

# LITHIUM AND DEMOCRACY

*Lithium and Democracy: Conditional Capital and the Challenges facing Argentina*

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Federalismo  
y Libertad



ATLAS  
NETWORK

# LITHIUM AND DEMOCRACY

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# INTRODUCTION

## JOSÉ GUILLERMO GODOY

This work is part of a broader project aimed at examining the political impact of the productive restructuring taking place in Argentina. For more than a century, the country's economic axis was concentrated in the Pampas region — particularly along the Littoral — where the agro-export model constituted the principal source of foreign currency and political power. In contrast, Andean Argentina — La Rioja, Catamarca, Tucumán, Salta, Jujuy — historically integrated into the colonial circuit of Potosí, entered a prolonged cycle of stagnation following the decline of that mine. With the exception of certain specific enclaves, such as Tucumán and Mendoza in the early twentieth century, sustained by targeted protectionist policies, Andean Argentina remained associated with structural poverty and persistent political marginality.

Alongside the consolidated Argentine agro-export complex — historically the principal generator of foreign currency — a new structural axis of international integration is increasingly taking shape: the Andean complex, based on metalliferous mining and energy. This process does not imply a displacement of agriculture, but rather an expansion of the export matrix toward sectors intensive in strategic natural resources. Various projections concur that, should favorable macroeconomic and regulatory conditions be sustained, Argentine exports could approach USD 120 billion by the early part of the next decade. In particular, mining — driven by lithium and copper — could multiply several times its current levels, while the energy sector, leveraged on the development of Vaca Muerta, is projected to become a net provider of foreign exchange. Taken together, the articulation between the agro-export complex and this emerging Andean complex configures a scenario of expansion and diversification of Argentine exports, with the potential to significantly alleviate the country's chronic external constraint.

This productive reconfiguration raises a host of critical questions. One of the most relevant is how it will affect the Argentine political system. Since the constitutional reform of 1994, natural resources belong to the provinces, and it is therefore the provincial governments that bear the primary responsibility for managing this emerging phenomenon. In a federal system such as Argentina's — where each province possesses its own historical legacy, institutional structure, and political dynamics — it is to be expected that the management of these resources will reflect those particularities.

To this must be added the inevitable international dimension: given the strategic nature of the minerals at stake, foreign powers — particularly those with political models distinct from our own — seek to secure presence and influence in the region. This places provincial actors at the center of an extraordinarily complex dynamic, where economic interests, diplomatic pressures, and geopolitical disputes converge.

The central question of this work is, therefore, how this transformation will impact the Argentine political system and what risks and opportunities it entails. On the one hand, it may give rise to new forms of dependence and institutional vulnerability; on the other, it offers the possibility of strengthening provincial economies and, with them, consolidating democracy.

From the Federalism and Liberty Foundation, which promotes the values of a free and democratic society with full respect for human rights, we observe with close attention the growing gravitational pull of autocratic powers — in particular, China — in the Argentine Andean arena. The excessive dependence of some provincial governments on investments from an external actor with an authoritarian political regime constitutes a challenge that cannot be overlooked.

The Federalism and Liberty Foundation promotes Argentina's integration into the world and openness to foreign investment flows as engines of development. Within this framework, the challenge consists of strengthening the institutional capacities necessary to ensure that such investments are embedded in an environment of transparency and democratic accountability. This implies consolidating governance frameworks that guarantee environmental sustainability, respect for human rights, and institutional autonomy, as well as generating reliable information and fostering a citizenry capable of critically assessing the effects of external influence.

The present work is structured around two complementary chapters that address, from different angles, the growing influence of the People's Republic of China in Argentina, with particular attention to the lithium sector — a central strategic resource in the global energy transition.

The first chapter, prepared by economist **Nahuel Ríos**, analyzes in depth the economic, commercial, and financial dimensions of the bilateral relationship. It examines how China has consolidated itself as Argentina's principal strategic partner and as the origin of a growing volume of investments, with particular emphasis on lithium extraction projects in the so-called "Lithium Triangle." The chapter characterizes the presence of Chinese companies in the region, their modes of operation and commercial practices, before discussing the economic and geopolitical implications of this phenomenon. Among the central axes are the challenges Argentina faces in terms of governance, local value-added development, environmental sustainability, and labor conditions.

The second chapter, authored by lawyer **José Salas**, addresses the institutional and democratic implications of China's expansion in the country. The analysis traces the evolution of bilateral ties across successive administrations — from Néstor Kirchner to Javier Milei — and highlights the role of lithium in northwestern Argentina as a privileged vector of Chinese investment. It also examines the participation of political actors, business chambers, think tanks, and educational exchange programs as instruments of Chinese soft and sharp power projection.

## CONDITIONAL CAPITAL: A CATEGORY FOR UNDERSTANDING CHINESE INFLUENCE IN ARGENTINA

This work draws on the concept of corrosive capital developed in studies on international influence, which describes the mechanisms by which a foreign power shapes strategic decisions without resorting to direct intervention. However, the elements observed in the Argentine case do not fully constitute a form of corrosive capital in the terms defined by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). A more fitting framework is an intermediate category: conditional capital — a concept that captures the logic of structural influences capable of shaping economic and institutional incentives without explicitly imposing ideologies, while nonetheless consolidating dependency schemes and asymmetric relationships.

From the economic dimension, the notion of conditional capital allows for a more precise description of the mechanisms deployed by the People's Republic of China in Argentina:

- **Turnkey financing:** a large portion of Chinese loans and investments include the obligation to incorporate that country's technology, machinery, and companies, thereby securing global competitive advantages. For a country with limited access to international credit, these offers present themselves as "irresistible."
- **Conditionality in financial agreements:** the currency swap with China requires the maintenance of the relationship with the IMF, introducing an explicit layer of conditionality.
- **Repayment with natural resources:** experiences in countries such as Ecuador and Venezuela show that financing is often secured against oil or minerals — a pattern that acquires particular relevance in light of China's interest in Argentine lithium.
- **Structural and strategic ties:** the relationship extends beyond commerce to encompass infrastructure, energy, defense, and technology, consolidating interdependencies that narrow the national margin of maneuver.
- **Sovereignty-limiting clauses:** such as the "cross-default" clause between the Belgrano Cargas railway and the Santa Cruz River dams, which constrain regulatory and infrastructure policy.
- **Control over production:** Chinese companies seek to advance toward majority ownership of projects, securing dominance over the extractive chain.

In the **political and institutional** sphere, conditional capital manifests through subtler yet equally decisive dynamics:

- **Opacity and weak oversight:** contracts containing confidentiality clauses limit legislative and civil society scrutiny, undermining transparency.

- **Replication of opaque practices:** a highly centralized regime lacking accountability mechanisms projects its own logics onto partners with fragile institutions.
- **Diplomatic silencing:** the expectation of economic benefits may induce Argentina to avoid criticism on issues sensitive to Beijing (Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinjiang).
- **Co-optation of provincial elites:** in lithium-rich provinces, dependence on investment may align subnational actors with the interests of foreign companies, weakening the defense of the public interest.
- **Influence operations:** educational programs, study trips, and cooperation networks that promote the cultural and symbolic insertion of China among political and academic elites.

The analysis of the Argentine case suggests that Chinese influence does not fully conform to the notion of corrosive capital, but can be better understood through the category of conditional capital. This concept refers to a pattern of influence that does not seek to impose an ideology, but rather shapes strategic decisions through economic, financial, and institutional incentives that impinge on national autonomy and provincial governance. From this perspective, critical sectors such as lithium pose a twofold challenge: on one hand, harnessing foreign investment to drive productive development; on the other, establishing safeguards to ensure that external conditionalities do not compromise institutional transparency, environmental sustainability, labor conditions, or, ultimately, democratic quality.

**Jose Guillermo Godoy**  
Founder and President  
Federalism and Liberty Foundation

# CHINA, LITHIUM, AND DEMOCRACY: ECONOMIC INFLUENCE AND GOVERNANCE OF STRATEGIC RESOURCES IN ARGENTINA

## NAHUEL RIOS

Argentina finds itself at a decisive juncture for redefining its place in the global economy of strategic resources. Lithium, as a key input for the world's energy transition, occupies a central position in this discussion. China's emergence as Argentina's principal partner has profoundly reconfigured the country's commercial, financial, and productive dynamics, consolidating a relationship of structural interdependence that transcends bilateral trade in goods and extends into sensitive areas such as infrastructure, energy, defense, and technology.

In this context, the present report aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of Argentina's economic relationship with China, quantifying the evolution of imports, exports, and financing mechanisms from both a historical and a recent perspective. It also incorporates the multilateral agreements, cooperation protocols, and bilateral commissions that shape a robust institutional architecture, evidencing the magnitude of Chinese influence in sectors strategic to Argentina's development.

The report likewise presents a detailed map of lithium investments, identifying active, under-construction, and under-evaluation projects in the provinces of the Lithium Triangle ("Triángulo del Litio") — Catamarca, Salta, and Jujuy — and characterizing the principal institutional actors and business consortia operating in this industry. It examines in depth the participation of Chinese firms, quantifying their relative weight, exploring their corporate links, and assessing their environmental, labor, and governance practices.

The analysis is completed with an assessment of the economic value of lithium for the producing provinces, gauging its real and projected impact on exports, royalties, employment, and Gross Geographic Product (PBG). Through updated data, projections, and input from business chambers, unions, and civil society organizations, the report seeks to illuminate both the opportunities and the limits of this new export boom, highlighting the challenges associated with rent capture, local value addition, and environmental and social sustainability.

The report proposes lines of reflection on the need to strengthen sector governance, promote strategic planning that ensures coordination across different levels of government and productive actors, and establish regulatory safeguards to maximize the benefits for national development. In sum, this work aspires to contribute to an informed debate on Argentina's place in the global lithium value chain, in a context of geopolitical disputes, structural leverage, and unique opportunities to reorient its productive matrix toward a more equitable and sustainable path.

To that end, the document is organized in four interrelated sections: the first addresses economic influence with China, quantifying trade, financing, and multilateral mechanisms; the second develops a map of lithium investments, identifying projects and key actors; the third examines the presence and strategy of Chinese firms in the sector, with emphasis on their relative weight and governance structures; and the fourth dimensions the economic value of lithium for the provinces, projecting scenarios and highlighting the challenges of democratic and federal governance. This structure seeks to articulate the central thesis: understanding lithium not merely as an export resource, but as a strategic asset for strengthening legal certainty, institutional transparency, and free competition — protecting market integrity against the distortions generated by the influence of autocracies such as China.

## **GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ARGENTINA'S ECONOMIC INFLUENCE WITH CHINA — HISTORICAL AND RECENT OVERVIEW**

Diplomatic relations between the Argentine Republic and the People's Republic of China were officially established in the early 1970s. This rapprochement was part of a wave of international recognition of the Beijing government, within the context of the Cold War and the process of opening toward China promoted by the United States, symbolized by President Richard Nixon's visit that same year. It should be noted that this recognition was not an isolated event but rather formed part of the beginning of a broader Chinese strategy toward Latin America (Tokatlian, 2010).

Commercial relations between the two countries can be divided into two distinct stages. The first, extending from the 1970s to 2004, is characterized by nascent trade, with small volumes and few bilateral agreements. The second, from 2004 to 2024, marks an inflection point, with a deepening of economic ties, a notable increase in bilateral trade, and the advance of infrastructure financing agreements, positioning China as an increasingly relevant strategic partner (Myers and Ray, 2009).

Since 2007, the Argentine Republic and the People's Republic of China have intensified their cooperation in strategic areas such as defense, science, and technology. This process has been consolidated through a succession of agreements, protocols, and memoranda of understanding that configure a robust, long-term institutional architecture. These instruments have been accompanied by the creation of permanent bilateral commissions and regular technical meetings, reinforcing the operational character of the comprehensive strategic partnership established in 2014.

The first milestone of this process was the Memorandum of Understanding on strengthening the exchange and cooperation in defense matters, signed in Buenos Aires on May 16, 2007, between the defense ministries of both countries. This agreement laid the groundwork for structured military cooperation, covering training, logistics, and coordination in international forums.

From 2012, bilateral cooperation deepened through new, more specific instruments. In July of that year, a memorandum on defense cooperation was signed in Beijing, followed in November by another on science, technology, and industry for defense, subscribed between Argentina's Ministry of Defense and China's State Administration for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND). These agreements enabled advances in joint innovation projects, technology transfer, and the strengthening of Argentina's defense industrial capacity (Ministry of Defense of the Argentine Nation, 2012).

In 2014, a new memorandum of cooperation on defense logistics and industry was signed in Beijing between the Chinese state-owned enterprise China National Technical Import and Export Corporation (CNTIC) and Argentina's Secretariat of Science, Technology and Production for Defense. This agreement represented a deepening of the link between the business sector and government agencies, promoting public-private partnership schemes oriented toward the production and supply of strategic goods.

In subsequent years, two free military assistance protocols were signed (Buenos Aires, 2017 and 2019), confirming China's commitment to provide equipment, supplies, and technical support to Argentina's armed forces. The most emblematic agreement of this stage was the Convention on Cooperation in Science, Technology and Industry for Defense, signed on July 31, 2020, between SASTIND and Argentina's Ministry of Defense, which consolidated the previous

instruments and elevated the level of bilateral commitment (Ministry of Defense of the Argentine Nation, 2020).

This framework is complemented by a network of institutional monitoring mechanisms, among which the Joint Defense Commission (JDC) stands out – its fifth meeting was held in January 2021 via videoconference. Likewise, since 2014 multiple meetings on bilateral technological and industrial cooperation have been held, with sessions in Buenos Aires (2015 and 2018) and Beijing (2014). The Permanent Binational Commission, convened in China in 2017, expanded the axes of cooperation to areas such as peacekeeping missions, disaster relief, Antarctic logistics, and officer training.

This sequence of agreements and institutional spaces reflects a consolidated pattern. China has managed to position itself as a strategic actor for Argentina not only economically but also in the realms of defense and dual-use technology. This dynamic of integration affects institutional quality and the country's capacity to attract investment based on clear rules of the game. Analysis of economic influence must go beyond trade to identify how external state financing can generate dependencies that affect transparency and free competition, consolidating an ecosystem of influence that transcends the purely commercial.

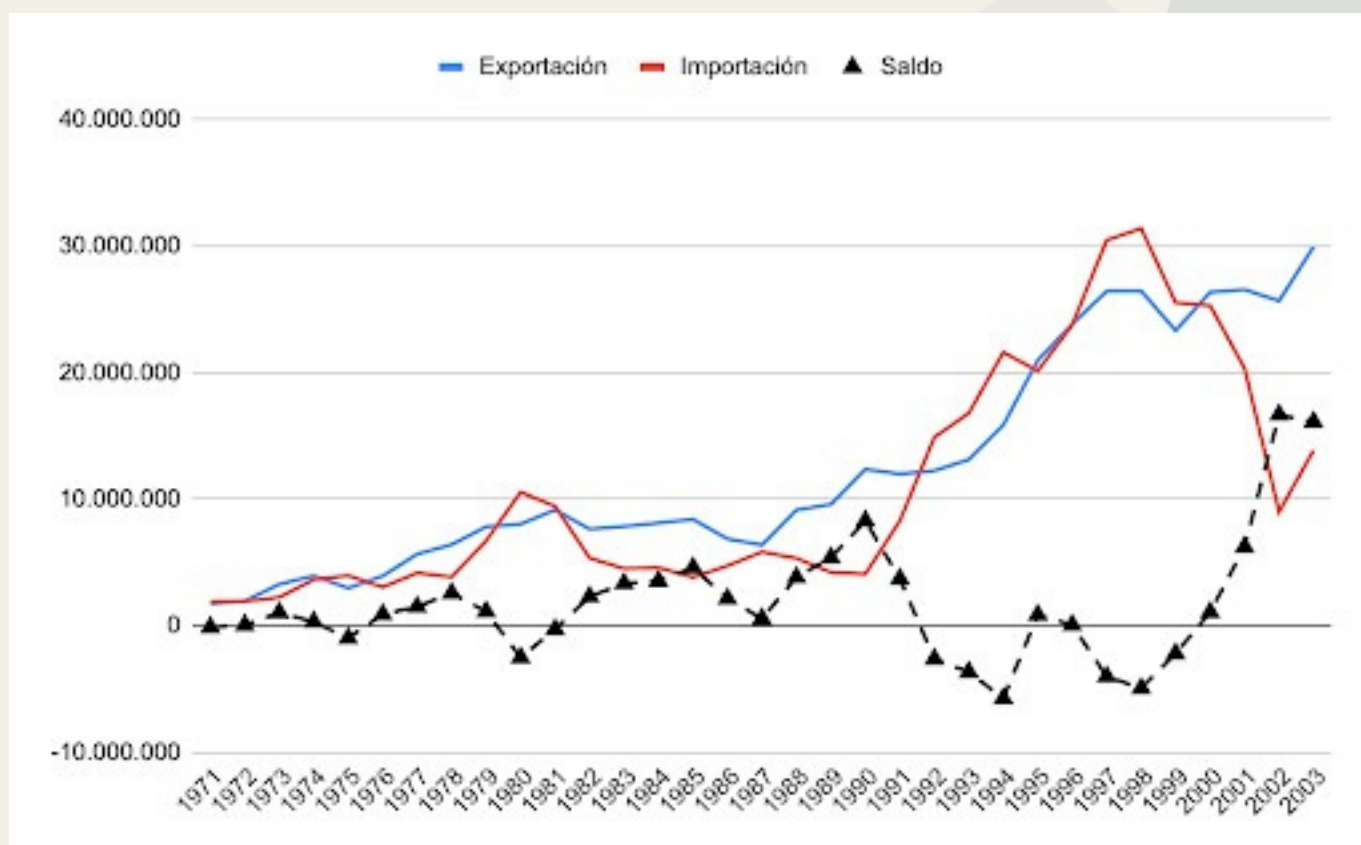
However, to adequately understand the bilateral relationship, it must be framed within the broader dynamics of Argentina's international trade. In this sense, it is essential to analyze the behavior of the trade balance, terms of trade, and the evolution of the current account in both periods. Only from this comprehensive perspective is it possible to gauge the structural impact of the China relationship on the national economy.

## • **IMPORTS, EXPORTS, AND CHINESE FINANCING**

Between 1971 and 2003, Argentina's trade balance exhibited marked oscillations, influenced by both domestic factors and the international economic context. During the 1970s, exports benefited from rising international commodity prices, although the trade balance was unstable due to macroeconomic imbalances and growing financial openness. In the 1980s, the external debt crisis and the adjustment policies imposed generated trade surpluses, though these were the result of a drastic contraction of imports rather than export dynamism.

The 2001 crisis and the subsequent exit from convertibility entailed a reconfiguration of the trade scheme. The steep devaluation caused a collapse in imports, while exports remained relatively stable, leading to record trade surpluses in 2002 and 2003, exceeding USD 16 billion. This stage marks the beginning of a new model based on a competitive exchange rate, which would characterize the ensuing years.

#### EVOLUTION OF ARGENTINA'S FOREIGN TRADE (1971–2003): EXPORTS, IMPORTS, AND TRADE BALANCE.



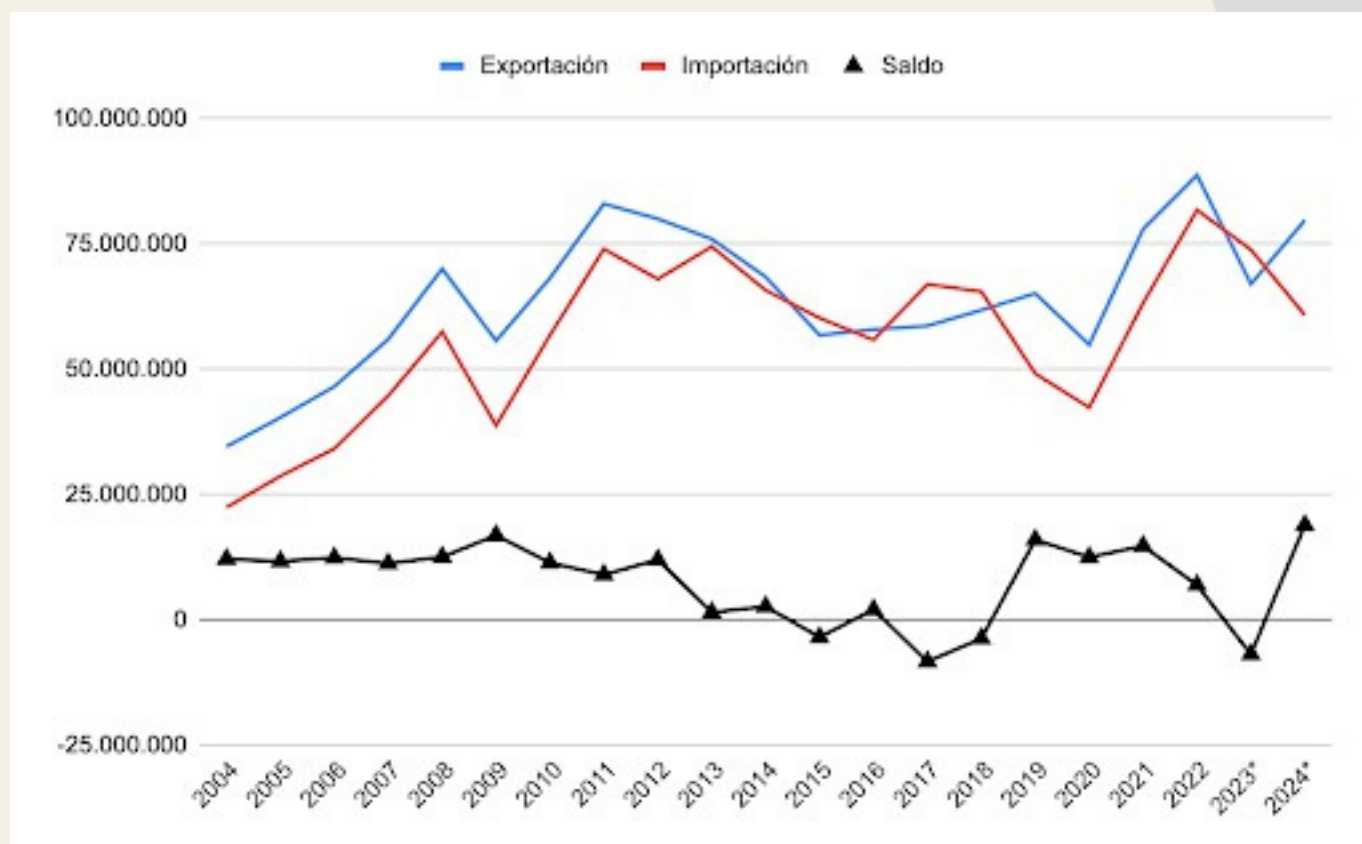
Source: Own elaboration based on INDEC, National Directorate of External Sector Statistics and International Accounts

Between 2004 and 2011, Argentina's trade balance maintained sustained surpluses. This period coincided with an exceptionally favorable international context, characterized by high commodity prices and a competitive real exchange rate, which significantly boosted exports. Although imports also grew, driven by the expansion of domestic consumption and productive investment, the positive balances were substantial, reaching in some years figures exceeding USD 16 billion (2009). This performance reflects the functioning of an economic model whose expansion was sustained, among other pillars, by the trade surplus.

From 2012, however, the outlook began to deteriorate. Exports stagnated or declined in real terms as a result of lost competitiveness, external constraints, and changes in international prices. At the same time, imports continued to grow, pressured by persistent currency demand, exchange rate lag, and dependence on imported inputs. As a result, the trade balance became more vulnerable, with recurring deficit years (2015, 2017, 2018, and 2023). The 2018 devaluation allowed for a temporary correction of the imbalance, though without a structural improvement in the external accounts.

In 2024, projections again indicate a relevant trade surplus, though this result is more linked to import adjustment derived from the cooling of economic activity and external constraints than to sustained export growth. Taken together, the 2004–2024 period exposes the structural dependence of trade balance equilibrium on terms of trade, exchange rate competitiveness, and domestic macroeconomic conditions.

#### EVOLUTION OF ARGENTINA'S FOREIGN TRADE (2004–2024): EXPORTS, IMPORTS, AND TRADE BALANCE.



Source: Own elaboration based on INDEC, National Directorate of External Sector Statistics and International Accounts

## • CHINA'S ENTRY INTO INTERNATIONAL TRADE

China's influence on the Latin American economy has been notable over the past twenty years, driven by investment, the new Chinese ideal, and proposals for integrating plans for future investments, evidencing a quest for consolidating a multilateral order of power. This objective opens a discussion about the type of economic relationship that has developed between Latin America and China, reviewing the socioeconomic evolution of Chinese policy in the global context and updating its position and influence in several Latin American countries. The findings suggest that current multilaterality is being questioned, and agreements with Latin America tend to demonstrate that China's intentions correspond to the substitution of one hegemonic power by another (Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025).

China's Global Strategy and its Multilateralism. The "century of humiliation" experienced by China — when Western powers such as the United Kingdom, Russia, and Japan subjugated it during the Opium Wars and other adverse events — marked a reality of defeat and substantial loss of credibility (Alcalde Cardoza, 2021; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). In response to this reality, the new Chinese ideal was born, seeking to position China as an economic, political, and social power to remedy this historical debt and transition from silent follower to global leader on its own merits (Ramírez Ruiz & Pinto Salvatierra, 2023; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). China pursues this ideal through a vision of a world where power and decision-making capacity materialize through a multilateral scheme of participation, breaking with the traditional unipolar hegemony led by the United States and seeking a multipolar world (Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). This vision of "reactionary" multilateralism has been cultivated since the last century with China's positioning as a manufacturing giant, investor, and provider of technology and industrial knowledge (Alcalde Cardoza, 2021; Qinjian & Savellano, 2024; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025).

Since the second half of the 20th century, China configured itself as a country apt for world manufacturing, attracting large corporations due to its cheap labor that reduced production costs (Vázquez Rojo, 2022; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). Over the last 30 years, the Chinese Communist Party's economic reforms and the massive opening of its capabilities to the world developed a commercial and financial infrastructure, positioning the country in global trade

relations (Kaplun, 2024; Rodríguez Gómez, 2021; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). In the last decade of the 20th century, with Deng Xiaoping's reforms, China accumulated high flows of liquidity and specialized labor, deploying a plan of global commercial interconnection that produced notable changes in the economic power structure traditionally led by the West (Treacy, 2020; Olea Contreras, 2021; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025).

China's intention to establish a commercial and financial sphere within a multilateral order materialized in 2013 with Xi Jinping's launch of the New Silk Road, or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). This mega-initiative for developing economic corridors and infrastructure seeks to link, commercially and productively, countries in Europe, Asia, and North Africa (Slipak & Ghiotto, 2019; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). The announcement revealed China's interest in recovering the international prominence of its ancient Middle Kingdom and shaping a new international order with Asian values (Rubiolo et al., 2020; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). This paradigm of changing world order arises from the increase in Chinese economic power against Western decline and the rise of extremist ideologies (Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). The current relative multipolarity presents China as a challenging center of the world economy, allied with Russia as an energy and military power to counterbalance the influence of the United States and the European Union (Merino et al., 2019; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025).

The Belt and Road Initiative seeks to integrate surrounding countries under Chinese investment policy to gain influence and weight, as reflected in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which covers 31% of global exports and 39% of global GDP, and in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). China defends the liberalization of trade and investment, denying protectionism, and has emerged as the world's largest exporter in complex categories, demonstrating its great competitiveness (Merino et al., 2019; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025).

## **RELACIÓN ECONÓMICA DE CHINA CON AMÉRICA LATINA**

China's presence in the renewable energy sector in Argentina, and in Latin America more broadly, has been driven by the internationalization of its companies and technologies in energy infrastructure (González Jáuregui, 2022).

China has sought to strengthen a multipolar world by using its commercial power, flexible investment, and international cooperation, considering Latin America's role in the BRI (Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). China's efforts to participate in Latin America's financial, commercial, and political organizations materialized from the 1990s onwards, establishing political dialogue with the Rio Group, obtaining observer status at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), and opening bank branches (Cornejo & Navarro, 2010; Treacy, 2020; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025).

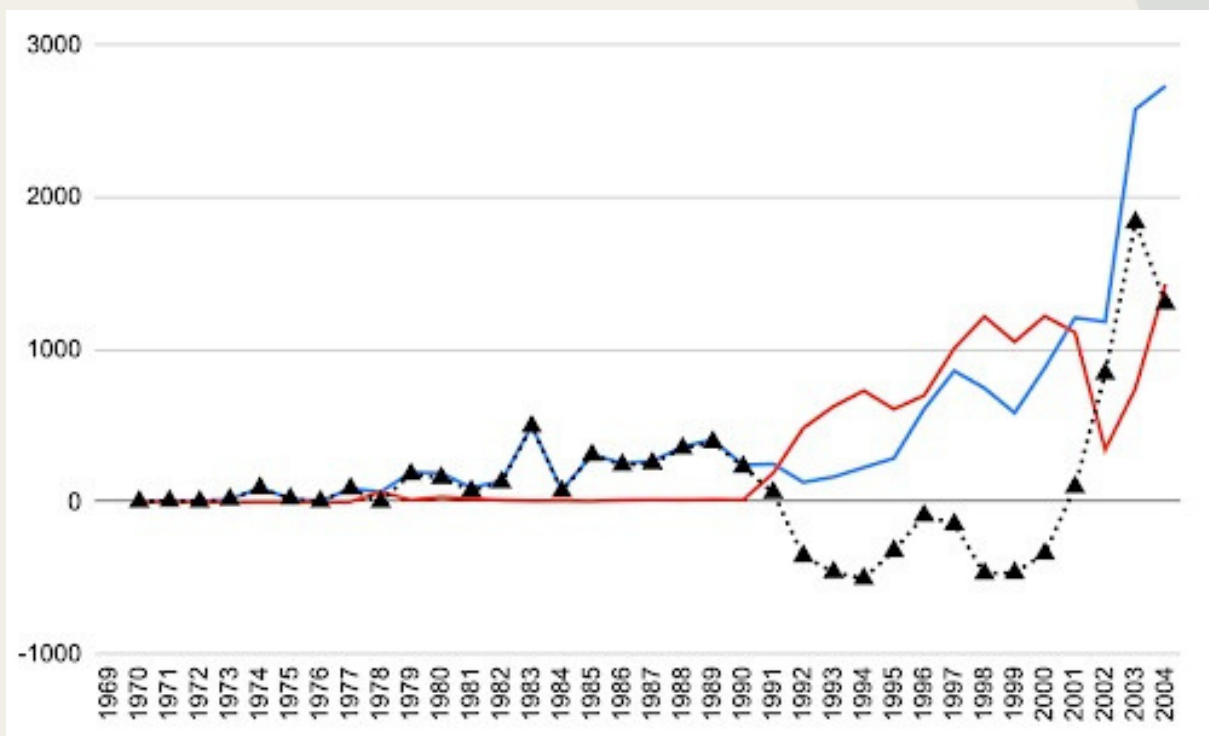
Latin America holds special interest for the Belt and Road Initiative due to its natural and energy wealth, which China seeks to secure for its raw material and energy needs. China aims to guarantee its energy and food security by sourcing primary-extractive resources from as many sources as possible. Moreover, Latin America is a safe market for China to export high-technology manufactures and heavy machinery, projecting a mutual complementarity where China provides infrastructure for Latin American development in exchange for energy resources. Xi Jinping expressed the intention for investments in the region to reach USD 250 billion. The Asian giant's interest in Latin America is of great magnitude — it plans to finance large infrastructure projects to streamline logistics and reduce the costs of moving goods for its production machinery, and to become an exporter of cutting-edge services and technologies, transferring basic productive processes to Asian peripheries, Africa, or Latin America (Slipak & Ghiotto, 2019; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025).

There is a pattern in Chinese projects in the region: initial investments concentrate in primary-extractive sectors, mainly hydrocarbons and mining, with some in infrastructure and energy almost exclusively linked to logistical support for raw materials. Flexibility is a characteristic of the BRI, as the investment technique varies by country and project. For example, in Peru and Venezuela, China National Petroleum Corporation's participation in extractive projects was through association with government firms, while in Argentina or Brazil, other Chinese companies have acquired already-established enterprises. In Venezuela and Ecuador, China has extended loans repayable or guaranteed with barrels of oil or mineral resources. Latin America plays a fundamental role as a "mineral and energy experimentation laboratory" for .

China, with projects exploring and exploiting natural resources and minority investment in alternative energies, alongside the development of logistics infrastructure for moving these goods (Slipak & Ghiotto, 2019; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025)

Argentina is a relevant destination for Chinese investment in Latin America and ranks among the leading recipients of financing from Chinese development banks (Dussel Peters, 2021; Myers & Ray, 2022). The economic linkage between Argentina and China was initially cemented in trade, which was nascent until the 1980s but increased following Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening" policy of 1978 (González Jáuregui, 2023). Until the 1990s, Argentina posted trade surpluses with China, and bilateral ties deepened with Argentina's support for China after the Tiananmen events (González Jáuregui, 2023).

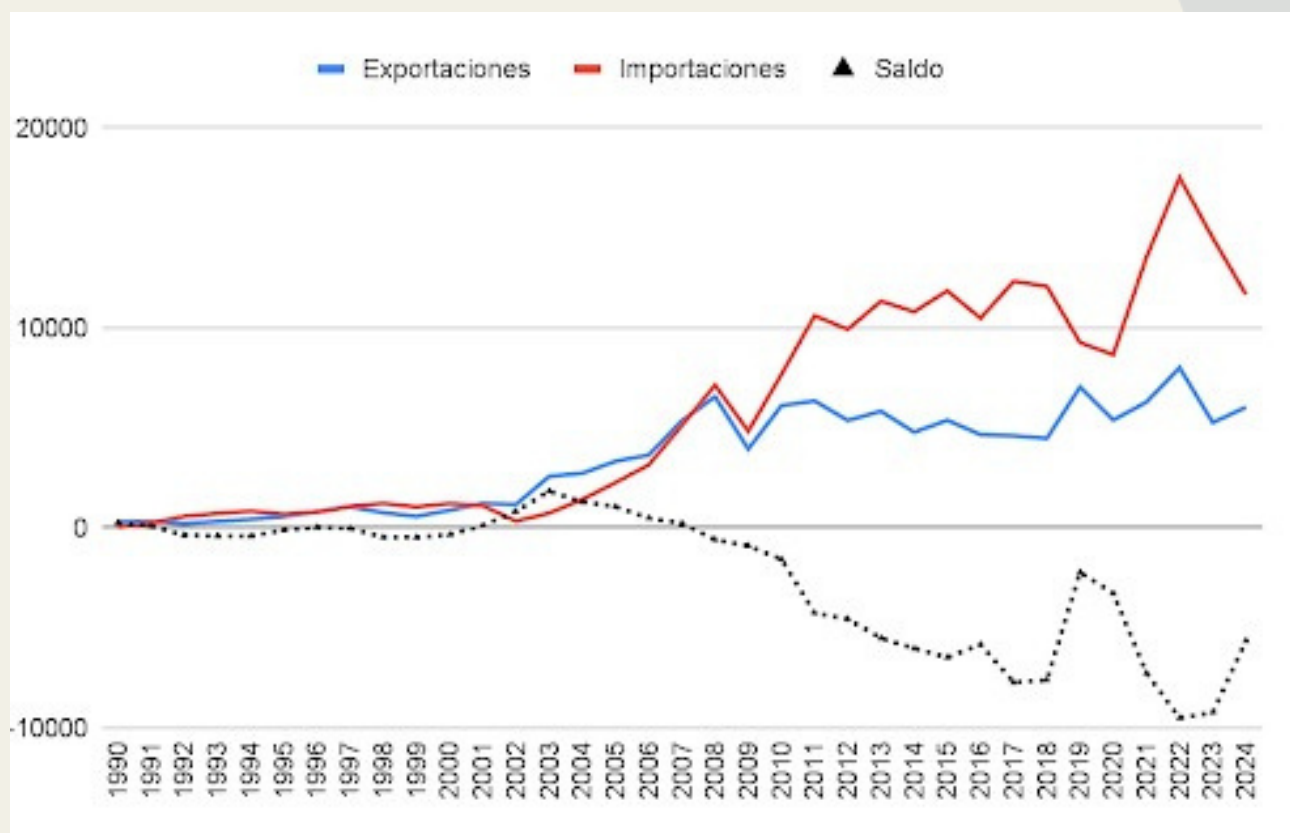
#### IMPORTS AND EXPORTS WITH THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN EARLY YEARS.



Source: Own elaboration based on Ferreres

Toward the late 1990s and into the 21st century, the pattern of trade consolidated, with Argentina becoming a key supplier of food, energy, minerals, and other strategic resources, as well as a destination market for Chinese industrial goods (González Jáuregui, 2023). Since 2008, Argentina has recorded a persistent deficit in its bilateral trade with China (González Jáuregui, 2023). Today, China is Argentina's second largest trade partner, the main destination for Argentine lithium carbonate, and the source of 50% of mining investment (Arteaga, 2024; González Jáuregui, 2023). In 2022, 9% of Argentine exports went to China, concentrated in agro-industrial products: soybeans (92%), meat (57%), and feed barley (59%), which together accounted for 66% of sales. Lithium carbonate has also been prominent, with 41.6% of exports to China in 2022 (González Jáuregui, 2023). Some 21.5% of Argentine imports originated from China, composed of finished goods and industrial inputs (González Jáuregui, 2023). Argentina has incurred annual trade deficits with China, transferring billions of dollars to it (Mangione, 2021).

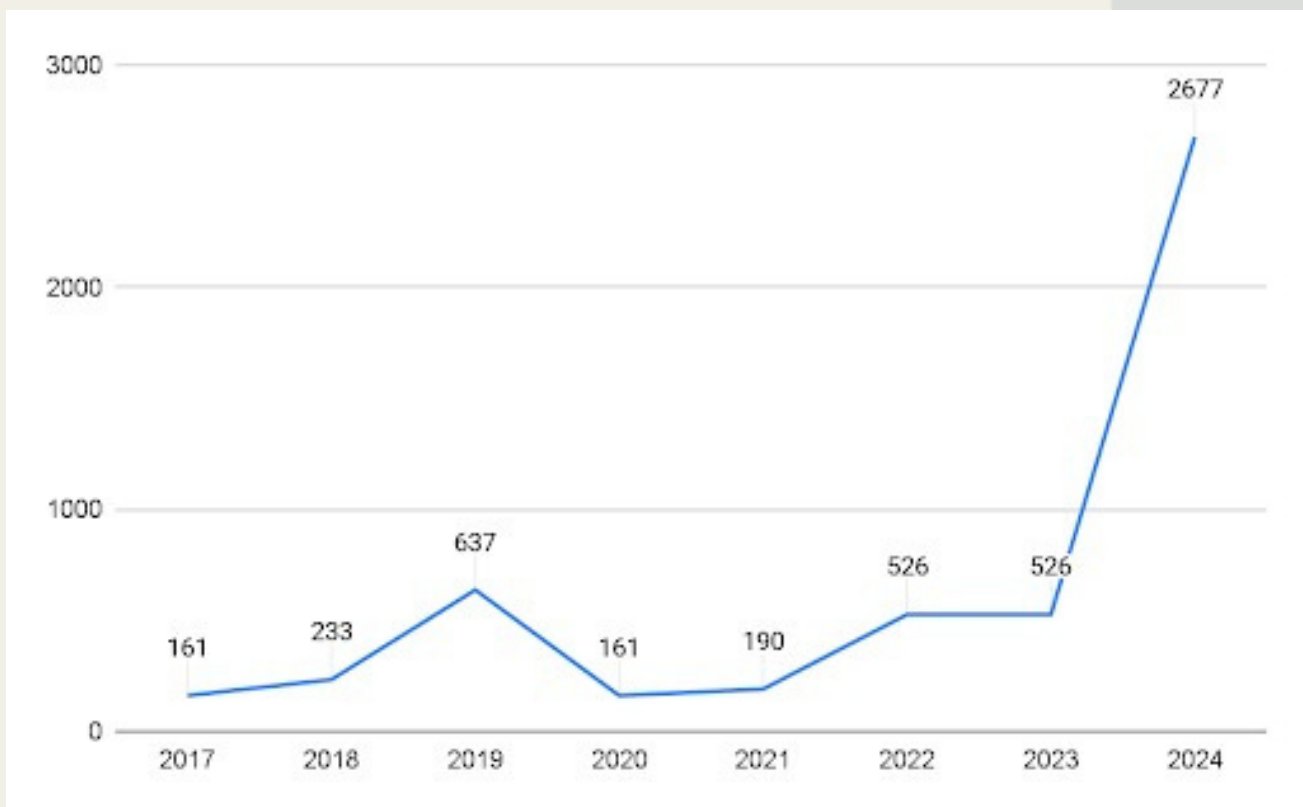
CHART: TRADE BALANCE WITH THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA — FOB EXPORTS, CIF IMPORTS, TRADE BALANCE (FOB-CIF) IN MILLIONS OF USD.



Source: INDEC

Chinese investments in Argentina between 2000 and 2022 exceeded USD 18.2 billion. These investments range from the soy complex (input supply, storage, processing, transport, and marketing) to the meat industry, the automotive sector, retail trade, fisheries, entertainment, real estate, telecommunications, the digital sector, hydrocarbons, mining (including lithium), and logistics and transport infrastructure. Investments in renewable energies (wind, solar) and alternatives (large hydroelectric dams) have also been recorded. Chinese companies have positioned themselves as key investors in strategic sectors where other firms are practically absent, such as energy, transport and logistics infrastructure, and telecommunications (González Jáuregui, 2023).

#### ANNUAL FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT BY THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN MILLIONS OF USD.



*Source: External Sector Statistics Management, Central Bank of the Argentine Republic*

Argentina ranks as the fourth largest recipient of financing from Chinese development banks in Latin America, receiving USD 17 billion between 2005 and 2019, destined primarily for energy and transport infrastructure projects (Myers & Ray, 2022; González Jáuregui, 2023). Chinese commercial banks have also financed energy, transport, and mining infrastructure projects in Argentina between 2007 and 2021 (González Jáuregui, 2023). Most of this financing has been carried out under "turnkey" contracts, which condition the provision of

funds on the inclusion of Chinese technology and machinery, and on project development by Chinese companies, thereby promoting their global positioning (González Jáuregui, 2023; Kaplan, 2021).

The financial linkage includes currency swap agreements. The first swap agreement between Argentina and China was signed in 2009, and the second in 2014, having been activated on several occasions and renewed in 2017 and 2020 (González Jáuregui, 2023; Quiroga, 2025). In 2023, a tranche of 35 billion yuan (equivalent to USD 5 billion) was activated to use yuan in trade with China, in a context of dollar scarcity. In 2023, the swap was renewed until July 2026, avoiding a payment of USD 4.8 billion that would have negatively impacted reserves. The swap represents 47% of the Central Bank of Argentina's gross reserves (Quiroga, 2025). China uses its financial capacity as the spearhead of its foreign policy, financing investments or trade by its own companies, presenting what amounts to "an offer impossible to refuse" for Argentina due to its lack of access to voluntary private international credit. However, Chinese financing cannot be seen as a substitute for IMF lending, since a clause in the swap contract specifies the need to keep the relationship with the IMF "alive" — this constituting "China's first conditionality" (Szewach, 2023).

It would also be useful to examine whether China's demands on Argentina are replicated with other countries, particularly regarding foreign policy or institutional conditionalities. In this regard, prior experience in countries such as Ecuador, Venezuela, and Sri Lanka shows that Chinese financing has been subject, in several cases, to repayment schemes guaranteed with natural resources (such as oil or minerals), confidentiality clauses, or requirements to directly contract Chinese companies. Furthermore, in Africa and Southeast Asia, demands have been documented that limit the sovereign margin of maneuver in regulatory or geopolitical decisions, even in multilateral forums. Analyzing these patterns could shed light on the existence of a systematic model of economic and diplomatic conditioning that transcends the Argentine case.

Strategic projects and their implications in Argentina, China has taken an interest in numerous projects in Argentina, including hydroelectric dams, nuclear power plants, a deepwater port in Tierra del Fuego, the communications sector, control of the Hidrovía waterway, and access to co-

pper and lithium (Arteaga, 2024).

In the province of Santa Cruz, Chinese banks are financing the Jorge Cepernic and Néstor Kirchner dams, seeking to unlock approximately USD 800 million to reactivate stalled works. These plants, which have suffered years of delays, will increase the national electricity supply by 4.5% and hydroelectric energy production by 15% (Arteaga, 2024).

China is particularly interested in copper and lithium due to the energy transition. The Asian giant processes or refines between 60% and 70% of four of the most important critical minerals (lithium, nickel, cobalt, and manganese), and accounts for approximately 50% of global electric vehicle production. Argentina is part of the Lithium Triangle ("Triángulo del Litio") and has reactivated its position in mining. Chinese companies such as Ganfeng Lithium, Shandong Gold, Hanaq Group, China Metallurgical Group Corp (MCC), and CAM are present in Argentina, from Jujuy to Chubut (Arteaga, 2024).

China has also shown interest in the bidding to privatize the Paraná-Paraguay Waterway (Hidrovia), Argentina's main inland waterway through which 80% of foreign trade passes. Shanghai Dredging, a Chinese company experienced in dredging, participated in the previous process and is expected to compete again. Furthermore, China is seeking to establish another port in Latin America, attempting to build a "multipurpose port" in Río Grande, Tierra del Fuego. Initially, China Shaanxi Chemical Industry Group committed to installing a chemical plant and a power plant there, although local media suggest that the project could be delegated to HydroChina Corp, which would be responsible for the construction of a synthetic ammonia, urea, and glyphosate plant (Arteaga, 2024).

Chinese investments in Argentine infrastructure, such as the modernization of the Belgrano Cargas and San Martín Cargas railways, aim to reduce the export costs of agricultural production (Mangione, 2021). The Belgrano Cargas railway is linked, through a cross-default clause, to the construction of the Santa Cruz river dams, meaning that cancellation of one project would cancel the other and trigger penalty interest (Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025; Mangione, 2021). The Chinese state-owned company COFCO has positioned itself as Argentina's leading grain exporter in 2020, having acquired the grain exporters Noble and Nidera, thereby gaining export infrastructure including

ports and processing plants, as well as part of seed production and the biotechnology business (Mangione, 2021; Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025). Syngenta, acquired by the state-owned ChemChina, has promoted grain exports to China (Dangdai, 2021; Mangione, 2021).

The controversial case of the large-scale pig farming operations is another example of Chinese investment in Argentina, driven by the African swine fever outbreak in China. These investments, focused on Chinese needs, can encroach upon local production. Serious deficiencies and technical omissions have been reported in the Environmental Impact Assessment for projects such as the dams in Santa Cruz, and Chinese companies have been sanctioned for "malpractice" in water projects globally. Chinese investment projects are linked to a lack of transparency and a departure from environmental compliance and respect for civil rights (Mangione, 2021).

## **CHALLENGES FOR ARGENTINA**

The challenges for Latin America lie in generating "win-win" trade opportunities with China. The region's current position vis-à-vis Chinese influence resembles that held relative to the United States in the last century, which rules out a multilateral conception of power with equitable participation. There is a possibility that Latin America becomes entirely subordinated to Chinese needs, compromising its political and commercial independence due to financial commitments, market asymmetry, and the limited responsiveness of governments. So far, the responses of Latin American countries show no consensual vision that encompasses an agenda to promote value-added economies, local company participation in projects, and technology exchange (Meza-Molina & Lugo-Rubio, 2025).

Argentina faces the challenge of diversifying its export basket to China and promoting the placement of products with greater value added. In Chinese investments and the financing of strategic projects, the creation of technology transfer schemes and/or shared industrial and technological development remains pending, as does the joint participation of Argentine companies and the local science and technology system. The swap agreements, which operate as loans, raise the challenge of Argentina's repayment capacity in a context of high external debt (González Jáuregui, 2023).

Argentina exhibits institutional fragmentation between the national and subnational levels that makes it difficult to consolidate a predictable business environment. Rather than imposing forced integration of local components — which tends to generate inefficiencies — the challenge lies in improving the competitiveness of Argentine industry to facilitate its organic insertion into global value chains. Investment agreements must prioritize transparency and respect for international standards, preventing the lithium regulatory framework from being limited to the mere capture of foreign exchange without strengthening institutional governance and respect for free competition.

Argentina faces institutional fragmentation and a lack of regulatory coherence between the national and provincial levels that generates uncertainty in lithium governance. Rather than the absence of a centralized industrialization plan, the problem lies in the lack of incentives for competitive integration into global value chains. Initiatives led by the public sector and discretionary agreements with Chinese state-owned companies have shown limited results (González Jáuregui, 2024). In a context of financial vulnerability, the use of credit conditioned by geopolitical interests underscores the urgency of establishing a transparency framework that prioritizes legal certainty and alignment with open-market standards (Szewach, 2023).

Years	Event
1972	Diplomatic relations Argentina-China.
1978	Opening reforms in China (Deng Xiaoping).
1990	Argentine support after Tiananmen + trade balances
2004	Turning point in trade and investments.
2007	First cooperation agreement in defence.
2009	First currency swap with China.
2012	Memorandums on defense, technology and SASTIND.
2014	Agreement with CNTIC and creation of a Binational Commission.
2015	Technological bilateral meetings (Bs. As.).

2017	Free military assistance protocols.
2018	Technological bilateral meetings (Bs. As.).
2019	Free military assistance protocols.
2020	Consolidated SASTIND agreement.
2021	V Defense Commission Meeting.
2023	Swap activation for 5 billion USD.
Presente	China = principal destino del litio argentino y fuente del 50% de las inversiones mineras.

### Clasificación comercial de Argentina con las principales zonas económicas — 2024\*

Economic zones	2024*		
	Export FOB	Importation CIF	Balance
Mercosur	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	-1.290
Chile	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	5.617
Resto de ALADI	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	2.866
SICA	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	1.651
USMCA (1)	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	356
European Union	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	-698
United Kingdom	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	170

Switzerland	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	1.126
CIS	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	224
ASEAN	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	3.448
China	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	-5.596
Republic of Korea	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	723
Japan	<b>19</b>	<b>9</b>	-938
India	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	2.639
Middle East	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	3.524
Maghreb and Egypt	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	1.312
SACU	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	217
Oceania	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	227
Rest of the world	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	3.351

*Source: INDEC. National Directorate of External Sector Statistics and International Accounts*

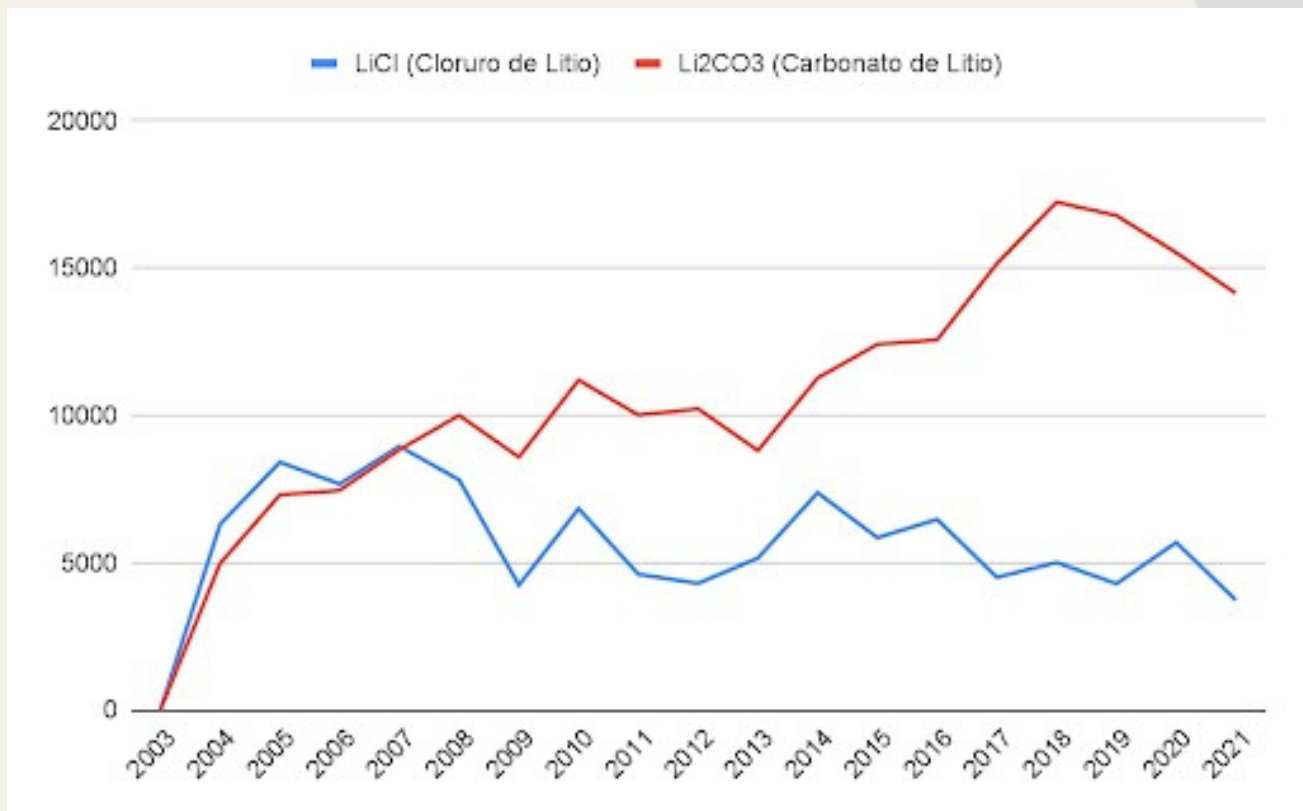
## **INSTITUTIONAL AND BUSINESS MAP OF LITHIUM IN NORTHWESTERN ARGENTINA**

Argentina has consolidated itself as an emerging strategic player in the global lithium market, leveraging its vast reserves and the growing global interest in this key mineral for the energy transition (Panorama Minero, 2024; Secretaría de Minería, 2024).

Argentina, together with Bolivia and Chile, forms part of the so-called Lithium Triangle ("Triángulo del Litio"), a geographic region in South America that concentrates more than 85% of the world's known reserves of this alkali metal. This triangle holds 53% of global lithium resources. Specifically, Argentina accounts for approximately 12% of global reserves and 21% of global brine lithium resources (Marín et al., 2024).

In 2023, Argentina ranked as the fourth largest lithium producer in the world, after Australia, Chile, and China, with a 5.3% share of the global market. The country's lithium production experienced notable growth of 45.67% in 2023, reaching 51,101 tonnes (Secretaría de Minería, 2024). This momentum has been bolstered by significant exploratory investment, with Argentina receiving the most investment globally for lithium exploration between 2010 and 2022, at USD 500 million (Litio Argentina, 2023; Secretaría de Política Económica, 2024).

**CHART: LITHIUM PRODUCTION BY GROUP, PROVINCE OF CATAMARCA**



Source: Provincial Directorate of Statistics and Censuses, Production Statistics Directorate

## CURRENT PROJECTS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Argentina currently has a diverse portfolio of lithium mining projects, with a total of 38 projects according to the national Secretariat of Mining, although other sources mention nearly 50 (Ballarino & Ferreiro, 2023; Litio Argentina, 2023; Secretaría de Minería, 2024; Secretaría de Política Económica, 2024). Most of these projects are in advanced exploration stages or under construction, with only three in production as of June 2023 (Ballarino & Ferreiro, 2023; Secretaría de Política Económica, 2024):

**Fénix:** Operated by the US company Livent, which recently merged with Australia's Allkem to create Arcadium Lithium (Ballarino & Ferreiro, 2023; Secretaría de Política Económica, 2024; Marín et al., 2024). Located in Catamarca, this project, operational since 1997, uses a hybrid method combining direct lithium extraction (DLE) with traditional evaporation techniques. Its current production is 22,000 tonnes LCE/year, with expansion plans to 55,000 tonnes LCE/year (Marín et al., 2024).

**Salar de Olaroz:** Operated by Sales de Jujuy, a partnership between Arcadium Lithium (formerly Allkem), Toyota Tsusho Corp. (Japan), and the provincial state enterprise Jujuy Energía y Minería Sociedad del Estado (JEMSE) (Ballarino & Ferreiro, 2023; Secretaría de Política Económica, 2024; Marín et al., 2024). This project in Jujuy has been producing technical- and battery-grade lithium carbonate for over seven years and is in the process of expanding its production capacity from 17,000 to 42,000 tonnes per year (EconoJournal, 2023; Marín et al., 2024).

**Cauchari-Olaroz:** Began production in June 2023 (Ballarino & Ferreiro, 2023). Operated by Minera Exar, a company with majority shareholders including Canada's Lithium Americas Corp and China's Ganfeng Lithium, along with JEMSE (Ballarino & Ferreiro, 2023; Secretaría de Política Económica, 2024; Marín et al., 2024). Also located in Jujuy, estimated future production of 40,000 tonnes LCE/year (Marín et al., 2024).

Of the 38 projects, five are in the construction stage (Ballarino & Ferreiro, 2023; Secretaría de Política Económica, 2024). The Centenario-Ratones project in Salta, operated by Eramet and Tsingshan, is expected to begin its production phase in July 2024, using a process 100% based on DLE technology (Marín et al., 2024). Other advanced construction projects include Tres Quebradas, Sal de Vida, and Sal de Oro in Catamarca, and Mariana in Salta (Marín et al., 2024).

Projections indicate substantial growth in lithium production in Argentina. If the most advanced projects materialize, commercial production of lithium compounds could reach 166 kilotonnes LCE by end-2025 and approximately 480 kilotonnes LCE by 2035, which would mean multiplying current production by nine. This increase in production could generate annual export value close to USD 6.25 billion by 2035 (assuming a price of USD 13,000 per tonne LCE) or even exceed USD 10 billion if average prices remain at USD 22,000 per tonne (Marín et al., 2024).

The production costs of lithium from Argentina's salt flats are globally competitive, ranging between USD 4,000 and USD 6,000 per tonne (Marín et al., 2024; Secretaría de Minería, 2024). This cost advantage is attributed to the geographical and climatic characteristics of the Puna salt flats.

Lithium projects in Argentina predominantly employ evaporitic technology, which involves the use of large ponds for brine concentration through solar evaporation. However, there is growing interest in and development of direct lithium extraction (DLE) methods. Argentina has been a pioneer in DLE experimentation, with the Fénix project using it since 1998. DLE is characterized by its rapid extraction (hours or days compared to months or years for evaporation) and the possibility of not requiring large evaporation ponds. Despite these advantages, DLE is still under development, may be more intensive in energy and water consumption, and in some cases more costly per tonne of LCE (Marín et al., 2024).

Institutions such as the Center for Research and Development in Advanced Materials and Energy Storage of Jujuy (CIDMEJu) are researching and experimenting with DLE methods to recover fresh water from brine and obtain by-products, which could generate greater efficiency and sustainability (Marín et al., 2024).

Argentina currently inserts itself in the global lithium value chain primarily as a producer of lithium compounds (battery-grade and technical-grade lithium carbonate, and to a lesser extent lithium chloride) that are exported and used as precursors in other stages of the chain, primarily in Asia. The majority of cathode material and battery manufacturing is concentrated in China, Japan, and South Korea (Marín et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, there are efforts in Argentina to advance in higher-complexity technological links:

**Y-TEC:** This public-private consortium (YPF and CONICET) is developing lithium-ion cell and battery plants (UniLiB) in Berisso and Santiago del Estero, with the aim of producing LFP batteries for energy storage in homes and electric vehicles for the local market. However, it faces challenges such as access to local lithium (since extracting companies prioritize exports) and the need to scale production.

**Dynami:** An Argentine startup developing ultra-thin batteries. While it benefits from Argentina's qualified human resources, it imports key materials and performs most of its production and assembly in the United States, due to difficulties importing inputs and the lack of a local market for specialized components.

**Electric Vehicle Manufacturers:** Domestic companies such as Coradir (Tito) and Volt Motors are assembling small- and medium-scale electric vehicles. Coradir, for example, has already agreed with Y-TEC to use domestically produced pilot batteries. These companies depend heavily on imported cells and face the absence of a national electromobility law to incentivize local electric vehicle demand (Marín et al., 2024).

The development of local suppliers is crucial for sector growth. In the construction stage, there is a significant presence of domestic companies in civil works, road construction, and engineering services. During the production stage, the demand for chemical inputs is significant. While lime is supplied by domestic producers such as Los Tilianes in Jujuy, sodium carbonate (soda ash), a vital input, is mostly imported, despite the existence of ALPAT, the only producer in South America (Marín et al., 2024).

The Argentine mining regime is characterized as liberal and open to private investment, privileging fiscal stability and offering tax benefits for 30 years through the Mining Investment Law (Law 24,196). Mining royalties are set at 3% ad valorem on the at-mine-gate value (Secretaría de Política Económica, 2024). However, the real competitiveness of the sector is severely compromised by the technical structure of these levies and the overlapping of governmental levels. By taxing on the 'at-mine-gate' value rather than on the final processed product, the system imposes a burden on the primary resource regardless of its profitability or degree of industrialization achieved, acting as a fixed cost that disincentivizes efficiency. This distortion deepens when one considers that the activity is embedded in a poorly designed national, provincial, and municipal tax ecosystem, characterized by a multiplicity of rates, cascading taxes, and overlapping regulations. This fiscal architecture not only erodes the profitability of the lithium complex but generates market failures that affect the systemic competitiveness of the Argentine economy as a whole. Rather than functioning as a neutral revenue mechanism, the current scheme operates as a set of institutional barriers that penalize productive investment and distance the country from the governance and economic freedom standards necessary for successful global insertion.

A key aspect of governance is the Lithium Roundtable (Mesa del Litio), an initiative by the provinces of Salta, Jujuy, and Catamarca to coordinate policies, standardize practices, and foster the development of local suppliers and employment (EconoJournal, 2023; Secretaría de Política Económica, 2024).

At the provincial level, there are "buy and hire local" laws (in Catamarca since 2014, Salta since 2019, and Jujuy since 2024) that seek to promote the hiring of local labor and the procurement of goods and services from local suppliers, establishing minimum percentages, often 70%. However, the effectiveness of these policies is subject to debate, with divided opinions on whether they foster competitive development or generate inefficiencies (Marín et al., 2024).

As lithium production expands, significant concerns arise around sustainability, especially regarding the water balance in the Puna salt flats, an arid region with water scarcity. Intensive extraction of brine and fresh water can impact groundwater levels and water quality, affecting both communities and ecosystems. There is a need for basin-scale environmental impact studies that evaluate the cumulative effect of multiple projects, beyond individual-project assessments (Marín et al., 2024).

Argentina has a unique opportunity to position itself as a leader in global lithium production. However, to maximize benefits and ensure development, effective policy coordination between the national government and the provinces, implementation of incentives for local value addition, and promotion of public-private partnerships in research and development are essential (EconoJournal, 2023).

## TECHNICAL PROJECT SHEETS

Argentina is a key player in the global lithium industry, forming part of the Lithium Triangle ("Triángulo del Litio") along with Bolivia and Chile, a region concentrating between 50% and 85% of the world's reserves of this metal. Lithium in Argentina is found primarily in the high-altitude salt flats of the Puna, spanning the provinces of Salta, Jujuy, and Catamarca, and the north of San Juan. Argentina is currently the world's fourth largest lithium producer.

Below is an overview of lithium projects in Argentina, highlighting their status as of the source dates (primarily June 2023 and May 2024 updates):

## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF LITHIUM PROJECTS IN ARGENTINA

**Number of Projects:** There are 38 mining projects with lithium as the primary mineral in the country. Other sources mention "nearly 50" projects or "at least 48 active lithium projects"

**Geographical Distribution:** Most projects are in Salta (17 projects), Catamarca (14 projects), Jujuy (5 projects), and one in San Juan. There is also a project shared between Catamarca and Salta (Sal de Oro).

**Development Stages:** Of the 38 projects, most are in advanced exploration, 5 in construction, and only 3 are currently in production (one began operations in June 2023). A more recent analysis (May 2024) indicates 3 projects in production, 5 in construction, 7 in feasibility, 2 in pre-feasibility, 3 in preliminary economic assessment, 19 in advanced exploration, 5 in initial exploration, and 5 in prospecting.

**Foreign Investment:** The vast majority of advanced mining projects are held by capital from the United States, China, Australia, and Canada, among other foreign investors. Argentina was the world's top recipient of lithium explora-

tion investment between 2010 and 2022, at USD 500 million. China, in particular, has an estimated USD 3.383 billion invested in seven projects in northwestern Argentina.

**Projected Growth:** Argentina's lithium production is estimated to potentially reach 166 kilotonnes of lithium carbonate equivalent (LCE) per year by end-2025 and approximately 480 kilotonnes LCE per year by 2035, multiplying current production (approximately 50 kt LCE/year in 2023) by 9 times.

## TECHNICAL PROJECT SHEETS

### PROJECTS IN PRODUCTION (3 CURRENT, 1 STARTING IN 2024)

- Fénix (Arcadium Lithium, formerly Livent Corp.)
- ➔ **Capital Origin:** United States (Livent). Merged with Allkem to form Arcadium Lithium in May 2023 (merger completed January 2024).
  - ➔ **Province:** Catamarca (Salar del Hombre Muerto). Lithium chloride production also involves a plant in Güemes, Salta.
  - ➔ **Stage:** Production (since 1998), under expansion.
  - ➔ **Capacity:** Current 22,000 tonnes LCE/year, with planned expansion to 55,000 tonnes LCE/year.
  - ➔ **Estimated Useful Life:** 40 years.
  - ➔ **Contract Type:** The integrated operation of the Fénix project, managed by former Livent, involves extraction in Catamarca and lithium chloride refining in General Güemes, Salta. There was a contract with the Province and Fabricaciones Militares since 1991, partially renegotiated in 2017. The extraction process is hybrid (selective DLE adsorption and evaporitic).

Fabricaciones Militares desde 1991, renegociado parcialmente en 2017. El proceso de extracción es híbrido (adsorción selectiva DLE y evaporítico).

## SALAR DE OLAROS (SALES DE JUJUY S.A. / ARCADIUM LITHIUM, FORMERLY ALLKEM)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** Australia (Allkem, now Arcadium Lithium, 66.5%), Japan (Toyota Tsusho Corp., 25%), Argentina (JEMSE, 8.5%).
- ➔ **Province:** Jujuy.
- ➔ **Stage:** Production (since 2015 or 2018), under expansion.
- ➔ **Capacity:** Current 13,000 tonnes LCE/year, with planned expansion to 42,500 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➔ **Estimated Useful Life:** More than 40 years.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** Joint venture. JEMSE participates as a provincial state enterprise.

## CAUCHARI-OLAROS (MINERA EXAR)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** Argentine company with majority shareholders from Canada (Lithium Americas Corp., 43.4%) and China (Ganfeng Lithium, 46.7%). JEMSE (Argentina) also holds a 8.5% stake.
- ➔ **Province:** Jujuy.
- ➔ **Stage:** Commercial production since June 2023.
- ➔ **Total Investment:** USD 979 million (estimated by Exar). Ganfeng's investment approximately USD 457 million.
- ➔ **Capacity:** 40,000 tonnes of battery-grade lithium carbonate per year. Possible Phase 2 for an additional 20,000 tonnes.
- ➔ **Estimated Useful Life:** 40 years.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** Joint venture.

## CENTENARIO-RATONES (ERAMINE SUDAMÉRICA S.A.)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** France (Eramet, 50.1%) and China (Tsingshan, 49.9%).
- ➔ **Province:** Salta (Salar Centenario Ratones).
- ➔ **Stage:** Completing Phase 1 construction; operations projected to begin in the second half of 2024. Will be the first Saltanian project to produce lithium carbonate for export.
- ➔ **Total Investment:** Approximately USD 800 million. Tsingshan's contribution approximately USD 480 million.
- ➔ **Capacity:** Estimated annual production of 24,000 tonnes of lithium carbonate.
- ➔ **Estimated Useful Life:** 40 years.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** Partnership. The DLE technology is proprietary, driven by Suez/Veolia.

## PROJECTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION (ADDITIONAL TO CENTENARIO-RATONES)

### TRES QUEBRADAS (ZIJIN MINING GROUP)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** China (100%).
- ➔ **Province:** Catamarca (Salar de Laguna Verde, Fiambalá).
- ➔ **Stage:** Under construction (phase 2).
- ➔ **Total Investment:** Approximately USD 620 million.

- ➔ **Capacity:** Seeks to expand to 30,000 tonnes per year of lithium carbonate, with expected production of 20,000 tonnes per year.
- ➔ **Estimated Useful Life:** 50 years.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** 100% owned by Zijin Mining Group.

## SAL DE VIDA (ARCADIUM LITHIUM, FORMERLY ALLKEM)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** Australia (100%).
- ➔ **Province:** Catamarca (Antofagasta de la Sierra, east of Salar del Hombre Muerto).
- ➔ **Stage:** Under construction.
- ➔ **Capacity:** Designed for 15,000 tonnes per year of lithium carbonate equivalent, with potential to increase to nearly 50,000 tonnes per year.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** 100% owned by Arcadium Lithium.

## SAL DE ORO (POSCO)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** South Korea (100%).
- ➔ **Province:** Catamarca (shared with Salta, in the northern section of Salar del Hombre Muerto). Lithium hydroxide production is expected to take place at the Güemes industrial park, Salta.
- ➔ **Stage:** Under construction.
- ➔ **Capacity:** 25,000 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** 100% owned by Arcadium Lithium.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** 100% owned by POSCO.

## MARIANA (GANFENG LITHIUM)

- ➡ **Province:** Salta (Salar de Llullaillaco).
- ➡ **Stage:** Under construction.
- ➡ **Total Investment:** Approximately USD 600 million.
- ➡ **Capacity:** Estimated annual production capacity of 20,000 tonnes of lithium chloride, or 22,500 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➡ **Estimated Useful Life:** 25 years.
- ➡ **Contract Type:** 100% owned by Ganfeng Lithium. Powered by an off-grid solar park. Local community collaboration.

## PROJECTS IN FEASIBILITY / PRE-FEASIBILITY / PRELIMINARY ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

Pastos Grandes (Lithium Argentina, formerly Lithium Americas)

- ➡ **Capital Origin:** Canada (100%).
- ➡ **Province:** Salta (Salar de Pastos Grandes).
- ➡ **Stage:** Feasibility.
- ➡ **Capacity:** Estimates indicate production of 25,000 tonnes/year of lithium carbonate. 22,500 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➡ **Contract Type:** 100% owned by Lithium Argentina.

## SALAR DEL RINCÓN (RIO TINTO GROUP)

- ➡ **Capital Origin:** United Kingdom (100%).
- ➡ **Province:** Salta (Salar del Rincón).

- ➡ **Stage:** Feasibility.
- ➡ **Total Investment:** The company acquired the project in early 2022 with an investment of USD 825 million.
- ➡ **Capacity:** Plant expected to operate at an annual capacity of 3,000 tonnes of the resource. 22,500 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➡ **Estimated Useful Life:** 25 years, possibly more than 40 years.
- ➡ **Contract Type:** Managed by Rincón TLD and operated by Rincón Mining Limited.

### KACHI (LAKE RESOURCES / LILAC SOLUTIONS)

- ➡ **Capital Origin:** Australia (Lake Resources, 75%), United States (Lilac Solutions, 25%).
- ➡ **Stage:** Pre-feasibility.
- ➡ **Capacity:** Aims to produce lithium carbonate from 2027, with full production capacity toward end-2028. 40,000 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➡ **Estimated Useful Life:** 25 years.
- ➡ **Contract Type:** Joint venture. Extraction via pumping and evaporation. DLE technology by Lilac Solutions.

### POZUELOS-PASTOS GRANDES (PPG) (GANFENG LITHIUM)

- ➡ **Capital Origin:** China (100%).
- ➡ **Province:** Salta (Salar de Pastos Grandes and Salar de Pozuelos basins).
- ➡ **Stage:** Preliminary Economic Assessment (PEA).

- ➔ **Total Investment:** Approximately USD 338 million.
- ➔ **Capacity:** Could reach 25,000 tonnes per year of lithium carbonate, beginning in 2026 and generating 1,000 jobs. 40,000 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➔ **Estimated Useful Life:** 25 years. More than 20 years.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** Acquired by Ganfeng Lithium in 2022. Would use brine extraction, solar evaporation, and conventional processing technology.

### SALAR TOLLILLAR (TECPETROL)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** Argentina (100%).
- ➔ **Province:** Salta (Salar de Tolillar).
- ➔ **Stage:** Preliminary Economic Assessment (PEA).
- ➔ **Capacity:** 25,000 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** Tecpetrol acquired 54% of Alpha Lithium in October 2023.

### RINCÓN LITHIUM (ARGOSY MINERALS)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** Australia (100%).
- ➔ **Province:** Salta (Salar del Rincón).
- ➔ **Stage:** Preliminary Economic Assessment (PEA).
- ➔ **Capacity:** Production of 2,000 tonnes of lithium carbonate per year. 10,000 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** 100% owned by Argosy Minerals.

## SAL DE LOS ÁNGELES (POTASIO Y LITIO ARGENTINA S.A.)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** China (Revotech Asia Limited 46%, Tibet Summit Resources Co., Ltd. 45%), Leading Resources Global Limited (9%).
- ➔ **Province:** Salta (Salar de Diablillos).
- ➔ **Stage:** Advanced exploration.
- ➔ **Total Investment:** Estimated at USD 700 million.
- ➔ **Capacity:** 25,000 tonnes per year of lithium carbonate. 13,500 tonnes LCE/year.
- ➔ **Estimated Useful Life:** 20 years.
- ➔ **Contract Type:** Majority Chinese shareholding. Pumping and evaporation method.

## HOMBRE MUERTO OESTE (GALAN LITHIUM LIMITED)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** Australia (100%).
- ➔ **Province:** Catamarca.
- ➔ **Stage:** Feasibility.
- ➔ **Capacity:** 20,000 tonnes LCE/year.

## SALAR DE CAUCHARI (ARCADIUM LITHIUM, FORMERLY ALLKEM)

- ➔ **Capital Origin:** Australia (100%).
- ➔ **Province:** Jujuy.
- ➔ **Stage:** Pre-feasibility.
- ➔ **Capacity:** 25,000 tonnes LCE/year.

## CAUCHARI (LAKE RESOURCES)

- ➡ **Capital Origin:** Australia (100%).
- ➡ **Province:** Jujuy.
- ➡ **Stage:** Pre-feasibility.
- ➡ **Capacity:** 18,000 tonnes LCE/year.

## PROJECTS IN INITIAL EXPLORATION / PROSPECTING

Laguna Verde (Zangge Mining / Ultra Lithium)

- ➡ **Capital Origin:** China (Zangge Mining, 65%), Canada (Ultra Lithium, 35%).
- ➡ **Province:** Catamarca (north of Salar de Antofalla).
- ➡ **Stage:** Initial exploration.
- ➡ **Total Investment:** Estimated at USD 290 million. Chinese company investment approximately USD 189 million.
- ➡ **Capacity:** Would produce 20,000 tonnes per year of lithium carbonate.
- ➡ **Estimated Useful Life:** 30 years.
- ➡ **Contract Type:** Joint venture.

## MINAS CHASCHUIL (SALAR CAZADERO GRANDE) (YPF LITIO)

- ➡ **Capital Origin:** Argentina (YPF Litio, subsidiary of state oil company YPF).
- ➡ **Province:** Catamarca (Fiambalá).
- ➡ **Stage:** Exploration, with usufruct option.

➔ **Capacity:** Aims to obtain 20,000 tonnes/year.

## LOS SAPITOS (ORIGEN RESOURCES INC.)

➔ **Capital Origin:** Canada (100%).

➔ **Province:** San Juan.

➔ **Stage:** Initial exploration.

## OTHER MENTIONED PROJECTS (NO CAPACITY/INVESTMENT/USEFUL LIFE DETAILS IN SOURCES)

➔ **Olapacato (Tecpetrol):** Argentina (Tecpetrol, Techint Group). Salta. Pilot stage (direct lithium extraction pilot plant). Processing capacity of 1,200 liters of brine per hour, with production of 25 tonnes LCE/year.

**Pular:** Salta, advanced exploration.

**Río Grande:** Salta, advanced exploration (operated by Pluspetrol Resources Inc., Netherlands).

**Sal de la Puna:** Salta, advanced exploration (operated by Lithium Americas Corp., Canada).

**Arizaro:** Salta, advanced exploration (operated by Lithium Chile Inc., Canada, with participation by SMG SRL, Argentina).

**Sincera Antofalla:** Catamarca, advanced exploration (operated by Antofalla Minerals SA).

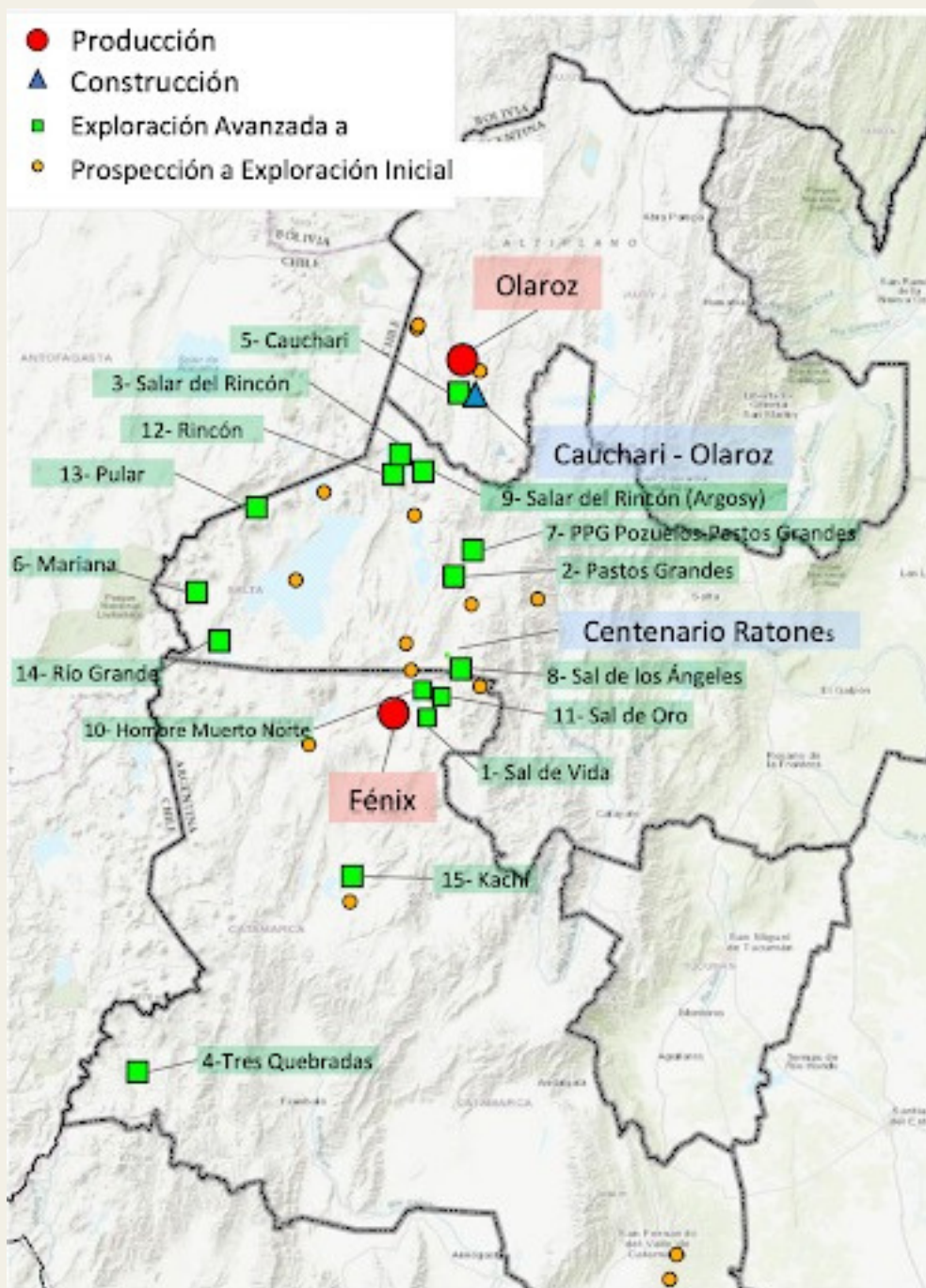
**Salar de Antofalla I to XIII and Bolland VI:** Catamarca, prospecting (operated by Albemarle Argentina SRL, USA).

**Incahuasi:** Catamarca, prospecting (operated by Argentina Lithium & Energy Corp., Canada). Also mentioned is an Incahuasi project in Salta in advanced exploration.

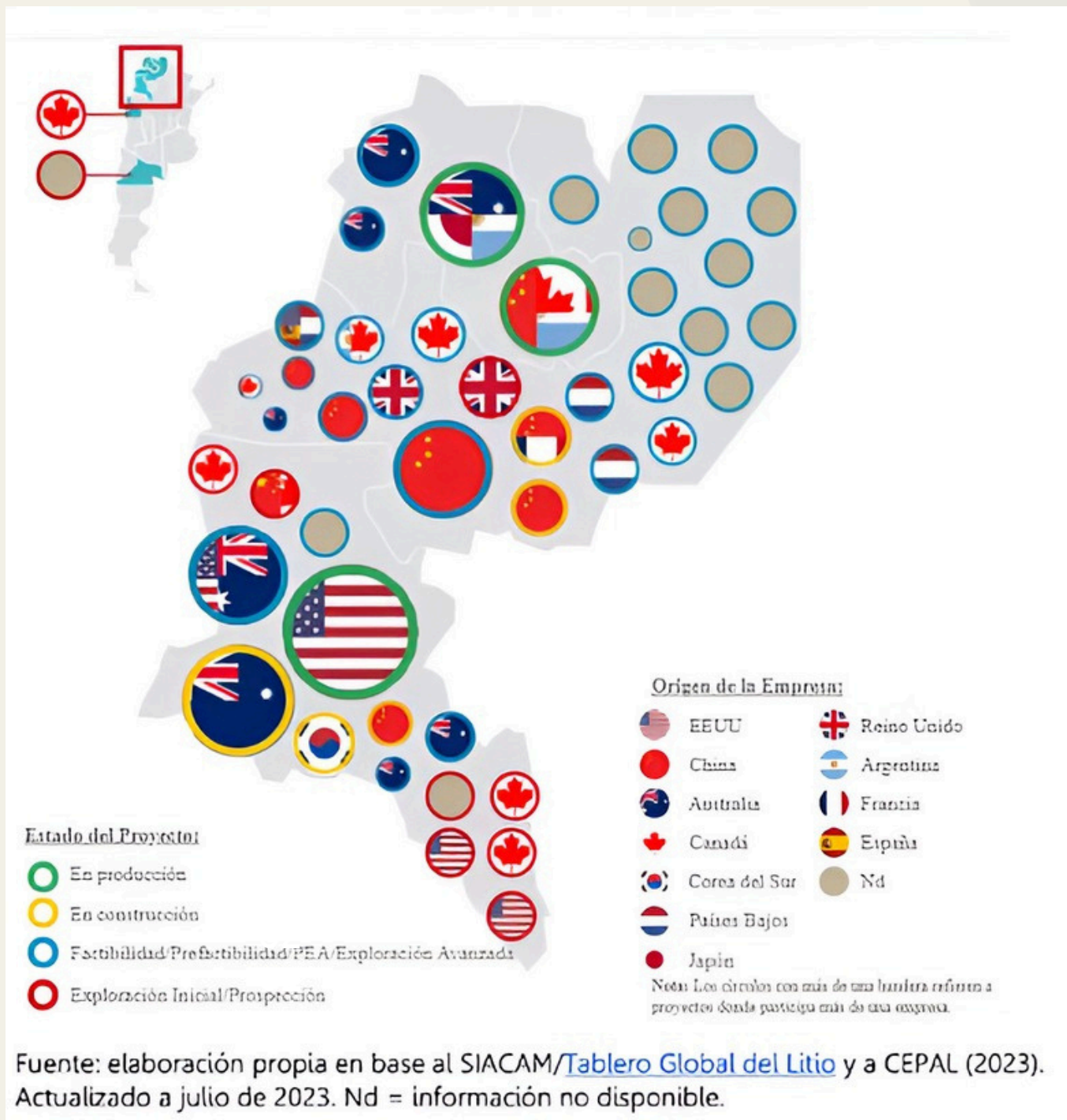
**Karachi Salar:** Catamarca, prospecting (operated by Lithium South, Canada).

**Litio Gold I, II, and III:** Catamarca, prospecting (operated by Franklin Mining Argentina SA, USA).

### ADVANCED LITHIUM PROJECTS.



Source: Secretaría de Minería de la Nación



## PRESENCE AND STRATEGY OF CHINESE COMPANIES IN THE ARGENTINE LITHIUM SECTOR

Argentina has consolidated itself as a significant player in global lithium production, with output reaching 33,000 tonnes in 2022 and doubling in 2023, exceeding 60,000 tonnes of lithium carbonate. This resource is considered crucial for the post-fossil energy transition, electromobility, and the "green" economy. In this context, companies' commitment to environmental and social responsibility toward local communities has grown.

However, the development of Argentina's lithium industry is framed within a complex scenario that encompasses advances in sustainable methods, an environmental regulatory framework, concerns about social and labor impact, and geopolitical and economic dynamics that influence the value chain.

As noted above, Argentina's lithium industry is adopting technologies and methods that seek to minimize environmental impact. The Direct Lithium Extraction (DLE) method stands out as a significant advance toward cleaner, more sustainable production, with lower environmental impact and more efficient resource management that reduces the effect on climate change.

DLE encompasses at least three "families" or types of processes for extracting lithium from brine:

- **Absorption:** Lithium chloride molecules are physically absorbed into a solvent and then separated with a precipitating agent.
- **Ion Exchange:** Lithium ions in the brine water are absorbed into a solid ionic material and then exchanged for another positive ion.
- **Solvent Extraction:** Involves a liquid phase with absorptive or ion-exchange properties to remove lithium chloride or lithium ions from the brine.

This method offers multiple benefits compared to conventional practices:

- **Extraction efficiency:** Simplifies and accelerates extraction times by minimizing the need for multiple chemical and physical steps, resulting in superior efficiency and lower mineral acquisition costs.
- **Lower energy consumption:** Tends to require less energy for lithium extraction and purification, positively impacting the carbon footprint and contributing to more sustainable production.
- **Fewer chemicals:** Minimizes the amount of chemical reagents used, generating less chemical waste and reducing the environmental risks associated with their handling.
- **Smaller environmental footprint:** The combination of lower energy consumption and reduction in chemical use decreases the overall environmental footprint compared to other methods.

- **Technological innovation:** Promotes innovation and technological development in the lithium industry by driving research into more efficient and sustainable methods.

DLE is already applied at the Salar del Hombre Muerto in Catamarca by the company Livent through its subsidiary Minera del Altiplano S.A.

Lithium-producing companies in Argentina must comply with government regulations to operate sustainably. A key instrument is the Environmental Impact Declaration (DIA), based on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA is a mandatory procedure that allows for the identification, prediction, evaluation, and mitigation of a project's potential environmental impacts in the short, medium, and long term.

The main objectives of the EIA in the lithium industry are:

- To determine the environmental viability of a project for informed decision-making.
- To promote transparency and public participation in the planning and decision-making process.
- To encourage the prevention and adequate management of potential environmental and social impacts of projects

Each Argentine province has its own decrees to regulate mining activity according to specific requirements for each case. For example, in Salta, the EIA was approved for the exploration of lithium carbonate at Salar del Rincón.

Regarding water management, a report by the Government of Jujuy, "Debunking Myths about Water and Lithium," addresses local concerns. Specialists maintain that the lithium production process is "sustainable and does not generate waste similar to that of other industrial activities." The absence of water contamination is explained by the fact that there are no liquid effluents, except for sewage from mining camps; the water vapor from brine evaporation returns to the atmosphere. Furthermore, the myth that lithium production consumes more water is dispelled, given that the salt flat basins are closed, and the water used in the process is not suitable for human consumption.

At the Salar de Olaroz-Cauchari in Jujuy, there are 420 environmental monitoring and control points that guarantee the protection of the environment and associated communities, based on Decree 7751, Article 98, which controls parameters such as water, air, soil, flora, and fauna.

## ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS

Argentina ranks as the world's fourth producer and exporter of lithium. In 2023, the country's lithium exports increased by 27%.

Some 62% of the world's known lithium resources are concentrated in the Lithium Triangle (Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile). Just seven companies account for 80% of the global lithium extraction market, among them US companies Albemarle and Livent, Chile's SQM, Australia's Allkem and Pilbara, and China's Ganfeng and Tianqi Lithium. However, the value chain is controlled by automakers such as Tesla, BYD, Toyota, Volkswagen, and BMW, through vertical integration with battery-producing companies. China, for example, concentrates 70% of cathode production for lithium-ion batteries.

Aspect	Bolivia	Chile	Argentina
Estimated reserves (million tonnes)	23	9.3	4
Annual production (approx. 2024)	2.000 tonnes	49.000 tonnes	18.000 tonnes
Recent Chinese investment	Approx. USD 1 billion in agreements with CBC and CATL	Investments mostly not publicly quantified	Around USD 3.2 billion between 2020 and 2024
Development status	Stagnant; low actual output despite large reserves	Highly industrialized; strong state control with private operators	Investment boom; multiple active and expanding projects

Value-added and industrialization	Very limited; scant local industrial development	Advanced; controlled refining and export processes	Nascent; industrialization projects under development and partnership building
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*Source: Own elaboration based on El País (2025), ISDP (2025), IR Review (2025), Wilson Center (2024), Undisciplined Environments (2025), Reuters (2024), and Maastricht University (2024)*

Lithium-ion batteries are used primarily in electric or hybrid vehicles (which account for the largest increase in demand), consumer electronics, and energy storage systems. Demand for electric vehicles is concentrated in China (59%), Europe (25%), and the United States (12%), while in South America it is marginal (less than 5%). The battery technology used by each company determines the types of raw materials required and, therefore, the competitive disputes in extraction countries.

Argentina's regulatory framework is recognized as one of the most favorable for mining investment globally. Mining Investment Law No. 24,196, in force since 1993, guarantees fiscal and exchange rate stability for 30 years, with no restrictions on investment or foreign ownership of mining rights. This regime has been complemented since 2024 by the RIGI, and by a network of Bilateral Investment Treaties signed with the United States, Australia, Canada, China, and South Africa, among others. Argentina also joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2019 and has operated since 2022 the SIACAM system, a public platform with economic, environmental, social, and cadastral information on the sector. The level of social acceptance of mining activity is at its historic high (Mining in Argentina, SecMin, Sept. 2024).

To this is added a structural geological advantage: Argentine lithium is found in high-altitude brines in Puna salt flats, which implies significantly lower extraction costs than in hard rock or clay deposits in Australia and the United States, positioning the country as a first-order investment destination. The concrete result: Argentina today has at least 4 lithium projects in production — Cauchari-Olaroz, Mariana, Tres Quebradas, and Centenario-Ratones — and a portfolio of more than 180 active mining projects at various stages, with 70% of the mineral territory still unexplored. The country is also consolidating its

position as the world's third destination for lithium exploration budgets, behind Australia and Canada (Mining in Argentina, SecMin, Sept. 2024). With total lithium resources estimated at 216.32 MTn LCE as of February 2026 — the largest in the world — Argentina has the conditions to rapidly scale production and challenge Chile for global industry leadership by 2030.

The presence of Chinese companies in the Argentine lithium sector is significant. China is the world's largest lithium consumer and a central player in the refining and manufacturing of technologies for renewable energy. Chinese companies such as Ganfeng Lithium and Tianqi Lithium are among the leading global producers. In Argentina, Chinese companies participate in 28% of lithium projects, representing 14 of 50, and their investments — often through mergers and acquisitions — total approximately USD 1.7 billion between 2020 and the first quarter of 2023.

#### Distinctive characteristics of Chinese investments include:

- Priority for advanced projects with already-identified resources and approved permits.
- Seeking production control, progressively acquiring majority or full control of projects.
- Access to implicit public financing from Chinese development financial institutions and commercial banks, which grants them greater capacity to adapt to the risks of lithium exploitation.

China has been the primary destination for Argentine lithium exports in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Examples of projects with Chinese participation include:

- Cauchari-Olaroz (Jujuy): Operated by Minera Exar, a company formed by Ganfeng Lithium Co. Ltd. (controlling principal shareholder), Lithium Argentina Corp., and JEMSE (Jujuy state enterprise). In full lithium carbonate production, with Measured and Indicated Resources of 19.85 MTn LCE and total Reserves of 3.64 MTn LCE (Secretaría de Minería, Feb. 2026).

- **Mariana (Salta):** Ganfeng Lithium project with an investment of USD 980 million and a zero liquid discharge system. In lithium chloride production. During the construction phase, it generated approximately 3,000 direct and indirect jobs, prioritizing local hiring (82% from Salta, 36% from the Puna).
- **Tres Quebradas (Catamarca):** Operated by Liex S.A., the Argentine subsidiary of Zijin Mining Group Ltd., which acquired 100% of the project. Reached the production phase with a target of 20,000 tonnes per year of LCE. M&I Resources: 5.97 MTn LCE (Secretaría de Minería, Feb. 2026).
- **Pozuelos Pastos Grandes — PPG — (Jujuy/Salta):** Acquired by Ganfeng Lithium in 2022. Currently in the feasibility stage, it is one of the country's highest-potential projects: M&I Resources of 15.08 MTn LCE and Inferred Resources of 6.71 MTn LCE (Secretaría de Minería, Feb. 2026).
- **Sal de los Ángeles (Salta):** Controlled by Revotech Asia Ltd., a company linked to Tibet Summit Resources. Under construction, with total Reserves of 1.04 MTn LCE. Tibet Summit Resources projects an investment of USD 2.2 billion in its Saltanian operations, with a production target of between 50,000 and 100,000 tonnes per year of lithium carbonate.

Argentina faces structural obstacles to scaling up the lithium value chain due to inefficient fiscal design and poor inter-jurisdictional coordination. While nominal royalties are low (3% at-mine-gate, approximately 0.6% effective), the aggregate tax burden and the overlapping of national and subnational levies distort investment incentives. This lack of fiscal neutrality raises the cost of capital and limits systemic competitiveness, hindering organic integration into global value chains and degrading institutional quality relative to international market standards.

The bulk of value addition (component production and cell/battery manufacturing) is concentrated in the countries of the "Battery Triangle" (primarily China, South Korea, and Japan), the United States, and more recently Europe. This limits Argentina's prospects for deep industrialization, due to the absence of certain technical capacities, limitations in the creation and use of patents (dominated by large companies), and the scarcity of other critical minerals (cobalt, nickel, manganese) that must be imported.

There is concern about the lack of transparency in lithium exploitation in Argentina. State contracts with private companies are not always publicly accessible; for example, the contract between Sales de Jujuy and the province is not available (El Diario AR, 2023). Jujuy is also the only one of the main mining provinces that has not joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Identifying the real beneficial owners of companies represents an additional obstacle, hampering investigation of possible illicit activities such as tax evasion or money laundering. Major investment funds such as BlackRock (16%) and The Vanguard Group (11.1%) are principal shareholders of Livent, while HSBC and JP Morgan are shareholders of Allkem; these same funds are also holders of Argentine external debt bonds (El Diario AR, 2023; Página 12, 2023). The merger between Livent and Allkem, completed in January 2024 to form Arcadium Lithium, created a global giant with four projects in the country (Infobae, 2024); however, in October 2024 Rio Tinto acquired Arcadium Lithium for USD 6.7 billion, further consolidating sector concentration in the hands of large transnational corporations (La Nación, 2024).

The lack of coordination between the national and provincial governments, as well as among the provinces themselves, regarding lithium governance also restricts the generation of consensus to promote active participation in industrialization. Although public initiatives exist (such as UniLiB for small-scale battery manufacturing) and agreements with Chinese companies to explore industrialization, progress has been limited in the absence of clear local content requirements and technology transfer.

Ultimately, Argentina's challenge is not only to attract investment to the lithium sector, but to position itself strategically in the global battery value chain. This requires coordinated institutions — across levels of government and with the private sector — that provide predictability, promote the development of local capabilities, and establish conditions for a growing share of processing and technological innovation to occur within the national territory.

## **DIMENSIONING THE IMPACT OF LITHIUM IN ARGENTINA: PROVINCIAL REALITIES AND PROJECTIONS**

Argentina is the world's fourth producer and exporter of lithium. National production of lithium carbonate equivalent (LCE) reached 33,003 tonnes in 2022

For 2023, growth of 32% year-on-year was estimated, driven by the commencement of operations at new projects such as Cauchari-Olaroz and ongoing expansions.

Argentine lithium exports have shown significant growth, rising from USD 1 million in 1998 to USD 695.9 million in 2022, and reaching USD 846 million in 2023, contributing 1.3% of total national exports. In 2023, 95% of exports corresponded to lithium carbonate and the remainder to chloride. The main destinations for these exports in 2023 were China (43%), Japan (25%), the United States (11%), and the Republic of Korea (11%).

At the provincial level in 2023, Jujuy contributed 72% of the exported value (USD 607 million), followed by Catamarca with 23% (USD 198 million) and Salta with 5% (USD 40 million). The incidence of lithium in provincial exports in 2023 was notable: 72% in Catamarca and 57% in Jujuy, while in Salta it was 4%. For the period January to September 2024, mining represented 87.1% of Catamarca's exports, 77.9% of Jujuy's, and 36.0% of Salta's, with lithium accounting for 44.8% of mining shipments from the Northwestern Argentina (NOA) region in September 2024.

The fiscal regime regulating mining activity in the province of Jujuy is set out in Articles 334 to 349 of the provincial Tax Code. This legislation establishes a specific framework applicable to all natural or legal persons engaged in mineral extraction activities within the provincial territory, whether as a primary or ancillary activity.

The taxable event consists of the extraction of minerals classified by the Mining Code as first and second category. The exploitation fee is due from the moment the mineral is delivered, the invoice or equivalent document is issued, regardless of the subsequent destination of the product. The tax base is defined as the quantity of mineral effectively extracted at the "at-mine-gate" point, valued according to the greater of the prevailing price in the national or international market. This value must be determined net of costs incurred from extraction to the first stage of commercialization, in accordance with parameters established by the corresponding regulations.

The general rate of the exploitation fee, as noted above, is three percent (3%) on the at-mine-gate value, and payment must be made in cash or by certified che-

ck. However, the Executive Branch may authorize other means of payment if so decided. The tax is liquidated through a monthly sworn declaration, which must be filed within the first fifteen days of the month following the declared fiscal period. This declaration is subject to verification by the provincial tax authority in the exercise of its audit and control powers.

The regime includes fiscal benefits aimed at promoting local development. In this regard, a two-thirds reduction of the tax is established in cases where the mineral is industrialized within the provincial territory, either by the same taxpayer or through a maquila scheme. Likewise, the law provides for a non-taxable minimum that is set annually through the corresponding Tax Law.

In addition, the regime enables the reassignment of up to one-third of the amount actually paid as a fiscal incentive, provided that said amount is directed toward geological exploration activities within the province. This reassignment does not imply any restitution by the State, but rather constitutes a conditional tax credit subject to compliance with previously approved projects. These projects must incorporate technology, job creation, or social improvements, and are subject to a monthly monitoring and audit system by provincial authorities.

Taken together, Jujuy's mining fiscal regime attempts to reconcile state rent capture with a policy of incentivizing value-added activity, industrialization, and local exploration. However, its effectiveness depends largely on actual compliance with the conditions required to access fiscal benefits and on the degree of oversight exercised by the competent provincial agencies.

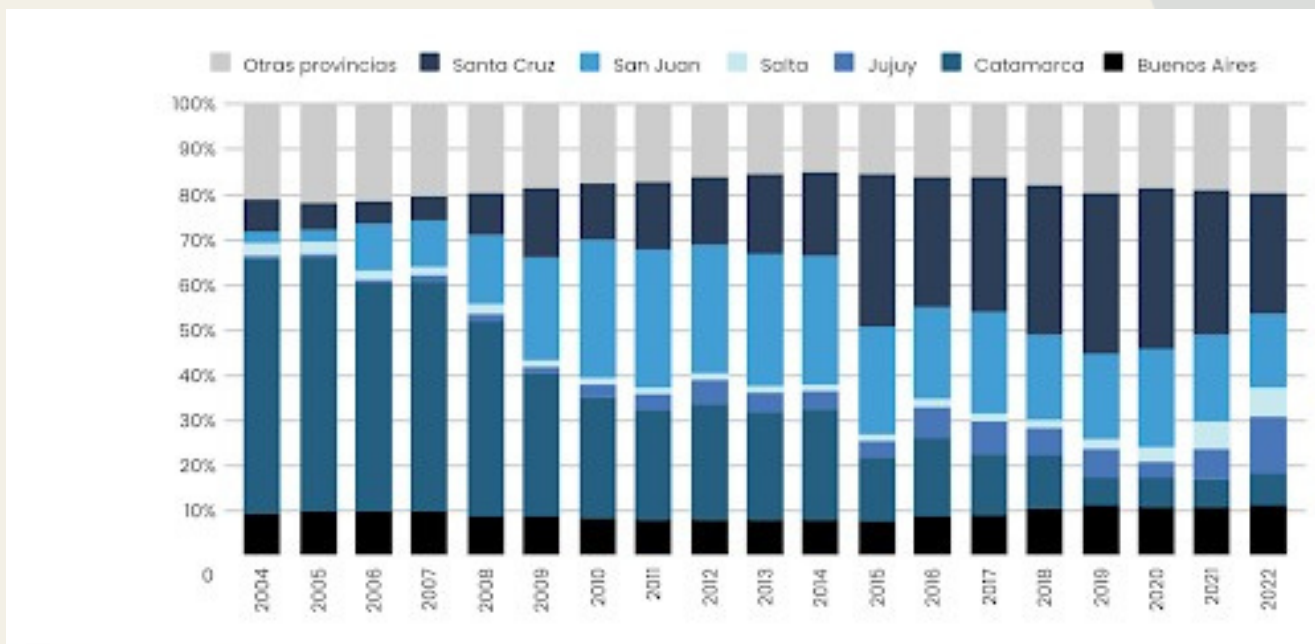
## **THE DISTRIBUTION OF ROYALTIES VARIES BY PROVINCE:**

**Catamarca:** 35% for the department of the mining site, 5% for departments contributing water resources, and the remaining 60% for the province. These funds are allocated to investment, infrastructure, or productive development projects. Additional contributions were also agreed, such as a "Monthly Additional Contribution" equivalent to 2% of sales (less royalties) and contributions to a Trust Fund (1.2% of sales).

**Jujuy:** The 3% royalty on at-mine-gate value is reduced to 2% for companies that industrialize the mineral. Of the total, 35% goes to a Quebrada and Puna Promotion and Development Fund, 10% to municipalities, and the remaining 55% to the Provincial Treasury. The provincial company JEMSE holds an 8.5% equity stake in operating projects and may request up to 5% of production for local industrialization.

**Salta:** 20% of royalties go to municipalities, 10% to a Special Mining Promotion Fund, and the remaining 70% to the provincial treasury. Salta allows up to 50% of royalties to be applied to offset company investments in public infrastructure works. The provincial company REMSa agreed to participate with 5% of future sales from the Centenario-Ratones project.

**DISTRIBUTION OF NATIONAL MINING GDP BY PROVINCE, 2004–2022.**



Source: EITI – Argentina Fourth Cycle Report

Employment: The lithium industry represents a concrete opportunity for the generation of formal and skilled employment in the provinces of the Lithium Triangle. The sector has recorded sustained growth in recent years, consolidating itself as a driver of regional economies and with the potential to become a structural engine of provincial development in the medium term. The pending challenge lies in maximizing local productive linkages so that this potential is fully translated into genuine employment in the territories.

In 2022, the sector generated 3,364 direct jobs nationwide, of which 2,941 (87.43%) were located in the provinces of the Lithium Triangle (Catamarca: 505, Salta: 1,091, Jujuy: 1,345). These figures represent only 1.43% of registered salaried employment in Catamarca, 2.12% in Jujuy, and 0.89% in Salta. At the national level, lithium contributes barely 0.03% of formal salaried workers. Lithium mining requires fewer workers per active mine compared to other metallic mining operations. It is important to note that these figures correspond exclusively to direct employment; the quantification of indirect employment generated by the supplier chain and associated services exceeds the methodological scope of this report.

Employment statistics for the sector present variations according to the source and methodology used. Provincial records typically incorporate employment generated in the local supplier chain and auxiliary services, which raises the figures relative to data reported by the companies themselves for their direct operations. Thus, while official Jujuy sources counted 1,345 direct production jobs in 2022, Orocobre/Allkem declared 628 workers at its Olaroz mine; in Catamarca, provincial records indicated 493 lithium-linked jobs, while Livent reported 304 at the Fénix deposit. This methodological discrepancy underscores the need to consolidate a unified measurement system that allows for precise quantification of the total labor impact of the sector.

Lithium mining represents a concrete opportunity for labor market development in Puna communities, with the potential to reverse historical regional emigration trends. The participation of local workers in projects varies by company and production stage: Livent reported 16.44% local employment in Antofagasta de la Sierra for the Fénix project, while official provincial sources record up to 72% for lithium production in Catamarca. These differences partly reflect different measurement methodologies and accounting perimeters. In any case, the consolidation of a robust local labor

market depends less on local content regulations than on sustained investment in human capital formation and the development of regional suppliers that make local labor competitive relative to that from other regions

Regarding working conditions, lithium mining is characterized by:

**Relatively high wages:** In the first half of 2022, the average salary for lithium sector workers was approximately ARS 337,000 (approximately USD 3,200), 129.25% above the general average. However, this gap narrowed from the second half of 2020, and lithium salaries came to be 26.11% below the general mining average in the first half of 2022. Salary growth in the lithium branch was lower (70.80%) in the 2020–2022 triennium than in the mining sector as a whole (147.65%).

Salaries in the lithium mining sector are above the average of the provincial economies where it operates, positioning it as one of the best-paid formal employers in the region. At the same time, macroeconomic data reflect that the provinces of the Lithium Triangle start from an income base below the national average: in the third quarter of 2022, the average monthly salaried household income was ARS 58,258 in Salta, ARS 53,438 in Catamarca, and ARS 51,064 in Jujuy, compared to ARS 76,375 at the national level. These figures illustrate the structural gap that these regional economies have historically faced and dimension the magnitude of the opportunity that lithium represents: a sector with high relative remuneration and the potential to raise the provincial wage floor as its scale grows, as the local supplier chain consolidates, and as competition for talent in the Puna labor markets deepens.

**Production and Export Growth:** Projections for Argentine lithium are optimistic. The Argentine Mining Companies Chamber (CAEM) and the Rosario Stock Exchange (BCR) estimate that national lithium production will reach 130,800 tonnes LCE by 2025, representing an increase of 75% compared to 2024. This milestone is due to the incorporation of new operational projects and the expansion of existing plants.

With international prices stabilized at around USD 8,500 per tonne, the export value of the Lithium Complex is projected to rise to USD 947 million in 2025, a 44% growth in dollars relative to 2024. In the medium term, it is estimated that Argentina could reach 200,000 tonnes of LCE within the next five years (+373%

versus 2023). By 2030, annual LCE production is projected to range between 246,500 and 375,000 tonnes, with exports that could comfortably exceed USD 5.6 billion per year. More ambitious projections from the Central Bank and the Ministry of Economy suggest that total mining exports could triple or even quadruple 2024 levels, reaching between USD 15.6 billion and USD 19.2 billion by 2030.

**Investment and Job Creation:** Argentina has led the capture of lithium exploration investments regionally between 2010 and 2022, attracting nearly 22% of the global total. The country currently holds a portfolio of investments for lithium projects of between USD 4.5 billion and USD 5 billion, given that it has not declared lithium a national strategic resource, thereby granting private capital full freedom. Between 2019 and 2024, lithium attracted nearly USD 13 billion in investments. Exploration spending in lithium increased from USD 37 million in 2017 to more than USD 320 million in 2024. In 2023, Argentina received 17% of the USD 830 million global exploration budget, ranking third, behind Australia and Canada.

The governors of the Lithium Triangle expect the arrival of USD 19 billion in investments, with Salta leading expectations (USD 9 billion), followed by Catamarca (USD 7 billion) and the remainder in Jujuy. It is estimated that these investments could generate approximately 15,000 new jobs. As of September 2023, registered private employment in lithium exploration and exploitation in Argentina reached 4,169 jobs, an increase of 837% since 2010. Jujuy concentrates 35% of these jobs, Salta 33%, and Catamarca 24%.

The Argentine government approved in April 2024 the Incentive Regime for Large Investments (RIGI), under the Ley Bases, consolidating a clear signal of openness to private capital in strategic sectors. The regime applies to projects with a minimum investment of USD 200 million and guarantees fiscal, customs, and exchange rate stability for 30 years — including a corporate income tax rate of 25% versus the general 35%, and progressive free availability of foreign currency (20% after 2 years, 40% after 3 years, 100% after 4 years). Projects exceeding USD 2 billion qualify as Long-Term Strategic Export Projects, with even more favorable conditions. The resolution also allows investment vehicles to maintain accounting in dollars under IFRS standards and access international arbitration (PCA, ICC, or ICSID) in the event of disputes.

The first mining project approved under the RIGI was submitted by Rio Tinto for the development of a lithium venture in Salta, with a committed investment of more than USD 2.5 billion. To date, seven mining projects have applied for inclusion in the regime, evidencing international private sector interest in the conditions Argentina offers. This framework adds to the Mining Investment Law (No. 24,196), in force for more than 30 years, which already guaranteed fiscal stability for 30 years and other benefits at each stage of project development — constituting one of the most competitive mining investment attraction regimes in the region.

The Argentine mining sector today operates with 180 active projects, of which 23 are in production, 8 in construction, and 10 in the feasibility stage. In 2023, mining exports reached USD 4.06 billion (6.1% of total exports), positioning the sector as the country's third largest net foreign currency generator with a surplus of USD 3.264 billion. Direct sector employment reached 41,170 jobs in November 2023, with salaries 1.8 times the national average — and 2.6 times in the metallic segment — and with 80% of large mining companies' revenue reinvested within Argentine territory. (Mining in Argentina, Secretaría de Minería, Sept. 2024; Incentive Regime for Large Investments — CNV Resolution No. 1020; Mining Investment Law No. 24,196.)

## CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of lithium as a critical input for the global energy transition has reconfigured international interest in the countries of the so-called Lithium Triangle ("Triángulo del Litio"), particularly Argentina. In this context, the present work analyzed the multiple dimensions of the relationship between Argentina and China, paying special attention to the structural character that this linkage has acquired in commercial, financial, institutional, and technological terms.

Throughout the document, the first focus was on China's growing weight as a strategic economic partner. The bilateral link has evolved from a marginal commercial relationship toward a complex dependency, sustained by a pattern of investments, conditioned financing, and growing corporate participation in critical sectors such as lithium mining, energy, infrastructure, and defense. The ongoing projects and active Chinese companies were analyzed, identifying governance schemes where the public and private intertwine, often with scant transparency and low participation by local actors.

The role of bilateral agreements, multilateral mechanisms of influence, and the practices of Chinese companies in the country were also examined. All of this allowed for the understanding that China's advance is not limited to the provision of capital or technology, but is inscribed in a longer-term strategy aimed at consolidating a new multilateral order with a strong Asian imprint and growing geopolitical gravitation in Latin America.

Within this framework, Argentina faces a strategic opportunity that demands it rise to the occasion: the global demand for lithium opens a window of prosperity that will not repeat itself under the same conditions, and the relationship with China as an investment partner can be mutually beneficial if framed within clear, reciprocal, and transparent rules of the game. Capitalizing on that potential requires less a "comprehensive state policy" than efficient institutions: regulatory coordination between the national government and the provinces, competitive and predictable fiscal frameworks, and transparency standards that allow all actors — investors, communities, and governments — to make informed decisions. The real risk is not the presence of foreign capital but the absence of institutional conditions that incentivize quality investments,

that generate local productive linkages, and that ensure that resource rents are reflected in genuine welfare for the producing provinces. Argentina has the resource, the basic legal framework, and the international momentum: the challenge is to consolidate predictability and open competition as hallmarks of its mining model, positioning itself as a reliable destination in the global lithium chain — not as a passive supplier, but as an actor that adds value through the quality of its rules, not through restrictions on capital outflows.

The high concentration of foreign direct investment — where more than 50% originates from Chinese capital — together with an export dependency exceeding 40% toward that market, poses significant challenges in terms of diversification and institutional quality. While projections indicate that Argentina will double its exportable volume within five years, consolidating its global leadership, the current fiscal scheme (with provincial royalties of between 1% and 3% added to the current tax system) and weak inter-jurisdictional articulation evidence design inefficiencies that limit systemic competitiveness. These indicators represent a market opportunity that can only be capitalized if a framework of legal certainty and transparency is consolidated to replace discretion with global competition standards.

Therefore, lithium must be understood not only as an economic resource but as an opportunity to redefine the development model. The relationship with China as an emerging power demands that Argentina develop greater negotiating capacity, institutional strengthening, and strategic planning. Only through intelligent articulation among the state, the productive sector, and the science and technology system will it be possible to transform the lithium boom into a vector of inclusive and sustainable development. Otherwise, there is a risk of repeating the history of enclave, influence, and loss of autonomy that has characterized other stages of Argentina's peripheral relationship with the world.

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# Lithium and Democracy: Argentina's Relationship with the People's Republic of China

**JOSÉ SALAS**

In recent years, the relationship between Argentina and the People's Republic of China has deepened steadily, spanning the economic, diplomatic, cultural, and educational spheres. This rapprochement has been especially visible in the provinces of northwestern Argentina (NOA), where the presence of Chinese companies linked to lithium, agreements with local universities, and political dialogue at the provincial level are delineating a new phase in the bilateral relationship. It is within this context of growing interconnection that this report sets out to analyze these dynamics in a systematic manner, with particular attention to the challenges this relationship poses for institutional governance in a democratic environment characterized by disparities in negotiating capacity and by the opportunity to strengthen the management capabilities of local actors in the territories concerned.

Within this framework, the work draws on concepts developed in international influence studies, such as *soft power* (cultural and educational projection), *sharp power* (narrative pressure), and *corrosive capital* (National Endowment for Democracy – NED). The application of these categories allows us to frame the mechanisms through which a power with global interests can exert influence over strategic decisions, public discourse, and institutional ties.

## **METHODOLOGICAL NOTE ON THE INCLUSION OF ACTORS**

This analysis operates exclusively within the terminology and categories of Social Sciences, Governance Studies, and Geopolitical Dissemination, without attributing illicit, fraudulent, or irregular conduct to any of the individuals mentioned. References to named individuals

1. **Public Officials (Governors, Ministers, etc.):** By virtue of their official functions, institutional travel, or participation in delegations relevant to bilateral policy.
2. **Private Actors (Former Scholarship Recipients, Entrepreneurs and Companies, etc.):** Due to their documented participation in public activities, business delegations, institutional agreements, or information that is in the public domain and directly related to the subject matter of this report.
3. **Legislative Bodies and Institutional Dynamics:** References to bodies such as Parliament and its Committees (e.g., the China Friendship Commission) are made to analyze institutional dynamics and the plurality of party representations that participate in foreign policy.

In no case is reference made to the private sphere or personal life of any individual. All content is grounded in journalistic sources, official documents, internet platforms, and other publicly available networks, duly cited in the body of the text and in the reference bibliography at the end of this report.

## **PRESIDENTIAL DYNAMICS AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

From the year 2000 onward, a sustained process of rapprochement consolidated, with an active role for Chinese financing in large-scale infrastructure projects. This dynamic represented an inflection — at least partial — with respect to Argentina's historically close relationship with the United States, whose influence had traditionally centered on short-term financial assistance and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in other sectors of the economy.

What initially responded to a logic of international projection on the part of the PRC (People's Republic of China) soon transcended the economic and commercial spheres, extending into other dimensions. Among these stand out educational and cultural exchanges, scientific and technological cooperation in strategic fields, and a growing development of subnational ties — facilitated by provincial autonomy over natural resource management following the reform of Article 124 of the National Constitution in 1994 — which had an impact on the domestic political dimension. This progressive insertion became especially visible in the articulations and negotiations of the period between 2003 and 2015, notwithstanding the fact that the relationship was maintained in subsequent administrations.

## **PRESIDENCY OF NÉSTOR KIRCHNER (2003-2007)**

As President Néstor Kirchner stated at the time: “We share with this nation a past of important convergences, of mutual respect and fruitful exchange, with renewed momentum since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1972, without bilateral confrontations, with shared positions on our international agenda, and we must further deepen the bilateral relationship” (Kirchner, 2004).

That same year, a potential Chinese investment in Argentina of approximately USD 20 billion was announced. Although the figure did not materialize during his term, the announcement reflects the strategic importance his administration attached to the bilateral relationship. While his term did not see large disbursements of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), progress was made on trade agreements and cooperation in areas such as agriculture, education, and energy, laying the groundwork for a broader framework of collaboration in subsequent years.

## **PRESIDENCY OF CRISTINA FERNÁNDEZ DE KIRCHNER (CFK) (2007-2015)**

The administration of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner deepened the commercial and institutional relationship with China, a period during which significant investments were finalized, including Sinopec's acquisition of Occidental Petroleum's operations in Argentina (Bai, 2010) and the ICBC's purchase of Standard Bank (Kwok & Dolan, 2011).

During her second term, Chinese investments reached a new level. Notable undertakings include the hydroelectric dams in Santa Cruz, the modernization of the Belgrano Cargas railway, a currency swap agreement, and new nuclear energy projects. While several of these initiatives would be executed under subsequent administrations, their design and initial approval took place during this period. With respect to lithium, in 2014 Ganfeng Lithium launched the Mariana project in Salta, marking one of the first Chinese forays into this strategic sector (International Lithium Corp., 2014). That same year, CFK declared that the bilateral relationship had entered a phase of “comprehensive strategic partnership,” an expression that encapsulated the level of political commitment achieved (Fernández de Kirchner, 2015).

## **PRESIDENCY OF MAURICIO MACRI (2015-2019)**

The change in political direction in 2015 brought with it an initial reassessment of foreign policy toward China, as part of a renewed alignment with the United States and a more pro-Western orientation. The Macri administration reviewed several agreements inherited from Kirchnerism, including those related to the Santa Cruz dams, the Atucha III nuclear power plant, and the space tracking station in Neuquén.

However, following this initial phase, the relationship stabilized under a pragmatic logic. The G20 Summit held in Buenos Aires in 2018 was a bilateral milestone, not only because of Xi Jinping's visit, but also because of the delivery of military equipment by China to reinforce event security.

The Cambiemos government prioritized certain projects, such as the modernization of the Belgrano Cargas and the continuity of the currency swap (crucial given external constraints). In the mining sphere, lithium exports were promoted through the reduction of bureaucratic and tariff barriers, and sectoral coordination mechanisms were advanced, including the Lithium Strategic Plan and the Competitiveness Roundtable, a forerunner of the current National Lithium Roundtable. During this period, Chinese investments in the sector ranged between USD 700 million and USD 1 billion, concentrated in the Cauchari-Olaroz (Jujuy) and Mariana (Salta) projects, with Ganfeng as the principal actor

## **PRESIDENCY OF ALBERTO FERNÁNDEZ (2019 - 2023)**

During this administration, alignment with China reached its peak, with milestones such as Argentina's accession to the Belt and Road Initiative, a mega-project designed to promote trade and investment through land, maritime, and digital infrastructure. In that context, President Alberto Fernández stated: "China as a brother who accompanied us during the pandemic, who came to our financial rescue when the pressure of the International Monetary Fund put us in check, and who invests in our country generating jobs for Argentines." He also praised the Belt and Road as "a promising initiative of global cooperation born from the idea of joint contribution" (Fernández, 2023).

Among the most significant investments of this period were the continuation of the Santa Cruz works, the renewal of rolling stock for the Belgrano Cargas, and new photovoltaic projects such as the expansion of Cauchari Solar. On the financial front, the currency swap was expanded by USD 5.6 billion and activated repeatedly to mitigate foreign exchange shortages in a context of severe external constraints.

With respect to lithium, this period marked the beginning of what became known as the “lithium boom.” In 2022, the National Lithium Roundtable was formally established to coordinate policies among the producing provinces (Catamarca, Jujuy, and Salta) and the national government. Chinese investments in this sector exceeded USD 3 billion, with prominent actors including Ganfeng Lithium and Zijin Mining Group (González Jáuregui, 2024).

## **PRESIDENCY OF JAVIER MILEI (2023-PRESENTE)**

From the outset of his administration, Javier Milei’s government signaled a distancing from China, consistent with his discursive positioning during the presidential campaign. In an interview with Tucker Carlson in September 2023, the then-candidate declared his intention that the Argentine state would not conduct business with China, nor with any communist country. He did, however, clarify that Argentine private actors were free to trade with whomever they wished (Tucker Carlson, n.d.). In keeping with this stance, Argentina rejected its entry into the BRICS bloc and suspended previous bilateral agreements, including the Atucha III project and the Buenos Aires Port expansion project involving Chinese companies (Política Argentina, 2024).

Nevertheless, from April 2024 onward, the bilateral relationship began to moderate. Foreign Minister Diana Mondino traveled to Beijing accompanied by officials Santiago Bausili and Pablo Quirno, and an agreement was reached on the renewal of the currency swap with the People’s Bank of China (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Argentina, 2024). While Milei did not travel to the PRC, he held a meeting with Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the G20 held in Brazil in November 2024.

These gestures suggest a pragmatic approach on the part of the current government. Although no new China-financed mega-projects were announced

continuity for existing ones was guaranteed, including Cauchari-Olaroz (Ganfeng Lithium), Tres Quebradas (Zijin Mining), and Sal de Los Angeles (Tibet Summit Resources).

## 1. POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH

Having briefly addressed the relationship with China across successive presidential administrations, it is pertinent to examine this relationship from the perspective of Argentina's main political parties.

### PERONISM

In its various strands, Peronism has been the party with the greatest influence on Argentine politics since the mid-twentieth century, which accounts for its prolonged presence in power, both through the executive and through its significant parliamentary weight. Over the past two decades, it has operated under different names (Frente para la Victoria, Unidad Ciudadana, Frente de Todos, Unión por la Patria), but always under the preponderant leadership of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner or aligned figures. This continuity in power has facilitated a sustained relationship with the People's Republic of China, a relationship that will be illustrated through reference to numerous figures within the movement, whether through their official roles (presidents, ministers, ambassadors, governors) or through the establishment of ties at the partisan or ideological level with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

### UNIÓN CÍVICA RADICAL (UCR)

The Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), as a member of the Cambiemos and subsequently Juntos por el Cambio coalitions, was part of the national government between 2015 and 2019, alongside the PRO administration. Although it did not lead the executive branch, it maintained a relevant institutional presence through legislators, governors, and officials. Its ties with China have been specific and less structured compared to Peronism, although there were efforts oriented toward commercial, educational, and cultural exchanges in districts where the UCR held executive representation.

## **PRO – CAMBIEMOS / JUNTOS POR EL CAMBIO**

The PRO, as the central force within the Cambiemos and later Juntos por el Cambio coalitions, governed the country between 2015 and 2019. The administration displayed a relationship with China focused on the management of strategic projects inherited from the previous administration, seeking to consolidate specific commercial and financial ties. Nonetheless, in the partisan sphere, specific linkages emerged that illustrated the existence of a channel of dialogue. This was evidenced by the participation of national PRO authorities in a delegation to Beijing (La Política Online, 2016). This phenomenon may configure a new generation of institutional and cultural ties with the PRC for a party without the governing tradition of the main Argentine political movements.

## **LA LIBERTAD AVANZA (LLA)**

La Libertad Avanza (LLA) is the most recent political force to reach the National Executive Branch. Although its initial rhetoric displayed a marked ideological distance from China, in practice it has opted to maintain pragmatic relations, keeping financial agreements such as the currency swap active and supporting the development of pre-existing investments in strategic sectors. The latter stance may have undergone a substantial shift, as the government has moved markedly closer to the Trump administration and its geopolitical vision.

## **PARTY REPRESENTATIVES AND CHANNELS OF INTERACTION**

This analysis operates within the terminology and categories of Social Sciences, Governance Studies, and Geopolitical Dissemination.

The objective is to examine the channels of contact between these officials or party representatives and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the exercise of their functions. The selection of figures reflects the relevance of their roles in areas of national strategic interest, prioritizing Mining, Energy, and Infrastructure, but also including Defense and Economy. In this context, the aim is to identify patterns of interaction that could be framed within the concepts of Soft Power and Sharp Power — categories that describe tools of diplomacy, influence, and strategic projection.

## PERONISM / JUSTICIALISM

### JORGE TAIANA

Sociologist and Peronist politician with an extensive public career. He began his political activism in left-wing Peronist organizations and held prominent positions including Secretary of Human Rights, Foreign Minister, MERCOSUR parliamentarian, national senator, and Minister of Defense.

During his tenure as Foreign Minister, Jorge Taiana deepened diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of China within the framework of the Strategic Partnership initiated in 2004. On his official visits to Beijing he held high-level meetings, including with Vice President Zeng Qinghong, aimed at consolidating political, economic, and cultural cooperation. From the Foreign Ministry, dialogue mechanisms and cooperation instruments were promoted that broadened bilateral exchanges and fostered greater participation by Chinese companies in sectors such as agro-industry and infrastructure.

Joint coordination in multilateral foreign policy forums was also advanced (Argentine Foreign Ministry, 2006; Argentine Foreign Ministry, 2009).

In his subsequent role as Minister of Defense, Taiana maintained institutional meetings with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China and with defense delegations, within the framework of existing bilateral cooperation. Although no equipment acquisitions were finalized, technical and professional training exchanges were sustained (News ArgenChina, 2022).

At the partisan level, he participated in dialogue forums between the Justicialist Party and the Chinese Communist Party, such as the seminar *"Argentina-China and Social Justice as a Horizon,"* organized by the Latin American Center for Political and Economic Studies on China (CLEPEC) in 2017, which reflects the political-partisan dimension of bilateral ties (DangDai, 2017; DangDai, 2021).

## **JULIO DE VIDO**

Engineer and politician, he served as Minister of Federal Planning, Public Investment, and Services under the presidencies of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. His portfolio covered key areas including infrastructure, energy, transport, and public works, making him a central interlocutor in the bilateral economic relationship with China.

By virtue of his role, he was linked to numerous agreements, most notably the Belgrano Cargas railway (with CMEC participation), the Néstor Kirchner and Jorge Cepernic hydroelectric dams in Santa Cruz (financed by China Development Bank) (AidData, 2014), and negotiations over the Atucha III and IV nuclear power plants (with CNNC). He also promoted wind and solar energy projects (Infobae, 2014).

In the exercise of his portfolio, he held meetings with senior Chinese officials, as well as with executives of state-owned enterprises and banks, which were essential to the viability of large investment projects; on several occasions he led technical missions to the Asian giant focused on agreements in railways, dams, and nuclear energy.

With respect to partisan matters, his contact with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was limited to the protocol channels inherent to his function. Although his ministry had oversight of energy resources, his relationship with mining was concentrated in coal and uranium.

## **JOSÉ LUIS GIOJA**

Lawyer and historical leader of the Justicialist Party (PJ), he governed the Province of San Juan for three consecutive terms (2003–2015). His rise coincided with the return of Peronism to power at the national level and the definition of mining as state policy in the province — elements that would later prove fundamental to his international projection toward the PRC. His profile consolidated him as a political actor with subnational management capacity (PJ President, 2016–2021).

During his three terms, he actively promoted rapprochement with the People's Republic of China to secure investments in infrastructure and mining. In the area of public works, he advanced the promotion of the Central Bioceanic Corridor and the Agua Negra Tunnel, seeking Chinese interest and financing for this strategic project (DangDai, 2020).

In the mining sphere, the state policy of promoting the sector facilitated the arrival of Chinese capital. A milestone in direct negotiations was the framework agreement signed in 2010 between the Provincial Institute of Mining Exploration (IPEEM) and the Chinese state corporation Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC). This agreement was key in formalizing Chinese risk investment for the exploration of new mining areas in the province (Agrofy News, 2010).

Complementing the attraction of capital, Gioja's administration played a central role in defining the sector's fiscal policy. His government promoted a modification of the royalty scheme, shifting from calculation based on pit-head value (which allowed production costs to be deducted) to 3% on gross sale value — a measure that increased provincial revenues — and promoted large-scale projects such as Veladero, which began operations in 2005 (Mining Press, 2011).

He made numerous official visits to China as governor and party leader, aimed at attracting investment and negotiating financing. During these visits, he held meetings with central government officials and executives of state-owned enterprises, seeking to consolidate bilateral ties (DangDai, 2020).

In the realm of partisan relations, José Luis Gioja was a prominent member of the exchange platform between the Justicialist Party and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This linkage focused on governance cooperation and development, materializing in joint seminars for the analysis and transfer of poverty alleviation strategies, using the Chinese province of Guizhou as a reference model (DangDai, 2020).

## **SERGIO MASSA**

Sergio Massa, lawyer and Argentine political leader, served as Minister of Economy between 2022 and 2023, a period during which he fostered greater financial dialogue with the PRC. From that role, he promoted the activation and subsequent expansion of the currency swap with the People's Bank of China, which made yuan available for commercial operations and alleviated pressure on the Central Bank's reserves (Reuters, 2023).

During an official visit to Shanghai and Beijing in June 2023, Massa agreed with authorities from the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the People's Bank of China on a cooperation agenda within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, oriented toward investments in infrastructure, energy, and transport (Infocielo, 2023). Prior to this trip, he had received in Buenos Aires delegations from the China Development Bank (CDB), PowerChina, and the Gezhouba Group, with the aim of monitoring financing and investment projects in energy and mining.

In that context, and given the growing strategic relevance of lithium for the energy transition, he engaged in cooperation with Chinese companies in the sector, including PowerChina, State Grid Corporation of China, Tibet Summit Resources, and Ganfeng Lithium, both in China and Buenos Aires, in the framework of follow-up on bilateral economic and financial agreements (Ámbito Financiero, 2023; Argentina.gob.ar, 2023).

Massa's relationship with Chinese authorities had no partisan dimension, remaining strictly in the institutional and economic sphere commensurate with his public functions.

## **AGUSTÍN ROSSI**

Political leader of the Justicialist Party, whose activism began in his youth as a student representative at the National University of Rosario, and who consolidated himself as a prominent Kirchnerist figure through his congressional career and his performance as Minister of Defense, interim head of the Federal Intelligence Agency, and Chief of Cabinet.

During his tenures as head of the Ministry of Defense, Agustín Rossi maintained a policy of technical cooperation with the People's Republic of China, oriented toward the modernization and logistical supply of the Armed Forces. Within this framework, minor equipment purchases such as military uniforms were finalized, and possibilities were explored for the acquisition of more complex equipment, including Chinese-made 8x8 armored vehicles. These negotiations took place in the context of the bilateral defense relationship (La Capital, 2014; Infobae, 2020).

As minister, Rossi maintained contacts within the framework of defense cooperation with the People's Republic of China: in March 2015 the Ministry announced the dispatch of an official delegation to Beijing to explore equipment alternatives, and previously, in 2013, he received in Buenos Aires a flotilla of the Chinese Navy (comprising the destroyer Lanzhou, the frigate Liuzhou, and the supply vessel Boyanghu) in a protocol visit that reaffirmed bilateral defense ties (Infobae, 2015; La Nación, 2013).

## **SABINO VACA NARVAJA**

During the presidency of Alberto Fernández, Sabino Vaca Narvaja served first as Special Representative for China Affairs and, from 2021, as Ambassador to the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the local academic sphere, he was the driving force behind the PROSA Program at the National University of Lanús, where the first Specialization in Contemporary Chinese Studies was established. He is the author of the books *Why China?* and *China, Latin America, and the Geopolitics of the New Silk Road*.

In June 2023, he was named Honorary Professor of China's National Defense University in Beijing, a distinction the Asian country grants exceptionally to foreign figures (DangDai, 2023). During his diplomatic tenure, he actively participated in Argentina's accession to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and in the subsequent signing of the Cooperation Plan in 2023, linked to the financing of infrastructure and energy works (El Destape, 2022). He also coordinated vaccine procurement from Sinopharm and managed agreements for local production.

As an illustrative anecdote: at a bilateral meeting in the Great Hall of the People, the then-ambassador addressed Xi Jinping in Mandarin, quoting a line

from a historic CCP song — a gesture aimed at consolidating ideological affinity and symbolic closeness between the two administrations.

He also participated in political-partisan dialogue between the Justicialist Party and the Chinese Communist Party, including bilateral seminars oriented toward the exchange of governance and political organization experiences (DangDai, 2021).

His role unfolded in a context of China's growing projection in Argentina, in which bilateral cooperation acquired a broader dimension in political, economic, and cultural terms.

## **FRANCISCO CAFIERO**

Peronist politician with a background in defense and international relations. Grandson of the historic leader Antonio Cafiero, he served in the Ministry of Defense as Under-Secretary for Scientific Research and Industrial Policy and later as Secretary of International Defense Affairs (2019–2023), where he coordinated the cooperation and military technology agenda with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

During his tenure, he led technical missions to evaluate the acquisition of the JF-17 Thunder combat aircraft from the Chinese state-owned company CATIC. Although the project did not materialize, his involvement deepened the bilateral relationship by exploring technology transfer schemes and co-production in coordination with FADEA (Zona Militar, 2021).

He also presides over the Latin American Center for Political and Economic Studies on China (CLEPEC), founded in 2013. Under this framework, in 2017 he coordinated an institutional mission to Beijing and Anhui together with the National University of Avellaneda, where academic cooperation agreements were signed (National University of Avellaneda, 2018). In 2021, his institutional activity included participation in partisan dialogue forums, such as the meeting held between the Justicialist Party (PJ) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on the occasion of the latter's centenary (DangDai, 2021).

His work developed in a context of growing interconnection between both nations, in which the opening of dialogue channels in strategic sectors such as defense and aerospace technology has enabled a broader and more diversified dynamic of bilateral cooperation.

### **AXEL KICILLOF**

Axel Kicillof is an economist and Peronist leader, identified with Kirchnerism, whose career combines academic formation and public administration. He served as Secretary of Economic Policy and later as Minister of Economy between 2013 and 2015, a period in which he played a central role in the negotiation and signing of agreements with the People's Republic of China aimed at strengthening the national energy sector. In that framework, together with Julio De Vido he signed agreements with the China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC) and state financing banks for the construction of the Atucha III and Atucha IV nuclear power plants, signed during Xi Jinping's official visit to Argentina in 2014. These agreements consolidated bilateral cooperation in strategic infrastructure and baseload energy, reinforcing the presence of Chinese capital and technology in the nuclear sector and establishing a relevant precedent in the expansion of the energy partnership between both countries (Ámbito Financiero, 2014).

### **GILDO INSFRAN**

Gildo Insfrán is a veterinarian and Peronist leader, governor of the Province of Formosa since 1995, where he has consolidated himself as a prominent figure of Peronism in northern Argentina. During his administration he has sought access to external financing and the promotion of Chinese-origin investments in infrastructure and energy projects. In this context, the construction of an aqueduct with the participation of Chinese companies was advanced, within the framework of the memorandum of understanding signed by Argentina under the Belt and Road Initiative (News ArgenChina, 2022).

The case of Formosa illustrates the participation of provincial governments in processes of decentralized institutional cooperation with China, linking the local agenda with national guidelines for bilateral engagement. Insfrán also participated in a virtual seminar on political exchange and training between the Justicialist Party and the International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party, evidencing the continuity of dialogue channels between both organizations (AgroEmpresario, 2021).

## **RAUL JALIL**

Peronist politician with a career in the Province of Catamarca, where he served as mayor of the provincial capital (2011–2019) before assuming the governorship in 2019. His administration has been linked to the promotion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the mining and energy sectors, establishing institutional channels with various international capital sources, prominently including companies from the People's Republic of China. As background, in 2015, during his tenure as mayor, he joined an institutional mission to China focused on technology applied to urban management.

During his governorship, capital attraction for the lithium industry was incentivized. In January 2022, following a technical evaluation process, the provincial administration issued the Environmental Impact Declaration (EIA) that allowed Zijin Mining Group to begin construction of the Tres Quebradas (3Q) project in Flambalá (EconoJournal, 2022). This process was accompanied by an official mission to Beijing in 2023 to address the industrialization of the mineral at source and the strengthening of the San Francisco Pass as a strategic logistics node toward the Asian market.

In the energy area, agreements for the energy transition were advanced through coordination with the state-owned company PowerChina, oriented toward the construction of a complex of four solar parks with a projected capacity of 600 MW (InfoEnergía, 2022). This work is part of a dynamic of opening dialogue channels in strategic sectors, enabling bilateral cooperation in infrastructure development and investment attraction for the province.

## **CRISTINA ÁLVAREZ RODRÍGUEZ**

Peronist leader with a legislative and executive career, she has served as Minister of Government of the Province of Buenos Aires and Vice-President of the National Justicialist Party (PJ). Within the framework of partisan diplomacy, she has acted as an interlocutor in exchange forums with the International Department of the CCP Central Committee, participating in seminars such as the 2021 event on governance, multilateralism, and global development.

Unlike profiles linked to extractive sectors or defense, her work is oriented toward the consolidation of political communication channels and the exchange of public policy experiences between both organizations. Her role stands out for integrating the bilateral cooperation agenda on issues of sovereignty and public health within the institutional partisan dialogue (DangDai, 2021).

## **UCR (RADICAL CIVIC UNION)**

### **GERARDO MORALES**

Politician of the Radical Civic Union (UCR) and governor of Jujuy (2015–2023). During his two terms, he oriented provincial governance toward the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), positioning the People's Republic of China as a strategic actor for the development of critical infrastructure in lithium mining.

In the energy sector, he finalized the construction of the Cauchari Solar Park, financed through a USD 331 million credit from China's Export-Import Bank (subsequently expanded), with technical execution by PowerChina and Shanghai Electric. This project was structured so that the state-owned company Jujuy Energía y Minería Sociedad del Estado (JEMSE) retained ownership of the park, repaying the financing through the sale of energy to the national grid.

With respect to lithium mining, Morales consolidated the "Jujuy Model," under which JEMSE participates as a partner with an 8.5% stake in Minera Exar (operated by China's Ganfeng Lithium and Canada's Lithium Americas) (JEMSE, 2021). Under this scheme, not only extraction but also industrialization was promoted through agreements with Gotion High-Tech for the installation of a lithium battery cell plant in the Perico Free Trade Zone, aimed at integrating the province into the global value chain.

An institutional milestone in this relationship was his official visit to China in 2018, where he led a delegation of officials and businesspeople to strengthen ties with the Export-Import Bank and authorities from Guizhou Province. That same year, his role as interlocutor was validated at the national level when he joined the official delegation that received President Xi Jinping during the G20 Summit in Argentina (La Nación, 2018).

## **ALFREDO CORNEJO**

Leader of the Radical Civic Union (UCR) and governor of Mendoza (2015–2019; 2023–present). During his administration, he oriented the province's international strategy toward the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), with a focus on the People's Republic of China in the energy and technology sectors. A milestone in this relationship was the signing in 2019 of a cooperation memorandum with Qinghai Province for technical exchanges in renewable energy (Government of Mendoza, 2019). In this framework, dialogue channels were established with financial institutions (such as ICBC) and infrastructure firms (China Railway and SPIC) to evaluate the feasibility of large-scale projects and the reactivation of strategic deposits such as Potasio Río Colorado.

In the mining sphere, Cornejo promoted a vision of "responsible mining" aimed at inserting Mendoza into the electric mobility value chain, which materialized in the incorporation of the first fleet of electric buses from Chinese firm BYD in 2019. Nevertheless, Provincial Law 7,722 functioned as a strict regulatory framework that delimited the possibilities of investment in metalliferous mining. At the political level, he maintained a strictly institutional and commercial relationship; in 2018, as president of the UCR National Committee, he delegated partisan representation at meetings with the CCP, preserving formal communication channels without participating in direct political training forums.

## **ALBERTO BERNIS**

Leader of the Radical Civic Union (UCR) and current Deputy Governor of Jujuy (2023–present). His role has been key in providing institutional support for the development of projects with international financing in the province, such as the Cauchari Solar Park and the Perico Free Trade Zone. As president of the ruling bloc in the Legislature, he influenced the building of the political consensus necessary for the passage of laws establishing regulatory frameworks for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), under the Jujuy–China subnational cooperation model (Tres Líneas, 2017). In 2018, he joined the official mission to China, where he participated in technical meetings with China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and energy sector companies such as PowerChina and Shanghai Electric, serving as a link between the parliamentary agenda and strategic infrastructure projects.

## **MARTÍN KERCHNER TOMBA**

Economist and UCR leader from Mendoza; he served as Minister of Economy, Infrastructure, and Energy during Alfredo Cornejo's governorship. From his position, he led the search for international financing and market opening, positioning China as a priority partner for the reactivation of the province's productive matrix. Between 2018 and 2019, he led official missions to Beijing and Shanghai to manage investments in strategic sectors such as energy and agro-industry, promoting local export offerings (Memo, 2019). His technical management facilitated dialogue with financial institutions (ICBC, Bank of China) and technology firms for the development of critical infrastructure and clean energy projects, maintaining ties strictly in the commercial and managerial sphere.

## **PRO (PROPUESTA REPUBLICANA)**

### **DIEGO GUELAR**

Diplomat and PRO leader; he served as Argentine Ambassador to the People's Republic of China between 2015 and 2019. During his tenure, he acted as an institutional link for the continuity of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, focusing the bilateral agenda on technical predictability and compliance with international standards for investment attraction.

Under his operational leadership, dialogue was facilitated for the financing of infrastructure, energy, and transport works totaling an estimated USD 25 billion, consolidating China as a strategic partner in the provision of capital (Reuters, 2016). Although his role was eminently diplomatic, he functioned as an interlocutor for the inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) under the umbrella of Capital Diversity, promoting pragmatic commercial integration and traveling across various Chinese provinces to strengthen subnational ties and technical cooperation.

### **HUMBERTO SCHIAVONI**

Lawyer and PRO leader; he served as National President of the party and Director of the Binational Yacyretá Entity (EBY). In his capacity as PRO chairman, in 2016 he led an official delegation to Beijing and Chongqing, where institutional cooperation was agreed upon between the political training schools of both parties within the framework of the exchange programs that the Asian country maintains with foreign political forces (Sitio Andino, 2016). The delegation held meetings with members of the Political

Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, oriented toward understanding economic development processes.

Subsequently, in 2018, in his capacity as a representative of the Pensar Foundation, Schiavoni signed academic cooperation agreements in Beijing linked to the Belt and Road Initiative, holding meetings with authorities for the exchange of governance experiences (Infobae, 2018). Although his profile was focused on political and legislative articulation, his interventions underscored the importance of international technical cooperation and the study of development models, under a framework of capital diversity and institutional autonomy.

## **FULVIO POMPEO**

PRO leader and international relations specialist; he served as Secretary of Strategic Affairs of the Nation during the presidency of Mauricio Macri. He also served as Under-Secretary of International and Institutional Relations of the Buenos Aires City Government and currently holds the position of Secretary-General and International Relations of the City of Buenos Aires.

In 2016, he joined the PRO delegation that visited China to establish institutional ties with the International Department of the CCP, participating in meetings with the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (La Política Online, 2016). In 2019, he accompanied the official mission to Beijing to reinforce the bilateral agenda and coordinate high-level meetings between heads of state; during this visit, he held working sessions with government officials and visited Huawei headquarters. In his public interventions and academic articles, Pompeo has emphasized the importance of a balanced and diversified commercial relationship centered on national strategic interests.

## **PEDRO ROBLEDO**

PRO leader; he served as National Youth President of the party and National Under-Secretary of Youth. In July 2016, he joined the official mission that visited China to establish an institutional engagement agenda. During the tour of Beijing, Shanghai, and Chongqing, he participated in meetings with CCP representatives and productive sector stakeholders, oriented toward the

exchange of governance experiences and knowledge of technological hubs (DangDai, 2016).

### **FRANCISCO QUINTANA**

Lawyer and PRO leader; he currently serves as Secretary of Justice of the City of Buenos Aires. With a career that includes the first vice-presidency of the Buenos Aires Legislature and the presidency of the Judiciary Council, his ties with China have been manifested in both parliamentary missions and the executive sphere. In 2017, he consolidated this profile by joining the official delegation that accompanied then-President Mauricio Macri on his tour of the Asian country (BigBang! News, 2017). His participation has maintained a strictly institutional, legal, and formative focus, oriented toward the exchange of experiences on state modernization and urban management models, without projections toward resource exploitation areas or commercial transactions.

### **LLA (LA LIBERTAD AVANZA)**

#### **JULIANA SANTILLÁN**

National deputy for the Province of Buenos Aires (LLA). Since 2024 she has presided over the Parliamentary Friendship Group with China, the institutional dialogue forum between legislators from both countries. At the end of that year, she led a parliamentary delegation composed of deputies from various political parties that traveled to the PRC at the invitation of the National People's Assembly (Parlamentario, 2024). The mission focused on areas of interest for the local agenda, such as technology and agro-industry, limiting her relationship with the Asian country strictly to this institutional function in Congress.

#### **FERNANDO VILELLA**

Agricultural engineer, former dean of FAUBA, and academic with an extensive career in the analysis of the global agri-food system, author of numerous publications and seminars on commercial ties with Asia. Between December 2023 and July 2024, he served as National Secretary of Bioeconomy (LLA). His management had a technical and pragmatic profile, with the standout commercial mission at the beginning of 2024 that succeeded in reopening the PRC market for poultry meat and advancing sanitary protocols for pork offal (Bichos de Campo, 2024). His activity was limited strictly to market opening and the consolidation of export channels for the Argentine agro-industrial sector.

## 2.POLITICAL ACTORS AND CHANNELS OF INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS WITH CHINA: LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE SPHERES AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE COOPERATION

### ARGENTINE LEGISLATIVE PARTICIPATION IN CHINA-RELATED INITIATIVES: INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR EXECUTIVE FOREIGN POLICY (2010–2025)

In the bilateral relationship between Argentina and the People's Republic of China, it is clearly apparent that the most significant initiatives in strategic, technological, commercial, and diplomatic cooperation do not arise autonomously from the Legislative Branch. On the contrary, they almost entirely respond to impulses and negotiations promoted by the Executive Branch. Laws, declarations, and formal endorsements issued by the National Congress — whether through the passage of legislation, the ratification of international agreements, or the issuance of institutional statements — have originated as a consequence of consensuses previously managed by the Presidency, the Foreign Ministry, or the ministries with competence in foreign policy.

In this sense, the role of deputies and senators has been fundamentally one of providing institutional support, ratifying agreements, or expressing political backing for decisions already adopted by the Executive. Even those individual legislative interventions that acquired a degree of public visibility have occurred, for the most part, within the framework of debates, votes, or opinions previously advanced by the ruling party, and not as autonomous initiatives originating from Parliament.

The following presents a selection of significant interventions by national legislators who, throughout the period under review, illustrate this systematic pattern of parliamentary support for the policies promoted within the bilateral relationship with China.

## **ROBERTO BASUALDO – ENDORSEMENT OF A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON MINING COOPERATION WITH CHINA (2012)**

In 2012, the National Senate expressed its institutional support for the deepening of the bilateral relationship with the People's Republic of China through a declaration bill introduced by Senator Roberto Basualdo (National Senate, 2012). Within this framework, it was proposed that the chamber express its approval of the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Argentina's Secretary of Mining and China's Vice-Minister of Land and Resources, oriented toward cooperation in the fields of geology and mining. The agreement was signed in the context of Argentina's participation in the international exhibition China Mining 2012, a forum dedicated to technical exchange and investment promotion in the sector. This type of initiative was part of the national Executive's strategy at the time, aimed at strengthening economic and technological cooperation with the Asian country.

## **JJULIÁN DOMÍNGUEZ – INSTITUTIONAL DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FOR THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP (2014)**

In May 2014, the then-President of the Chamber of Deputies, Julián Domínguez, received a delegation from the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Congress, as part of the preparatory activities for President Xi Jinping's official visit to Argentina. During this meeting, Domínguez spoke positively about the strengthening of bilateral relations, noting that "Argentina and China have consolidated the political process by prioritizing the win-win premise" (Parlamentario, 2014). This statement was consistent with the Executive's policy at the time, which sought to consolidate China as a priority strategic partner, especially in infrastructure, production, and technology. Domínguez's institutional gesture was part of the parliamentary support for this diplomatic line.

## **GGUILLERMO CARMONA — DEFENSE OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE CHINESE SPACE STATION (2015)**

In 2015, during the legislative debate on the approval of the agreement for the installation of a Chinese space station in the Province of Neuquén, National Deputy Guillermo Carmona (Frente para la Victoria), who served as President of the Committee on Foreign Relations and Worship, acted as the ruling party's reporting member. In his address, Carmona emphatically defended technological cooperation with China and rejected the opposition's allegations regarding the alleged military use of the facility. In that context, he stated: "Attempting to pass off this agreement as a subterfuge for military use is an outrage... modernizing industry... increasing value added" (Parlamentario, 2015). Carmona's defense was consistent with the national Executive's strategy of presenting space cooperation as a pathway for Argentine scientific and technological development, aligned with cooperation agreements with Beijing.

## **CARMEN POLLEDO / JUAN MARIO PAIS — REAFFIRMATION OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE THROUGH THE PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP GROUP (2018)**

In 2018, the National Congress of Argentina hosted the third annual meeting of the Political Dialogue Committee between the Argentine Parliament and the National People's Assembly of the People's Republic of China. The opening was presided over by the presidents of the Parliamentary Friendship Groups (PFG): Deputy Carmen Polledo (PRO) and Senator Juan Mario Pais (Justicialism/FPV). Regarding the challenges of the relationship, Polledo stated: "Both our countries have an important bond and we seek to strengthen bilateral trade," while Senator Pais emphasized that relations "are based on equality and mutual benefit" (Chamber of Deputies of the Argentine Nation, 2018).

This activity took place in conjunction with the parliamentary diplomacy agenda advanced by Argentina's G20 presidency, functioning as a multipartisan validation forum for the objectives of "implementing joint projects" and "increasing political trust" promoted by the Chinese delegation. The proceedings concluded with the reading of a Joint Declaration, consolidating legislative support for the deepening of the strategic relationship in a pivotal year for national foreign policy.

## **CRISTINA FERNÁNDEZ DE KIRCHNER / JORGE TAIANA — ARGENTINA'S ACCESSION TO THE ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK (AIIB) (2020)**

In 2020, Argentina formalized its accession to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), one of the principal financial instruments promoted by the People's Republic of China. The initiative was ratified by the National Senate through the approval of a bill submitted by the Executive Branch, during a session presided over by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. During the legislative proceedings, Senator Jorge Taiana acted as the ruling party's reporting member, highlighting the advantages of access to international financing without conditionalities and at competitive rates, in line with the country's infrastructure development objectives (Grupo La Provincia, 2020).

*The parliamentary interventions described above illustrate that, rather than autonomous initiatives, the Argentine Congress has supported the foreign policy defined by successive governments with respect to China. Although they do not directly address the lithium issue, they contribute to understanding the institutional and political framework within which strategic agreements are developed — agreements that, in many cases, have an impact on sectors such as mining and energy.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP GROUP WITH THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

This body constitutes one of the principal formal instruments through which the Argentine Congress channels its ties with the Chinese legislature, particularly with the National People's Assembly. Its existence reflects the customary diplomatic practice between countries seeking to strengthen their bilateral ties through parliamentary diplomacy mechanisms that complement Executive Branch initiatives. In the Argentine case, this group began to gain relevance from 2012 onward, within the framework of the strategic rapprochement promoted by then-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and has maintained continuity across changes of government. The composition of the group has historically been heterogeneous, which reinforces its institutional character above and beyond temporary partisan divisions. In 2018, for example, it was presided over by Carmen Polledo (PRO)

in the Chamber of Deputies and Juan Manuel Pais (Frente para la Victoria) in the Senate, demonstrating a cross-partisan representation between the ruling party and the opposition. During the period 2020–2022, under the Frente de Todos government, the presidency was held by Deputy Marcos Cleri. In its current composition, assumed in 2024, figures of very diverse political profiles stand out: Juliana Santillán (La Libertad Avanza), who serves as president, alongside members such as Juan Marino (Unión por la Patria) and Julia Strada (Unión por la Patria), among others. This plurality reveals that the relationship with China has been sustained as a state policy beyond internal ideological differences.

The purpose of this group is to sustain a channel for political, cultural, and economic dialogue with Chinese legislators, to participate in exchanges, forums, and official visits, and to support the cooperation agendas established by the Executive Branch. Its existence reinforces the institutional profile of the bilateral relationship and lends parliamentary legitimacy to intergovernmental relations with Beijing.

### **FORMER EXECUTIVE BRANCH OFFICIALS MOST RELEVANT TO THE SINO-ARGENTINE RELATIONSHIP (2003–2023)**

The following identifies figures whose careers and functions within the structure of the National Public Administration (including ministries, state secretariats, and diplomatic missions) have participated in the dynamics of bilateral relations. These profiles are presented as channels for the implementation of state foreign policy and were involved in the technical management and follow-up of strategic agreements with the People's Republic of China:

JULIO DE VIDO, Minister of Federal Planning between 2003 and 2015, was one of the most influential figures in the conclusion of infrastructure, energy, transport, and public works agreements financed by China. He promoted strategic projects such as the Santa Cruz dams and railway agreements, consolidating Chinese presence in key sectors of the Argentine economy. (See development in Section 1 — political actors linked to PRC/PERONISM.)

SABINO VACA NARVAJA, who after his tenure as head of International Relations at the Senate served as Ambassador to China between 2021 and 2023, was a key element of the Executive Branch in managing Argentina's accession to the Belt and Road Initiative and in strengthening ties with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. His diplomatic management facilitated the continuity of infrastructure, energy, and trade projects, acting as the strategic nexus for the development of the comprehensive partnership between both countries. (See development in Section 1 — political actors linked to PRC/PERONISM.)

FRANCISCO CAFIERO, Secretary of International Defense Affairs between 2021 and 2023, played a relevant role in the strategic cooperation agenda with China in defense and military technology. From his position, he strengthened institutional ties in an area of sensitivity for regional geopolitics. (See development in Section 1 — political actors linked to PRC/PERONISM.)

DIEGO GUELAR, Ambassador to China between 2015 and 2019 during the Macri administration, stood out for his public advocacy of strengthening the bilateral relationship. He promoted Chinese investments in strategic sectors such as energy, infrastructure, and agricultural trade, and was a key figure in sustaining the continuity of bilateral relations beyond the change of government. (See development in Section 1 — political actors linked to PRC/PRO.)

GUILLERMO CARMONA, Secretary for the Malvinas, Antarctica, and the South Atlantic at the Foreign Ministry between 2021 and 2023, was involved in China-related matters due to his mandate in sensitive areas where Beijing has growing interests, such as Antarctic and maritime projection. During his tenure, he maintained dialogue with representatives of foreign powers, including China, on strategic issues concerning the natural resources of the South Atlantic and Antarctica — regions that Beijing observes with increasing attention in its commercial and logistics expansion plans. Previously, as a national deputy, he publicly defended the agreement for the Chinese space station in Neuquén and highlighted the importance of bilateral agreements in science and technology. His intervention reflected a consistent position in favor of strategic agreements, particularly those that strengthen Chinese presence in sensitive sectors.

*For methodological purposes, this section has referred back to figures previously developed in Section 1, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition and maintain the report's coherence. This recurrence of names itself reflects the dynamics of Argentine politics, in which the actors relevant to the Sino-Argentine relationship tend to occupy different roles over time, reinforcing their centrality in this agenda.*

## **CHAMBERS, ASSOCIATIONS, AND FORUMS LINKED TO CHINA**

Relations between Argentina and the People's Republic of China are not limited to traditional state or diplomatic channels, but are also articulated through a dense network of intermediate institutions. Binational chambers, bilateral councils, and think tanks are relevant actors in the articulation of economic, cultural, and strategic ties with the Asian giant. These organizations — some with a business profile, others oriented toward public diplomacy or academic analysis — help to institutionalize the bilateral relationship and frequently function as nexuses between the public sector, the private sector, and civil society. Certain parliamentary spaces and training networks also reinforce this interlocution architecture, lending it political reach and federal breadth.

### **ARGENTINE-CHINESE CHAMBER OF PRODUCTION, INDUSTRY, AND COMMERCE (CACC)**

Founded in 1984, it is the principal binational chamber in industry, commerce, and services between Argentina and China. Its objective is to promote bilateral exchange and encourage reciprocal investments, acting as a fundamental bridge between businesspeople from both countries. The CACC organizes trade missions, seminars, and business forums, and maintains a fluid relationship with various Argentine government ministries — including Foreign Affairs, Economy, Production, and Agriculture — as well as with Chinese diplomatic representations in Argentina.

The Chamber is currently presided over by Sergio Spadone, while Alejandra Conconi serves as executive director (Argentine-Chinese Chamber, 2020). Both are key figures in dialogue with public and private sector actors, participating in official events, advising on policy formulation, and supporting initiatives aimed at facilitating productive and commercial projects linked to China.

The CACC plays a central role in the institutionalization of the bilateral economic relationship, translating into concrete actions such as business missions, bilateral meetings, and advisory services for exporters and importers.

### **ARGENTINE-CHINESE COUNCIL**

This is a non-profit civil association that has consolidated itself as a key management forum for fostering ties between both countries in areas such as trade, culture, tourism, and education. From its headquarters in Buenos Aires, it organizes trade missions, specialized seminars, and promotional meetings with Chinese delegations, both business and diplomatic. In August 2020, Ernesto Fernández Taboada took over as executive director; he had previously led the Argentine-Chinese Chamber for over two decades and currently heads training and coordination programs with the private sector and government. Under his leadership, the Council has organized sectoral meetings with Argentine companies, participated in international trade fairs, and promoted knowledge of the Chinese market among national SMEs.

### **ARGENTINE COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (CARI)**

CARI is one of Argentina's most prominent think tanks in the area of foreign policy. Although its focus is global, it has specialized committees on Asia, making it a relevant actor in the study of the relationship with China. Unlike business chambers, CARI functions as a strategic debate forum that produces reports and organizes conferences oriented toward the analysis of Argentine foreign policy.

Among its key figures stand out individuals such as José Octavio Bordón and Jorge Faurie, whose diplomatic experience provides a pragmatic perspective that complements academic analysis, connecting the Council with decision-making processes. Through seminars and studies, CARI maintains frequent dialogue with officials and specialists linked to the strategic agenda with Beijing.

## JUJUY, SALTA, AND CATAMARCA: PROVINCIAL DYNAMICS AROUND LITHIUM PROJECTS WITH CHINESE PARTICIPATION

In the Argentine case, the provincial dimension occupies a relevant place in the management of natural resources, within the framework of the current federal system. In this context, the provinces of the so-called "Lithium Triangle" concentrate both resource ownership and the direct relationship with the companies participating in their development, making them a central space for understanding how these projects are articulated in practice.

### -JUJUY

In Jujuy, the strategic management of state mining resources is channeled through JEMSE (Jujuy Energía y Minería Sociedad del Estado — Jujuy Energy and Mining State Company). Since 2023, its presidency has been held by Dr. Exequiel Ivacevich, who leads institutional dialogue with the foreign investors that make up the province's productive matrix.

Under this leadership, the strategic partnership with Ganfeng Lithium in the Cauchari-Olaroz project has been reaffirmed. In this asset, the Chinese company is the majority partner alongside Canada's Lithium Americas, with JEMSE holding an 8.5% stake. The project today represents one of the country's principal mining investment channels (Mining.com, 2024). During 2023, the commissioning of the production plant took place with the presence of provincial authorities and company executives, consolidating the operational continuity of existing agreements.

The policy of promoting mining investment is currently coordinated by Juan Carlos Abud from the Ministry of Economic Development and Production, and by José Gabriel Gómez at the Secretariat of Mining and Hydrocarbons. Both officials maintain a technical coordination agenda with sector actors in forums such as COFEMIN (Federal Mining Council), facilitating the development of the province's energy and mining project portfolio.

In summary, Jujuy's mining structure sustains a consolidated technical and commercial relationship in the Cauchari-Olaroz project. This articulation, channeled through JEMSE, focuses on the execution of productive commitments under international standards and operational coordination with the consortium comprising Chinese and Canadian capital.

## **-SALTA**

In the Province of Salta, the management of mining resources and investment attraction are articulated through the Ministry of Production and Sustainable Development and the state-owned company REMSA S.A. (Recursos Energéticos y Mineros de Salta — Energy and Mining Resources of Salta). These bodies have established an institutional framework oriented toward the expansion of productive capacity in the province's salt flats, where Chinese-capital companies maintain a strategic stake in large-scale projects.

Under the management of Minister Martín de los Ríos, the province has sought to consolidate a diversified project portfolio. Within this framework, Tibet Summit Resources has projected an investment of USD 1.7 billion for the construction of lithium processing plants in the Arizaro and Diablillos salt flats (Cruz, 2023). The company has also formalized commitments to increase its production and refining capacity in the region (Yicai Global, 2021).

REMSA, under the presidency of CPA Javier Montero, fulfills a technical role in the management of mining areas and logistics for these projects. Montero has maintained the sector's internationalization strategy, working in coordination with Dr. Romina Sassarini, a REMSA Board member and representative in COFEMIN. Both officials play a central role in the technical and regulatory articulation needed to position Salta as an investment destination under criteria of legal certainty.

In summary, Salta has structured an institutional architecture that prioritizes regulatory predictability for capital flows. This strategy combines ministerial technical management with REMSA's operational capacity, consolidating a work scheme oriented toward the execution of the lithium projects projected by firms such as Tibet Summit and Ganfeng Lithium.

## **-CATAMARCA**

The Province of Catamarca presents a consolidated institutional articulation oriented toward the development of the lithium sector, promoting a strategy for the attraction of external capital in its principal salt flats. The leadership of this mining policy is centralized in the Ministry of Mining, currently headed by Dr. Teresita Regalado, and in the state-owned company CAMYEN S.E. (Catamarca Minera y Energética Sociedad del Estado — Catamarca Mining and Energy State Company), presided over by Hugo Gabriel Moya.

Under this framework, the province has promoted the advancement of large-scale projects with Chinese capital participation. The most relevant asset at present is the Tres Quebradas (3Q) project, located in Fiambalá and operated by Zijin Mining (through its subsidiary Liex) (Ramseyer & Bergero, 2024). This deposit, which formally commenced its productive phase at the end of 2025, represents one of the most recent milestones in the province's technical and commercial relationship with Asian investment groups.

Likewise, Zangge Mining (in partnership with Canada's Ultra Lithium) maintains its presence in the territory through the Laguna Verde project, located in the northern section of the Salar de Antofalla, consolidating the province's positioning as a strategic jurisdiction for the supply of critical minerals (Ramseyer & Bergero, 2024).

The institutional structure is completed by Catamarca's participation in bodies such as YMAD and COFEMIN, where the province maintains a position of regulatory predictability and technical cooperation for the execution of high-impact mining projects.

In summary, Catamarca has structured a management architecture that combines ministerial authority with CAMYEN S.E.'s operational capacity for the development of investments in the lithium sector. This strategy has enabled a sustained relationship with operators such as Zijin Mining and Ganfeng, directing provincial efforts toward the consolidation of its productive and energy matrix.

### 3.FORMAL VISITS AND INSTITUTIONAL RAPPROCHEMENT MISSIONS

*The bilateral relationship between Argentina and the People's Republic of China has had, since 2004, a central chapter in high-level visits, which consolidated an agenda of economic, commercial, financial, and political cooperation. These presidential encounters, both in Beijing and in Buenos Aires, allowed for the formalization of strategic agreements that defined the profile of the relationship between both countries over the past two decades.*

## OFFICIAL VISITS OF ARGENTINE PRESIDENTS TO CHINA AND CHINESE PRESIDENTS TO ARGENTINA (2004–2024)

In November 2004, Néstor Kirchner was received in Beijing by his counterpart Hu Jintao. During that trip, both parties signed a joint declaration in which they highlighted the beginning of a "strategic partnership relationship" and underscored the "high levels of economic complementarity" between both countries. Kirchner emphasized the need to elevate bilateral trade to a new level and the importance of a political relationship "without confrontations or interference." Although investments of USD 20 billion were announced during the visit (which were not fully materialized), the trip marked a symbolic milestone, inaugurating a period of growing political closeness that would deepen in subsequent years.

During Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's first term, her official visit to China took place in July 2010, where she held meetings with the senior authorities of the Chinese Communist Party and signed a series of agreements aimed at broadening bilateral trade and scientific and technological cooperation. Although of lesser media impact than her subsequent visit, this trip was key to sustaining the bilateral relationship initiated by Néstor Kirchner and preparing the ground for greater articulation in strategic projects (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2010).

The most significant visit took place in February 2015, during Fernández de Kirchner's second term. On that occasion, more than 15 agreements were signed in key areas including railway infrastructure (Belgrano Cargas), hydroelectric energy (Néstor Kirchner and Jorge Cepernic dams), and space cooperation. Both governments also agreed to advance the strengthening of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, a diplomatic category implying a qualitative leap in the relationship. Cristina Fernández stated on that occasion that the relationship with China was no longer merely commercial, but a geopolitical alliance (Casa Rosada, 2015; Myers & Gallagher, 2017). This visit consolidated Argentina's entry into the Asian giant's direct sphere of influence, with both economic and institutional implications.

Mauricio Macri traveled to China in 2017, on which occasion various agreements were signed, most notably the Joint Action Plan for Strategic Cooperation 2017–2021, which set out bilateral priorities for the following years. Infrastructure, energy, and transport were central areas, with negotiations for the construction of nuclear power plants with Chinese financing and technology standing out. Phytosanitary protocols were also agreed upon, opening new Argentine exports, while progress was made in scientific, technological, fiscal, and financial cooperation. In this context, the president participated in the "One Belt, One Road for International Cooperation" forum, positioning the country as a strategic nexus for regional trade and as a key provider of resources and technology (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship, 2017).

During Alberto Fernández's presidency, two visits to China were undertaken. In 2022, the visit formalized Argentina's accession to the Belt and Road Initiative through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, marking Argentina's adherence to this ambitious global infrastructure scheme promoted by Beijing. In October 2023, Fernández returned to China to participate in the Belt and Road Forum, where he publicly expressed gratitude for the financial support received from the Chinese government. On that occasion, he met with Xi Jinping to agree on the expansion of the currency swap between both central banks and expressed Argentina's interest in joining the New Development Bank (NDB) of the BRICS and the bloc itself as a full member.

As for the current administration of Javier Milei, no official trip to China has been undertaken to date. However, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in November 2024, Milei held a bilateral meeting with Xi Jinping. At that meeting, existing trade and financial agreements were reaffirmed and new opportunities to strengthen the bilateral relationship were explored. Despite his initially critical rhetoric toward the Chinese regime, Milei displayed a pragmatic shift in foreign policy at this encounter, and both parties exchanged invitations to formalize future state visits.

During the same period, the People's Republic of China also undertook presidential visits to Argentina that helped reinforce this bilateral dynamic. In November 2004, President Hu Jintao arrived in Buenos Aires, and five framework agreements were signed, most notably Argentina's commitment to

recognize China as a market economy — a milestone of great symbolic and strategic weight in Beijing's international projection. This recognition facilitated the advancement of commercial and sectoral agreements, including space cooperation, tourism, railway activities, and education, as well as investment projects in hydrocarbons, telecommunications, and housing. This gesture positioned Argentina, alongside Brazil and Chile, as one of the first countries in the region to accompany China in this phase of its external projection.

Xi Jinping visited Argentina on two occasions. In 2014, the visit formalized the elevation of the relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and agreements were signed in key areas including energy, infrastructure, finance, trade, and agriculture. Of particular note were the agreement to establish a local currency swap of USD 11 billion between the central banks, as well as financing commitments for the Santa Cruz River dams and the expansion of the Atucha III power plant, together with the promotion of modernization of the Belgrano Cargas railway. In 2018, Xi returned to Buenos Aires on the occasion of the G20 Summit and held a bilateral meeting with Mauricio Macri, where more than 30 cooperation agreements were signed, reaffirming the economic and political ties between both nations.

These presidential visits, both Argentine and Chinese, configure a line of diplomatic and strategic continuity that has sustained, over the past twenty years, the construction of a privileged interlocution between both countries. They have been the principal vector for the signing of agreements involving strategic financing, infrastructure, energy, and financial cooperation, consolidating China as a central partner in Argentina's international projection.

## VISITS OF ARGENTINE GOVERNORS TO CHINA: JUJUY, SALTA, AND CATAMARCA (2004–2025)

The provinces of northern Argentina — especially Jujuy, Salta, and Catamarca — have consolidated themselves as key actors in the Sino-Argentine agenda. Driven by the presence of strategic resources such as lithium, their provincial authorities have strengthened institutional ties with the People's Republic of China. This model of cooperation, maintained across successive administrations, is based on agreements in mining, infrastructure, and finance, reflecting the strategic priority of these regions in the bilateral relationship.

Historically, the attraction of investment linked to Jujuy's natural resources operated under a model of institutional delegation, subordinated to the framework agreements that the National Executive established with foreign states or capital. However, from 2015 onward, a shift in the provincial management approach is observed, grounded in the powers granted by Article 124 of the National Constitution, which gives the provinces original ownership of their resources. This process allowed Jujuy to transition from being a district receiving centralized investment flows to a direct manager of its strategic assets (particularly in mining and energy), establishing its own technical and financial ties with various global actors, among which the People's Republic of China stands out for its volume of infrastructure investment.

This new model of engagement was initially materialized through financing from the Export-Import Bank of China (Exim Bank) for the construction of the Cauchari solar complex, an infrastructure milestone backed by Provincial Law No. 5949 (Official Gazette of the Province of Jujuy, 2016). Beyond the change of provincial executive authorities in 2023, this strategy has maintained a marked operational continuity oriented toward the industrialization of critical inputs.

In May 2024, an official provincial mission to China made it possible to formalize institutional agreements with leading global firms: a commitment with Gotion for the development of a 200 MW solar park at "El Pongo" and with Tsingshan Mining for the installation of a hydrochloric acid plant in the Perico Industrial Park stood out. The visit also prioritized the promotion of the La Quiaca Free Trade Zone and technical training projects in mining and renewa-

ble energy (Government of the Province of Jujuy, 2024). These actions integrate local productive capacities into global supply chains linked to the People's Republic of China, situating the province's strategic position in the lithium market and the energy transition.

In a dynamic similar to that observed in Jujuy regarding natural resource management, Salta has consolidated a management model oriented toward the attraction of strategic investments under the framework of its provincial autonomy. During the administration of Juan Manuel Urtubey (2007–2019), engagement with the People's Republic of China focused on technical and commercial missions, with China Tobacco International Corp. showing interest in 2009 and meetings with BYD Industries in 2017 to evaluate electric mobility projects. These initiatives were part of an opening strategy that also included commitments with French, American, and Australian capital.

Under the governorship of Gustavo Sáenz (2019–present), although no official governor-level missions to China have been recorded, the province has deepened the relationship through city diplomacy and direct contact with mining operators. A significant milestone was the sister-city relationship established with Xuzhou in 2019, aimed at strengthening technological and commercial ties. In the mining sphere, the administration has coordinated projects with firms such as Ganfeng, Tibet Summit, and Hanaq, alongside other large-scale ventures led by Anglo-Australian Rio Tinto and France's Eramet.

By February 2025, this engagement reached an industrialization milestone with the inauguration of Ganfeng Lithium's plant at the General Güemes Industrial Park, the third lithium processing plant in production in the province (Government of the Province of Salta, 2025). This installation, an integral part of the Mariana Project (located in the Llullaillaco Salt Flat), includes a photovoltaic solar park designed under an off-grid model, positioning it as the largest industrial self-consumption complex in Argentina and ensuring comprehensive energy self-sufficiency for the process. This value-added scheme was recently consolidated, in February 2026, with the first rail export of lithium chloride to international markets, marking a differentiation in the regional logistics and export basket linked to the energy transition.

Focusing the analysis on the Province of Catamarca — a key piece of the Lithium Triangle and a hub for international capital investment — the relationship with the People's Republic of China has intensified significantly in recent years. During the administration of Lucía Corpacci (2011–2019), while no official visits by the governor were recorded, technical approaches began in 2018 for the Catamarca Solar project, which incorporated Chinese-origin photovoltaic technology.

Under the administration of Raúl Jalil (2019–present), the province has deepened its international engagement policy. Jalil has led negotiations in the Asian country, most notably his participation in the presidential delegation of 2022 and the provincial mission of April 2023. In the latter, he held meetings with Zijin Mining Group executives to advance lithium industrialization projects and optimize export logistics through the San Francisco Pass (Letra P, 2023).

This dialogue with Chinese capital, however, coexists with the presence of other global actors. Catamarca's mining sector is characterized by a landscape in which Arcadium Lithium (a merger of American and Australian capital) leads production in the Salar del Hombre Muerto. South Korea's POSCO also develops significant investments in the region. This scenario reflects that, while Catamarca has strengthened ties with China for the development of projects such as Tres Quebradas (Zijin), the province maintains a balance of forces with Western and non-Chinese Asian capital, consolidating itself as an internationally competitive mining hub.

## **CHANNELS OF DIALOGUE AND BILATERAL COOPERATION**

The relationship between Argentina and China develops through various dialogue forums that operate at different levels of influence and with distinct objectives. These spaces range from institutional policy to commercial interaction between private actors, and constitute the foundation upon which the strategic relationship between both countries rests.

Overall, Argentina's participation in these meetings reflects both the interest in strengthening economic ties with the Asian giant and the progressive integration of provinces and strategic sectors (especially mining, lithium, and infrastructure) into the networks of cooperation and investment that China fos-

ters in Latin America. To analyze this dynamic, it is useful to distinguish four principal spheres:

- Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Oriented toward large-scale infrastructure projects and state-to-state financing.
- China–CELAC Forum: The principal mechanism for political and diplomatic concertation at the regional level.
- China–LAC Business Summit: A platform linking provincial governments and productive sectors with investment capital.
- China–LAC Expo: A technical and commercial channel for product insertion and direct company-to-company contact.

### **ARGENTINE DELEGATIONS TO THE BELT AND ROAD FORUM (2017–2023)**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) constitutes China's principal platform for global projection. Inspired by the historic Silk Road, it seeks to promote commercial and infrastructure integration on a transcontinental scale through strategic investments. In Latin America, the initiative has gained traction with the accession of more than 20 countries, a process in which the Argentine Republic formalized its incorporation in February 2022. National participation in BRI forums has developed across three instances that reflect the changes in the country's geopolitical priorities.

Finally, in October 2023, under the presidency of Alberto Fernández, Argentina attended the third forum already as an acceding country, following the aforementioned signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2022. This last presidential mission focused on the reaffirmation of the political relationship and the management of financial assistance through the expansion of the currency swap.

## ARGENTINA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CHINA–CELAC FORUM

The China–CELAC Forum, established in 2014, functions as the principal mechanism for political dialogue and multilateral cooperation between China and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Since its inception, Argentina has maintained an active presence, viewing this space as a strategic platform for coordinating agendas on economic, technological, and infrastructure matters. The first Ministerial Meeting, held in Beijing in January 2015, laid the foundations of this relationship through the signing of the 2015–2019 Cooperation Plan and the Beijing Declaration, documents that defined priority areas such as energy, agriculture, and science.

During the Macri administration, Argentina participated in the second Ministerial Meeting held in Santiago de Chile in January 2018. On that occasion, the country reaffirmed its institutional commitment to the forum through the signing of the 2019–2021 Action Plan, maintaining continuity with previous strategic guidelines. Subsequently, in December 2021 and under the presidency of Alberto Fernández, national participation was expressed at the third Ministerial Meeting (held virtually), where the 2022–2024 Action Plan was approved. This document incorporated priorities linked to sustainable development, technological innovation, and digital connectivity, adapting the forum's objectives to the demands of the post-pandemic global agenda.

A significant shift in Argentina's posture was recorded in May 2025, during the fourth Ministerial Meeting in Beijing. Under the Milei administration, the country sent a delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Eduardo Bustamante and the head of the Foreign Ministry's Cabinet, Ricardo Lachterman. On this occasion, while Argentina participated in the meeting, it chose not to sign the final declaration, becoming the only member country to abstain (El Estratégico, 2025). This decision marked a departure in Argentine foreign policy with respect to the multilateral approach of the forum and the nature of its political relationship with the People's Republic of China.

## ARGENTINE DELEGATIONS AT THE CHINA–LAC BUSINESS SUMMIT

The China–LAC Business Summit, organized since 2007 by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) together with the People's Bank of China and the IDB, constitutes one of the most significant forums for the strengthening of economic ties between the Asian country and Latin America. This forum, which alternates venues annually, operates as a strategic platform for promoting investment and strengthening cooperation between governments and private sectors. Argentina's participation in recent editions reflects a sustained interest in attracting capital in key areas such as infrastructure, energy, and natural resources.

At the 12th edition, held in 2018 in Zhuhai, the high-level Argentine delegation was led by then-Minister Rogelio Frigerio, accompanied by financial authorities and the Governor of Entre Ríos, Gustavo Bordet. The focus of that mission was on financing for public works and market opening for regional economies. Subsequently, at the 2021 edition in Chongqing, while official participation was of lower rank due to the health context, the country achieved a significant milestone in the mining sector. Within that framework, an investment commitment of USD 700 million was finalized between Tibet Summit Resources and the Province of Salta for lithium carbonate extraction, consolidating one of the most significant productive cooperation understandings to emerge from this forum (News ArgenChina, 2021).

Finally, the 16th edition of 2023 in Beijing once again featured a diversified representation of officials and businesspeople from sectors such as technology, mining, and services. The delegation, which included Central Bank and Foreign Ministry authorities alongside Ambassador Sabino Vaca Narvaja, reinforced national presence in the attraction of strategic investments. Although no new bilateral protocols of the magnitude achieved in 2021 were signed at the main event, Argentine participation underscored the continuity of the commercial relationship and the pursuit of opportunities in areas such as the knowledge economy and cultural tourism, complementing prior economic promotion actions carried out in Buenos Aires.

## **PARTICIPACIÓN DE ARGENTINA EN CHINA-LAC EXPO**

The China-LAC Expo is a trade exhibition organized periodically in China, alternating between the cities of Zhuhai and Hainan, oriented toward promoting business exchange between Chinese and Latin American companies. Unlike other forums with a political and institutional profile, this trade fair has a strictly commercial character, focused on the generation of business opportunities in strategic sectors such as agro-industry, food, technology, and energy.

Argentina has participated consistently through the Argentine Investment and International Trade Agency (AAICI), which has coordinated national presence through the organization of institutional pavilions. These spaces have sought to project emblematic Argentine products, particularly those linked to the food industry, the wine sector, and more recently, technological and services capabilities. Argentina's participation in this fair falls within its commercial insertion strategy in the Chinese market, prioritizing direct company-to-company engagement and the strengthening of its presence in specific commercial niches.

## **4. TRAINING PROGRAMS, SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS, AND SOFT POWER**

### **TRAINING PROGRAMS PROMOTED BY THE ASIAN GIANT**

The People's Republic of China has consolidated a scholarship system that various analysts consider a central element of its public diplomacy. These academic mobility schemes could be considered soft power instruments oriented toward projecting its development model and strengthening ties with foreign technical cadres. Among the most prominent instruments are the following:

**China Scholarship Council (CSC):** Dependent on the Ministry of Education, it is the principal administrator of Chinese Government Scholarships (CGS). It offers full or partial financing for undergraduate and postgraduate studies, as well as research residencies. Its management is typically conducted through diplomatic delegations or inter-university agreements.

**Ministry of Commerce of China (MOFCOM):** Its programs are specifically oriented toward the training of public officials, professionals, and academics from developing countries. These grants prioritize strategic areas such as public administration, international trade, and technology management, with the objective of training technicians who can act as interlocutors in the bilateral relationship.

**Center for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC – formerly Hanban):** Its programs are specifically oriented toward the training of public officials, professionals, and academics from developing countries. These grants prioritize strategic areas such as public administration, international trade, and technology management, with the objective of training technicians who can act as interlocutors in the bilateral relationship.

In addition to these central channels, there are complementary mechanisms such as agreements between local governments (Chinese provinces or municipalities) and direct inter-university agreements that permit tuition waivers or short-term exchanges. Collectively, this training structure would enable the Asian power not only to diffuse its culture, but also to generate long-term professional and political networks in the region.

Within the framework of the China–CELAC Cooperation Plan (2015–2019), the Chinese government formally committed to providing 6,000 governmental scholarships for Latin America, along with 6,000 internships and 400 job opportunities offered during the same period (Cardenal, 2017). These programs have allowed numerous Argentine professionals to access specializations in areas including law, international relations, and trade, consolidating a pool of human resources with direct knowledge of the Chinese operational dynamic.

## **PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORIES AND INFLUENCE IN STRATEGIC SECTORS**

The training of technical and academic cadres in the People's Republic of China has given rise to a network of Argentine professionals who occupy roles

of technical liaison in strategic sectors. The following list, without claiming to be exhaustive, illustrates how training residencies and exchange programs translate into careers with influence across various relevant spheres:

- **Management and Strategy:** In the field of defense and higher education, Gonzalo Tordini stands out — a former postgraduate scholarship recipient and current director of the Sino-Argentine Strategic Program (PESA) at the National Defense University. His work has been consistent in coordinating study spaces and graduate networks, such as the Association of Argentina-China Alumni (ADEBAC).
- **Strategic Sectors (Mining and Lithium):** A technical profile worth noting is that of Augusto Aquiles Gonçalves, who, after completing studies at the Silk Road School (Renmin University), works as legal counsel for Zijin Mining.
- **Academic Research:** Within the scientific-university system, Dr. Ignacio Villagrán (CONICET/UBA) represents a profile of diversified formation, with a doctorate obtained in the United States and research residencies at Beijing Normal University. As director of the Argentina-China Studies Center (CEACH), he coordinates academic debates and research programs linked to the Belt and Road Initiative in Argentina.
- **Dissemination and Culture:** There are also established figures who, without necessarily having been beneficiaries of undergraduate scholarship programs, act as opinion leaders. Such is the case of Gustavo Ng, director of the magazine "DangDai", whose cultural dissemination work was recognized in 2023 with the Special Book Award, positioning him as an interlocutor in the narrative of the bilateral relationship.

*The information presented here has been gathered from public sources, journalistic articles, and institutional data openly available online. The selection of these profiles reflects their current relevance in leadership or technical advisory positions, illustrating the diversity of spheres — academic, legal, business, and media — in which professional engagement with the Asian country is projected.*

## THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE IN THE NOA PROVINCES

The Confucius Institute (CI) operates in Argentina as the People's Republic of China's principal vector of public diplomacy, functioning through cooperation agreements between national universities and their counterparts in the Asian country. Beyond technical language instruction, these centers constitute a platform for the generation of cultural affinity frameworks and the long-term construction of institutional contact networks. Currently, the country has central headquarters at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), the National University of La Plata (UNLP), and the National University of Córdoba (UNC). From these hubs, a scheme of "teaching points" has been developed that allows educational influence to extend into the country's interior, coordinating training activities, scholarships, and international certifications that facilitate the integration of local cadres into the bilateral ecosystem.

In the Province of Salta, this dynamic is channeled through an agreement between the Catholic University of Salta (UCASAL) and the Confucius Institute of the UNLP. This linkage has its antecedents in cooperation agreements promoted in 2013 by then-National Senator Sonia Escudero, which involved the provincial Ministry of Education and local universities with the Education Department of Jiangsu Province. Currently, UCASAL is an official examination center for HSK level certifications, establishing itself as the linguistic validation hub in the province. While there were initiatives to integrate the language into the early public education system, the offering has been concentrated predominantly in the university sphere and in the training of technical cadres.

Similarly, in Jujuy, the Catholic University of Santiago del Estero (UCSE) (Jujuy Campus) has functioned as a teaching point since 2015 (Confucius Institute UNLP, 2024). In 2017, Confucius Institute authorities held discussions with the then-Minister of Education, Isolda Calsina, with the objective of evaluating the incorporation of Mandarin into the provincial public education system as part of an international opening strategy. Although this large-scale project was not fully formalized at the basic education levels, activity remains active at the higher education platform, to which course offerings at the National University of Jujuy (UNJu) have recently been added.

Unlike neighboring provinces, Catamarca does not register the presence of teaching centers linked to the Confucius Institute, nor institutionally broad lan-

guage exchange programs. In this jurisdiction, the relationship with People's Republic of China entities is markedly economic and productive in character, focused almost exclusively on mining activity and the lithium value chain. This absence of cultural formation mechanisms suggests that, in Catamarcan territory, the bilateral relationship has been prioritized along the axis of direct investment and extractive infrastructure, dispensing with the educational diplomacy and social license-seeking strategies observed in other parts of the greater North.

## **FOUNDATIONS, THINK TANKS, AND RESEARCH CENTERS LINKED TO CHINA**

Beyond the formal educational sphere, Argentina is home to analytical centers and academic spaces that maintain active engagement with entities of the People's Republic of China. As platforms for intellectual diplomacy, these spaces articulate technical and political interests, developing reference frameworks that tend to influence public perception of the strategic relationship with the Asian country, fostering fluid institutional dialogue in key areas of the common agenda.

Within this ecosystem, the Argentina-China Studies Center (CEACh), housed at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), was established in 2016 as a cooperation space with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Its principal function consists of promoting research and postgraduate training, fostering the exchange of specialized knowledge between both nations (University of Buenos Aires, n.d.). For its part, the Argentine Council for International Relations Foundation (CARI) positions itself as a central actor in foreign policy analysis through its Committee on Asian Affairs. In its role as a non-governmental dialogue platform, CARI maintains constant exchange with Chinese specialists, facilitating technical debate and promoting a mutual understanding agenda (Argentine Council for International Relations, n.d.).

There are also research groups with a consolidated track record in academic output. The Study Group on Asia and Latin America (GESAAL), belonging to the Institute of Latin American and Caribbean Studies at UBA, publishes the biannual journal *Asia/América Latina* and organizes academic activities with

the participation of regional universities, consolidating transnational ties (GESAAL, n.d.). In a similar vein, the Chinese Studies Center (CECHINO) of the National University of La Plata (UNLP), dependent on the Institute of International Relations, acts as a regional reference hub; in 2024, it organized the III Latin American Congress of Chinese Studies in collaboration with Chinese institutions, reinforcing scientific cooperation ties (CECHINO-UNLP, 2024).

Unlike centers integrated into public university structures, the Latin American Center for Political and Economic Studies on China (CLEPEC) constitutes itself as a civil society organization focused on the articulation of institutional relations. Founded by Francisco Cafiero and Gonzalo Tordini, CLEPEC plays an active role in training and engagement with Chinese bodies, positioning itself as an interlocution platform that facilitates regional cooperation. Its activity contributes to the creation of contact networks between the political system and the academic sphere, integrating itself into the scheme of cultural and intellectual exchange linked to China in Argentina (CLEPEC, n.d.).

## **POLITICAL DIMENSIONS AND CONTROVERSIES IN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

China's engagement strategy has demonstrated a remarkable ideological cross-cutting ability, managing to project its influence toward political sectors of diverse stripes, including those with a rhetoric of greater geopolitical distancing. A relevant indicator of this dynamic is the sustained relationship with technical cadres and legislators linked to the Union of Latin American Parties (UPLA), an organization that brings together the center-right forces of the region.

In January 2026, this capacity for interlocution was manifested in an official mission to Beijing and Shanghai comprising national deputies from La Libertad Avanza and the PRO (a party integrated into the UPLA structure). According to the records of the invitation and journalistic coverage of the event, the trip was financed by the Department of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and included visits to the corporate headquarters of strategic companies such as Huawei (TN, 2026). These types of exchanges, characterized by various press sectors as exercises in influence diplomacy,

suggest that the Asian power prioritizes the consolidation of operational ties with the Argentine political leadership above partisan affinities or declared ideological alignments.

Relationship with technical cadres and legislators linked to the Union of Latin American Parties (UPLA), an organization that brings together the center-right forces of the region.

## **EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION AND TECHNICAL TRAINING AGREEMENTS WITH CHINA IN THE NOA PROVINCES**

### **JUJUY**

In February 2024, the National University of Jujuy (UNJu) signed a cooperation agreement with Tsingshan Holding Group, a company linked to the lithium industry and established in the Perico Industrial Park. The agreement, signed by Vice-Rector Liliana Bergesio, provides for students of Mining Engineering, Industrial Engineering, and Chemical Engineering to undertake internships and technical training residencies in China. The ceremony was attended by Jhon Li, President of Tsingshan Argentina, and Hernando Lisak, the company's Community Relations Superintendent (UNJu News, 2024).

In August of the same year, UNJu renewed the agreement with Tsingshan Holding Group. During the ceremony, Rector Mario Bonillo and Vice-Rector Bergesio met again with company representatives to expand the internship program, which includes visits, technical training, and professional practice in China, with a particular focus on encouraging women's participation in Engineering programs (UNJu News, 2024).

Furthermore, since 2015, the Jujuy campus of the Catholic University of Santiago del Estero (UCSE-DASS) has maintained an active engagement with Chinese institutions through its incorporation as a Teaching Point of the Confucius Institute of the National University of La Plata (UNLP), offering language courses, cultural activities, and academic cooperation oriented toward the dissemination of Chinese language and culture (Confucius Institute UNLP, 2024).

### **SALTA**

In April 2024, the Catholic University of Salta (UCASa) signed an agreement with the China University of Mining and Technology (CUMT) and Sunwoda

Electronic Co. Ltd., a lithium battery manufacturer headquartered in Shenzhen. The agreement establishes the creation of a Joint Research Center for Mineral Resources and Lithium Batteries, the donation of equipment, scientific cooperation, internships for Argentine students, and training programs for local researchers. The agreement was signed by Rector Rodolfo Gallo Cornejo, Vice-Rector Daniel Sánchez Fernández, and Shenzhen municipal authorities (UCASAL, 2024).

This link is part of a prior trajectory: in May 2021, UCASal had signed a strategic cooperation memorandum with CUMT to develop academic exchange programs and research in microbial mining and ecological restoration. On that occasion, Professor Carolina Sánchez, former National Secretary of Mining Policy, participated as an institutional representative (Editorial RN, 2025).

Between 2019 and 2021, UCASal advanced the creation of a biotechnology laboratory for the restoration of mining soils and environmental remediation, in collaboration with Chinese universities including CUMT itself, the China University of Communications (CUC), Jinan University, and Fujian University. These initiatives included academic and technical exchanges, as well as institutional meetings with the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Argentina, notably the visit of Ambassador Wang Wei (UCASAL, 2021).

## CATAMARCA

In August 2024, during an official mission to China, the Province of Catamarca signed a memorandum of understanding oriented toward promoting technical training, research, and the development of lithium-based mining technology. The signing consortium included Chinese companies Lishang New Energy Technology, Sichuan Three Rare Times Technology, and Grupo Audes. On behalf of Catamarca, the agreement was signed by Deputy Governor Rubén Dusso, Minister Verónica Soria, Minister Marcelo Murúa, the Secretary of University Extension of the UNCa Adolfo Agüero, the President of the Mining Suppliers Chamber Manuel Gómez Bello, and the Secretary-General of the Argentine Mining Workers' Association Gustavo Molina. On behalf of the Chinese companies, Liu Shengchun and Xu Gang signed. The agreement contemplates the creation of a Research and Training Center for direct lithium extraction technologies, the transfer of innovative technologies, internships,

and the generation of local employment, with a commitment of at least 70% Catamarcan labor and suppliers (Catamarca Actual, 2024).

That same year, during the official mission to China led by Deputy Governor Dusso, the UNCa joined the institutional delegation, represented by the Secretary of University Extension, Adolfo Agüero, and Dr. Flavia Lobo Maza. In the framework of this visit, the university initiated negotiations to establish academic and technological agreements with Chinese institutions specializing in direct lithium extraction technologies, oriented toward professional training and knowledge transfer in the province (UNCa, 2024).

## 5. STRATEGIC CONSULTING AND INSTITUTIONAL LIAISON PROFILES

In the architecture of bilateral relations between Argentina and the People's Republic of China, a network of professionals and specialized firms can be identified that operate as technical articulators. These actors contribute an in-depth knowledge of market dynamics, institutional protocols, and the regulatory frameworks of both countries, providing advisory services that facilitate the flow of investments in strategic sectors such as lithium mining, energy, and infrastructure. Their technical work is fundamental to the consolidation of stable ties between the public and private sectors of both regions.

In the high-level business sphere, the career of José Luis Manzano stands out; through his various investment platforms and media outlets, he has facilitated instances of bilateral cooperation. A documented example of this work was the incorporation of the *China Watch* supplement into the local media ecosystem, enabling broader dissemination of the Asian country's current affairs agenda in Argentina (Argentine Embassy in China, 2016). Likewise, through his investment holding, he maintains an active stake in the strategic minerals sector in northwestern Argentina, where his role centers on corporate articulation and the management of alliances requiring constant technical dialogue between local and global actors in the energy market.

Also worth noting, among the new generation of consultants, is Santiago Notarfrancesco, founder of the firm *Negocios con China* (义和桥). As a former recipient of the UNESCO–China The Great Wall program scholarship, Notarfrancesco contributes a technical specialization oriented toward the identification of investment opportunities and the organization of institutional missions (*Negocios con China*, n.d.).

Finally, the firm *Herrera Zhang Consultants*, led by Andrés Herrera and Xiaojie Zhang, offers strategic consulting services oriented toward facilitating business development in the Southern Cone. Based in Spain with a presence in Asian markets, this consultancy assists institutions and companies in understanding the political and economic factors affecting investments in strategic resources. Its comprehensive advisory model functions as technical support for institutional engagement, particularly in regions where mining and lithium concentrate the interest of international capital (*Herrera Zhang Consultants*, n.d.).

## 6. COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS AND SECTORAL NARRATIVE

Public perception of lithium mining and the participation of international capital — with a relevant presence of the People's Republic of China — rests on a media landscape that prioritizes an industrial development narrative. This editorial tendency presents the arrival of foreign investment as an engine of progress, centering coverage on job creation and infrastructure expansion. Within this framework, coverage tends to concentrate on productive aspects and, to a lesser extent, on socio-environmental dimensions, with limited development of technical debates linked to mechanisms for overseeing capital and the competitiveness of value chains in terms of the capture of public revenue.

**National Coverage:** In the national economic press, outlets such as *Ámbito Financiero* (with a pro-market profile) tend to present mining developments in the NOA with a perspective favorable to investment, highlighting predictability, productive scale, and export potential. In parallel, the media ecosystem of Grupo América (América TV, A24), linked to the business group of José Luis Manzano and Daniel Vila, tends to frame activity in terms of development and economic opportunity. Although no direct links to Chinese capital in the sector are recorded, the coincidence with business interests

associated with mining (through Integra Capital) allows for observation of coverage that prioritizes economic aspects over other dimensions of the debate.

**Specialized and Provincial Media:** In the provinces of the Lithium Triangle, technical and commercial information is channeled through portals such as *Minería Sustentable*. This outlet regularly highlights the economic benefits, job creation, and logistical advances of mining companies, including those of Chinese origin, under a technical approach favorable to investment (Minería Sustentable, 2025). In a complementary manner, portals such as *Catamarca Actual* provide continuous coverage of joint activities between the public sector and foreign companies, underscoring the positive economic impact of these partnerships (Catamarca Actual, 2025).

Taken together, this media landscape configures a communications environment that tends to favor capital investment, in which the selection of topics and the informational tone contribute to consolidating a narrative of national productive benefit. This discursive construction facilitates the insertion of foreign capital — including that originating from China — by positioning it as strategic for regional economic stability.

## **7. CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY IN THE CONTEXT OF STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS**

### **ASYMMETRIES IN PROVINCIAL-LEVEL NEGOTIATION AND THE ALIGNMENT OF INCENTIVES**

The growing projection of global investments — with a relevant presence of the People's Republic of China in the lithium sector in Jujuy, Salta, and Catamarca — represents an opportunity for economic expansion but also poses challenges with respect to the alignment of incentives among provincial elites. This phenomenon refers to the possibility that the interests of governmental actors and local power groups may converge disproportionately with those of foreign investors, which could condition institutional transparency, accountability, and the autonomy to defend the public interest over the long term.

In contexts where regional economic activity is heavily dependent on export mining or large infrastructure works, promises of foreign direct investment become a high-impact incentive for local administrations. This dynamic can foster frameworks of interaction in which public decisions are oriented primarily toward the capture of immediate financing, sometimes postponing the strengthening of stricter regulatory criteria or governance standards.

The expectation of attracting large-scale projects can feed a tendency toward the relaxation of local regulations and the expediting of procedures, in some cases reducing oversight mechanisms to ensure territorial competitiveness. According to a report by IBI Consultants, unlike the Chilean model of national control over lithium, the Argentine NOA provinces possess an autonomy that allows them to "negotiate as they see fit" (IBI Consultants, 2023). This decision-making freedom, in a context where there are no fully uniform competition schemes nor homogeneous application of transparency standards at the federal level, may increase institutional vulnerability at the provincial level and favor agreements concluded under less standardized conditions, in scenarios with differing levels of access to information.

This section functions as a diagnosis of the institutional fragilities that will be addressed below, enabling the delineation of zones of interlocution between local actors and foreign capital that require more thorough technical supervision.

## **INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES LINKED TO LITHIUM DEVELOPMENT**

The advancement of lithium-related projects in northern Argentina may pose institutional and social challenges in certain regions. Although these initiatives are typically presented as opportunities for economic development and job creation, they may also produce significant transformations in local dynamics, particularly in areas with more limited state capacities or insufficient infrastructure to accompany processes of accelerated expansion. In some cases, these scenarios may generate tensions linked to access to strategic resources, territorial planning, and public oversight mechanisms.

Some reports indicate certain margins of discretion in the negotiation of

agreements linked to investment projects by NOA provinces, particularly in the absence of uniform oversight criteria (IBI Consultants, 2023). In this regard, the case of the Salar del Hombre Muerto in Catamarca reflects a scenario of conflict linked to environmental and judicial challenges. According to international surveys, local communities have filed legal actions related, among other points, to the drying up of the Los Patos River attributed to mining activity (Gulman, 2024).

From a critical but constructive perspective, the challenge does not consist in rejecting foreign investment, but in identifying the points where the institutional fabric becomes more permeable. Strengthening democratic governance requires consolidating oversight and coordination mechanisms that allow provinces to manage these processes with greater predictability and clearer regulatory criteria.

## **OPERATIONAL INTEGRITY CHALLENGES: TRANSPARENCY, CONTRACTUAL FRAMEWORKS, AND PUBLIC OVERSIGHT**

When analyzing the impact of foreign capital on regional development, the scale of the People's Republic of China's deployment in the lithium value chain demands a detailed examination. By virtue of its role as one of the principal investors and infrastructure operators in the NOA, the operational dynamics of its companies acquire systemic relevance. In contexts of fragile institutionality, this scale of intervention may reveal asymmetries that give rise to low transparency and the weakening of public oversight mechanisms, as observed in the following areas:

- Oversight and over-invoicing: A test case of these tensions is that of Liex-Zijin, operator of the Tres Quebradas project in Catamarca. In 2023, the Directorate-General of Customs filed a complaint against the firm for over-invoicing of equipment by more than five million dollars through commercial triangulation. Beyond the specific incident, the episode revealed the limitations of the state to oversee large-scale operational structures in real time (Página/12, 2023).

- Technological dependency and suppliers: In various projects, a tendency toward the consolidation of closed supply ecosystems is observed. Equipment compatibility and conditioned financing generate a structural dependency that may limit competition. Even in official publications of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on bilateral cooperation, the need to ensure that these investment models do not displace local value integration or reduce the margins of autonomous supervision has been flagged (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship, 2023).
- Contractual opacity: The inclusion of restrictive confidentiality clauses in agreements that commit natural resources or strategic infrastructure poses challenges for democratic quality. The difficulty of accessing data on terms, prices, or suppliers restricts citizen oversight and legislative scrutiny, eroding the institutional transparency necessary to protect the public interest (Todo Noticias, 2024).

These elements reflect a logic of engagement that adapts with ease to environments of low institutional oversight. Unlike other governance systems, economic actors from authoritarian regimes typically operate under differentiated accountability standards in their country of origin. This condition could introduce a structural opacity that tends to replicate itself in their external relationships, particularly when local interlocutors lack robust audit capacities or when the relationship is conditioned by a marked asymmetry of power between global capital and provincial administrative structures.

## **ECONOMIC CONDITIONING AND DIPLOMATIC ABSTENTION IN MULTILATERAL BODIES (UN, OAS, IDB)**

In recent years, Argentina's posture in the principal multilateral bodies has evidenced a strategy of caution in the face of the People's Republic of China's interests. The prevailing logic responds to the need to preserve strategic ties in sectors such as trade, mining, energy, and infrastructure, while avoiding statements that might strain the bilateral relationship. This tendency is replicated across much of Latin America, where countries such as Brazil and Mexico adopt similar postures of diplomatic caution to protect their investment flows.

In the sphere of the United Nations, Argentina's attitude has maintained a framework of non-direct confrontation with Beijing. Under the Fernandez de Kirchner administration, backing for criticism on sensitive issues such as Hong Kong or Xinjiang was avoided. During the Macri presidency, despite alignment with Western blocs, technical neutrality was maintained in human rights forums so as not to affect the commercial relationship. Under Alberto Fernández, this caution was made explicit in October 2022, when Argentina abstained in the UN Human Rights Council vote to debate the report on human rights violations in Xinjiang (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022). With the arrival of Javier Milei, although the initial rhetoric was one of ideological distancing, diplomatic practice has maintained the tradition of caution, avoiding votes of frontal condemnation that would jeopardize financial stability and existing infrastructure agreements.

With respect to the OAS, Argentina has opted for balanced positions to avoid discomforting Beijing through its regional allies. During the Alberto Fernández government, key abstentions were recorded in resolutions on the crisis in Venezuela, a gesture interpreted as a way of avoiding statements that would affect strategic interests linked to Chinese influence (Infobae, 2020). In the current administration, although official discourse maintains a firm stance in defense of regional democratic values, at the formal level of the multilateral relationship an institutional continuity has been maintained that avoids direct confrontation, preserving a margin of diplomatic maneuver in the face of the economically weightiest extra-regional actors.

With regard to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), China's role as a financial partner has historically conditioned Argentine attitudes. During the Alberto Fernández administration, in 2020, Argentina abstained in the vote for the presidency of Mauricio Claver-Carone, a movement aligned with the pursuit of a neutrality that favored Beijing's interests in the organization (France24, 2020). Currently, under the Milei administration, the management of pre-existing financial commitments has given rise to a practice of strategic balance. In this sense, Argentine diplomacy prioritizes a realistic economic approach that makes it possible to sustain the necessary investment flows while maintaining a functional relationship with the various sources of global capital.

## **DISCURSIVE SOVEREIGNTY AND THE LIMITS OF PRAGMATISM: THE TAIWAN FACTOR AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA**

The deepening of the strategic relationship with the People's Republic of China poses subtle challenges to Argentina's international positioning on issues of high sensitivity for Beijing. The relevance of economic agreements may induce a form of diplomatic caution that moderates the country's historical positions on matters such as the status of Taiwan or the observance of human rights in specific regions. This dynamic is associated with strategies of sharp power, where influence is exercised through the conditioning of narrative frameworks and symbolic pressure on partner countries.

In this context, the "One China" principle constitutes a point of departure that Argentina has historically respected. However, the risk arises when this adherence becomes a systematic avoidance of actions that could be interpreted as a departure from Beijing's official line, thereby affecting the autonomy to engage in global debates on pluralism and self-determination.

This phenomenon has become visible in episodes of high sensitivity. In January 2024, an informal meeting between Foreign Minister Diana Mondino and representatives from Taiwan was characterized by Beijing as a "provocation," evidencing the fragility of the margin of maneuver in the face of the Asian power (La Nación, 2024). A recent and paradigmatic case involved the Federalism and Liberty Foundation in April 2024, when the dissemination of a photograph of a national deputy alongside the director of the Taiwan Trade Office — in the context of an institutional event — generated diplomatic tensions disproportionate to the private nature of the encounter (La Política Online, 2024). These episodes show how symbolic gestures by third-sector actors or legislative figures can be observed within a dynamic of diplomatic sensitivity that impacts at the institutional level. Along the same lines, various indications suggest that cooperation initiatives promoted by provincial governments with Taiwanese actors (particularly in areas such as smart cities) have been approached with caution at the diplomatic level, in a context of general coordination of Argentine foreign policy and attention to guidelines associated with the "One China" principle, with the aim of avoiding tensions in the bilateral relationship with Beijing.

With regard to international denunciations of human rights violations in Xinjiang or Hong Kong, Argentina's posture has shown a disproportionate caution that, through the end of 2023, consolidated itself as a policy of non-confrontation. While the current administration has begun a path of reevaluation of Western alliances, the persistence of inherited structural commitments makes an immediate break with this tradition of caution difficult. This situation poses the challenge of avoiding the perception of a diplomatic double standard that could weaken the country's historical credibility as a defender of democratic principles.

Ultimately, the conditioning of public discourse not only affects the nation's external image but erodes its diplomatic sovereignty. The great challenge of Argentine foreign policy consists of finding a balance in which necessary economic cooperation does not entail renunciation of the autonomy to shape the most relevant multilateral debates of the present.

## **INSTITUTIONAL RISK MATRIX: STRATEGIC VULNERABILITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF SOVEREIGN INTEGRITY**

Based on what has been addressed at various points in this report, it is possible to outline a scenario of sensitivity for Argentina's institutional solidity in relation to the dynamics of certain external capital. These risks would not represent a direct threat to the rules of the democratic game, but could manifest in subtle ways through an eventual attenuation of principles such as transparency, accountability, and decision-making autonomy.

The engagement model based on conditioned financing and economic diplomacy would tend to find fertile ground in contexts where audit and oversight capacities still present limitations or are in the process of consolidation. At the provincial level, the scale of these investments could generate asymmetries that make it difficult for local administrations to negotiate with full technical independence. Factors such as potential opacity in contracts or operational exclusivity could configure scenarios of strategic vulnerability.

While these elements do not necessarily constitute a full form of corrosive capital (in the terms of the National Endowment for Democracy), they do invite consideration of intermediate categories, such as that of conditional capital.

This category would help to describe dynamics that, without seeking to impose an ideology, could consolidate schemes of asymmetric and dependent relations. Within this framework, training trips, academic exchanges, and institutional ties would function as non-coercive mechanisms capable of gradually influencing certain strategic visions.

For all these reasons, it is pertinent for the Argentine state to continue strengthening its capacities to manage its international engagements without ceding critical margins of autonomy. Ensuring that bilateral relationships develop within frameworks compatible with republican values constitutes a shared challenge in the face of any external influence. In a context of resource disparity, the integrity of the democratic system depends on its capacity to transform these dynamics of soft conditioning into relations of greater symmetry, transparency, and sovereignty.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MITIGATION AND INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

Based on the preceding observations, it is appropriate to consider a series of guidelines aimed at optimizing the management of strategic ties and strengthening the state's technical autonomy in scenarios of global asymmetry.

- **Transparency and competitiveness:** It would be advisable to deepen the principles of public scrutiny through the proactive publication of the technical, financial, and environmental aspects of agreements with foreign capital, preserving confidentiality only in strictly justified cases. Likewise, the prioritization of public and competitive bidding in strategic projects would limit discretion and foster the participation of multiple bidders, securing better conditions for the country.
- **Regulatory frameworks and legal certainty:** It would be of great utility to strengthen environmental and technical oversight instruments, defining clear standards that provide predictability for investors. It is essential that this strengthening not translate into a bureaucratic burden that discourages the inflow of capital, but into a framework of clear rules that guarantees the sustainability of projects. In this sense, investment in the training of provincial technical teams would improve their monitoring and audit capacities.

- Coherence in foreign policy: The bilateral relationship should not displace Argentina's historical tradition in the area of human rights and pluralism. Maintaining an independent voice in multilateral forums on issues of high sensitivity — such as the situation in Taiwan or the observance of fundamental freedoms in various regions — would strengthen the country's international credibility. The diversification of alliances emerges here as a tool for broadening margins of maneuver and reducing exposure to conditioning from a single source.
- Provincial governance and professionalization: It would be valuable for local administrations to have update programs for the cadres in charge of managing international agreements. Likewise, the institutionalization of consultation mechanisms with communities that may be affected not only constitutes a practice of inclusion, but also a tool for lending greater legitimacy and transparency to operations in the field.

The implementation of these guidelines would not imply a rejection of engagement with the People's Republic of China, but rather the construction of a robust institutional ecosystem ensuring that such engagement — and any other of a similar nature — develops under conditions of balance and sovereignty. Only within a framework of technical integrity can a genuine strategic partnership be consolidated, avoiding schemes of concealed structural conditioning.

Ultimately, the challenge would not lie in questioning the advisability of the commercial relationship, but in ensuring that its terms are compatible with the Argentine state's capacity for oversight. In the face of governance models that differ from the liberal democratic tradition, the maintenance of republican standards and the establishment of clear rules of engagement do not constitute an ideological gesture, but a basic condition for preserving political autonomy and the quality of public institutions.

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