STUDY ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND PERU, 1971–1972

1. *Introduction*

In January 1980, the United States Central Intelligence Agency reviewed China's relations with Latin America in a report, noting that «The most active period in PRC-Latin American Relations was from late 1970 to 1974», this was because «China's emergence in the early 1970s from its long period of isolation and, notably Washinton's new relationship with Beijing, prompted several Latin American state to reappraise their China policy, of the 13 Latin American States that have recognized the PRC, nine established relations during this period»[1]. As the report describes, during this period China successively established formal diplomatic relations with Chile, Peru, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and other nations, transitioning from the «people-to-people diplomacy» of the 1950s and 1960s to a phase of formal diplomacy. Among them, Peru became the first Latin American country governed by a non-socialist regime to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing, thereby departing from the pattern established by China's earlier diplomatic breakthroughs in Cuba and Chile, both of which had been closely associated with ideological affinity and leftist political leadership.

Existing scholarship has generally explained China's diplomatic expansion in Latin America through two major frameworks. The first emphasizes the role of ideology, arguing that China's relations with Latin American countries during the 1950s and 1960s were primarily shaped by revolutionary solidarity and support for left-wing movements. Studies on Sino-Cuban and Sino-Chilean

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[1] Intelligence Summary of Strides Made in Relations between China and Latin American Countries, Central Intelligence Agency, 22 Jan. 1980, U.S. Declassified Documents Online, Gale Archivos, p. 1.

relations have largely followed this perspective, highlighting the importance of socialist affinity in facilitating diplomatic recognition[2]. The second framework attributes China's diplomatic successes in the early 1970s principally to the changing global balance of power, particularly the Sino-American rapprochement initiated under the Nixon administration. According to this interpretation, Washington's evolving China policy reduced the costs associated with recognizing Beijing and encouraged Latin American governments to reconsider their diplomatic positions toward the PRC[3].

While both explanations capture important aspects of China's diplomatic expansion, they are insufficient to explain the Peruvian case. Unlike Cuba and Chile, Peru was governed by a military regime that did not identify itself as socialist. Moreover, although Sino-American rapprochement created a more favorable international environment, Peru initiated contacts with Beijing before the public announcement of Nixon's visit to China and pursued diplomatic recognition based primarily upon its own domestic priorities and foreign policy objectives. The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Peru therefore suggests that factors beyond ideological affinity and superpower détente were at work.

This article argues that the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Peru was primarily driven by the convergence of two parallel processes: China's transition from an ideologically oriented diplomacy toward a more pragmatic strategy, and Peru's pursuit of an independent nationalist foreign policy aimed at reducing its dependence upon the United States. Rather than representing merely a consequence of Sino-American rapprochement,

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[2] Huang Shikang, "Cong Allende dao Alywin", Zhongguo Waijiaoguan zai Ladingmeizhou,Shanghai, Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2005, p. 113; Wuhua, Zhang Sulin, "Zhongguo yu Guba Jianjiao Shimo", Zhongguo Dangan, 2008, 1, pp. 60–61; Li Tong Cheng, Huang Shikang ed., Zhongguo Waijiaoguan zai Ladingmeizhou, Shanghai Renmin, 2005, pp. 262–269; William E. Ratliff, "Chinese Communist Cultural Diplomacy toward Latin America, 1949–1960", The Hispanic American Historical Review, 1969, 1, pp. 53–79; Cecil Johnson, Communist China and Latin America, 1959–1967, New York, Columbia University Press, 1970.

[3] Odd Arne Westad, The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 356–369; Matthew D. Rothwell, Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America, New York, Routledge, 2012, pp. 163–183; Maria Montt Strabucchi, "The PRC's Cultural Diplomacy towards Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s", International Journal of Current Chinese Studies, 2010,1, pp. 53–83.

Sino-Peruvian normalization reflected a broader transformation within the international system during the early 1970s, characterized by the growing assertiveness of Third World countries and the increasing importance of national autonomy in foreign policy decision-making.

More specifically, this article advances three interrelated arguments. First, Sino-Peruvian normalization emerged from a process of reciprocal accommodation around each side's core diplomatic objectives, particularly campaign to restore the PRC's seat in the United Nations and Peru's effort to secure international support for its 200-nautical-mile maritime claim. Second, the Peruvian case illustrates China's growing willingness to engage pragmatically with nationalist governments beyond ideological boundaries, reflecting an important transformation in its approach toward Latin America during the early 1970s, which was also reflected in China's subsequent establishment of diplomatic relations with other Latin American countries. Third, although the available evidence does not support a direct causal relationship between the Peruvian case and Mao Zedong's Theory of Three Worlds, diplomatic engagement with Peru formed part of China's broader interaction with developing countries and contributed to its evolving understanding of the political diversity of the Third World.

The existing historiography on Sino-Peruvian relations remains relatively limited. General studies on China's relations with Latin America have tended to focus on the earlier period of «people-to-people diplomacy» during the 1950s and 1960s, while paying comparatively little attention to the wave of diplomatic normalization that occurred during the 1970s. Research specifically addressing Sino-Peruvian relations has generally emphasized three themes: the chronology of diplomatic contacts between the two countries; Peru's pursuit of an independent foreign policy under General Juan Velasco Alvarado; and the reactions of overseas Chinese communities to diplomatic normalization[4]. While these studies have significantly improved our understanding of bilateral

[4] He Shuangrong eds., Zhongguo yu Latinmeizhou yu Jialebi Guojia Guanxishi, Beijing, Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2016; Rubén Berríos, "El Perú y la República Popular de China: Otro Puente de Entrada a Asia", Agenda Internacional, 2003,18, pp. 145–160; Zhang Xiaoyu, El Establecimiento de Relaciones Diplomaticas entre el Perú y la República Popular China en el Año 1971 Y las Reacciones de la Colonia China en el Perú, Tesis para optar el grado de Magíster en Historia con mención en Estudios Andinos que presenta, 2019; Antonio Zapata, Zhang Kun, "Desde el Rincon: el gobierno de Taiwan frente al Peru y Chile, 1955–1971", Peru y Chile, Lima, CRITICA, 2019, pp. 133–147.

relations, they have paid insufficient attention to the strategic calculations underlying the normalization process and have seldom integrated evidence from multiple archival sources.

More importantly, existing scholarship has rarely situated the Peruvian case within broader historiographical debates concerning China's transformation from revolutionary diplomacy to pragmatic engagement. Nor has it adequately examined how Peruvian nationalism, maritime sovereignty claims, and efforts to reduce dependence upon the United States intersected with China's own search for diplomatic partners amid the Sino-Soviet split and changing Cold War dynamics. Consequently, the broader implications of Sino-Peruvian normalization for understanding China's foreign policy evolution remain underexplored.

Drawing upon archival materials from Peru, mainland China, Taiwan, Chile, and the United States, this article seeks to address these gaps. It demonstrates that Sino-Peruvian normalization emerged from the interaction between domestic political transformations, Third World nationalism, and the strategic adaptation of both states to a changing international order. In doing so, it contributes to the historiography in three ways: first, by emphasizing the agency of Latin American actors in China's diplomatic expansion; second, by highlighting the role of nationalist developmental regimes in facilitating diplomatic normalization; and third, by enriching our understanding of China's evolving engagement with the Third World during the Global Cold War.

2. *Analytical Framework and Sources*

Understanding the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Peru requires moving beyond explanations based solely on ideological affinity or changes in the global balance of power. As discussed in the Introduction, the Peruvian case emerged at the intersection of broader transformations affecting both China's diplomacy and Latin America's international position during the early 1970s. To analyze this process, this article draws upon four interrelated concepts: Third World politics, national autonomy and pragmatism, and proactive diplomacy, which together provide a framework for interpreting the motivations and strategies of both governments.

This study understands the Third World not simply as a category of economically underdeveloped countries but as a political project centered on sovereignty, development, and resistance to external domination. Recent scholarship on the Global Cold War has emphasized that developing countries were not passive objects of superpower competition but active participants seeking

greater autonomy within the international system[5]. This perspective is particularly relevant to the Sino-Peruvian case. Despite their different political systems, both China and Peru sought to expand their room for maneuver in a world largely structured by the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The pursuit of autonomy was closely linked to nationalism. In the Peruvian context, nationalism is understood as a state-led effort to strengthen political sovereignty and reduce external dependence. Under General Juan Velasco Alvarado, Peru pursued agrarian reform, nationalization policies, and a more independent foreign policy aimed at diversifying its international relationships. From this perspective, the decision to establish relations with the People's Republic of China formed part of a broader strategy designed to enhance Peru's diplomatic flexibility and reduce reliance upon traditional centers of power.

At the same time, the Sino-Peruvian case highlights the growing importance of pragmatism in Chinese foreign policy. During the early 1970s, Beijing increasingly expanded relations with nationalist governments that were not socialist but nevertheless pursued independent foreign policies and challenged established power hierarchies. Cooperation with Peru therefore reflected a willingness to move beyond ideological affinity and engage with governments whose political systems differed significantly from China's own. This development was accompanied by what this article describes as proactive diplomacy, which means China's deliberate effort to cultivate relations with strategically important countries in the developing world through political engagement, economic cooperation, and support for issues of particular concern to prospective partners.

These concepts do not constitute a formal theory of Sino-Latin American relations. Rather, they provide analytical tools for understanding why China and Peru found common ground despite their different ideological orientations and historical experiences. The goal is not to impose an abstract framework upon the historical evidence, but to clarify the broader political dynamics within which diplomatic normalization occurred.

Methodologically, the article adopts a process-tracing approach to reconstruct the gradual development of Sino-Peruvian relations between 1970 and

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[5] Vijay Prashad, The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World, New York, The New Press, 2007, pp. 1–18; Odd Arne Westad, The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 3–10, pp. 396–407.

1972. Instead of treating diplomatic recognition as a single event, this approach makes it possible to examine how a sequence of interactions, negotiations, and policy decisions progressively brought the two governments closer together. Particular attention is given to four stages of this process: the emergence of unofficial contacts, reciprocal support surrounding the United Nations and maritime sovereignty issues, negotiations over trade and diplomatic recognition, and the triangular interactions involving Peru, the People's Republic of China, and Taiwan.

Reconstructing these developments requires evidence from multiple archival perspectives. Consequently, this study employs a multi-archival approach drawing upon sources from Peru, mainland China, Taiwan, Chile, and the United States. Peruvian cabinet records provide insight into domestic decision-making and the formulation of foreign policy objectives. Taiwanese diplomatic archives reveal how policymakers in Taipei interpreted and responded to Sino-Peruvian rapprochement. Chinese diplomatic documents and memoirs help illuminate Beijing's broader objectives in Latin America, while Chilean archives offer valuable observations from diplomats who closely monitored developments in both Beijing and Lima. Declassified American records provide an additional external perspective and help situate the case within wider Cold War dynamics.

The use of multiple archival collections is particularly important because official documents cannot be treated as transparent reflections of state intentions. Government records are produced within specific political and institutional contexts and often reflect particular priorities, assumptions, and constraints. For this reason, the analysis compares evidence across different archival collections in order to identify inconsistencies, omissions, and competing interpretations. Such triangulation helps reduce the limitations associated with reliance on any single national archive and allows for a more balanced reconstruction of the normalization process.

In addition to process tracing, the article incorporates limited comparative analysis. Although Peru remains the central focus, occasional comparisons with Chile, Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil help assess whether the Peruvian experience represented a unique diplomatic breakthrough or formed part of a broader pattern in China's expanding engagement with Latin America. These comparisons are intended not to construct a general theory but to better evaluate the historical significance of the Peruvian case.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. Access to Chinese archival materials concerning foreign-policy decision-making in the early 1970s remains highly restricted, making it difficult to reconstruct internal debates within the Chinese leadership in a comprehensive manner. Consequently, the

article does not seek to establish a direct causal relationship between the Peruvian case and broader diplomatic doctrines such as the Theory of Three Worlds. Instead, it focuses on explaining the normalization process itself and situating it within the wider evolution of China's engagement with the Third World.

Taken together, this combination of conceptual clarification, process tracing, and multi-archival research provides a foundation for examining Sino-Peruvian normalization as both a bilateral diplomatic process and a reflection of broader transformations in Cold War international politics.

3. *Converging Paths toward Diplomatic Normalization: National Autonomy and Third World Diplomacy in China and Peru*

The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Peru was not an abrupt development resulting solely from the changing international environment of the early 1970s. Rather it emerged from a gradual convergence in the strategic orientations of both countries as they sought to expand their autonomy within the constraints of the Cold War order. Although China and Peru occupied very different positions within the international system, both governments increasingly perceived the existing bipolar structure as limiting their respective national interests. Consequently, each sought to diversify its external relationships and pursue a more independent foreign policy.

The historical foundations of Sino-Peruvian relations predated the Cold War. Chinese migration to Peru in the nineteenth century established enduring social connections between the two societies, leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Peru and the Qing Dynasty in 1874[6]. Following the establishment of the Republic of China, formal diplomatic relations continued after 1911 and persisted after 1949 through the Nationalist government in Taiwan with the support of the United States[7].

However, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, Latin America initially occupied only a secondary position within Beijing's diplomatic priorities. During the 1950s, Chinese foreign policy was largely shaped by the strategy of «leaning to one side», emphasizing solidarity with socialist countries while maintaining a more limited engagement with the developing

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[6] Humberto Rodriquéz Pastor, Hijos del Celeste Imperio en el Perú 1850–1900: Migración, Agricultura, Mentalidad y Explotación, Lima, Sur Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 2001.

[7] Ruben Berrios, "El Perú y el República China: otro puente de entrada a Asia", Agenda Internacional, 2003, 18, pp. 145–160.

world[8]. Mao Zedong summarized this hierarchy in foreign policy priorities by stressing the importance of socialist unity while placing relations with Asia, Africa, and Latin America in a secondary position. Nevertheless, even during this period, Chinese leaders remained interested in establishing relations with Latin American countries[9]. Efforts to normalize relations with Mexico, Argentina, and Chile during the 1950s ultimately failed because of limited economic exchanges, U.S. opposition, and pressure from Taiwan. Instead, China relied heavily upon unofficial contacts and people-to-people diplomacy[10]. In Peru, invitations extended to political figures, intellectuals, and leaders of leftist organizations helped establish channels of communication and contributed to the accumulation of mutual knowledge[11].

These activities reflected China's earlier revolutionary approach toward Latin America, which prioritized ideological solidarity and anti-imperialist movements. Yet they failed to generate formal diplomatic breakthroughs. The limitations of this strategy became increasingly evident during the 1960s as Beijing confronted a rapidly changing international environment.

The deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations fundamentally transformed China's strategic calculations. The Sino-Soviet split, border disputes, and military clashes along the Ussuri River generated profound security concerns for Chinese leaders[12]. At the same time, China's international isolation became increasingly pronounced. Faced with the prospect of confronting both superpowers simultaneously, Beijing gradually reassessed the role of ideology in foreign policy and increasingly emphasized national interests and strategic flexibility[13].

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[8] Maozedong Waijiao Wenxuan, Beijing, Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1994, p. 288.

[9] Wang Taiping eds., Xinzhongguo Waijiao 50nian II, Beijing, Beijing Chubanshe, p. 1621.

[10] Wang Taiping eds., Xinzhongguo Waijiao 50nian II, op. cit., pp. 1621–1623.

[11] "Bilu Renshi fang Zhonggong 1958–1965 ",020-063202-0048, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (AMFARC), pp. 4–14; William E. Ratliff, "Chinese Communist Cultural Diplomacy toward Latin America, 1949–1960", Hispanic American Historical Review, 1969, 1, p. 59.

[12] Chen Jian, Mao's China and the Cold War, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001, pp. 238–266.

[13] In a 1969 conversation with Chen Yi, Mao Zedong commented: «How is your research on international affairs progressing? … We are now isolated; no one pays any attention to us anymore», Wang Yongqing, 1966–1976 nian zhongmeisu guanxi jishi, Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu, 1997, 4, pp. 34–45.

This transition did not imply the abandonment of anti-imperialist principles. Rather, it reflected a broader reconceptualization of potential partners in the developing world. Mao Zedong's evolving understanding of international politics increasingly stressed cooperation with nationalist forces resisting external domination, regardless of their ideological orientation. As Mao remarked during discussions with Peruvian communist representatives, China should support not only communists but also nationalists who genuinely opposed imperialism[14].

The significance of this shift should not be underestimated. China's willingness to engage nationalist governments represented an important departure from earlier diplomatic practices that had privileged ideological affinity. Rather than viewing world politics primarily through the lens of socialist versus capitalist confrontation, Chinese leaders increasingly interpreted international relations through the framework of opposition between hegemonic powers and developing countries seeking greater autonomy. This emerging perspective laid the foundation for China's subsequent expansion of relations with non-socialist states throughout the Third World.

Peru experienced a parallel, although distinct, transformation. The military coup led by General Juan Velasco Alvarado in October 1968 inaugurated one of the most ambitious reform projects in twentieth-century Latin America. Rejecting the developmental model associated with Peru's traditional oligarchy and its close relationship with the United States, the Velasco government pursued an agenda centered upon nationalism, structural reform, and economic sovereignty[15]. Agrarian reform, nationalization of strategic sectors, industrial development initiatives, and the recognition of indigenous rights formed essential components of this broader project.

These domestic transformations were accompanied by a substantial reorientation of Peru's foreign policy. The Velasco administration increasingly sought to diversify Peru's international relationships, strengthen cooperation among developing countries, and reduce dependence upon the United States[16].

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[14] During the 1960s, when receiving a delegation from the Peruvian Communist Party, Mao Zedong stated: «We have a principle: whether they are communists or nationalists, as long as they are genuinely anti-imperialist, we will support them», "Maozedong Zhuxi jiejian bilu gongchandang Jose Sotomayor deng tanhua jilu", 111-00608-05, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC MFAA).

[15] Peter Klaren, Nación y la Sociedad en la Historía del Perú, Peru, Editorial IEP, 2012, pp. 409–413, pp. 416–423.

[16] Helán Jaworski, "La Identidad de la Politica Exterior", Carlos Franco ed., El Perú de Velasco Tomo III, Lima, CEDEP, 1983, pp. 595–598.

Within Latin America, Peru supported regional integration initiatives aimed at enhancing collective autonomy. Internationally, Peru actively participated in the Non-Aligned Movement and cultivated relations with socialist countries while simultaneously maintaining its independent identity. Peru's foreign policy should not be interpreted simply as ideological alignment with socialism. It reflected what may be characterized as nationalist pragmatism: the pursuit of international partnerships based primarily upon their contribution to national development and political autonomy[17]. From this perspective, relations with China offered opportunities to strengthen Peru's diplomatic leverage, expand economic exchanges, and reinforce its broader strategy of resisting external constraints.

The growing tensions between Peru and the United States further reinforced this tendency. Peru's nationalization of foreign-owned petroleum assets and its defense of a 200-nautical-mile maritime zone generated considerable friction with Washington. The resulting economic pressures and diplomatic disputes encouraged Peruvian leaders to seek alternative international partners capable of supporting Peru's claims and reducing its dependence upon traditional power centers[18].

Despite their differing historical trajectories, China and Peru thus confronted a common challenge: how to preserve national autonomy within an international system dominated by superpower competition. For China, this challenge emerged primarily from strategic isolation following the Sino-Soviet split. For Peru, it arose from longstanding patterns of political and economic dependence upon the United States. In both cases, foreign policy diversification became a mechanism for expanding room for maneuver within a constrained international environment.

The convergence between Chinese and Peruvian foreign policy orientations therefore reflected more than temporary diplomatic convenience. It represented a broader transformation in the international order during the early 1970s. As détente reduced tensions between the superpowers and decolonization expanded the number of newly independent states, developing countries increasingly sought to assert their own interests within global politics. The traditional East-West framework of Cold War competition gradually intersected with emerging North-South conflicts concerning development, sovereignty, and international inequality.

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[17] Helán Jaworski, "La Identidad de la Politica Exterior", op. cit., pp. 593–596.

[18] "Peru: Actions and Contingencies", April 23, 1969, U.S Declassified Documents Online, Gale Primary Sources, pp. 5–24.

Understanding Sino-Peruvian rapprochement through this perspective highlights the limitations of explanations based exclusively upon ideology or superpower politics. The establishment of diplomatic relations became possible not because China and Peru shared identical political systems, but because both governments increasingly prioritized national autonomy and Third World solidarity within their foreign policy strategies. Their diplomatic convergence therefore reflected the growing importance of pragmatic cooperation among developing countries seeking to reshape their position within the international system.

It was within this context that subsequent interactions concerning China's representation at the United Nations and Peru's claim to a 200-nautical-mile maritime zone acquired particular significance.These issues provided concrete opportunities through which an already emerging convergence of interests could be translated into diplomatic normalization.

4. *Signaling Interests and Building Trust: The Politics of Recognition and Maritime Sovereignty*

The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Peru resulted from a gradual process of reciprocal signaling through which both governments sought to assess each other's intentions, reliability, and strategic priorities. Before engaging in formal diplomatic negotiations, China and Peru needed to determine whether the other side genuinely shared their commitment to independent foreign policies and whether cooperation would advance their respective national interests. This process was particularly important because neither government possessed extensive prior experience in dealing with the other. China had only limited official diplomatic engagement with Latin America beyond its earlier contacts with revolutionary movements, while Peruvian policymakers possessed relatively limited information regarding China's foreign-policy priorities and diplomatic principles[19]. This mutual unfamiliarity created considerable uncertainty during the initial stage of bilateral contacts, making confidence-building an essential prerequisite for diplomatic normalization. Under these conditions, both governments relied on symbolic diplomatic gestures and concrete policy positions on issues of fundamental national importance to assess each other's intentions and evaluate the potential benefits and risks of establishing formal diplomatic relations.

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[19] Huang Zhiliang, Zhongla Jianjiao Jishi, op. cit., p. 103; Matthew D. Rothwell, Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America, op. cit., pp. 1–15.

The question of China's representation in the United Nations represented Beijing's most important diplomatic objective during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, the Chinese leadership had regarded the restoration of China's legitimate seat at the United Nations as both a matter of sovereignty and an essential step toward overcoming international isolation. Consequently, support from developing countries increasingly became a central component of China's diplomatic strategy, making the expansion of diplomatic relations with Asia, Africa, and Latin America a political priority rather than merely a symbolic objective[20]. Within this broader context, Peru acquired particular diplomatic significance. As one of the more influential Latin American countries and an active participant in debates over international law and the rights of developing states, Peru's position carried political weight beyond the bilateral relationship itself.

For Beijing, Peru's position on the «Important Question» resolution at the United Nations offered a valuable opportunity to assess whether the Velasco government was genuinely pursuing an autonomous foreign policy. Unlike many Latin American governments that continued to align closely with the United States on issues concerning China, Peru's leadership demonstrated a growing willingness to reconsider its traditional diplomatic orientation. The deliberations recorded in the Peruvian Cabinet Minutes reveal that Peru's voting behavior was neither automatic nor ideologically predetermined. Ministers debated three possible alternatives: maintaining alignment with the United States, abstaining, or actively opposing the American-sponsored «Important Question» resolution[21]. The arguments advanced during these discussions reflected a broader transformation in Peruvian foreign policy thinking. Fisheries Minister Javier Tantalean emphasized the economic opportunities associated with closer relations with China, particularly the potential expansion of exports to the Chinese market. Minister Jorge Fernández Maldonado stressed political autonomy, arguing that Peru's foreign policy should no longer be dictated by American preferences but instead reflect Peru's own national interests[22]. These discussions suggest that Peru's eventual decision to oppose the «Important Question» resolution represented more than a procedural vote within the United Nations. It constituted an important signal that the Velasco administration was willing to exercise diplomatic independence even when doing so risked intensifying tensions with Washington.

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[20] Chen Jian, Mao's China and the Cold War op. cit., pp. 229–245.

[21] ACMP, Tomo VI, Noviembre de 1970, p. 196.

[22] ACMP, Tomo VI, Noviembre de 1970, p. 197.

From Beijing's perspective, Peru's voting behavior suggested that the Velasco government was pursuing a more autonomous foreign policy than many other Latin American governments. Peru's support therefore functioned not merely as diplomatic assistance on a specific issue but as an indication that meaningful political cooperation might be possible.

If the United Nations question represented China's principal concern, Peru's claim to a 200-nautical-mile maritime zone occupied a similarly important position within its foreign policy agenda. Since the 1950s, Peru had advocated expanded maritime jurisdiction as a means of protecting national resources and defending economic sovereignty against the interests of major maritime powers[23]. Under the Velasco administration, the 200-mile principle acquired heightened political significance. It became closely associated with broader efforts to promote national autonomy and resist perceived forms of external domination[24]. Consequently, international support for Peru's maritime claims assumed both practical and symbolic importance.

China's public endorsement of the Latin American position regarding maritime sovereignty therefore attracted considerable attention within Peruvian political circles. On 20 November 1970, People's Daily published articles supporting Latin American claims concerning the 200-mile maritime zone while criticizing the opposition of major powers to these initiatives[25]. Significantly, these commentaries specifically cited the statements of Peru's foreign minister regarding the rights of developing countries. The timing of these publications suggests that they should not be interpreted merely as routine reporting on international events. Appearing shortly after Peru's favorable position regarding China's representation at the United Nations, they constituted a form of diplomatic signaling designed to communicate Beijing's support for an issue of fundamental importance to Peru.

Chinese diplomat Huang Zhiliang later recalled that Beijing deliberately sought to express its support clearly and publicly in order to facilitate the development of relations with Peru and other Latin American countries[26]. Whether or not Chinese policymakers anticipated the full diplomatic consequences

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[23] Francisco Orrego Vicuña, The Exclusive Economic Zone: Regime and Legal Nature under International Law, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 1–20.

[24] Abraham F. Lowenthal, The Peruvian Experiment: Continuity and Change under Military Rule, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 191–205.

[25] Renmin Ribao, 20th November,1970, p. 5.

[26] Huang Zhiliang, Zhongla Jianjiao Jishi, op. cit., p. 103.

of these gestures, Peru interpreted China's position as evidence that Beijing genuinely supported the interests of developing countries rather than simply pursuing narrow strategic objectives. Peruvian cabinet discussions and public statements by Foreign Minister Mercado Jarrín consistently emphasized China's support for the 200-mile principle as a significant factor influencing Peru's diplomatic calculations[27]. This suggests that Chinese endorsement served as more than symbolic rhetoric. It strengthened perceptions that China represented a valuable international partner capable of supporting Peru's broader efforts to defend national sovereignty.

The interaction between these two issues demonstrates that Sino-Peruvian rapprochement evolved through a process of reciprocal testing rather than unilateral initiative. Each side employed policy positions on matters of fundamental concern to assess the credibility of the other's commitment to an independent foreign policy. Peru's support for China's representation at the United Nations allowed Beijing to evaluate whether the Velasco government genuinely intended to pursue diplomatic autonomy beyond rhetorical declarations. Conversely, China's endorsement of Peru's maritime claims enabled Peruvian leaders to determine whether China would actively support the aspirations of developing countries in practice rather than merely in principle. The significance of these interactions extends beyond the bilateral relationship itself. They illustrate how emerging forms of Third World diplomacy during the early 1970s increasingly relied upon mutual recognition of shared concerns regarding sovereignty, development, and resistance to great-power domination. Cooperation was not based upon ideological uniformity but upon overlapping interests arising from efforts to expand national autonomy within an unequal international system.

Consequently, the events of 1970 should not be understood as a series of isolated diplomatic gestures. They represented the gradual construction of political trust through reciprocal signaling. By the time formal negotiations concerning diplomatic recognition began in 1971, China and Peru had already established a substantial degree of confidence regarding each other's strategic intentions. The subsequent process of diplomatic normalization therefore emerged not from sudden geopolitical realignments but from the cumulative effect of these earlier interactions, through which both governments discovered that cooperation could simultaneously advance their respective national interests and broader visions of international order.

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[27] ACMP, Tomo VIII, Mayo de 1971, p. 75, p. 152; Tomo IX, Agosto de 1971, p. 18, p. 152.

5. *Reconciling Pragmatism and Principle: Negotiating Sino-Peruvian Diplomatic Recognition*

By early 1971, Sino-Peruvian relations had moved beyond preliminary diplomatic signaling and entered a phase of substantive negotiations. The arrival of the Chinese trade delegation led by Zhou Huamin in Lima represented an important transition from symbolic gestures to practical diplomacy[28]. Yet the process of normalization was not simply a matter of expanding economic exchanges, instead it involved balancing economic pragmatism with political principles, while simultaneously navigating the increasingly complex triangular relationship among mainland China, Peru, and Taiwan.

During the initial negotiations, Peru advanced two principal objectives. The first was securing explicit Chinese support for Peru's 200-nautical-mile maritime claim. The second involved expanding bilateral economic exchanges through trade agreements and the establishment of commercial offices[29]. Evidence from Peruvian and Chilean archives suggests that China emphasized three essential conditions: support for the restoration of the People's Republic of China's seat in the United Nations, recognition of Beijing as the sole legitimate government representing China, and the severance of diplomatic relations with Taiwan[30]. Rather than representing merely a continuation of earlier political exchanges, these negotiations marked a transition from diplomatic signaling to institutional bargaining, through which both governments sought to translate political convergence into concrete diplomatic arrangements.

The resulting negotiations demonstrated a high degree of pragmatism on both sides. Peru viewed China primarily as a potential economic partner capable of reducing dependence on traditional Western markets. China, in turn, regarded Peru as an important diplomatic partner whose support could strengthen Beijing's international position[31]. The trade agreements that emerged reflected this convergence of interests. Peru agreed to export substantial quantities of fishmeal, fish oil, copper, lead, and zinc to China. For Peru, these exports offered an opportunity to diversify its external markets and reduce dependence upon traditional trading partners, particularly at a time when economic and

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[28] ACMP , Tomo VIII, Abril de 1971, p. 14, p. 57.

[29] ACMP, Tomo VIII, Mayo de 1971, p. 75; "Antecedentes Relaciones Diplomaticas China- Perú", ER15-Rio No.248/44, CHN/15, Fondo Paises, Archivo General Histórico, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores del Chile (AGHMREC), pp. 1–4.

[30] ACTA, Tomo VIII, Mayo de 1971, p. 110, Julio de 1971, p. 144; AMFARC, "Bilu yu Zhonggong Jianjiao", 505.22/0001, pp. 152–153.

[31] ACTA, Tomo VIII, Junio de 1971, p. 161; ACTA, Tomo IX, Agosto de 1971, p. 18.

political relations with the United States had become increasingly strained[32]. For China, access to these commodities supported domestic economic needs while simultaneously strengthening relations with an emerging diplomatic partner. The economic cooperation should not be interpreted merely as a by-product of diplomatic normalization, rather than trade functioned as an instrument of confidence-building. Commercial exchanges therefore functioned as a mechanism through which earlier political trust was transformed into durable bilateral cooperation.

At the same time, Chinese willingness to import products such as fishmeal carried significance extending beyond immediate economic considerations. Contemporary observers, including Chilean diplomats stationed in Beijing, noted that China's demand for fishmeal remained relatively limited and that the transaction appeared to possess a strong political dimension. In this respect, trade served not only economic purposes but also diplomatic ones[33]. By accommodating Peruvian export priorities, Beijing demonstrated its willingness to support partners pursuing independent foreign policies.

Despite the progress achieved through economic negotiations, the question of Taiwan remained the most significant obstacle to diplomatic normalization. Unlike trade agreements, which allowed room for compromise and adjustment, the issue of representation involved competing claims to sovereignty and political legitimacy.

Taiwanese authorities became increasingly concerned regarding developments in Sino-Peruvian relations during 1971. Reports submitted by Taiwan's diplomatic representatives in Lima recognized that Peru's growing dissatisfaction with the United States, combined with China's support for Peru's maritime claims, created favorable conditions for Beijing[34]. In reality, the Peruvian

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[32] Abraham F. Lowenthal, The Peruvian Experiment: Continuity and Change under Military Rule, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 202–210.

[33] Fishmeal and fish oil were primarily used as feed in the livestock and aquaculture industries, The fisheries of Peru and Chile accounted for a substantial share of global red fishmeal production. According to an estimate by the Chilean ambassador to China, the total value of fishmeal was around US$50 million. In 1971, bilateral trade between China and Peru reached US$19.3 million, of which US$19.27 million consisted of Chinese imports from Peru. Given that bilateral trade had remained minimal before 1970-at roughly US$10,000-it can be inferred that the value of the commodities discussed in these commercial negotiations was roughly equivalent to China's total imports from Peru in 1971, Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade of the People's Republic of China, Duiwai Maoyi Tongji Ziliao Huibian: 1950-1989, 1990, p. 121.

[34] AMFARC, "Bilu yu Zhonggong Jianjiao", 505.22/0001, pp. 21–23.

government recognized these differences, and concluded that China was better positioned to satisfy Peru's strategic priorities than Taiwan[35]. The issue therefore extended beyond simple diplomatic recognition, it involved competing visions regarding which partner could more effectively support Peru's broader objectives of autonomy and international diversification.

Rather than immediately rejecting Taiwan's proposals, the Peruvian government initially adopted a cautious approach. Taiwanese archival materials indicate that as late as 14 October 1971, Peru's Foreign Minister informed the U.S. Secretary of State that Lima was still considering the «Two Chinas» proposal[36]. Only on 22 October did Lima formally notify both Washington and Taipei that it would support the Albanian Resolution.

Taiwan subsequently requested that Peru postpone the public announcement of diplomatic recognition until after the United Nations General Assembly vote. This request reflected broader strategic calculations rather than merely bilateral concerns. Taipei feared that another Latin American country's recognition of Beijing before the vote might encourage additional developing countries to support the People's Republic of China, thereby further weakening Taiwan's international position. Contemporary Chinese leaders likewise remained uncertain regarding the outcome of the forthcoming vote. Shortly before the General Assembly convened, Mao Zedong reiterated that China would never accept a «Two Chinas» arrangement, even if doing so delayed its admission to the United Nations[37]. Because Beijing itself remained uncertain regarding the outcome of the vote, it initially attached relatively limited importance to delaying the public announcement of diplomatic recognition. Consequently, although China and Peru signed the Joint Communiqué establishing diplomatic relations on 26 October 1971, the announcement was not made public until 2 November, after United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 had already been adopted.

Following its defeat at the United Nations, Taiwan shifted its strategy toward preserving an unofficial presence in Peru. Officials proposed transforming the existing embassy into a semi-official commercial office responsible for promoting bilateral trade, maintaining contacts with overseas Chinese communities, and preserving channels through which diplomatic relations might eventually be restored[38]. Peruvian officials initially appeared receptive to this

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[35] AMFARC, "Bilu yu Zhonggong Jianjiao", 505.22/0001, pp. 21–29.

[36] AMFARC, "Bilu yu Zhonggong Jianjiao", 505.22/0001, p. 120.

[37] Mao Zedong Nianpu, Vol. VI, op. cit., p. 411.

[38] AMFARC, 510.18/90002, pp. 34–37.

proposal. This hesitation reflected both a limited understanding of the political significance of the Taiwan issue within Chinese diplomacy and Peru's desire to preserve existing commercial agreements, particularly those involving fishmeal exports[39]. Taiwan similarly interpreted Peru's ambiguity as evidence that continued economic engagement might preserve a degree of official presence following diplomatic normalization. Plans were developed to transform Taiwan's embassy into a semi-official commercial office responsible for maintaining economic and social ties[40].

Beijing's reaction demonstrated the boundaries of pragmatism within Chinese diplomacy. When reports emerged suggesting that Taiwan might retain a commercial office in Peru, Chinese authorities immediately suspended ongoing negotiations and demanded clarification from the Peruvian government. This episode highlights an important characteristic of China's foreign policy during this period. Although Chinese diplomacy increasingly emphasized pragmatism and cooperation with ideologically diverse partners, such flexibility operated within clearly defined political constraints. The principle that the People's Republic constituted the sole legitimate representative of China remained non-negotiable. Economic interests could facilitate diplomatic normalization but could not override questions concerning sovereignty and political legitimacy.

The eventual establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Peru on 2 November 1971 reflected the successful resolution of these competing pressures. Peru accepted Beijing's conditions concerning representation and severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan, while China demonstrated its willingness to support Peru's economic and political priorities[41]. The normalization process therefore involved more than the exchange of diplomatic recognition. It represented a mutual political commitment grounded in the recognition that cooperation advanced the strategic interests of both governments.

6. *Peru in Comparative Perspective: Rethinking China's Diplomatic Expansion in Latin America*

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that Sino-Peruvian normalization emerged from the convergence of Chinese diplomatic pragmatism and

[39] AMFARC, "Bilu yu Zhonggong Jianjiao", 505.22/0001, p. 120.
[40] AMFARC, "Bilu yu Zhonggong Jianjiao", 505.22/0001, p. 132.
[41] Mercado Jarrin, Los Discursos de Mercado Jarrin, 6 de Septiembre de 1971.

Peru's pursuit of greater national autonomy. An important question nevertheless remains: to what extent was the Peruvian experience exceptional, and to what extent did it reflect broader transformations in China's relations with Latin America during the early 1970s?

A comparative examination of China's diplomatic recognition in Latin America provides a broader perspective for assessing the historical significance of the Peruvian case. Rather than viewing Sino-Peruvian normalization as an isolated bilateral event, comparison with Chile, Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil reveals a broader shift in China's diplomacy during the early 1970s from relationships based primarily on ideological affinity toward engagement with nationalist governments pursuing more autonomous foreign policies.

China's earliest diplomatic breakthrough in the region occurred with Cuba in 1960. Sino-Cuban relations were strongly shaped by revolutionary solidarity and ideological affinity. Both governments emphasized anti-imperialism, socialist transformation, and support for revolutionary movements throughout the developing world[42]. Diplomatic recognition therefore occurred within a context characterized by substantial ideological convergence. The establishment of diplomatic relations with Chile in 1970 represented a transitional case. Although Salvador Allende's government pursued democratic socialism rather than revolutionary communism, political affinity and shared anti-imperialist objectives continued to facilitate the establishment of diplomatic relations[43]. China's support for Chile reflected both political affinity and broader efforts to expand relations with left-leaning governments in Latin America.

Peru represented a significant departure from these earlier patterns. Unlike Cuba and Chile, the Velasco government was neither a socialist regime nor politically aligned with the international communist movement. Instead, it pursued a nationalist project centered on state-led development, economic reform, and greater autonomy in foreign affairs[44]. Consequently, Sino-Peruvian normalization demonstrated that ideological compatibility was no longer a necessary condition for diplomatic recognition.

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[42] Cecil Johnson, Communist China and Latin America, 1959–1967, op. cit., pp. 18–42; Julia C. Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, London: Bodley Head, 2019, pp. 180–205.

[43] Matthew D. Rothwell, Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America, op. cit., pp. 145–170.

[44] Abraham F. Lowenthal, The Peruvian Experiment: Continuity and Change under Military Rule, op. cit., pp. 3–35.

Subsequent diplomatic developments throughout Latin America further reinforced this emerging pattern. Mexico established diplomatic relations with China in February 1972 under the Institutional Revolutionary Party, emphasizing principles of non-intervention and an independent foreign policy rather than ideological solidarity. Argentina recognized the People's Republic of China later in 1972 under a military government primarily motivated by economic interests and a broader strategy of diplomatic diversification. Brazil followed in 1974 under another military regime, reflecting a foreign policy increasingly characterized by pragmatic autonomy and the search for expanded international partnerships[45]. Taken together, these cases indicate that ideological affinity gradually became less decisive in China's diplomacy toward Latin America, while engagement with governments pursuing more autonomous foreign policies assumed increasing importance. From this perspective, Peru's significance lies not in having directly shaped China's subsequent diplomatic expansion in the region. Rather, it represented one of the earliest Latin American cases demonstrating that diplomatic engagement between China and nationalist, non-socialist governments could be successfully pursued on the basis of shared strategic interests rather than ideological affinity alone.

7. *Conclusion*

Rather than viewing Sino-Peruvian diplomatic normalization as the inevitable consequence of Sino-American rapprochement or as a simple extension of China's diplomatic expansion in Latin America, this article argues that it is best understood as a process of reciprocal accommodation between two governments pursuing distinct yet compatible strategic objectives. China's search for international recognition and broader engagement with the developing world converged with Peru's effort to strengthen national autonomy, diversify its external relations, and reduce dependence upon the United States. Diplomatic normalization therefore emerged not from ideological convergence, but from the gradual construction of political trust through reciprocal signaling, pragmatic negotiation, and mutual recognition of each side's core national interests. Viewed from this perspective, reciprocal accommodation provides a

[45] Mario Ojeda, Alcances y límites de la política exterior de México, Mexico City, El Colegio de México, 1976, pp. 165–180; Carlos Escudé, Foreign Policy Theory in Menem's Argentina, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1997, pp. 18–25; Rubens Ricupero, *A Diplomacia na Construção do Brasil 1750–2022*, Rio de Janeiro, Versal Editores, 2024, pp. 479–481.

useful analytical framework for understanding how China established diplomatic relations with politically diverse governments during the early 1970s.

The Peruvian case also invites a reconsideration of China's diplomatic transformation in Latin America. China's earlier diplomatic breakthroughs in Cuba and, to a lesser extent, Chile were facilitated by revolutionary solidarity and ideological affinity. By contrast, Peru demonstrated that diplomatic recognition could be achieved with a nationalist military government that neither identified itself as socialist nor maintained close ties with the international communist movement. Comparison with Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil further suggests that Peru was not an isolated exception but one of the earliest manifestations of a broader regional transformation. During the early 1970s, China's diplomacy in Latin America increasingly shifted from a model in which ideological compatibility occupied a central position toward one characterized by pragmatic engagement with governments pursuing greater national autonomy. At the same time, the negotiations with Peru demonstrate that such pragmatism was never unlimited. While Beijing showed considerable flexibility regarding trade, economic cooperation, and political engagement, questions concerning sovereignty and representation, above all the One China principle, remained beyond negotiation. China's diplomatic pragmatism therefore represented not a departure from principled diplomacy but a new method through which enduring political principles were pursued under changing international circumstances.

More broadly, the Peruvian experience highlights the active role of developing countries in reshaping the international order during the Global Cold War. Rather than functioning merely as objects of superpower rivalry, both China and Peru sought to expand their strategic autonomy by diversifying international partnerships and resisting external constraints. Their interaction illustrates how the growing agency of developing countries created new opportunities for diplomatic realignment beyond the traditional ideological divisions of the Cold War. This broader context also helps explain China's evolving understanding of the Third World during the early 1970s.

Although the available evidence does not support a direct causal relationship between Sino-Peruvian normalization and Mao Zedong's formulation of the Theory of Three Worlds in 1974, diplomatic engagement with politically diverse governments such as Peru formed part of China's expanding practical experience in cooperating with the developing world. The Peruvian case demonstrated that governments with very different political systems could nevertheless become strategic partners on the basis of shared commitments to sovereignty, national autonomy, and resistance to external domination. Such experiences contributed to China's increasingly differentiated understanding

of the political diversity of the Third World and reinforced an approach that emphasized common strategic interests rather than ideological uniformity.

Seen from this perspective, Sino-Peruvian normalization should be understood not simply as a bilateral diplomatic achievement but as part of a wider reconfiguration of international politics during the early 1970s. As growing numbers of developing countries sought greater room for maneuver between the superpowers, new forms of cooperation emerged that rested increasingly upon mutual accommodation, pragmatic engagement, and respect for national sovereignty. Re-examining the Peruvian case therefore contributes not only to the historiography of Sino-Latin American relations but also to broader debates concerning China's evolving Third World diplomacy and the international history of the Global Cold War. The significance of the Peruvian case lies not in establishing a direct precedent for China's subsequent diplomacy in Latin America, but in revealing how pragmatic cooperation, bounded by principled commitments to sovereignty, became an increasingly important characteristic of China's engagement with the politically diverse developing world during the Global Cold War.

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Abstract

La normalizzazione diplomatica sino-peruviana è compresa al meglio come un processo di accomodamento reciproco, piuttosto che come conseguenza inevitanea di un'affinità ideologica o del riavvicinamento sino-americano. Il riconoscimento diplomatico emerse attraverso la graduale convergenza tra la ricerca cinese di un più ampio riconoscimento internazionale e la ricerca peruviana di una maggiore autonomia nazionale, poiché entrambi i governi accolsero reciprocamente i rispettivi interessi strategici fondamentali riguardanti la questione della rappresentanza cinese alle Nazioni Unite, la rivendicazione peruviana delle 200 miglia nautiche di mare territoriale e i successivi negoziati sul commercio e sulla questione di Taiwan. Il processo di normalizzazione rivela inoltre un'importante trasformazione nella diplomazia cinese verso l'America Latina, dimostrando la crescente disponibilità di Pechino a impegnarsi pragmaticamente con governi nazionalisti oltre i confini ideologici, mantenendo al contempo un fermo impegno verso la sovranità e il principio di Unica Cina. Più che servire come un modello diretto per la successiva espansione diplomatica della Cina in America Latina, il caso peruviano rappresentò una manifestazione precoce del crescente impegno cinese con il mondo in via di sviluppo politicamente diversificato, rivelando come la cooperazione pragmatica, delimitata da impegni di principio verso la sovranità, sia diventata una caratteristica sempre più importante della diplomazia cinese verso il Terzo Mondo durante la Guerra Fredda globale.

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Cina
Zona economica esclusiva delle 200 miglia nautiche
Rappresentanza all'ONU
Juan Velasco
Taiwan

Abstract

Sino-Peruvian diplomatic normalization is best understood as a process of reciprocal accommodation rather than as the inevitable consequence of ideological affinity or Sino-American rapprochement. Diplomatic recognition emerged through the gradual convergence of China's search for broader international recognition and Peru's pursuit of greater national autonomy, as both governments accommodated each other's core strategic interests surrounding the question of China's

representation in the United Nations, Peru's 200-nautical-mile maritime claim, and the subsequent negotiations over trade and the Taiwan issue. The normalization process further reveals an important transformation in China's diplomacy toward Latin America, demonstrating Beijing's growing willingness to engage pragmatically with nationalist governments beyond ideological boundaries while maintaining firm commitments to sovereignty and the One China principle. Rather than serving as a direct blueprint for China's subsequent diplomatic expansion in Latin America, the Peruvian case represented an early manifestation of China's evolving engagement with the politically diverse developing world, revealing how pragmatic cooperation, bounded by principled commitments to sovereignty, became an increasingly important characteristic of China's Third World diplomacy during the Global Cold War.

KEYWORDS

China
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