

CHINA—LATIN AMERICA RELATIONS IN TRANSFORMATION

ECONOMY, TECHNOLOGY & GOVERNANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY



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CHINA-LATIN AMERICA RELATIONS IN TRANSFORMATION: ECONOMY, TECHNOLOGY, AND GOVERNANCE IN THE TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY

Lecture Series
Chair in Contemporary China
2025

Editor:
Mario R. González Rodríguez
Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences
(FLACSO Program in Cuba)



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IN MEMORIAL

The Chair in Contemporary China and the FLACSO Cuba Program honor the memory of Dr. Antonio Romero, a prominent Cuban economist and leading figure in international economics, development, and regional integration.

This memory is published in tribute to his valuable contribution.



PRESENTATION

PRESENTATION

The Chair in Contemporary China of the General Secretariat of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) is pleased to present the volume *China–Latin America Relations in Transformation: Economy, Technology, and Governance in the Twenty-First Century*, the outcome of the Fifth Latin American Lecture Series on Contemporary China, held in August 2025.

China's rise as a central actor in the international system, together with Latin America's pursuit of greater strategic autonomy, has reshaped the economic, technological, and diplomatic dynamics of the twenty-first century. This edition of the Lecture Series was marked by an examination of new complex interdependencies, a growing institutionalization of biregional dialogue, and the expansion of agendas that transcend trade to include technology, non-traditional security, culture, education, and global governance.

Since the early 2000s, the region has experienced a sustained increase in its engagement with China, coinciding with Latin America's diplomatic diversification and the emergence of multilateral mechanisms such as the China–CELAC Forum, which since 2015 has broadened the scope of cooperation and political coordination. These developments take place in a highly dynamic geopolitical context, where competition among major powers coexists with the need to protect global public goods, manage shared risks, and strengthen an inclusive multilateralism.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, these transformations have opened opportunities in infrastructure, finance, emerging technologies, the digital economy, energy transition, and higher education. Yet they have also raised crucial questions: How can more balanced relations be ensured? How can technological cooperation be leveraged without deepening existing gaps? How should digital, climate, and health security challenges be addressed? What institutional capacities are required to navigate an evolving multipolar order?

Within this broader context, the Chair in Contemporary China has worked consistently to foster plural and comparative analysis on China and its engagement with Latin America. Since its establishment, the Chair has promoted an interdisciplinary dialogue aimed at strengthening public policy,

expanding academic cooperation, and advancing a more nuanced understanding of the transformations shaping this relationship.

This volume brings together contributions from specialists from China and Latin America, who examine—through complementary perspectives—the structural components of biregional relations: trade and investment, technological innovation, non-traditional security, sustainable development, cultural diplomacy, and multilateral coordination. The chapters offer empirical evidence, conceptual frameworks, and strategic proposals that help interpret the accelerated changes defining the China–LAC agenda.

The relevance of this work lies not only in the breadth of topics addressed, but also in its capacity to illuminate critical debates within a global landscape marked by contestation. In the face of the energy transition, accelerated digitalization, tensions in supply chains, climate challenges, and the need for fairer models of global governance, the relationship between China and LAC emerges as a key space for exploring cooperative alternatives that strengthen the region’s autonomy, sustainable development, and scientific innovation.

These contributions were presented during the Fifth Lecture Series, coordinated by FLACSO-Cuba in collaboration with the Institute of Latin American Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (ILAS–CASS), reaffirming the institutional commitment to building high-quality spaces for academic exchange.

Through the Chair in Contemporary China, we hope this publication becomes a valuable resource for researchers, policymakers, and all those interested in examining the challenges and opportunities of this relationship in an increasingly interdependent world.

We extend our gratitude to the authors and institutions that made both the Lecture Series and this publication possible. The Chair reaffirms its commitment to promoting intercultural dialogue, critical reflection, and the production of knowledge that contributes to more balanced and inclusive cooperation between Latin America, the Caribbean, and China.

Chair in Contemporary China
General Secretariat
Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO)



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In the transition towards a more heterogeneous world order, the reconfiguration of ties between China and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has acquired significant strategic importance. The region has moved from a secondary role to becoming a space where economic, technological and diplomatic interests converge, with visible impacts on the architecture of global governance. The fundamental mechanism structuring this transformation is the institutionalization of Sino-Latin American cooperation through multilateral formats (in particular the China-CELAC Forum), combined with initiatives of global scope (such as the Global Security Vision and China's triad of initiatives on development, security and civilization). This double helix—regional multilateralism plus global initiatives—has made it possible to expand the agenda beyond trade and investment to encompass non-traditional security, science and technology, culture and education, with a horizon of mutual benefit and sustainable development.

This reconfiguration is embedded in three structural transformations. First, LAC's diplomatic diversification and its strategy of "active non-alignment," which seeks to maximize room for maneuver in a context of systemic competition among great powers, without abandoning pre-existing relationships or the defense of its own interests. Second, the technological transformation driven by the digital economy, artificial intelligence (AI) and 5G, whose diffusion is reshaping value chains, standards and public policies, and opening up unprecedented fields of interaction between China and the region. Third, the expansion of regional multilateralism through the China-CELAC Forum, a platform that has catalyzed convergent agendas in development, civilization and peace, with concrete instruments ranging from credit lines and supply-chain integration to cooperation on cybersecurity, health and disaster management.

From a historical perspective, Sino-Latin American ties have undergone a qualitative leap in the last two decades. Economically, trade has expanded at an accelerated pace, and the relationship has shifted from marginal to central

in South America's international insertion; investment and financial arrangements indicate an institutional densification that goes beyond existing free trade agreements. Politically and diplomatically, the region has strengthened its role as a multilateral protagonist, combining pragmatism with strategic autonomy. In the technological realm, the AI-5G synergy enables applications in manufacturing, smart cities, health and education, but it also raises challenges related to data security, the digital divide and algorithmic ethics, which call for regulatory frameworks and scientific cooperation.

That said, the advance of this cooperation architecture is not exempt from key questions that this book seeks to address. How can the *quality*—and not only the *quantity*—of trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows be optimized so as to reduce asymmetries and increase value added in LAC? What shared standards will make it possible to manage data privacy and security in AI-5G projects and to mitigate socio-environmental impacts in extractive and infrastructure sectors? How can climate finance be articulated with the needs of Caribbean small island developing States (SIDS) so that the energy transition is both just and resilient? In what ways can cultural and educational cooperation be institutionalized in order to foster lasting mutual understanding and bilingual capacities in both directions? This volume offers partial answers while opening a plural and multidisciplinary dialogue with the academic and policy communities.

The present book emerges from the Fifth Latin American Lecture Series on Contemporary China: “Fourth China-CELAC Ministerial Meeting,” held in August 2025 under the coordination of the Contemporary China Chair of the General Secretariat of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) and the FLACSO Cuba Programme (FLACSO-Cuba), in collaboration with the Institute of Latin American Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (ILAS-CASS).

Each chapter of this book corresponds to one of the six lectures delivered in August 2025 by distinguished Latin American and Chinese scholars. We consider the main contribution of this volume to be twofold: on the one hand, it provides an analytical map of the political economy of China-LAC relations (trade, investment, finance, technology, governance); on the other, it proposes normative criteria and institutional designs to enhance the quality of cooperation, with particular emphasis on non-traditional security, sustainable development and cultural diplomacy.

The first chapter, entitled *Socioeconomic evolution of relations between China and Latin America and the Caribbean: challenges and prospects*, by Cuban researcher Gladys Cecilia Hernández Fernández, reconstructs the trade and financial trajectory of the past two decades, showing the leap in bilateral trade (2000–2014) and its subsequent consolidation, the role of FDI, and the growing financial institutionalization that anchors cooperation beyond free trade agreements. It highlights opportunities and risks, arguing that the priority should be “higher-quality relations” oriented towards value added and sustainability. This chapter offers a structural reading of economic interdependence and of its policy levers—such as productivity, diversification and environmental standards—useful for designing national and regional strategies.

The second chapter, *Science, technology and innovation: AI, 5G and China’s digital transformation*, by Chinese professor XIE Wenze, explains how AI–5G synergy operates as a driver of transformation in smart manufacturing, urban development and public services, while at the same time generating regulatory challenges, deepening the digital divide and creating ethical dilemmas that require international cooperation and standard-setting. XIE Wenze supports his analysis with a range of cases in telemedicine and remote monitoring, digital twins and robotics, smart-city deployments, risk identification and emerging legal frameworks. This chapter provides technical inputs for discussing technology transfer and adaptation in LAC, including training, interoperability and cybersecurity, and it adopts a forward-looking perspective on future trends.

The third chapter, *Relations between China and Latin America and the Caribbean in the face of the challenges of sustainable development*, by prominent Cuban economist Antonio F. Romero Gómez, situates China–LAC cooperation within the framework of sustainable development and climate finance, emphasizing the urgency faced by Caribbean small island developing States and the need to combine investment in the energy transition with a careful calibration of socio-environmental risks. In terms of evidence, it identifies China’s prominence in renewable and nuclear energy, and documents tensions in extractive projects; it suggests economic integration and diversification as pre-conditions for autonomy. Overall, this chapter offers policy guidelines for connecting sustainable finance, adaptation plans and the productive agenda, in dialogue with proposals such as the Bridgetown Initiative.

The fourth chapter, *Cultural and educational cooperation between China and Latin America and the Caribbean*, by Chinese scholar HAN Han, examines the expansion of Confucius Institutes, scholarship schemes and exchange programmes, and advocates reciprocity—for example, establishing centers for Spanish language and Latin American culture in China—in order to deepen mutual understanding. This fourth contribution outlines a cultural roadmap that includes heritage exchanges, academic mobility and digital literacy, with a view to anchoring the social links that sustain economic and technological cooperation.

The fifth chapter, entitled *Political and diplomatic cooperation: multilateral relations and the role of LAC in the global strategy*, by Cuban historian and scholar Mario R. González Rodríguez, advances the central argument that Latin America and the Caribbean are redefining their role in the international system through inclusive multilateralism and active non-alignment; the relationship with China is understood as a lever for autonomy and as a platform for joint agendas (financial reform, health, internet governance). In terms of evidence, the chapter traces the institutionalization of dialogue (CELAC, the China–CELAC Forum), records proposals in the areas of development, civilizations and peace (including cooperation in cybersecurity and disaster management), and examines emerging security cooperation (police training, asset recovery, permanent observation in regional fora). Its main contribution lies in proposing criteria to navigate great-power competition without eroding regional cohesion, by reinforcing rules and capacities for collective action.

The sixth and final chapter, *Promoting cooperation on non-traditional security in the China–CELAC Forum: building common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security*, by Chinese scholar WANG Song, argues that the Global Security Vision shifts the focus towards non-traditional security and global public goods, and that the China–CELAC Forum functions as an operational arena in which this vision is translated into concrete practices and mechanisms. It also offers a historical reconstruction of the concept of security in China and a chronology of the sectoral agenda of the China–CELAC Forum. Its principal contribution is the identification of operational principles for institutionalizing non-traditional security in LAC, ranging from local capacities to sectoral regimes, aligned with a cooperative multilateralism.

This volume, presented here to the reader, is an effort to foster dialogue between academia and decision-makers in a field where economic, technological and normative dynamics are mutually reinforcing. Its three main contributions are as follows. At the conceptual level, it shifts away from binary narratives of dependence versus hegemony toward relational frameworks that combine complex interdependence, global public goods and strategic autonomy. At the empirical level, it organizes evidence on trade, FDI, finance, AI-5G, non-traditional security and cultural cooperation, linking political forums with sectoral projects. Finally, at the practical level, it offers actionable recommendations, such as diversifying value chains, raising environmental and data standards, strengthening technological governance capacities and aligning climate finance with LAC's needs, particularly those of the insular Caribbean.

Therefore, *China–Latin America Relations in Transformation: Economy, Technology and Governance in the Twenty-First Century* will help to understand China–LAC cooperation as a process in motion: a web of institutions, technologies and practices that, if properly oriented, can expand the policy space for more productive, inclusive and sustainable development. This book sets out the roadmap and the right questions; it is up to decision-makers, researchers and societies on both shores to turn them into public policies and alliances commensurate with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Mario R. González Rodríguez
Researcher, FLACSO–Cuba
Coordinator of the Fifth Lecture Series, 2025

SOCIOECONOMIC EVOLUTION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

This report is based on the presentation: “Socioeconomic evolution of relations between China and Latin America and the Caribbean: challenges and prospects”, presented on August 18, 2025, during the V Lecture Series held within the framework of the Chair in Contemporary China.



SOCIOECONOMIC EVOLUTION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Gladys Cecilia HERNÁNDEZ FERNÁNDEZ¹

Introduction

China's links with the region date back to the sixteenth century, when the Manila Galleon trade route facilitated the exchange of porcelain, silk and spices between China and Mexico. By the 1840s, hundreds of thousands of Chinese immigrants had been contracted as *coolies*, or servants, by the Spanish colony, ultimately ending up as slaves on sugar plantations or in silver mines in places such as Cuba and Peru. Over the following century, China's relations with the region were characterized primarily by migration. These trends stimulated an intense exchange of customs and traditions that created historical bonds between Latin America and the Caribbean and different Chinese provinces, among which the province of Canton or Guangdong² stands out.

In the 1960s and 1970s, most Latin American countries recognized the government of the People's Republic of China, with revolutionary Cuba being the first on this list. The 1970s marked the beginning of a process of rapprochement between the region and China, once China and the United States initiated a new stage in their relations with U.S. President Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972. The process of economic transformations launched by China at the end of that decade introduced significant changes in the country's economic development strategies and foreign policy,

¹ Economist and Cuban academic, she graduated in International Relations from the Superior Institute of Moscow (1984) and holds a Master's degree in Philosophy and History from the University of Havana (2004). Since 1985, she has served as an assistant researcher and Head of the Department of International Finance at the Center for Research on the World Economy (CIEM) in Cuba.

² Guangdong (Canton), is a province on the southeast coast of China, borders Hong Kong and Macao. Its capital, Guangzhou (Canton), is located within the Pearl River Delta region.

generating attractive policies for international trade and foreign investment that had a notable impact on the expansion of cultural, political and economic relations with the rest of the world.

Among the milestones in these relations, the 13-day official visit by former President Jiang Zemin to various Latin American countries in 2001 is particularly noteworthy. Since then, dozens of high-level political exchanges have taken place. President Xi Jinping has visited the region at least five times since taking office in 2013. China's growing global influence has generated new exchanges: in 2023 alone, eight presidents from the region paid visits to China.

Reviewing the trajectory, China and Chile signed an initial trade partnership in 2005. Subsequently, China has been expanding its economic and commercial presence in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to the various bilateral agreements, it has concluded with countries in the region, China has signed comprehensive strategic partnerships—its highest level of diplomatic recognition—with at least seven countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. In 2023, China signed five major agreements with countries in the region, including one with Ecuador, 15 trade-related agreements with Brazil, and key agreements with Argentina and Nicaragua. These accords extend the scope of cooperation beyond the easing of trade and tariff barriers by promoting the international use of the Chinese yuan.

The consolidation of China's export-oriented model and its insertion into global markets took on particular importance in the 2000s, especially following China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001. This event specifically initiated a relatively rapid process of rapprochement between China and the Latin American and Caribbean region. From 2000 to 2024, a remarkable strengthening of political, economic and cultural ties can be observed. Today, countries such as Brazil, Cuba, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela are home to significant Chinese-origin communities that have gradually settled and integrated into Latin American nations over several generations. In fact, many of China's initial approaches over the years have been channeled precisely through the so-called Chinese diaspora.

At the multilateral level, China has promoted its presence in the region through mechanisms such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the BRICS, the Group of 77 plus China, and the China-CELAC Forum.

Evolution of Socioeconomic Relations

In 2000, the Chinese market accounted for less than 2% of Latin America's exports. However, both China's rapid growth and resulting demand, as well as the commodity boom in those years, drove an expansion of the region's commodity trade, especially in South America. Between 2000 and 2014, trade between the two sides multiplied at an average annual rate of 27%, whereas the value of the region's trade with the world during the same period merely tripled, growing at an average annual rate of 9% (CEPAL, 2015).

In 2021, as the process of recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 began, the total volume of trade exceeded 450 billion dollars (SELA, 2022). This figure rose in 2024 to 518 billion dollars, reaching a historical record, with imports surpassing 241.46 billion and registering 46% growth compared to 2019 (Xinhua, 2025). The steady expansion of trade relations has led many economists to predict that, by 2035, trade volumes could exceed 700 billion dollars. China is now the main trading partner for the South American subregion and the second largest for Latin America as a whole, after the United States.

Latin America and the Caribbean export to China products such as soybeans, copper, oil, iron ore, nickel, fishmeal, hides, sugar, zinc, tin, grapes and other raw materials that the country needs to fuel its industrial development. At the same time, the region mainly imports higher value-added manufactured products. For years, a marked trade deficit with China has been observed in several of the region's main trading partners, which has led, over time, to bilateral discussions on the terms of trade—a pattern which, according to some experts, has harmed local industries due to the relatively lower cost of Chinese products.

China has been receptive to these and other demands raised by its Latin American partners and has significantly modified the content of the White Papers that guide China's bilateral relations with the region. China adopted its first strategy document for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2008 and, in 2016, published an updated "Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean," outlining its trade and economic strategy for the region. The 2008 document sets out the objectives of that strategy in the areas of trade, industrial investment, financial cooperation, and cooperation in energy and infrastructure as priorities. In 2012, then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao delivered a speech at CEPAL headquarters in Santiago, Chile. This speech not only significantly boosted the relationship but also translated the

guidelines outlined in the White Book into concrete proposals (Xinhua, 2008; Xinhua, 2016).

The 2016 Policy Paper already incorporated a series of new elements that would go on to shape these relations. In addition, it is important to recall that changes in China's development model—from one that was essentially export-oriented to another based not only on exports but also on domestic consumption—provide China with the capacity to generate alternatives through rising national wages, which may offer new opportunities for the region's trading partners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Another crucial milestone in these ties has been the emergence and evolution of the Belt and Road Initiative. By June 2025, 22 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean had joined China's Belt and Road Initiative, the most recent being Colombia. For participating countries worldwide, 2024 was a positive year. In the case of imports and exports with BRI partner countries, trade increased by 6.4%, representing 50.3% of the total value of imports and exports. Exports of mechanical and electrical products grew by 8.7%, accounting for 59.4% of total exports. In December, the total value of imports and exports of goods reached 4.067 trillion yuan, an average annual increase of 6.8%. Specifically, the total value of exports was 2.4099 trillion yuan, an increase of 10.9%, while the total value of imports amounted to 1.6570 trillion yuan, up 1.3% (ONE, 2025).

Today it is clear that the initiative has served as a mechanism for strengthening ties beyond the free trade agreements that China has concluded with countries such as Chile (2005), Peru (2009), Costa Rica (2011), Nicaragua and Ecuador (2024). At the same time, other institutional agreements that facilitate relations have been generated, such as the increased use of the yuan in trade payments. In this context, the People's Bank of China has signed several currency-swap agreements with some Latin American central banks to facilitate trade payments in the Chinese currency, thereby increasing its use in the region.

China has signed currency-swap agreements with Argentina and Brazil. By 2023, Argentina held around one-third of its central bank reserves in Chinese yuan, and in Brazil the yuan had surpassed the euro as the second most important currency (Hernández Bruno, 2023).

For many years, entities responsible for China's lending to the region—mostly state-owned and multilateral Chinese banks—have played a central

role. These include the two main policy banks, the China Development Bank and the Export–Import Bank of China, the region’s principal lenders, as well as the New Development Bank, headquartered in Shanghai and established by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). Between 2005 and 2023, they granted loans worth 141 billion dollars, meaning that China provided more lending than either the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank (Hernández Bruno, 2023).

One of the sectors in which a growing evolution of relations is most evident is Chinese outward foreign direct investment (FDI). In 2024, China’s FDI in Latin America and the Caribbean reached approximately 8.5 billion dollars, representing 6% of China’s total outward FDI. Statistics show that by the end of 2022, the stock of China’s direct investment in Latin America and the Caribbean had reached 596.2 billion dollars, almost seven times the figure at the end of 2013. “Cooperation in traditional fields has deepened and consolidated, and cooperation in emerging fields is on the rise,” notes Yuan Dongzhen, Deputy Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Professor at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, when summarizing the outstanding characteristics of current investment cooperation between China and Latin America and the Caribbean (Xinhua News Agency, 2024).

China’s economic development has also enabled it to become a member of the Inter-American Development Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank.

Over the last decade, Chinese investment in Latin America has been characterized by large-scale infrastructure projects—roads, railways, dams and ports, among others—often backed by state financing and, in many countries, framed under the banner of the Belt and Road Initiative. In recent years, however, the nature of this investment has been changing. While China continues to look to its Latin American partners for markets and key resources, Chinese companies—rather than Chinese lenders—have become the main actors in investment, with particular attention to new technology sectors.

As noted above, at various points in the 2010s the support provided by Chinese development finance institutions for infrastructure financing in the region exceeded that of traditional providers such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. This trend, however, has since

reversed, as Chinese lending declined sharply in the second half of the decade.

Already in 2015, Latin America experienced a significant drop in loans from the China Development Bank (CDB) and the Export–Import Bank of China (CHEXIM), two of the three public Chinese banks owned by the State Council that have historically been the most active institutions in offering funds to the region. Between 2019 and 2023, the region received on average only 1.3 billion dollars per year from CDB and CHEXIM, with most of the total concentrated in 2019 and 2023; loans fell to zero in 2020 and saw a slow post-pandemic recovery in 2021 and 2022. By contrast, in 2010 CDB alone lent 25 billion dollars. A decade ago, China’s financing to the region exceeded that provided by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Today, the situation is reversed. In 2024, the only two credit operations in favor of the region from these institutions were granted to Brazil’s National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) to promote infrastructure and the green economy (Dialogue Earth, 2025).

Enrique Dussel Peters, coordinator of the China–Mexico Studies Center at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), concurs: “these trends are the result of a learning process by Chinese companies over more than two decades in the region, and by Latin American officials and companies themselves with respect to China” (Dialogue Earth, 2025).

China’s newly prioritized sectors include electric vehicles, solar panels, batteries, digitalization, telecommunications, fintech, electrification and artificial intelligence. In several of these sectors, China holds a dominant position at the global level, as is the case for solar panels, batteries and electric vehicles. China accounts for more than 80% of global exports of solar panels, 50% of lithium batteries and more than 20% of electric vehicles. In turn, these “new infrastructure” sectors accounted for 58% of China’s outward investment in the region in 2022 and more than 60% of the number of projects announced by Chinese companies that year (Dialogue Earth, 2025).

Dussel Peters summarizes the shift in priority sectors as follows: “Sectors linked to raw materials—metals, minerals and mining—continue to predominate in China’s investment in Latin America, accounting for 34% of the total during 2020–2023, although this is far below their share in 2005–2009, which was 81%. Conversely, the energy sector—particularly non-fossil

energy—and the automotive and auto parts sectors have become the most dynamic in the past decade” (Dialogue Earth, 2025).

A Look at Relations across Different Sectors

A range of sectors reveal increased bilateral cooperation. The energy and commodity sectors are particularly prominent in this regard. Chinese participation in Latin American oil markets expanded from 2005 onwards. Between 2005 and 2017, the region received around 30 billion dollars in FDI in the oil and gas sector, directed mainly to Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela and Peru. China also provided approximately 98 billion dollars in loans to Latin America’s oil and gas sector between 2007 and 2016. In this context, China’s crude oil imports from Latin America grew by 556% between 2007 and 2019, as shipments from the region accounted for nearly 13% of the total volume of China’s crude oil imports. Statistics become difficult to track after 2019 due to U.S. sanctions on Venezuela (Webster Joseph and Tobin William, 2024).

China entered the Latin American energy sector at a time of severe financial crisis and major price impacts that affected commodity trade, particularly oil. Additionally, the boom in shale oil and gas in the United States negatively affected Latin American crude exports. Chinese overseas investment and the massive 2009 energy stimulus package consolidated China as an alternative market for Latin American producers, even though conditions changed in 2018 due to the tightening of U.S. sanctions on state-owned *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)* and the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (Webster Joseph and Tobin William, 2024).

China’s energy influence is particularly extensive in Brazil, considered the region’s largest crude oil exporter. By 2021, crude oil exports to China accounted for nearly 47% of the value of all Brazilian crude exports and roughly 0.9% of Brazil’s gross domestic product that same year. In 2009, China International United Petroleum & Chemicals (Unipetec) and Brazilian state oil company *Petróleo Brasileiro*—better known as Petrobras—concluded a supply agreement guaranteeing 200,000 barrels per day between 2010 and 2019, alongside a 10-billion-dollar loan from the China Development Bank. In Brazil, China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec), Unipetec’s parent company, formed a partnership with Petrobras from 2010 onwards to acquire expertise in offshore drilling. Between 2007 and 2020, China invested approximately 66 billion dollars in Brazil, with the oil and gas sector accounting for nearly 30% of that investment (Webster Joseph and Tobin William, 2024).

China's efforts to secure Latin American minerals began in 2004, when the Chinese government started offering subsidies for overseas investments in natural resources that are scarce in China. Reforms implemented in 2017 regarding China's outward investment further encouraged Chinese companies to invest in foreign mining. Today, Chinese investments in Latin America remain concentrated in a small number of activities considered strategic, including full or partial acquisitions aimed at securing access to strategic minerals such as copper, lithium and niobium, according to a report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Wischer Gregory and Villasmil Juan Pablo, 2023).

Financial schemes coordinated by Chinese authorities have enabled the acquisition of overseas mining projects to secure important minerals. For example, a consortium of Chinese mining companies (MMG, Guoxin and CITIC Metal) acquired the Las Bambas copper mine from Glencore in Peru in 2014 with a syndicated loan of 5.988 billion dollars arranged by China's state development banks (China Development Bank and Export-Import Bank of China) and state-owned commercial banks (Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and Bank of China, Sydney branch) (Wischer Gregory and Villasmil Juan Pablo, 2023).

In Latin America, the mining sector was the second most important target—after energy—for Chinese FDI, accounting for 30% of China's investment in the region between 2007 and 2018. Moreover, the mining sector came to represent 51% of Chinese investments in Latin America over the same period (this figure excludes Brazil, where Chinese companies continue to invest heavily in the energy sector). Most of China's mining deals in Latin America are mergers and acquisitions that “have secured the supply of natural resources” for China. China's share in Latin America's extractive exports rose from 1% in 2000 to 34% in 2020 (Wischer Gregory and Villasmil Juan Pablo, 2023).

Previously, Chinese mining investments had focused on copper (the Las Bambas mine in Peru) and iron ore (the Marcona mine facilities, also in Peru). However, there is now a clear trend toward investing in the production of so-called critical minerals, with Chinese mining projects concentrating primarily on metals such as lithium, which is needed to manufacture electric-vehicle batteries. Between 2019 and 2022, Chinese companies invested around 4.5 billion dollars in lithium projects in Mexico and South America, especially in the so-called lithium triangle countries of Argentina, Bolivia and

Chile. This triad holds approximately half of the world's reported lithium reserves (Wischer Gregory and Villasmil Juan Pablo, 2023).

In January 2022, Chinese company Zijin Mining purchased Canadian firm Neo Lithium for 690 million dollars, thereby acquiring the Tres Quebradas lithium project in Argentina. Zijin has also launched a 380-million-dollar project to build a lithium carbonate plant in Argentina. For its part, Chinese battery company Gotion—through a joint venture with the Argentine state-owned mining company Jujuy Energía y Minería Sociedad del Estado—announced in June 2022 that it would also build a lithium carbonate plant in Argentina. Subsequently, in July 2022, Ganfeng Lithium acquired Argentine mining company Lithea Inc. for 962 million dollars, gaining control over the Pozuelos and Pastos Grandes lithium brine assets. In January 2023, a Chinese consortium that included mining giant CMOG and battery giant CATL committed to invest 1.4 billion dollars in lithium development projects in Bolivia (Wischer Gregory and Villasmil Juan Pablo, 2023).

Another sector in which China's presence has grown is health. It is worth recalling, however, that China's stance on cooperation in global health issues dates back to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. From this period, the authorities of the new Chinese state provided health assistance to socialist countries. During the decade of African independence in the 1960s, many countries on that continent also received Chinese cooperation. As diplomatic ties expanded, China's health programmes also grew. These relations reached their most visible expression in 2014–2016, when the largest Ebola outbreak on record took place. China played a key role as part of international efforts to halt the spread of Ebola. It provided four rounds of emergency aid—delivered in April, August, September and October 2014—worth 750 million yuan (about 123 million dollars) to West African countries. China not only guaranteed financial and material assistance but also sent more than 1,000 medical professionals to the region to support local epidemic prevention and control efforts (UNDP, 2014).

More recently, Chinese health cooperation has deepened. This policy has acquired a new dimension as part of the Chinese initiative known as the “Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road,” or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Under this framework, different strands have been developed, one of which is the Health Silk Road, launched in 2015. In fact, this health dimension is considered part of the initial documents presented by the Chinese authorities when articulating the humanistic and solidarity-based

nature of the cooperation foreseen under the BRI. These purposes are enshrined in the key document known as “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” (2015): “We should enhance cooperation with neighboring countries in exchanging information on epidemics, exchanging technologies for prevention and treatment, and training medical professionals, and improve our capacity to jointly respond to public health emergencies” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2015).

The concept of the Health Silk Road was presented by the National Health and Family Planning Commission in its three-year plan for health exchanges and cooperation under the Belt and Road (2015–2017). In January 2017, Xi signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the World Health Organization that endorsed international health regulations and promoted health security along the Silk Road. By August 2017, China had convened the Belt and Road High-Level Meeting for Health Cooperation, and the resulting document was the Beijing Communiqué of the Belt and Road Health Cooperation & Health Silk Road, adopted, among others, by WHO, UNAIDS and the OECD (Vadell Javier and Rubiolo Florencia, 2020).

In the context of COVID-19, China played an essential role in supporting the Latin American and Caribbean region. At the bilateral level, more than 500 donations were recorded to 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean between February and June 2020, representing around 130 million dollars. The main recipients of Chinese external assistance in the region were Venezuela (45 million dollars), Brazil (23 million), Chile (9 million), Cuba (9 million) and Peru (6 million). In fact, two dimensions of health cooperation have been implemented in the region: multilateral and bilateral. This process included the distribution of medical equipment such as ventilators and diagnostic test kits, and the granting of billions of dollars in loans to countries to purchase Chinese vaccines, as well as investments in facilities for local vaccine production. Donations did not come solely from the central government but also from other actors. Philanthropic organizations such as the Jack Ma Foundation played a key role, as did donations from companies such as Huawei, Chery, Yutong, Three Gorges and others, and shipments of medical supplies from provincial governments such as Hangzhou, Sichuan or Fujian, and even municipalities such as Shanghai (Telias Diego and Wilchinski Marcelo, 2023). In the face of the pandemic of the century, China supplied more than 300 million doses of vaccines and around 40 million units of health supplies and equipment to

countries in the LAC region, and sent several teams of medical experts to the area (Xinhua, 2025a).

At the multilateral level, the role of CELAC must be highlighted. This mechanism, comprising the 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, became a forum for multilateral dialogue between Latin American officials and Chinese specialists. The work of Vadell Javier and Rubiolo Florencia underscores this: “Mexico, in its capacity as *pro tempore* president of CELAC, played an outstanding role in this rapprochement. Under Mexican leadership, the organization facilitated communication between countries to monitor coronavirus outbreaks around the world. In March 2020, CELAC, through Mexican Foreign Minister Ebrard, convened a virtual ministerial meeting of the Health Ministers of its member States with China’s National Health Commission, represented by its Vice-Chairman, Dr. Zeng Yixin. Thirty ministers participated, along with organizations such as the Pan American Health Organization, ECLAC, CARICOM and SELA” (Vadell Javier and Rubiolo Florencia, 2020).

Infrastructure is another key area of investment cooperation between China and Latin America and the Caribbean, and this process has more recently been driven by the Belt and Road Initiative. Statistics reveal that Latin America is the second largest destination for Chinese overseas investment, and China is the third largest source of investment in Latin America. By September 2023, China had backed more than 200 infrastructure projects in the region and had built thousands of kilometers of roads, railways and light rail systems; more than 100 schools, hospitals and stadiums; nearly 100 bridges and tunnels; dozens of airports and ports; and more than 30 power plants and other energy facilities, providing nearly one million jobs for the local population (Xinhua News Agency, 2024).

Among the most important examples in this sector is the port of Chancay, located about 80 kilometers north of Lima, the capital of Peru. Situated in Chancay Bay on the Pacific Ocean and backed by the Andes Mountain range, it is a natural deep-water port expected to become a major port in Latin America and a gateway to the Pacific Ocean, significantly reducing the shipping time for direct routes from Peru to Asia. In Ecuador, Manta International Airport was also inaugurated after being rebuilt following the earthquake that struck the region. In Mexico, Section 2A of the general modernization project of Line 1 of the Mexico City Metro was put into operation, while in Antigua and Barbuda the renovated and expanded deep-

water port of St. John's will allow the country to develop as a regional maritime transport hub (Xinhua News Agency, 2024).

In recent years, investments between China and Latin America and the Caribbean have been initiated in strategic sectors such as high technology, including renewable energy, electric vehicles, the digital economy, aerospace satellites, artificial intelligence and cross-border e-commerce.

Chinese companies' investment in renewable energy in Latin America and the Caribbean is growing rapidly. Between 2010 and 2024, China invested 33.69 billion dollars in renewable energy in the region through 70 transactions for an equal number of projects, 54 of which were in non-hydroelectric energies, amounting to 13.138 billion dollars (IPS, 2025).

According to Enrique Dussel Peters, coordinator of the Latin American and Caribbean Academic Network on China (Red ALC-China) in Mexico, these figures "highlight the importance of China in supporting the region's energy transition, both through investments and infrastructure projects" (IPS, 2025).

With regard to renewable energy, the gradual increase in such investments is noteworthy. According to Red ALC's Investment Monitor, there was no Chinese investment in this sector in the region between 2000 and 2009, but by 2010–2014 eight projects had emerged, worth 3.298 billion dollars and generating 6,000 jobs. By 2015–2019, 25 projects with Chinese financing had been approved, worth 19.568 billion dollars and generating 9,300 jobs. In the 2020–2024 period, 37 transactions were completed, totaling 10.824 billion dollars and creating 15,000 jobs. Although there was a significant decrease in the volume of investment in 2020, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as a counterpart 35 of the 37 renewable energy transactions during the five-year period were in non-hydroelectric energy projects (Dussel Peters Enrique, 2025; IPS, 2025).

A report published by the Brazilian Institute of Applied Economic Research notes that between 2019 and 2022, the investment of Chinese companies in photovoltaic power-generation capacity in Latin America quadrupled, rising from 363 MW to 1.4 GW, while Chinese companies' investment in wind farms to generate electricity increased from 1.6 GW to 3.2 GW (Xinhua News Agency, 2024).

Chinese electric vehicles are well received in the Latin American and Caribbean market, and many Chinese automakers have accelerated their

investments in Brazil, Mexico and other countries. Emerging markets in Asia and Latin America are becoming new growth centers, with electric-vehicle sales increasing by more than 60% in 2024 to nearly 600,000 units—approximately the size of the European market five years earlier. In Brazil, Latin America’s largest automotive market, electric-vehicle sales more than doubled to 125,000 in 2024, reaching a sales share of more than 6%. Policy support and relatively affordable imports of electric vehicles from China have played a central role in boosting sales in some emerging EV markets, accounting for 85% of electric-vehicle sales in both Brazil and Thailand, for example (IEA, 2025).

Chinese export markets for electric vehicles are diversifying as Chinese manufacturers expand into Brazil, Mexico and Southeast Asia. Several potential markets for Chinese electric-vehicle exports have recently adopted or are considering applying tariffs. This has prompted Chinese manufacturers to anticipate exports before such tariffs take effect (as in Brazil) or to seek new markets for their available production. Currently, Chinese manufacturers’ overseas production capacity accounts for approximately 5% of electric-vehicle sales in emerging markets and is expected to continue growing (IEA, 2025).

In the field of the region’s digital economy and associated technologies, China views progress as a key objective of its efforts. These areas have received a significant boost both through “Made in China 2025” and the “Digital Silk Road” initiative launched by the PRC in 2015. On the one hand, two of the eight pillars of China’s Global Development Initiative—namely, the digital economy and connectivity—are directly related to these fields. On the other hand, the China–CELAC Plan 2022–2024 explicitly prioritizes China’s engagement with the region across a broad range of digital sectors, including “digital infrastructure, telecommunications equipment, 5G, big data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, smart cities, Internet+, universal telecommunications services,” and “radio spectrum management” (Evan Ellis Robert, 2022).

Since 1999, Huawei has played an important role in the telecommunications sector in Latin America and the Caribbean. By 2019, Huawei was operating in 20 Latin American countries, with market shares of more than 20% in four of them. In Brazil, Huawei holds 50% of the telecommunications equipment market. Much of Huawei’s current participation in Latin American telecommunications architectures is based on the incorporation of its

phones, servers, routers and other equipment into the architectures and commercial offerings of retail providers such as Claro, Movistar, Personal and Tigo, although PRC-based companies also supply components and services directly to state telecommunications entities in other countries, such as Antel in Uruguay or Indotel in the Dominican Republic. Other Chinese companies also supply equipment to Latin America, including Oppo and Xiaomi, which opened their first physical stores in Buenos Aires in March 2022 (Evan Ellis Robert, 2022).

At present, Huawei is a leader in Latin America in providing equipment for 5G networks, often with advantages in cost and breadth of offerings. The company's equipment is well positioned to be significantly integrated in Chile, Peru and Brazil, which lead the region in 5G deployment. In Curitiba, Brazil, Huawei is seeking to establish a trial 5G "smart city." The company is also well positioned in Argentina and Colombia, among others, and is making significant strides in defining and auctioning bandwidth (Evan Ellis Robert, 2022). Currently, several Chinese cross-border e-commerce platforms have entered the Latin American market.

Cooperation in the space sector has also been an important area in relations between China and the region. In 1988, the first joint space initiative between China and Latin America and the Caribbean was launched with the establishment of the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) programme. This programme, the result of cooperation between the China Academy of Space Technology and Brazil's National Institute for Space Research, aimed to jointly develop and launch satellites to observe and monitor the Earth's resources and environment. Six CBERS satellites have been launched: in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2013, 2014 and, most recently, in 2019 (Gadzala Tirziu Aleksandra, 2023).

Argentina signed a framework agreement on space cooperation with China in 2004. Concluded between Argentina's National Commission on Space Activities and China's National Space Administration, the agreement provided for the use of Chinese Long March rockets to launch satellites for the national satellite company, Argentina Satellite Solutions Company, founded during that period. The agreement also paved the way for the establishment of the Deep Space Station in Neuquén province, Patagonia. The station has a 35-metre-diameter antenna and is operated by China's Satellite Launch and Tracking Control General (CLTC), a division of the People's Liberation Army's Strategic Support Force. The project was agreed

in 2014 by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and President Xi Jinping and came into operation at the end of 2017. The facility, costing 500 million dollars, is part of China's Deep Space Network and is the first deep-space ground station Beijing has established outside the Asian continent. It is designed to facilitate communication between deep-space missions and spacecraft flying over the Southern Hemisphere. Chinese state media confirm that it "played an important role" in the landing of the Chang'e-4 probe on the far side of the Moon in 2019. It is also crucial for China's Mars research and its plans to enhance multi-target tracking, telemetry and command (TT&C) capabilities, thereby enabling more coordinated communication during complex missions (Gadzala Tirziu Aleksandra, 2023).

China has also developed bilateral space relations with Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Venezuela. To date, cooperation has centered on the provision of launch services, satellite components and Chinese platforms, financed mainly through loans from the China Development Bank. These capabilities have enabled LAC countries to monitor their natural resources and agricultural activity, including for export to China. They have also facilitated improvements in telecommunications and the collection of geospatial data that can contribute to border surveillance and other national security issues. Bilateral space cooperation with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean is part of China's Space Information Corridor, a component of the Belt and Road Initiative aimed at strengthening space cooperation and data sharing among BRI members through the deployment of satellites, ground stations, data centers and other terrestrial application systems, as well as the training of foreign space personnel (Gadzala Tirziu Aleksandra, 2023).

In addition, China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) explicitly declares its support for the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in playing an active role in defending regional peace and security. In this regard, the Joint China–CELAC Action Plan 2022–2024 proposed the establishment of a China–CELAC Space Cooperation Forum through which members would cooperate on satellite technology, remote sensing and research. The plan also points to the goal of using the Belt and Road framework to extend China's Beidou satellite system (Gadzala Tirziu Aleksandra, 2023).

Cooperation and the China–CELAC Forum

Cooperation between China and LAC has deepened and diversified since the 2000s and can be observed in several areas: trade, investment, finance, scientific and technical collaboration, tourism, culture and education. The mechanisms for this cooperation are diverse: project design, complementarities in goods and materials, technical cooperation, human-resource training, the deployment of technical personnel—such as medical teams or technicians sent to support project implementation—emergency humanitarian aid, overseas volunteer programmes and the provision of debt relief. This cooperation is carried out primarily on a bilateral basis and involves all institutional levels in each country: governments, legislative bodies, political parties and even local authorities.

In this context, the publication of the aforementioned “Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean” in 2008 and its update in 2016 is highly relevant, as these documents set out the essential guidelines for promoting cooperation (Xinhua, 2008; Xinhua, 2016).

However, many experts consider the holding of the First Ministerial Meeting of the China–CELAC Forum, held in Beijing in January 2015, to be a watershed moment, as the Forum constitutes the institutional framework for advancing relations with the region in multiple dimensions, including cooperation.

Among the initiatives mentioned by Wen Jiabao in 2012, the establishment of a China–Latin America and Caribbean Cooperation Fund already stood out, designed to support cooperation in various sectors along with the granting of a special credit line of 10 billion dollars to promote the construction of key infrastructure—railways, roads, ports, power plants and telecommunications networks—in the region. The China–CELAC Forum proposal finally materialized on 17 July 2014, when President Xi Jinping attended the meeting of Chinese, Latin American and Caribbean leaders in Brasília. At this historic meeting, the official launch of the China–CELAC Forum was announced and the first meeting of Foreign Ministers was convened, to be held in Beijing (Morales Ruvalcaba Daniel, 2024).

The Forum agreed on cooperation based on principles of flexibility and voluntary participation, and its most important outcome was the approval of the Cooperation Plan between the two regions for the period 2015–2019. The “Beijing Declaration” issued by the Forum sets out as a main objective

the transition from a relationship based on trade in natural and energy resources to cooperation geared towards strengthening and developing investment in infrastructure (China–CELAC Forum, 2015).

The second ministerial meeting, held in Santiago, Chile, in January 2018, strengthened this partnership through the Santiago Declaration and the adoption of the 2019–2021 Action Plan. This plan reflected the commitment of both sides to promote sustainable development in the region by seizing the opportunities offered by China’s Belt and Road Initiative. The third ministerial meeting, held virtually in December 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, produced a joint declaration and the adoption of the 2022–2024 Action Plan. This plan reflected progress in cooperation between the two sides and showcased a novel approach in areas such as politics and security, economic cooperation, science and technology, high-quality infrastructure, and social and cultural cooperation, among others (Morales Ruvalcaba Daniel, 2024).

More recently, at the fourth ministerial meeting held in Beijing in May 2025, China pledged to increase its engagement in the region. President Xi announced several proposals, summarized below (Xinhua, 2025a).

a) *The Solidarity Programme.* China proposes to maintain mutual support on issues related to core interests and fundamental concerns. To this end, exchanges in various spheres must be strengthened, and communication and coordination on major international and regional issues must be deepened. Over the next three years, China will annually invite 300 cadres from the political parties of CELAC member countries to visit China to conduct research and exchange experiences on governance. China will support the countries of the region in enhancing their influence on the multilateral stage and is willing to work with them to resolutely uphold the international system with the United Nations at its core and the international order based on international law, speaking with a common voice in international and regional affairs.

b) *The Development Programme.* China is ready to work with the region to jointly advance the Global Development Initiative, firmly defend the multilateral trading system, the stability and smooth functioning of global industrial and supply chains, and an open and cooperative international environment. To this end, both sides must strengthen the alignment of development strategies, vigorously promote high-quality Belt and Road

cooperation, deepen cooperation in traditional areas such as infrastructure, agriculture and food, as well as energy and mining, and expand cooperation into emerging areas such as clean energy, 5G communications, the digital economy and artificial intelligence, while implementing the China-LAC Science and Technology Partnership Programme. China pledges to import more high-quality products from LAC and will encourage its companies to increase investment in the region. To support the development of countries in the region, China will provide a credit line worth 66 billion yuan.

c) *The Civilizations Programme*. China is willing to work with the region to implement the Global Civilization Initiative, embrace the concept of civilizations based on equality, mutual learning, dialogue and inclusion, and uphold the common values of humanity—peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom. To this end, exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and LAC civilizations will be deepened by promoting a China-LAC conference on dialogue between civilizations. Exchanges and cooperation in cultural and artistic fields will also be broadened, including a Latin American and Caribbean Art Season. Cooperation and exchanges in the field of cultural heritage will be strengthened, including joint archaeological excavations, the protection and restoration of historical monuments and ruins, and museum exhibitions, as well as studies on ancient civilizations. Joint efforts will be made to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural property.

d) *The Peace Programme*. China is willing to work with the region to jointly implement the Global Security Initiative. China supports the proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace and the declaration by the 33 LAC countries of their intention to create a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Latin America and the Caribbean. China is prepared to collaborate in strengthening cooperation in disaster management, cybersecurity and the fight against terrorism, corruption, drugs and transnational organized crime, in an effort to safeguard regional security and stability. In response to the needs of CELAC member countries, China will implement law-enforcement training projects and provide equipment assistance within its means.

e) *The Peoples' Programme*. Over the next three years, China will provide CELAC member countries with 3,500 government scholarships, 10,000 training opportunities in China, 500 scholarships for international Chinese-language teachers, 300 training opportunities for poverty-reduction professionals, and 1,000 visits to China under the “Chinese Bridge”

framework. It will also implement 300 “small but beautiful” welfare projects and promote cooperation projects in vocational education such as the Luban Workshop, supporting CELAC member countries in developing Chinese-language teaching. China will host screenings of Chinese films and television programmes under the project *The Bond*. China and the region will work to ensure that 10 popular telenovelas or audiovisual programmes from each side are translated annually. They also propose to foster dialogue on tourism. To further facilitate friendly exchanges between people on both sides, China has decided to apply visa-waiver policies for five LAC countries as an initial step, to be extended to other countries in the region at an appropriate time.

As noted, political, socioeconomic and cultural relations between China and LAC remain positive for both parties, and it is evident that there is considerable scope for achieving greater results. While Latin America and the Caribbean hold significant importance for China in the current global context, these advances also stimulate relations between the two sides in ways that can help reduce the region’s gaps in infrastructure, logistics and connectivity, thereby promoting intraregional trade and the creation of value chains, not only with China but also within the region itself.

U.S. Reaction to the Growth of China’s Relations with the Region

U.S. policymakers and military officials have expressed growing concern regarding China’s expanding presence in Latin America. During his first term, President Trump adopted a tougher line than his predecessors, imposing sanctions on several countries, including Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, and withdrawing support from others—most notably the so-called Northern Triangle countries in Central America. Many experts argue that these actions prompted some governments to reconsider their relations with China. Trump’s policies also affected trade relations with the region by promoting the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

President Biden, who had taken the lead on Latin American policy during his tenure as Vice President under Barack Obama, long argued that the United States should renew its leadership role in the region to counter China’s growing influence. Calling China a “strategic competitor” and pledging to strengthen U.S. partnerships in the Western Hemisphere, Biden launched the “Build Back Better World” (B3W) Initiative in 2021, together with his G7 counterparts, with the aim of countering the rising influence of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. However, the Biden administration promised only 6

million dollars to B3W in its first year, later renaming it the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. At the 2022 Summit of the Americas, Biden announced a series of new economic initiatives, including the creation of the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity, intended to make the region more competitive. In addition, the Biden administration pressed countries to maintain their support for Taiwan and continued to raise concerns about Huawei. Some experts, however, argue that Biden did not pay sufficient attention to the region, particularly on trade issues (Roy Diana, 2025).

The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission's 2024 Annual Report—prepared by an independent U.S. government agency—highlighted the challenges posed to Washington by Beijing's growing influence in Latin America. Meanwhile, bipartisan legislation introduced by then-Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and later by Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) in 2022 called for measures to counter China's "malign influence" in the region by strengthening multilateral security cooperation and anti-drug efforts. Other legislative proposals have urged U.S. companies to foster permanent trade partnerships with Western Hemisphere countries in order to encourage the "nearshoring" of supply chains located in China to countries closer to the United States (Roy Diana, 2025).

In his second term, President Trump has adopted an even firmer approach to countering China's regional influence. He has repeatedly claimed that China secretly controls the Panama Canal, despite the fact that it is Panamanian-owned, and has threatened to retake the waterway, which the United States handed over to Panama in 1999. The Trump administration has also imposed tariffs, applying a base tariff of 10% to most countries—including those in Latin America—with higher tariffs on Mexico due to concerns about immigration, drug trafficking and on China itself. Many experts believe these measures will ultimately harm the U.S. economy and cede part of its trade to China. Trump's focus on border control could also pose problems for Latin American countries, as many depend on remittances from the United States to sustain their economies (Roy Diana, 2025).

Challenges for China and the Region

For more than two decades, China has fostered political, economic and cultural relations with many Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Brazil, Peru, Chile, Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Haiti. The main challenge in this context arises from the United States' increasingly

evident concern about the growing impact of Chinese influence in the region. China's presence in the United States' so-called "backyard" provokes intense debates not only within the United States itself but also among the different political factions in Latin American countries, some of which have intrinsic ties to U.S. capital and view China's presence as an imminent threat to their own interests and those of the United States.

Both the United States and these opposing sectors advance various arguments. One such claim is that China is taking advantage of its expanding ties with the region to consolidate its economic presence and continue its efforts to achieve the creation of "One China," which would mean that those countries still maintaining relations with Taiwan would sever them and instead recognize the People's Republic of China. Another argument is that Chinese investments merely increase the indebtedness of the countries involved and do not provide adequate conditions for the objective development that these countries seek.

Without disregarding the real starting conditions under which Latin American and Caribbean nations engage with the Asian giant—whose economic performance and scientific development currently secure it an ascending position in the global economy and international relations—it is also necessary to recognize several important elements when making value judgements about the importance or validity of relations with China. Among these are the following:

- a) Any move toward closer ties with China by a country in the region constitutes a sovereign act, framed in a primarily national assessment of the pros and cons of promoting such a process. Moreover, there are no historical precedents of old-style colonialism or the development of imperialism that, in many cases, conditioned relations of subordination.
- b) If, over recent decades, the United States has distanced itself from the region's structural problems and focused its efforts on other parts of the world, it would seem logical that, in the face of China's dynamic emergence, Latin America and the Caribbean should take up the challenge of broadening their horizons and exploring new economic and financial relations. This is even more the case given that the severity of recurring global crises and the interplay of their various dimensions have significantly deteriorated living standards in the region, and the U.S. response to these problems has been

practically non-existent. This does not appear to be the case with China; it suffices to recall the importance of Chinese support for the region during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- c) It is true that investment processes around the world, given the enormous inequalities between creditors and borrowers, have generated the huge volumes of external debt that characterize most of the underdeveloped world today. However, critics focus on the levels of indebtedness associated with Chinese investments in the region while paying insufficient attention to the substantial impact that these investments—especially in infrastructure, logistics and technological advancement—are already having on the economies involved. Nor is adequate account taken of the magnitude of the historically unsustainable debt that many countries owe to their former colonial powers or metropolises, a burden that has become a vicious circle of exploitation and subjugation.

Opportunities for China and for the Region

The boom in trade between China and Latin America and the Caribbean is rooted in the dynamism of both markets and their promising prospects. It is clear that, for China, Latin America and the Caribbean constitute a market with notable opportunities—first, due to the availability of natural resources, including critical minerals, and features such as access to water and renewable and natural energy sources.

For the region, China also offers significant opportunities. Several factors are relevant in this regard. One is China's drive to boost domestic demand, sustain its growth and further open its vast market, which is generating new opportunities for the entry of high-quality Latin American products. In 2024, designated as the "year of consumption promotion," China's retail sales of consumer goods—an important indicator of the country's consumption strength—increased by 3.5% year-on-year, reaching 48.79 trillion yuan (6.79 trillion dollars), according to China's National Bureau of Statistics (Xinhua, 2025).

This drive is supported by policies aimed at unleashing China's enormous demand potential. In recent years, initiatives such as increased fiscal contributions, higher incomes, the removal of trade barriers and the promotion of technological innovation have been spurring growth and opening new frontiers for consumption. China's economy is undergoing a transformation in its growth model, with consumption gradually playing a

larger role. This process is conditioned by rising wages, which should increase Chinese consumers' purchasing power, especially in relation to imported goods. Added to this is the trend toward higher urbanization and an expanding middle class that demands higher-quality food and services.

This situation represents an opportunity for the region's economies to add value to their export baskets to China, as companies in Latin America and the Caribbean are capable of meeting these needs. It is evident that, rather than worrying about whether relations will expand, the key issue now is to ensure that these relations become more *qualitative*, so that Latin American and Caribbean countries can eliminate the inequalities and asymmetries that have characterized their external engagement in the past.

Sustainability illustrates this point. The exploitation of natural resources in mining, energy and agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean has raised environmental concerns, such as water pollution and deforestation. In the current context, and in order to build a resilient partnership, both sides—but particularly Latin America and the Caribbean—must explore sustainable solutions for raw-material exploitation and seek to diversify the types of goods and services traded, thereby reducing dependence on specific sectors and products.

Another opportunity lies in the real influence that Chinese technologies now exert. China currently has the capacity to produce technology, implement it and scale it at the required speed. This is evident in the field of renewable energy and electric vehicles. These factors have led U.S. economist Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University and adviser to the United Nations, to argue that, in essence, “the energy transition is Chinese.” Sachs views China as “a leader in key technologies that will be essential in the next 25 years: photovoltaic solar, wind, modular nuclear, long-distance power transmission, 5G (now 5.5G), batteries, electric vehicles and others” (IPS Noticias, 2025).

On another front, in order to improve ties with China, all actors in the region—governments and the private sector—must work on designing strategies and concrete measures aimed at correcting the asymmetries and imbalances present in these relations. It is evident that the region lacks a well-designed, long-term strategy for engaging with China, whereas China does have such a state-led strategy.

Among the actions that the region could undertake are the following:

1. Continue advancing trade diversification in sectors other than raw-material exploitation, such as industry, services and infrastructure.
2. Strengthen the integration of technological progress and knowledge in export promotion.
3. Increase and improve reciprocal FDI flows. Encourage the region's investments in China, while promoting Chinese investment in Latin America and the Caribbean that supports higher value-added exports, greater technology transfer, the creation of quality jobs and social and environmental sustainability.
4. Increase and strengthen linkages between Latin American and Chinese companies through different types of business partnerships (productive, commercial and technological alliances) to enable Latin American firms to be integrated into value chains.
5. Design a strategy to meet financing needs for the transition to clean energy in the new context of China's changing investment pattern, which may offer new opportunities for Latin American countries but also pose challenges related to the impact on local economic development and the management of socio-environmental tensions.

Conclusions

The year 2025 will be important for the development of relations between China and the Latin American and Caribbean region, particularly as all these countries face pressure from the current occupant of the White House, President Trump. Tariffs could affect exports in both directions.

The scenarios are complex. In response to intensified trade tensions, China may resort to a strategy of renegotiating with Trump—as it has done in the past—in an effort to stabilize its relations with the United States and gain time for domestic reforms. However, if pressures persist, and bearing in mind that the trade war is only the tip of the iceberg, it is possible that China will further strengthen its internal positions and, as an independent actor in international relations, continue to influence the world economy thanks to the strength of its manufacturing sector. There is no doubt that the impacts will affect its performance in the short and even medium term, but China will not abandon its long-standing objectives.

For the Latin American and Caribbean region, it is clear that U.S. pressures may continue to exert a negative influence on its relations with the United

States while bringing certain countries closer to China. At the same time, however, there are fears of imperial power and the example of Panama and its decision in February 2025 not to renew its Belt and Road agreement with China, a possible option that some countries could consider in order to balance their ties between the Asian giant and the United States.

It is evident that each country must resolve this crossroads for itself, weighing whether it is prepared to sacrifice the tangible aspects of its relationship with China or, instead, maintain the status quo with the United States.

Panama's exit from the initiative could be interpreted as a setback for China, but in practice the arrogance of U.S. assertiveness stands in stark contrast to China's cooperative posture and its willingness to take into account the interests of developing countries. This contrast may well offset the loss of Panama, as it is likely that more countries will be attracted by these principles.

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SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION: AI, 5G AND CHINA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

This report is based on the presentation: "Science, Technology and Innovation: AI, 5g and China's digital transformation" presented on August 20, 2025, during the V Lecture Series held within the framework of the Chair in Contemporary China.



SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION: AI, 5G AND CHINA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

*XIE Wenzhe*³

Introduction

Humanity is rapidly entering the digital era, marked by the pervasive integration of digital technologies into all spheres of life. From work, communication and learning to social governance and economic functioning, digital tools—such as smartphones, cloud platforms, AI and high-speed networks (5G)—have become indispensable. In this accelerated arrival of the digital age, the digital economy has emerged as a new economic form that takes digitized knowledge and information as key factors of production, digital technology as the central driving force, and modern information networks as its fundamental support. Through the deep integration of digital technology with the real economy, it continuously increases the levels of digitalization, connectivity and intelligence of the economy and society, and accelerates the reconfiguration of economic development and governance models.

In the global landscape of technological revolution, digital transformation has consolidated itself as a crucial driver of economic growth, social progress and national competitiveness. Among the countries at the forefront of this transformative wave, China stands out for its ambitious vision, rapid implementation and remarkable achievements. In China's process of digital transformation, two revolutionary technologies have emerged: artificial intelligence (AI) and 5G. Often operating in tandem, they have become the

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cornerstones of China's strategy to redefine its economic structure, enhance industrial efficiency and improve the quality of everyday life.

AI refers to the simulation by machines—especially computer systems—of processes associated with human intelligence. These processes include learning (acquisition of information and rules for its use), reasoning (application of rules to reach approximate or definitive conclusions) and self-correction. Specific applications include expert systems, speech recognition and machine learning. 5G—the fifth generation of wireless technology—is the latest global standard for cellular networks. It is designed to deliver significantly higher data-transmission speeds, lower latency (the time devices take to communicate with each other), greater network capacity and more reliable connections than its predecessors. By enabling seamless connectivity among billions of devices and supporting real-time data exchange, 5G acts as a foundational technology for driving digital transformation across sectors, economies and societies.

This article explores, from a technological innovation perspective, the multifaceted role of AI and 5G in driving China's digital transformation. It examines the state of development of these technologies in the country, their synergistic applications in different sectors, the challenges encountered and future prospects. By delving into the complex interaction between AI, 5G and digital transformation, it seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of how China leverages technological innovation to shape its digital future.

Technological Foundations: Development of AI and 5G in China

The development of AI in China has experienced a meteoric rise over the past decade, evolving from follower to global leader in several domains. This progress rests on a combination of strategic planning, data abundance, substantial investment and a dynamic ecosystem of researchers and entrepreneurs.

Development planning and public policy. The Chinese government has identified AI as a core strategic technology. President Xi Jinping has emphasized that AI is an important driving force of the new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation, with a profound impact on global economic and social development and on the progress of human civilization. In 2017, the State Council of the People's Republic of China issued the *New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan*, setting clear goals: by 2020, to reach a level of development broadly in line with global leaders; by 2025, to

become a major center of AI innovation; and by 2030, to consolidate itself as one of the world's main hubs for AI innovation. This roadmap has provided a clear direction and mobilized resources across the country. Subsequent policies, such as the inclusion of AI in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025), have further reinforced its strategic importance for national development.

Data advantage. China's large population, rapid digitalization and broad Internet penetration have generated an enormous volume of data—the “new oil” of the digital age. Combined with advances in big-data technologies, these data have provided fertile ground for training high-performance AI models. In computer vision, for example, Chinese companies have access to vast sets of images and videos, enabling the development of highly accurate facial and object recognition algorithms.

Investment and market growth. China has positioned itself as a global leader in AI investment. According to industry reports, Chinese AI start-ups have attracted billions of dollars in recent years, with substantial public and private investment. This financial support has fueled a vibrant AI sector spanning hardware, software and application services. Companies such as Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent (BAT) and Huawei have become global players in AI research and applications.

Research and innovation. Chinese researchers have made significant contributions, particularly in deep learning, computer vision and natural language processing. The number of AI publications authored by Chinese scholars has soared, with strong representation in top-tier international journals and conferences. China also participates actively in global AI competitions, achieving prominent results that demonstrate its technical capabilities.

5G: Laying the Groundwork for a Hyperconnected Society

5G is characterized by high speed, low latency, massive connectivity and high reliability. It is the backbone of the digital economy, enabling seamless connectivity among people, devices and systems. China has been at the forefront of 5G development and deployment, aiming to build a world-class network to support its digital-transformation goals.

Infrastructure deployment. China has made notable progress in constructing 5G infrastructure. By the end of 2024, it had deployed millions of 5G base stations, with coverage in both urban and rural areas. This extensive

network has provided ubiquitous coverage and high-speed mobile access, enabling a wide range of applications. The accelerated rollout has been driven by strong government support, heavy investment by operators and the technological capabilities of equipment manufacturers such as Huawei and ZTE, among others.

Technical innovation. Chinese companies have played a crucial role in 5G technical innovation and have contributed significantly to standards development, holding numerous key patents in coding, modulation and antenna technology. Huawei, in particular, has consolidated itself as a global leader by offering end-to-end 5G solutions. Chinese researchers and engineers are exploring advanced technologies such as network slicing, edge computing and massive MIMO to enhance the performance and capabilities of 5G networks.

Commercialization and use. China is actively promoting the commercialization and application of 5G. Since the official launch of commercial services in 2019, the number of users has grown rapidly, reaching hundreds of millions. 5G is widely applied in telecommunications, health, education, transport and manufacturing. For example, remote medical diagnosis, smart classrooms, autonomous driving and the industrial Internet have been piloted and deployed in multiple regions, showcasing 5G's enormous potential to drive digital transformation.

Synergistic Effects: How AI and 5G Drive China's Digital Transformation

AI and 5G are not isolated technologies; their true power lies in their synergies. Combining AI's intelligent processing with 5G's high-speed, low-latency connectivity creates a powerful engine for digital transformation. This synergy enables the development and deployment of innovative applications that were previously unimaginable, transforming sectors across the economy and society.

Advancing Smart Manufacturing. Smart manufacturing is one of the areas where the synergy between AI and 5G has the deepest impact. By integrating both into production processes, China aims to achieve intelligent, flexible and efficient manufacturing.

Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT). 5G provides reliable, high-speed connectivity for large numbers of IoT devices in factories, enabling real-time data

collection and transmission. AI algorithms analyse these data to optimize production schedules, predict equipment failures and improve product quality. For instance, in a smart factory, sensors on production lines capture data on temperature, pressure and vibration; 5G transmits these data to the cloud, where AI models detect anomalies and predict breakdowns, enabling proactive maintenance and minimizing downtime.

Digital twins. The combination of AI and 5G makes it possible to create digital twins—virtual replicas of physical assets, processes or systems. These twins simulate and optimize manufacturing, allowing products and methods to be tested in a virtual environment before implementation. 5G ensures real-time synchronization between the physical and virtual worlds, while AI continuously learns from the data to refine models. This technology reduces development costs, shortens time-to-market and improves efficiency.

Autonomous robotics. AI-powered autonomous robots are increasingly performing tasks such as assembly, welding and materials handling. 5G provides low-latency communication between robots and control systems, enabling precise coordination and real-time decision-making. AI allows robots to adapt to changing environments, acquire new skills and collaborate with humans, thereby boosting productivity and flexibility.

Transforming Health Care

The integration of AI and 5G is revolutionizing health care in China by improving access, diagnostic accuracy and remote monitoring.

Telemedicine. 5G enables high-quality video consultations and real-time transmission of medical images (X-rays, CT, MRI) between patients and physicians in different locations. Patients in rural and remote areas can thus access specialized care without long journeys. AI assists in image analysis, provides preliminary diagnoses and suggests treatment options, enhancing efficiency and accuracy.

Remote patient monitoring. Wearable devices and IoT sensors record vital signs such as heart rate, blood pressure and glucose levels in real time. 5G transmits these data to providers, enabling continuous monitoring of patients with chronic diseases or those recovering from surgery. AI detects anomalous patterns and triggers timely alerts, facilitating early intervention and preventing complications.

Precision medicine. AI can analyze large volumes of genomic data, medical records and lifestyle information to identify personalized treatments. 5G facilitates the secure and efficient transmission of these data among health-care institutions and research centers, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing. This supports the development of targeted therapies and improves outcomes, particularly in cancer and complex diseases.

Advancing Smart Cities

China is promoting smart cities to improve urban management, strengthen public services and create more livable environments. AI and 5G are key enablers, providing connectivity, data processing and intelligent decision-making.

Intelligent transport. 5G enables real-time communication among vehicles, traffic lights and road infrastructure, supporting the development of connected and autonomous vehicles (CAVs). AI analyses traffic data to optimize flows, reduce congestion and enhance safety. For example, traffic-management systems use 5G to collect data from roadside cameras and sensors; AI models predict conditions and adjust traffic lights dynamically, reducing waiting times and improving efficiency.

Smart energy management. 5G connects smart meters, renewable energy sources and storage systems, enabling real-time monitoring and management of energy use. AI optimizes distribution, reduces waste and integrates renewables into the grid. This improves efficiency, lowers emissions and promotes a more sustainable energy system.

Public security. AI-powered video-surveillance systems, combined with 5G connectivity, strengthen public safety through real-time monitoring and analysis of public spaces. AI can rapidly detect and alert authorities to potential threats—crime, accidents, fires. 5G ensures fast and reliable transmission of images, enabling swift responses.

Revolutionizing Education

The integration of AI and 5G is transforming education in China, making learning more accessible, personalized and interactive.

Online education. 5G supports high-quality video streaming and interactive classes, giving students access to top-tier resources from anywhere. AI-driven learning platforms personalize the experience by analyzing

performance data, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and recommending appropriate materials and activities. Adaptive systems adjust difficulty and pace according to each student's progress.

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). 5G provides the bandwidth and low latency required for immersive VR/AR experiences. Students can explore virtual environments, conduct experiments and manipulate 3D models, thereby deepening understanding and engagement. AI adds intelligent guidance and feedback, making learning more interactive and effective.

Smart classrooms. AI and 5G technologies are being integrated into classrooms through smart boards, voice-recognition systems and IoT devices. Algorithms analyze classroom data to provide teachers with insights into student progress and behavior, helping them refine instruction.

Challenges and Opportunities

Although AI and 5G have brought significant benefits to China's digital transformation, they also pose various challenges. At the same time, they open up immense opportunities for innovation and development.

Challenges

Dependence on key technologies. Despite advances in AI and 5G applications, there remains a degree of dependence on foreign technologies in critical areas such as high-end chips, operating systems and core algorithms. This dependence entails risks for national security and industrial development, making China vulnerable to geopolitical tensions and trade restrictions.

Data security and privacy. The widespread use of AI and 5G generates massive amounts of data, raising concerns about security and privacy. Ensuring the secure collection, storage and use of data is crucial to maintaining public trust and promoting the healthy development of the digital economy. China has introduced laws and regulations—such as the Data Security Law and the Personal Information Protection Law—to address these issues, although effective implementation and enforcement remain challenging.

Digital divide. Despite major progress in infrastructure, gaps persist between urban and rural areas and among income groups. Rural regions and low-income populations may have limited access to high-speed Internet and digital technologies, making it difficult for them to benefit from digital

transformation. Narrowing this divide is essential for inclusive growth and social equity.

Ethical and social issues. The development and application of AI raise dilemmas such as algorithmic bias, job displacement and impacts on human autonomy. For example, AI-based decision systems may be biased against certain groups, leading to unfair treatment. Extensive automation may also cause job losses in some sectors, requiring measures to address unemployment and retrain the workforce.

Opportunities

Technological innovation. The development of AI and 5G provides a platform for innovation, driving advances in related fields such as quantum computing, edge computing and the Internet of Things (IoT). China can consolidate its global leadership by leveraging its strengths in AI and 5G and fostering innovation and collaboration among industry, academia and research institutes.

Economic growth and industrial upgrading. China has become the world's second-largest digital economy, with roughly 50% of its GDP linked to the digital economy. AI and 5G are key engines of growth, enabling the transformation and modernization of traditional industries and spurring new industries and business models. The digital economy is expected to become an even greater contributor to growth, creating jobs and strengthening national competitiveness.

Improved well-being. Applications of AI and 5G in health, education, transport and other sectors can significantly improve quality of life. Telemedicine brings health care closer to rural areas, while intelligent transport reduces travel times and enhances road safety.

Global leadership in digital governance. As a major player in the global digital economy, China has an opportunity to contribute to the development of digital-governance rules and standards. By engaging actively in international cooperation and dialogue on AI and 5G, it can help promote a more just, equitable and inclusive global digital order.

Future Prospects

Looking ahead, the integration of AI and 5G will continue to drive China's digital transformation, with several key trends on the horizon:

Deepening AI–5G integration. Synergies will intensify, enabling more innovative applications across sectors. The combination of AI, 5G and IoT will lead to smarter homes and cities, as well as a more intelligent and efficient industrial Internet.

Acceleration of 6G and quantum technology. China is already actively researching and developing 6G, which is expected to provide even higher speeds, lower latency and more advanced capabilities than 5G. 6G will promote a closer integration of the physical, digital and biological worlds, opening new possibilities. China has also made notable progress in quantum technology, especially in communication, computing and precision measurement. It holds a leading international position in quantum communication: in 2016 it successfully launched the world's first quantum-experiment satellite, *Micius*. By 2023, the secure fiber-to-fiber distance for quantum key distribution exceeded 1,000 kilometers.

In quantum computing, China is at the forefront globally. In 2020 it designed and built the prototype “Jiuzhang” with 76 photons, the world's first work with a strict demonstration of quantum advantage. In 2021, “Jiuzhang 2” with 113 photons was introduced; in 2023, “Jiuzhang 3” with 255 photons; and the “Jiuzhang 4” prototype currently under testing surpasses 2,000 photons. In addition, the superconducting prototypes “Zu Chongzhi” and “Zu Chongzhi 2” have been built. “Zu Chongzhi 3,” announced in 2024, can process random linear-sampling tasks one million trillion times faster than the “Frontier” supercomputer, representing the largest publicly known advantage in superconducting quantum computing to date.

In quantum precision measurement, especially in time standards, China has played an important role by developing an optical clock with an error of no more than one second in 7 billion years, making it the second country—after the United States—to achieve this overall index.

In 2025, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology announced plans to accelerate the development of the quantum industry. Supported by national planning and public policies, China is expected to maintain and expand its advantage in the international race for quantum information.

Emphasis on innovation in key technologies. China is mobilizing increasing efforts to develop key technologies in AI, 5G and related fields, reducing dependence on external sources and strengthening technological self-reliance. This involves higher investment in R&D, the training of high-level

talent and the promotion of integration among enterprises, universities and research institutes.

Strengthening data governance. As data become ever more important in the digital economy, China will continue to reinforce its data-governance framework: improving security, protecting privacy and promoting data sharing and use. This will create a safer and more reliable environment for digital innovation.

Inclusive digital transformation. China will seek to close the digital divide, ensuring that all segments of society benefit from digitalization. This will require improving infrastructure in rural and remote areas, promoting digital literacy and developing affordable digital products and services.

Conclusion

AI and 5G play a decisive role in China's digital transformation: they drive innovation, raise productivity and improve people's lives across multiple sectors. The country's remarkable technological advances, combined with strong policy support and vast market potential, have positioned it as a global leader in the digital economy.

However, challenges such as dependence on core technologies, data security and privacy, the digital divide and ethical issues must be addressed to ensure sustainable and inclusive development. If China can overcome these obstacles and seize the opportunities offered by AI and 5G, it will be able to further strengthen its position as a digital power, energize economic growth and enhance the well-being of its population.

China's digital-transformation journey is ongoing, and the integration of AI and 5G will continue to shape its future. With sustained innovation, effective governance and a commitment to inclusive growth, China is moving towards the construction of an intelligent, connected and sustainable digital society.

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RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE FACE OF THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE FACE OF THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Antonio F. ROMERO GÓMEZ⁴

Introduction

In the current context of crisis, Latin America and the Caribbean constitutes a contested space within the framework of a new dynamic of the world system that differs markedly from the bipolarity that structured much of the twentieth century. In this setting, it is important to note the perceptible growth in the diplomatic, trade, financial and cooperation ties of the People's Republic of China with most countries in our region in recent years.

Given this general context, it is highly relevant to analyze and generate proposals regarding the dynamics and prospects of relations between China and Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly for addressing the challenges of sustainable development, the socio-environmental crisis and ecological collapse.

This presentation offers, first, a succinct analysis of some elements that illustrate the crisis and transformations in the global system in recent times, and the rise of China's position in the international arena. Second, it examines some of the key characteristics and essential trends that typify relations between China and Latin America and the Caribbean in connection with sustainable development. A third section focuses on several problems and concerns regarding the current state and future prospects of relations between the countries of our region and China. Finally, by way of summary, the central ideas of this presentation are synthesized.

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Crisis and Transformation in the Global System: The Rise of China

In almost all analyses that address the current crisis and the process of transformation in the contemporary international system, several core elements are highlighted as defining this scenario. Among the most recurrent are:

- a) A relative retreat of the United States in terms of economic and political hegemony. As an expression of this, tensions have increased among the “Western allies of old”—that is, between the United States and the European Union (EU), and above all between the United States and China, but also with Russia.
- b) A deep disaffection toward the “liberal order” and “representative democracy.” In this sense, it is increasingly common for “emerging powers” to call for the configuration of “a post-Western order.”
- c) Growing vulnerability of international supply and logistics networks, expressing perceptible changes and some degree of reconfiguration in global value chains (GVCs).
- d) A strengthening of “protectionism,” threats of trade wars and a loss of legitimacy of the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- e) A clear weakening of international cooperation and multilateralism.

In this turbulent and uncertain process of “geopolitical transition,” dominant sectors of the U.S. establishment consider that:

- The United States must reassert itself in the field of geopolitics, in the competitive dynamics that govern the world economy, and in the definition of values and ideological frames that should prevail in the contemporary world.
- The United States must modify the world order that it itself designed and built in 1945 and sustained and expanded for decades.
- The current administration of President Trump expresses profound disdain for that “liberal order,” its international architecture and the so-called “rules-based world.” From this perspective, the liberal order is viewed as the source of U.S. decline.
- Trumpist logic assumes that weakening the liberal order improves U.S. conditions for confronting its strategic rivals, with China in first place.

In contrast, there has been a very significant rise of China across multiple indicators that point to a perceptible shift in the international balance of power in favor of the Asian giant. Among others:

1. China has been the fastest-growing major economy over the past 35 years.
2. At present, in terms of “economic size,” it ranks as the world’s second-largest economy.
3. For roughly half a decade, it has been the world’s leading exporter of merchandise.
4. It is the world’s second-largest exporter of commercial services.
5. It is among the world’s top five exporters of outward foreign direct investment (FDI).
6. It is the principal source of South–South cooperation flows.
7. It exhibits growing dominance in key frontier technologies: it is the world’s largest manufacturer of solar panels, wind turbines, batteries and electric vehicles (low-carbon technologies).
8. It possesses vast territories with so-called “rare earths,” and in recent years has made sustained advances in the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) and other “disruptive technologies.”

China’s Relations with LAC and Sustainable Development

During his first term, President Trump acted with disregard and harshness toward the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region.

Paradoxically—or as a result of this—in the current context of geopolitical tension, Latin America and the Caribbean has acquired outstanding importance due to China’s rapid and sustained commercial, financial, technological and infrastructure expansion in the region. Today, 31 LAC countries are formally adherents to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the exception of the Bahamas.

Moreover, on the global agenda, Beijing’s positions in favor of multilateralism, peace, non-intervention, development cooperation and the fight against climate change resonate with key pillars of the foreign policies of most LAC countries.

In contrast, Washington seeks to impose its own priority agenda—migration, security, border control, defense, trade and investment—while retracting commitments linked to the environment, energy transition, international cooperation and technology transfer, which are crucial to addressing some of the most important challenges facing the developing world.

The elements outlined above are relevant as a general context for understanding China's relations with LAC in connection with “sustainable development” in the current scenario of crisis, heightened uncertainty and geopolitical transition.

In broad terms, five aspects synthesize, in a general way, the relations between the Asian giant and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in the sphere of sustainable development:

1. China is a major investor, creditor and trading partner for LAC. Bilateral trade exceeded US\$500 billion in 2024, and China has made significant investments in infrastructure, clean energy and sustainable projects.
2. China's cooperation on “sustainable development” with countries in the region is framed by multilateral agreements such as the Joint Action Plan for Cooperation (2022–2024) of the China–CELAC Forum and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The latter constitutes the integrated external-projection strategy of the People's Republic of China and, as such, was incorporated into the text of the Constitution of the Republic in 2017.
3. Although globally China's cooperation and investment in projects related to climate change mitigation and sustainable development are embedded in multilateral agreements, Chinese authorities have consistently emphasized that bilateral cooperation is tailored to each country, adapting climate-finance models to specific capacities and needs.
4. Over the past seven years, two special funds and credit lines for “sustainable development” have been designed and implemented in our region: (i) a special loan of US\$20 billion for infrastructure⁵; and

⁵ Officially announced by the Chinese government at the 1st CELAC-China Summit in 2015; and managed by the China Development Bank.

(ii) a preferential financing line of US\$10 billion⁶ provided by China for sustainable investment in the region.

5. In addition, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), under Chinese leadership, supports clean-energy projects in several LAC countries.

In general terms, when the information on areas, projects and specific actions developed with the support of the People's Republic of China in our countries for sustainable development is systematized, the following classification stands out:

Table 1. Classification of areas and projects

Area or project	Actions
1. Clean-energy projects and accreditation mechanisms	China supports investments in solar and wind-energy projects in LAC and seeks to establish mechanisms to measure and ensure that these projects generate real climate benefits.
2. South-South climate-cooperation initiatives	Dialogue and strategic collaboration are fostered to address common climate-change challenges, based on complementarities such as natural resources, technology and energy markets.
3. Construction of low-carbon infrastructure	China supports transport electrification, green agriculture and the development of low-carbon industrial parks.
4. Multilateral agreements, debt-for-climate swaps and carbon markets	China explores mechanisms such as debt-for-climate swaps and market-based schemes for emission reductions, grounded in international standards.

⁶ An additional credit line to support the development of the region, announced by President Xi Jinping at the CELAC-China Forum Ministerial Meeting, Beijing, May 13, 2025

These projects and actions undertaken by the authorities, financial institutions and enterprises of the People's Republic of China in our economies—and more broadly throughout the world—mark a transition in China's approach from a focus on “market expansion” toward “sustainable development,” using financial, technological and political instruments to foster deeper climate cooperation with LAC.

One element that has consistently generated controversy among certain political and social sectors in the Global South concerns the real impact of debt-for-climate swaps, which—as indicated above—have also been used in China's projections for its relations with developing countries. As their name suggests, debt-for-climate swaps are a mechanism that seeks to ease the fiscal burden of countries with high external debt, enabling them to invest in climate-mitigation and adaptation projects, biodiversity protection and environmental sustainability.

Positive impacts of debt-for-climate swaps include: (a) freeing up fiscal resources for investment in climate-resilient infrastructure; (b) reducing interest payments on debt, which constrain public spending on climate, health and education; and (c) the potential to attract additional financing and international cooperation through concrete commitments with creditors and donors.

Negative impacts and criticisms include: (1) swaps do not generate new international financing and depend on local capacity to invest in projects that genuinely have environmental impact; (2) they can deepen dependency between creditor and debtor countries, with the risk of imposing policies misaligned with a country's real needs; and (3) the complexity of negotiations—particularly when private creditors are involved—may hinder or delay implementation (Laixhay, P. 2023).

In short, debt-for-climate swaps should be understood as an innovative tool for sustainable financing in heavily indebted countries, but one that requires careful management in order to avoid new forms of dependency or limited impacts.

Another important element in analysing China's relations with our countries in support of sustainable development concerns the so-called “green investment principles” that have been incorporated—at China's initiative—into the Belt and Road Initiative.

Green investment principles in the BRI. These principles, established in 2018, constitute a normative framework aimed at ensuring that projects meet environmental-sustainability requirements, address climate-risk mitigation and gradually phase out investments in sectors with a high carbon footprint.

These principles include:

1. Transparent assessment and disclosure of strategies for mitigating climate risks.
2. Creation and monitoring of targets to increase the share of green investment.
3. Commitment to the progressive reduction of financing for carbon-intensive projects.
4. Development of classification systems (taxonomies) that categorize BRI projects as green (positive), yellow (neutral) or red (high environmental risk), based on international standards (from the EU and the International Finance Corporation, IFC).

The “Green Investment Principles” for the BRI should therefore be understood as a combination of normative commitments, environmental-assessment tools and financial targets designed to transform the BRI into a greener, low-carbon development strategy.

It should also be noted that infrastructure and sustainable-development cooperation projects supported by the People’s Republic of China in LAC form an essential part of the total financing channeled by that country, whether through resources provided by Chinese banks or through FDI flows executed by Chinese companies in the region.

Although in 2010, 2013 and 2015 the resources provided by China’s policy banks to LAC countries exceeded those of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), as shown in Annex I, in the most recent period for which information is available (2017–2023) these financial flows have been far lower.

The main causes explaining this downward trend in Chinese financing to LAC governments in the recent period include: (i) changes in China’s economic policy that place greater emphasis on domestic investment; (ii) stricter oversight of financial and banking transactions by the Chinese government; (iii) the interruption since 2015 of credit provision to Venezuela

and reductions to other countries such as Brazil and Ecuador; (iv) the deterioration of the financial conditions of some recipient countries, limiting their ability to access new loans; (v) the negative impact of the pandemic, project paralysis, supply-chain disruptions and a deterioration in conditions in many countries, preventing governments from meeting agreed counterpart contributions in projects; (vi) political and economic instability in some countries of the region; and (vii) lower willingness among highly indebted countries to take on new Chinese loans (Regueiro, L. 2025: 6).

In turn, the other main flow—foreign direct investment (FDI)—shows, as indicated in Annex 2, a pattern similar to that observed in lending by the Chinese banking system. There is an upward trend in FDI from Chinese companies in the region up to 2019. From that point onward, there is a perceptible decline in incoming FDI flows from China to our countries.

Nevertheless, as indicated in Annex 3, in cumulative terms, more than 200 infrastructure projects had been initiated in LAC with Chinese financing by 2024. Most relevant is that projects developed in the hydropower sector accounted for 62% of China's total outward investment in that sector; those in wind energy represented 34% of China's total outward investment in such projects; and those carried out in the solar-energy sector constituted almost one-third of all projects China has developed worldwide in that strategic sector.

From this follows the high importance of Latin America and the Caribbean as a destination for investment in hydropower, wind energy and solar energy by Chinese firms and/or with the financial support of Chinese institutions worldwide. It is worth underscoring that these three sectors are key to the energy transition and the consolidation of low-carbon energy systems.

Problems and Prospects

In this analysis, certain criticisms and concerns about Chinese investments and projects developed in countries of the region cannot go unmentioned.

In LAC, negative impacts have been identified in Chinese mining, oil and hydroelectric projects that have led to forest loss, pollutant discharges and harm to protected species. In this regard, documentation highlights: (i) failures to comply with the requirement of free, prior and informed consultation with affected Indigenous peoples; (ii) instances in which investments have lacked rigorous and comprehensive environmental assessments, hampering the mitigation of negative impacts and the effective

participation of communities; and (iii) limited experience and adaptation of Chinese enterprises to local environmental regulations and contexts in host countries, revealing an ongoing learning process (Fundación Andrés Bello, 2023). Also noteworthy is the work of the interactive mapping of projects involving Chinese companies and financing, monitored by the Regional Group on Financing and Infrastructure (GREFI) and the Regional Coalition for Transparency and Participation in Peru, Argentina, Colombia and Brazil (FUNDEPS, 2022).

At the same time, it should be taken into account that China's official recognition of these problems has led to the inclusion of the right to a clean environment in its legislation, although implementation and oversight remain challenges, as these provisions are largely non-binding guidelines.

Beyond the environmental-sustainability concerns associated with certain projects in the region, there are also broader worries regarding China's current relations with LAC. Particularly salient are:

1. The markedly asymmetric structure of the region's trade with China.
2. The significant use of Chinese labor in the implementation of agreed investment and infrastructure projects.
3. Specific instances of corruption among key political and economic actors in the region who participate and/or "collaborate" in Chinese-financed projects.
4. Potential diplomatic and security tensions with the United States, especially given the position of the current Trump administration.

Nonetheless, despite these criticisms and the problems and concerns present in certain political, economic and social circles in our region regarding relations with the People's Republic of China, most LAC countries have revealed that they cannot simply ignore Chinese projects, for reasons that include:

1. The notable absence of the United States as an investor and provider of development assistance in recent years;
2. The fact that the conditions on Chinese loans are more favorable than those offered by other financing sources for low- and lower-middle-income countries;

3. China does not use per capita income as a criterion for access to concessional financing; and
4. Chinese cooperation is crucial for sustainable development at a time when the United States has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement and the Trump administration displays an anti-multilateral bias.

Even so, it should not be forgotten that the United States remains a vital external partner for regional economies, although China's trade, investment and development-assistance flows have increased in recent years.

In this context, the situation and position of the island Caribbean countries are particularly interesting. These nations—classified as Small Island Developing States (SIDS)—are extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change, to the point that some of the smallest islands face genuine existential threats if current levels of greenhouse-gas emissions and rising average sea temperatures are not reversed.

For this reason, the island Caribbean has been highly active at the international level in defending the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” in confronting climate change. It must be borne in mind that these SIDS are not emitters of greenhouse gases, and at the same time constitute a highly significant source of global biodiversity.

In this regard, the island Caribbean has insisted on the need to balance actions and projects (and, by extension, available financing) between “mitigation” and “adaptation” to climate change. According to ECLAC, between 2020 and 2021, 89.9% of total international climate finance was directed to mitigation actions, leaving barely 10% for adaptation. The island Caribbean region has received only 6% of the climate financing captured by LAC in recent years, and 70.2% of those resources have come from bilateral sources (ECLAC, 2023: 17).

It is indisputable that without predictable, timely and sufficiently large climate financing, growth, development and even survival will be impossible for most Caribbean SIDS. This is clearly reflected in the “Bridgetown Initiative,”⁷ which contains a set of proposals designed to reorient the

⁷ The Bridgetown Initiative was launched in Barbados in July 2022, following a high-level retreat held in the country and promoted by Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley.

international economic and financial system to provide fairer treatment and greater financial support to developing countries, particularly SIDS.

Given the foregoing, under current conditions it is evident that the island states of the Caribbean will not be willing to forgo the benefits of project proposals, investments and loans offered by China to address their complex sustainable-development challenges.

Conclusions

1. The global order is in “transition,” with growing manifestations of a multipolar world characterized by high uncertainty and crisis.
2. China has increased its presence in our region. It wields considerable weight in trade terms and is essential in relation to investment and cooperation projects for sustainable development.
3. Through investments in energy transition, renewable energies (including green hydrogen) and nuclear technology, China is attaining pre-eminence as an “external actor,” even as it maintains a presence in extractive-economy processes in which certain environmental risks persist.
4. Internal structural transformation, diversification of external linkages and economic integration are preconditions for achieving greater autonomy and development in Latin America and the Caribbean in today’s world.

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CHINA—LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (LAC) CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION

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CHINA–LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (LAC) CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION

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Introduction

Cultural and educational cooperation between China and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has deepened significantly, particularly in the areas of academic exchange and talent training.

China is the most populous country in the world, with more than 1.4 billion people, which presents unique challenges in terms of resources and development. Since the reform and opening-up process began in 1978, China has experienced impressive economic growth, becoming the world's second-largest economy.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a region characterized by notable socioeconomic diversity, historical complexity and a distinctive geopolitical position. It is a space of contradictions: it possesses abundant natural resources and demographic potential (the total population of LAC is 650 million, 2022; 8.2% of the global population), while facing multiple challenges such as institutional fragility, structural inequality and the search for a sustainable development model. The urbanization rate reaches 81% (2021). The Gini coefficient stands at 0.45 (2022). Regional GDP amounts to approximately USD 5.5 trillion (2022), equivalent to 4.7% of the global economy; agriculture accounts for 4.7% of GDP (compared with the global average of 4%).

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Foundations for Understanding Contemporary Chinese Culture and Cooperation

On the one hand, it is necessary to consider the rapid multisectoral development that characterizes Chinese culture. From a single point to a broad front: the beginning and comprehensive advancement of reform and opening-up.

Economic growth since reform and opening-up. The transformation from a planned economy to a market economy has been key to this process, along with the opening to international trade and foreign investment.

Key economic sectors for development. China's principal economic sectors include manufacturing, technology, construction and financial services. Technological innovation and digitalization have been engines of growth in recent years, driving the transformation of the economy toward a more sustainable, high-quality development model.

Combination of challenges and future prospects. Despite its economic success, China faces challenges such as regional inequality, population ageing and dependence on foreign innovation. Future strategy focuses on promoting indigenous innovation, sustainability and improving the population's quality of life.

On the other hand, many features of Latin America favor cooperation. The region's population and social structure are dynamic and provide human and intellectual resources for development. According to World Bank data (2023), the total population of LAC is around 650 million (2022), with an average age of approximately 31 years, indicating that the region is still within a "demographic bonus" window, although population ageing is accelerating.

Trade and investment. China has consolidated itself as the region's second-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade surpassing USD 450 billion in 2022. Foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to LAC represent 10% of the global total (2021), but are highly concentrated in Brazil (41% of the regional total), Mexico (23%) and Chile (9%).

Environment and resources. LAC hosts 40% of global biodiversity and 25% of the world's forest area (the Amazon basin extends across nine countries). The share of renewable energy in electricity generation reaches 33% (2022), exceeding the global average (28%), with a strong dependence on

hydropower (45% of the power-generation matrix). It is also a critical zone of climate vulnerability: extreme weather events caused average annual economic losses of USD 12 billion between 2000 and 2020 (ECLAC data).

Defining Cultural and Educational Cooperation

Cultural cooperation is a fundamental concept in international relations and an essential driver of societal development. In essence, cultural cooperation is the process through which two or more parties (states, institutions, communities or individuals) collaborate in a coordinated manner to achieve common objectives in the spheres of culture, the arts, heritage and creativity. It is not merely a passive exchange (such as watching a foreign film), but an active and deliberate undertaking that involves planning, shared resources and mutual goals.

Educational cooperation is the set of coordinated actions among institutions and actors in the educational field (schools, universities, ministries, international agencies) aimed at improving the quality, equity and accessibility of education through the exchange of resources, knowledge and experiences.

Main objectives of cultural and educational cooperation include:

- Promoting intercultural dialogue: Facilitating understanding and respect among different cultures, breaking down stereotypes and prejudices.
- Protecting and valorizing cultural heritage: Restoring monuments, managing museums, combating illicit trafficking in cultural property and safeguarding intangible traditions (such as music, dance or Indigenous languages).
- Fostering the diversity of cultural expressions: Supporting artists, musicians, writers and creators so that their work reaches global audiences, ensuring that all cultures have a voice.
- Driving economic and social development: Culture is an economic sector (“cultural and creative industries”) that generates employment, attracts tourism and revitalizes cities and regions.
- Strengthening diplomatic ties (“cultural diplomacy”): Culture is a powerful tool of soft power that improves a country’s image and builds bridges where politics sometimes fails.

Institutional Cultural and Educational Cooperation between China and Latin America

The Belt and Road Initiative provides a platform for cooperation. It has enabled advances in institutional cultural and educational cooperation between China and Latin America.

A notable feature of cultural and educational cooperation between China and Latin America is that these mechanisms provide institutional confidence. In May 2025, Chinese President Xi Jinping opened the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the China–CELAC Forum with a clear announcement: five strategic programmes to strengthen cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean, and a credit line of 66 billion yuan to promote development in the member countries of the bloc.

Furthermore, there is political assurance that, in a changing world with interconnected risks, China is committed to unity, cooperation and mutual respect, as President Xi underlined in his speech in Beijing before representatives of the 33 member states of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Although China and Latin America and the Caribbean are geographically distant, both sides share a long history of friendly exchanges, Xi Jinping recalled.

Looking ahead, medium- and long-term cooperation projects are being built. At the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the China–CELAC Cooperation Forum, the launch of the “Five Major Programmes” of unity, development, civilization, peace and winning people’s hearts was announced, setting the direction for the construction of a China–Latin America community with a shared future and for pragmatic cooperation.

Cultural and Educational Cooperation in Specific Sectors

While the institutional framework for cooperation is being developed progressively, what stands out most is cooperation in practice. The following are the most representative sectors.

First, Educational Exchanges and Talent Training. These initiatives offer scholarships and training courses. According to the Ministry of Education, China has granted a total of 17,000 government scholarships and 13,000 training places in China to LAC countries, and has signed 26 educational cooperation agreements with 19 countries in the region.

Bridge to the Future Programme. Since 2015, this project has invited more than 1,000 young leaders from Latin American political parties, businesses and academic circles to study in China, giving them the opportunity to directly experience Chinese development.

Second, Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms. Sixty-eight Confucius Institutes and Classrooms have been established in 26 LAC countries, promoting the study of the Chinese language and Chinese culture. China has pledged to provide 500 scholarships for international Chinese-language teacher training and to support the incorporation of Chinese into national curricula in LAC countries.

Third, Technical and Vocational Training Programmes. Luban Workshops: In 2025, China and Nicaragua signed an agreement to establish the first *Luban Workshop* in Latin America, focused on technical and vocational training and paying tribute to the legendary Chinese master carpenter Lu Ban.

Fourth, Scientific Cooperation and Exchange in the Natural Sciences. LAC countries are important actors in the space sector. The geographical locations of China and LAC place them on opposite sides of the globe, which is mutually beneficial for space cooperation. In recent years, both sides have carried out long-standing, comprehensive and practical cooperation encompassing various areas such as space infrastructure, deep-space exploration and space science, the space-industry value chain, global governance of outer space and scientific human-resource training.

A clear example of cooperation between China and Latin American and Caribbean countries is the relationship between China and Bolivia. The two countries have engaged in multiple forms of space cooperation, such as the successful launch of Bolivia's Túpac Katari communications satellite with Chinese assistance. In the future, Bolivia and other LAC countries can undertake further exchanges and achieve mutually beneficial development under the framework of space cooperation with China.

Fifth, Technological Development in the Global South. As President Xi pointed out in his congratulatory letter to the forum, China is willing to work with LAC countries, using the first China-LAC Space Cooperation Forum as a starting point to build a high-level China-LAC space-cooperation partnership, promote space technology so that it better benefits the peoples on both sides,

and continue advancing the construction of a China–LAC community with a shared future.

China's influence in the global space arena continues to grow, and through cooperation with China, Latin American and Caribbean countries can also play a more active role in international space-navigation affairs.

Moreover, space cooperation between China and LAC is not limited to the technological level. Through this cooperation, both sides can exchange and collaborate at multiple levels, including talent training, research projects and data sharing, which is of great importance for national security in the space-technology domain and for strengthening research capacities in LAC countries.

For example, space cooperation between China and LAC can help countries in the region establish their own satellite-data reception and processing centres, thereby enhancing their autonomous capacity in areas such as weather forecasting, disaster management and resource exploration. In addition, in low-Earth-orbit communication systems, including broadband Internet, China and the United States are competitors in LAC.

Sixth, Academic Cooperation. Both forums and joint research projects are expanding rapidly. Academic forums and think tanks. The China–LAC Think Tank Forum and the High-Level China–CELAC Academic Forum are held regularly, and a China–CELAC University Presidents' Forum is being planned, with the aim of promoting equal educational opportunities for beneficiaries.

Seventh, China Studies Centers. China–LAC Knowledge Alliance for Development. This alliance was created to promote the exchange of knowledge and development experiences between China and LAC, including the establishment of China studies centers at Latin American universities.

Eighth, Facilitating Mobility and Visas. Visa policies. China has implemented a 240-hour visa-free transit policy for various LAC countries and has granted visa exemptions to citizens of Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru and Uruguay, thereby facilitating academic and cultural exchanges.

Challenges for Cultural and Educational Cooperation and Some Reflections

Language is one of the most significant barriers between Chinese and Latin Americans. As noted by scholar Guo Cunhai, author of *An Infinite Dialogue: Cultural Exchange between China and Latin America*, “The strong connection between China and Latin America has clearly driven the demand for language” (Pizarro, July 2022).

In addition, due to the geographical distance between China and Latin America and the cultural differences, considerable efforts are still required from scholars, journalists and other relevant professionals to foster mutual understanding.

In the face of these challenges, it is necessary to promote and diversify both the expansion and the depth of cooperation within the framework of South-South cooperation. The institutional axes that will guide future cooperation with CELAC countries are:

- *Solidarity Programme*: will strengthen political and multilateral ties.
- *Development Programme*: oriented toward investment in infrastructure, energy, mining, telecommunications, the digital economy and artificial intelligence.
- *Civilization Programme*: will promote cultural exchange, heritage protection, artistic events and partnerships.
- *Peace Programme*: will foster regional security, supporting the nuclear-weapon-free zone and police training.
- *People-to-People Connectivity Programme*: will expand scholarships, teacher training, cultural exchanges and visa facilitation.

Each initiative seeks to consolidate a comprehensive partnership that combines economic growth, cultural exchange and political dialogue. It is our conviction that China will continue to be a strategic ally of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the shared message for unity should be:

Let us write together a new chapter in our community with a shared future.

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POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC COOPERATION: MULTILATERAL RELATIONS AND THE ROLE OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE GLOBAL STRATEGY

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POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC COOPERATION: MULTILATERAL RELATIONS AND THE ROLE OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE GLOBAL STRATEGY

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Global Context: Towards a Multipolar and Cooperative World

The current international landscape is marked by a transition towards a multipolar order. Emerging powers such as China, India, and various coalitions of the Global South have gained influence in recent decades, eroding the absolute hegemony of traditional powers. In this context, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are seeking to redefine their role in the global strategy, actively participating in multilateral arenas and forging diversified alliances. The region, historically considered the “periphery” of major geopolitical conflicts, now strives for greater strategic autonomy. In the words of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Latin America “does not want to be forced to choose between the United States or China” nor become trapped in a new Cold War. Lula has emphasized that China is a crucial trading partner for Brazil, but “that does not prevent us from also having [partnerships] with other countries,” underscoring the region’s rejection of mutually exclusive alignments. This sentiment encapsulates Latin America’s determination to maintain independent foreign policies rooted in multilateralism, South–South cooperation, and the defense of a more balanced international order.

At the same time, pressing global challenges—from climate change to health crises—demand coordinated responses. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, exposed the need for international cooperation in public health. Latin America was hit hard and turned to both multilateral mechanisms

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(such as COVAX) and bilateral alliances to obtain medical supplies. China, in particular, played a prominent role in “vaccine diplomacy,” providing millions of doses to the region at a critical moment. By the end of May 2021, Chinese-made vaccines accounted for 82% of all doses administered in Chile and 86% in El Salvador, as well as a significant share in countries such as Peru. Although most of these vaccines were purchased (rather than donated) by Latin American governments—something some analysts point to as a strategic-commercial approach by Beijing—there is no doubt that this health cooperation strengthened diplomatic ties in the midst of the emergency. This example illustrates how contemporary challenges are catalyzing new forms of political and diplomatic cooperation, with Latin America exploring novel alliances that help it confront its vulnerabilities while amplifying its voice in global governance.

The emergence of a multipolar order offers LAC an opportunity to increase its weight on the global agenda. With 660 million inhabitants and vast natural resources, Latin American and Caribbean nations have become desirable actors in the strategies of global powers. To take advantage of this juncture, the region has deepened its commitment to multilateralism and diversified its external relations, weaving closer ties not only with traditional partners (the United States, Europe) but also with new allies, particularly China. What follows examines the role of Latin America and the Caribbean in multilateral relations, with emphasis on cooperation with China. It highlights current examples in different domains (economic, political, technological, cultural, among others) and offers a critical analysis of the opportunities and challenges involved.

LAC on the Multilateral Stage: Prominence and the Search for Autonomy

Latin American and Caribbean countries have been active participants in the multilateral architecture since the postwar period, contributing to the creation of the UN and other international organizations. However, for a long time their role was constrained by the dominant influence of external powers in the region. Today, LAC seeks to strengthen its diplomatic autonomy and project its collective interests on the global stage. A clear example was the formation in 2010 of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), a bloc of 33 countries that excludes the United States and Canada, conceived to articulate a unified regional voice. CELAC has enabled the region to present itself more cohesively in dialogues with other powers and blocs, serving as a counterpart in biregional relations (for

example, CELAC–European Union summits) and as a platform for forums with emerging partners such as China.

Within the United Nations, LAC often operates as a bloc on many issues through the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC) and also within the G77 + China coalition of developing nations. The region has been a staunch defender of principles such as non-interference in internal affairs, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and the rule of international law—values that it shares with China in multilateral discourse. Several Latin American countries have raised their voices in favor of reforming global governance, seeking greater representation for emerging economies. For example, regional powers such as Brazil and Mexico have advocated for reform of the UN Security Council (Brazil aspires to a permanent seat) and for changes in the Bretton Woods institutions to reflect current economic realities. Likewise, in 2023 Brazil hosted the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro, and Peru will host the next APEC summit in 2024, demonstrating the region’s leadership in key forums of economic governance.

LAC’s active participation in UN peacekeeping operations (such as missions in Haiti, Cyprus, Lebanon, etc.), as well as in global climate negotiations (many Latin American countries were among the drivers of the Paris Agreement and of the recent Escazú Declaration on environmental justice), reflects a commitment to collective solutions. The region has also promoted its own initiatives: for instance, the Los Angeles Declaration (2022) on hemispheric migration or the Amazon Initiative led by South American countries to protect the rainforest, both of which require international cooperation and support from extra-regional partners.

In seeking broader strategic room for maneuver, Latin American governments have diversified their alliances beyond the traditional hemispheric axis. They have deepened ties with emerging powers in Asia and Africa, revitalized relations with the Middle East, and strengthened South–South cooperation. A notable case is the rapprochement with China, which has become a key political and financial partner. However, this diversification does not imply abandoning existing relationships; rather, LAC seeks a balance that allows it to maximize benefits and minimize dependencies. This is evident in the strategy of “active non-alignment” adopted by some leaders, which consists in cooperating with all parties to the extent that it serves national and regional interests, while avoiding unconditional alignment with any sphere of influence. In practice, this

approach means that a country in the region can, for example, vote alongside the United States in condemning human rights violations in certain forums, while at the same time supporting positions promoted by China in defense of the principle of state sovereignty, depending on the issue at stake. Flexibility and diplomatic pragmatism are hallmarks of contemporary Latin American multilateral action.

In short, Latin America and the Caribbean are reinventing their role in global diplomacy. The notion that they are merely recipients of external agendas is gradually receding; the region now strives to build its own agendas and coalitions that reflect its priorities: sustainable development, fair financing, combating climate change, orderly migration, among others. To that end, it has found in South–South relations an effective vehicle, relying on political and economic alliances with China and other Asian and African countries that share similar interests. Let us now examine in greater detail the case of relations with China, given their profound impact over the last decade, and how they fit into LAC’s global strategy.

Strategic Alliances with China: Transforming LAC–China Relations

Relations between Latin America and the Caribbean and the People’s Republic of China have evolved rapidly in the 21st century, moving from marginal to a central axis of the region’s international insertion. China approaches its ties with LAC from a strategic perspective, promoting what it calls a “comprehensive cooperation partnership” based on equality, mutual benefit, and shared development. Since President Xi Jinping proposed in 2014 the idea of building a “China–LAC community with a shared future,” high-level exchanges and cooperation in various areas have multiplied.

Diplomatically, China has established official relations with 26 of the 33 LAC countries (only a handful of Central American and Caribbean nations still recognize Taiwan). In the last decade, Beijing has signed strategic partnership agreements with 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries, which entail frequent political dialogue, long-term cooperation plans and, in some cases, coordination on global issues. Countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, and Peru are among those that have different levels of strategic partnership agreements with China. A key milestone was the creation in 2015 of the China–CELAC Forum, a multilateral dialogue mechanism between China and the entire LAC regional bloc. This Forum, which held its fourth Ministerial Meeting in Beijing in May 2025, has consolidated itself as a platform for collective cooperation. Ten

years after its launch, the China–CELAC Forum has matured, deepening strategic trust and expanding practical cooperation across numerous areas. For China, this mechanism is also a way to engage with the region as a whole, complementing its country-by-country bilateral relations.

A central aspect of this diplomatic rapprochement has been the question of Taiwan. For years, China has demanded that its Latin American partners adhere to the “one China” principle, and in recent years it has achieved important advances in this regard. Most LAC governments now recognize Beijing as the sole legitimate government of China, following the decisions by Panama (2017), the Dominican Republic (2018), El Salvador (2018), Nicaragua (2021), and Honduras (2023) to break relations with Taiwan and establish diplomatic ties with the PRC.

This diplomatic realignment was encouraged in part by Chinese promises of investment and trade, and it has led to even closer ties with those countries. Honduras, for example, opened the door to new Chinese-funded infrastructure projects after recognizing Beijing in 2023, and Nicaragua received Chinese commitments in the energy sector and in Belt and Road initiatives after reestablishing ties. Thus, in the political-diplomatic sphere, China has rapidly secured broad regional consensus around its core interests, in exchange for providing LAC with economic opportunities and support in international forums.

The Boom in Sino–Latin American Trade and Investment

In the economic and commercial sphere, the last decade has witnessed an explosion of exchange between LAC and China. Bilateral trade reached a record 518.4 billion dollars in 2024, doubling the volume of just ten years earlier. China has firmly established itself as the region’s second most important trading partner, behind only the United States, and as the first for South America. Indeed, for South American countries such as Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay, China is now the number one destination for their exports and their main supplier of manufactured goods. This transformation has taken place in record time: in 2000, China accounted for less than 2% of Latin America’s foreign trade; today it represents roughly one out of every five dollars of the region’s trade. China’s emergence even displaced the European Union from second place in 2013, reflecting the growing interdependence between the two sides.

The profile of this trade follows traditional North–South patterns, albeit with nuances. Latin America mainly exports basic products and raw materials (soybeans, minerals, oil, copper, meat, etc.) and imports predominantly industrial manufactures and technology from China. This exchange has benefited commodity-exporting Latin American economies, boosting growth during years of high prices (the so-called commodities super-cycle of 2003–2012 was largely driven by Chinese demand). However, it has also generated dependency on a small number of products and volatile revenues, as well as significant deficits in manufactured goods. For example, between 2010 and 2020, South American exports to China grew from 36 to 126 billion USD (principally raw materials), but at the same time the Latin American deficit with China in manufactured goods expanded substantially. This asymmetric pattern has fueled debate: is LAC trapped in a primary-export role in its relationship with China? Organizations such as ECLAC have called for an agenda that leverages ties with China to diversify productive structures rather than simply export natural resources. In fact, at the most recent China–CELAC Forum meeting (2025), strategies were discussed to move towards cooperation oriented to more productive, inclusive, and sustainable development, seeking to overcome “development traps” (such as low productivity and inequality) through innovation and new industries.

In terms of foreign direct investment (FDI), China has also climbed the ranks in Latin America. Between 2005 and 2020, Chinese companies invested more than 130 billion dollars in the region, with Brazil, Peru, Chile, and Argentina among the main destinations. Chinese FDI registered notable peaks in years such as 2010 (when it surpassed 29 billion USD in a single year, including major acquisitions in Brazil and Argentina). Initially, many investments were concentrated in traditional extractive sectors: oil, mining, gas, and agriculture. For example, Chinese oil firms acquired fields in Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Venezuela; Chinese mining companies bought major iron ore mines in Peru and lithium projects in the Southern Cone.

More recently, however, the composition of investment has begun to shift towards “green” and technological sectors. According to analysts, 58% of Chinese FDI in 2022 went to “new infrastructure” (renewable energies, electric vehicles, telecommunications, high-tech manufacturing), lowering the relative weight of purely extractive projects. China is financing solar and wind farms in countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, while firms like BYD, Chery, and Foton have announced electric vehicle and battery

plants in Brazil, Mexico, and other Latin American markets. This “transition” in Chinese investment coincides with Beijing’s declared priority of boosting clean industries and innovation, while consolidating positions in future-oriented sectors (electric mobility, 5G technology, etc.).

Nonetheless, the accumulated stock of Chinese investment in LAC remains heavily concentrated in traditional fields, and its environmental and social impacts have come under scrutiny. Chinese mining and oil projects have sparked controversy over socio-environmental conflicts (pollution, impacts on Indigenous communities) and opaque financial conditions. In Ecuador, for example, construction of the Coca Codo Sinclair dam by a Chinese company, financed by debt, led to technical problems and a national scandal over cost overruns. Similar situations have occurred in other countries, underscoring the importance of demanding high standards of corporate responsibility and transparency in cooperation with China. The good news is that both Latin American governments and China appear aware of the need to improve the sustainability of their joint projects. At the China–CELAC Forum, both sides have reiterated their commitment to green development. China, for its part, is exploring ways to “green” its Belt and Road investments by incorporating environmental criteria. Latin American countries, meanwhile, seek to align Chinese financing with their climate and clean energy goals. A telling example is the Sino–Brazilian CBERS-4A satellite launched in 2019, whose objectives include monitoring the Amazon and environmental changes to help protect forests and study climate change. This is a concrete case of how the China–LAC partnership can generate global public goods (satellite data) for sustainable development.

In the financial sphere, China has also emerged as a lender of last resort for several Latin American economies. Chinese “policy banks” (the China Development Bank and Eximbank) have granted large loans to governments in the region, especially for infrastructure and energy. It is estimated that between 2005 and 2020 they provided 94 loans totaling 137 billion dollars in Latin America, surpassing in some years the financing of institutions such as the World Bank or the IDB. Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, and Argentina were the main recipients of these loans, often backed by exports of oil or other commodities (resource-backed lending schemes).

These financial flows helped build bridges, dams, roads, and strategic projects that might otherwise have struggled to secure Western financing, but they have also raised concerns about debt sustainability and financial

dependency. Venezuela, for example, accumulated more than 60 billion dollars in debt with China during the oil boom and later had to restructure it when its economy collapsed. Ecuador renegotiated the terms of its oil-backed Chinese loans to ease its fiscal burden. These experiences have yielded important lessons: the need for transparency in contracts (many Chinese loan agreements were initially confidential, violating domestic transparency laws), for diversified credit sources, and for rigorous assessment of project viability before taking on debt. For China, in turn, its “learning process” in Latin America has led it to reduce new sovereign loans since 2018, shifting its focus towards direct investment and more selective financing—a pattern similar to its strategic adjustment in other regions.

Overall, it can be said that economic alliances with China have brought major opportunities to LAC—a huge market for its exports, fresh capital for investment, technology, and infrastructure projects—but also new challenges in terms of trade balances, debt sustainability, and socio-environmental management. The balance so far is positive in many respects: thanks to China, the region was able to partially weather the 2008–09 financial crisis through Asian demand; during the pandemic it had access to equipment and supplies; and today it enjoys additional options for financing and investment. However, Latin American countries are increasingly aware that they must define clear strategies for their engagement with the Belt and Road Initiative and other Chinese frameworks so that these serve their own development plans. This means prioritizing projects that generate local value added, employment, and technology transfer, rather than incurring debts for oversized, low-return “white elephants.” It also implies greater regional coordination in negotiating with China (a small country negotiating alone has less bargaining power than a coordinated regional front). In this regard, ECLAC has advocated for stronger Latin American coordination so that the region can relate to China “as a bloc,” using forums such as CELAC to agree on common positions.

Political, Scientific, and Cultural Cooperation

Beyond economics, cooperation between LAC and China spans multiple political, scientific, educational, and cultural domains. A distinctive feature of China’s strategy has been its pursuit of comprehensive collaboration—not only in trade and investment, but also in infrastructure, technology, health, security, and people-to-people exchanges. Several current examples illustrate this trend.

Infrastructure and connectivity. Under the umbrella of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has promoted more than 200 infrastructure projects in Latin America, ranging from roads and railways to ports, telecommunications, and energy, generating millions of local jobs according to official reports. By 2024, over 20 Latin American countries had formally joined the BRI, aligning their national development plans with this Chinese global connectivity strategy. Countries such as Panama, Bolivia, Uruguay, and several Caribbean nations joined in recent years, seeking to attract investment in logistics, transport, and digitalization. A notable case is the proposed Bioceanic Railway Corridor between Brazil and Peru (linking the Atlantic and the Pacific by rail), an ambitious project under study with Chinese interest. Another example is China's contribution to the construction of Mexico's Maya Train through the provision of railway equipment within the BRI framework.

In telecommunications, Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE have offered to help upgrade regional connectivity. In fact, around 70% of 4G-LTE infrastructure in Latin America was supplied by Huawei, meaning that communications for more than 660 million Latin Americans run on Chinese technology. While the United States has pressured to exclude Huawei from 5G deployment on security grounds, most Latin American countries have chosen not to ban the company, prioritizing economic and technical criteria. Only Costa Rica has formally blocked Chinese providers from its 5G networks (via a cybersecurity regulation), while others, such as Brazil and Mexico, allow Huawei's presence to varying degrees, recognizing the competitiveness of its solutions. This reflects how LAC carefully navigates between powers: valuing affordable Chinese technology without severing cooperation with the West on security standards. Improved physical and digital infrastructure, with Chinese support, is fundamental for regional integration and global competitiveness.

Science, technology, and space exploration. Sino-Latin American cooperation extends into the scientific arena. A historic milestone is the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) program, one of the earliest high-tech joint projects between developing countries. Since 1988, China and Brazil have worked together on Earth resources satellites, launching their first in 1999 and jointly placing six CBERS satellites in orbit by 2019. These satellites provide imagery for environmental, agricultural, and disaster monitoring for both Brazil and China, as well as other developing countries. It is a successful

example of technology transfer and capacity building, with Brazilian and Chinese engineers collaborating side by side and demonstrating that South–South cooperation can produce cutting-edge technology.

Another case is the Neuquén Space Station in Argentina, a 35-meter-deep space antenna that China installed in southern Argentina in 2016 in partnership with the Argentine space agency CONAE. Officially dedicated to lunar and Mars exploration, satellite tracking, and other scientific uses, the station has enabled China to communicate with its deep space probes (for example, the Chang’e mission to the far side of the Moon) and has given Argentina partial access to the facility for its own projects. Although the base sparked internal debate over potential dual military use—since the Chinese CLTC agency that operates it is linked to the People’s Liberation Army—both governments maintain that it is a civilian and scientific installation.

Beyond these examples, China has opened doors to LAC in areas such as technological innovation (establishing joint laboratories in biotechnology, tropical agriculture, and renewable energies), space cooperation (offering Latin American countries participation in its BeiDou satellite navigation program, similar to GPS), and training in new technologies. An interesting detail: in 2023, China invited 300 young political leaders from CELAC each year for three years to visit China and deepen ties and knowledge exchange on governance and innovation. This reflects an active scientific and educational diplomacy.

Public health and health cooperation. As noted earlier, China played a major role in providing COVID-19 vaccines. In addition, China and several LAC countries have signed agreements to establish vaccine production centers in the region (for example, in Brazil and Chile with the Sinovac vaccine), to cooperate on traditional medicine, and to strengthen health systems in the post-pandemic era. In 2021, many Latin American states received donations of Chinese medical supplies (masks, ventilators) and later acquired Chinese vaccines (Sinopharm, Sinovac, CanSino). In total, a dozen countries in the region signed vaccine contracts with China that complemented access via other channels. This episode has become a reference point for South–South health diplomacy, reinforcing the idea that cooperation with emerging partners can be vital in times of need. Looking ahead, initiatives such as a China–LAC “network of sister hospitals” or physician training programs could deepen this area of collaboration.

Security and strategic issues. Although defense cooperation remains limited (given the traditional U.S. military influence in the region), there are discreet areas of collaboration. China has donated police and military equipment (vehicles, uniforms) to smaller countries, provided training courses for Latin American officers, and even sold surveillance satellites (Venezuela acquired the “VRSS-1” observation satellite, launched in 2012 with Chinese support). In the realm of non-traditional security, coordination has increased in the fight against transnational crime: China and some Latin American countries have agreed to cooperate on cybersecurity, counterterrorism, and anti-money laundering. For example, at the 4th China–CELAC Forum (2025), a program was announced to jointly combat corruption, drug trafficking, and organized crime, as well as to improve disaster management. China offered assistance in police training, the repatriation of fugitives, and the recovery of illicit assets—issues of particular concern for Central American and Caribbean states. Symbolic gestures also matter: China has become a permanent observer in the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino), indicating its desire to engage in regional political dialogue. These trends suggest that, although security cooperation is still incipient, it is gaining ground as political trust grows. One area to monitor is the sale of surveillance technology: Chinese companies have provided smart-city camera systems to various Latin American cities, prompting debates on privacy but also offering tools for crime prevention.

Culture, education, and people-to-people exchanges. No political alliance is sustainable without mutual understanding between societies. With this in mind, China has invested heavily in cultural diplomacy in Latin America. By 2025, 68 Confucius Institutes and classrooms had been established across the region, where thousands of young people study Mandarin and learn about Chinese culture. China also offers hundreds of government scholarships for Latin Americans to pursue university studies in Chinese cities. These initiatives have nurtured a new generation of Latin American academics, officials, and business leaders familiar with China.

Meanwhile, Chinese cultural events are multiplying throughout LAC: film festivals, Lunar New Year celebrations (which countries such as Brazil and Venezuela have officially recognized as national holidays), art exhibitions, and more. Tourism has also contributed: before the pandemic, over half a million Chinese tourists visited Latin American destinations each year—a modest figure, but one that was growing as promotional efforts expanded. In

addition, media exchanges are increasingly prominent: Chinese outlets (Xinhua, CGTN) have strengthened their Spanish-language presence, while Latin American journalists are invited to training programs in China to report with more context on that country's reality. All of this aims to build human bridges and foster durable understanding beyond the governments of the day.

Taken together, political and diplomatic cooperation between Latin America/the Caribbean and China is multidimensional. It goes well beyond commercial deals, encompassing strategic dialogue, development programs, crisis assistance, cultural exchange, and coordination in international forums. Both sides frequently invoke a “win-win” relationship and the construction of a “community with a shared future,” slogans that reflect aspirations for a long-term partnership. For Latin America, China has become an alternative source of ideas and support: for example, during the conflict in Ukraine, leaders such as Lula joined China in calling for a ceasefire and peace negotiations, even launching a joint six-point China–Brazil proposal for peace in Ukraine. These initiatives reflect a shared geopolitical vision on certain issues—such as the defense of inclusive multilateralism, the primacy of dialogue over confrontation, and the search for a more equitable international order. This does not mean there are no differences or tensions, but it does indicate a notable convergence between China and many LAC countries around key global principles (sovereignty, non-intervention, common development).

LAC, China, and Cooperation in Global Forums

A fundamental dimension of this topic is how Latin America and the Caribbean, together with China, operate in multilateral spaces to advance their common goals. Because the subtitle highlights “Multilateral relations and the role of LAC in the global strategy,” it is useful to explore how the LAC–China partnership projects itself beyond the bilateral level, influencing broader geopolitical dynamics.

Both LAC and China see themselves as part of the Global South and frequently coordinate positions in international organizations. At the UN, for example, most Latin American countries tend to support resolutions calling for respect for sovereignty and opposing unilateral sanctions—positions aligned with China's. In 2022–2023, several CELAC nations abstained from or voted against Western-sponsored resolutions critical of China on human rights issues (such as Xinjiang or Hong Kong), in line with

Beijing's defense of non-interference. In turn, China has long backed Latin American demands such as ending the embargo on Cuba or supporting Argentina's call for negotiations on the Malvinas/Falklands, earning goodwill in the region. This diplomatic reciprocity strengthens their collaboration in the UN and other forums.

In the G77 + China, which brings together 134 developing countries, Latin America plays an active role and China is a major ally. A telling example was the G77 + China Summit in Havana (2023), chaired by Cuba, where Latin American leaders and the Chinese envoy converged in calling for a more equitable economic order, technology transfer to the Global South, and reform of international financial institutions. These forums allow the articulation of Global South demands, with LAC and China presenting a united front on issues such as climate finance (pressing developed countries to fulfill their aid commitments), the right to development, and unimpeded technological cooperation. China frequently presents itself as a spokesperson for the South and has incorporated LAC into its recent global initiatives: the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Security Initiative (GSI), which propose new approaches to international cooperation on development and security. Several Latin American governments have expressed support for these Chinese ideas because they resonate with their own priorities for sustainable growth and peace. Along with the Global Civilization Initiative, focused on cultural exchanges, they are promoted as inclusive platforms from which LAC can obtain concrete benefits (for example, GDI funds for development projects) and raise its global profile.

Another important space is the BRICS group, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Brazil, as a founding member, has served as a bridge to draw its neighbors closer to this orbit. At the 15th BRICS Summit (South Africa, 2023), Argentina was formally invited to join the bloc in 2024, which would have meant incorporating the second-largest South American country. Although a change of government in Argentina in December 2023 put this accession on hold (the new president expressed reservations and decided not to join for the time being), the invitation itself reflected the mutual interest of BRICS and Latin America. Other Latin American countries, such as Mexico and even Peru, have been mentioned in discussions on possible future BRICS+ expansion.

The significance of this potential integration lies in the fact that BRICS is pushing initiatives with global reach: from the New Development Bank (NDB) based in Shanghai—where even non-member countries such as Uruguay or Colombia could obtain infrastructure financing—to the idea of using local currencies in trade (challenging the dominance of the dollar, an idea Lula has publicly supported). If more LAC countries were to join BRICS or strengthen ties with the bloc, this would increase their influence in the ongoing financial reconfiguration towards greater multipolarity.

China has also encouraged Latin American participation in its own cooperation ecosystem. For instance, it invited several Caribbean states to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as members, and countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay have indeed become shareholders of this Chinese-backed global financial institution. This shows that LAC is not merely a passive recipient but also a co-shaper of new multilateral mechanisms led by emerging economies. In the AIIB's case, Latin American membership opens the door to funding for regional projects under international standards and diversifies credit sources beyond the West.

Another dimension to highlight is coordination on specific global issues. *Climate change*: China and LAC have aligned in demanding differentiated responsibilities from wealthy countries and in promoting clean energy. Brazil, for example, cooperates with China through the BASIC group (large developing countries in climate negotiations) and in bioeconomy initiatives. *Cyberspace*: many Latin American governments have been sympathetic to China's notion of "cyber-sovereignty," supporting, within the ITU, standards that favor some degree of state control over the Internet, although this is a nuanced field. *Disarmament and non-proliferation*: LAC, as a nuclear-weapon-free zone, has found an echo in China to push for global nuclear disarmament, hosting joint conferences on the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons, among others.

Challenges and Critical Analysis: Where Is Cooperation Headed?

Despite significant advances in political and diplomatic cooperation between LAC and China, major challenges and open debates remain regarding its implications. Addressing them critically is essential in order to capitalize on opportunities while minimizing risks. Some key points of concern include:

Economic dependency and vulnerability. The rapid deepening of economic ties with China has raised worries about potential overdependence. Countries such as Chile or Peru are heavily reliant on the Chinese market for their copper and mineral exports; Brazil depends on China for soybeans and iron ore; Central America and Mexico, while less export-oriented towards China, import large volumes of Chinese manufactures. This means that an economic slowdown in China, changes in its demand patterns, or unilateral decisions (such as imposing tariffs) could strongly affect Latin American economies. Likewise, specialization in commodities can perpetuate the region's vulnerability to international price shocks instead of encouraging productive diversification. ECLAC has warned of the "trap of reprimarization" in relations with China, calling for industrial policies that add value to exports. A key challenge will be to ensure that agreements with China in technology, manufacturing, and emerging sectors actually translate into knowledge transfer and local development, rather than relegating LAC to merely supplying basic inputs into a global value chain dominated by China.

Debt and transparency. Massive loans from Chinese banks have been a double-edged sword. While they financed important projects, they also exacerbated debt problems in some cases. Critics warn of a possible "debt trap," citing countries such as Venezuela, where dependence on Chinese loans, combined with poor macroeconomic management, fueled crisis. It is true that China has generally shown willingness to renegotiate deadlines (it has not seized strategic assets in Latin America as collateral, unlike the oft-cited port case in Sri Lanka), and new Chinese sovereign loans have declined sharply since 2018. Nevertheless, opacity persists: confidential contracts, guarantee clauses involving oil (in Ecuador and Venezuela) or advance sales of resources have raised controversy. To ensure that financial cooperation remains sustainable, LAC countries must strengthen their project-evaluation procedures and open negotiations, ensuring that debts contracted with China are manageable and invested in productive endeavors that generate returns. China, for its part, has begun to support international debt-relief initiatives (coordinating with the IMF in African cases, for example); a pending question is how it would participate in potential restructurings in Latin America, where, aside from Venezuela (handled bilaterally), there has not yet been a major test.

Social and environmental impact. Several Chinese projects have encountered Latin America's vibrant civil societies, which demand strong environmental

standards and community consultation. Construction of hydroelectric dams or mines by Chinese companies has faced local protests (as in the Las Bambas mine in Peru or dams in Argentina's Patagonia), sometimes due to perceived labor shortcomings or fears of ecological damage. In other instances, the arrival of Chinese workers for projects has generated tensions with local labor. This is not unique to China, but it underscores the need to enhance corporate social responsibility in these undertakings. The positive sign is that Chinese companies—pushed by their own government—are beginning to adopt green finance guidelines and ESG (environmental, social, governance) standards. The recent China–CELAC agenda explicitly includes cooperation on sustainable development, with commitments to protect biodiversity and promote clean energy. LAC can and should use its bargaining power to demand that foreign investment (from China or elsewhere) comply with its environmental laws and respect community rights. This could mean, for example, inviting China to support mechanisms such as the Amazon Fund to protect the rainforest or to join initiatives against illegal gold mining in the Amazon. Careful management is needed to prevent the China–LAC cooperation narrative from being tainted by controversial projects that provoke social backlash.

Political–ideological differences. Although cooperation transcends political systems, it is impossible to ignore that China is a one-party state while most LAC countries are pluralist democracies. This sometimes generates subtle frictions: for example, during Jair Bolsonaro's term in Brazil (2019–2022), which was closely aligned with the United States, relations with China were rhetorically strained (Bolsonaro criticized Huawei and initially blamed China for COVID-19), slowing some projects. However, pressure from governors, business groups, and economic reality led Bolsonaro to moderate his stance, and Brazil ultimately maintained strong trade with China and allowed Huawei's participation in 5G. This episode showed that while an ideologically distant government can create uncertainty, structural factors (economic interests, domestic lobbying) help preserve cooperation. Conversely, left-wing governments in the region have tended to enjoy political affinity with China in their anti-hegemonic discourse (as in the cases of Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, and now once again Brazil under Lula), easing strategic agreements. It is nevertheless crucial that relations with China become state policies in each country, rather than sources of partisan division. This can be achieved by emphasizing that they are pragmatic,

development-oriented relationships that are beneficial regardless of the incumbent government's political orientation.

Geopolitics and great-power rivalry. The growth of China's influence in Latin America inevitably triggers reactions from the United States, the region's traditional power. Washington has made clear its unease with certain Chinese incursions, sometimes referring to the region as its "backyard"—a term strongly rejected by Latin Americans. It has pressured against Huawei, warned of alleged espionage risks (for example, U.S. Southern Command has argued that Chinese 5G networks could compromise regional security), and urged its allies to provide alternative investments. The Biden administration, rather than directly confronting LAC over its ties with China, has opted to compete by offering investment (through initiatives such as América Crece or the G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure) and by stressing shared democratic values. Still, there is a risk that the region could become entangled in Sino-U.S. rivalry—for instance, if both compete for major projects (as with 5G) or if military tensions escalate elsewhere (Taiwan, the South China Sea) and Washington seeks hemispheric support against Beijing.

So far, LAC's stance has been to avoid taking sides in distant disputes: no Latin American country supports Taiwan's independence (they align with China's One China policy), but neither would any endorse armed confrontation in Asia. As a Latin American foreign minister recently put it, "We do not want to be pawns in a global chess game." Maintaining this active neutrality will require diplomatic skill to ensure that cooperation with China is not perceived by the United States as a threat to its core interests. In this sense, trilateral dialogue mechanisms (for example, U.S.–LAC talks on how to ensure transparency in Chinese investment, or joint projects) could be useful in reducing mutual suspicions.

Asymmetric power relations. Finally, the asymmetry in LAC–China relations must not be overlooked. China is the world's second-largest economy and a technological–military giant; Latin America as a whole has economic weight but is fragmented into 33 countries with very different development levels. This means that one-on-one negotiations with China can be unbalanced. Some critics fear that China might acquire excessive political leverage in certain countries in exchange for economic support (what some label "chequebook diplomacy"). Cases such as Chinese loans' influence in

Venezuela's domestic politics or the role of Chinese companies in local propaganda campaigns have been mentioned.

That said, evidence of direct political interference remains limited; rather, China tends to cultivate relations with all major parties in each country (inviting both government and opposition delegations to visit China) in order to be well positioned regardless of electoral outcomes. Even so, LAC must articulate a clear and unified stance on what it expects from China. CELAC can serve this purpose: to define principles (respect for sovereignty and labor–environmental standards, for example) and outline priority areas in which cooperation with China is especially welcome (sustainable infrastructure, inclusive digital transformation, etc.). Likewise, diversification of partners remains essential: China is crucial, but not the only actor. Europe, Japan, South Korea, India, and of course the United States, all offer complementary opportunities. Indeed, many countries are adopting a “China and everyone else” strategy.

Mexico, for example, is increasing trade with China while simultaneously benefiting from nearshoring by U.S. and Asian companies spurred by the trade war. Colombia, despite its close relationship with the United States, has received Chinese investment in 4G highways and in the Bogotá Metro. The key is to balance relationships so that no single power dominates Latin America's diplomatic and economic agenda.

In conclusion for this section, LAC–China cooperation—despite its shadows—offers more advantages than risks if handled wisely. Not criticizing China does not mean ignoring the challenges; it means analyzing them objectively. China, like any global actor, pursues its own interests—access to resources, markets for its companies, diplomatic support—but those interests can align with Latin America's in mutually beneficial ways. The region must remain vigilant so that the relationship follows a genuinely reciprocal path, demanding transparency, sustainability, and respect while also valuing the development opportunities it offers.

Conclusions

Towards a Global Strategy with a Latin American Flavor

This overview makes it clear that Latin America and the Caribbean have emerged as active players in global political and diplomatic cooperation and that their relations with China play a leading role in this transformation. The LAC–China interaction has become a strategic axis whose scope extends

beyond the bilateral level: it is reshaping alliances, influencing the distribution of economic power, and bringing new perspectives to international debates on development and governance.

Far from being mere spectators, the countries of the region have demonstrated agency. By capitalizing on China's rapprochement, Latin America has managed to diversify its development options, increase its exports, build infrastructure, and strengthen its collective voice in forums such as the UN and the G20. China, for its part, has gained a reliable partner in the West, significantly expanding its diplomatic footprint in the Western Hemisphere, generally in a manner welcomed by regional governments. Both sides have benefited: LAC found markets and financing in times of need; China gained political support, natural resources, and a "laboratory" for its peaceful global projection.

Looking ahead, several points are essential:

1. *Deepening cooperation with a sustainable development focus.* The future agenda should ensure that cooperation with China helps tackle Latin America's structural problems—low productivity, inequality, climate vulnerability. This implies channeling Chinese investment towards sectors that generate local linkages (physical and digital infrastructure that integrates the region, advanced manufacturing, renewable energies, cultural industries) rather than merely extracting resources. The China–CELAC Forum already points in this direction, with concrete 2025–2027 action plans for cooperation in key areas. If successfully implemented, we may see in a few years a more interconnected Latin America (thanks to highways, railways, fiber-optic cables, 5G), a greener one (through solar and wind projects and Chinese-financed electric transport), and one better prepared technologically. The shared vision is to build a "community with a shared future" in which each side's progress reinforces the other's.
2. *Maintaining geopolitical balance and regional autonomy.* LAC does not wish to become a theater of hegemonic competition, but rather a space for encounter and cooperation. Within Latin America's global strategy, the relationship with China is not meant to replace traditional ties but to complement them under the principle of multilateralism. The region must continue sending a clear message: it has the maturity to engage with both Washington and Beijing without turning that into a zero-sum

dilemma. As a proverb cited at the latest China–CELAC summit put it, “The great ship will move forward if we all row together”—the region aspires to row alongside all powers toward shared goals (development, peace, mutual respect). A potential role for LAC in the global strategy is to act as a bridge between East and West, leveraging its understanding of both worlds to facilitate dialogue (for example, Uruguay hosting trade talks with China while belonging to Mercosur; Mexico serving as an interlocutor between the U.S. and China on specific issues). This constructive posture could grant the region a diplomatic weight greater than what its material power alone would suggest.

3. *Strengthening Latin American integration as a platform for international negotiation.* The effectiveness with which LAC harnesses its alliances, including with China, depends largely on its internal unity. Revitalizing integration efforts (revamping UNASUR or PROSUR in South America, consolidating the Central American Integration System, etc.) and articulating common positions within CELAC will increase the region’s influence. A cohesive Latin American–Caribbean bloc can negotiate better terms with China (and any partner), avoid harmful competition among neighbors to attract investment, and put forward joint proposals in global forums (for example, LAC and China could co-sponsor UN initiatives on inclusive digital development, drawing on Latin America’s social inclusion experience and China’s technological capabilities). Parliamentary and academic diplomacy can also contribute: exchanges between legislatures (such as Parlatino’s relations with China) and think tanks help ensure that mutual understanding transcends the executive branches of the day.
4. *Smart management of challenges.* Acknowledging challenges does not mean shying away from cooperation but rather managing it better. The region should institutionalize mechanisms to monitor agreements with China, periodically evaluating their impact (perhaps through a CELAC–China observatory on goal fulfillment). It should also continue diversifying its alliance matrix: China is crucial, but the world is wide. Europe, the Asia–Pacific (beyond China), and Africa all offer complementary opportunities. Fortunately, Latin America is also reviving its ties with the EU (as seen in the 2023 CELAC–EU summit) and exploring accords with countries such as South Korea, Japan, India, and Turkey. This polycentric stance will increase resilience. On the global stage, LAC can

position itself as a champion of inclusive multilateralism—defending international rules while advocating to reform them to make them fairer. That has been its stance in debates on financial reform, internet governance, and democratizing vaccine production, often with Chinese support. Continuing along this path will yield medium-term benefits, reinforcing the legitimacy of the causes the region champions.

In short, Latin America and the Caribbean are ceasing to be passive subjects and are becoming protagonists of multilateral cooperation. Their role in the global strategy is being consolidated through creative alliances, and the one forged with China is perhaps the most transformative of the 21st century so far. Far from the caricature of a purely neocolonial Chinese influence or a zero-sum rivalry, reality shows a more nuanced relationship of mutual learning, economic complementarities, and shared aspirations for a more balanced world order.

Latin Americans face the task of navigating complex waters, ensuring that this cooperation leads to more prosperous, just, and sustainable democracies in the region. But with strategy, unity, and prudence, LAC can harness cooperation with China (and with other actors) to drive autonomous development that improves the quality of life of its peoples and contributes to tackling major global challenges. Ultimately, Latin America and the Caribbean are demonstrating that they can be the architects of their own global destiny, rowing together with diverse partners in humanity's great ship under the shared premise that, *united, we are unmatched*.

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PROMOTING COOPERATION ON NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY IN THE CHINA—CELAC FORUM: BUILDING COMMON, COMPREHENSIVE, COOPERATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

This report is based on the paper: "Promoting cooperation on non-traditional security in the China–CELAC Forum: building common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security", presented on August 28, 2025 at the V Lecture Series developed within the framework of the Chair in Contemporary China.



PROMOTING COOPERATION ON NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY IN THE CHINA–CELAC FORUM: BUILDING COMMON, COMPREHENSIVE, COOPERATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

WANG Song¹⁰

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the origins and evolution of China's Global Security Vision and compares it with traditional security approaches. Based on a systematic review of the security issues addressed at the ministerial meetings of the China–CELAC Forum and an examination of cases of cooperation in non-traditional security—such as public health, cyber and digital security, climate and environment, and space security—the article shows that China–LAC cooperation on non-traditional security, driven by the Global Security Vision, has gradually shaped a practical paradigm distinct from traditional models. This paradigm emphasizes equality and mutual benefit and has played a significantly positive role in strengthening the global governance system.

Background

Today, the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century. The international configuration is evolving at an accelerated pace. Geopolitical competition is becoming intricately intertwined with non-traditional security threats. The stability and sustainability of the international order face unprecedented challenges. Non-traditional threats—such as global health crises, climate change, cyber risks, and transnational crime—have rendered classical paradigms centered on military and political confrontation insufficient, making it difficult to respond effectively to increasingly complex security challenges. Given the increasingly blurred

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boundaries of security affairs, international cooperation on non-traditional security has become crucial to sustaining world peace and development.

China, as the most populous developing country and a natural member of the Global South, has been committed to promoting an open, inclusive, balanced, and win-win international order, actively practicing genuine multilateralism and South-South cooperation. From China's perspective, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is an essential component of emerging economies and developing countries, as well as an important force for safeguarding world peace and development. China regards LAC as an indispensable strategic partner in building a shared future. In 2015, China and LAC countries jointly established the China-CELAC Forum, which has become a key platform for advancing comprehensive cooperation between both sides. It has opened a broad avenue of collaboration—characterized by equality, mutual benefit, and common development—in multiple areas: politics, economy, culture, science and technology, society, and security.

This article focuses on how the China-CELAC Forum, operating under China's vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security, fosters South-South cooperation practices in the field of non-traditional security. The following sections outline the evolution of China's security concept, the development of the Global Security Vision (“**全球安全观**”, GSV), and a comparison between the GSV and traditional perspectives. It then examines the evolution of security themes within the China-CELAC Forum and explores the forms of non-traditional security cooperation facilitated by the Forum. Finally, it offers recommendations for addressing the challenges facing China-LAC cooperation in non-traditional security.

Global Security Vision: Origins, Development, and Comparison

Since 1949, China's concept of national security has undergone significant evolution. In the early years of the People's Republic, facing a complex external environment and ideological challenges, the Chinese government identified imperialism as the main external threat. Chairman Mao Zedong proposed strategies such as “starting from scratch” (“**另起炉灶**”), “cleaning the house before inviting guests” (“**打扫干净屋子再请客**”), and “leaning to one side” (“**一边倒**”), emphasizing comprehensive cooperation with socialist countries. In 1953, China put forward for the first time the Five Principles of

Peaceful Coexistence (“和平共处五项原则”): mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. These principles became fundamental guidelines of its foreign policy and remain valid to this day.

With the deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union in the 1960s, the Chinese government perceived an encirclement and blockade against it. Consequently, it stressed the strategy of “independence and self-reliance” (“独立自主”), actively preparing for war and disasters while supporting revolutionary movements internationally. In 1978, with the launch of reform and opening-up, China identified peace and development as the defining themes of the era, and external threats diminished. The focus shifted to “keeping a low profile” (“韬光养晦”) and participating actively in international affairs to safeguard national interests. National development priorities turned to economic construction, emphasizing that the military should “act with patience.” This led to large-scale troop reductions together with efforts to modernize the People’s Liberation Army.

With the end of the Cold War and the deepening of globalization, China’s security concept was updated again in the 1990s. In 1999, President Jiang Zemin, at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, summarized for the first time the core of the New Security Concept (NSC) as “mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation.” In 2002, China issued a “Position Paper on the New Security Concept,” stating that its essence is to transcend unilateral security and pursue common security through mutually beneficial cooperation. It further clarified that the connotation of security had evolved into a comprehensive concept, expanding from the military and political domains to the economic, technological, environmental, cultural, and many other spheres. By then, the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security had taken initial shape.

In 2007, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi pointed out that the NSC refers to “comprehensive security, development security, cooperative security, and common security,” where “development security” is another expression of “sustainable security.” The most important breakthrough came in 2014, when President Xi Jinping proposed the holistic approach to national security (“总体国家安全观”) and systematically elaborated the common,

comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security vision for Asia, marking the first regional synthesis of this concept. In 2017, Xi Jinping stated that all countries should establish a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable vision of global security, formally elevating the concept to a worldwide solution. Since then, this approach has been incorporated into several key documents of the Communist Party of China and has become a national strategy. In 2022, Xi Jinping officially launched the Global Security Initiative (GSI), with the GSV as its cornerstone and primary emphasis, turning it into a clear and actionable global public good.

The formation of the GSV is evidently a continuous, evolutionary, and deepening process. It arises from China's thorough reflection on its own security practices and global security realities, responds to the demands of changing times, and ultimately unfolds into the GSI with a global perspective.

The GSV contains four dimensions. *Common security*: respecting and safeguarding the security of all countries; no state should achieve its own security at the expense of others. *Comprehensive security*: adopting a holistic approach that ensures security in both traditional and non-traditional domains. *Cooperative security*: generating security through political dialogue and peaceful negotiation, promoting diverse forms of international and regional cooperation based on trust, respect, and equality. *Sustainable security*: resolving conflicts through development and removing the root causes of insecurity, focusing on the long-term and structural nature of security issues. These four dimensions are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, forming the full framework of the GSV. This framework advocates an open, inclusive, and non-exclusive security philosophy aimed at establishing a new type of international security relations based on dialogue rather than confrontation, cooperation rather than competition, and sharing rather than exclusion.

There are significant differences between the GSV and traditional security visions. In terms of *objectives*, traditional security adheres to the notion of "absolute security," prioritizing national security even at the expense of global and social well-being; by contrast, the GSV upholds security as universal and equitable. In terms of *scope*, the traditional conception is often confined to military and political aspects, focusing on threats such as territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political stability; the GSV addresses

diverse threats—cyber, climate, pandemics, terrorism, among others—with a holistic approach to an interconnected world. In terms of *means*, traditional security promotes military alliances, exclusive blocs, sanctions, and similar measures; the GSV advocates addressing international problems through dialogue, consultation, and international cooperation, while respecting the role of mechanisms such as the United Nations. In terms of *foundations of security*, traditional approaches seek hierarchical power structures; the GSV emphasizes development as the basis, pursuing lasting peace and prosperity.

In the face of emerging challenges, the international community urgently needs to break free from the constraints of traditional security visions and adopt the GSV. This is not only necessary to safeguard national interests, but also a responsibility toward the common well-being of humanity.

Security Issues Addressed by the China–CELAC Forum

Security cooperation within the China–CELAC Forum is a dynamic process that is continuously deepening and expanding. A review of the outcome documents of the ministerial meetings reveals a clear trajectory that vividly reflects the GSV’s transition from concept to practice.

In 2015, when cooperation was still at an initial stage, the parties focused mainly on areas related to the economy and the movement of people, such as protecting the security of citizens and enterprises, strengthening judicial and law-enforcement cooperation, and combating the smuggling of migrants and human trafficking.

By 2018, the scope had significantly expanded to include traditional security issues such as counter-terrorism and the prevention and control of weapons of mass destruction. Non-traditional areas were also deepened: combating drug trafficking and organized crime, anti-corruption, anti-money-laundering and asset recovery, as well as strengthening police equipment and training exchanges. This underscores the growing strength of the common and comprehensive dimensions of the security concept.

In 2021, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, public health security was elevated to an unprecedented level, reflecting a timely response to concerns over comprehensive security. Cooperation became more institutionalized, including the establishment of a high-level defense forum, the incorporation of the Global Data Security Initiative (GDSI), and reinforced collaboration in disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, and other fields. This indicates

that security cooperation not only responds to current crises but also seeks to build long-term governance mechanisms, evidencing a sustainable security orientation.

After a decade of development, by 2025 cooperation had entered a new stage of comprehensive integration. The Global Security Initiative (GSI), together with China's Global Development Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative, as well as Brazil's Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, were incorporated into the conference declaration. Security cooperation expanded into new and cutting-edge areas, such as AI governance, Antarctic science and conservation, zero-carbon island development, and the Digital Pact. This shows that cooperation between China and LAC countries has addressed both traditional and non-traditional threats, considered present and long-term challenges, and integrated security and development.

From the perspective of *common security*, cooperation has moved from the bilateral to the multilateral and now to a global level: from merely protecting citizens and enterprises to assuming responsibilities in the face of humanity's shared challenges, such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, and global health crises. Regarding *comprehensive security*, cooperation has significantly broadened the concept beyond the military and political domains to include economic, environmental, health, digital, and other spheres, forming a complete, multidimensional security system. With respect to *cooperative security*, the degree of institutionalization has increased and a set of joint action mechanisms has been established to forge forward-looking, systematic partnerships through dialogue and collaboration. Finally, in terms of *sustainable security*, cooperation has evolved from crisis responses to long-term solutions: in public health, for example, from supplying emergency medical materials to supporting local vaccine-production capacity; in the digital field, from tackling cyber threats to promoting global norms for AI governance and data security.

Non-Traditional Security Cooperation within the China–CELAC Forum

Table 1 presents four concrete examples of non-traditional security cooperation between China and LAC countries. Taken together, they illustrate the GSV and genuine multilateralism, highlighting the core features of South–South cooperation and its complementary and reinforcing role in global security governance.

Table 1. Non-Traditional Security Cooperation between China and LAC Countries

Security Domain	Cooperation Approach	Cooperation Practices
Public Health	Views global public health as a shared challenge; advocates vaccines as a global public good; opposes “vaccine nationalism.”	Emergency medical supplies, supply chain guarantees, vaccine cooperation and localized production, expert exchanges, capacity building.
Cyber and Digital Security	Views cyberspace as a shared homeland; advocates a peaceful, secure, open, and cooperative cyberspace.	Digital infrastructure investment, cybersecurity capacity building, technology exchange; global digital governance rules and exploration of AI governance; GDSI.
Climate and Environment	Firmly supports the Paris Agreement; adheres to Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR); prioritizes green development.	Large-scale green energy investments, green finance, climate adaptation and resilience building, disaster risk management, ecosystem protection and environmental governance.
Space Security	Views space technology as a key tool for national governance, disaster response, and economic development; emphasizes shared, inclusive benefits.	Promotion of the BeiDou satellite navigation system in LAC; remote-sensing data sharing; joint research in space technology.

When COVID-19 spread worldwide, China stood shoulder to shoulder with LAC countries: both sides supplied each other with emergency medical materials and engaged in large-scale vaccine cooperation. This stood in clear

contrast to “vaccine nationalism.” The collaboration effectively strengthened epidemic-response capacity and public health resilience in the region, constituting a model of common and cooperative security.

In the digital era, reliable infrastructure is essential for development and forms a foundation for security. Chinese enterprises have actively contributed to building 5G networks, fiber-optic systems, and data centers in LAC countries, helping to bridge the “digital divide.” In cybersecurity, China has supported the region in strengthening its defenses through training, technical exchanges, and emergency-response mechanisms. Both sides have jointly explored global digital governance rules, and the GDSI provides a framework for promoting the free flow of data while ensuring security. This cooperation is closely aligned with the principles of comprehensive and cooperative security.

China and LAC countries are among the principal victims of climate change and actively work together to confront it. As representatives of developing countries in international climate negotiations, both uphold the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities. They have collaborated extensively on the transition to clean energy: Chinese investments in photovoltaic, wind power, and ultra-high-voltage transmission help optimize LAC’s energy matrices. This cooperation highlights the nexus between common security and sustainable development.

China’s BeiDou satellite navigation system has been deployed in numerous LAC countries. Remote-sensing data shared by China with the region are widely used for estimating agricultural yields, preventing forest fires, and issuing early warnings for disasters, demonstrating an effective integration of comprehensive and cooperative security.

In sum, China–LAC cooperation on non-traditional security emphasizes addressing global challenges through dialogue, consultation, and practical collaboration, in clear contrast to unilateralism, hegemonism, and zero-sum thinking. Based on equality and mutual benefit, it avoids imposing political conditions and prioritizes capacity building and technology transfer, reflecting key principles of South–South cooperation. It has established a new approach to security cooperation among developing countries, offering a more inclusive, development-oriented model for providing global public goods and injecting fresh momentum into the reform and strengthening of global security governance.

Challenges and Recommendations

Although non-traditional security cooperation between China and LAC countries within the China–CELAC Forum has made significant progress, it still faces numerous challenges. First, geopolitical competition presents clear obstacles—such as the “China threat” narrative and other ill-intentioned speculations and deliberate obstructions—which not only hinder the advancement of cooperation but also undermine the foundation of mutual trust. Second, the complexity of LAC cannot be ignored: the diversity of political systems, uneven economic development, marked differences in domestic security, and political instability all affect the continuity and stability of cooperation. Third, the level of institutionalization needs to be further strengthened, and counterpart funding remains insufficient, which has led to a lack of detailed implementation plans in some areas. Fourth, cultural differences and divergent thinking frameworks also pose challenges that must gradually be overcome through sustained and institutionalized people-to-people exchanges. Finally, effectively communicating cooperation outcomes is another critical challenge: in today’s complex global media environment, faithfully conveying the story of cooperation and enhancing its international recognition requires serious attention.

To address these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed. First, China and LAC countries should continue deepening the theoretical and practical aspects of the Global Security Vision, emphasizing the mutual reinforcement of development and security and building a more comprehensive and cohesive cooperation framework. Second, they should optimize security cooperation mechanisms, improve coordination in high-level design and planning, and expand collaboration into emerging areas such as maritime security, space security, biosecurity, and other non-traditional security fields. At the same time, they should strengthen capacity building and technology transfer to help the region enhance its development autonomy.

Third, China and LAC need to build mutual strategic trust, institutionalize high-level dialogues, normalize defense exchanges, and jointly resist external interference. Fourth, it is necessary to deepen and broaden people-to-people exchanges to consolidate the social foundation of support. Finally, China and LAC countries must improve coordination on multilateral platforms—such as the United Nations, the G20, BRICS+, and APEC—to jointly promote reforms in global governance, expand the representation and voice of

developing countries, advocate for a just and equitable international order, and contribute their wisdom and strength to building a community with a shared future for humankind.



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