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# **Playing a two-faced game in a changing arena**

A Neo-Gramscian analysis of China's policy on Latin America

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## **Abstract**

The position of The People's Republic of China in international relations has developed significantly during the 21st century. In Latin America, growing Chinese engagement has been particularly visible. The purpose of this thesis is to gain better understanding of China's increasing influence in Latin America over time, examine possible power relations, as well as discuss if the country can be seen as a new hegemonic force in the region. The primary material consists of China's two policy papers on Latin America and the Caribbean from 2008 and 2016, which are analyzed and then compared to detect how policy has developed over time. This is done by using the method of Critical Discourse Analysis according to Teun A. van Dijk's principles, and applying the theoretical framework of Neo-Gramscianism. The study's results show that there has been a slight change in Chinese policy between 2008 and 2016, from mainly emphasizing South-South cooperation and common development, to increasingly stressing the emergence of markets and the importance of China's own development. Due to the identification of discursive strategies, it can be assumed that China is reproducing a power relation by language. Through application of Neo-Gramscian theory, the slight changes in policy are identified as consequences of social relations. Further, it additionally concludes that China, in terms of their current involvement in the region, cannot yet be classified as neither a full hegemon nor a radical counter-hegemonic force in the Neo-Gramscian sense.

*Key words: Hegemony, power, dominance, The People's Republic of China, Latin America, Chinese foreign policy, Neo-Gramscianism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Teun A. van Dijk*

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# 1. Introduction

“Hegemony is as old as mankind”

- Zbigniew Brzezinski<sup>1</sup>

International politics have throughout history been characterized by the presence of superpowers. During the Cold War, the world’s political landscape was distinguished by bipolarity and was split into two rival superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Each superpower exercised political and economic control over different parts of the world. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the world fell into unipolarity, with the United States remaining as the main world power.<sup>2</sup>

However, in recent years, China has grown into an increasingly strong actor on the world stage, expanding influence far beyond the country’s own borders. This has especially been noticed in Latin America, a region which has been subject to US hegemony since the early 19th century.<sup>3</sup> In 2008 and 2016, the Chinese government released official policy papers on Latin America and Caribbean, which outlined their vital goals and instruments for economic and political engagement in the region. Since the first release, Chinese engagement in Latin America, particularly trade and investment, has increased. Due to the history of US influence in Latin America, China’s presence in the region and the nature of the contemporary relationship has been thoroughly discussed and questioned.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this thesis is to better understand China’s growing engagement in Latin America. It seeks to examine this context to identify and understand eventual power relations, relationships of dependency and exercise of hegemony within international relations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. Basic Books, 1997, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> León-Manriquez, Jose & Alvarez, Luis, F., “Mao’s steps in Monroe’s backyard: towards a US-China hegemonic struggle in Latin America?”. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*. 2014 Special Edition, Vol. 57, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> León-Manriquez, Jose & Alvarez, Luis, F., 2014, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Hegemony is usually defined as control or influence over others, which for example can be of political, economic, or military character. There are different perceptions of what hegemony is. However, in this thesis, hegemony refers to the word in the Gramscian sense. This definition and its content are presented more closely in chapter 3, containing the theoretical framework. Power is defined as having the ability to make someone act in a certain way that they would not otherwise have done.

China's pronounced approach towards Latin America will be examined and analyzed through a Critical Discourse Analysis and a Neo-Gramscian theoretical perspective.

## 1.1 Background

The politics and economy in the region of Latin America have historically been characterized by foreign interference. Ever since the withdrawal of the main former colonial powers Spain and Portugal in the 19th century, the US has maintained strong influence in Latin America.<sup>5</sup> During the Cold War, the Monroe Doctrine from 1823 was reinterpreted and the US regularly intervened in the region, at the time seen as a battleground against the Soviet Union and communist influence.<sup>6</sup> Progressive governments were repeatedly overthrown by the US, which supported strategic allies in a battle against what was perceived as a security threat in its own backyard.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1990's, the US strategy towards Latin America somewhat changed, affected by important events such as the fall of Soviet Union and the implementation of the Washington Consensus. It now focused less on aggressive geopolitical coercion and more on economic issues, such as free trade deals.<sup>8</sup> The early 2000's saw the emergence of the Pink Tide, a number of elected left-wing governments in Latin America challenging US hegemony and neoliberalism in the region.<sup>9</sup> Several of these governments turned to expanding economic relations with China.<sup>10</sup> However, there have been shifts in government since then, and US influence remains strong.<sup>11</sup> The US still holds the status of main trading partner to several countries in the Caribbean, Central America and the north of South America.<sup>12</sup>

China, officially The People's Republic of China (PRC), has gone through different phases of relations with Latin America. Following the Chinese Revolution in 1949, China had split into the communist-ruled People's Republic on the mainland and the at the time US-supported Republic of China in Taiwan.<sup>13</sup> In the early years of the PRC, much focus in Latin America was therefore

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<sup>5</sup> León-Manriquez, Jose & Alvarez, Luis, F., 2014, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

on gaining political recognition as the legitimate China and as a new state.<sup>14</sup> However, due to strong US influence in Latin America, many countries in the region supported Taiwan.<sup>15</sup>

Under Mao Zedong's leadership (1949-1976), China's foreign policy was in general strongly ideologically influenced. It focused on supporting Third World (mostly Maoist) movements, as well as combating the US within the Cold War context. After the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960's, countering Soviet influence was added to the equation.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, China's relations to Latin American countries were for many years distinguished by maintaining friendly contacts with ideologically similar movements and realizing sporadic political and cultural exchanges.<sup>17</sup>

After Mao's death in 1976, his successor Deng Xiaoping initiated free-market reforms, which paved the way for a new economic model that gave China potential as an increasingly influential economic player on the world stage.<sup>18</sup> At first, China's priorities for export were the big markets in Europe, Japan, and the US.<sup>19</sup> This changed when China was let into the WTO in 2001 and the country's trade was widened to include markets in developing countries as well.<sup>20</sup> Further, in 2002 the Chinese government's so-called Go Out policy encouraged both state-owned as well as private Chinese companies to participate in the country's global economic expansion. This changed the flow of capital and gave green light for conducting direct investment all over the world.<sup>21</sup>

Ever since, China's involvement in Latin America has increased visibly. In 2004, then Chinese president Hu Jintao toured the region and established contact with several Latin American leaders.<sup>22</sup> Four years later, in 2008, China released a policy paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, which included their stance towards the region and ambitions for political, economic, and cultural cooperation. This was followed by a second policy paper in 2016.

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<sup>14</sup> Ellis, R. Evan, *China on the ground in Latin America: challenges for the Chinese and Impacts on the Region*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> León-Manriquez, Jose & Alvarez, Luis, F., 2014, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Ellis, R. Evan, 2014, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 5-6.

In 2014, Chinese president Xi Jinping announced the so-called “1 + 3 + 6” plan for Latin America. The “1” meant one plan for development, the “3” consisted of the main driving forces of the plan: investment, trade and financial cooperation, and the “6” stood for the sectors in which this would be done: agriculture, infrastructure, energy and resources, information technologies, manufacturing and innovation in science and technology.<sup>23</sup> In addition to this, in 2015 Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang proposed the so-called “3 x 3” model for industrial production and financial cooperation, leading to China creating a special fund for Latin America.<sup>24</sup> China has also increased loans given to Latin American countries.<sup>25</sup>

Within extractive sectors, particularly mining, oil and agriculture, Chinese economic presence in Latin America has been notably focused. These are also sectors estimated with the greatest risk of opposition to China’s presence.<sup>26</sup> A lot of these resources aim to satisfy the demand of buyers in China, especially those from mining, which are important for China’s urban development.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the presence of Chinese companies in Latin America has suffered recurrent complaints. There have been conflicts between Chinese companies and Latin American workforces about harsh working conditions and not hiring local labor to the expected extent.<sup>28</sup> There have also been concerns about environmental issues, due to Chinese projects having used and contaminated groundwater, drilled oil without permission, and created issues with storage of toxic byproducts of extraction.<sup>29</sup> As Latin America is a region with a strong presence of social movements, these outcomes from China’s economic engagement have led to protests and social unrest in several Latin American countries.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, Chinese engagement in Latin America continues. As China increasingly challenges the US for influence in the region, this brings reason to keep trying to understand the strategies,

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<sup>23</sup> Teng, Chung-Chian, “The Pattern of China’s Financial Initiative in Latin America: A Comparative Study”. *Issues & Studies: A Social Science Quarterly on China, Taiwan, and East Asian Affairs*, Vol. 53, No. 1, March 2017, 1740003, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Teng, Chung-Chian, 2017, p. 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> Piccone, Ted, “The Geopolitics of China’s Rise in Latin America”. *Geoeconomics and Global Issues*, No. 2 November 2016, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis, R. Evan, 2014, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 165.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 166.

motives, and concrete results of this advancement. This leads to the formulation of the research questions of this thesis, which will be presented in the next section.

## **1.2 Purpose and research questions**

Due to the changing landscape of international politics, China's growing importance in the world in general and in Latin America in particular, the purpose of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of China's influence in Latin America over time. It seeks to examine eventual power relations and whether the documented increase of Chinese involvement in the region is reflected in policy. Further, it is to discuss if China in Latin America can be considered a new hegemonic force, and to understand the current situation through a Neo-Gramscian lens on international relations.

The research questions for this thesis are the following:

- How has China's official policy towards Latin America changed from 2008 to 2016?
- How can this eventual change be understood in the light of a Neo-Gramscian theoretical perspective?

## **1.3 Previous research**

A wide range of research has been conducted from several angles about China's relation to Latin America. Some of the most important works will be listed in the section below.

There are several works that somewhat problematize Chinese presence in Latin America. The 2014 book *China on the ground in Latin America: challenges for the Chinese and Impacts on the Region*, by R. Evan Ellis, is a thorough work on the subject, focusing on China's physical presence in Latin America. Some of the chapters specifically address China's projects in Latin America, the use of the region's natural resources, the question of Chinese communities living in Latin America and cooperation challenges for both China and Latin America.<sup>31</sup> Miguel Ángel Urrego's article "China and the dispute over Latin America. Cold War, Maoism and Trade Relations" from 2020 analyzes how China's stance towards Latin America changed during the Cold War and how the Sino-Soviet split affected China's relations with actors in the region, with

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<sup>31</sup> Ellis, R. Evan, 2014, p. 13-14.



focus on the Maoist movements they supported there. The author finally concludes that commercial trade has been prioritized by China, and former ties to revolutionary movements in the region have been abandoned.<sup>32</sup> Ted Piccone's 2016 article "The Geopolitics of China's Rise in Latin America" also explores China's growing influence in Latin America.<sup>33</sup> It examines China geopolitical ambitions, as well as detailing different aspects of them, from a US perspective.

Several studies have been done regarding hegemonic influence of world powers in Latin America. The 2014 article "Mao's steps in Monroe's backyard: towards a US-China hegemonic struggle in Latin America?" by Jose León-Manriquez and Luis F. Alvarez, is about the US' and China's relationships to Latin America and whether a power struggle between these countries is emerging.<sup>34</sup> It describes the historical involvement of both countries in Latin America. The article's conclusion is that there have not been clashes between the US and China over influence in Latin America.<sup>35</sup> The 2020 article "China's Regional Engagement Goals in Latin America" by Margaret Myers describes China's strategy to achieve goals within Latin American institutions, that often are strongly influenced by the US.<sup>36</sup> Another highly relevant and useful contribution to the question of China and hegemony, is Serafettin Yilmaz's paper "China, Historical Blocs and International Relations" from 2014. It gives a thorough introduction to Neo-Gramscian theory and its key concepts, such as hegemony, historical blocs, and passive revolution. It seeks to analyze China as a so-called historical bloc according to the theoretical framework. Its conclusion is that China's rise can be seen as historically different to established hegemony, however it does not claim that it represents a transformation of the general international system.<sup>37</sup>

There are different views of the nature of Chinese policy in Latin America. Some works draw quite positive conclusions. One such is "The Expansion of China's Global Hegemonic Strategy:

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<sup>32</sup> Urrego, Miguel Angél, "China and the dispute over Latin America. Cold War, Maoism and Trade Relations". *Revista Izquierdas*, No. 49, April 2020, p. 2571.

<sup>33</sup> Piccone, Ted, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> León-Manriquez, Jose & Alvarez, Luis, F., 2014, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Myers, Margaret, "China's regional Engagement Goals in Latin America". *Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy*, May 2020, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, "China, Historical Blocs and International Relations". *Issues & Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 4, December 2014, p. 209.

Implications for Latin America" by Li Xing, from 2016. It examines two shifting strategies in Chinese foreign policy and seeks to understand the motivation behind them. The author applies Neo-Gramscian theory and World System Theory and concludes that Latin America should take advantage of China's interest in the region.<sup>38</sup> One similar work is the 2017 article "The Pattern of China's Financial Initiative in Latin America: A Comparative Study" by Chung-Chian Teng. It analyzes China's economic strategy in Latin America, conducting a comparative study on how this has been implemented in Ecuador and Argentina, two countries with different main resources. The article concludes that China's funds have been put into strategically important sectors in these countries and will likely contribute to genuine development.<sup>39</sup>

However, some works lift a different perspective. Rhys Jenkins' 2012 article "Latin America and China - a new dependency?" is one example. It examines the economic relations between Latin America and China and is especially relevant due to claiming that this relationship holds several characteristics of a situation of dependency. Although, it also claims that the US and Europe are still hegemonic forces due to conducting more trade with Latin America than China does.<sup>40</sup>

These listed works are helpful and have thoroughly examined China's role in Latin America. Some have applied concepts of Neo-Gramscianism and similar theories onto parts of China's foreign policy or economic activity, drawing different conclusions. However, no studies have been found that use Critical Discourse Analysis, examining China's official language towards Latin America more closely, or combining this method with Neo-Gramscianism. Here, this thesis intends to contribute, by the combination of method and theory applied onto the chosen material, thus adding the role of policy language to the equation.

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<sup>38</sup> Xing, Li, "The Expansion of China's Global Hegemonic Strategy: Implications for Latin America". *JCIR Special Issue*, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Teng, Chung-Chian, 2017, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Jenkins, Rhys, "Latin America and China - a new dependency?". *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 7, 2012, p. 1337.

## 2. Material

The primary material used in this thesis consists of two policy papers on Latin America and the Caribbean written by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.<sup>41</sup> The first comprehensive policy paper was released in 2008. Eight years later, in November 2016, the second one was released. During the years between the two papers, the relation between China and Latin America has evolved considerably. The primary material has been chosen since it is produced by China's government, which may help to get a better understanding of how China officially portrays itself, how they recognize Latin America and how they interpret the importance of relations to the region.

The secondary material will consist of several of the works mentioned in the section "1.2 Previous research", such as the book *China on the ground in Latin America: challenges for the Chinese and Impacts on the Region*, by R. Evan Ellis, the articles "Latin America and China - a new dependency?" by Rhys Jenkins, "The Geopolitics of China's Rise in Latin America" by Ted Piccone, "China's Regional Engagement Goals in Latin America" by Margaret Myers and "China, Historical Blocs and International Relations" by Serafettin Yilmaz. This material will be used to contextualize and to support theoretical and analytical assumptions. The theoretical and methodological works "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method" by Robert W. Cox and "Principles of critical discourse analysis" by Teun A. van Dijk will also be used.

### 2.1 Limitations

Due to the policy documents being official statements of the Chinese government, the conclusion has been drawn that this material is wide and rich enough in content for comparison and analysis. It is also limited to a short period of time, yet one which forms an interesting part of China's and Latin America's history. The choice of Latin America as a region of interest is a limitation. To examine Chinese relations globally and not in one specific region or continent was too wide. The idea of analyzing China's relations to one or two specific countries in Latin America was

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<sup>41</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean from 2008, the first one, can be found at [https://china.usc.edu/chinas-policy-paper-latin-america-and-caribbean#China\\_and\\_Latin\\_America](https://china.usc.edu/chinas-policy-paper-latin-america-and-caribbean#China_and_Latin_America), the second one, from 2016, is found at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1418254.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1418254.shtml).

discussed at an early stage of the thesis but was abandoned. The choice of limiting the focus to the Latin American region was due to the policy papers, the primary material, referring to it on a more general level.

In the analysis, there will be limitations in the material, as excerpts of the policy papers will be made of parts that are considered the most interesting, in line with the choice of method.

Additionally, the analysis will for the most part focus and be limited to the economic relations between China and Latin America, such as trade, extractivism and access to natural resources.

## **2.2 Source evaluation**

The primary material is perceived as trustworthy, as the policy papers come from the primary source of study in this thesis. The policy papers are also widely known within the research already conducted on the subject and are often referenced to in other works. One thing worth mentioning is that the policy paper from 2008 could only be found posted on an academic page, while the second one is to be found on the page of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

However, this is not seen as a problem, since the page where the first paper is found belongs to US-China Institute of the University of Southern California, which is an official and credible source. It is clearly shown that the content was originally released by the Chinese government.<sup>42</sup> The secondary material consists of previous research, characterized by transparency according to scientific tradition. The chosen articles are therefore also perceived as trustworthy.

## **3. Theoretical framework**

In this section, the theoretical framework of the thesis will be introduced, which will be used to analyze the material. It will consist of Neo-Gramscianism, which is used to analyze hegemony and power in international relations. The background and some of the major concepts of Neo-Gramscianism will be explained below.

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<sup>42</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean 2008.

### 3.1 Neo-Gramscianism

Neo-Gramscianism is, as the name suggests, rooted in the ideas of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci, once the leader of the Italian Communist Party, was imprisoned by the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini from 1926 until his death in 1937. While in prison, Gramsci authored influential theories on how to understand capitalism, much of it focusing on hegemony and the reproduction of power.<sup>43</sup> While most of Gramsci's thinking was on a national level, scholars such as Robert W. Cox pioneered Neo-Gramscianism, applying Gramsci's thought onto international relations.<sup>44</sup>

Gramsci is widely recognized for his theory on hegemony. It is based on the Marxist understanding of material conditions and how one economic class exercises domination over another by economic and ideological means.<sup>45</sup> This means that capitalism maintains its power both by the state's coercion, yet also by consent through reproduction of capitalist culture. The state, the main subject in international relations, is an important actor also within Neo-Gramscian theory, however it is extended to also include the internal social sphere within the state.<sup>46</sup> Before Gramsci's contributions, the Marxist view on hegemony merely consisted of the observation that an alliance between the proletariat and the farmers would overthrow bourgeois hegemony. This view was for example propagated by the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution and focused almost exclusively on economic factors.<sup>47</sup>

Gramsci based his theory of hegemony on three connected pillars: the importance of people's understanding of the world, and not exclusively how the state acts to the exercise of power, that hegemony is practiced within civil society (non-state actors) and institutions, and finally that the main strategy to practice hegemony is to integrate both consent and coercion in political entities.<sup>48</sup> On the international level, Neo-Gramscianism defines three different areas in which hegemony is exercised: economic structure, political society, and civil society. The economic

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<sup>43</sup> Cox, Robert W., "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method". *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol 12, No. 2, 1983, p. 162.

<sup>44</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 200.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 192.

<sup>46</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 169.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

structure is synonymous with society's so-called structure.<sup>49</sup> Political and civil society are located within the superstructure.<sup>50</sup> The structure is formed by material conditions, while the superstructure is formed by ideas, norms, and ideologies. The superstructure is a reflection of the structure.<sup>51</sup> Here, there is also emphasis on hegemony as something exercised by both consent and coercion.<sup>52</sup> Political society is where coercive hegemony is practiced.<sup>53</sup> Civil society would on the other hand today include actors such as institutions, corporate media and international organizations.<sup>54</sup> Neo-Gramscianism also maintains the notion that the economic sectors of weaker states are generally dependent on, and largely affected by bigger states.<sup>55</sup>

Next to hegemony, another key concept in Neo-Gramscian theory is *historical blocs*. A historical bloc is a counter-hegemonic force that challenges the global hegemon.<sup>56</sup> It consists of a social class that exercises its own hegemony, and new historical blocs are created when a subordinate class takes power.<sup>57</sup> Historical blocs combine the superstructure and the structure.<sup>58</sup> Here, Gramsci differs from traditional Marxism, by mutually interlinking material conditions with ideas.<sup>59</sup> The three characteristics of a historical bloc are economic-corporate power, class consciousness and hegemony.<sup>60</sup> In sum, Gramsci meant that the working class should take power and establish hegemony by creating its own worldview, ideas, and norms.<sup>61</sup> In international relations, a historical bloc can be translated to a subordinate state or a group of states that wishes to challenge the order of the system.<sup>62</sup>

A third concept within Neo-Gramscian theory is that of *passive revolution*, which is closely linked to the previous concept of historical blocs.<sup>63</sup> It is a rearrangement of the structure of class

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<sup>49</sup> The structure is also referred to as “base” in classical Marxism.

<sup>50</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 201.

<sup>51</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 167.

<sup>52</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 200.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 201.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 202.

<sup>55</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 169.

<sup>56</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 192.

<sup>57</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 168.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>60</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 210.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 204-205.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 192.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 206.

relations and how the state exercises power. The point of it is to maintain the capitalist mode of production and be able to adapt to developments.<sup>64</sup> The main process here is so-called systemic change, which relies on elites, lacks mass mobilization, and aims to hinder more radical demands of change. Systemic change is in sharp contrast to system's change, which is a revolutionary standpoint that seeks to change the system entirely, relying on mass mobilization.<sup>65</sup>

These concepts can be used to understand different actors and their relation to capitalism and hegemonic power. As China has developed both internally and externally in recent decades and changed position in the international system in general and Latin America especially, it is relevant to apply this theory on China in Latin America. This will be done with methodological help of a Critical Discourse Analysis, which is compatible with the theory of Neo-Gramscianism, as both seek to examine the upholding of inequality, power, and hegemony.

## **4. Methodology**

Here, the methodological approach of the thesis will be presented. It consists of a Critical Discourse Analysis, according to the principles of Dutch scholar Teun A. van Dijk. This method has been chosen to help analyze the primary material of the thesis, together with the compatible theoretical framework mentioned in the previous chapter.

### **4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis is a multidisciplinary method that amounts to study societal phenomena through text and talk, i.e. communication, since according to the method, the usage of language shapes reality.<sup>66</sup> Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of many developments from the classic discourse analysis, and is often associated with its main founder Norman Fairclough.<sup>67</sup> Even though the method can be traced back to the time of the Second World War, CDA is often considered a fairly new and therefore underdeveloped method within Political Science.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 206.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 206–207.

<sup>66</sup> Bergström, Göran & Boréus, Kristina, *Textens mening och makt: Metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*. Studentlitteratur, 2012, p. 354.

<sup>67</sup> Bergström, Göran & Boréus, Kristina, 2012, p. 373.

<sup>68</sup> Schiffrin, Deborah, Tannen, Deborah & E. Hamilton, Heidi, *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p. 360.

However, since the method is multidisciplinary, it has benefited from other disciplines, and today there are many analytical tools available for analyzing discourses.<sup>69</sup>

CDA aims to examine the relation between discourses and social structures, to study power relations and the upholding of power structures.<sup>70</sup> As stated by Fairclough, discourses have three functions: the ideational function, the relational function and the upholding of identities. Further, discourses hold two different positions; a discursive side and a non-discursive side, which both are shaped by social structures.<sup>71</sup> According to Fairclough, discourses construct social identities which enable existing social relations to exist and thereby uphold power structures, such as hegemony.<sup>72</sup> The method follows a three-dimensional framework, by examining the text, the discursive and the sociocultural practice. By doing that, it enables one of the important principles of the method, which is to examine how the production of the text, distribution and consumption is related to the discourse.<sup>73</sup> These principles are also recognized in Van Dijk's approach to CDA, which will be presented in the next section.

#### **4.2 Teun A. van Dijk's CDA model**

With context of the method's origins, this thesis will conduct a CDA in line with Van Dijk's strategies, presented in the article "Principles of critical discourse analysis". Van Dijk raises further awareness to power structures and focuses on dominance and inequality, which is beneficial when examining hegemony, as is done with Neo-Gramscian theory.

Van Dijk is a well-known person in the studies of CDA and has developed an influential model of analyzing discourse. In "Principles of critical discourse analysis" he differs from other approaches within the field, and gives an alternative approach to examine discourses by relating macro and micro levels of the text, to study power and dominance and how it is manifested, produced and reproduced through discourse.<sup>74</sup> He explains in his article that previous approaches

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<sup>69</sup> Schiffrin, Deborah, Tannen, Deborah & E. Hamilton, Heidi, 2001, p. 360.

<sup>70</sup> Bergström, Göran & Boréus, Kristina, 2012, p. 374.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 374.

<sup>72</sup> Fairclough, Norman, *Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language*. Longman, 1995, p. 76.

<sup>73</sup> Fairclough, Norman, 1995, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Van Dijk, Teun A., "Principles of critical discourse analysis". *Discourse & Society* SAGE, Vol. 4(2), 1993, p. 250-251.



of CDA have failed to take mental cognition into account in the study of discourses, which ties together the discursive structures with the social ones.<sup>75</sup>

In the previously mentioned article, Van Dijk explains the importance of the different levels of communication - since the micro level of communication is related to the macro level of analysis.<sup>76</sup> This means that texts do not only shape the micro level of social interaction, however also reproduce an image of reality in larger contexts.<sup>77</sup> Van Dijk studies power based on the analysis of control, as "... groups have (more or less) power if they are able to (more or less) control the acts and minds of (members of) other groups".<sup>78</sup> Power can therefore be exercised in many ways, which must be taken into account when analyzing China's policy documents.

A systematic framework for how to utilize and understand CDA, is presented in Van Dijk's article. This is split into two parts: the discursive framework and the discursive strategies, which will be presented below.

When analyzing the discursive framework there are several analytical tools that can be employed, which are meant to systematically and explicitly describe discursive structures at all levels.<sup>79</sup> This part analyzes through looking at context, access and setting, genre, role and positions, communicative actions and what "social signals" and interactions the text constructs. These analytical tools are thereby necessary to grasp the backdrop and contextual aspects of the text in order to carry out the analysis of discourse strategies.

The discursive framework analysis begins with looking at the context of the text, which is done by examining access and setting.<sup>80</sup> These analytical tools are meant to explain the topics of the text, local meanings, style, and rhetoric. The intention is to examine the linguistic context in which the text is embedded, where the text is available and in what context it is produced and consumed.<sup>81</sup> It is therefore vital to clarify who produced the text and what type of communication it consists of, for example if it is a one-sided communication. Genre is meant to

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<sup>75</sup> Van Dijk, Teun A., 1993, p. 251.

<sup>76</sup> Schiffrin, Deborah & Tannen, Deborah & E. Hamilton, Heidi, 2001, p. 354.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 354.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 355.

<sup>79</sup> Van Dijk, Teun A., 1993, p. 270.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 270.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 270.

explain which genre the text inheres, and what can be understood from it.<sup>82</sup> Role and position is employed to analyze what kind of role the producer of the text has.<sup>83</sup> Communicative actions and interactions are linked to social signals, which are intended to examine the social context of the text. Van Dijk exemplifies this in his article by studying politicians' politeness towards other politicians.<sup>84</sup>

Once the discursive framework has been examined, the analysis continues by studying the discursive strategies, in order to analyze what role discourses play in society. The ambition here is to display how the discursive context is socially embedded.<sup>85</sup> For example, discursive strategies look at argumentation, rhetorical figures, lexical or syntactic style, local meaning, and coherence.<sup>86</sup> These will be explained below.

Argumentation is a strategy that often correlates with other strategies, as the author of the text that is to be analyzed often uses other discursive strategies or facts to advocate for its cause or position.<sup>87</sup> These argumentations can use rhetorical figures, which is another strategy that intends to examine parallels in the text, metaphors and exaggerations or understatements. Rhetorical figures are often analyzed by looking at attitudes, for instance how “the others” and “we” are portrayed in the text and thus the establishment of power and dominance.<sup>88</sup> Another example of a strategy is the adaptation of lexical or syntactic style in the text, which both studies the stylistic tools used in discourses.<sup>89</sup> The characteristic of the lexical style is the choice of words by the author, that either suggest positive or negative emphasis on the matter.<sup>90</sup> Syntactic style is studied by looking at how words have strategically stylistically been placed to accentuate their meaning.<sup>91</sup> Further, it is relevant to study the local meaning and coherence, which aims to interpret vagueness, implications and presuppositions in the discourse. This part is important

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<sup>82</sup> Van Dijk, Teun A., 1993, p. 271.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 272.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 271.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 262.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 264.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 264, 273.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 278.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 278.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 264.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 277.

when wanting to know how the information submitted in the text is described, what is omitted by and of the author as well as the vagueness or implications of the text.<sup>92</sup>

Since the purpose of the method is to expose the upholding of power relations and inequality, it requires its authors to take a stance in the analysis.<sup>93</sup> Regarding China and Latin America, the position of this thesis maintains that it is generally beneficial for countries to cooperate, however it also firmly opposes hegemonic systems and conditions in which some tend to benefit at the expense of others. Latin America has historically been a region affected by inequality and foreign interference. Therefore, while it is possible that China-Latin America relations are built on cooperation perceived as mutually beneficial by all parts, there is also a possibility that it could include a shift in hegemonic power in the region from the US to China. It cannot be assured that this necessarily would be beneficial to the over-all sovereignty of Latin America in the long term, as it rather might transfer the region's possible state of dependency from one superpower to another.

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<sup>92</sup> Van Dijk, Teun A., 1993, p. 275–277.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 252.

## 5. Analysis

In this chapter, the analysis of the primary material will be conducted. Firstly, it will apply Van Dijk's discourse framework onto China's policy papers and secondly, it will analyze these in more detail through the identification of discourse strategies. The policy papers will be compared, to see if there have been any significant changes between them. Further, a Neo-Gramscian analysis of these results, as well as China's general role in Latin America will be conducted, to bring perspective, explanations, and broader understanding of the subject in question.

### 5.1 Discourse framework

Here, the discourse framework of China will be identified, according to the points cited in Van Dijk's article "Principles of critical discourse analysis", previously introduced in chapter 4.2 of the thesis.

China, as an established and powerful state, has *access* to a wide number of platforms to communicate official policy. Along with the use of the internet, they have access to channels of communication through their official Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with contact with other states. The *context* of how wideness of spread is therefore profoundly broad since it is possible for almost anyone today to access the documents on the internet free of charge. Due to the structure of the policy papers, the communication is one-sided, which means that China has full control and influence on its content and agenda and excludes others from exerting influence. China is asserting power discursively. The *genre* of the policy papers is that of political text and therefore contains formal political language, as these statements are part of official policy of China as a state. The consumer of the papers is likely people of political interest and knowledge, as the papers use terminology that might exclude others. It is legitimate for China with the *role* as a state to write policy papers on their political relations with other states, however China's *position* in the world has shifted over the years. China's position in 2016 has most likely become stronger in the international arena compared to when they released their first policy paper in 2008. The relations with Latin American countries have also been expanded. Lastly, through the policy documents, China *communicates* and has *social significance* to countries in Latin America, as well as other countries in the world, by making their policy public.

## 5.2 Discourse strategies

In the following two headings the policy papers will be analyzed, according to the discursive strategies identified by Van Dijk. China's policy paper from 2008 is first analyzed, followed by the paper from 2016, to identify discourse, distinguish similarities and differences and the development over time between the papers. Extracts of the most interesting parts of the policy papers will be done. Additionally, the analysis will take mainly three prevalent guiding aspects into account when examining the text and identifying interesting excerpts: China's views of themselves, the importance of Latin America, and the nature of their relation to Latin America.

### 5.2.1 2008 Policy Paper

The policy paper on Latin America from 2008 is the first one issued by China towards the region. The paper begins by stating China's purpose and intentions with the cooperation and later describes the different areas in which they want their relations to develop. There are several discursive strategies utilized to exercise power through control.<sup>94</sup> In the foreword, China presents their current worldview and matters that the international community is facing:

“The world today is undergoing major transformation and adjustment. Peace and development are the trend of the times. The move toward multi-polarity is irreversible and economic globalization is gaining momentum. World peace and development are facing new opportunities as well as various challenges. It is in the fundamental interest of people of all countries and also their common aspiration to share development opportunities, jointly address challenges and promote the noble cause of peace and development of mankind.”<sup>95</sup>

This forms part of an argumentative discursive strategy, as the paragraph shows how China validates and legitimizes their intention on increasing their involvement in Latin America due to globalization. Additionally, China narrates a positive depiction of the world, draws extensive conclusions, and uses lexical style with strong words as “irreversible”, “momentum”, “fundamental” and “mankind”.

“As the largest developing country in the world, China is committed to the path of peaceful development and the win-win strategy of opening-up. It is ready to carry out

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<sup>94</sup> Van Dijk, Teun A., 1993, p. 257 & 264.

<sup>95</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008.

friendly cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and build a harmonious world of durable peace and common prosperity.”<sup>96</sup>

China proceeds, in the foreword, by describing itself as “the largest developing country in the world”. China positions themselves on the international political arena as someone to confide in. The use of magnifying words can, according to Van Dijk, be a way of asserting one’s power.<sup>97</sup> As read in the paragraph above and throughout the paper, China portrays their wish to find “win-win” solutions in different political and economic areas, by establishing South-South cooperation.<sup>98</sup> For example, the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” are repeated frequently in the paper, when presenting the areas in which they are interested in cooperating. Additionally, China consistently throughout the paper uses positive words when describing the cooperation between the regions and that they only have good intentions in mind. Similar features can also be distinguished in the forthcoming paragraph:

“The Chinese Government is ready to strengthen consultation and coordination with Latin American and Caribbean countries in multilateral trade and financial institutions and regimes, with a view to promoting South-South cooperation, bringing about a more just and equitable multilateral trading regime and ensuring a bigger say and greater role in decision-making for developing countries in international trade and financial affairs.”<sup>99</sup>

In this paragraph one could argue, from the argumentative stance, that China explicitly brings forth that they would like to cooperate in terms of a South-South approach. In their argument, they continue to use lexical style with positive words and plead that such cooperation would lead to a more “just” and “equitable” multilateral union. Furthermore, they maintain that Latin America and China’s multilateral position as developing countries would benefit from such cooperation and become more influential by gaining a stronger role in international trade and financial affairs. By arguing that their future cooperation could lead to more influence in the multilateral arena, China’s course of argumentation could indicate that they, at the time when the

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<sup>96</sup> China’s Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008.

<sup>97</sup> Van Dijk, Teun A., 1993, p. 277.

<sup>98</sup> South-South cooperation is, as the name suggests, a cooperation between countries in the Global South, often also referred to as the “Third World” or the “developing world”. It is a strategy for historically subordinate countries to empower each other by collaborating and sharing mutually beneficial knowledge, trade, or initiatives of different sorts, without the involvement of countries in the North (also known as the West). The Global South goes by different names, often with somewhat different content, however the common denominator to most names is usually the inclusion of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where most countries have a history of European colonization.

<sup>99</sup> China’s Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008.

policy document was published, believe they lack such influence in the international community. Additionally, as the paragraph above indicates that China recognizes both themselves and Latin American countries as part of the developing world, it is a way of positioning themselves on an equal level to Latin America and identifying commonalities despite many differences between them. China's discourse here appeals to counter-hegemony in form of South-South cooperation and partly draws attention to the Neo-Gramscian concept historical bloc - a group of subordinate states challenging the global power structure.<sup>100</sup> However, the equal positioning could also be seen as problematic, since it compares China to a whole region, consisting of several diverse countries with various underlying history and therefore preconditions. By doing so, China is not only trying to create a bond to Latin American countries, however it also creates attitudes by causing group affiliation on the international arena.

The policy paper continues:

“Countries in the region have been actively exploring development paths suited to their national conditions. They have maintained political stability and continued economic growth, and the life of the people is steadily improving. Latin American and Caribbean countries cherish a strong desire for self-development through unity and the commitment to promoting regional peace, stability and development. The region on the whole is growing in strength and its international influence is rising. Latin American and Caribbean countries have taken an active part in international affairs and contributed significantly to world peace and common development. They are playing an increasingly important role in regional and international affairs.”<sup>101</sup>

Throughout the entire policy document, China's discourse illustrates Latin America in a positive light. In this section it is possible to draw the conclusion, among other things, that China tends to describe Latin America as a region on the rise to something bigger and more important. China describes the region's potential, which could be interpreted as another argument and background to invest in Latin American cooperation. Their attitude towards the region is therefore predominantly positive, in the choice of words and by leaving out information that would indicate the opposite. This could, however, be a sign of concealing power relations, or other intentions that China has in mind.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 192.

<sup>101</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008.

<sup>102</sup> Van Dijk, Teun A., 1993, p. 250.

“The one China principle is the political basis for the establishment and development of relations between China and Latin American and Caribbean countries and regional organizations. The overwhelming majority of countries in the region are committed to the one China policy and the position of supporting China's reunification and not having official ties or contacts with Taiwan. The Chinese Government appreciates such a stance. China is ready to establish and develop state-to-state relations with all Latin American and Caribbean countries based on the one China principle.”<sup>103</sup>

In the policy paper, China does not only argue on reasons why they want to cooperate with Latin America, and present beneficial and persuasive motives on why the cooperation should take place - this paragraph also introduces argumentative conditions of their cooperation. The collaboration China seeks is not unconditional, as they are stating that countries in Latin America are expected to take China's side in the far-reaching tension with Taiwan. By conditioning, the cooperation could be seen as a way of controlling and exercising power on Latin American countries, simultaneously as they try to increase their influence in eastern Asia.

Moreover, if more Latin American countries would position themselves in line with China in the dispute, it could cause further friction and competition in international politics.<sup>104</sup> Further, by utilizing emotionally connotated words like “overwhelming”, China is able to create attitudes, separating the countries on their side, “the overwhelming majority”, from the “others”, which then seem to be the minority. This argumentation can possibly be interpreted as a verbal form of coercion, which combined with consent is a characteristic of exercising hegemony, according to Neo-Gramscian theory.<sup>105</sup>

Based on China using discursive strategies of argumentation and lexical style formulated by Van Dijk, as well as the creating attitudes towards states, China can be seen as using language to maintain itself in a position of power. Additionally, the last extracted paragraph presented above does not correlate to China's previously positive word choices about the ambition of world peace, and the section could therefore be looked upon as rather contradictory.

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<sup>103</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008.

<sup>104</sup> Piccone, Ted, 2016, p. 22-23.

<sup>105</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 200.



### 5.2.2 2016 Policy Paper

The second policy paper is quite similar to the first one. However, the preface is different, putting emphasis on different factors in why the relation to Latin America is important.

Throughout this policy paper, the use of Van Dijk's discursive strategies argumentation and lexical style are identified as well. The preface is a slightly longer and China expresses itself in a somewhat more confident and determined tone:

“The world today is undergoing unprecedented historical changes, with multi-polarization and globalization gaining momentum. The rise of emerging markets and developing countries has become an irresistible historical trend. At the same time, the world economy is recovering amidst twists and turns. Global and regional hot-spot issues take place frequently. Traditional and non-traditional security threats are intertwined. Safeguarding world peace and promoting common development remains a daunting task.”<sup>106</sup>

Here, China explains the change in the world during the 8 years since the release of the first policy paper. It forms part of an argumentation on why their relations to Latin America yet are necessary. This time, there is a somewhat increased economic emphasis early in the text, mentioning “rise of emerging markets” as part of an “irresistible historical trend”, which is a new feature. Chinese economic engagement in Latin America has grown the years that followed, which means that the policy has changed along with this trend.<sup>107</sup> The use of lexical style is now slightly more frequent, containing words such as “unprecedented”, “irresistible” and “daunting”.

“China has entered a crucial stage in achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In order to fulfill the "two centenary goals" of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2020 and turning the nation into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by the mid-21st century, China has been actively promoting the construction of a socialist market economy, socialist democracy, advanced culture, a harmonious society, as well as ecological civilization.”<sup>108</sup>

Within this policy paper, it is observed that China emphasizes the reasons for strengthening ties with Latin America as more related to the country's own development. In the first policy paper, China called themselves “the biggest developing nation on earth”.<sup>109</sup> They pursued cooperation

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<sup>106</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016.

<sup>107</sup> Ellis, R. Evan, 2014, p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016.

<sup>109</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008.

with Latin America by equal positioning. This seems to have shifted since the last policy paper, as the focus now is on “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” and building up their own country. It is likely that this shift in focus is due to China noticing that their domestic development and economy has benefited from the relation and therefore changed the country’s self-image to some extent. The argumentation in this policy paper is also longer and more engaged. Lexical style is identified here again, since strong, largely positively charged words are used, such as “crucial”, “great” and “unswerving”. The fact that China has enhanced the use of lexical style, could yet here be a sign of reproducing a power relation appealing to consent, which is in line with the Neo-Gramscian view of hegemony.<sup>110</sup>

The policy paper continues:

“Part I Latin America and the Caribbean: A Land Full of Vitality and Hope

As important members of emerging economies and the developing world, Latin American and Caribbean countries play a major role in safeguarding world peace and development. Since the dawn of the new century, Latin American and Caribbean countries have actively explored development paths suited to their own conditions and attained achievements that have attracted the world's attention.”<sup>111</sup>

Here, within continued argumentation, China now emphasizes Latin American countries positively as part of “a land full of vitality and hope”, and “important members of emerging economies and the developing world”. China uses lexical style here as well, describing facts with positively charged words such as “important”, and that the region has “attracted the world’s attention”. This most likely means China’s attention, continuing the discourse of Latin America as a strongly positive partner which China wants to develop their relations to.

As China’s trade with Latin American countries has increased since the first policy paper, and due to China being a considerably more important trade partner for Latin America than vice versa, this is assumingly used as a way to uphold a relation that is not on equal terms.<sup>112</sup> This is interesting, as China in the first policy paper from 2008 stresses the need for a more “equitable trading regime”.<sup>113</sup> However, the trade relation with the region has been identified as more

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<sup>110</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 200.

<sup>111</sup> China’s Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Jenkins, Rhys, 2012, p. 1348.

<sup>113</sup> China’s Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008.

beneficial to China than to Latin American countries, many of whom are now very economically dependent on exports to China.<sup>114</sup> Latin American countries export raw materials in exchange for manufactured goods from China, which are characteristics of an economic centre-periphery relation.<sup>115</sup> This puts China in a position of power and enables them to set the terms of the relationship as well as the discourse. This is also compatible with the general Neo-Gramscian stance that smaller or financially weaker countries' economies are intertwined with and dependent on larger countries, due to the exploitative nature of the international capitalist system.<sup>116</sup>

The way China stresses the importance of Latin America can also be connected to communication and social consequences within the discourse framework, which Van Dijk exemplified with politeness between political officials.<sup>117</sup> This would further confirm that there is a continuing power dynamic behind the wholesomely positive way in which China describes Latin America. For China to use strong, positive, and fancy words to describe this relationship, could be seen as a way to conceal the inequality in the relationship.<sup>118</sup>

“Though far apart, China and Latin America and the Caribbean have a long history of people's friendship. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, with the concerted efforts of several generations, the relations between China and Latin America and the Caribbean have gone through a remarkable journey ...”<sup>119</sup>

The positive description of the relation's development continues here, with the word “remarkable” in line with the lexical style, as well as describing the relation as a “journey”.

In sum, the policy papers are largely similar and predominantly positive towards Latin America, however it is possible to identify a slight shift in the 2016 version. The 2008 paper emphasizes win-win cooperation on a South-South basis, equal positioning, and development, forming part of a more counter-hegemonic approach. The 2016, however, mentions win-win cooperation however focuses more on economic factors that seem to attract China, such as access to emerging markets. There is also a slight change in China's self-image, as they now emphasize

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<sup>114</sup> Jenkins, Rhys, 2012, p. 1348.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 1350.

<sup>116</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 169.

<sup>117</sup> Van Dijk, Teun A., 1993, p. 271.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 250.

<sup>119</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016.

the importance of their own development in comparison to the 2008 paper. It becomes more apparent that China seems to increasingly see relations to Latin America as economic opportunities. Trade relations have been identified as somewhat unequal, and China's overly positive and polite language can therefore be a strategy of concealing circumstances more beneficial to China than to Latin America.

Within both policy papers, Van Dijk's discursive strategies of argumentation and lexical style have been identified. The fact that these strategies to uphold power through language have increased in the second paper could indicate that China's position towards Latin America has become more influential and therefore more desirable to uphold. The argumentation in the 2016 policy paper is longer and more thorough, and the lexical style is somewhat stronger and more frequent. This also correlates with the assumption of economic relations with Latin America increasingly developing towards China's favor.

### **5.3 A Neo-Gramscian approach to China in Latin America**

Neo-Gramscianism would explain political shifts like this as consequences of social relations.<sup>120</sup> In this case, it can firstly be traced all the way to the fundamental changes in China with Deng Xiaoping's free market reforms implemented after 1976. The Neo-Gramscian approach assumes that pro-capitalist reforms would naturally cause a major change in the economic structure and social relations. This would eventually pave the way for the rise of a new capitalist class in China, which would then over time establish and exercise hegemony in the country.<sup>121</sup> Further, the Go Out policy, a more recent milestone in China's capitalist evolution, undoubtedly intensified this process. It can be seen as an example of how internal material conditions and interests affect ideology, political decisions and policy, according to the Neo-Gramscian notion that society's superstructure is a reflection of its economic structure.<sup>122</sup>

According to Robert W. Cox, world hegemonies are created when national hegemonies in influential countries that have gone through big political and economic changes eventually are

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<sup>120</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 169.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

spread outwards.<sup>123</sup> Related to previous observations, China's internal political and economic changes can therefore undoubtedly explain how the country's external economic strategy has evolved. During the years between the releases of the policy papers, this development has likely continued due to established internal hegemony, as well as the nature of capitalism and its inherent ambition of growth and expansion beyond national markets. In this case, internal markets have not been sufficient for China's demand for resources, hence the emphasis on "emerging markets" in the second policy paper.<sup>124</sup> China takes advantage of this "irresistible historical trend" mentioned in the second policy paper, by evidently using Latin America as a safe source for raw materials.<sup>125</sup>

On the question of hegemony, however, China can only be seen as playing a potentially hegemonic role in Latin America. The country maintains influence in the region's economic structure mostly by relying on consent, as clearly expressed in the policy documents, although sporadic cases of coercion by Chinese companies can be identified.<sup>126</sup> China's impact in the economic structure is due to the country being such a big source of trade for Latin America, and that loans from the country's development banks have become an apparent alternative to economic institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, enabling Latin American countries to avoid forced neoliberal reforms. This includes Taiwan-friendly states, even if those political relations don't necessarily correlate with the economic ones.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, these points mentioned are not enough for China to be classified as a full regional hegemon according to Neo-Gramscian theory, as they need to exercise hegemony within all three different spheres: economic structure, political structure and social structure.<sup>128</sup> Even if China expresses a will to trade with Latin America on a "regulated market", the game in the economic structure is still mostly played with rules set by the hegemonic neoliberal institutions of the international economic order.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, the question of classifying the country as a hegemonic force in Latin America is quite complex.

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<sup>123</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 171.

<sup>124</sup> China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016.

<sup>125</sup> Jenkins, Rhys, 2012, p. 1344.

<sup>126</sup> Ellis, R. Evan, 2014, p. 165.

<sup>127</sup> Piccone, Ted, 2016, p. 17-18.

<sup>128</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 172.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 171-172.

Within Latin America's political society, Chinese hegemony is generally absent. Political society is where coercive hegemony is exercised.<sup>130</sup> China is yet to develop ideology to maintain by a combination of consent and coercion, and their strategy is not characterized by political or ideological coercion through military measures.<sup>131</sup> It is so far mainly economic, to secure a flow of resources for the country's own growth.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, within civil society, Chinese hegemony is also unlikely to be widely reproduced at this stage. Many institutions are often still friendly towards the US.<sup>133</sup> The biggest regional organization, the OAS (Organization of American States), for example, was founded by the US and is based in Washington. Institutions are important for the development and reproduction of ideology.<sup>134</sup> China-led institutions such as BRICS or the SCO have emerged globally, yet are not based in Latin America.<sup>135</sup> The China-CELAC Forum, started in 2014, can be seen as an exception, but mainly functions for China to get their economic strategy across.<sup>136</sup> In Latin America, traditionally pro-US elites control large parts of the corporate media, which forms part of the Neo-Gramscian view of civil society.<sup>137</sup> There have been conscious protests against Chinese exploitation of resources in several Latin American countries, led by social movements.<sup>138</sup> The presence of Chinese companies is also more physical in Latin America in comparison to Western companies that frequently work through subsidiaries.<sup>139</sup> This relative invisibility possibly allows Western hegemony to be more easily reproduced by consent, despite exploitative practices. General opinion of China in Latin America has also declined in recent years.<sup>140</sup> All these factors speak against the idea of current Chinese hegemony. However, as China's influence within Latin America's economic structure is strong, their influence within the region's superstructures is probable to grow, since a society's superstructure is, as mentioned, a reflection of its structure.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 201.

<sup>131</sup> Ellis, R. Evan, 2014, p. 207.

<sup>132</sup> León-Manriquez, Jose & Alvarez, Luis, F., 2014, p. 24.

<sup>133</sup> Myers, Margaret, 2020, p. 4-5.

<sup>134</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 172.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p. 193.

<sup>136</sup> Myers, Margaret, 2020, p. 1.

<sup>137</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 202.

<sup>138</sup> Ellis, R. Evan, 2014, p. 166.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> Piccone, Ted, 2016, p. 7-8.

<sup>141</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 167.

The question of China and historical blocs also arises. Historical blocs are counter-hegemonic and based on material conditions eventually creating ideology and ideas.<sup>142</sup> China, despite their growing influence in the international system, has however not yet reached this position, and their status as a counter-hegemonic force in the Neo-Gramscian sense is questionable, due to this requiring hegemony, economic-corporate power and class consciousness.<sup>143</sup> China lacks full hegemony yet partly holds economic-corporate power, although since the country's shifts to market-orientation, the economic structure has likely changed, negatively affecting the required revolutionary class consciousness. China now plays an important part in world capitalism and can today therefore be seen as a systemic actor in the international system.<sup>144</sup> This can, despite the rhetoric of South-South cooperation in the policy papers, be most exemplified in the asymmetrical trade relations and the overseas exploitation of natural resources in export dependent Latin American countries.<sup>145</sup> It contributes to the complexity of the analysis of China and hegemony, since their more exact ideology and desired mode of production is harder to define and separate from those of the contemporary neoliberal hegemony. The next steps for China to become a hegemon in Latin America would be to consolidate, expand and institutionalize their economic influence and then to uphold this by developing and reproducing ideology through institutions.<sup>146</sup>

Since China refers to their economy as a “socialist market economy” in the policy paper from 2016, their systemic characteristics in international relations can play an important role in passive revolution and could possibly be understood by comparing it to the classic Marxist interpretation of reformism. This is a stance that passivates more radical and systematically critical ideas.<sup>147</sup> During the Mao era, China was likely closer to being a candidate for system's change and a potentially global counter-hegemonic force, since their policy was characterized by revolutionary politics that wished to change the capitalist system entirely. For example,

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<sup>142</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 209.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 210.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p. 216.

<sup>145</sup> Jenkins, Rhys, 2012, p. 1350.

<sup>146</sup> Yilmaz, Serafettin, 2014, p. 216.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 207.

according to Cox, the Maoist mobilization concept of the “mass line”, is compatible with Neo-Gramscian thought of counter-hegemonic working-class action.<sup>148</sup>

Nowadays, China however participates in capitalism, undoubtedly being an increasingly influential economic player. China’s friendly discourse towards Latin America is likely a way of reproducing power through consent. To summarize, China can practice economic domination in some sectors, upheld by discourse, without having to be a hegemon in the Neo-Gramscian sense. Even though China cannot be fully classified as a hegemon yet, it is possible that the country can develop into one in the future.

## **6. Discussion**

The purpose of this thesis was to gain a better understanding of China’s growing influence in Latin America over time, examining possible power relations, as well as if increased Chinese involvement in Latin America is reflected in official statements. Additionally, it strived to discuss if China can be considered a new hegemonic force in the region. Through the use of Teun A. van Dijk’s model of Critical Discourse Analysis and the application of Neo-Gramscian theory, the two research questions “how has China’s official policy towards Latin America changed from 2008 to 2016?” and “how can this eventual change be understood in the light of a Neo-Gramscian theoretical perspective?” have been answered.

China’s policy towards Latin America between 2008 and 2016 has remained largely similar; strongly positive and seeking deeper cooperation. However, a certain degree of change in focus and motives has been identified. The policy towards the region has changed from mainly emphasizing South-South cooperation and equal positioning with Latin America, to highlighting the importance of the cooperation for China’s own advancement and seeing it as a way to access new markets. This coincides with the increase of somewhat unequal trade relations with Latin America that benefit China’s internal development. Hence, the nature of the relation to and policy towards Latin America has slightly altered, as China seems eager to continue along this road. Nonetheless, the South-South, or win-win rhetoric remains, even though it is more up-front in the first policy paper. Additionally, Van Dijk’s discursive strategies of argumentation and

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<sup>148</sup> Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 168.



lexical style have been identified in both of China's policy papers and have increased to a certain degree over time. As these are tools of reproducing power through language, China is likely upholding a position of power towards Latin America, concealed by overly positive speech.

The Neo-Gramscian theoretical perspective can help understand these changes through the conclusion that social relations cause shifts in politics. Internal economic, political, and therefore hegemonic shifts in China have undoubtedly affected their external strategy and the slight changes in policy towards Latin America over time. However, according to Neo-Gramscianism, China cannot at the moment be categorized as a fully hegemonic force in Latin America, due to simply not exercising hegemony in all three required areas: economic structure, political society and civil society. China is, though, still influential within the economic structure in Latin America, a position largely upheld by relations appealing to cooperation, as seen in the policy papers. It seems that China's strategy is not yet to become a world hegemon as their influence is mostly limited to this economic engagement, which so far rarely features a combination of consent and coercion. China is also not to be classified as a counter-hegemonic historical bloc according to Neo-Gramscianism. This is partly due to China's expansion outwards, contemporary participation in capitalist exploitation in parts of Latin America, as well as lacking full hegemony. China can instead be interpreted as more of a systemic actor that serves as an alternative to the hegemonic structure in the region, yet currently does not offer any radical, fundamentally counter-hegemonic changes to the structure of the system itself.

Despite these conclusions, it is, as mentioned earlier, very possible that China can evolve into a hegemonic force in the near future. Even if their main influence in Latin America currently is economic, China's rise has gone relatively fast and will most likely continue, eventually into a hegemonic state. This is compatible with the Gramscian view of material conditions affecting ideas and ideologies. China will eventually need ideological support to uphold economic power, as well as practicing coercion. The impact of this can be large, and the geopolitical playground would probably go through remarkable changes, also affected by the position and geography of the US. If the noticed trend continues, the change in a possible future update of the policy paper is likely to be more market oriented. It would, however, not be surprising if the South-South rhetoric would continue. It does contain some substance but is clearly also a way for China to play a two-faced game.

When discussing China, this duality must be pointed out, as the China of today is a complex actor to understand. Despite the critical perspective of this thesis, it is important to add nuance and note that China's engagement in Latin America is not simply black or white. China's rise has helped Latin American states to pursue different paths than a standardized US-friendly one, which due to historical reasons can be seen as beneficial to the region's sovereignty at this stage. Several states have gained access to trade, funds, and loans without being forced to implement neoliberal structural adjustment programs that privatize and deregulate their economies. This has helped to combat poverty through reforms in an otherwise severely economically unequal region. There is, therefore, also some truth in the policy papers.

Yet, at the same time, China also keeps several Latin American states in situations of economic dependency, which is an all too familiar condition for the region. This gives reason to discuss alternative scenarios, and how to create a different world where no one benefits at the expense of others. This world would without a doubt need to fully turn its back on capitalism, which further raises the question of the existence of hegemony. The Gramscian conclusion would be that hegemony will exist, however it will not be practiced by the bourgeoisie but by the proletariat and the subalterns, in order to create a more just world.

China's duality and complexity is what makes the country an interesting study object. This would pave the way for a lot of possible future studies. One could conduct studies on China's relations to specific Latin American countries, other regions, or continents. Comparative studies of China and the US, or also Russia could be carried out. China's international relevance will likely grow in the future, and along with this development, the country's role will definitely go through new phases.

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