



LOOKING TOWARDS CHINA

MULTIPLICITY AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE
LATIN AMERICAN PEOPLE



Dossier n° 51
Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research
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The art in this dossier features a large-scale mural by Chinese artists Shengtian Zheng and Jingbo Sun entitled *Winds of Fusang* (2017). ‘Fusang’ is an ancient Chinese word referring to what some believe to be the shores of Mexico. The work is an homage to Latin America’s influence on China, particularly that of Mexican artists on the development of modern Chinese art. With portraits of 50 people – from David Alfaro Siqueiros to Lu Xun, from Frida Kahlo to Li Cheng, and from José Venturelli to Shengtian Zheng himself – the mural is a recovery of a rich tradition of cultural exchanges between the peoples of Latin America and China.

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鄭勝天 阿波堂 1945年 100x150cm



阿波堂

鄭勝天

Introduction

The prophecies regarding the ‘New American Century’ have been left behind as the People’s Republic of China re-emerges as both an economic powerhouse and a global player. The United States’ strategies to advance its vision of unipolarity have been buried under the rubble of a Western world that sought to make the entire planet its dominion.

The longed for Western, globalised capitalist world has not lived up to the expectations of even its most enthusiastic advocates. Today we are witnessing a shift towards a multipolar world, despite the aspirations of neoliberal globalists, neoconservatives, and those who favour the US model of development (‘Americanists’). Of course, this situation has favoured both the emergence of new right-wing movements as well as the re-emergence of the old right in new guises.¹ This crisis of hegemony, which goes hand in hand with the geopolitical transition already in full swing, poses profound challenges but also offers major opportunities for the people of the Global South.

The decline of the US empire and the shaping of a multipolar world that began in 2001 and accelerated following the 2008 financial crisis opens up a new series of possibilities and discussions for Latin America, which the United States has long considered its backyard. This reality has sparked debates about the prospects for regional autonomy in a transition that moves away from dependence on the

core capitalist countries and accounts for the needs of the majority. In this context, two key questions arise: what does China's re-emergence and its global influence mean for increased national autonomy in the region? What role can Latin American integration processes play in using the region's resources to satisfy the needs of the majority of its peoples?

Latin America today is a continent caught between two contradictory dynamics. On the one hand, new popular projects have managed to reach the state level as a result of the struggles waged against the new offensive of the right, the ruling classes, and US imperialism since at least 2012. On the other hand, a series of right-wing groups have emerged with high levels of legitimacy, even when this puts the very foundations of bourgeois democracy in crisis.

Looking Towards China: Multipolarity as an Opportunity for the Latin American People (dossier no. 51) discusses how the opportunities provided by China's economic investment and geopolitical power could open up new possibilities for Latin America and the Caribbean and a new type of regional integration – one that is more urgent today than ever as we are faced with the desperate moves of an empire in decline.





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1. The Escalating Transition from US Hegemony

We are currently witnessing a geopolitical transition of global hegemony from the West to the East, which is unprecedented in the history of the capitalist world-system. Though this transformation is not the first of its kind in history, it nonetheless represents a significant change in course. Firstly, this transition coincides with an unparalleled social, economic, and ecological crisis that some refer to as a ‘crisis of civilisation’. Secondly, for the first time in its almost five hundred years of existence, the core of the capitalist system is beginning to shift from its Atlantic axis. This not only explains the dynamics of the trade war between China and the United States and the struggles for global predominance, but also the weakening of the Atlantic alliance between North Americans and Europeans and their respective internal crises. This includes the resurgence of fascist and ultra-conservative forces, as well as the exacerbation of regional political conflicts in the spheres of influence of rising first- and second-tier powers. We are witnessing this in Yemen, Kashmir, and Ukraine, for example, the latter of which illustrates a type of intervention known as hybrid war.²

As world-systems theorist Giovanni Arrighi has argued, each period of a global hegemonic transition is characterised by an increase in competition between states and between capitalists.³ This also leads to an exacerbation of social struggles within each nation and is preceded by a ‘signal crisis’ characterised by financial expansion. The

signal crisis of US hegemony began to reveal itself at the end of the 1960s; in 1979, the ‘Volcker Shock’ – when the US Treasury Department hiked up dollar interest rates and triggered the global debt crisis – clearly indicated that this hegemonic shift was underway with a process of accelerated financialisation that was built on the steep decline of the productive economy.⁴ It is worth clarifying that this first sign of the crisis did not have an immediate impact on the global order; the United States remained the most powerful country in the world for decades afterwards. However, the emergence of financialisation demonstrated the limits of what Bretton Woods⁵ apologists called ‘the Golden Age of Capitalism’.

In the decades preceding this signal crisis, the United States enjoyed a privileged place in the world order. Not only was it a leading force in the economic and military spheres, but it also brought about a major change compared to previous empires. It introduced the ‘American way of life’ (i.e., one that bases personal fulfilment on consumption) and presented its paradigm of liberal democracy as the only possibilities for the entire world.⁶ However, the velvet glove could not hide the imperial iron fist; from the 1950s to 1970s, the people of the Global South challenged the hegemonic political and cultural paradigm and set clear limits on the reproduction of the world in the image and likeness of the United States and its allies. This took place through social revolutions, national liberation processes, and gatherings that furthered the unity of peoples who had been oppressed by the strategy of the North.

Following the Volcker Shock, the hegemonic crisis progressively deepened. Financialisation reached unprecedented levels and

resulted in a handful of the super-rich controlling more than 60% of the world's income.⁷ Militarisation and the war cycle intensified, as was the case during other processes of global hegemonic transition such as the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15), and World War I and II (1914–18; 1939–45). From the early 1990s onwards, US military interventions around the world multiplied, reflecting the belief that the new century had ushered in the northern power as the lasting global leader after the fall of the Soviet Union. Among the most significant were several direct interventions through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, former Yugoslavia, Libya, and Haiti and several other covert interventions carried out by the United States and its allies against Venezuela, Honduras, Yemen, and elsewhere, exposing the harshest face of US imperialism and unipolarity.

Caught up in triumphalism following the defeat of its arch-rival the Soviet Union, the US did not appear to hear the whispers of a world that had begun to change significantly, though the full scale of this shift would not be seen until the late 1990s. As the United States crumbles, East Asia – and China in particular – are re-emerging, reversing a process known as the Great Divergence which saw industrial capitalism emerge as a global system and eclipse and subordinate the Asian continent, putting the West at the global forefront in economic and geopolitical terms.⁸

It should be clarified that there is no direct causal relationship between the re-emergence of East Asia and the onset of the crisis of US hegemony. Rather, the decline of US hegemony corresponds to the global crisis of capitalism, which came to be known as 'global

turbulence' and which was met in the West with a search for a solution that would conserve the status quo.⁹

As the crisis of US hegemony has accelerated since the late 1990s, China has intensified its strategy to contest a new world order with multipolar characteristics. The repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999 – which was passed in 1933 following the Great Depression and had barred commercial and investment banks from merging – as well as the increased sway of neoconservatives after 2001 and the new military incursions of the so-called 'War on Terror' further undermined US power and deepened the internal tensions between globalists and Americanists that continue to this day.¹⁰

The projects at play within the US establishment offer nothing more than unipolarity for the countries of the South. On the one hand there are the projects of unilateral unipolarity, which eschew diplomatic and cooperative forms, even in relations with allies and are defended by Americanists and the right wing of the Republican Party. On the other, there are projects of multilateral unipolarity, which seek to construct a broader front within the North and are at the core of the foreign policy of Biden and other globalists such as Obama, Clinton, and a large part of the Democratic Party.

China's re-emergence minimises the space for unipolarity to advance and opens up windows of possibility for the world's periphery. The old order born of Bretton Woods no longer carries the same weight and has lost power compared to previous periods. However, the Bretton Woods institutions continue to be used as tools to further imperial rule, even if they are unable to contain the

emergence of new powers. They seek to deepen alignment with certain projects of unipolarity through increasingly coercive measures: financial conditionality through the International Monetary Fund; trade and financial sanctions for designated 'rogue states'; encouragement of right-wing and anti-popular options in several Latin American countries; attempts at military control through buffer states in Eurasia; and the financing of destabilisation strategies of various kinds. The United States is openly working with all its might to regain its strategic positions despite the damage that its actions will have on the Global South.



2. The Re-Emergence of Asia and the Multipolar World

The nineteenth century saw the consolidation of the Great Divergence, which marked the beginning of the capitalist West's global dominance as well as the destruction of the social formations in Asia.¹¹

Following this period of the peripheralisation of Asia (a product of British capitalist strategy), the region began to recover economically and politically from 1914 to 1917 and made a significant leap forward in the 1960s. At that time, the 'Asian Tigers' and Japan began to make huge strides in developing their productive forces. Meanwhile, far from subordinating its growth to bilateral agreements with the United States (like the rest of the East Asian states), the People's Republic of China opened up its economy after Mao's death in 1976, opting for strong state-controlled development planning.¹² This led to rising economic growth with an average of 9.5% per year between 1978 and 2017.¹³ This development strategy was made possible by the achievements of the revolution led by Mao Zedong in 1949. Since that time, the People's Republic of China has rebuilt its national sovereignty and strengthened its state institutions, achieved a significant level of social equality, promoted a successful model of land reform by nationalising land and giving the peasantry access to it, and reached a high rate of economic growth (nearly 11% per year during the two and a half decades following the 1949 revolution). This allowed the country to radically

expand the state's ability to support a development strategy that prioritises the needs of the people, poverty reduction, and social inclusion. As Samir Amin argued, China became the only fully sovereign emerging country to do this without following the stages of capitalist development proposed by Walt Rostow, the ideologue of the concept of economic development of the core.¹⁴

In the 1970s, when the capitalist West was beginning to feel the effects of major global economic turbulence, the People's Republic of China was compelled to change direction in order to incorporate a significant proportion of its urban population (which had increased significantly since the late 1940s) into the labour force by increasing both its productive and technological capacity. The Deng Xiaoping government made progress in a series of significant reforms such as shifting towards a market economy (i.e., non-centralised price setting); foreign investment with clear state control over the use of that investment; and changing the way that farmers worked the land in order to increase agricultural production without causing a regression towards latifundia.

The data clearly shows that, at the end of the 1970s, China began a course of sustained economic growth, with high levels of planning, highly accelerated poverty reduction processes, and a growing share of global trade and production. As a consequence, East Asia went from representing 5% of the world GDP in 1950 to 20% in 2003.¹⁵ In 2020, the People's Republic of China was the only single country to surpass Western Europe's cumulative share of the world GDP (13.3%), with a share of 22.7%.¹⁶

It is undeniable that China is a global player in economic terms, driving growth in several regions of the world. As a result, it has become a major power in the global geopolitical order, a fact which cannot be ignored by even the governments that are most closely aligned with the United States. At the same time, China's model of economic success breaks with the neoliberal moulds that have been applied across the entire Third World since the 1970s. This is disconcerting to those who want to attribute the key to China's meteoric growth and development to pro-market reforms and economic openness. Rather, state economic planning appears to be the key to China's success, which presents a promising model for all nations stifled by decades of International Monetary Fund mandates.

There are, however, two interesting questions regarding China's re-emergence. First, there is a long-standing debate about the socialist character of China's economy. Several Western leftist approaches consider China to have taken its own path, transitioning from a socialist economy to capitalist development through stages similar to those followed by Europe and the United States.¹⁷ In contrast, a number of intellectuals have shifted the focus of this debate by arguing that China has indeed followed its own process of development, combining an 'industrious revolution' that is based on a social division of labour and small-scale decentralisation with strategic socialist planning.¹⁸ This strengthens the socio-economic aspect of Chinese development, which bears no resemblance to the Western capitalist development model. China's model constantly generates jobs and plans and distributes employment opportunities to meet social needs such as health, education, and housing. At

the same time, land, banks, and strategic natural resources are the exclusive property of the state, which has not changed despite trade liberalisation and globalisation.

A second key point is how China relates to the rest of the world as an emerging economic power. One interpretation is that, as part of its development, China effectively subordinates the sovereign choices of periphery countries in a manner similar to Western imperialism.¹⁹ However, this ignores a number of factors. For one, China saw unprecedented development and splendour prior to the nineteenth century based on principles of cooperation, non-intervention, and respect for other nations. This was reinforced after the 1949 revolution in what became known as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence between China, India, and Myanmar: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries; equality and mutual benefit; and, finally, peaceful coexistence.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has reiterated these tenets of peaceful coexistence on several occasions, such as in his speech on the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China:

On the journey ahead, we will remain committed to promoting peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, to an independent foreign policy of peace, and to the path of peaceful development. We will work to build a new type of international relations and a human community

with a shared future, promote high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative through joint efforts, and use China's new achievements in development to provide the world with new opportunities.²⁰

This strategic vision of international relations is diametrically opposed to that offered by the US empire and its plans for intervention, hybrid wars, lists of 'rogue states', human rights violations, the coercive export of its political model, and complete subordination to the logic of the financialised capitalism that dominates the West, among other issues. However, despite these principles, China's tensions with other states continued, such as with India (1962) and the USSR (1966).



3. The Belt and Road Initiative and the Importance of Latin America in China's Strategy

In 1904, British geographer Halford Mackinder wrote that every imperialist power has contemplated control of Eurasia or blocking the development of any other power in the region.²¹ Mackinder's most famous maxim states: 'Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the World'. This summarises what later became known as the Heartland or 'pivot area' theory, which considers central Eurasia to be the world's strategic territory; after all, it is the largest continuous strip of land on the planet, where the highest population density is concentrated, and whose historical-cultural continuity dates back thousands of years. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) supports the integration of Eurasia by building transport systems, infrastructure, communications networks, and international trade zones in the region. China's strategy of promoting Eurasian unity contrasts starkly with the strategies implemented by the British Empire, and then by the United States in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The last major Western advance in this sense was seen in the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan (the latter of which concluded in 2021 with the withdrawal of US troops from Kabul).

The BRI, initially known as the One Belt One Road project, was formally announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in September

2013 during an official visit to Kazakhstan. Initially, the BRI sought to build communications links and integrate western China – the poorest and most isolated part of the country – with Central Asian countries and Europe. Over the years, the BRI has expanded to include maritime routes that incorporate Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, Africa, and, since 2017, Latin America as it expands towards the Arctic Ocean.

The BRI, also known as the ‘Chinese Marshall Plan’, has two central axes. The first is the development of a land route connecting China with Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Europe through trains that run from the Balkans to France. The second is the expansion of a maritime route to Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East known as the String of Pearls, which includes installing commercial ports in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and Caribbean Sea.

Although China has prioritised Eurasia as a regional hub in the initial phase of the BRI, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have become increasingly important to the initiative.

Over the last fifteen years, China’s relations with the LAC have greatly expanded. In November 2008, the Chinese government published a white paper on LAC, China’s first policy document regarding the region, which highlights the importance China attaches to LAC.²² In the fifteen years prior to 2008, China had already formally established strategic partnerships with Brazil (1993), Venezuela (2001), Mexico (2003), and Argentina (2004),

and later did so with Chile (2012). Trade between China and LAC grew from US \$14.9 billion in 2001 to US \$261.3 billion in 2012, making China the region's second largest trading partner. By the end of 2012, China's direct investment stock in the region totalled US \$68.2 billion, according to Chinese government figures. In addition, China signed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Chile (2005), Peru (2009), and Costa Rica (2010).

Since Xi Jinping took office, China's relations with LAC have taken on greater importance. In a 2014 meeting between Chinese and Latin American and Caribbean leaders in Brazil, and then at the First Ministerial Meeting of the Forum between China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) held in 2015 in Beijing, President Xi Jinping proposed an initiative to establish a new framework for comprehensive cooperation between China and LAC called '1+3+6'. The number one refers to the China-LAC Cooperation Plan 2015–2019, while there are three engines (trade, investment, and financial cooperation) and six areas of cooperation (energy resources, infrastructure, agriculture, manufacturing, technological innovation, and information technology).²³

In November 2016, the Chinese government issued a second white paper entitled 'China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean'. Though the paper addresses a wide range of topics, its focus is on China's model of economic cooperation with the region: trade, investment, finance, agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure, resources and energy, customs, quality inspection, tourism, public debt reduction, and technical assistance. The objectives

pursued are clear in terms of China's need to access raw materials both in order to fuel its rapid economic growth but also (and above all) to position itself as a global player that tends towards a fairer and more respectful world order. The paper places particular emphasis on this alternative model, which encompasses much more than simple commercial relations in accordance with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The white paper outlines the importance that China attaches to the growing international role that Latin America has acquired in recent years, describing inter-regional ties as 'strategic'. It also makes clear that the One China policy is the basis and necessary condition for countries in the region to establish bilateral relations with China.²⁴ China also seeks to avoid stirring up sensitivities and resentment from the US by limiting cooperation with the region to defence exchanges, cooperation, and dialogue.

Although China avoids any kind of diplomatic confrontation with the US, Washington's response to China's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean has often been hostile and threatening. There is a direct connection between the US imperialist advance on the region and the growing ties between China and the revolutionary projects defending their sovereignty. There is remarkable continuity between a number of events, for example:

1. The intensification of the US-led hybrid war against Venezuela and the strengthening of commercial, political, and military ties with China.

2. The parliamentary coup against Dilma Rousseff, supported by the US and launched shortly after the BRICS Summit held in Fortaleza and the CELAC-China Summit held in Brasilia, both in 2014.
3. US imperialism's commitment to Mauricio Macri in Argentina after the development of a multipolar agenda by the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.
4. Ecuador's subordination to Washington's agenda with the arrival of Lenín Moreno.
5. The 2019 coup d'état in Bolivia, which was supported by the US and halted various cooperation projects with China that had been conducted either bilaterally or regionally through CELAC, whose founding was made possible by the initiative and support of former Bolivian President Evo Morales along with regional leaders Hugo Chávez and Rafael Correa.

Latin American countries were first invited to join the BRI in May 2017 at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing. The event was attended by then President of Argentina Mauricio Macri, then President of Chile Michelle Bachelet, and twenty ministers from other LAC countries. Of these two countries, only Chile continued to deepen its economic ties with China, while Argentina boycotted CELAC and cooled relations with China outside of formal and commercial spheres. In 2017, Panama

– a strategically positioned country that connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans – announced the severance of diplomatic relations with Taiwan, thereby recognising Beijing’s One China policy to establish bilateral relations. A few months later, Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela and Chinese President Xi Jinping signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation within the Framework of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative. In 2018, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador also established diplomatic relations with China. Out of the 33 countries in the region, there are now 24 LAC countries that have established diplomatic relations with China. In addition, 12 LAC countries (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Suriname, and Jamaica) have established strategic partnership relations with China, the first seven of which have established comprehensive strategic partnerships with China.

The second ministerial meeting between China and CELAC held in Chile in January 2018 marked a fresh starting point, as China formally invited Latin American states to join the BRI. The proposal was very well received by regional representatives of different ideological backgrounds, with Chile’s neoliberal government being among the most enthusiastic. The meeting saw the approval of a special declaration on the Belt and Road Initiative, in which all governments agreed that the Chinese government’s initiative represented an important opportunity to strengthen development cooperation among the countries involved.

Meanwhile, China put forward five proposals with the aim of deepening cooperation in key areas:

- Connecting the land and the sea by strengthening infrastructure.
- Opening up a large market by facilitating trade and investment.
- Accelerating cooperation over production in high-value-added sectors.
- Enhancing the cooperation of emerging sectors for green development and innovation.
- Increasing equitable cultural exchanges.
- Building mutual trust through research about both China and Latin America.

The summit put the US government on alert and, a month later, in February 2018, it sent then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to visit several Latin American and Caribbean countries. Tillerson did not shy away from making statements praising the Monroe Doctrine, condemning Venezuela, and warning of China's alleged nefarious ambitions in the region, cautioning that 'Latin America does not need new imperial powers that seek only to benefit their own people. ... China's state-led model of development is reminiscent of the past. It doesn't have to be this hemisphere's future'.²⁵

Despite Washington's efforts, ties between China and LAC have thus far continued to deepen. The Sixth CELAC Summit in September 2021 was characterised by strong support for regional integration and ties with China. The summit questioned the interventionist role of the Organisation of American States (OAS), condemned the blockade against Cuba, and advocated for Venezuela's full participation of in the bloc. Member states also committed to sustain ties with partners outside of the region – especially with the CELAC-China Forum. In this context, the China-CELAC Joint Action Plan for Cooperation in Key Areas 2022–2024 detailed opportunities in various fields such as security, economy, tourism, finance, and technological innovation.²⁶

This strengthening of political relations was facilitated by a change in several governments in the region to administrations in favour of multipolarity, but also because the total value of trade between China and Latin America and the Caribbean reached a new peak in 2021 at more than US \$450 billion, and there is every indication that it will continue to grow steadily. According to the latest Statistical Bulletin on China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment published by the Chinese government, Latin America accounts for 10.8% of China's outward investment flows.²⁷ This makes the region the main recipient of Chinese investment outside of Asia, surpassing Europe, North America, Africa, and Oceania.

Currently, 21 LAC countries have signed cooperation memoranda or agreements with China as part of the Belt and Road Initiative: Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, the Dominican Republic, Barbados,

Jamaica, Cuba, Suriname, Bolivia, Guyana, Venezuela, Uruguay, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and, most recently, Nicaragua (January 2022) and Argentina (February 2022). Since China is a major geopolitical power, some form of coordination with the country is now a reality for the entire region. However, the questions remain: from the standpoint of the Latin American people, what are the political objectives of this deepened connection? What will be the development agenda for the continent?



4. Latin America and the Integration Projects at Play

Governments of different political persuasions in Latin America have made progress in forging closer economic and political ties with the People’s Republic of China. The BRI has generated enthusiasm among different Latin American governments that are accustomed to the financial debt plans dictated by Washington, accompanied by little or no investment in infrastructure. In addition, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the collaboration of major players such as China and Russia in providing access to vaccines far surpassed US assistance – even to its most servile partners in the region. For example, Chile’s neoliberal government headed by Sebastián Piñera advanced its participation in the BRI with a US \$42.8 billion infrastructure investment plan.²⁸ Similarly, the government of Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, one of the clearest representatives of the continent’s new right-wing configurations, signed a trade agreement with China in 2019. Even Colombia’s conservative government is debating joining the BRI after President Iván Duque’s visit to China in 2019. Only a few of the region’s governments have been openly pro-US and anti-China. Among them is the right-wing government of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, but even his commitment to furthering US interests has not received support from Economy Minister Paulo Guedes.²⁹

On the other hand, progressive and left-wing governments in the region have maintained flexible relations with China, which has allowed them to receive an influx of hard currency either to put towards developing certain industries (especially those linked to mineral extraction and infrastructure), or to stabilise local currencies in the face of the speculative manoeuvres of US financial capital. This is of course the case with the relations developed between China and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, but also with other progressive governments such as in Mexico and Argentina (the latter of which signed a US \$23 billion investment agreement to join the BRI in February 2022).

The potential that China offers Latin American nations to pursue a sovereign development project that prioritises the needs of the people depends on two factors:

1. First, the ability of popular movements to politicise their struggles and displace oligarchies from state power. This is crucial because Latin America's dependence upon the US-centred trade and investment system is also deeply intertwined with the colonised ideology of the ruling classes, who generally seek to become appendages of US capital. This ideological dependency often goes against people's own interests.
2. Secondly, the rekindling of a process of regional integration and unity that prioritises cooperation over competition and that excludes the United States and its interventionist foreign policy from Latin American political institutions.

The contending projects in the region centre around two main contradictions:

1. **Unipolarity versus multipolarity.** Will the Latin American state projects help the United States maintain and strengthen its fragile unipolar ambition, which was strengthened after the collapse of the USSR in 1990–91? Or will they work towards promoting a world order premised on the growth of regionalism?
2. **The development of underdevelopment versus national and regional sovereignty.** Will the Latin American state projects continue to allow themselves to be subordinated in a world economic system that creates wealth for the North and for a small section of capitalists in the region while immiserating the majority of its peoples (in other words, what Andre Gunder Frank called ‘development of underdevelopment’)? Or will they drive an agenda that prioritises national, regional, and popular development?

The role of China in Latin America does not fall onto one side or the other of these contradictions. It is possible for Chinese integration to further the ‘development of underdevelopment’ if the Latin American state projects produce a new relationship of dependency on China by merely exporting primary products. On the other hand, it will be far better for the region’s peoples if the relationship is based on equality (multipolarity) as well as the transfer of technology, the upscaling of production processes, and regional integration (national and regional sovereignty).

The Latin American right, which is committed to free trade policies, has developed a pragmatic approach to China. This pragmatism is rooted both in multilateralism that nonetheless does not challenge US unipolarity and in a combination of primary resource extraction with some upgrading of high-value production. They accept the role of China but do not wish to allow the expansion commercial ties with China or to produce any profound change in terms of the economic and social structure of their countries – much less in the structure of the current global order. This is the case with the governments of Sebastián Piñera in Chile, Iván Duque in Colombia, Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, and some others. As they see it, China's economic potential offers a way to reproduce local oligarchies and their power through an international position that continues to be peripheral and deepens external dependence.

However, other projects explore the potential for autonomy and national sovereignty in their relations with China. This group of countries is beginning to generate a proposal that takes advantage of the opportunities for mutually beneficial exchanges with China to develop a project for structural change in the economic sphere and sovereignty in the political sphere – some of them at a steadier pace than others. This approach offers a pathway to advance the Bolivarian project, which has been under a harsh attack of increasing sanctions and hybrid warfare by the US.

Along these lines, the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of the Americas (ALBA) – a body of nine states founded in 2004 by then Presidents Hugo Chávez Frías and Fidel Castro that promotes the twin goals of sovereignty from external domination and integration

for internal advancement – represents a regional alternative in terms of international relations. This project is based on the importance of cooperation as opposed to competition in terms of regional trade; the complementarity of exchanges based on the needs of each nation and region; the importance of unity to face possible negotiations with other regional blocs; the objective of a regional currency to break with dependency on the US dollar; and the coordination of infrastructure development and financing initiatives (such as the Bank of the South). China's resurgence presents an opportunity to advance a development agenda based on cooperation and non-interference.

Ultimately, leaving behind the path of Western capitalist development requires a different form of globalisation and a break with Western notions of modernity. It requires a globalisation based on multipolarity, cooperation, and planning in which Latin America succeeds in breaking out of the vicious cycle of international relations as zero-sum games and makes progress towards win-win integration. China is emerging as a major world power whose development is changing the world in every sense. However, building a new, multipolar future that uplifts the sovereignty of developing nations will also depend on whether the people take advantage of this changing geopolitical reality to consolidate a project for a country and *Patria Grande* (a 'Great Homeland') which puts the interests of the majority first.³⁰





Art Credit

Shengtian Zheng and Jingbo Sun

Winds from Fusang, 2017.

Acrylic on canvas, panel of six, 320 x 200 cm each.

Courtesy of the artists.

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3. Zhang Guangyu (1900–1964)
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11. Diego Rivera (1886–1957)
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19. Arturo Estrada Hernández (1925–)
20. Mario Orozco Rivera (1930–1998)
21. Zhou Enlai (1898–1976)
22. Celia Calderón (1921–1969)
23. José Raúl Anguiano Valadez (1915–2006)
24. Arturo García Bustos (1926–2017)
25. Rina Lazo (1923–2019)

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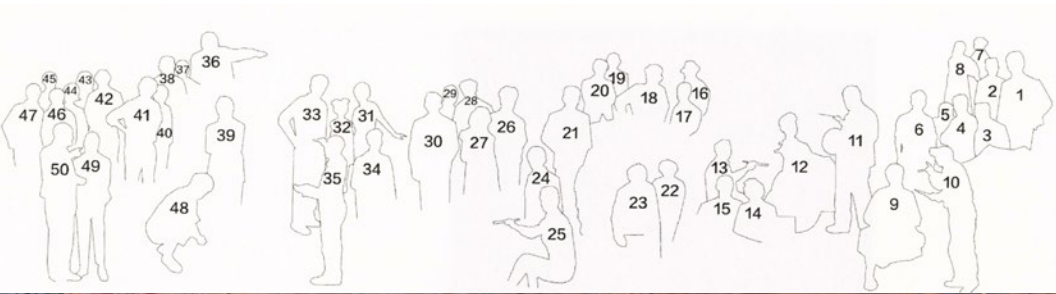
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- 27. Angelica Arenal (1910–1989)
- 28. Wang Qi (1918–2016)
- 29. Yao Zhonghua (1939–)
- 30. Dong Xiwen (1914–1973)
- 31. Delia Baraona (d. 1988)
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- 35. Zhuo Dong (1980–)
- 36. Yiming Hou (1930–)
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Endnotes

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- 4 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
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