

Article [EN]

## Research on the foundation and current situation of China-Latin America cooperation

*Investigación sobre los fundamentos y la situación actual de la cooperación entre China y América Latina*

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**[EN] Abstract:** China's foreign policy has exerted some influence on the development of Latin America cooperatively as communication between the two sides deepens. This paper first analyzes the foundations of China-Latin America cooperation from internal and external factors. The internal factors mainly refer to China and Latin America's willingness and choice tendency. External ones are considered from factors outside the two sides, such as the extra-regional country and historical factors. Secondly, this essay will detailedly illustrate their overall cooperation through four fields: economics, politics, culture, and the new development model - green development, which are also the essential manifestations of China's foreign policy in affecting international politics in Latin America. Lastly, this essay will have a concise conclusion: China interacts with Latin American countries through cooperation, which also means that cooperation is the main form of interaction and the core of China's foreign policy towards Latin America.

**Keywords:** China-LAC relations, comprehensive cooperation, green development

**[ES] Resumen:** La política exterior de China ha ejercido cierta influencia en el desarrollo de América Latina de forma cooperativa a medida que se profundiza la comunicación entre ambas regiones. El presente trabajo analizará en primer lugar los fundamentos de la cooperación sino-latinoamericana desde el punto de vista de factores tanto internos como externos. Los primeros se refieren principalmente a la propia voluntad y tendencia de selección de las dos partes. Los segundos, a su vez, se consideran desde aspectos ajenos a ellas, como los países extrarregionales y los factores históricos. En segundo lugar, este ensayo ilustrará detallada y globalmente sus actividades cooperativas clasificándolas en cuatro campos: la economía, la política, la cultura y el nuevo modelo de desarrollo - el desarrollo verde, que son importantes manifestaciones de la influencia de la política exterior del gigante asiático en los asuntos internacionales del subcontinente lejano. Por último, se saca una conclusión concisa: China se relaciona con los países latinoamericanos a través de la cooperación, lo cual significa que esta es la principal forma de interacción, así como el núcleo de la política exterior del primero hacia América Latina.

**Palabras clave:** relaciones China-América Latina, cooperación integral, desarrollo ecológico

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## 1. Introduction

The current international situation is full of twists and turns. Since 2020, whether it is the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, or the rise of the regional power - India, all have had a new impact on inter-continental relations and even the pattern of international relations. So will rising power China and an uncertain Latin America. Briefly, China, as a developing country with the fastest rise and development speed in the world today, has attracted the significant attention of other countries in the international arena. Latin America, as a region of relative political and economic instability, has been striving for independence and strength for a long time. Many scholars and specialists have admitted that China's foreign policy has exerted some influence on the development of Latin America cooperatively as communication between the two sides deepens.

Especially since the beginning of the new millennium, China-Latin American political, economic, trade, and cultural relations have witnessed a wave of rapid development, and their bilateral cooperation has reached an unprecedented level. In this process, the comprehensive cooperation between China and Latin America has become a reality from conception, which is an integral part of China's overall cooperation system, and solid support for promoting the diplomacy of significant powers with Chinese characteristics. At present, overall cooperation has become a new engine to boost Sino-Latin American relations and a significant way for China's foreign policy to affect Latin American international politics. It is expected to promote and shape Sino-Latin American comprehensive cooperation on a broader field and at a higher level (Wang, 2017: 64). On July 18, 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a keynote speech entitled "Efforts to build a Community of Destiny Together" at the Sino-Latin American Leaders' Meeting in Brasilia. He appealed that both sides can build a Community of Destiny between China and Latin America, which is a step higher than win-win cooperation (Jiang, 2018: 30). Although there is still massive room for development between the two sides, opportunities and challenges coexist in the process of further cooperation.

This essay will look more closely at how the foreign policies of China affect the contemporary international politics of Latin America (it equals Latin America and the Caribbean or LAC in this essay), so it focuses on the perspective of China's foreign policy. Firstly, this paper will present the foundations of China-LAC cooperation from internal and external factors. Secondly, this essay will detailedly illustrate their overall cooperation through four fields: economics, politics, culture, and the new development model, which are also essential manifestations of China's foreign policy in affecting international politics in Latin America. Economically, China has established economic and trade cooperation with many countries in Latin America, such as Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, and the bilateral import and export volume of them has grown steadily (Chen, 2011: 8). Politically, they have established strategic partnerships through bilateral and multilateral dialogues and exchange mechanisms. Culturally, China's soft power tools, such as Confucius Institutes and classes, have been an important lever of influence in the LAC. As for the development model, they both endorse sustainable and green development concepts. A large number of cooperation and initiatives have been actively promoted in this field by both, especially exchanging the experience and achievements among Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (U.N.). Lastly, this essay will have a concise conclusion. Despite inevitable friction and contradiction, comprehensive cooperation is the central theme between the two sides. China fully respects and does not interfere in Latin American countries' state power and social development. Instead, China interacts with Latin American countries through cooperation, which means that cooperation is the main form of interaction and the core of China's foreign policy towards LAC.

## 2. The foundation of cooperation between the two sides

Many observers have found that the relationship between other developing countries and China involves a wide range of path. On one side of the path is optimism: China is a new and alternative driving force for trade and investment for developing countries. This optimism is occasionally reminiscent of the view that China provides an alternative model for other countries to develop their economies and engage in diplomacy (Kurlantzick, 2007: 75). On the other side of the road are doubts and fears about China's growing economic, political intentions and cultural influence (Chen, 2011: 3; Wintgens, 2022). In short, many scholars and experts have debated the "China Model", that is, whether the rapidly developing trade and investment relationship between China and the developing world is more sustainable and equal than that between developed and developing countries in the past. Despite a debate, internal and external factors have shown that there are foundations for cooperation between China and Latin America. The internal factors mainly refer to China and Latin America's willingness and choice tendency. External ones are considered from factors outside the two sides, such as the extra-regional country and historical factors. Based on this premise, this paper argues that the basis of

such cooperation includes at least the following five points.

### 2.1 *The guarantee from both governments*

The willingness of both governments is the fundamental guarantee for cooperation. China's hope to cooperate with Latin American countries is first reflected in its national character. Because the Chinese nation has attached great importance to friendship and goodneighborliness, it is a consistent diplomatic philosophy of China to cement peaceful relations by upholding good faith and pursuing harmony with other nations. It is next reflected in the adjustment of China's diplomatic strategy; Latin America is playing an increasingly important role in China's diplomatic strategy. A clear demonstration of the government's willingness is the spontaneous signing or disclosing of documents or agreements. In November 2008, the Chinese government published its first-ever policy paper on LAC (Guo, 2017: 16). The document states that "the Chinese government views relations with Latin America and the Caribbean from a strategic perspective and is committed to establishing and developing a comprehensive cooperative partnership of equality, mutual benefit and common development with Latin American and Caribbean countries" (GOC, 2008). Building on the previous achievements, the Chinese government issued its second policy paper on Latin America and the Caribbean in November 2016. It makes clear that Latin America is "a land full of vitality and hope" and "China's development cannot be achieved without the common development of the vast number of developing countries, including Latin America and the Caribbean" (Jiang, 2018: 31). The second policy paper is to summarize experience, draw a blueprint for the future, and provide a comprehensive explanation of the new ideas, proposals, and initiatives in China's LAC policy for the new era. Both official documents intend to promote China's cooperation with LAC in various areas.

Besides, since the first Ministerial Meeting of the Forum of China and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (China-CELAC Forum, CCF) was held in Beijing in January 2015, China and CELAC have jointly formulated and released several policy documents, such as the China-Latin American and Caribbean Countries Cooperation Plan (2015-2019), the China-CELAC Joint Action Plan for Cooperation in Priority Areas (2019-2021), and the China-CELAC Joint Action Plan for Cooperation in Key Areas (2022-2024). These official documents have defined specific areas and plans for China-Latin America cooperation. Then in January 2021, the Chinese government issued a white paper titled "China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era". It mentions China's approaches to development cooperation, China's principles for development cooperation, and the practical measures for development cooperation in chapter one. The sixth chapter mainly focuses on sharing governance experience and appropriate technologies accumulated in long-term practice with developing countries, helping developing countries enhance their renewal capacity, promoting South-South cooperation to deepen development, and achieving self-improvement through unity.

Theoretically, the information in these official documents is the basis for the decision-making of both governments, serves as proof of their execution and a source for generalization, as well as material for conducting reference and guidance work. Realistically, the significance of these public documents is not an empty promise or mandatory constraint of both governments, but a guideline and specification framework for advancing practical cooperation, as well as a strong support for win-win cooperation. One trend in attitudes towards international cooperation is that an increasing number of countries believe that they are incapable of solving some global problems in isolation and that cooperation is not a burden, still less a threat to their national interests or an intrusion on their national sovereignty. Cooperation strengthens nations, while isolation makes them weaker. Therefore, when zooming out from the world to the relationship between China and LAC, it is clear that their cooperation has the same status and significance. Judging by the breadth and depth of the cooperation field mentioned in these official documents, the Chinese and Latin American governments are willing and determined to cooperate. In a word, these official documents provide a basic institutional guarantee for Sino-LAC cooperation.

### 2.2 *The existence of public goods*

China's ability to provide public goods is another intrinsic basis for Sino-LAC cooperation. As Chinese scholar Jiang Shixue (2018) mentioned, China can provide more public goods to build a community of shared future between China and Latin America. In a broad sense, "an international public good is a benefit providing a utility that is, in principle, available to everybody throughout the globe" (Ferroni & Mody, 2002: 35). Investment has the property of public goods, and there is a complementarity and mutual substitution relationship between outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) and international trade (Wang, 2003: 80), so the property of public goods will also extend to the field of trade. However, this paper does not demonstrate the categories of public goods, but only discusses China's capacity and initiatives to provide public goods. In this regard, China has become a supplier of public goods. Specifically, from 1950 to 2016, China

provided more than 400 billion yuan in foreign aid and implemented more than 5,000 foreign aid projects of various forms, including nearly 3,000 complete sets of projects and more than 11,000 training courses to train more than 260,000 personnel for developing countries (Jiang, 2018: 32). Since the reform and opening up, China has attracted over 1.7 trillion dollars of foreign investment and accomplished over 1.2 trillion dollars of outbound direct investment, making a great contribution to world economic development (*ibid*).

Trade with LAC also demonstrates China's ability to provide public goods. According to the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) report issued in May 2022, total China-LAC trade increased from almost \$18 billion in 2002 to nearly \$449 billion in 2021. China's imports from LAC amounted to \$221 billion in 2021, and exports to the region in 2021 amounted to \$228 billion. China has become the top trading partner of Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay and the second-largest trading partner for many other countries. China has free-trade agreements with Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru and, in February 2022, launched talks with Ecuador. Moreover, China's investments in LAC from 2005 to 2021 amounted to \$140 billion, with Brazil accounting for \$64 billion and Peru \$25 billion. The report also shows that China's construction projects in LAC from 2005 to 2021 were valued at \$66 billion, with energy projects accounting for 51% and transportation accounting for 29%. Furthermore, Chinese banks (China Development Bank and China Export-Import Bank) became large lenders in LAC more than a decade ago, although amounts have declined in recent years (there were no such development loans to LAC in 2020 or 2021). Accumulated loans amounted to \$138 billion from 2005 to 2021, with Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, and Argentina as the top recipients. A majority of the lending (69%) has been for energy projects, and 19% has been for infrastructure projects (Sullivan & Lum, 2022). Investment in energy projects and transportation facilities strongly demonstrates China's contribution to local public goods.

As an international public good and international cooperation platform proposed by China in the new era (MFAPRC, 2022), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has already covered LAC. At the China-CELAC summit in January 2018, China officially invited LAC countries to participate in BRI. Sun Yanfeng, the deputy director of the Institute of Latin American Studies of China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said that since Panama became the first LAC country to sign the BRI agreement with China, LAC countries have gradually realized that the BRI is a global agreement committed to joint development and sharing development opportunities. Then an increasing number of Latin American countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with China under the BRI. They believe the BRI can bring great development opportunities to the region (MOFCOM, 2022). As of October 2022, 21 countries in LAC have participated in the BRI, and Argentina, the latest one, joined in February 2022. This initiative is conducive to the complementarity between the two sides, and a deepening and extension of the "China-Latin America community of shared future" (Lv, 2018: 140). The BRI focuses on PRC-backed infrastructure development worldwide, which has expanded the supply of global public goods.

Additionally, China raced to develop a vaccine as the world fought COVID-19, and its shots were the first to reach many developing countries. In October 2020, China signed an agreement with the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (Gavi), to formally join the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), aiming to take concrete actions to promote equitable vaccine distribution and ensure vaccine assistance to developing countries. Latin American countries that have received the vaccines, such as Brazil, Colombia, and Antigua and Barbuda, have given credit and appreciation to the Chinese vaccines. By October 2022, three Chinese vaccines had been included in the World Health Organization's (WHO) emergency use list. Sinovac Biotech, a Chinese company, not only provides the finished vaccine, but also ships large packages of semi-finished vaccines to other countries, which are authorized to do subsequent filling and packaging production, to get the vaccine to those countries quickly and increase the inoculation rate. It has been shown that as a global public good, the vast positive spillover effect of Chinese vaccines (such as the prevention of infection in others) can effectively control the spread of the epidemic at the source.

### 2.3 The rational choice of the LAC

Latin American countries prefer to strengthen cooperation with China, another internal foundation. Since the outbreak of the international financial crisis in 2008, the price of primary products in the international market remained keen; hence Latin America's export revenue and economic growth were greatly affected. After a dozen years of self-rescue and development, the Latin American economy has not entirely extricated itself from the plight of the sluggish recovery. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2017) believes that Latin American countries must expand investment and improve labor productivity, especially in infrastructure, to accelerate economic recovery. Given Latin America's weak capital accumulation capacity, Chinese investment would play a significant role in this region. The increasing number of Latin American leaders recognize China's critical role and hope to develop economic and trade relations with China further. For example, then-Peruvian President Kuczynski chose China for his first

overseas visit since taking office in July 2016. He said that Peru attaches great importance to developing economic and trade relations with China and hopes that China will increase investment in Peru. Then-Colombian President Iván Duque also said that try to get China to see Colombia as a strategic destination for investment when he visited China for the first time in July 2019.

However, one event succeeds another. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has spread worldwide and severely damaged global economic development, especially the developing countries. According to the policy note of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020), “the impact of this crisis will leave the large majority of LAC countries with negative growth and GDP per capita will bring LAC back to levels similar to those of 2009”. Becoming one of the world’s most affected emerging and developing regions renders LAC facing the stricter task of economic recovery. As OECD (2020) emphasizes that “investment efforts to promote activity are fundamental to spur a swift economic recovery”, several LAC countries have joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). In terms of vaccine assistance early in the pandemic, while LAC benefited from assistance from both the U.S. and China, Chinese vaccines arrived first, showing that timely Chinese shipments accentuated sustained and consistent support to LAC, which they routinely call for from the USA (De Ávila et al., 2022: 9). Besides, China provides the region with more benefits, such as China cut attractive deals to deliver its vaccines at cheaper prices than U.S. vaccines to Central America; China and Brazil build laboratory-to-laboratory collaboration that helps Brazil successfully copy this partnership with other countries, resulting in a level of COVID-19 vaccine self-sufficiency that most LAC nations have never achieved. Since these regional governments are disproportionately affected by the economic fallout from global circumstances, such as the pandemic, these leaders prefer to seek support from willing partners (*ibid*). It can be argued that China is an ideal option.

#### 2.4 The thrust of the extra-regional country

Except for the above three internal factors, the United States is a prominent external factor, because it is the most influential extra-regional country in Sino-LAC relations. The facts of the international situation have proved that relations between Latin America and the United States have changed. During the Obama presidency, there were two crucial changes in the U.S. policy towards Latin America: one was to restore relations with Cuba; The other was to pay more attention to Latin America in the political and economic fields. After President Trump took office, the U.S. policy in Latin America had been adjusted. In addition to his repeated pledges to renegotiate North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and to erect a wall along the US-Mexico border at Mexico’s expense, President Trump had tightened the Obama Administration’s policy towards Cuba. Meanwhile, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba were confronted with crippling sanctions and menacing rhetoric and were called the “Troika of Tyranny” by President Trump’s Administration (Stuenkel, 2020). The result was that the aggressive U.S. approach and stance had left Latin American policymakers scrambling for other partners who could balance Washington’s influence, such as Beijing - a more influential and more powerful role in LAC in virtually every dimension and an economy that get more opportunities to gain in the region (Hsiang, 2017; Stuenkel, 2020). American scholar Gallagher (2016) commented, “Latin America is suffering the slowest economic growth since the ‘lost decade’ of the 1980s. At such a critical juncture, instead of helping, the U.S. is retreating... In Latin America, Trump builds walls, while Xi builds bridges”.

The Biden Administration’s approach to Latin America differs distinctly from the Trump presidency’s. He acknowledged that the prosperity and security of Latin America were closely linked to the United States and viewed Latin America as a partner of the United States in the western hemisphere (Wang, 2021). Instead of warning countries in the region about engagement with China by the Trump Administration, President Biden described China as a strategic competitor in the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance issued in March 2021 (Sullivan & Lum, 2022). He then announced an agreement called Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) at the Summit of the Americas in June 2022, which is not only a plan for a new economic partnership with Latin America but also an economic framework alternative to China, aiming at countering China's growing clout in the region. Still, growing trade between China and Latin America could consolidate China’s economic influence in the region. Meanwhile, it could be admitted that the current US-Latin American relations are very different from those under the Obama presidency. The matching degree of bilateral interest demands has decreased significantly, and Latin American countries are more inclined to replace the US-led Inter-American cooperation framework with cooperation among Latin American countries or between Latin American countries and other extra-regional countries, which provides more room for China to dig deeper into LAC (Stuenkel, 2020; Wang, 2021; Yu & Li, 2022).

## 2.5 The common historical inheritance of the both

A fact that needs to be mentioned is that both sides have a long history of exchanges. As early as the 16th century, the ancient Maritime Silk Road and Manila Galleon trade route promoted the exchange of commercial products between them. For more than 20 years since the founding of New China in 1949, restricted by the international situation, Sino-Latin American relations have been dominated by non-governmental exchanges (Sun, 2014: 14), especially the overseas Chinese played an important role. It has been more than 450 years since the overseas Chinese brought Chinese culture and livelihood to LAC during the period of Manila Galleon, to coolie trade after the Opium War, to the end of the 19th century of unrestricted immigration, and then to the new immigration stage after reform and opening up (Cui & Xu, 2018). It was not until 1960, when China and Cuba established formal diplomatic relations, that China and Latin American countries began to conduct numerous official exchanges. Nowadays, the BRI, a new economic and trade road connecting China with the world, is a comprehensive inheritance and transcendence of the ancient Maritime Silk Road. Peru, Brazil, Cuba, Paraguay, and Venezuela have large Chinese diaspora communities, and Peru has the largest one in the region, accounting for 5% of its population (Roy, 2022). In a word, Latin America, as an essential part of this initiative, shows that the relationship has never been interrupted.

Although the two sides have a long contact history, some doubts exist about China's engagement in LAC. For example, whether China, as a rising power, will play a leading role in engaging in Latin America, similar to the United States; China is practicing neo-colonialism in Latin America; Or China is a "predator" and menace of Latin America. As Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in an interview with Chile's *El Mercurio* newspaper in July 2019, China has always adhered to the principles of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit, and maintained openness, transparency and compliance with the law in promoting cooperation with LAC countries. As developing countries, China-Latin America cooperation is both sides' shared aspiration and independent choice. Indeed, their developing-country status stems from the same historical experience of being oppressed and enslaved by western powers. The commonalities in the history of development are more likely to give each other empathy and the possibility of equal co-development (Das, 2016). In this sense, a common historical experience may result in a "window of opportunity" that enables them to cooperate pragmatically with each other that seemed hitherto incomplete.

## 3. The analysis of the all-round cooperation of Sino-LAC

Although it argues that the Sino-Latin America relationship has been greatly restricted by "geographical distance, cultural ignorance, and economic incompatibility" (Das, 2016), the reality is that with China's active outreach and positive response from LAC, the friendly relations between the two sides have increased significantly in recent years. Chinese foreign policy already has economic, political, and cultural implications for the region. To be more precise, they have conducted extensive cooperation in these aspects. Moreover, China and Latin America also have started cooperating on green development.

### 3.1 From the perspective of economic cooperation

With the rise of China's economy, the impact of its economic policies on Latin America's international politics is known as the "China Model". Many scholars and specialists have questioned the "China Model", arguing that China's demand for the Latin American market, especially for their natural resources, has led to the re-industrialization and re-commodification of Latin America's industrial structure. In other words, China's demand for Latin American primary products will lead to adverse changes in the Latin American industrial structure, reversing the industrialization process in Latin America (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012; Mulder, 2013). In fact, China's entry into the Latin American market does not hinder its industrialization process but helps Latin American countries to exert their comparative advantages, which are the basis of regional advantages. The rapid development of China's economy has expanded the demand for overseas resources, thus keeping the prices of primary products in the world market high for a long time, greatly benefiting Latin America. Because Latin America exports large quantities of primary commodities yearly and this is also its comparative advantage. Alicia Bárcena Ibarra, former Executive Secretary of the ECLAC, believes that Sino-Latin American economic and trade relations have improved Latin America's terms of trade, increased economic growth rate, and enabled Latin America to obtain funds to invest in education, infrastructure, and innovation (Jiang, 2013: 5). Briefly, this misconception arises because many scholars fail to focus on changes in China's domestic economic growth model and its vital role in driving the global commodities bull market, and fail to accurately describe the reasons for China's growing demand for natural resources in Latin America and other regions (Chen, 2011: 5).

Although the "China Model" is conducive to Latin America to exert its comparative advantages and maximize the

complementarity of the two economies, some people debate that the main part of Sino-Latin American economic and trade relations so far is the inter-industry trade rather than the intra-industry trade, so it is an unsustainable development (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012: 165). This debate implies that China should import primary products from Latin America and more manufactured goods from here. In fact, the sustainability of trade relations between China and Latin America does not depend on the merits of inter-industry trade or intra-industry trade, but on whether the complementarity of the two economies can be maximized (Chen, 2011: 82; Jiang, 2013: 5). Latin America's comparative advantage is that it has abundant natural resources, and China's rapid economic development needs to import a variety of resources from abroad. Only such complementarity can maintain the sustainability of Sino-Latin American economic and trade relations. Moreover, China supports sustainable and inclusive economic growth and has taken the lead in recovering economic growth from the COVID-19 pandemic, which helps Latin America out of difficulties. The maintaining growth of China-Latin America's economy and trade has fully demonstrated their economic and trade relations' great resilience, complementarity, sustainability, and potential.

There is also the view that the Latin American manufacturing industry is facing threats and pressures due to the intense competitiveness of Chinese export products. According to the analysis of Gallagher and Porzecanski (2010), there are three categories of Latin American industry threatened by China: the first one is "threatened industry", in which Latin America's share of export of manufactured goods in the world market is declining while that of China is increasing; the second is "partly threatened industry", that is, Latin America and China are both increasing their share of manufactured goods in the world market, but China is increasing its share even more; the third one is "safe industry", in which Latin American manufactured goods have increased their share in the world market more than China's share. They concluded that by 2009, 92% of Latin American industrially manufactured goods exports had been threatened by China. Therefore, strengthening China's competitiveness undermines Latin America's ability to develop in the long run. Chinese researcher Jiang Shixue (2013) has explained that the decline in the share of Latin American manufactured goods in the world market predates the "rise" of China, and that this decline in Latin America's share is due to a variety of reasons, not all of which can be attributed to China. In Brazil, for example, heavy taxes, bureaucracy, high labor prices, poor infrastructure, and other costs that discourage economic activity are all obstacles. Furthermore, the international competitiveness of a country's products is the most important factor for it to have a larger share of the world market. Therefore, Latin America should not defend itself against Chinese products by anti-dumping or other punitive measures but should strive to improve its competitiveness.

### *3.2 In terms of political cooperation*

The economic achievements have spurred more political contact between China and Latin America (Wintgens, 2022). The most prominent was the high-density and high-frequency visits by Chinese leaders to Latin American countries. The number of high-level bilateral visits evidently indicates the Latin America's significant to China's diplomatic strategy (Das, 2016). After taking office as President in 2013, Xi Jinping has vigorously promoted the development of foreign affairs with Latin America and the Caribbean, visiting Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, and other countries. He is the first top Chinese leader to visit LAC in the first year of his presidency, the first to visit English-speaking Caribbean countries (Trinidad and Tobago), and the first to visit Ecuador (Wang, 2017: 64). In 2016, Prime Minister Li Keqiang and President Xi Jinping visited Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile in September and November respectively. Subsequently, the Presidents of Peru and Uruguay visited China successively, and the heads of Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico attended the G20 Summit in Hangzhou. By October 2022, China has established a "strategic partnership" with twelve Latin American countries (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Suriname, and Jamaica) and a "comprehensive strategic partnership" with the first seven of these twelve countries. It is worth mentioning that Brazil is the first country in the world that China established a partnership, in 1993. These show that the political mutual trust and political ties on the bilateral level have been continuously enhanced and deepened.

Not only on the bilateral relation, but China and LAC also have strengthened the multilateral interaction. One presentation is the China-CELAC Forum established in 2011. It is a platform for overall cooperation between China and Latin America, which has been rapidly established based on the mutual development needs of China and Latin America. This cooperation platform has a series of institutional arrangements, such as being positioned as an intergovernmental cooperation platform led by the ministries of foreign affairs of China and the member countries of the CELAC, which can hold ministerial meetings. It is not only conducive to strengthening China-Latin America solidarity and promoting South-South cooperation (Guo, 2017: 10), but also provides China an opportunity to reach out to some Central American states that China has no diplomatic ties (Wintgens, 2022: 5). The Chinese government has also been actively advocating cooperation in various fields under the Forum framework. However, it has been criticized that the Forum lacks the

necessary capacity and experience to coordinate the various views of different countries. In brief, it has negligible influence in the international arena and limited impacts on Latin American affairs (Jiang, 2018: 12). In early 2017, at the Fifth CELAC Summit held in Dominica, more than ten leaders of Latin American countries were absent. Therefore, China should have a realistic assessment of the role of CELAC and should not expect too much from it. When promoting overall cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean, China should attach importance to the sub-regional organizations in this region, such as the Pacific Alliance and Mercosur, and make them part of the overall cooperation between China and LAC. It also has to be noted that the cooperation mechanism of BRI is also characterized by multilateralism because it is a global public good (Li, 2018: 40).

However, there is an argument goes that because “the growing economic interdependence between China and a large number of LAC countries is asymmetric”, Latin American countries have developed economic dependence on China, thereby enhancing China’s ability to exert influence over its partners, especially by extension political influence (Wintgens, 2022: 2). Moreover, the “strategy of so-called ‘South-South’ or ‘mutually beneficial’ cooperation” deployed by China and “(t)he Third World narrative of ‘respect for sovereignty’ and ‘non-interference’ globally advocated by Beijing in its diplomacy converged with the economic and political interests of leaders of the ‘New Latin American Left’ (such as Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Lula da Silva in Brazil, Evo Morales in Bolivia or Rafael Correa in Ecuador)” to achieve strategic expansion (Wintgens, 2022: 1-2; Roy, 2022). Firstly, South-South cooperation, as a platform for global developing countries to jointly carry out cooperation and share knowledge and initiatives, will not lose its reputation and prestige due to China’s participation, let alone allow any country to abuse it. Secondly, mutually beneficial always corresponds to cooperation and partnership. The partnership China advocates emphasizes cooperation on affairs, that is, cooperation on issues of common interest (Liu et al., 2019). China does not stand for unilateralism or single-country dominance. The partnership advocated by China is characterized by seeking peace and cooperation, treating each other as equals, advocating openness and inclusiveness, and emphasizing win-win and shared benefits (*ibid*). Thirdly, “respect for sovereignty” and “non-interference” are the contents of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, China’s national diplomatic guiding policy, which has been accepted by many countries, evidently showing that it has positive effects around the world. Briefly, China stands up for the rules-based international order and will continue to defend and devote energy to strengthening multilateralism and international cooperation.

### 3.3 In the light of cultural cooperation

A reasonable explanation for the controversy over China’s engagement in LAC is that there are certainly cultural differences between the two sides (Guo, 2018: 4; Zhang et al., 2020: 97). Therefore, cultural cooperation and exchange are necessary to overcome this difference. China’s “cultural diplomacy” towards Latin America is the biggest transformation of China’s public foreign policy in the past 15 years and one of the new themes of China’s public foreign policy. This is also called China’s “soft power diplomacy”, because the Chinese government is trying to build the country’s “soft power” through its long history, culture, and ideology as well as its achievements in many fields, and then exert its international influence in many ways (Cornejo & Lan, 2015: 14). It is worth mentioning that the Chinese government has created a socialist core value system with “harmony” as the main body, intending to resist “Western universal values”. The core concepts of this system include respect for human rights, poverty eradication, environmental protection, non-interference in other countries’ internal affairs, and peaceful coexistence with other countries in the world. It is also the primary ideological guidance for China to implement “soft power diplomacy”. In the practice of “soft power diplomacy”, the most influential ones in Latin America are the establishment of Confucius Institutes and classes and holding cultural exchange activities.

Confucius Institutes have developed rapidly in Latin America. In 2006, China established its first Confucius Institute in Mexico. Then by 2016, 39 Confucius Institutes and 19 Confucius classrooms had been established in 20 countries of Latin America (Guo, 2017: 16). The construction of Confucius Institutes is an important cultural project of the Chinese government. It is also an essential non-profit social public welfare institution for promoting the Chinese language and spreading Chinese culture to the world. Confucius Institutes are key in promoting Chinese language education and transnational academic exchanges. In Latin American countries, it is mainly located within universities. In July 2014, the China-Latin America and Caribbean Leaders Meeting was held in Brasilia. Article 10 of the Joint Statement issued after the meeting clearly welcomed China’s opening and adding Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms in Latin America and the Caribbean. Meanwhile, Spanish education is also booming in China. By 2018, there were 96 Spanish majors in China (74 of them are undergraduate institutions), eight times the number in 1999; and more than 20,000 students were enrolled, forty times more than in 1999 (CECLA-INCAE, 2017: 5). But some scholars have questioned whether the establishment of Confucius Institutes is more like a disguised cultural invasion and they are tools for China to promote its



ideology. With the rapid development of Confucius Institutes in Latin America, Confucius Institute Headquarters is often unable to provide teachers of Chinese as a foreign language in quality and quantity. All these problems deserve the attention of the Chinese government.

Latin America, like China, has a long and splendid civilization, and cultural exchanges can promote the continuation and development of their respective civilizations. In 2016, China and Latin American countries held the Year of Cultural Exchange. In addition to China, the activity area covered more than 30 countries, such as Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil (Guo, 2017: 11). Through performances, exhibitions, forums, exchanges, and other activities, they show each other their country's cultural achievements and characteristics in various fields. Although there are differences in cultural vision and aesthetic habits, which inevitably become obstacles to cultural acceptance, the successful holding of the year not only promoted the spread of culture but also laid a foundation for the overall cooperation between China and Latin America. It also presents that although the two sides have great differences in language, religion, and ideology, both the oriental and Latin American cultures are inclusive and compatible.

Additionally, the Chinese government has strengthened people-to-people exchanges with Latin America to ensure the effectiveness of mutual learning and cultural exchanges between China and Latin America. In July 2014, the Chinese government decided that, from 2014 to 2019, China will provide 6,000 government scholarships, 6,000 training places as well as 400 on-the-job master's degree places to Latin American and Caribbean countries, and will invite 1,000 leaders of political parties from Latin American and Caribbean countries to visit and exchange in China, and launch the "Bridge of the Future" training program for thousands of young leaders from China and Latin America in 2015 (Guo, 2017: 11). In the speech to the Peruvian Parliament in November 2016, President Xi Jinping once again upgraded the strength of human-to-human and culture exchanges, pointing out that China will strengthen technology transfer and human resources cooperation with Latin America, and increase the number of training places for Latin America to 10,000 in the next three years based on the currently existing ones. At the same time, he announced that to expand media exchanges between both sides, a China-LAC Press Center would be set up in Beijing in 2017 to invite LAC journalists to work and study in China. In May 2017 and May 2018, the two sessions of LAC journalists' classes began as scheduled. These journalists have become the eyes to help LAC people understand China. Briefly, the Chinese government has taken practical actions to promote cultural exchanges and soft power diplomacy exerts some impact on the region.

### *3.4 The rise and application of green development cooperation*

Green development cooperation is a new area of cooperation between China and Latin America under the framework of the BRI. In theory, the green development concept has the core of the sustainable development concept. In reality, green development advances the more scientific and authentic sustainability. In the practical application of China-Latin America cooperation, they both support the concept of sustainable and green development, which stems from the fact that both sides have similar ways of getting along with nature, practical needs of developing economy, and coping with the deterioration of ecological environment caught by the development of modern science and technology (Meng, 2017). As green development is an inclusive and open concept that can be incorporated into different fields, this type of cooperation between China and LAC has flourished and blossomed in many fields, such as cooperation on green energy, green agriculture, green finance, and green trade. The core objective of these cooperations is to achieve sustainable development with low carbon and emission reduction. Therefore, in short, the significance of China-Latin America green development cooperation is the joint efforts of both sides on low carbon and emission reduction and climate action, then achieving the carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

China and LAC countries have a strong environmental focus, emission reduction targets, and clear sustainable and green development actions. In September 2020, China set the goals of "carbon peaking" by 2030 and "carbon neutrality" by 2060. Various LAC countries have also identified their responsibilities and action targets under the constraints of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. For instance, there are eight LAC countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, Panama, and Paraguay) have launched the project "Sustainable Industrial Parks Development in Latin American countries" (UNIDO, 2017: 7). Following their national conditions, they decided to promote the circular economy and low-carbon industry in sustainable industrial zones/parks that have been established or planned, which were supported and financed by United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (UNIDO, 2017; UNIDO, 2019). Moreover, six LAC countries (Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru) have realized that building long-term decarbonization strategies with economic and social goals at their heart is necessary and help update NDCs, so they investigated national decarbonization pathways (IDB & DDPLAC, 2019). They analyzed that they need to transform the three vital sectors - transport, power generation, and land-

use, which means they need to expand public transport and plan transport electrification, support the expansion of clean electricity generation, and factor in new land-use options in economic planning (*ibid*). It is worth mentioning that green development cooperation between China and LAC coincides with the long-term decarbonization strategy of Latin America. For example, the Kirchner-Cepernic hydroelectric plant jointly built by China and Argentina could supply power to 1.5 million Argentine households, save nearly U.S. \$1.1 billion in oil and gas import expenses annually, and export electricity to Brazil and Paraguay (teleSUR, 2021). To avoid affecting the Perito Moreno Glacier, the project strictly protects the glacier and the surrounding ecological environment. China has built 32 wind turbines in Chile's Punta Sierra wind farm, supplying clean energy equivalent to 130,000 households and reducing carbon emissions by 157,000 tons per year (REVE, 2018).

Additionally, there is an argument that while COVID-19 has brought an economic crisis to the LAC region, the decarbonization path has not been effectively blocked, because the pandemic could offer "the region a chance to respond with a green stimulus that can help decarbonize its economy, potentially with China's help" (Koop, 2020). The economic recession forces LAC governments to take measures - using their own resources or attracting foreign investment - to stimulate their economies and thus to spur greater climate action in the region. As a significant trade and investment partner for many LAC countries, China should shift investment on high-carbon projects to green alternatives, which could assist in recovering the region's economy and reducing their emissions (*ibid*). In fact, China's contribution to climate action in Latin America has shifted from the economic sphere to green development. Tang (2022) analyzed that "China could save 256 million to 768 million tonnes of oil equivalent annually by investing in wind power and photovoltaic projects in countries along the Belt and Road. Examples in Latin America include a photovoltaic power station in Jujuy province and wind power projects in the Patagonia region in Argentina." She also proposed that China could swap the debt in Ecuador for climate action, such as forgiving Ecuador's debt in exchange for a certain hectare of Amazon rainforest conservation, which would avoid hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the progress of bilateral cooperation can be seen in the political, economic, and cultural fields, along with the concepts of sustainable and green development. Whether it is the community of shared future proposed by the Chinese government or the all-around cooperation that the two sides had begun, China is working with Latin American countries through concrete actions to narrow the distance and achieve joint development. Despite the differences and contradictions, they are all resolved through peaceful consultation. Moreover, the rapid growth of economic and cultural relations between China and Latin America benefits from the significant enhancement of political relations and government policies' support, guidance, and promotion. Coupled with the common pursuit and maintenance of green development, this interactive relationship appears to be particularly precious.

Since 2008, when the Chinese government viewed its relations with Latin America and the Caribbean from a strategic perspective and issued the first "China's Policy Document on Latin America and the Caribbean", China-Latin America relations have been on a fast track of accelerated development. Then in 2016, the publication of the second "China's Policy Document on Latin America and the Caribbean" shows that China has framed its diplomatic practice towards that region in the form of a policy document, thus significantly enhancing the certainty of the development of this kind of relation.

There are noticeable obstacles to the development of Latin America at present. First of all, it is difficult for major Latin American countries to exert leadership and influence on regional affairs due to internal political struggles, so Latin America is in a state of "leaderless". Secondly, interventions of the extra-regional country on LAC are apparent, especially former President Trump's immigration restrictions and trade protection policies and American values-based diplomacy of the Biden Administration have negatively impacted many Latin American countries. However, this makes China, which advocates building an open and fair world economic system, more attractive to Latin American countries, so China's foreign policy could be described as an opportunity for LAC.

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