



China's presence in Latin America: Intercultural geopolitical interventions in the Global South

SILVA, Danilo Alves Torres⁽¹⁾; SOUZA, Augusto Cezar Vieira de⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾  0009-0007-0057-5516; State University of Rio Grande do Norte (*Universidade do Estado do Rio Grande do Norte - UERN-CAPF*), Pau dos Ferros (RN), Brazil, Email: danilo2024008118@alu.uern.br

⁽²⁾  0009-0004-5540-4122; State University of Rio Grande do Norte (*Universidade do Estado do Rio Grande do Norte - UERN-CAPF*), Pau dos Ferros (RN), Brazil, Email: augusto2024007317@alu.uern.br

The content expressed in this article is the sole responsibility of its authors.

ABSTRACT

We present a proposal that brings the discussion about the role of China and its presence in the regional context and geopolitical relations with Latin America. For this, we carried out an essay that analyzes some specific issues regarding cultural interactions that involve maintaining dialogues that result in opportunities for advancing the capital of global regional integration, evidenced through strategic partnerships, bilateral agreements, and multilateral forums, such as CELAC-CHINA (*Comunidade de Estados Latinos Americanos e Caribenhos*), strengthening regional cooperation and joint action in the face of common challenges, in addition to reducing dependence on external powers and increasing the bloc's autonomy in the international arena. This work adopts a qualitative and descriptive-analytical approach, based on bibliographic and documentary research. The study aims to understand China's political, economic, and technological interests and actions in Latin America, analyzing its commercial development, the region's role in supplying raw materials, Chinese diplomatic expansion, and investments in infrastructure and technology. The structure of the discussion is organized under the following topics: China's global integration strategy: from Asia to Latin America, Bilateral trade: Latin America as a supplier of raw materials, Chinese diplomacy in Latin America, The role of China in digital and technological infrastructure.

RESUMO

Apresentamos uma proposta que traz a discussão sobre o papel da China e sua presença no âmbito regional e de relações geopolíticas com a América Latina. Para isso, realizamos um ensaio que analisa algumas pautas pontuais quanto as interações culturais que envolvem manter diálogos que resultem de oportunidade no avanço do capital da integração regional global, evidenciado por meio de parcerias estratégicas, acordos bilaterais e fóruns multilaterais, como a CELAC-CHINA (*Comunidade de Estados Latinos Americanos e Caribenhos*) fortalecendo a cooperação regional e a atuação conjunta frente a desafios comuns, além de reduzir a dependência de potências externas e aumentar a autonomia do bloco no cenário internacional. Este trabalho adota uma abordagem qualitativa e descritivo-analítica, fundamentada em pesquisa bibliográfica e documental. O estudo busca compreender os interesses e ações políticas, econômicas e tecnológicas da China na América Latina, analisando seu desenvolvimento comercial, o papel da região no fornecimento de matérias-primas, a expansão diplomática chinesa e os investimentos em infraestrutura e tecnologia. A estrutura da discussão está estruturada nos seguintes tópicos: A estratégia de inserção global da China: da Ásia a América Latina, O comércio bilateral: América Latina como fornecedora de matéria-prima, Diplomacia chinesa na América Latina, O papel da China na infraestrutura digital e tecnológica.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Article Process:
Submitted: 10/31/2025
Approved: 03/02/2026
Published: 04/09/2026



Keywords:
Geopolitics of regional integration, China, Latin America

Palavras-Chave:
Geopolítica de integração regional, China, América Latina

Introduction

In recent decades, the People's Republic of China has established itself as one of the main actors on the international stage, expanding and boosting its economic and political influence beyond Asia and reaching Latin America. This advance materializes through a colossal trade volume, which exceeds 450 billion dollars, positioning China as the main trade partner of most South American countries. According to Pini (2015, p. 03): “[...] Beijing seeks to pragmatically coordinate its relations with developing countries mainly using its immense economic resources, through trade and unconditional investments [...]” From this perspective, we can see the strategic synthesis of China's policy and soft power in relation to the global south.

In the regional economic context, China has become the main economic partner of Latin America, with an emphasis on Brazil, which is responsible for a large part of the exports of soybeans, iron ore, and oil, followed by Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, and Bolivia, which supply strategic commodities such as soybeans, copper, oil, and lithium. In addition to trade, Chinese investments in energy, infrastructure, and technology reinforce its influence in the region. Despite the opportunities, dependence on commodities and environmental impacts represent challenges, making innovation and sustainability decisive factors for the future of Latin American economy.

In the political and diplomatic sphere, since the beginning of the 21st century, Beijing has intensified its pursuit of relations with local governments in the Latin American axis through strategic partnerships, bilateral agreements, and multilateral forums, such as CELAC-CHINA - Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (*Comunidade de Estados Latinos Americanos e Caribenhos*), which aims to promote the political, economic, and social integration of Latin America and the Caribbean, strengthening regional cooperation and joint action in the face of common challenges, in addition to reducing dependence on external powers and increasing the bloc's autonomy in the international arena.

In the technological sphere, China is a global leader in technology and innovation, standing out in 5G, artificial intelligence, and the production of digital equipment. Strategic projects such as the Digital Silk Road expand its influence, building critical infrastructure and shaping global standards, consolidating its geopolitical and technological power, especially over partner countries dependent on its technology.

Due to the exorbitant growth of relations between China and Latin America, the question arises of how China's presence in Latin America impacts the politics and infrastructure of the countries in the region, and what the real Chinese strategic interests behind these actions are?

The justification for this study is based on the growing presence of China in Latin America and its contributions in the economic, technological, and diplomatic relations fields, allowing an understanding of the impacts of an emerging power on countries in the process of

development. The objective of this study is guided by analyzing the presence of China in Latin America, highlighting its economic and political interests and the impacts on the region.

Methodology

This work adopts a qualitative and descriptive-analytical approach, based on bibliographic and documentary research. The study seeks to understand China's political, economic, and technological interests and actions in Latin America, analyzing its commercial development, the region's role in the supply of raw materials, Chinese diplomatic expansion, and investments in infrastructure and technology.

The literature review considered scientific articles, institutional reports, CEPAL publications, and official documents from international organizations and Latin American governments. Statistical data on foreign trade and investments were used, extracted from reliable sources such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and reports from China itself. These data will be analyzed to understand the economic and strategic impacts of the Chinese presence in the region.

Qualitative analysis allows examining the social, political, economic, and technological dimensions of Sino-Latin American relations. The period analyzed spans from the beginning of the 21st century to 2024, a moment when China consolidated itself as the main trading partner of South America and expanded its diplomatic and technological influence, making it possible to observe the historical evolution of the relations and their geopolitical impacts.

The comparative method was adopted to identify convergences and divergences among Latin American countries in the process of integration with China, considering sectors such as agriculture, mining, energy, technology, and diplomacy. This comparison allows for evaluating how the Chinese strategy manifests in different ways across the various national contexts of the region.

China's global integration strategy: From Asia to Latin America

Recently, the diplomatic relations of the People's Republic of China with other Latin American countries have intensified in the economic geopolitical scenario. The Chinese government has undertaken financial partnerships with Latin American nations since the beginning of the 21st century. With China's entry into the World Trade Organization, other countries began to maintain a reinforced diplomatic relationship with the country, considering that in the first decade of the century there was a growth of blocs and groups with the intention of economic cooperation, such as the founding of BRICS in 2006, which at the time was called BRIC, as South Africa had not yet joined, showing an economic consolidation between China and Brazil and later maintaining relations not only with the South American continent but with the global South in general.

In 2000, Latin America's exports accounted for only 2% of the Chinese market, with the United States representing the largest commercial presence on the continent. However, Chinese trade began to grow by 31% annually with its development, and in 2024, the trade of Chinese products reached approximately US\$ 518 billion. This is due to the fact that Latin American nations began to engage in economic and political cooperation actions with the Chinese government. Currently, China is the largest trading partner of South America, surpassing the United States, which previously had greater commercial power.

The agricultural and livestock sector, which are the main financial sources of Latin American countries, is the largest export sector of Latin American products to China, in addition to the extraction of raw materials for industrial development. Reciprocally, the region imports manufactured products of added value. In 2024, China signed free trade agreements with countries such as Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Peru. Although negotiations with Uruguay have not advanced due to Mercosur's resistance, more than twenty nations in Latin America and the Caribbean have already joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), promoted by Beijing - with Colombia being the most recent to join the project.

Through commercial advancement, China comes to be seen as an economic power, becoming the main center of global trade actions, which a few years ago was historically influenced by the United States, due to the fact that the Chinese government tends to maintain diplomacy through multilateralism, with financial and political freedom among nations, showing an alternative to the unipolar order so far, being beneficial to developing countries and especially to Latin and Caribbean nations.

Bilateral trade: Latin America as a supplier of raw materials

Between the years 2000 and 2019, the evolution of foreign trade with China is remarkable, with Brazil accounting for most of the transactions, 32.4% of which are Brazilian products such as: soybeans, iron ore and its concentrates, and crude petroleum oils or bituminous minerals. Alongside Brazil, Argentina is also one of the main soybean exporters to China from Latin America; in July 2025, a volume of 30 thousand tons of soybeans from Argentina was delivered to China. In addition to food products, a large part of the extraction of natural materials such as copper from Chile, oil from Venezuela, and lithium from Bolivia is of great importance for Chinese commercial relations with the South American continent.

This shows how the insertion of bilateral trade and financial strengthening debated among emerging countries has been presenting positive results for the global economy, coming from Chinese investments in Latin countries, in various types of services such as electricity, renewable energies, telecommunications, low-emission vehicles, infrastructure projects, loans, and investments.

It is observed that raw materials play a central role in the production trajectory of Latin America, to the point that the practice of agriculture is configured as the fundamental sector

of the continent's economy. This activity not only drives the local economy but also proves to be the main source of income for small producers. In particular, those who depend on family farming as their main means of subsistence find in agricultural production an essential basis for their survival and economic development.

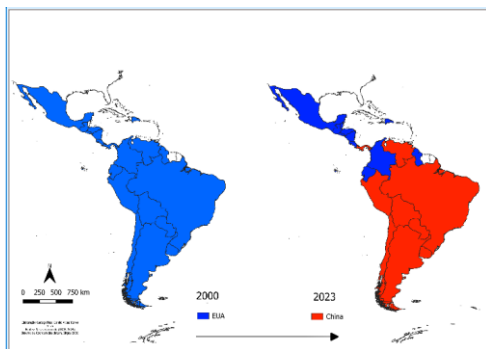
What makes Latin American trade take a leading role in the field of natural material production, being essential for the global supply of natural materials, such as minerals and agricultural products, is the growing global demand from emerging economies, which further drives the importance of Latin American raw material trade, since the industrialization and economic growth of these countries generate a constant need for natural resources (Nonnenberg, 2013).

The adoption of sustainable practices and innovative technologies also proves to be fundamental for the future of commerce in Latin America, as it can attract conscious international influence that values environmental responsibility. However, the region faces significant challenges, such as economic inequality and environmental issues, which need to be overcome to consolidate its prominence in the global market. Therefore, innovation and sustainability will be decisive for the future of raw materials trade in Latin America, allowing the region to take advantage of its potential and position itself competitively in the international arena (Rocha, 2016).

Chinese diplomacy in Latin America

Latin America has become a strategic target of this new diplomacy, especially since the 2000s, at a time when many Latin American countries were seeking to diversify partnerships and reduce the historical dependence on the United States and the European Union.

Figure 1.
Map of Latin America's trading partners.



Note: Prepared by the authors (2025).

China's diplomatic activity in Latin America has intensified in recent decades, revealing a strategy aimed at expanding its geopolitical influence in the Western Hemisphere. This

Comentado [RD1]: FAVOR TROCAR "EUA" POR: USA

movement is manifested, among other ways, through the creation and strengthening of multilateral mechanisms such as the China-CELAC Forum.

The Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the CELAC-China Forum (FCC) was held on May 13, 2025, in Beijing. With the aim of further deepening the FCC, the People's Republic of China and the CELAC Member States [...] agreed on the following CELAC–China Joint Action Plan for Cooperation in Key Areas (2025–2027) [...] (Joint Action Plan CELAC-China 2025-2027, p. 1-2).

The CELAC-China Joint Action Plan (2025-2027) proposes comprehensive cooperation between China and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in areas such as politics, economy, infrastructure, technology, agriculture, culture, environment, health, and security. The goal is to strengthen dialogue and partnership, offering financial support of 66 billion yuan, scholarships, training, and development projects. It foresees the facilitation of trade and investment, cooperation in sustainable energy, 5G, and artificial intelligence, as well as actions for food security and agricultural modernization. It also encourages cultural and educational exchanges, and addresses global issues such as climate change, public health, and combating organized crime. Implementation will be voluntary, adapted to national needs, and focused on developing countries, consolidating the strategic partnership between China and CELAC.

Chinese diplomacy in Latin America makes use of a diverse set of mechanisms that combine economic, political, and cultural strategies, adapting to the profile of each country in the region. In economic matters, the mobilization of financing, investments, and trade emerges as a central parameter of Chinese economic diplomacy in Latin America.

In the case of Brazil, which has become China's main trading partner in Latin America, it is the main destination of Chinese exports in this region; in Argentina, financing for the Kirchner-Cepernic hydroelectric dam in Patagonia and for railway lines stands out.

Cultural and educational diplomacy is visible in Peru, with exchange scholarships for Peruvian students to study in China; in Brazil, it is essential to highlight the establishment of Confucius Institutes (*Institutos Confúcio*) in universities such as Unesp and PUC-Rio. In the scientific-technological field, notable cooperations include the Deep Space Station in Neuquén, Argentina, used for Chinese space missions, and the development of solar energy projects in the Atacama Desert, in Chile.

Infrastructure diplomacy facilitates the construction of strategic projects, such as the Bioceanic Railway, which will connect Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru, and the modernization of the Santiago metro in Chile by Chinese companies. Finally, digital diplomacy is gaining ground with the participation of companies like Huawei and ZTE in 5G network projects in Brazil, Mexico, and Chile, as well as the installation of fiber optic cables in the Caribbean. Together, these mechanisms, supported by concrete examples in different countries, reveal an integrated

approach that combines soft power and hard power, projecting Chinese influence in a continuous and adaptable way to the different political, cultural, technological, and economic contexts of the region.

The role of China in digital and technological infrastructure

China plays a fundamental role in the development of global digital and technological infrastructure. Currently, the country stands out as a major power in technological innovation and scientific advancement, being responsible for about 90% of the world's computer manufacturing, 75% of global cellphone production, and 80% of solar panels. Furthermore, the country has been actively promoting digital transformation, investing in 5G connectivity, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, and various other digital technologies.

In recent years, China has begun to consider AI as a national priority, since the launch of the New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan (PNIA), with the goal of becoming the leading global power in AI by 2030. According to Hiratuka and Diegues (2021, p. 10):

[...] The PNIA sets the goal of achieving significant advances in basic research, technologies, and AI applications by 2025, listing them as vectors for upgrading and productive transformation. By 2030, the goal is to reach levels compatible with competing for global leadership in terms of innovation, obtaining relevant results in building an 'intelligent' economy and society, capable of sustaining an innovative economy and paving the way to become an economic power.

From this perspective, China's growing ambition to dominate AI as a tool of geoeconomic and technological power can be observed. A concrete example is DeepSeek, an advanced artificial intelligence model that emerges as a direct competitor to Western systems. By offering an open and accessible platform, the model expands Chinese influence over developing countries, which may choose to adopt Chinese technological solutions instead of American ones. This movement reinforces that China reaches global competitive levels, fundamental to consolidating its international technological influence. Another central element is the Digital Silk Road (DSR). According to GEBRICS (2023):

[...] The so-called Digital Silk Road (DSR), announced in 2015 and officially launched in 2017, aims to extend the reach of Chinese influence in an extremely sensitive and internationally contested area: Technology. Among the projects and initiatives promoted by the DSR are the construction of terrestrial and submarine fiber optic cables, satellite links, as well as the intensification of cooperation in areas such as the digital economy, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, quantum computing, big data, cloud computing, and smart cities (GEBRICS, 2023).

From this perspective, by building critical infrastructure such as fiber optic cables and satellite links and promoting cooperation in cutting-edge areas like AI and big data, these initiatives show that China does not act merely as a technology provider, but also as a strategic actor capable of shaping global standards, flows, and digital infrastructure, reinforcing its geopolitical and technological presence in the countries participating in the initiative, making them deeply dependent on Chinese technological diplomacy and strengthening China's power in one of the most internationally contested areas.

Conclusion

China's presence in Latin America goes far beyond simple commercial relations. The country has established itself as a strategic economic partner, especially for Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, and Bolivia, importing essential commodities and offering manufactured products. This relationship strengthens trade ties, but also highlights a dependence on raw materials that makes innovation and sustainability central challenges for the region's future.

In the political field, Chinese diplomacy is flexible and diverse. Through bilateral agreements, infrastructure investments, and participation in forums such as CELAC-China, Beijing seeks to expand its influence, strengthen regional cooperation, and offer alternatives to the historical dependence on traditional powers, adapting its actions to the needs of each country.

In the technological area, China stands out as a global leader, investing in artificial intelligence, 5G, and digital infrastructure, as well as projects like the Digital Silk Road. These initiatives not only modernize the region but also bring Latin American countries closer to Chinese technological standards, increasing their strategic dependence. In summary, the Chinese presence offers important opportunities for economic growth and innovation, but also imposes challenges that require planning and policies.

REFERENCES

- Celac & China. (2025). Plano conjunto de ação CELAC-China para cooperação em áreas-chave (2025-2027). Fórum CELAC-China.
https://www.economia.unicamp.br/images/arquivos/artigos/TD/TD422_1.pdf
- Council on Foreign Relations. (s.d.). China's Influence in Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Security, Energy, BRI. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-influence-latin-americaargentina-brazil-venezuela-security-energy-bri>
- Gebrics (Grupo de Estudos sobre os BRICS). (2023, 19 de maio). Rota da Seda Digital na África.
<https://sites.usp.br/gebrics/rota-da-seda-digital-na-africa/>
- Hiratuka, C., & Diegues, A. C. (2021). Inteligência artificial na estratégia de desenvolvimento da China contemporânea (Texto para Discussão, n. 422). Instituto de Economia, Universidade Estadual de Campinas. https://www.economia.unicamp.br/images/arquivos/artigos/TD/TD422_1.pdf

- Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada. (s.d.). A China e a América Latina: uma análise das relações comerciais. Boletim Internacional, 21(2).
https://portalantigo.ipea.gov.br/agencia/images/stories/PDFs/boletim_internacional/bepi21_arto2.pdf
- Pini, A. M. (2015). A crescente presença chinesa na América Latina: desafios ao Brasil. Boletim de Economia e Política Internacional, 21, 22-31. <https://www.ipea.gov.br/bepi/>
- Silva, J. (2021). A influência da China na América Latina: um estudo de caso. Revista de Estudos Políticos, 12(3), 45-67.
<https://www.scielo.br/j/rep/a/G95GdThLtYgnrWCD6gPBCSc/?format=pdf&lang=pt>
- Tricontinental. (s.d.). Enquanto EUA buscam retomar suas esferas de influência, China responde com sua multipolaridade cosmopolita. <https://thetricontinental.org/pt-pt/brasil/enquanto-eua-buscam-retomar-suas-esferas-deinfluencia-china-responde-com-sua-multipolaridade-cosmopolita/>