

*Branding and Legitimation: China's Party Diplomacy amid the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Abstract

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, how does the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) attempt to project a positive image both at home and abroad? This article examines China's *party diplomacy*—the CCP's interactions with foreign political parties and organizations as an international actor per se—that is managed by the CCP's International Department (IDCPC). Mirroring China's domestic situation, party diplomacy during the pandemic has gone through three stages: “outbreak,” “giving back,” and “new normal.” Party diplomacy is primarily aimed at branding the CCP as a capable and responsible ruling party. The case of a joint open letter initiated by the CCP suggests that party diplomacy has succeeded in soliciting positive responses from some of its foreign counterparts. Moreover, the IDCPC has been increasingly paying attention to China's domestic audience. Through packaging positive remarks by foreign political elites into domestic propaganda, the IDCPC seeks to not only exhibit the Party's international prestige and legitimize its rule, but also showcase the department's own competence. Taken together, the IDCPC emerges as an integrated propaganda vehicle, a hub of favorable information, that links the CCP's international liaison with domestic legitimation.

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