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Chinese geostrategic vision and its incidence on Latin America and Africa: A view from the theory of naval power

Section: MILITARY STUDIES

Scientific and technological research article

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Visión geoestratégica china y su incidencia sobre Latinoamérica y África, una mirada desde la teoría del poder naval

Visão geoestratégica chinesa e seu impacto na América Latina e na África, uma visão da teoria do poder naval

La vision géostratégique chinoise et son impact sur l'Amérique latine et l'Afrique, une vue de la théorie de la puissance navale

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Abstract. China has had a significant incidence in various sectors of African and Latin American politics, economy, and trade. There is no denying that its foreign policy has strategic interests in both regions. One of the most outstanding features of Chinese politics is its desire to promote cooperation to foster a renaissance between Asia and Latin America and Africa. Unlike the old colonial masters, China is committed to providing these regions with new opportunities for development. Bearing in mind Alfred Mahan's theory of naval power, and the strategic rearguard that, at a given time, it allowed the United States, China is attempting to maintain the strategic center of gravity, which the economic control of Latin America and Africa and its surrounding resources provides to generate a strategic expansion that would ensure its interests and power in the hemisphere. In exchange, China strives to promote economic, commercial, political, and social development in African and Latin American societies.

Keywords: center-periphery; cooperation; economic development; strategic interests; Theory of naval power.

Resumen. La presencia de China en África y América Latina ha tenido una presencia importante en distintos ámbitos de la política, la economía y el comercio de estas regiones. China no niega que su política exterior tiene intereses estratégicos en ambas regiones, uno de los rasgos más sobresalientes de la política china es su aspiración de promover la cooperación para alcanzar el renacimiento entre Asia con América Latina y África. A diferencia de los antiguos maestros coloniales, el compromiso de China proporciona a estas regiones nuevas oportunidades de desarrollo. Teniendo en cuenta la teoría del Poder Naval de Alfred Mahan y la retaguardia estratégica que en su momento planteó para Estados Unidos, China está tratando de mantener un centro de gravedad estratégico que va a tener el control económico de América Latina y África, y de los recursos que rodean cada región, generando esto una expansión estratégica para asegurar sus intereses y su poder en el hemisferio, a cambio de promover el desarrollo económico, comercial, político y social en las sociedades africanas y latinoamericanas.

Palabras clave: centro-periferia; cooperación; desarrollo económico; intereses estratégicos; Teoría del Poder Naval.

Resumo. A presença da China na África e na América Latina teve uma presença importante em diferentes áreas da política, economia e comércio nessas regiões. A China não nega que sua política externa tenha interesses estratégicos em ambas regiões. Uma das características mais destacadas da política chinesa é sua aspiração de promover a cooperação para o renascimento entre a Ásia, a América Latina e a África. Ao contrário dos antigos mestres coloniais, o compromisso da China oferece a essas regiões novas oportunidades de desenvolvimento. Dada a teoria do Poder Naval de Alfred Mahan e a retaguarda estratégica que no momento posou para os Estados Unidos, a China está tentando manter um centro de gravidade estratégico que terá o controle econômico da América Latina e da África, e os recursos que cercam cada região, gerando isso uma expansão estratégica para garantir seus interesses e poder no hemisfério, em troca de promover o desenvolvimento econômico, comercial, político e social nas sociedades africanas e latino-americanas.

Palavras-chave: centro-periferia; cooperação; desenvolvimento econômico; interesses estratégicos; Teoria do Poder Naval.

Résumé. La présence de la Chine en Afrique et en Amérique latine a eu une présence importante dans différents domaines de la politique, de l'économie et du commerce dans ces régions. La Chine ne nie pas que sa politique étrangère a des intérêts stratégiques dans les deux régions. L'un des traits les plus saillants de la politique chinoise est leur volonté de promouvoir la coopération pour réaliser la renaissance entre l'Asie et l'Amérique latine et en Afrique. Contrairement aux anciens maîtres coloniaux, l'engagement de la Chine donne à ces régions de nouvelles opportunités de développement. Compte tenu de la théorie de la puissance navale d'Alfred Mahan, et de l'arrière-garde stratégique qui a, à l'époque, posé pour les États-Unis, la Chine tente de maintenir un centre de gravité stratégique donner par le contrôle économique de l'Amérique latine et en Afrique, et les ressources qui entourent chaque région, générant une expansion stratégique pour assurer leurs intérêts et leur pouvoir dans l'hémisphère, en échange de la promotion du développement économique, commercial, politique et social dans les sociétés africaines et latino-américaines.

Mots-clés: centre/périphérie ; développement économique ; intérêts stratégiques ; la coopération ; Théorie de la puissance navale.

Introduction

A State's interests are guided by its particular objectives, which drive its actions within international activities. The extent to which a State manages to protect its interests guarantees its survival. The succession of power has occurred in the international system throughout history, demonstrating that power is materialized in concrete entities. The contemporary international system is a participant in the struggle for world power, against States that refuse to be denied international power (Cancelado, 2016).

In the 21st century, the sea continues to be the means by which countries maintain trade relations and a setting for a series of deployments of military power. China is aware of the sea's importance in international relations; therefore, it does not overlook its naval projection. Latin America and Africa are not extrinsic to Chinese interests; instead, they are regions that have become the axes of the Chinese economy.

The new form of power is focused on capital systems and their processes of reproduction and diffusion, indicating that interests drive power relations. The new international economy implies a change in the nature of international trade. The information revolution and the communication of production have transformed these practices; the States' tendency is towards a model of information and communication technologies. The world economy associates the State as a meta-power, which can change the national and international rules. In the digital world, the economy has had a shift in dynamics (Cancelado, 2016, p. 36).

The changes undergone by China imply a study of the creation of power in the international system, based on the construction of naval power and focused on the development of the combination of economic capacity and projection of commercial power.

In this article, the projection of Chinese power will be analyzed, drawing from the growth of its naval power and the expansion of its influence in Latin America and Africa and considering its implemented policies of cooperation, trade, and diplomatic approach. First, an analysis of the theory of naval power will be made, heeding the geopolitical thinking of Alfred Mahan¹ and its influence on the interests of the States of the contemporary international system. From this, an analysis of the International Economic Policy is made, postulating Frieden and Martin to understand how the foreign economic policy of the States is configured strategically according to the interests of government and influential groups. Following China's power in the 21st century will be exposed. Latin America and Africa will be analyzed as a case study, considering the interests of this Asian Tiger in the resources and commercial dynamism of these two regions.

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The theory of naval power

The structure of the contemporary international order is apparently becoming decentralized, providing the idea of polarity an opportunity to be revitalized. Currently, a complex multipolar scenario is developing, with different, geographically dispersed, economic and political centers of power. The onset of the multipolar system observed in the economic sphere, and the presence of different international actors with global reach has an impact on the relevance of the current international regimes and questions the validity of several of them. (Bonilla & Milet, 2015, p.10)

As a theoretician of maritime power, Alfred Mahan studies the United States' need to improve its foreign policy through the expansion of maritime communication lines, the projection of naval power, and expansion at a global level. The influence of the naval power allows States with maritime access to use maritime commerce to develop their economy and ensure marine dominion, supported by a strong naval power in times of war and peace (Mahan, 2000). Mahan formulated naval power as a geopolitical theory that restructures the strategy or naval tactics; it extracts six factors of maritime power, namely, geographical position, physical configuration, territorial extension, population, national character, and government institutions.

This author of the theory of naval power states that the influence exerted by dominion over the ocean is a consequence of geographical reality, as water covers much of the planet. Progressively, the sea has become the primary means of communications to fulfill economic, strategic, political, and social purposes. Maritime power consists of the faculty that a State has to profit from the sea on its behalf. It is composed of two elements: economic and social maritime interests, which are the set of economic, political, social, and military benefits obtained by the nation from all activities related to the use of the sea, and naval power (Mahan, 2000).

The Theory of Naval Power is based on the combination of a series of geographical situations related to the lack of common borders with potential adversaries, meaning that the States are not compelled to invest excessively in terrestrial armies; their dominant geographic location, concerning the general maritime traffic system, allows them a permanent control over commercial traffic (Mahan, 2013).

Mahan argued that maritime power and economic development are deeply interrelated. Only the ability to protect trade and project power on the sea can ensure the vitality and power of a State. With the theory of naval power, Mahan influenced the need of the United States to take over world power. Thus, it identifies an appropriate naval policy to achieve national interests (Mahan, 2000).

This theory of power is a term that continues to acquire vigor in the international scenario; an example of this is China. For a few years now, China has been increasing its naval and maritime interests mainly towards territories such as Latin America and Africa. China's sole intentions are to ensure its energy expenditures and achieve broader security

objectives. Its maritime strategy is rooted in the United States, a state that China perceives as its key strategic adversary, given the origin of the theory of naval power.

If a nation wishes to exert political influence in unstable regions, it must possess suitably situated bases and the demands of peacetime commerce that often dictate the need for such possessions, which are admitted when the opportunity presents itself (Mahan, 2103).

For Mahan, the strategic value of a site depends on three conditions. The first and foremost, its position; power and resources can be supplied or artificially increased, however, the port's condition as a strategic area of influence cannot be changed. The second and third are its military power—both offensive and defensive—, and the resources of the place itself and the surrounding territory (Mahan, 2013).

As an element of foreign policy, naval power contributes to national fulfillment. Its considerations show that the essential and supreme factor in establishing and maintaining a country's economic, political, and military power, in outer maritime regions, is the control of a fleet superior to that of any possible adversary to target the objective (Mahan, 2000).

Geopolitics has been used as a tool to justify theories on the interrelation between national power and the international community. It has helped some States to reach their political objectives. Many thinkers have established different conceptualizations to explain national power; from international relations, it is a crucial factor in international politics. Even so, dimensioning a State's national power is challenging because most of its related factors, such as leadership, nationalism, and religiosity, as well as values of society, racism, among others are intangible (Mahan, 2000).

However, other factors *are* tangible, such as the territory's physical characteristics, population, government system, technological development, information, and communications system, natural resources, industrial and agricultural production, and its armed forces and exporting and importing capacity, among others. Concerning the distribution of power in the world, Geopolitics could be summarized as the relationship between geographical and other factors (Mahan, 2000).

Mahan believed that the on-land control and government of political power distribution was highly complex, thus, he based his theory on the ability of States to manage the use of the oceans and international maritime crossings as a means of transportation. Mahan's conception grew along with his conviction that maritime communications would always be more efficient and massive than terrestrial communications (Mahan, 2000).

Mahan formulated the thesis that the State controlling and using the world's maritime communications on its behalf, acquires an invaluable economic and military advantage over its contenders; the high influence of maritime trade on the wealth and strength of a country was clearly recognized as the founding principle for the development and prosperity of a State's commerce.

The interaction between domestic and international affairs in the construction of the States' economic external policy

Given the construction of the foreign economic policy of the States, it is possible to surmise, that the interaction between domestic and foreign policy is based on the current development model, and its implementation is made possible in a nationally and internationally existing institutional and regulatory framework. Frieden & Martin state that all of the elements of international economic policy answer to "*interests, institutions, and structure of information*", which allows us to posit that the interrelation of domestic and international interests enables the strategic use of information and institutions, which ultimately yields the States' foreign economic policy (Frieden & Martin, 2002).

In the next section of the text, we analyze how these elements make this interaction possible in light of the proposed hypothesis. The role of the effect of capital markets and international economic trends on the response of groups that debate their interests between national products and international factors is recognized, resulting in the economic policies, a trend that will be the object of the analysis to follow.

When making an in-depth analysis, it is necessary to start by describing how the interaction of these three elements develops internally, in domestic politics, to then analyze the effect of the international referent. At this point, the sources of interstate conflict and cooperation, which are consequences of the globalization of national and international political economies, come to play an important role. Therefore, it is essential to take into account the global political economy and strategic role of interaction between nation-states and non-state actors because the core of the national-international connection is the impact of national products and institutions, and interests on international interaction, which can be analyzed in terms of interests, institutions, and the information managed within this framework (Frieden & Martin, 2002).

On the one hand, the interests of economic and political factors are a driving force that lies behind economic policy decisions, thus depending on the strategic environment. On the other, the interests are incorporated through institutions that also delegate responsibility for decision-making to specific actors. Lastly, the structure of information influences negotiations and political choices.

One form of national-international interaction looks directly at how the international economy affects national and international interests and their information, thus affecting the national foreign policy economically through the related channels. From the global economy to the preferences of national socio-economic and political actors, the trends directly affect the interests of domestic groups, leading them to new political preferences, which is why the expansion of world trade strengthens the holders of abundant factors at the national level, such as labor in poor countries and capital in richer countries (Frieden & Martin, 2002).

The international economic environment affects political preferences and the behavior of domestic groups, which has an impact on the formulation of national, and foreign policies, as well as economic policies. In addition to affecting national interests, the international economy can affect national institutions.

In another instance, a variant analysis of the impact of the international on the national economy speaks of the effects of the globalization of the State's perspectives on the state of social democratic welfare and similar social policies. This economic integration has reduced the ability of governments to tax capital, which limits the scope of government policies to deal with the social upheavals created by globalization, which has been developing the global economic integration.

The theory of the International Economic Policy presents different perspectives to analyze the way in which the domestic and international components interrelate and ultimately base the policy. Seeking to integrate them, to present the best possible analysis, it was possible to understand how the international and domestic context are mutually influential in the different negotiation processes, hence, determine that it is fundamental to articulate the institutions, information, and domestic interests in such a way that allows those elements that the current development model prefers and restricts those that it rejects. The economic foreign policy of the States is then configured in a strategically, according to the interests of government and groups with influential capacities; Therefore, it is definitive to state that the policy is dynamic in time according to the specific international situation, as is the national regulatory and institutional framework in responding to the changing needs and demands of the international system.

The power of China

The transformation of China's power has been taking place for 40 years, with the reforms starting from Deng Xiaoping's transformation process. From the beginning, this transformation sought to break the old idea of Mao Tse Tung's revolution, which sought to remove the Republic of China away from any external influence that could change the scenario built by the communist revolution. Deng's new scenario focused on an opening of China's foreign policy and the construction of world power (Cancelado, 2016, p. 39).

Upon the institution of the Deng era, after the abandonment of the Maoist era policies, and the advancement of the post-Cold War and disappearance of the Soviet Union, China emerged as a regional and global power, maintaining political and economic relations with great part of the international system. It adopted a foreign policy framed within the principles of independence and peace, intensifying its relations with the West and seeking pragmatism and flexibility as its guide (Tobón, 2009, p. 242).

During the governments of Deng and Jiang Zemin, China's foreign policy set three priorities for the strengthening of the State (1) the consolidation of the Chinese State, seeking to maintain the communist regime, (2) the pursuit of territorial integration,

which involves Taiwan, and (3) the attainment of higher prestige and power in the international scene (Tobón, 2009, p. 244). Chinese leaders were compelled to guide the emergence of their country as a great power by developing global strategic interests, in the context of a structural transformation of international power (Delage, 2007).

The shift in China's foreign policy involved political and economic reforms, which drove a transformation of unprecedented impact in recent history. The economic benefits yielded by the opening of the economy soon stunned the world and positioned China as an undisputed regional and world power. Regarding this economic marvel, The World Bank stated that, in one generation, China had achieved what others have grappled to attain; no other country, least of all of continental proportion, had ever set out to do so much in such little time (Bartésaghi, n.d.).

This political and economic strategy has forced China to turn to different regions of the world in order to satisfy its needs, especially for raw materials, which are vital to sustaining its growing development and positioning within the system. With this in mind, China has pursued the construction of naval power, creating a Navy to project the Chinese power beyond Asia, leaving behind a vision of a closed, self-sufficient empire. China has expanded its geopolitical vision; currently, the Chinese government believes that national power is derived from the country's economic development.

Since 2003, China has increased its participation in the global economy. In terms of GDP, measured at current prices, the Chinese economy has become second in the world in 2010, after the United States. China represents half of the combined GDP of the four countries called BRIC (Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, and China). The size of the Chinese economy, of more than 5 trillion dollars, already exceeds the combined GDP of all of the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012, p. 15).

The Chinese economy is an essential contributor to the sustainment of the global rate. Among the ten most important economies in the world, China has the lowest coefficient of consumption in relation to the product; the dynamism of the Chinese economy has rested, above all, on the promotion of investments as a growth engine (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012, p. 17).

China's protagonism has been relevant in the production of raw materials, the international system trade, and the international financial sphere. China plays an increasingly important role in maintaining global economic balances. China is a protagonist of the international financial market, investing a great part of its reserves abroad. The agency in charge of the administration of China's international reserves has invested in US Treasury securities (Oakley & Anderlini, 2008).

The Chinese State Administration of Foreign Currency has made purchases of some foreign companies and acquired a minority stake in companies such as Rio Tinto, Royal Dutch Shell, BP, Barclays, Tesco, and RBS, intensifying the acquisition of international companies; these have been carried out mainly by state companies that operate in

the natural resources sector in Australia, Canada, and the African continent (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012, p. 27).

The agglomeration of reserves has stimulated the central bank to make the Yuan a new reserve currency, replacing the dollar; exchange agreements have already been signed in Yuans. In this way, the fluidity of the liquidations of commercial operations is guaranteed, in cases of international illiquidity. The objective is to grant the Chinese currency a more international role; however, this has yet to be internationalized. There is still a long way to go before the Yuan becomes an international currency. Having reached full convertibility to operate in a stable financial system, the Chinese currency could become the international currency of Asia and represent a percentage of the reserves of the world's central banks, surpassing the Japanese Yen or the British pound (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012, p. 29).

The definition of South-South Cooperation is the system among emerging countries aimed at promoting their development and industrial promotion. However, it must be clear, that China is not a southern country; hence, China's cooperation towards Africa and Latin America is presented as a center-periphery relationship, which is considered as the extraction of resources from emerging countries to developed countries.

Reflecting China's adoption of Alfred Mahan's thinking on sea power, in 2003, the Chinese Communist Party asserted that national power derives from economic development, which is generated by foreign trade, an activity that must be protected by a powerful navy (Malena, 2011).

Considering the international environment in 1999, China undertook a strategy focused on internationalizing the Chinese market to promote foreign investment based on a policy that included the following points: (1) Strengthen China's foreign direct investment; (2) Increase product diversification; (3) Improve the level and quality of projects; (4) Develop financing channels in the internal market; and (5) Raise the brand of Chinese companies in the EU and US markets. Initially, this policy was implemented for investment in the African market; it was then expanded to commercial interests towards other regions such as Latin America.

However, faced with a new world order, the military approach could not be overlooked. On this point, China has maintained its defense of the central characteristics of its foreign policy, based on the so-called peaceful ascent or peaceful development. Some recent events demonstrate the importance that the country places on the empowerment of the components that make it a strong State, given the realistic theory of international relations. For the United States and its strategic partners in Asia Pacific, such as Japan or the Republic of Korea, there are hesitations about the policy deployed by China in the region, especially because of the Chinese reaction to the border disputes that it has faced with Japan, the Philippines or Vietnam (Bartasaghi, n.d.).

China's external policy in Latin America

China is a new and unfamiliar player in Latin America; in the same way, those who make political decisions in China lack a differentiated understanding of the region. Chinese political studies and documents include the Caribbean in a cursory fashion, and diplomatic representatives in the region rotate at a considerable rate. The fact that only three of the 42 countries in the region published an official response to the Chinese Government's Policy Document in 2008 suggests that there is still a long way to go to achieve greater integration and an adequate response on both sides of the Pacific. (Creutzfeldt, 2013)

The United States' declining influence has empowered China to approach Latin America with commercial interests. China sustains that this strategic alliance of the economies of China, Latin America, and the Caribbean will generate an accelerated and higher growth than that of the industrialized economies. The preceding is exposed by Henry Cancelado, taking into account that the international system is facing an international state that promotes the consolidation of new global and regional strategies of commercial and foreign investment alliances (Cancelado, 2016, p. 40).

The appeal of this region to China is not limited to its natural and human richness but also its growth and development potential. Chinese Prime Minister, Li Keqiang, in May 2015, during his visit to Chile, said that China could manufacture equipment and integrated technology at competitive prices, while Latin America has the demand for infrastructure expansion and industrial upgrading, making industrial cooperation between China and Latin America timely. Chinese businesses in the region have been related to the energy sectors, infrastructure construction, agriculture, manufacturing, and technological innovation.

This scenario opens the doors to China in Latin America, and with it, its the positioning in strategic scenarios of the region or, geostrategic scenario; given the region's proximity to the United States —theoretically important in the thinking of Alfred Mahan— and the historical contribution to growth and global projection it has provided the European empire and the United States (Cancelado, 2016, p. 40).

A construction of cooperation policy between Latin America and China suggests a transition in the capitalist system towards China; it is a contention of economic competition but not a politico-military competition. China seeks a peaceful ascent; its interest is first to ensure its economic authority rather than its strategic military hegemony.

Concerning exports and imports, China's trade with the region has proved the most dynamic in the last years. The growth rates of total exports and imports between China and Latin America and the Caribbean have doubled (Fig. 1). China's bilateral trade with the region has reached 120,000 million dollars. The region's share of total Chinese imports and exports has continued to increase, reaching 4.7% and 6.4%, respectively; this shows a growing trade, nevertheless its low level (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012, p. 69).

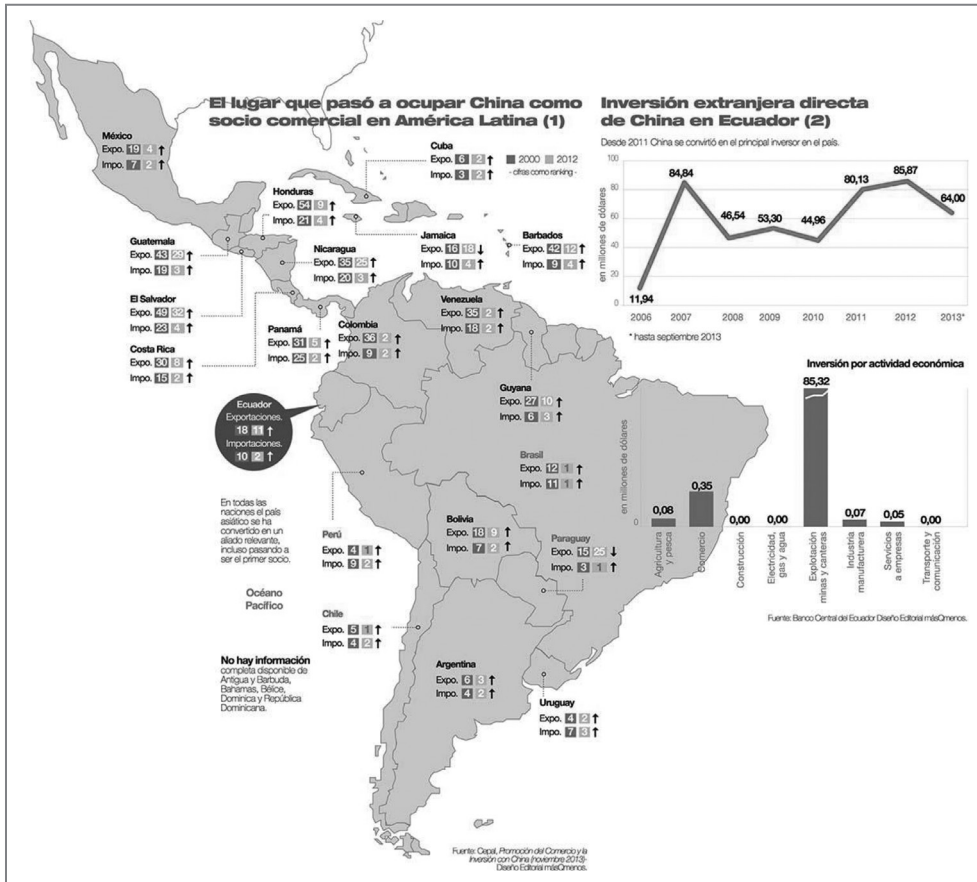


Figure 1. China's position as a commercial partner in Latin America.

Source: *El telégrafo*, Ecuador

China could eventually displace the European Union as the second trading partner in the region. The projections for 2020 suggest that China would noticeably increase its relative position as a destination for regional exports. If the growing demand rates for Latin American and Caribbean products by the United States, European Union, and the rest of the world persists, and China's demand continues to grow, the Asian country would surpass the Union European Union to become the second largest market for imports and exports from the region (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012, p. 71).

According to data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, China is the first destination market for exports from Brazil and Chile, and the second for Peru, Cuba, and Costa Rica. Also, it is the third country among the primary origins of the region's imports. Given these new perspectives, the States intend to invigorate this association further. To this end, an increase in exchange is required, but above all, the diversification of the investment portfolio (Peraza, 2016).

China's initiative reached Latin America at a time when many of its constituting countries have been dependent on the export of raw materials for years and striving to transform their economic structure, achieve greater industrial capacity, and provide added value to its exports. Therefore, months ago, China and its Ministry of Commerce announced their intention to achieve a more substantial exchange with Latin America and the Caribbean and project cooperation in sectors such as industry, infrastructure, economic-technical cooperation, financial support, and professional training (Peraza, 2016). According to both parts, the objective is to project a new strategic partnership and restructure the commercial links because, in past decades, Chinese capital investments in the Latin American continent were focused on obtaining the raw materials necessary to produce all of the goods that are sold in the world (Peraza, 2016).

The relationship between Latin America and China reflects a cultural, commercial, diplomatic, and political exchange, as well as cooperation on issues of mutual interest in the international arena. China's dynamic insertion into the globalization process has not gone unnoticed in Latin America and the Caribbean. China has substantially increased its presence in the region, both through international organizations, such as the United Nations and regional organizations, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Development Bank of Latin America. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States has even established that China will be a significant aspect of the region's future agenda in the "China-CELAC-Forum" and the Declaration of Havana (Dussel, 2015, p. 23).

China and Latin America's interrelationships have grown significantly in the academic exchange, not only in the number of Chinese student internships in the region but also in China from Latin America. The number of joint academic activities developed between Chinese and Latin American academic institutions is considerably higher than in previous decades. The Chinese government is sparing no effort to increase exchanges that allow a greater understanding of China in Latin America [Bartesaghi, n.d.).

Latin American countries have been strengthening regional integration by founding the Community of Latin American States, in pursuit of becoming a coalition to become a global reference. The correlation of international forces has begun to indicate significant changes in favor of China. While China and other emerging countries' economic power is on the rise, the United States and European Union have undergone a relative decline.

The common strategic interests of emerging countries are increasingly more apparent, and cooperation is strengthened continuously. To achieve these interests, these countries mutually strengthen the coordination of a common and convergent position of forces, in safeguarding the interests of the developing nations. Seeking a mutual understanding and support in matters related to their respective interests, they find their particular difficulties and reinforce their cooperation and mutual support to overcome them (Xiaoping, 2015, p. 52).

During the meeting of the member countries of the BRIC, President Hu Jintao explained that the four countries face new opportunities for development and a series of challenges. Therefore, they should take advantage of opportunities, strengthen unity and cooperation, and jointly safeguard the essential interests of developing countries. The strengthening of China's economic power and the rise of its political position on the international stage exerts a significant influence on the configuration of the new world context. The political, economic, and social development of China is globally alluring.

The imports from Latin America that have ensured China's manufacture and nurtured its development have been mainly oil from Venezuela, copper from Peru and Chile, and soy from Brazil and Argentina. The common interest in diversifying bilateral trade responds to a new environment of Sino-Latin American ties, following a golden period of development based on reciprocal demand and great economic complementarity.

To ensure the prompt implementation of these new initiatives, China set in motion the Chinese Development Bank and the Export and Import Bank. These mechanisms enable the financing of their investment projects in Latin America. China's commitment to the growth of developing countries can be seen in the deployment of initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Silk Road that, above all, aspire to create a new Asian order. However, it goes beyond that, considering China's level of global influence it also attaches importance to its cooperation in Latin America (Gutiérrez & Cesarin, 2015).

China places pressure on Latin American economies, creating the dependence of Latin America on the Chinese economy. What is presented in the relations between Latin America and China is center-periphery rhetoric, a type of cooperation that drives the countries' development, industrial promotion, and changes of institutional structure. Center-periphery focuses on trade and the promotion of infrastructure; therefore, it does not affect the development of the country itself.

China's transition marks a shift of international equilibrium, China is not only the core of relations between Asia and Latin America, based on the classical capitalist structure of trade, exchanges, and loans, but it also presents itself as a semi-periphery in terms of relations with other developed states of the international system because it is not the center of the global capitalist network.

The dependence that may have taken place is a product of China's economic rise. In ten years, the success of China's productive transformation process has moved it from being Latin America's third or fourth business partner to its second or first. Foreign investment and cooperation generate dependency. Refocusing is presented in how the primary sector surpasses the manufacturing industry and service sector; this has occurred in Latin America for the last ten years. However, the occurrence of this is not driven by China but from the Latin American countries, on the one hand, because of the political and investment issues that have been unwilling to change, which beg the question, is Latin America settling for competitive commodities trading?

The comparison of China's rise with Latin America's commercial stagnation requires a qualitative analysis of the two regions' export and import products. While Europe and the United States are the primary destinations for Chinese exports of technology products, Latin America is one of the regions with the lowest import of Chinese products—mainly high technology—; this due to the low per capita income of Latin American regions.

Therefore, it can be stated that the only way to change the economic situation of Latin America is to generate value through a productive transformation. Given that Chinese imports also include crude oil and iron ore, the distribution of imports changes, as Latin America is the primary export source of these products, evidencing the existence of a trade deficit with China.

The tendency of Latin American trade of settling for competitiveness in commodities and unwillingness to wager on investments and productions of other types of goods create tension between competitiveness and development; what the region needs is a market economy in which revenue can be increased. America's investment continues to be in competitive goods, while China generates pressure to continue exporting these same types of goods.

The increase of China's interests in the region has contributed to the growing concerns about the consequences that this can have concerning poverty, in comparison with what has occurred Africa, the increase of China's interests in emerging economies is due the institutional deterioration presented in these countries since when cooperation from Europe is required, a series of requirements are imposed to access the aid, a scene entirely changes when it comes to China's cooperation with these countries.

China cooperates with countries that are under the control of corruption like Venezuela; that is, that the aid is focused on the economic without taking into account the destination of these funds. On the other hand, the maritime expansion of the United States is compared concerning the economic control of the Caribbean as to the interests that China currently has in Latin America. The Chinese strategic and geopolitical plan on Latin American resources and trade establish new perspectives on commercial power and new ways of reaching the Caribbean.

However, the scenarios of influence that are presented in the region by Chinese interests, as mentioned previously, may bring forth tensions between different actors. The relationships between these regions are not precisely South-South cooperation but center-periphery relationships in which the interests of China have prevailed over the parity between the economic gains that the parties, partaking in the commercial exchange, receive. Therefore, China aims to ensure strategic relations in the region. Initially, a balance of cooperation between actors was proposed; however, the presence of a program of relationships based on economic interests has been more widespread and has spilled over into the larger part of Latin American (Prieto, 2016).

The debate centers on whether relations with China are based on helping to promote the future of the emerging countries and help resolve their internal conflicts or if these

relations are directed towards the net economic benefit that the commercial exchange can bring. At first, the discussion is directed toward the creation of a more multipolar world, which distances entirely from the economic, commercial scenario. However, the focus of China's economic rise on the interest of imposing itself in the region through economic and social cooperation becomes evident, as well as its restriction to Latin American countries, casting aside the assistance to their political structures. The previous has dramatically benefited the domestic interests of the Asian country and promoted trade relations of the primary sectors of Latin American economies, but it has not promoted the development of the industrial structure of Latin America and the Caribbean (Prieto, 2016).

It is important to highlight the cycle change experienced by the region in economic, political, and social matters. However, the primary factor of concern is weak governance; this has produced a loss of territory, space, and influence for China, favoring, instead, The United States' position. Another association point between China and Latin America is military cooperation. This cooperation, which is more strategic than logistic has focused on updating the budget in Latin American countries where military investment has increased. In contrast to China, the United States' strategy has been to slightly set aside the Latin American region and focus on acquiring territory in Asia, to fulfill its interests and counteract the rise of Asia. However, in terms of security and to generate global stability, it would behoove the United States to establish a dialogue with China (Chávez, 2015).

China has set its commercial interests in Latin America and Africa, driven mainly by the natural resources present in these regions. Unlike other States, China buys at a price agreed upon by the countries of each region. China's intention is to act in such a way as to improve the lives of the citizens, sharing the fruits of economic development with the African and Latin American countries, using the benefits obtained in these regions to project the construction of railroads, hospitals, and schools. While profiting, China's alternative is more effective than those of the Western countries, which frequently entail embargos, unrealistic political conditions, and even armed interventions (Creutzfeldt, 2013).

China's external policy in Africa

As with Latin America, China acknowledges that its African policy hinges on its strategic interests in this continent (Fig. 2). Countering the former colonial rulers, Chinese politics focus on the promotion of cooperation pursuing the invigoration of Asia and Africa and providing the latter with new opportunities for development (Ardila, 2016).

The cooperation between China and Africa is an unwavering policy of the new Chinese Government, which aims to strengthen solidarity and cooperation with African countries (Garcia, 2006, p. 8). China's international status changed in the 1970s, its international relations amplified by establishing diplomatic relations with the countries of Europe and Latin America (Tobón, 2009, p. 242).

The Chinese government has strengthened its relations with Africa. However, with Deng's arrival to power and the reforms that followed, as well as China's admission into intergovernmental organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the Chinese foreign policy towards Africa grew increasingly focused on its trade relations. In the 1990s, the exchange grew with greater vigor, and a strategy was launched that revolved around granting soft loans to African governments, thus seeking Chinese investors to export goods using African countries to do so. During that time, President Jiang Zemin established the pillars of relations with Africa, which are 'trust, equality of sovereignty, nonintervention, development, mutual benefit, and international cooperation.' (Garcia, 2006, p. 2)

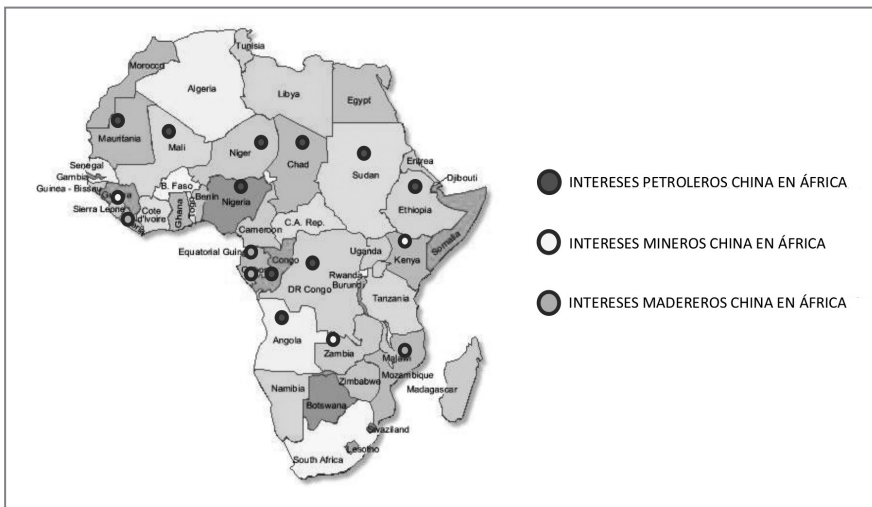


Figure 2. China's interests in Africa

Source: Carlota García Encina, Real Instituto El Cano; (Ardila, 2016).

China has always prioritized the development of relations with African countries, a relationship that forecasted great promise for the future. During his visit to three African countries in March 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that African countries and China have always been “a community with shared destinies” and that the essence of their bilateral relationship consisted of their cooperation for mutual benefits, “win-win.”

China's foreign policy towards Africa presents different characteristics. Its basic program indicates that it is based upon “mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence.” This program marks the difference between China's policy towards Africa and the West's. While China is committed to restraining from any intervention in the internal affairs of African countries, regardless of any failure

to respect human rights and international law or in other cases in which their behavior may be questioned, Western countries grant aid, considering the recipient country's behavior (Wei, 2104, p. 58).

Having set the course, forums for dialogue were created. In 2000, China devised a collective dialogue mechanism called the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in which ministerial consultations and meetings with high-level officials are held. Currently, 45 African States and 17 international organizations participate in this forum. The intention of these meetings is the development of South-South cooperation, a concept that Western powers have neglected or scorned.

In recent years, China has launched initiatives aimed at securing sources of raw materials to meet their interests throughout the world, especially in Africa. The Chinese government presented a document called, China's Policy in Africa, which contains, like a white paper, the postulates that frame its commercial and political activity in the African continent (Tobon, 2009, p. 290).

During a recent visit to Africa, in January 2014, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that China's aid to Africa was motivated by a desire to access African natural resources. To a certain extent, this has motivated Westerners to interpret China's African politics and Sino-African relations from the moral perspective of self-righteousness (Wei, 2104).

China's approach to the African continent is driven, in large part, by their need to achieve economic growth, which is buttressed by their access to Africa's natural and energy-related resources. "In 20 years, the general consumption of resources in the Asian country has multiplied by 3.6, oil by 3.7, natural gas by 3.2, and carbon by 3.4. Between 1990 and 2001, oil consumption increased by 100% and the demand for natural gas by 140%. Currently, China is the third importer and second largest consumer of crude oil in the world; it is also responsible for 40% of the global increase in demand over the last four years." (Garcia, 2006, p. 3).

It is important to analyze whether China plays a significant role in Africa's development. As mentioned previously, national interests are at the base of foreign policy each State's, which govern its international actions, China is no exception given its interest in promoting South-South relations to invigorate the alliance between Asia and Africa.

Despite China's commitment to provide Africa with new opportunities for development and promote its association with the globalized world in a more favorable way, the relationship between China and Africa has generated problems, such as an imbalance in the market and the lack of corporate social responsibility of Chinese companies.

China has developed its foreign policy mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, shifting from confrontation to cooperation and from exporting revolution to exporting development, and in contention with the isolationism of the Mao era, striving towards total integration of the system. China has achieved these endeavors by employing a foreign policy

that favors pragmatism and flexibility over ideological issues, with which it has been able to gain the spaces left unattended by the great powers, especially the United States (Chávez, 2015).

The economic benefits of this China-Africa commercial and economic collaboration have been evident. Statistics have confirmed that trade between both parts has skyrocketed since 2000. Key to both parties is the diversification of their imports of resources and energy; not unlike any world power, China has energy interests outside its borders.

The economic collaboration between China and Africa provides the experience necessary for companies to obtain a better acquaintance with the globalized world, which is part of the reason why Chinese companies go to Africa. Through research, trade, and projects in Africa, Chinese companies can gain valuable experience on foreign market development, business management, capital operations, risk control, and understanding how to deal with local governments, as well as with the different communities (Wei, 2014).

China and Africa have agreed to continue developing infrastructures as priority areas for cooperation; these infrastructures include transport, telecommunications, radio and television, water conservation, electric power, and energy. In the commercial field, China will continue to offer favored conditions to African countries, at the same time helping to raise the added value of primary products through technical assistance (Wei, 2014). China has also decided to apply “special programs for trade with Africa” to promote the import of African products. Regarding cooperation in energy and natural resources, the countries have been agreed upon shared exploitation by joint ventures and the optimal use of natural resources. Together they have committed to an Energy Sub Forum under the framework of the existing Forum (Xiaoping, 2015).

The Chinese companies already in African territory have faced criticism and pressure regarding their environmental policies and the employment-capital conflict; this has encouraged Chinese companies to improve their social responsibility and expand their understanding of the rules of international economy.

Chinese-African cooperation is of high strategic importance. The African countries have provided China a series of diplomatic advantages. African support for China allowed it to regain its place in the United Nations, with this, China was able to rescind its unfavorable political situation, regaining its place within the international community and global respect. After the political turmoil, the African countries helped China to cease the Western embargo.

The document on China's policy towards Africa indicates that, in the new era, it is crucial to promote solidarity and cooperation with African countries; this is an essential element of China's independent and peaceful diplomatic policy. Based on the common interests of African countries and China, socio-strategic relationships have been established and developed, entailing the upholding of political equality and trust and cooperation between the parties, as well as mutual economic and communication advantages and

learning in culture; these are all fundamental factors to maintain the harmony of both regions' commercial and economic relations. These standard policies coincide with the demands of the international community (Yungo, 2013).

The Chinese government's aid to Africa is progressively increasing, affording more attention to the living conditions of African citizens. Since the third conference of the Forum on Cooperation China-Africa, discussions have been active regarding an increase in aid to African countries that would improve the living conditions of the people by generating agricultural, health, and education benefits. President Hu Jintao stated that the most important objective is to build the capacity of African peoples towards independent development.

In his book —“*China en África ¿ayuda o arrasa?*”— Ali Askouri explains that as of the 21st century, China has employed a strategy to control and exploit African natural resources in the long-term, especially oil. He also pointed out that Chinese aid favors African elites, which generates an increase in social divisions and differences and contributes to corruption, disregarding the living conditions of African citizens (Askouri, 2007).

In this regard, the author advises that China should be cognizant of the consequences for its trade and investments that its negative involvement in Africa would entail. Chinese interests can benefit if its Government supports African groups fighting for democracy and human rights in Africa; otherwise, China should refrain from investing there if there are no international minimums on the continent's ecological and social impact.

Conclusions

With China's entrance into the international markets, the shift in power in the international system has been distinct. On the one hand, the economic and commercial power of countries such as the United States and Japan, as well as the European States has been weakened, in comparison with the development of emergent countries, especially the BRICs. On the other, the world has entered a new era of peaceful development. In the framework of economic globalization and in the pursuit of seeking rapid growth, all countries follow the peaceful rhythm of cooperation; therefore, it develops at an unprecedented speed.

As a result of technological development and economic globalization, countries are increasingly communicated; this implies a stronger interdependence between the actors of the international scenario. Therefore, stating that no country can survive and develop independently without international cooperation is a valid affirmation. Although countries are more attentive to the peaceful settlement of disputes through negotiations, the hegemonic policy persists, and the democracy of international relations remains unrealized. However, the consensus of mutual respect and equal treatment among the States has been reached through communication, dialogue, and harmonious coexistence.

The international system has experienced the rise of States seeking to increase their power through trade; however, their success depends on their ability to reach other ter-

ritories that can generate benefits. Since colonial times, Latin America has increasingly become a region desired for its wealth of natural resources. Mahan, in his hypothesis of expansion, states that the strategic rearguard must be obtained through maritime power, which produces a center-periphery relationship that promotes dependency.

Through this text, we have provided analysis of the evolution of China's policy towards Africa and Latin America from a post-People's Republic of China perspective. We have also elucidated China's role in the economy of these two regions by studying the evolution of bilateral trade and investment.

Politically, China strives to attain its role in the international order; in this sense, Latin America and Africa play a crucial role for the Chinese interests. China's aid structure is a suitable alternative to the aid provided by the West, which is beset with "neo-imperialist" hindrances. The Chinese Government's "non-interference" approach rebuts the reproach of both dictatorship and human rights abuses. Another of China's long-term objectives is to establish a new international order, in which relations between the South and North countries are more politically and economically objective.

The high number of developing countries in Africa and Latin America makes these regions a critical platform for China, allowing the country to protect its domestic affairs—human rights being the most remarkable aspect. China's interpretation of human rights differs from the West's. China's priority is to maintain social stability for economic development, and human rights have the potential to disrupt its "harmony."

The 21st century is marked by a structural change of the powers of the international system because of the emergence of new powers such as China. The Caribbean has been a focus of the interest of the powers, which challenges their supremacy. The advancement of these new powers reveals the inefficiency of relying on hard power to obtain dominion. China's approach is to enter into new alliances and political perspectives, contravening the United States' traditional militarist thinking.

The rethinking of the attainment of the Caribbean—in this case, the creation of influence—is marked by soft power, where bonds of camaraderie and mutual interests are created. China has created tactical tools, economic capabilities, and tripartite cooperation; moreover, its economic capability allows it to make with massive investments. Capitalizing on the impressions left by European countries in regions such as Africa, China's strategy of cooperation opens the doors to these regions more effectively.

Three elements have been central to China's transformation. The first is China's foreign policy, which respects the internal policies of the other countries, making it a friendly and unobtrusive partner. The second element is China's strategic vision that focuses on the peripheries of the world, which can be important defense allies and places where China can create influence and capacity. The last element is China's policy of cooperation. All the above elements urge countries like Colombia to resolve the conundrum of whether to continue with the *Respice Polum* doctrine directed towards the United States or open its doors to other actors such as China.

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