The dragon in the Andes: China-Ecuador relationships between South-South cooperation and renewed dependency.

Ximena Zapata Mafla¹
PhD (c) GIGA-German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Germany

Diana Castro Salgado²
PhD (c) Latin American Studies, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Ecuador

Daniele Benzi³
PhD Professor at Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Ecuador

Summary

The rise of China as a global player has been one of the most important issues in the world’s recent political and economic developments. Its rapid insertion into the global economy and political activism at the multilateral level have awakened expectations and concerns both in the developed and developing world. In the case of Latin America, the effects of China’s expansion as well as the reactions to its impact have widely differed, being framed under two contrasting interpretations.

The first one considers China’s rise as a part of a “New Bandung” process in the Global South, therefore assuming its bilateral relations with developing countries as guided by principles of South-South cooperation and mutual benefit. The second one takes a less optimistic view and argues that China’s expansion is shaping new forms of colonialism such

¹ Ximena Zapata Mafla is a PhD candidate at the GIGA-German Institute of Global and Area Studies. She holds a Master’s Degree in International Relations with a concentration in International Cooperation and Negotiation (FLACSO-Ecuador). Her research focuses on emerging powers in South America, South-South cooperation and regional integration in Latin America, and security in South America.
² Diana Castro Salgado is a PhD student in Latin American Studies and Master in International Relations at Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Ecuador. She is currently a professor in the Political Science and International Relations School, at Universidad de las Américas, Ecuador. Her research focuses on China-Latin America relations, economic cooperation, commodity-backed finance and investment in infrastructure and energy sectors, social and environmental impacts.
³ Daniele Benzi is PhD in Science, Technology and Society (UNICAL) and Master in Latin American Studies (UNAM). He was formerly a full-time professor in the Postgraduate program of Sociology, at the ICSyH-BUAP (México), associate professor in the Department of International Studies at FLACSO-Ecuador and associate professor in the School of Sociology at Universidad Central del Ecuador. He is currently a professor in the Social and Global Studies Department at Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Ecuador. His research interests include comparative regionalism and integration in Latin America and the Caribbean, Latin American thought and South-South cooperation/relations.
as the acceleration of exploitation of non-renewable resources, the deepening of Latin America’s historical condition as a raw-materials provider for the world’s economy and the reproduction of renewed patters of dependence.

The proposal presented here aims at bringing this debate to a more specific level of analysis. While several studies have been produced on the subject, particularly in regards to the economic and commercial links between Latin America as a whole and China, just few of them have examined country-specific dynamics. Indeed, the latter have mainly focused on the biggest Latin American economies, as it is the case of Brazil, Mexico and Argentina.

To overcome these shortcomings, this paper questions about the presence of China in small South American nations. Taking Ecuador as a case study, our purpose is to examine the state of its relations with China unveiling both, the cooperation and dependency patterns since the last decade. We will offer a short overview of the Chinese foreign policy toward the region trying to establish whether Ecuador, as a small Andean nation located in the Pacific Rim, has any geostrategic relevance for the Asian power. Then, political relations, trade agreements, credit, investment and military cooperation will be discussed, seeking to identify winners and losers in the context of a complex political process as the Ecuadorian “Revolución Ciudadana”. Finally, from an international political economic approach, we will critically reflect on the meaning and scope of the notions of South-South cooperation and mutual benefit defended by both governments in their official discourse and rhetoric.

**Key words:**

China, Ecuador, dependency, South-South cooperation, economic-political relations