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Win-win relations or a new dependency?

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Daniel Agramont Lechín

Abstract

The rise of the Popular Republic of China (PRC) is one of the most significant events in contemporary international relations. However, at the global level, the "re-emergence of China as a major global power has led to a considerable debate over the likely consequences for the rest of the world" (Jenkins, 2010: 810). China's growing power raises questions as to the meaning of its superpower status as a nation, and the impact of its newfound influence in not only the Asia-Pacific region, but also the Global South (Dessein, 2015). In the specific case of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the debate centers on the potential disadvantages that China's vast supply of financial resources might bring for the region. Accordingly, the current paper is intended to examine the debate that has arisen in recent literature around the impact of China's increased economic presence on Latin America –with win-win relations on the one hand and new dependency on the other.

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Contents

1. Introduction

The rise of the Popular Republic of China (PRC) is one of the most significant events in contemporary international relations. "China's emergence has been nothing less than breathtaking," as Eisenman, Heginbotham & Mitchell (2007: XIV) affirm. Specifically, the remarkable growth rates that China's economy has experienced since its late 70s reforms have not been recorded elsewhere in modern times (Huang, 2008; Wei, 2017; Kroeber, 2020). Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at rates of more than 10 percent per annum for almost two decades, until 2011, when it ultimately dropped. This growth has enabled China, on average, to double its GDP every eight years, raising the living standards for the majority of its population. In fact, "China has brought down the number of people in absolute poverty from 250 million to 15 million in less than 30 years" (Tsidell, 2009: 283).

The key driver of China's remarkable economic growth rates has been the industrial modernization that China went through since 1978 (Naughton, 2006, 2010, 2017; Bramall, 2008). From roughly producing 1% by 2018, "it produced more than a quarter of the world's manufactures goods by value and was the world's biggest exporter, accounting to 18 percent of the export of manufactures" (Kroeber, 2020: 67). This gained China the label of the *workshop of the world* (Shambaraugh, 2013; Jacques, 2009) or *the world's factory,* "describing not only the sheer volume of its cross-border trade but also the breadth of its sector coverage" (Wei, Xie & Zhang, 2017: 54). Consequently, China has become a new industrial power in the global economy, with a leading advantage in global trade networks, commodity markets, and the energy sector (Vadell, 2014) through an inverse process different from that experienced by Western nations. Furthermore, contrary to the other East Asian nations, a major determinant of China's rapid industrialization was Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) coming from the core, which, given China's restrictions, allowed for technology and know-how transfer.

At the global level, however, the aforementioned "re-emergence of China as a major global power has led to a considerable debate over the likely consequences for the rest of the world" (Jenkins, 2010: 810). As China's power grows, questions arise as to the meaning of its superpower status as a nation, and the impact of its new-found influence, not only on the Asia-Pacific region, but also in the Global South (Dessein, 2015). Specifically, although China has provided vast financial resources and several Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) countries have experienced an economic boom, the debate arises as to the potential disadvantages that this might bring. There is mounting evidence pointing to the potential difficulties that China's increased presence in Africa has brought in the past decades (Anshan, 2007, 2014; Power, Mohan & Tan-Mullins 2012); and a similar debate is now gaining prominence around Latin America.

On the basis of the above, this paper is intended to examine the debate around the impact of

China's increased economic presence on Latin America. As Cypher & Wilson (2015: 1) argue, "most of the literature [in the region] seems to fall along a continuum with complementarity at one pole and dependency at the other." The paper will then go over the two contending narratives, acknowledging that relations with China, as well as with any other world power, have advantages and disadvantages that can lead to the most beneficial or detrimental impacts. Ultimately, the intent is to shed light on the theoretical debate about core-periphery relations in the 21st Century. Several studies, with different methods and approaches, will be classified in order to determine whether the increased economic and political relations between China and LAC corroborate the traditional predictions of dependency and imperialist theories concerning the unavoidable surplus extraction of strong States over weak ones (Wallerstein, 2004), resulting in accumulation by dispossession as argued by David Harvey (2005) –in this particular case, the semi-periphery over the periphery– or whether, on the contrary, China's development model can prove to be an exception, as argued by Giovani Arrighi (2007).

2. The debate

The debate about the impact of China's rise follows a broad array of topics and methodologies. According to pundits from different theoretical backgrounds, China's emergence as an economic and political power is one of the most relevant geopolitical trends of the 21st century and its rise is posing an economic challenge to the West, to the point of even questioning its four-hundred-year leadership. However, as mentioned above, there is a growing scholarly and political debate about the likely impacts on the peripheries, also referred to as the Global South.[1] As Abdenur (2017: 177) explains,

> In the new millennium, the links between the extractive industries and socioeconomic development in LAC have once again become the subject of sharp debates, primarily because of China's rapid economic expansion and its quest to secure reliable sources of oil, gas, and other minerals abroad. The concept of dependency, which had long gone out of fashion in development and policy circles, resurfaced as LAC experienced another commodities boom, with some economies specializing more narrowly in extractive industries and especially after China overtook the United States as the top destination for these commodities exports.

Based on the above, following authors as Cypher & Wilson (2015), Stallings (2020) or Bernal-Mesa & Xing (2020), this paper identifies two contending narratives that, despite the different names given, discuss China's impact on the peripheries on the basis of its global projection. On the one hand, as Dehardt (2012: 1363) explains, the first trend follows the official Chinese discourse that is "rooted in South-South cooperation and guided by principles of harmony,

1 While the first category comes from the theoretical dependency tradition, the other two are political categories. Still, in the current research, all three will be used interchangeably.

mutual respect, non-intervention, and win-win." On the other hand, "Western commentators have increasingly made sense of China's impact on the developing world in terms of a China Model, often conflated with the term Beijing Consensus" (ibid.). More specifically, LAC literature shows contending positions ranging from a trend that vouches for complementarity (Staiano, 2018; Vadell, Secches & Burger 2019), also dubbed as the strategic partnership (Gil & Aguilera, 2018) or the Asian consensus (Vadell, 2013, 2014), and one that argues for a new dependency (Sevares, 2007, 2011; Slipak, 2014; Bernal-Mesa & Xing, 2020; Stallings, 2020), also referred to as the Commodities Consensus (Svampa, 2013).

Despite the different names assigned by scholars, the debate revolved around whether, on the one hand, China's engagement in the Global South effectively follows a win-win diplomacy, leading to mutual-benefit-gains, or whether, on the contrary, its engagement is reproducing a center-periphery type of relations, which would have detrimental consequences for the peripheries. Since the reform and openness of the late 70s, China became a semi-peripheral nation with an extraordinary industrial capacity. As proposed by Pieterse (2011), hence, given the changes in the global economy resulting from the acceleration of technological advances, China is regarded as the industrial core for peripheral LAC. Moreover, as Bernal-Meza & Xing (2020: 8) affirm

> There are three elements that sustain this core-periphery relationship: (1) the harmony (compatibility) of interests between Latin American exports, based on primary goods and the importation of capital goods and manufactures; (2) complementarity derived from asymmetric economic and commercial interdependence; and (3) the transformation of Latin America into a function of Chinese economic and political development. The first two are explained by complementarity and asymmetric interdependence. The third is explained by Latin America's adoption of the agenda of Chinese political interests.

3. Win-win relations

A first trend in the academic debate contends that the relationship between China and LAC is beneficial because China provides a historical opportunity to break the dependency that marked LAC's insertion into the international system. The thesis underlying this position is that the political and economic setting is increasingly negative to the West and the partnerships with LAC (Vadell, 2014) and Africa (Samy, 2010; Mai & Wilhelm, 2012) offer China the opportunity to develop a long-term strategic relationship that will result in mutual gains. The reasons are twofold.

The first reason is the compatibility of interests that results in structural complementarity (Bonilla & Millet, 2015). Through its relations with the peripheries, China first secures access to a wide variety of natural resources that its economy and population need and which are in turn abundant in the region (Hughes 2011; Stallings, 2020; Mckay et al. 2016) and range from not only minerals and agricultural goods, but even, to a lesser extent, oil. Second, it secures markets for its industrial production and capital (Becard et al., 2020; Slipak, 2017; Abdenur, 2017; Kroeber, 2020; Gallagher & Irwin, 2013). Third, China secures allies for several of its geopolitical objectives including the One-China principle, counterbalance of US presence in the South East China Sea, and the global governance reform (Aguilera & Gil, 2018; Ellis, 2014, 2021; Yu, 2005). The key point, however, is that LAC and Africa have simultaneously benefited greatly from these increased economic flows. China's increased presence has provided several nations with vast economic resources (Vasquez, 2010; Barbosa & Guimarães, 2010; CEPAL, 2010, 2015, 2018; Perrotti, 2015; Myers & Wise, 2016; Wise, 2020) that have resulted in huge growth rates and poverty reduction like never seen before (Gallagher & Porzecanski, 2010). During the 2003-2013 period, LAC experienced growth rates that were higher than those recorded in any other period in the past seven decades (Jenkins, 2018; Stallings, 2020). Furthermore, inequality in the region, which had reached its peak in 2002, saw a constant decrease in the following years (Messina & Silva, 2017). Based on the above, authors such as Abdenur (2017: 178) conclude that, rather than succumbing to the resource curse, LAC has, in fact, experienced a "*resource blessing* with windfalls from the extractive industries generating positive externalities for a broader swath of the population and helping to boost democratization".

The first channel has been international trade. According to Gallagher (2016: 7), while trade between China and LAC reached roughly 1% in the first year of the new millennium, by "2013 it was 289 billion and China stood as the number one trading partner for many of Latin America's biggest economies." Moreover, analyzing the composition, authors such as Castañeda (2017: 3) conclude that "despite the thriving trade between China and some Latin American economies, there is no relationship of dependency, and both parts are rather enjoying or suffering the benefits and costs of global market cycles." China was a buyer of several commodities coming from both regions, but its economic take-off has deepened the magnitude of the flows from Africa and LAC, since the late 90s and almost one decade later, respectively. Asides from this increase in quantity, peripheries benefited from a price effect (Jenkins, Dussel-Peters & Mesquita-Moreira, 2008) which improved the terms of exchange (Sevares, 2011). "The commodities supercycle spurred by China's rise is also associated with one of the largest and longest commodity price spikes in modern history" (Gallagher, 2016: 59). Consequently, authors such as Brutto & Crivelli (2018: 124) argue that economic relations with China are beneficial because "comparative advantage to develop industries is the best way in which a country can be competitive, have economic surpluses, foster savings, and improve the provision of infrastructure, maintaining the industrial modernization and growth in income and poverty reduction."

As a result, as Abdenur (2017: 201) emphasizes, the above marks a striking difference from the original dependency debates because "extractive industries have undergone *tectonic* shifts over the past fifteen years. Until the turn of the millennium, the sector grew more or less along with global GDP, but demand for these commodities then began outpacing global GDP." Furthermore, this growth in the peripheries' international income has in turn enabled LAC governments to implement several modernization projects in key areas such as infrastructure and communications and social programs, leading to a sharp reduction in poverty rates. At the same time, while State finances have benefited from the increase in exports, the population in the peripheries has also benefited from access to cheaper import goods coming from China. Cypher and Wilson (2015: 6) sum the foregoing up and explain that

> China played a major role in the commodities boom; both in hard commodities such as minerals and in soft commodities such as monocropped agriculture and livestock in various Latin American countries [...] During the boom, respectable rates of economic growth were experienced across South America [...] The average annual rate of real per capita income growth was 4.1 percent from 2003 through 2011. Thus, South America experienced an impressive 78 percent improvement in the average annual per capita income growth rate from that attained during the period 1990-2002 [...] Stronger growth also underwrote appreciable increases in social spending in many nations, which tended to induce further growth. Poverty rates fell at an impressive rate in several countries. Income dispersion between the middle class and the poor was reduced somewhat. The latter effect was widely hailed as evidence that Latin America´s notorious levels of income inequality had been somewhat undercut.

In addition to the foregoing, capital flows from China have also played a significant role. Dependency theory's basic precepts locate capital at the center of the analysis, with a focus on the peripheries' impossibility to access it. However, since the end of the 90s, China's official decision to invest abroad has benefited the peripheries. China's outward FDI has grown substantially since the financial crisis of 2008 and the peripheries have greatly benefited from it. Although most of the share goes to Asia and Africa, Latin America, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce, has received 13% of the total investment on average in the past decade. Hence, "while in 2000 Latin America hardly registered Chinese investments, by 2012 China was the third-largest investor in Latin America" (Gallagher, 2016: 50), staying behind the US and the Netherlands only. Currently, as Castañeda (2017: 4) affirms, the "presence of Chinese FDI in Latin America has increased in a meaningful way since 2010 and several Chinese companies are among the biggest investors in oil, mining and gas industries in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru [...] The new outburst of Chinese FDI is a direct consequence of recent acquisitions in the oil, gas, and mining industry."

But capital coming from China is a broader category than the classical Western flows that relate almost entirely to private activity. Chinese cooperation was designed to go beyond trade and investment flows and includes aid and cooperation, as well as closer political relations (Lin & Wang, 2017; Dominguez, 2016; Brutto 2017; Brutto et al., 2020). Chinese cooperation has sought to provide assistance to overcome structural limitations and its specific model of cooperation is a mixture involving aid, investment, debt cancellation, technical training, and scholarships (Bhattacharya, 2011). Official loans have proved to be a great alternative to the Washington-Consensus-based cooperation (Vadell, 2019), especially to the poorest nations that didn't want or couldn't resort to the Western international financial institutions (Kaplan, 2016). China's cooperation, as Brutto & Crivelli (2019: 123) assert, is about a "strategic association that moves away from traditional aid schemes to cover development cooperation with political dialogue, trade agreements, investments and non-concessional loans in infrastructure, seeking to rebalance international economic relations." For Castañeda (2017: 3), the foregoing provides yet another proof of the absence of center-periphery relations given that,

> Despite the fact that trade between China and Latin America is growing rapidly, the presence of Chinese (private and public) capitals and investments in Latin America is still limited and circumscribed to a few economic sectors (i.e., natural resources extraction). Therefore, despite the risks associated with the increasing export dependency on China (especially for a handful of countries and economic sectors), Chinese inflows of private and public investments are still relatively small and have not dramatically distorted Latin American economies or destroyed their industrial sectors (except in some few cases).

The second reason why relations with China can help break periphery dependency is that it provides an option to pursue a more autonomous course. That is an alternative to the political dominance exercised by the US and several European nations (Cesarin, 2007; Le-Fort, 2006; Tokatlian, 2007; Zimmermann & Smith, 2011; Vadell, 2018, 2019). China's increased economic and political international presence "is quietly remaking the landscape of international community and politics" (Halper, 2009: XVII). And this phenomenon has been fairly significant for the peripheries." As Kolodko (2020: 37) argues,

> if we take a close look at the geopolitical map of the world from this angle, it's easy to note that China is especially active where the West has failed. Once, in the colonial period when it exploited locals instead of helping them, later, in the neocolonial era, when it cheated them instead of being cooperative, and recently, in the age of globalization, when, at times, it marginalized them instead of creating areas of positive synergies.

Thus, while Western observers follow Chinese cooperation in the Global South with suspicion (Yiagadeesen, 2010; Bräutigam, 2011; Hensengerth, 2013), it has been welcomed by many African and Latin American leaders as a new path to development (Delgado, 2015; Rubio & Maya, 2020).

The strongest argument to support this claim is that China has a different approach to its relations with other nations. China's objective of building a *Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind* relies not only on guaranteeing peaceful relations, but also on pursuing shared benefits (Mai & Wilhelm, 2012). "We are not alone on a Great Way and the whole world is one family," declared President Xi Jinping in 2021.[2] And the latter, according to Chinese politicians and several scholars, is based on China's culture and tradition. As referred to by Wu (2018: 2), "China's political ideal, based on Confucian moral ethics […] emphasizes inter-subjectivity over the individual subjectivity […] and holds a strong vision of communal respect among national citizens." Hence, as Kishore Mahbubani (2020: 89) recalls, China does not believe that "it has a universal mission to promote Chinese civilization and encourage everyone else in humanity to emulate it. Americans fundamentally believe that they should stand for universal values and sincerely believe that the world would be a better place if the rest of humanity absorbed and implemented American values." Furthermore, Wang, (2013: 1) affirms, "the Chinese Dream is in many ways the polar opposite of the more widely understood American Dream. Specifically, whereas the American Dream emphasizes individuals attaining personal enrichment and success, the Chinese Dream is a collective undertaking that calls upon Chinese citizens to make personal sacrifices in order to serve the greater, national good."

In practice, the above is reflected in the principles and values of China's official strategy, i.e., South-South Cooperation (SSC). The gist of China's SSC is the rejection of the Western zero-sum-game realist view of international relations (IR), which led to a cold-war logic. Instead, it promotes the idea of win-win benefits that can be achieved through international cooperation (Kjøllesdal & Welle-Strand, 2010; Nonfodji, 2013; Vadell, 2018; Fornes & Mendez, 2018; Liang & Zhang, 2019). Therefore, contrary to the earlier Western practices reflected in the current North-South cooperation, as Bruckmann (2016: 105f.) affirms, China's foreign policy is based on principles which "resemble the spirit of Bandung in its fundamental principles of cooperation, economic and social development, based on shared benefits and affirmation of the countries of the South in the international sphere." The great implication is that China would not be promoting the spread of its own development model, but rather seeking the appropriate channels and mechanisms to work with such a diverse range of nations. This leads authors as Liang & Zang (2019) to affirm that, contrary to the Washington Consensus –the main method chosen by the US and its Western allies to impose its specific vision of political and economic organization–, relations with China won't be based on the imposition of a pre-defined development model. As Dehardt (2012: 1363) explains,

> Chinese policymakers have largely distanced themselves from the concept of a China Model, arguing that the country's experience at home cannot be equated with its policies abroad. They note that the country's development remains incomplete, that its history and culture are unique and cannot serve as a model for others, and that the

2 http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctenglish/2018/commentaries/202101/t20210128_800234170.html

> concept unjustifiably fuels worries about a looming China threat where none exists. Furthermore, many argue that the notion of a China Model recapitulates the idea of a monolithic Chinese state and political consensus in the face of ongoing internal debate about China's development method and goals. Even those Chinese scholars who have embraced the term have used it to emphasize the uniqueness of China's method rather than its replicability—i.e. a state capitalism with Chinese characteristics.

Instead, China's official discourses and documents emphasized, since the early years of the founding of the Peoples' Republic of China (PCR), the importance of horizontal, non-hierarchical relations (Semenov & Tsvyk, 2021; Breslin, 2013; Slipak, 2014, 2017). Specifically, unlike the discourse of several high-ranking officers, the basis for relations between States would be that no country in the world system can be considered to be ahead of others, eliminating in turn the prerogative that Western powers found in the past for pushing poor countries to follow their lead. Contrary to the modernization theory then, China's concept of Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind not only gives importance to peaceful relations, but also understands that they have to be achieved by respecting other countries' interests (Liang & Zhang, 2019). All countries in the world have a place to take and can pursue improvement respecting their peoples' way of living without compromising their cultural identity or independence. As the White Paper on China's Pacific Development argues, China's objective is to find

> new perspectives from the angle of the community of common destiny, sharing advances and afflictions, seeking mutually beneficial cooperation, exploring new ways of improving exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations, determining new dimensions of humanity's common interests and values, and seeking new ways of addressing multiple challenges through cooperation among countries and achieving inclusive development (FMPRC, 2011).

Hence, a key subject matter regarding China's cooperation and how it implements the aforementioned principles, providing an alternative to the Western Official Development Assistance (ODA)-type cooperation, has to do with *conditionality*. As Jiang (2019: 11) affirms, "conditionality is another long-held principle of the DAC[3] donors, particularly since the debt crisis in the 1980s. The ODA has become conditional on a wide range of economic, political, social and environmental policies." Conditionality by international financial institutions is argued to be the main coercion method applied by Western powers in the spread of their own development model across the Global South and the main reason why such a growing discontent arose in the developing world (Milner & Tingley, 2013; Dunford, 2020; Voutsa & Borobas, 2015). Instead, given the principles of equality and mutual cooperation, for the CCP, relations between donor and recipient countries had to be mutually beneficial (Delgado, 2015). Furthermore, the use of conditionality would imply a clash with other principles like

3 Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

independence, respect for sovereignty, and non-interference in domestic affairs (Kjøllesdal & Welle-Strand, 2010). As Dehardt (2012: 1368) emphasizes, the very concept of SSC "implicates the unequal global economic system and practices of conditionality and intervention as perpetuating another kind of structural violence that prevents a more harmonious, stable global system." China's SSC design, therefore, did away with conditionality, given that it was perceived as running counter to the non-intervention principle (Samy, 2010; Nolte, 2013; Vadell, 2019). Consequently, Kronke (2020: 49) argues that China was not interested in displacing the US from its leading role in the international system, but instead in acting "as a beacon for those who want to achieve independence from the influence of international financial institutions, if not simply the power of US financial sanctions."

China offered the possibility for a different type of relations, based primarily on the deepening of economic exchange and the absence of Chinese State intrusion through the imposition of policies on the peripheries. As Kjøllesdal and Welle-Strand (2010: 3) explain,

> Providing aid on terms of its own choosing, China challenges the current foreign aid paradigm in four main ways: The donor-recipient relationship is challenged by a partnership of equals; The modes of provision are challenged by China's focus on aid that is mutually beneficial; The use of conditionalities is challenged by China's insistence on sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs; Multilateralism is challenged by China's preference of doing the major foreign aid projects alone.

Hence, "contrary to classic theories of economic dependency," Castañeda (2017: 4) argues, "the economic relationship between China and Latin America has no significant political implications in the region. In fact, trade and investment flows between China and Latin America seem to be mainly market-driven and socio-political factors are indeed secondary." Consequently, while financial aid and different kinds of cash transfers were the most important flows under Western cooperation, China's mechanisms are based on other types of relations.

In the same way, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013 has gradually become one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects in the history of mankind and its importance for international development can't be overstated. The BRI goes further than just a lending project and China's government intends to have it address the global deficits of development, peace, and governance (Dunford & Liu, 2019). In Xi Jinping's own words, the BRI is meant to share China's development opportunities with countries along the way. "It is a pursuit not to establish China's own sphere of influence, but to support [the] common development of all countries" (G20, 2016: quoted in Alden & Mendez, 2019: 5). The development and well-being of the people are at the core of this project. Liang & Zhang (2019: 15-16) sum up and contend that

> Development has always been an unyielding principle for running the world and the greatest difficulty of the contemporary era. The Belt and Road initiative seized upon

> this key issue, focusing on development and policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people connectivity while paying attention to the comprehensive conditions for improving international development as a whole, which has helped developed countries along the route emerge from under the haze of the international financial crisis and increased the desire of developing countries to eliminate poverty and backwardness. Belt and Road is a pioneering work in the field of international development.

Its growing importance comes from the fact that the project is aimed at not only providing connectivity, but also becoming a mechanism for policy coordination (Li & Zotelle, 2021). Accordingly, developing countries have in the BRI a specific mechanism to improve their participation in the world economy, on the basis of principles of cooperation, solidarity, and mutual gains, as it is intended to boost business, but with a significant allocation of China's financial resources, technology, and know-how. Furthermore, as Vadell, Secches & Burger (2019) argue, the BRI is highly significant to suppress dependency ties as it offers an alternative to the current, neoliberal globalization. Not only is it the largest infrastructure project and clearly does away with Western conditionality; it seeks to improve the capacities of the countries involved through an increase in business opportunities –under close State guidance. Accordingly, far from the neoliberal pursuit of benefits from forced liberalization, China is presenting a statist model promoting business between different countries whose governments want to actively pursue economic growth. Mutual gains will then come from an increase in economic revenue on both sides, not from the aid that rich countries can give poorer ones.

4. New dependency

4.1. Why a new dependency?

On the opposite side of the Latin American academic debate, we find a skeptical view on the deepening of relations with China under the main argument that it reintroduces an all-too-familiar historical pattern in the region: dependency as the main form of insertion into the global political economy (Hernandez, 2016; Xing, 2020; Svampa, 2019; To & Acuña, 2018). Thus, this "new dependency" as authors as Bernal-Mesa & Xing (2020) or Stallings (2016) call it, points to a return to the precepts of the 1950s economic Dependency Theory in Latin America seeing poverty and backwardness as a structural international phenomenon.[4] Divided into two

4 Although several Latin American governments had started to apply policies that followed the structuralist logic as early as the 1930s –a period dubbed as nationalist developmentalism– (Bresser-Pereira, 2012), this critical economic thinking gained notoriety only by the 1950s with the work of Latin American scholars as Raul Prebisch, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Celso Furtado, and Osvaldo Sunkel and the institutional support of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB). Furthermore, as Martins (2021) affirms, from the end of the 19th Century to the 1930s, there was a "first flowering of dependency theory in anti-imperialist thought whose main expressions were the works of José Martí and Jose Carlos Mariátegui."

general currents, dependency and structuralism theories, "arose as a result of a critique of the existing development paradigms" (Kay, 1998: 2f.).

Still, as Weingast & Wittman (2006: 759) assert,

> The many variants of dependency theory [were] unified by the idea that the economy and prospects for development in poor countries (the periphery) are conditioned by a global economy dominated by already developed states (the core) [...] [P]oor countries are not just undeveloped, as had been the case for the core centuries earlier, but are underdeveloped by an international economy that is forever biased against them.

The theoretical foundations combined structuralist and Marxist elements (Van der Borgh, 1995) with Keynes' economic theory (Reyes, 2001) and aimed at providing an explanation for underdevelopment other than the mainstream modernization approach in force those days.[5] The essence of the dependency reasoning was that, instead of looking at national economies and domestic factors, the main reason for some countries' underdevelopment were world-economy dynamics that created an unequal exchange that increased the wealth of developed countries (Bárcena & Prado, 2015). Despite some spurts of growth, the development of poor countries was unbalanced in the long term (Tausch, 2010). Therefore, dependency rejected the comparative-advantage international insertion, based on natural resource extraction (Slipak, 2014). In order to overcome underdevelopment, governments needed to break the structural cycle that replicated disparities through the core's surplus extraction. This structural shift, as Bolinaga & Slipak (2015) explain, is a productive transformation that entails an expansion and diversification of industrial production that is conducive to the generation of added value and is the only way for developing countries to pursue a development agenda. Moreover, for authors as Svampa (2019) and Wanderley (2017), for LAC, this concept establishes a post-development model that has both industrial production and respect for the environment as the main pillars.

On this basis, China's outstanding modernization made it the largest exporter of manufacturing, and confirmed that fulfilling dependency theory's pillars needs to exploit the peripheries in order to maintain economic growth (Bernal-Meza & Xing, 2020). The biggest impact of China's presence in the region, under this line of thought, is that, far from providing an option to keep pursuing the aforementioned structural change, China's increasing trade and foreign investment is only deepening the region's dependency on the income generated through the export of primary goods (Cypher & Wilson, 2019; Jenkins, 2018), which then backslides to an increase in extractive activities (Slipak, 2014; Gudynas, 2018; Svampa, 2019; Burchardt & Dietz, 2014). It reproduces the longstanding primary dependency model in the region, hindering the productive development agendas and ultimately the possibility for a shift in the pattern

5 Modernization theory as explained by Andreas Nölke (2014: 199), refers to the theories "which made traditional economic, political and social structures –rather than exogenous influences– responsible for the persistent underdevelopment of the South."

of international insertion (Bolinaga & Slipak, 2015; Hernandez, 2016; Slipak, 2014; Svampa, 2013).[6] Hence, Latin American countries face the dilemma of increasing their income without compromising their political autonomy and own development (Bolinaga & Slipak, 2015; Agramont, 2021).

Specifically, in contrast to the win-win narrative, China's increased relations are detrimental to the peripheries because they are China's structural competitors. The fact that this nation has a huge demand for natural resources and a large offer of finished goods does not mean that it has complementarity with the peripheries (Lall & Weiss, 2007; Jenkins, 2018; Ray, Gallagher, Lopez & Sanborn, 2015; Bonilla & Millet, 2015; Slipak, 2022). It is true that currently Africa and LAC have opposite patterns of trade with China because the former have plenty of natural resources and an incipient industrial base, while the latter is the largest manufacturer in the world. However, as dependency theories predict, the deepening of economic ties with China is resulting in an intensification of the primary dependency (Roldán et al., 2016; Lederman, Olarreaga & Perry, 2009; Gallagher, 2019; Rosales, 2010; Slipak, 2012, 2017; Bolinaga, 2013; Cordeiro et al., 2015; Bernal-Meza, 2016; Briceño-Ruiz & Molina, 2020; Ross, 2020).

Accordingly, China and the Global South don't share compatible interests and, as Wise (2020: 46) argues, "China has assertively incorporated the Latin American region into its own ambitious development strategy." Clashing with the LAC's seven-decade pursuit of an agenda of productive modernization (Calix, 2016), China's primary interests for the Global South entail securing a supply of natural resources necessary to feed its manufacturing industry and population and, more recently, to maximize returns on the huge amount of capital from their reserves[7] (Visentini, 2013; Cesarin & Moneta, 2005; Galvez, 2012; Svampa, 2013) –and current data shows that China has been successful. As far as the trade of goods is concerned, the majority of China's purchases from the region are a few primary products, like copper, iron, oil, and soy (Ray et al., 2015; Fornes & Mendez, 2018). As Jenkins (2018: 226) asserts, "[a]gricultural products, fuels, and minerals account for about 85 percent of China's imports from the region." In turn, LAC's purchases from China are finished goods across the whole technological spectrum (Slipak, 2016). Currently, the region purchases from China not only consumption goods –as was the case until the last decade– but also intermediate and capital goods. Even though primary dependence is a historical characteristic of LAC, data shows that trade with China is less diversified than with other regions (Agramont & Bonifaz, 2018; Bonilla & Millet, 2015). As a matter of fact, China is the partner outside the region that buys the least manufacture. Furthermore, capital flows only worsen this situation. They are destined mostly

6 There is another debate about China's presence in the region that, given the specific objectives of this research, will not be addressed in detail. It relates to the consolidation of its hegemony. Following the debate about the Decline of the West and the Rise of the Rest of chapter 3, there are scholars that affirm that this Asian nation is half-way in the consolidation of its economic hegemony in the region (Oviedo, 2012; Dussel-Peters, 2016). At the same time, others consider that it has not replaced Western exploitation mechanisms in the region yet and that it can't be viewed as a new hegemon in the region (Slipak, 2014).

7 The value of Chinese foreign exchange reserves peaked at just over 4 trillion US dollars in June 2014.

to natural resource extraction through investment types characterized by scarce technology and know-how transfer (Alden & Large, 2011; Jenkins, Dussel-Peters & Moreira, 2008; Dussel-Peters, 2012; Ray et al., 2015; Hernandez, 2016). And the concentration rate is so high that, according to Jenkins (2018: 229), "estimates vary with some putting the share as high as 90 per cent." The rest are investments that are not directed to natural resources, but instead to manufacturing and services (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012). These are made mainly by private Chinese firms (Dussel-Peters, 2012) and also smaller, provincial SOEs (Lin & Milhaupt, 2013).

Finally, regarding aid and cooperation flows, the same pattern can be observed. Chinese governmental aid in Latin America has been primarily based on concessional loans (Rubio & Maya, 2020), mainly due to the condition of middle-income countries (Jenkins, 2018). More importantly, just as in the case of FDI flows, natural resources play a primary role. And this goes beyond mining or oil projects. It is true that some loans go directly to extractive sectors, but the key economic characteristic of Chinese loans to LAC is that a larger share is destined to infrastructure projects that aim at facilitating the extraction of these resources (Gallagher & Irwin, 2015; Stallings, 2017; Jenkins 2018). These projects are mostly operated by Chinese firms, using Chinese inputs, since in practice, "despite not demanding austerity, Chinese loans are not thoroughly free of conditionalities" (Peres Milani, 2021: 3).

As a matter of fact, the agenda of productive transformation for the Global South in the XXI century is argued by several authors to have greater challenges than before as a consequence of the rise of China and other nations in South and East Asia (SEA) (Gallagher, 2016; Kulfas, 2020; Wise, 2020). By successfully modernizing their economies, these nations are the new providers of low and medium-tech manufacture and constitute the greatest competitors for the peripheries (Wise, 2020; Jenkins, 2018). 'A *tale of two globalizations*', as Kevin Gallagher (2019) calls it, referring to the successful economic modernization and change in the international insertion that several SEA nations achieved, while LAC nations remain the providers of natural resources. This represents an additional challenge to the Global South because they are now peripheral areas not only subject to the rich, industrialized countries –the core– but also to these new industrial nations –also called semi-periphery. In practical terms, as Bernal-Meza & Xing (2020) affirm, due to the characteristics of the economic exchange, China can be considered a core nation for LAC. Specifically, Latin American manufacture doesn't have direct industrial competition with core-states that are engaged in the provision of high added-value activities like services and manufacture of high-tech goods. Instead, LAC's main competition comes from the efficient low and medium-tech manufacture produced in the semi-peripheries (Slipak, 2016) which is causing a setback in the South's economic integration blocs (Oviedo, 2006; Malamud & Gardini, 2019). In the words of Wise (2020: 22) "[w]ith the rise of China in regional markets, LAC countries are more pressed than ever before to climb quickly tap the value-added production ladder and to articulate a longer-term vision for a growth model based in efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness."

In addition, the renewed dependence of the region on commodity prices has greatly impacted the public finances. Income coming from the export of natural resources is highly volatile as it depends on international prices. The increased relations with China followed a 15-year pattern with a boom until 2014 and a decline afterward. Authors as Wise (2020) refer to these two sub-periods as the China boom and post-China boom. Hence, the main point regarding vulnerability is that LAC nations are growingly dependent on exports to China but also that, given that these exports are mainly commodities, the international income they receive becomes highly volatile. With China's economic slowdown came a decrease in the international prices and there was a direct impact on LAC nations. According to Stallings (2020: 52), while the growth rates in the 2003-2013 period were remarkable, as "the China boom ended, growth in the region became sluggish at best. Between 2014 and 2018, GDP aggregate growth averaged only 0,8 percent with negative growth in 2016." Poverty and inequality followed a similar path and, after a steady decline following the end of the price boom, they went up again. According to Myers & Wise (2016: 5), "The pass-through for the LAC region as a whole has been a simultaneous slowing of growth to 1–2 percent on average since 2013." The result is that from 2014 onwards, one by one, LAC's economies were hit by a reduction of incoming flows. Public finances saw a familiar scenario of growing twin-deficit (fiscal and external) which resulted in a constant loss of foreign exchange reserves and increased borrowing. Governments in the region didn't improve their taxation systems and over-relied on external income. Contrary to the boom phase, accordingly, not only did economic growth slow down; poverty and inequality upsurged again. Accordingly, as Gallagher (2016: 139) affirms, "commodity-led growth is not sustainable from an economic point of view."

4.2. Beijing or Commodities Consensus: Is there a Chinese model?

A key question that arises is whether this deepening of center-periphery relations is the result of market forces or specific policies applied by China. This is a recurrent topic in the current literature reviewing China-LAC relations. Having understood the aforementioned negative impacts of China's economic flows, it is still important to understand to which degree this has been caused by either economic competition or Chinese government intervention. In Immanuel Wallerstein's (2004) terms, the question would be whether this new dependency is coming as a result of market economy exploitation or if it is the result of the political enforcement of unequal conditions over peripheral States by strong States, also dubbed as political domination. According to several scholars from different theoretical traditions, the Chinese government, contrary to the official narrative of South-South cooperation, is promoting the implementation of specific policies in the Global South in order to secure its interests (DeHardt, 2012; Bernal-Mesa & Xing, 2020; Wise, 2020). However, as explained below, the two main views are divided between those who see the foregoing as a Chinese development model that has reached a certain international acceptance (i.e., consensus), and those who don´t.

Regarding the first current, following Dowdle & Mota-Prado (2017), three main development models can be found in Western academia, which are argued to be derived from the Chinese growth miracle: (1) Dani Rodrick's New development economics, (2) Randall Peeren's East Asian Model, and (3) Joshua Ramos' Beijing Consensus (BC). Given that the first two don't refer specifically to the case of China, and analyze the growth miracle of several East Asian nations, the Beijing consensus will be the relevant concept for our analysis. In a clear reference to the Washington Consensus, the Beijing Consensus (BC) emerged as an antimodel narrative (Chen, 2017). It refers to the existence of a Chinese development model (CDM) responsible for China's economic success. According to Ramo (2004: 1) world economic power was not only gravitating toward the East, but "the salient feature of this model was the shift to state capitalism, Chinese-style, is burying market economics." Specifically, the BC is based on three characteristics for a developing nation to find its place in the global economy "the first characteristic is constant innovation and experimentation. The second is the emphasis on quality of life, especially equity and sustainability as regards development. The third characteristic is that which refers to the principle of self-determination, according to the author, leaving aside the dictates of the World Bank and the IMF" (Vadell, 2014: 143). According to Kolodko (2020: 85) the salient feature of the BC is that it "boils down to the agreement as to the need for regulation of the economy, ensuring a significant state participation and the use of government interventionism, in which economic attributes go hand in hand with political centralism anchored in a single-party system."

In the case of Latin America, there is a relevant debate that relates not only to the existence of a certain Chinese development model, but also to the method through which it has spread around the world, resembling the modus operandi of preceding world powers. As Dehardt (2012: 1365) affirms,

> critics have invoked the China Model concept to represent what they see as a 'resource-hungry' China pursuing environmentally destructive, extractive industries that will ultimately limit, rather than support, the region's development. In these instances, detractors have used the China Model to describe how China's development ethics at home— defined by cheap labor and materials, exploitative work practices, and disregard for the environment—has shaped its modus operandi abroad.

Hence, a concept has been gaining prominence in the regional literature to describe this return to insertion based on primary exports: the '*Commodities Consensus*', as first coined by Maristella Svampa (2013). Through it, she tries to explain that in recent years the region has entered a new stage:

> In it, governments accept [...] an insertion into the global production and accumulation system as suppliers of products with low value-added content, taking advantage of the high international prices. In this way, they prioritize the development and the expansion of extractive mega-projects, and they are enclaves

> of export to the manufacturing centers of the planet. In some of these cases, the income from these activities is appropriated by the State for being used in progressive policies. However, all these governments – despite their differences – assume the need to strengthen what Svampa calls a neo-extractivist development model as an inevitable destination, an irrevocable truth, a necessary path to development (Slipak, 2014: 112).

However, as mentioned above, there is a second current that, although accepting the idea of a Chinese strategy for the specific incorporation of developing countries into its sphere of influence on its own terms, doesn't go as far as vouching for the existence of a clear Chinese development model, or the latter's reaching a mainstream position in world politics. As Kroncke (2017: 43) affirms,

> The idea of a consensus in development discourse is ever-alluring. Much like the discussion of best practices, asserting the existence of a consensus offers up the possibility that the most fundamental, if oft-elided, the challenge of development has been transcended – that of politics [...] In this way, the rise of the Washington Consensus was itself as much as the construction of a particular vein of development economics[...]. Understanding the rise of the idea of the Beijing Consensus this begs the question of what would generate interest in a new consensus in a very different multipolar, geopolitical context.

As the author continues, "most academic China experts have rejected the idea that China itself follows a singular, coherent, development model" (Kroncke, 2017: 47). Hence, the attempts to superficially find a specific Chinese model would help overcome the limitation of understanding not only China's political economy, but also the current state of world politics, best exemplified by Dani Rodrick's (2006) *'Goodbye Washington Consensus, Hello Washington Confusion'*.

Still, indifferent to both currents is the acceptance that the main problem for LAC is that China assigned this region a specific role in its own development model and applied specific policies to secure it (Bernal-Mesa & Xing, 2020; Wise, 2020). Fulfilling imperialist and dependency precepts, China as a strong State in the world-system, would be seeking the means to politically enforce the economic exploitation of the peripheries. That is, without affirming that China's development model has reached a consensus or mainstream international status, comparable to what the Washington Consensus was, China's foreign policy towards the Global South is intended to secure its own interests. As Wise (2020: 31) states, "China, out of necessity internationalized its development strategy in ways that have ad dramatic consequences for the LAC region." Specifically, she continues, "[its] scarcity of natural resources and its dependence on external suppliers to sustain its export-led manufacturing model. The LAC region has become integral to the country's development strategy" (Wise, 2020: 43). And the BRI can only be understood through these lenses. This initiative would be the most visible example since, through it, China would be "exporting its development model to the world and systematically strengthening its geostrategic position under the premises of development cooperation and securing international trade routes" (Herold, 2021: 6). Still, caution has to be taken in the fact that acknowledging the foregoing, to these authors, does not imply accepting the argument that China is actually trying to impose its own specific development model across the developing world in order to better pursue its interests, as is argued by others as Francis Fukuyama (2016). Rather, the incorporation of the peripheries into its development strategy is a less planned process with much experimentation guiding the policies.

Aside from the effect of the above on the current world order, the impact that concerns this research is that it hinders the development of the nations of the Global South. In short, SSC would not be substantially different from Western cooperation and it would be promoting hierarchical relations in which China secures its interests by enforcing specific policies on peripheral nations. China's official win-win discourse, as analyzed in the preceding section, made clear that disregarding the lack of definition of development or the cooperation mechanisms, some key variables had to be improved to help enhance the development process in the Global South. Specifically, it can be affirmed that China's SSC, following its own development experience model, has industrialization as the main pillar for the modernization of economy from as early as the founding of the PRC, and technology transfer was considered a key mechanism to foster the generation of added-value activities (Naughton, 2006; Kolodko, 2020; Brown, 2012; DeLisle & Goldstein, 2014; Whyte, 2020).

Hence, criticisms emerge because, according to several studies, the above has not been delivered and the Chinese government has been implementing a series of policies that contradict the rhetoric of SSC. Specifically, China would allegedly be using several geo-economic means that rely on its huge amounts of economic resources. China's development model is argued to be highly hierarchical and exploitative as a consequence of China's imperial past. China's international cooperation, without a clear theoretical definition of development or the main factors that can foster it, includes several pillars that are based on the Chinese experience. To understand the latter, following Kavalski (2009: 20), a "necessary starting point is to examine the implication of sinocentrism—the Chinese conception of their centrality and superiority in the known world [Fairbank 1968]. Such a conception is said to have led Chinese rulers to view foreign countries as inferior tributary/vassal states in a China-centered international hierarchy and to require them to pay proper tributes to the Chinese court in the form of local products." Furthermore, "The popular notion of Confucian pacifism is not a credible tradition of Confucian foreign policy, but a modern Chinese myth constructed in the early 20th century" (Zhang, 2015: 197). Accordingly, Xi Jinping's China Dream would be a return to its historical culture which is not peaceful but hierarchical. It's a return to the tributary system. A return to the centuries when China could claim to be the world's greatest civilization, "and a clear and justified sense of superiority to other nations" (Redding & Witt, 2007: 3). The objective of both the Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind and the SSC strategy is based on the notion that China can help other developing countries to achieve the huge increases in welfare it has achieved. As Alden & Mendez (2019: 5) affirm, owing "to their 'victimized' identity, the Chinese perceive themselves as benevolently solicitous of small states in the global South." In the facts, as Xuetong (2021: 2) argues, "China will try to shape an ideological environment favorable to its rise, pushing back against the notion that Western political values have universal appeal and validity." Hence, another conclusion is that, unlike Western cooperation, which openly relied on the modernization theory precepts, the difference is that China's SSC does exactly the same but in a covert way (Svampa, 2013; Slipak, 2014; Okolo, 2015).

Consequently, the huge economic flows are overall enabling China to experience larger benefits. China's trade and investment policies are argued to reinforce unequal exchange, imposing barriers and giving subsidies when needed (Bernal-Mesa & Xing, 2020). Furthermore, "despite the rhetoric of South-South cooperation and mutual benefits, China has not offered significant assistance in two areas of crucial importance to Latin America –increasing the value-added of its exports and making investments in China" (Stallings, 2020: 51). Along the same line, Slipak, (2022: 2) argues that the two common characteristics can be found in China's relations with several LAC countries: reduced or null technology transfer and the imposition of the hiring of Chinese firms as strategic suppliers for the projects, which end up placing machinery and key inputs on which China verifies an excess of productive capacity. Moreover, these controls to business flows are complemented with conditionality within development cooperation. The international order is witnessing the emergence of a different model of development cooperation (Kragelund, 2019; Modi, 2011; Simplicio, 2011; Welle-Strand & Kjøllesdal, 2010). Chinese aid, despite its strong rhetoric, has several conditions that recipient countries have to accept, and that are actually resulting in mechanisms to enforce policies in developing countries (Dunford, 2020; Stallings, 2020). Attention has to be called to the fact that this conditionality does not go as far as the Western imposition of a development model like the Washington Consensus which ultimately aimed at changing the political and economic organization of Southern nations (Harvey, 2005). But still, the conditions that the Chinese government imposes for access to its loans and aid are increasingly under scrutiny and allegedly largely beneficial to its interests. From a historical point of view, according to Dunford (2020: 1), this new cooperation model, derives "from China's distinctive historical experience of engagement with its peripheries as one of '*chao gong*' -tribute to an Emperor, China's own experiences of colonialism and socialist development, Confucian values of self-reliance, mutual benefit (win-win) and noninterference and a concept of common values (*gòng xìng*)." The BRI thus stands as the grand strategy of a "visionary step forward in promoting China's status as the center and the leader of global economy [...] which is unprecedented for a country of the south" (Hu, 2018: 16).

Accordingly, following To & Acuña (2018: 1), despite "massive increases in social expenditure, Latin American theorists arguing from a neo-dependency perspective have questioned the long-term benefits of this so-called cooperation. They have characterized the relationship as *neoextractivist* in reference to the historically dependent relationship between Latin America and countries in the Global North." Instead of win-win relations, this neoextractivism would be replacing the Washington Consensus' logic with a Commodities Consensus' one (Svampa, 2013; Svampa & Slipak, 2015). Therefore, despite this new consensus not following a set of macroeconomic prescriptions, the key point is that the accumulation method hasn't changed. Governments in the region, progressive or conservative, due to the outstanding income during the boom of the commodity prices, relegated the agenda of productive transformation and didn't invest resources in the pursuit of a transformation of their economies. As Eduardo Gydunas (2018: 61) emphasizes, "Extractivism is not an industry, since there is no industrial transformation involved. The insistence on qualifying it as an industry is to appeal to the imagination of large factories with many workers, as a means of seeking broad support within the citizenry [...] In extractivism nothing is produced but everything is extracted (it is a net loss of natural heritage)."

4.3. Environmental issues

A more recent theoretical development is the incorporation of environmental issues into dependency analysis, arguing that this is a key topic to analyze unequal exchange in the contemporary world-economy, as natural resources are sold massively –thousands of tons per year– resulting in the exploitation of not only workers, but also the environment (Goldfrank et al., 1999; Roberts & Grimes, 2002; Roberts & Parks, 2009). Irrespective of being mining, hydrocarbons, or monoculture farming, it is currently acknowledged that massive exploitation leads to severe environmental impacts (Gudynas, 2009; Acosta, 2011; Kulfas, 2020). This has led to the establishment of a new understanding of unequal exchange, which effectively includes these environmental issues. Following Piñero et al. (2020: 1), "core nations rely on foreign natural resources to fuel their socio-economic metabolism, pushing the commodity frontiers [...] and causing environmental cost-shifting to periphery nations, which leads to the emergence of socio-environmental conflicts." Thus, natural resource dependence reinforces inequalities not only through the international division of labor but also through environmental degradation (Clark & York, 2005). Core States extract cheap raw materials that generate economic surplus from the peripheries but also extract environmental resources with huge negative impacts like biodiversity losses (McKinney et al., 2010), deforestation (Burns, Kick & Davis, 2003), green-house emissions (Grimes & Kentor, 2003) and toxic waste disposal (Pellow, 2007). The ecological footprint in the peripheries is thus a result of massive natural resource extraction almost exclusively for its exportation to the core (Burns et al. 2003). As a result, as Kick & McKinney (2012: 397) argue, these "dynamics reproduce global inequalities in the world-system as they rob from the natural environments of non-core settings, with pernicious effects on their sustainability and the sustainability of the world as a whole."

This situation describes accurately the past two decades for the majority of South American nations and the role of China cannot be understated. As mentioned in the section above, the majority of economic flows with this country relate to natural resources and several authors even conclude that, due to the deepening of relations, the region has experienced a process of re-primarization (Slipak, 2016; Campani, 2017). And the problem is that extractive activities, regardless of being performed by companies from China or any other country, pollute at high rates (Kulfas, 2022). In addition, Chinese companies have increasingly become important actors. During their first years in LAC, their presence was plagued with controversy (Soutar, 2011). First, mining and oil companies have rapidly expanded their operations in the region, mostly by buying existing projects (Gallagher & Irwin, 2013). Second, there are several construction companies that arrived in the region as conditions to the intergovernmental loans and, as explained earlier, were aimed mostly at building infrastructure. More than 2.000 Chinese companies have installed in the region and have created more than 1,8 million local jobs (Ríos, 2019). However, despite the benefits, a large number of scandals have accompanied Chinese companies, mostly because of their lack of compliance with local legislation, which was caused by their lack of experience (Gallagher, 2019). As a response, the Chinese government is promoting more responsible operations of its private companies abroad, but according to others such as Garzón (2018), this is still merely rhetoric. A comprehensive study recently published, which includes in-field research, sums the above up as follows,

> A darker viewpoint suggests that China's overseas development assistance projects are largely focused, if subtly so, on gaining access to resources. Critics suggest that China is engaging in a modern version of colonialism, offering foreign aid to build infrastructure like roads and deep-water ports to allow for easier extraction of resources. The China Development Bank has been active throughout Latin America and Africa, providing generous credit in exchange for guaranteed access to resources, often in regions where corruption and/or political unrest make them the only game in town. Mining is one of the world's most conflicted extractive industries and China has been associated with social unrest and environmental degradation in Africa and Latin America (Shapiro, 2019: 103).

Furthermore, although this problem is present in the majority of countries in LAC, it is especially troublesome for left-wing governments which, despite the progressive discourse about respect to mother nature and to indigenous' rights, have hardly addressed the severe ecological impacts the exploration, extraction, and infrastructure projects have had (Svampa, 2013; Acosta, 2015; Slipak & Svampa, 2014). This was especially complicated for countries like Bolivia and Ecuador since the so-called *neo-extractivist* model countervails the official development model known as *Vivir Bien* (roughly translated as "live well"), a term used in the past decade by several politicians and scholars, mostly from Ecuador and Bolivia, which is supposedly based on the harmony that should exist between man and nature (Gudynas, 2011; Lang & Mokrani, 2012; Acosta & Martinez, 2009; Acosta, 2015; Garzón, 2018; Wanderley, 2011). Instead, empirical studies about increasing economic relations with China prove an association with negative environmental and social impacts (Gallagher, 2016; Svampa, 2019).

5. Conclusion

China's rise as a world power has greatly impacted other nations, and developing countries are no exception. In fact, given that China has transformed its economy and is currently the largest manufacturer in the world, its relationship with developing countries has sharply changed. In this regard, as shown above, there are two contending positions around the impact that China's increased economic flows are having on Latin America; wile the first one argues for large mutual benefits coming from the different forms of conducting relations by the Chinese government, the second argues for the reproduction of the hierarchical core-periphery type of relations with larger benefits for China. However, as most experts conclude, the reality is less dichotomous than the academic debate, and China and Latin America actually share many interests and the negative impacts could be reduced if governments took the appropriate measures (Fercheny, 2011; Gallagher, 2019; Wise, 2020).

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trAndeS seeks to create and promote knowledge that can contribute to the realization of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in the Andean Region. It focuses its efforts linking two dimensions: sustainable development as addressed by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that the United Nations established for the year 2030, and the serious socioeconomic, sociopolitical and socioecological inequalities that persist in the Andean region. Our goal is to identify how these inequalities present challenges to achieving the SDGs and how progress toward the SDGs can contribute to reduction of these inequalities.

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