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Dynamics and Prospects for China — Latin America Relations from the Perspective of Latin American Scholars

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Abstract. The research reveals Latin American academic thought on the relationship between Latin America countries and China. The relevance of the topic is linked to the growing importance and presence of China in the foreign policy of Latin American countries, whose bilateral relations are developing against a backdrop of growing US — China tensions. Today, China is one of the key economic partners of several Latin American countries, as well as implementing a number of infrastructure projects on the continent. This forces Latin America to choose between traditional ties of dependence vis-à-vis Washington and increasing economic and investment cooperation with Beijing. Methodologically the article is based on the study and interpretation of the ideas of Latin American scholars and experts gathered from secondary sources, monographs and academic articles. The author puts forward two hypotheses based on the existence of two conjectures. The first hypothesis is that there is no consensus among Latin American scholars and representatives of research centers about the impact of China's bilateral relations with the countries of the region in the logic of the core-periphery model on the economic development of Latin America. The second hypothesis is that the views of the local academic community have little or even no influence on the decisions Latin American governments make regarding China. The author concludes that at a time when Latin America is going through a crisis cycle of integration processes the region is unable to take a unified position on the issue of assessing China's performance.

Key words: Latin America, China, USA, international studies, Latin American studies


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Динамика и перспективы отношений Китая и Латинской Америки в работах латиноамериканских исследователей

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Аннотация. Раскрывается проблематика отношений Латинской Америки и Китая с отсылкой к ключевым работам латиноамериканских исследователей. Актуальность темы связана с ростом значимости и присутствия Китая во внешнеполитической деятельности латиноамериканских стран, поскольку отношения

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между КНР и странами региона развиваются на фоне роста американо-китайских противоречий. Сегодня Китай является одним из ключевых экономических партнеров ряда латиноамериканских стран, реализует ряд инфраструктурных проектов на континенте. Это вынуждает Латинскую Америку делать выбор между традиционными связями зависимости от Вашингтона и растущим экономическим и инвестиционным сотрудничеством с Пекином. Методологически исследование базируется на изучении и интерпретации идей латиноамериканских ученых и экспертов, содержащихся во вторичных источниках, монографиях и научных статьях. Автор выдвигает две гипотезы. Первая гипотеза заключается в том, что среди латиноамериканских ученых и представителей исследовательских центров нет единой позиции по вопросу влияния двусторонних отношений КНР со странами региона в логике модели «ядро — периферия» на экономическое развитие Латинской Америки. Вторая гипотеза состоит в том, что оценки местного академического сообщества практически не влияют на принимаемые правительствами латиноамериканских стран решения в отношении Китая. Автор приходит к выводу, что в настоящее время, когда Латинская Америка проходит через кризисный цикл интеграционных процессов, регион не в состоянии занять единую позицию по вопросу оценки деятельности Китая.

Ключевые слова: Латинская Америка, Китай, США, международные отношения, латиноамериканистика

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Introduction

The Chinese capitalist model, which is mainly production for export, has stimulated the growth of world economy by creating a virtuoso investment, production and market chains (Li Xing, 2010). Latin America has been drawn into this new dynamic circuit and has become economically indispensable to China, providing food, energy and minerals. In turn, it is a huge import market for Chinese manufactured goods, investment and loans (Li Xing & Christensen, 2012; Bernal-Meza & Li Xing, 2020). Nevertheless, Latin America has undergone a process of primary specialization and re-specialization in its productive structures, within a structure of complementary economic relations (primary exports and manufactured goods), as each part exports to the other the products it specialises in. China has displaced Latin American manufactured exports to third markets and replaced intra-regional exporters, due to its higher productivity. The displacement of trading partners and the dominance achieved by the Chinese economy has also negatively affected integration

processes, replacing most interregional exports (Hiratuka, 2016; Oviedo, 2016).

Given the importance that China has gained for the region, the bilateral relations are a common agenda of economic and political interest for Latin America (Bernal-Meza & Li Xing, 2020; Méndez & Turzi, 2020). There is no denying that China has become an issue of concern to governments, academics and research centers.

The purpose of this article is to examine Latin American scholars and researchers' perceptions of China and its regional influence. To this end, the initial selection of the most widely disseminated and cited publications in academia was done in order to identify commonalities and differences and to assess the impact of these views on Latin American foreign public policy.

China — Latin America Economic Relations: Evolution and Impacts

Until the last decade of the 20th century, China was an almost unknown actor in Latin

America's economic and political relations. Only Brazil and Chile had Beijing as an important trading partner, and Brazil was the only country that shared an international political interest agenda with China (Bernal-Meza & Quintanar, 2012). Since then, towards the end of the 1980s, Brazil — China relations have been characterized as strategic and South — South relationship (Becard, 2017; Santoro, 2022).

The expression *parceria estratégica* or strategic alliance was applied to this bilateral relationship during the government of Itamar Franco (1992—1995) and since then it has been used by successive governments (Albuquerque, 2013). Despite its vagueness, the term is widely used to indicate the profile acquired or desired in relations with a certain country, and there are various types of *parceria estratégica*, which differ according to the different objectives they intend to achieve (Becard, 2013). As in other countries, the expression *parceria estratégica* became an important idea in Brazil's foreign policy, the intense use is explained by the need for diplomacy to give priority to certain bilateral relationships (Oliveira, 2010; Lessa & Oliveira, 2013, pp. 9—12). This *parceria* constituted China's first close political rapprochement with a Latin American country, even though Chile was the first country in the continental hemisphere to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1971. China has subsequently established strategic alliances with Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina and other countries in the region,¹ signalling a gradual rapprochement with Latin America and deepening bilateral ties.

Over four decades, China has become a key player in the world economy and has consolidated a relationship of economic domination with the region within the *center — periphery* structure, modeled on the type of

international exchange of trade in basic or primary products in exchange for industrial and high-tech products. The Chinese productive model of export production has stimulated the growth of the rest of the world's economies through the creation of a virtuous circuit of investment, production and market (Bernal-Meza & Li Xing, 2020). In the context of the capitalist world-economy, Latin America has been drawn into this new dynamic center (Oviedo, 2014) and has become an economically indispensable region for China, providing food, energy (oil) and minerals. On the other hand, the Latin American region has gradually become an important market for industrial products, investments and loans of Chinese origin.

Currently, China is the main trading partner of Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Peru, Uruguay and Argentina, the second trading partner of Colombia and the main exporter to Paraguay and Bolivia. The country reached this position in less than thirty years, as the center of a center — periphery structure, specializing our region as an exporter of primary products and commodities and an importer of its industrial goods, equipment, technologies, investments and loans (Bernal-Meza, 2021a, p. 226).

Comparing the production and export structures of Latin American countries, three levels of economic development were observed by the last decades of the 20th century. These are the primary-exporting countries that have remained in this condition since their origins as independent states (Central American countries, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay and partially Peru (until 1960—1970)); countries that were advancing towards industrialization (Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Uruguay) and the semi-industrialized countries (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina) that were already exporting certain levels of industrial manufacturing.

A process of peripheralization, i.e. a return to the stage of development that was during the substitution process thanks to the development of industrialization (food, clothing, footwear,

¹ How China Ranks Its Partners in LAC // The Inter-American Dialogue. February 3, 2021. URL: <https://www.thedialogue.org/blogs/2021/02/how-china-ranks-its-partners-in-lac/> (accessed: 22.05.2022).

toys and other wooden products, etc.) and which corresponds to the second level mentioned above (countries such as Chile, Colombia, Uruguay, etc.), has begun to coexist with a process of re-peripheralization of these semi-industrial economies due to a return to the specialization of primary production.

The strengthening or reaffirmation of the primary character of the economy, as well as the re-peripheralization process, resulted from the structure of inter-industrial exchange with China during a period that has been developing for thirty years. These were the effects of Chinese economic, industrial and technological development, which contrasted high productivity on the Chinese side with low productivity on the Latin American side. This process has triggered various studies and analyses, which have been reflected in different publications (Guelar, 2013; Sevares, 2015; Moneta & Cesarín, 2016; Dussel Peters, 2016; Pastrana Buelvas & Gehring, 2017; Bernal-Meza & Li Xing, 2020). Both situations, peripheralization and re-peripheralization, underline the contrast between China's high economic development and the difficulties of Latin American countries in reducing their dependence due to their deep technological backwardness, within the framework of international political economy (Bernal-Meza, 2021a, pp. 225—226).

Consequently, this relationship represents a common agenda of economic and political interest for governments and a subject of concern for academics and research centers. In recent years, various studies and research articles of varying quality and analytical depth have been published. Some authors and publications have had an important distribution (Oviedo, 2012a; 2012b; 2014; 2017; da Costa Ferreira & Albuquerque, 2013; Rodríguez Aranda & Shouguo, 2013; Bartesagui, 2015; Bonilla & Milet, 2015; Pini, 2015; Sevares, 2015; 2016; Moneta & Cesarín, 2016; Becard, 2017; Pastrana Buelvas & Gehring, 2017; Bernal-Meza & Li Xing, 2020; Méndez & Turzi, 2020; Bernal-Meza, 2021a; 2021b;

Jaguaribe, 2021; Dussel Peters, 2021). To these should be added other studies produced by Latin American scholars as part of research at ECLAC² and research centers, such as the Latin American and Caribbean Academic Network on China, headquartered at the Centre for Sino-Mexican Studies at the Faculty of Economics, National Autonomous University of Mexico (Dussel Peters, 2016) and the Centre for Latin American Studies on China at Andrés Bello University (Chile) (Reyes Matta, 2017).

Analyzing the relations from the present to the starting point of the process of expansion of these economic relations, through the growth of commercial exchange, Latin America experienced a process of “primarization,” that is, the specialization (and re-specialization) of its productive structures, as a consequence of the complementary and harmonious economic relationship, derived from the differences in productivity that sustained both baskets of export goods.

For the Latin American semi-industrialized economies (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina) Chinese international competition has displaced their exports to third markets, including those of the region itself, due to the greater manufacturing and industrial productivity of the Chinese productive structure (Bernal-Meza, 2012; 2021a; 2021b; Beckerman & Moncaut, 2016; Oviedo, 2016). The most important example, given that it concerns inter and intra-industry exchanges between the two most industrialized South American economies (Brazil and Argentina), where Brazil has been Argentina's main trading partner since MERCOSUR was

² See: Latin America and the Caribbean and China. Towards a New Era of Economic Cooperation // Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. May 2015. URL: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/38197/S1500388_en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed: 22.05.2022); Exploring New Forms of Cooperation between China and Latin America and the Caribbean // Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. January 19, 2018. URL: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/43214/S1701249_en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed: 22.05.2022).

created in 1991, and was displaced from that top spot by Sino-Argentine bilateral trade at the end of 2020.³ In short, China, through its higher productivity — the result of accelerated and constant technological progress — built a structure that evolved according to the classical core-periphery morphology interpreted by R. Prebisch.⁴ His theory of deteriorating terms of trade, formulated in 1950, explains the current phenomenon of relations between China and Latin America, highlighting the accelerated process of re-primarization and primarization that leads to a new stage of dependence, reproducing cycles of economic subjugation with the political consequences that Latin America has experienced with other hegemonic powers in the past (Bernal-Meza, 2021b). Similarly, the substitution of trading partners and the dominance achieved by the Chinese economy began to have a negative impact on regional and sub-regional integration processes that sought to develop markets for complementary economies (Beckerman & Moncaut, 2016; Hiratuka, 2016). While not unique, the example of the Brazil — Argentina — China triangular relationship is the most significant in terms of the impact of trade with China, as it has an impact on inter- and intra-industry exchange.

This diagnosis allows us not so much to demonstrate as to expose two hypotheses based on the existence of two conjectures that draw attention to the conclusions of analyses and studies on Latin American-Chinese relations.

³ China desplazó a Brasil como principal socio comercial de la Argentina // *Télam* S.E. 03.06.2020. URL: <https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/202006/471744-argentina-comercio-exterior-brasil-china.html> (accessed: 22.05.2022).

⁴ See: Prebisch R. *The Economic Development of Latin America and Its Principal Problems* // Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. May 15, 1949. URL: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/30088/S4900192_en.pdf (accessed: 22.05.2022); Prebisch R. *Theoretical and Practical Problems of Economic Growth* // Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. May 16, 1951. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1474007> (accessed: 22.05.2022).

The first hypothesis states that there is no homogeneous opinion among scholars or research centers, universities or think tanks in Latin American countries about the impact and effects or results (positive or negative) that bilateral relations have on economic development, whether as a result of exchanges between countries or the region as a whole. This was warned about several years ago (Bernal-Meza, 2014), and a subsequent review of the specialist literature has not changed this conjecture. Nevertheless, it seems that the risks and problems that this relationship entails are becoming more widespread, given the huge differences in productivity between economic and production structures.

The second hypothesis holds that there is no clear basis for claiming that the views of academics have influenced or are influencing the perceptions and decisions of government policy towards China. This premise is important because it shows that other social actors have a greater influence on government decisions: in particular the business and export sector, as observed in the case of Chile (Wilhelmy, 2015; Ffrench-Davis, 2018; Bernal-Meza, 2020) and Brazil (Paulino, 2020; Vidigal & Bernal-Meza, 2020).

The case of Colombia has been one of the most significant. According to authors such as Ahumada (1996), Palacios (2001), and Estrada (2005), “*respice pollum*”⁵ expresses the natural link that intellectual power elites in Colombia want to maintain with the government in their economic and ideological interests. These were expressed through economic policy (Ahumada, 1996; Estrada, 2005), which subordinated it to foreign policy. The neoliberal ideas of the political elite and what the authors call “technocrats” have shaped public policy in general (Ahumada, 1996; Estrada, 2005) and

⁵ *Respice polum* (“*Mirar hacia el norte*”; “*Look toward North*”) — the foreign policy paradigm that dominates Colombia’s vision of international relations and, on this basis, has shaped the close relationship between Colombia and the USA since 1920.

have played a crucial role in strengthening ties with the US.

In the Mexican case, Aguilar Rivera (2014) brought together various authors to compile arguments in defense of liberalism to rid the state of the influence of corporate Mexico. The author argues that “while liberalism in many Latin American countries completely receded at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, Mexico is undergoing the third liberal moment in its history” (Aguilar Rivera, 2014). In the same book, Aguilar Camín (2014, p. 31) argues that there is not a single large enterprise in the Mexican economy that is not in the hands of monopolies or oligopolies. A study comparing eight countries concluded that business elites exercise *de facto* power over Latin American politics (Bottinelli & Serna, 2018).

The second relevant point is that although in the first phase of disclosure of publications on relations with China, towards the first decade of the 21st century and up to the present, problems arising from the nature or type of structure of China — Latin America economic relations, defined within the Prebisch *core* — *periphery* paradigm and the commercial and financial implications of these relations, formed the most important topic of academic reflection on bilateral international relations in general.

In recent years, since Donald Trump came to power and as a consequence of the tensions and conflicts between China and the US, a new topic of discussion has emerged among scholars, which revolves around the impact that confrontation between the US and China could have on Latin America’s international relations with both powers on the economic, political and military agenda.

Heterogeneity or Homogeneity in Latin American Academic Thought on China

In the first selection of texts, not many authors indicate that there are divergent views

among scholars on Chinese economic and political influence on Latin American countries, on its economic development or on the international economic integration of the region. However, according to some authors, China represents the greatest current challenge for Latin America. Such a position is expressed, for example, by Oviedo (2012a; 2012b; 2016), Guelar (2013), Sevares (2015), Bernal-Meza (2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2019b), Mourón, Urdinez and Schenoni (2016), Urdinez, Mourón, Schenoni and Oliveira (2016), Vadell and Ramos (2019), Bernal-Meza and Li Xing (2020), Méndez and Turzi (2020). These authors agree that the structure of economic relations, characterized by a core-periphery model (exchange of primary products for manufactured goods) does not favor the Latin American economic development.

Other authors believe that South America’s growing dependence on China in trade, investment and loans has a negative impact on South American economic integration, especially because Chinese exports are replacing the intermediate industrialisation of Latin American partners. Hiratuka (2016), Dussel Peters (2016), Oviedo (2016), Beckerman and Moncaut (2016) advocate exactly this position. More specifically, China has a negative impact on Brazil’s regional leadership by replicating core-periphery trade relations (Bernal-Meza, 2019b). Authors such as Becard (2017) question the existence of South — South relations between China and Brazil, as there is no symmetry in Brazil — China international relations, and doubt the existence of a true *parceria estratégica* between the two countries (Albuquerque, 2013; Becard, 2017; Santoro, 2022).

These authors contrast with others who see China as an important example of innovation and tradition (Girado, 2017; Reyes Matta, 2017). According to Kuwayama and Rosales (2012, p. 121), China’s leading role in the global economy implies that Latin American and Caribbean countries should seek a strategic

alliance with it, trying to make this relationship a pivot to improve the quality of their international integration.

Other authors mostly highlight the example of China as a model for development (Tzili Apango, 2022) or point to China as a partner that cannot be ignored (Tussie, 2019). There are also some authors who praise China's international role as an actor that promotes soft power policy, facilitates the consolidation of international regimes (Tzili Apango, 2011) and advocates global interdependence (Girado, 2021).

Some scholars emphasise that the Latin American-Chinese relationship may contribute to Latin America's greater autonomy regarding the United States (Bonilla & Milet, 2015). This view is relatively questioned by other authors, although they see a favourable Chinese presence in the region (Legler, Turzi & Tzili Apango, 2020), with the risk that China could lead bilateral forums such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) to its advantage (Tzili Apango, 2017). Vadell & Rubiolo (2020) highlight the cooperation that China provided to Latin America during the COVID-19 pandemic and argue that this cooperation was more important than that of the US and the European Union. Finally, there are those who imagine the world according to China's economic and political views (Girado, 2021).

Impact of the US — China Tensions

The problem of tensions between the US and China has grown because of former President Donald Trump's containment policy towards Beijing and the deepening of this strategy by the current administration of Joseph Biden. The conflict has become a new challenge for international relations in Latin America, and although it currently concerns only academics. This issue is being actively addressed by Vera, Defelipe & Castro (2017), de la Balze (2019), Rosales (2019), Schenoni (2019), Fortin, Heine & Ominami (2020; 2021), Actis and Creus

(2021), Bernal-Meza (2021a), Herz, de Almeida Silva and Marcondes (2021), Li Xing and Bernal-Meza (2021). However, it is not clear today whether the issue is a reason for reflection at governmental level or for foreign policy decisions, despite the fact that the regional implications of tensions between the two powers were present in the thinking of Latin American academics as early as the early 2010s (Pecequilo, 2013; Escudé, 2014).

As a political factor, due to the potential for increased autonomy of the region vis-à-vis the US, China has been the subject of interesting analyzes (Bonilla & Milet, 2015; Chávez, 2015; Legler, Turzi & Tzili Apango, 2020). Recent tensions between the two powers have renewed Washington's concerns over spheres of influence, and this has turned the gaze of the United States towards Latin America. The importance of this issue seems to be increasing in relation to the Ukraine conflict. Concern for spheres of economic influence is projected into areas of political and military influence (Bernal-Meza & Li Xing, 2020; Méndez & Turzi, 2020), while interests in global value and supply chains also become hard power factors in the power-sphere relationship (Prieto, Figueredo & Rodríguez, 2017; Bernal-Meza, 2021a).

The perception of Chinese power, as well as the economic, political and financial responses to Russia as a warning to China, contribute to the belief that Beijing will have to face new challenges from the United States and its allies. There is growing confidence that among Beijing's priorities is to secure its supply chain, of which South America is a very important link, as a supplier of energy, minerals (iron) and food, as well as strategic minerals such as copper, lithium and "rare earths," deposits of which lie in Brazil and to a lesser extent in Argentina, and which are accessible via the road system, although not as abundant as in other countries (China, Australia, Myanmar, Russia).

Faced with the risks of a return of pressure for alignment, the reflections of the Latin

American academy have not been significant. Fortin, Heine and Ominami's (2020) proposal for active non-alignment, which differs from the non-alignment promoted by the group of non-aligned countries at the time, attracted the most attention. The proposal aims to present itself as a new foreign policy doctrine, which is joined by a representative circle of the Latin American Academy of International Affairs (Fortin, Heine & Ominami, 2021). This view contrasts with that of authors such as Girado (2021), who foresee a world in which China will dominate, suggesting more convergence between countries and the new power.

For their part, Actis and Creus (2018) drew attention to the fact that both powers are currently the only ones capable of disseminating and supporting strategic projects leading to bipolarity, but the risks, for example for Latin America, will depend on their stiff or distended nature. According to these authors: "For Latin American countries, which have historically had to adapt to an international environment that is given to them and have been able to do little to modify it, it is essential to have precise interpretations of the international order to maximize opportunities and reduce their threats" (Actis & Creus, 2018, p. 14). In this sense, according to Castañeda (2021), active non-alignment would make Latin America a more present and dynamic actor on the international stage and would avoid the risk that either of the two powers — the United States or China — would see the region as an actor closer to one or the other.

Latin America and the US — China Conflict

Assumptions that the US — China conflict will have no consequences for Latin America are far from being true. The point here lies in the return of concerns about the establishment of spheres of influence, which seemed to be a thing of the past for the US after the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War.

D. Trump has pressured several governments (Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Panama, the Dominican Republic) not to implement Chinese 5G networks,⁶ to decouple their presence in Chinese value chains (Li Xing & Bernal-Meza, 2021) and to "discourage" the Chilean fibre-optic cable project that was to link Valparaiso with Shanghai.⁷ During his presidential campaign in 2020, Joseph Biden proposed an international alliance of democracies to protect and promote democratic governments and defend human rights,⁸ formulated to confront the Chinese challenge. Obviously, this strategy would expose Latin America to pressure and intervention from the US government and some of its allies, such as the European Union, as democracy and human rights are not values that dominate the Latin American political scene.

To avoid the dilemma of choosing between the hegemonic power of the hemisphere represented by the US and the increasingly dominant economic power of China, Fortin, Heine and Ominami (2020) suggested that the region should stick to active non-alignment. But such a policy requires political convergence based on strong ties of integration and regional governance, which is currently far from possible. It has to be recognized that Latin America is more fragmented than ever, and such a strategy seems more like utopia than a viable policy. The serious crisis that intra-Latin American cooperation is undergoing (Silva Flores, Noyola Rodriguez & Kan, 2018; de la

⁶ US Announces Expansion of Clean Network to 53 Countries // The Frontier Post. August 5, 2020. URL: <https://thefrontierpost.com/us-announces-expansion-of-clean-network-to-53-countries/> (accessed: 22.05.2022).

⁷ Chile Picks Japan's Trans-Pacific Cable Route in Snub to China // Nikkei Asia. July 29, 2020. URL: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Telecommunication/Chile-picks-japan-s-trans-pacific-cable-route-in-snub-to-china> (accessed: 22.05.2022).

⁸ Summit for Democracy Summary of Proceedings // The White House. December 23, 2021. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/23/summit-for-democracy-summary-of-proceedings/> (accessed: 22.05.2022).

Torre & Grabendorff, 2020) makes it impossible to coordinate strategies in the face of global challenges.

Crisis of Latin American Integration

After more than a decade of dominance of the free market model, the regional and global transformation that took place in the early 21st century has changed the way economic development is understood and the inclusion of regional integration blocs and agreements in the international political economy has modified the position of countries (Briceño-Ruiz & Morales, 2017; Devés & Álvarez, 2020).

At the beginning of this century, the balance of the 'state of affairs' in Latin America from an intra- and extra-regional perspective showed, in a tangible way, that there was a closeness between the Latin American countries. The strong homogeneity of the economic development model, a foreign policy converging with North American liberal internationalism, and good relations with the USA, views on globalization and regionalism, and socio-political and economic crises between 2000 and 2015 all contributed to this. Since the second decade of the 21st century, however, disagreements have emerged over four central issues: the vision of globalization, the degree of economic openness, relations with the US, the paradigm of regionalism and integration. Thus, the countries disagreed on issues on which they had agreed only a decade earlier (Bernal-Meza, 2019a). The countries differed on these policies, and integration entered into a process of great uncertainty.

Latin American regionalism has suffered the consequences of the deployment of post-liberal regionalism (Briceño-Ruiz & Morales, 2017). Latin American countries began unilaterally and without seeking convergence to adopt different political and economic strategies to face the challenges of an international scenario experiencing a crisis of multilateralism and caused by the impact of the COVID-19

epidemic (Bernal-Meza, 2021b; Li Xing & Bernal-Meza, 2021) and their own flaws in development policies. After the abandonment of the import substitution industrialization strategy, the two subsequent strategies, neoliberalism and unilateral opening and open regionalism, led to similar failures. It is in this context that China became increasingly important as an extra-regional actor.

Conclusion

Although the views of Latin American scholars tend to be predominantly critical of the medium- and long-term implications of China — Latin America relations, Latin American governments continue to deepen their economic and financial ties with Beijing. China is an important provider of monetary resources through investments and loans (Oviedo, 2016; 2017; Sevares, 2016; Becard, Lessa & Silveira, 2020; Bernal-Meza & Li Xing, 2020; Dussel Peters, 2021) and provides Latin American countries with a market for their primary exports.

In the context of constant and historical structural deficits in Latin American economies, these reasons take on a particular weight. Furthermore, China does not attach conditions linking economic relations to respect for labor and human rights, while other traditional investors in Latin America, such as the European Union countries, are strongly demanding on these matters.

However, these arguments in favor of economic relations with China run counter to the belief that the growth of economic and trade exchanges between China and Latin America is accompanied by the imposition of economic and political rules, of which China's international trade policy is the carrier. Even though the discourse of Chinese diplomacy is based on pragmatic policies, including South — South cooperation. China's arguments about relations with developing countries coincide with the economic and technical cooperation needs of Latin American countries (Bernal-Meza, 2017).

Predominantly, Latin American businessmen in general. The business elite governments continue to remain closer to liberal economic thought and its social representatives — large economic groups and exercise de facto power in Latin America (Bottinelli & Serna, 2018) and impose its vision on members of the academic world.

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