. 1, 1 March 1963, p. 2.

and the Colombian administration of President Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala. The accounts of past and current members of the CCFA make it possible to reconstruct the phase prior to the establishment of the first diplomatic legation of the PRC in Colombia and to understand the importance of cultural exchanges as a foundation for building formal diplomatic relations. Thanks to the efforts of CCFA members to convince various high-ranking officials of the Colombian government of the relevance of establishing informal channels of communication with the PRC, the first headquarters of XNCR was installed in Bogotá in 1979, in a building located at *Calle 53 and Carrera 7*, between Galerías and Teusaquillo. After his creation, XNCR-Bogotá was in charge of consular services. Some CCFA members, such as Francisco Posada Cano, to whom I referred to previously, recall that visas to travel to the PRC were issued by XNCR-Bogotá “on separate pieces of paper, so as not to qualify [the travelers] as ‘subversive’ allies of ‘red China’, the name with which the spokesmen of the Cold War stigmatized [the PRC]”.<sup>36</sup>

Because the PRC had no direct official ties with Colombia, it was difficult to obtain work visas for members of XNCR-Bogotá. However, once again, the CCFA’s lobbying of President Turbay Ayala and the Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs Diego Uribe allowed visas for Qiu Ling and Wu Huizhong to be processed.<sup>37</sup> Qiu Lin, a main correspondent of the XNRC, was a Cantonese journalist described as a very talented negotiator, fine connoisseur of Cantonese food and a good acupuncturist. This last quality cannot be ignored because Qiu Lin quickly gained a reputation as a good acupuncturist in Bogotá, and a few months after his arrival, he began treating a lumbago that afflicted the President of the Republic, Turbay Ayala. In circumstances that are unclear, when the ROC legation decided to leave Colombia, Qiu Ling, through the good offices of the Cambodian Embassy in Bogotá, received the former home of the ROC legation and a diplomatic car.<sup>38</sup> A year later, in 1980, Ricardo Samper Carrizosa was appointed as Colombian *chargé d’affaires ad interim* in Beijing. Some months later, Colombian ambassador Julio Mario Santo Domingo took office.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Posada Cano, Enrique. “Mi larga travesía con los Chinos.” *China y Colombia, op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>37</sup> Antecedentes de las relaciones Colombo-chinas. See *Amigos de China*, Separata Especial de febrero de 2005, *China y Colombia, op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, p. 77.

<sup>39</sup> Medina, María Angélica. “Julio Mario Santo Domingo, Primer Embajador Colombiano en China.” *China y Colombia, op. cit.*

## “The Beijing Review”

Those who walked the streets of downtown Bogotá in the first half of the 1970s saw magazines such as *Pekin Informa*, *China reconstruye*, *China ilustrada*, or *Vietnam Hoy*.<sup>40</sup> On *Calle 19*, between *Carreras 7* and *9*, there were different stands of national and international newspapers, magazines and books, whose vendors welcomed a wide readership of students, university professors, people who worked in the services sector, and in general, all those interested in acquiring international publications at good prices.<sup>41</sup>

Some of the magazines sold on *Calle 19* came from the *Cinco Continentes* bookstore, located a few streets south of *Calle 19*. Founded between 1972 and 1973, the *Cinco Continentes* bookstore was one of the nodal points of a vast network that included Communists, Maoists, Trotskyists and a whole plurality of people mobilized in Colombia's student, peasant and unionist movements.<sup>42</sup> Owned by Francisco Posada Cano, who was living in Beijing at the time and ensured shipments of books, *Cinco Continentes* sold and distributed publications from the Beijing Foreign Language Publishing House, such as the Selected Works of Mao Zedong, or books on traditional Chinese medicine (with acupuncture needles included) that were purchased by medicine students. Additionally, the bookstore could handle special requests for magazines and books distributed by Guoji Shudian, in charge of distributing the PRC's publications to the rest of the world.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most popular magazines sold and distributed by *Cinco Continentes* was *Pekin Informa*, a magazine in Spanish of PRC news and views published and printed in Beijing. It provided economic, political and cultural information concerning the PRC and its relations with the rest of the world. Each issue of the magazine had analytical and informative articles, giving facts and background on domestic events in the PRC and a special section that reported on all the social, cultural and political events that took place every week in Beijing. Full texts of important statements of the PRC's domestic and foreign policy were printed in a documentary section, as were essential statistics, graphs and charts, cartoons and some pictures. In addition to this, the magazine translated and published official documents from the highest levels of the Chinese government and of the CCP.

The history of *Pekin Informa*, as well as the PRC's other magazines and publications distributed by Guoji Shudian, were linked to the PRC's cultural diplomacy. The Spanish, French and Japanese editions of the magazine appeared one year after

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Daniel Pécaut, Paris, September 7, 2018.

<sup>41</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>42</sup> Archila, Mauricio. “El movimiento estudiantil en Colombia, una mirada histórica.” *Observatorio Social de América Latina* (OSA), CLACSO, Año XIII, No. 31, May 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Feldmand, Gayle. “The Organization of Publishing in China.” *The China Quarterly*, No. 107, September 1986, pp. 519-529.



the Sino-Soviet Split, a fact that without a doubt proves the PRC's need to create new communication channels with Asia, Europe and Latin America after the traumatic loss of its most important ally. Issues in English were published every week, while issues in Spanish and French were published every two weeks.<sup>44</sup>

The Spanish edition had news, reports and reprints of other publications such as the *People's Daily*, the most popular newspaper in the PRC, and *Red Flag*, a theoretical magazine created in the late 1950s that expressed the points of view of the CCP. In the 1960s and '70s, these two publications were quite important because they allowed readers to stay informed of what was happening in Mainland China and because the information they distributed was considered to be the official view of the CCP leadership. To that extent, *Pekin Informa* was a means of transmitting the main directives of the pro-Chinese international communist movement to the entire audience of Spanish-speaking readers.

What kind of content could a Spanish reader expect? As an example, in the first issue of 1963, there was a wide range of topics that give an account of the prevailing agreements and divergences in international communism. There was also a complete reprint of the CCP's position presented to the different world congresses that had been held in the Communist Bloc and in some international left-wing organizations between 1961 and 1963. The content of the articles or of the informative reprints shows that the magazine served as a means to align political groups around the world with the PRC's form of communism.

Sometimes subtly, but most often quite openly, the contents of *Pekin Informa* reproduced the PRC's foreign policy guidelines adapted to specific audiences, such as Latin Americans. One specific example is the way in which the CCP instrumentalized the 1963 visit of the Prince of Cambodia to Beijing, which served to demonstrate that the PRC showed respect to any country, regardless of its political regime, its international importance or the size of its population. What is interesting is the effort to demonstrate that the PRC respected smaller nations fit with the editorial line of several of the articles in the magazine with a twofold objective: on the one hand, to demonstrate that the PRC, contrary to the US or the USSR, respected the principle of sovereign equality between states (which of course meant that the PRC should be able to take China's seat at the UN), and on the other hand, and even more importantly, by speaking of small countries, the CCP sought to support Cuba, which after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, came to occupy a major place in the confrontation between the two superpowers.<sup>45</sup> The magazine's interpretative canon was notorious in stressing the importance of the peasant uprisings as promoters of the Cuban revolutionary transformation, but without referring to the guerrilla outbreaks (*foquismo*) theorized by

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<sup>44</sup> The contents of the magazine in Spanish were not exactly the same as in English, although they overlapped partially. A comparison between the contents in English and in Spanish can, as one might suppose, be very useful to determine the orientation given to information according to the various languages and areas of the world.

<sup>45</sup> Soutou, George-Henri. *La Guerre froide, 1943-1990*. Paris: Hachette, 2011.

Ernesto Che Guevara or Régis Debray. The sublimation of the figure of the peasant in the PRC's assessment of the Cuban Revolution was a way of establishing a bridge with the Latin American (and probably African) agrarian countries.

The end of the Cultural Revolution, the failure of the "Gang of Four" and Deng Xiaoping's swift ascension as the new strongman of the CCP brought drastic changes in the PRC's cultural diplomacy to the other side of the Pacific. *Pekin Informa* continued to be printed and distributed to the entire world, but the change that it underwent can be easily seen when comparing the issues from 1976 and 1977: first, a change in the contents, to the extent that the official propaganda initiated the condemnation of the "Gang of Four" and, secondly, a change in the layout of the magazine itself. Although *Pekin Informa* continued to sell and circulate in Colombia, *Cinco Continentes* stopped receiving the weekly air shipments from the PRC. The bookstore closed its doors at some point between 1977 and 1978.<sup>46</sup> Regarding the network of foreign experts, it is important to mention that from 1976 many of them left the PRC because they either believed that the Maoist dream was being abandoned or simply changed professions.<sup>47</sup>

A new phase in the international communist movement, and in particular in Maoism, took place with the start of Deng Xiaoping's economic opening-up reforms. The accusations of revisionism that had previously been launched by Mao Zedong against Khrushchev and the Soviet Communist Party were thereafter leveled by Colombians against Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping. Many of the Colombian Maoists turned to the Leninist-Marxist international movement that Albanian Prime Minister Enver Hoxha tried to build. In 1978, the VII Congress of the Albanian Labor Party, held in Tirana, was attended by delegations from the Marxist-Leninist Communist Parties from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Uruguay. During the sessions, the Albanians confirmed that in Latin America, and particularly in Colombia, there was deep dissatisfaction with the CCP's orientation.<sup>48</sup> In the case of certain Colombian Maoist groups, the fact that the PRC ceased to be the benchmark for the global Marxist-Leninist revolution caused a new phenomenon of political radicalization: between 1977 and 1978, in circumstances that remain ambiguous, the first Maoist-oriented urban clandestine armed cells emerged in Bogotá and Medellín.

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<sup>46</sup> García Parra, Aldo Fernando. *Historia de las ideas y experiencias maoístas en Colombia, 1970-2000*. Master's Dissertation, History Department, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2019, p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Lilia Rodríguez\*, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> "Declaración conjunta de las delegaciones de los partidos marxista-leninistas de América Latina presentes en el VII congreso del partido del trabajo de Albania." Tirana, 1976. *Documentos históricos del movimiento mundial del marxismo-leninismo del camarada Enver Hoxha en América Latina reeditado por la Comintern (SH) el 12 de Septiembre 2010*, [http://ciml.250x.com/archive/mlwm/mlwm\\_spanish/mlwm\\_america\\_latina/declaration\\_ml\\_parti\\_es\\_latina\\_america\\_tirana\\_1976\\_spanish.html](http://ciml.250x.com/archive/mlwm/mlwm_spanish/mlwm_america_latina/declaration_ml_parti_es_latina_america_tirana_1976_spanish.html).



## Conclusions

The end of the Cultural Revolution marked a drastic change in the PRC's domestic and foreign policy. While *Radio Peking* and *Peking Informa* continued to be broadcasted and published after 1976, the contents of the broadcasts and the publications began a gradual but unrelenting transformation: they ceased to be organs for the dissemination of PRC politics and began to limit themselves to spreading an image of the PRC's greatness and prosperity, without emphasizing the export of Maoism or the need to create the conditions for new communist revolutions around the world. Despite the political changes operated in the PRC during the Boluan Fanzheng and the Reforms and Opening Up programs led by Deng Xiaoping, broadcasts for Colombia and other Latin American countries such as Peru and Bolivia never stopped. Radio internet transmissions from the PRC to Latin America continue to the present day. This aspect must be taken into account to judge the continuities in the PRC's foreign policy in the Pacific Rim.

The PRC's cultural diplomacy toward Colombia was effective. In the context of an intense diplomatic blockade that lasted at least until the end of the Vietnam War, cultural diplomacy allowed the PRC to stop being seen as a factor of destabilization of the international system. Cultural diplomacy led the new communist authorities to: (a) export Maoism as the new ideology of the world communist revolution; (b) build unofficial channels of communication with governments that had not recognized the PRC; and (c) build and strengthen a global propaganda device made up of radio broadcasts, magazines and expert networks that acted to support communism in Mainland China.

In addition to allowing a change of perception, cultural diplomacy also initiated a policy of influence of the PRC in the Pacific Ocean. The Chinese Communist Revolution not only transformed the balance of powers within Asia, but also caused changes on a transpacific scale. The Korean War, the export of Maoism as an alternative to Soviet Communism, the beginning of the slow but inexorable commercial competition with the US after the economic opening of the mid-1970s and the Vietnam War, which set a definitive historical limit to the ambitions of western countries in Asia, were signs of a major transformation in the mental geography of new generations across the Pacific. In particular, the export of Maoism was a phenomenon that shaped the domestic situation of Latin American countries with a rural background such as Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia for several decades. As I have illustrated in the previous pages, in these countries, Maoism appeared as a real revolutionary alternative promoted by influential members of the intellectual elites, as well as by student and peasant movements.

In a scenario traditionally dominated by the US and the USSR, the PRC managed to establish links both with the governments of the South American Pacific and with social groups of students and intellectuals that later enabled greater rapprochement between the two sides of the Pacific. In the case of Colombia, many of the connections

that had been created with Japan, South Korea or Hong Kong had followed the routes drawn, and largely controlled, by the US and the UK. However, the PRC built direct links without mediation. This represented a new path in transpacific history.

To finish this article, I would like to say that the history of Latin Americans remains inextricably tied to a transatlantic point of view. Their Iberian past or historical interpretations based on the sharing of structural factors such as Catholicism, democratic models and the market economy would make Latin America a kind of *extreme West*. However, when studying the exchanges between the Far East and the Pacific countries of Latin America at the beginning of the Cold War, another geography of transpacific networks and connections appears, a geography that still needs to be built but which is undoubtedly not a copy of what occurred in the Atlantic world.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Rojas, Daniel. "Introduction: Latin America in the Global Time." *Ciencia Nueva. Revista de Historia y Política*, Dossier Global Perspectives of Latin American History, Vol. 3, no. 1, January-June 2019, pp. 68-75.

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Sr. Alfonso Romero Buj  
Av Jiménez No. 9 - 38 Ofc. 410/2  
Ap. Aéreo 8885  
Bogotá, Colombia

Pekín, 1 de agosto de 1959

Respetado Señor:

Todavía no hemos recibido su contestación a la carta fechada el 14 de julio y nos preocupamos que si ha llegado a su mano esta misma carta, en la cual le avisaba que nuestra Asociación prepararía reducir el número de la Delegación Cultural de Colombia para los festejos del 10<sup>o</sup> aniversario de la Fundación de la República Popular China, de cinco personas a cuatro, a excepción del señor Enrique Pérez Albelesar quien ha sido determinado, le pido el favor de elegir y recomendar rápidamente a los demás tres, dándonos una presentación de ellos a fin de mandar la invitación.

Cuando el señor Horacio Rodríguez Plata, presidente de su Asociación, estaba de visita en China, le habíamos relatado que nuestra Asociación planificaba mandar, entre el septiembre y el octubre del año presente, una Exposición de Arte y Artesanía Contemporáneas para realizar una gira por varios países del Centro y Sur de América. En aquel momento, el señor Rodríguez expresó que si esa Exposición podía entrar en Colombia, él tendría mucho deseo de ayudarnos a exponerla en algunas ciudades principales de su país. Actualmente ésta



se ha terminado lo fundamental el trabajo preparatorio. La delegación formada por tres o cuatro especialistas de arte y artesanía llevará los objetos que ocupan una superficie de 400 (cuatrocientos) metros cuadrados, entre los cuales, la parte principal de artesanía son tejidos y trenzados, una pequeña parte de objetos de cerámica y porcelana, esculturas de marfil de alta finura, bordados y recortes de papel, etc. Esperamos que pueda celebrarse ésta en su país. Mientras escribo ésta, escribo al señor Presidente Rodríguez. Esperamos que la Asociación de Amigos de China y ustedes dos cooperen y nos informen lo pronto posible la posibilidad de la realización de este propósito y nos aconsejen cuándo sea más conveniente de llegar a Colombia.

Esperamos la carta de usted. Dirijo un cariñoso saludo a los amigos de la misma Asociación.

Un saludo cordial

Chu Po-shen  
Vice-secretario general  
de la Asociación



Figure 1. Letter from Chu Po-Shen to Alfonso Romero Buj. *Archivo General de la Nación*, Bogotá, 1959.

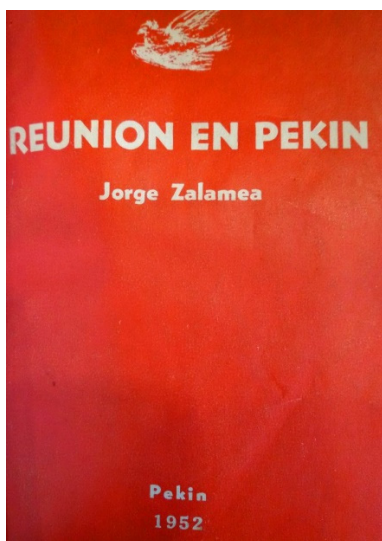


Figure 2. Book cover of *Reunión en Pekín*, by Jorge Zalamea, 1952. *Mareas del Pacífico*. *Revista Colombo-China*, Universidad del Valle <http://mareaspacifico.univalle.edu.co/reunion-en-pekín/>.



Figure 3. Manuel Zapata Olivella and Jorge Zalamea during the Feast of Pigeons, 1952. *Mareas del Pacífico*. *Revista Colombo-China*, Universidad del Valle <http://mareaspacifico.univalle.edu.co/reunion-en-pekín/>.

# RADIO PEKIN

## EMISIONES DIARIAS EN LENGUA ESPAÑOLA

Para España	Hora local	Hora de Pekin	Kc./s.	Mc/s.
		4.30-5.30	6125	48.98
	21.30-22.30 (Madrid)		7180	41.78
			7335	40.90
			9785	30.66
			12055	24.88
<b>Para América Latina</b>		6.00-7.00	6150	48.78
Primera emisión	19.00-20.00 (Bs. As. y Montevideo)		6210	48.31
			7080	42.37
			7335	40.90
	18.00-19.00 (Santiago de Chile y Asunción)		9457	31.73
			11650	25.75
Segunda emisión	18.30-19.30 (La Habana, Panamá y Bogotá)	7.30-8.30	7480	40.11
			9480	31.65
			11730	25.58
	19.00-20.00 (Caracas)		11945	25.12
			15095	19.87
	19.30-20.30 (Santiago de Chile)			
Tercera emisión	21.30-22.30 (Bs. As. y Montevideo)	8.30-9.30	6210	48.31
			7080	42.37
			7335	40.90
	20.30-21.30 (Santiago de Chile y Asunción)		9457	31.73
			11650	25.75
			15060	19.92
Cuarta emisión	20.00-21.00 (México, Managua, San José y Tegucigalpa)	10.00-11.00	7080	42.37
			9457	31.73
			11715	25.61
			11820	25.38
	21.00-22.00 (La Habana)		15060	19.92
			17745	16.91
	22.00-23.00 (Santiago de Chile)			

Figure 4. Daily radio broadcasts to Latin America and Spain, *Pekin Informa*, No. 1 (special opening number), 1963.





Figure 5. Excerpt from the editorial page of *Pekin Informa*, No. 1 (special opening number), 1963.

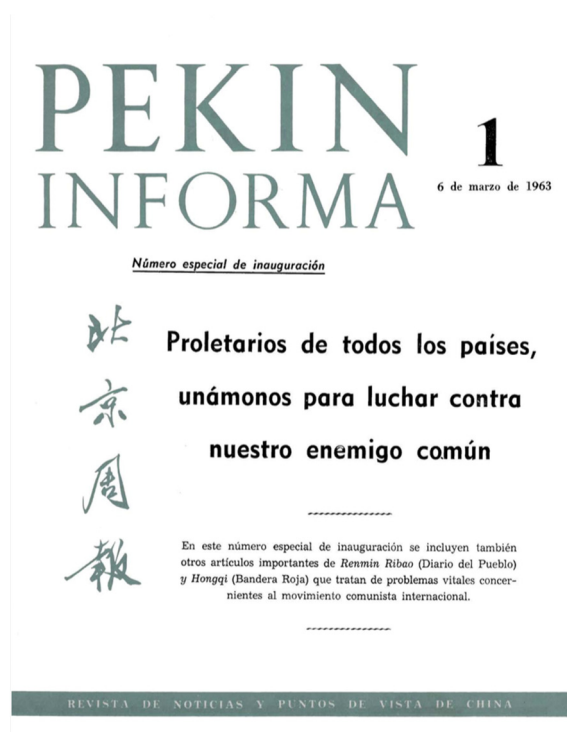


Figure 6. Magazine cover of *Pekin Informa*, No. 1 (special opening number), 1963.