

China's Developmental Diplomacy and the Reconfiguration of Global South Interdependence

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Abstract: This research examines the long-standing dominance of the Western model in the field of International Relations, which is founded on a liberal-realist paradigm of the rational state and balance of power. This model has often led to hegemonic relationships, particularly between the Global North and South. However, the rise of non-Western powers like China is challenging this established framework. The study posits Chinese diplomacy as an alternative model that redefines "interdependence" from a distinct civilizational perspective. In contrast to imposition or intervention, the Chinese approach is built on principles of harmony, shared interests, and mutual respect, as reflected in concepts like the "community of a shared future for mankind."

This alternative model is especially significant for states in the Global South seeking to escape political and economic dependency on Western institutions. The research, therefore, aims to explore how Chinese diplomacy, through tools such as the Belt and Road Initiative and developmental diplomacy, can offer a "value-governed pluralistic interdependence." This serves as a theoretical and practical alternative, capable of fostering partnerships based on national sovereignty and mutual benefit.

Keywords: Developmental Diplomacy, Peaceful Rise, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Interdependence, Harmony without Uniformity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment, the field of International Relations has been characterized by the predominance of Western paradigms in explaining state behavior and formulating the rules of international interaction. Western liberal and realist approaches have dominated the interpretation of concepts like security, development, diplomacy, and cooperation. However, the last two decades have witnessed radical transformations in the structure of the international system, resulting from the rise of new, non-Western powers—chief among them China—which now pose a challenge not only at the level of power distribution but also at the level of knowledge production and the conceptualization of international engagement.

Chinese diplomacy, with its philosophy derived from different civilizational and political traditions, is poised to be an alternative model to the Western liberal paradigm, especially in its dealings with the Global South. States in the Global South have shown growing discontent with Western political hegemony and the ideological conditionality that has accompanied their relations with Western institutions. China does not present itself as a hegemonic power but as an "equal development partner," offering a diplomatic model based on the principles of non-interference, mutual benefit, and comprehensive development without imposing a specific value system. This Chinese practice has sparked a wide-ranging debate within IR theories: does Chinese foreign policy represent merely a flexible version of realist pragmatism? Or are we witnessing a distinct theoretical approach that can be employed as a new model for developing nations to overcome the legacy of dependency? Hence, the significance of this research lies in presenting a theoretical and analytical reading of Chinese diplomacy from the perspective of an alternative model for international relations. It poses a fundamental question regarding the possibility of constructing a non-Western global model to guide international interactions, especially given the erosion of trust in the traditional liberal model following recent global crises (the 2008 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war).

The research problem is centered on the following: despite China's rise as a global economic and diplomatic actor, Western studies still approach its international behavior from normative Western standpoints, focusing on concepts such as liberalism, democracy, and liberal governance values, which do not necessarily align with the structure of the Chinese model. At the same time, the states of the Global South, disenchanted by decades of Western dependency, are drawn to this model based on partnership and development without ideological conditionality. Consequently, the research tests the central hypothesis of the extent to which Chinese diplomacy is based on the principle of "peace through development" rather than "peace through balance." This leads to a research puzzle that transcends the traditional explanation of China's foreign behavior, posed through two research questions:

- * How can Chinese diplomacy be interpreted as an alternative theoretical model to the Western normative model in international relations?
- * To what extent does Chinese foreign policy embody a theoretical and practical exit for the states of the Global South from the predicament of Western dependency, within the framework of a new approach to interdependence?

The objectives of the research are therefore:

- * To analyze Chinese foreign policy as an approach based on developmental partnership, non-interference, and multilateralism.
- * To evaluate the perception of the Global South towards China as an alternative development partner rather than a new hegemonic center.
- * To test the capacity of the Chinese model to bring about a theoretical shift in the approaches of International Relations.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a distinct theoretical framework by building upon Complex Interdependence theory (Keohane & Nye) but through a non-Western interpretation, establishing an alternative theoretical model by drawing on concepts from the Chinese School of International Relations (such as "harmony of civilizations" and "peaceful rise"). For instance, in the Western context of Complex Interdependence theory, as presented by Keohane and Nye, international relations are understood as an intertwined network of economic and institutional interactions that reduce the likelihood of armed conflict between states, especially with the growth of interdependence in economic, technological, and multilateral institutional spheres. However, this theory, despite transcending the conflict-oriented nature of realism, remained essentially West-centric, assuming the existence of shared liberal institutional systems and resting on the values of the market and capitalist governance. But when this theory is invoked in the Chinese context, we find not merely a technical application but a radical reinterpretation that reflects a different understanding of interdependence. This understanding moves beyond technical and economic linkages to a civilizational-ethical dimension, wherein China seeks to create a mode of international interaction based on 'harmony' instead of 'standardization,' and on 'plurality' instead of 'uniformity'.

From here emerges the approach of the Chinese School of International Relations, which posits that international relations are not an arena of conflict between hegemonic and non-hegemonic powers, but rather a shared civilizational space that can be organized based on the Confucian principle of "harmony without uniformity" (和而不同). This concept, which China invokes through narratives of "peaceful rise" and a "community of a shared future for mankind," establishes a model distinct from hegemony or even the utilitarian leadership found in Western liberalism.

Instead of imposing a single model for development or governance, China seeks to build a global system based on flexible networks of interdependence, but without ideological conditionality. Thus, the interplay between complex interdependence and Chinese principles produces a new theoretical model that can be described as "pluralistic interdependence governed by local civilizational values." This reflects a shift in the theoretical center of gravity from the West to the South, and from liberal individualism to cultural collectivism.

The term "pluralistic interdependence governed by local civilizational values" represents, in its essence, a qualitative leap in thinking about the relations of the Global South with the international system. It restores the significance of cultural, historical, and local identities in shaping models of cooperation and international interaction, rather than imposing normative Western models centered on liberalism and democracy. In the case of the Global South, which has long suffered from dependency relations that entailed the dismantling of local systems and subjugating them to the imperatives of neoliberal globalization, this concept offers an alternative that recognizes plurality and rebuilds international relations on the basis of respecting specificity rather than erasing it. In this context, the Chinese model of diplomacy, which does not impose political conditionalities or Western value systems (as Western institutions do), is a practical embodiment of the concept of "pluralistic interdependence," as it allows for the formation of broad economic and developmental partnership networks without demanding that states change their political or social structures.

Furthermore, Chinese civilizational values, such as the principle of "harmony without uniformity," provide a theoretical foundation that can be generalized across the Global South, where diverse cultural environments exist but share a rejection of the imposed Western model. This opens the way for an alternative model of international relations, where "interdependence" is measured not only by economic or institutional linkage,

but by the extent to which a partnership respects national sovereignty and cultural and social identity. Thus, "pluralistic interdependence governed by local civilizational values" transforms into a liberatory framework for developing nations, enabling them to redefine their international relations outside the logic of Western dependency and granting them a theoretical and sovereign voice in shaping the new world order.

III. RESULTS

The research is divided into two sections: the first section addresses the Chinese conceptual approach to soft power, while the second section covers the applied aspect by delving into and analyzing the correlational relationship between China and the Global South.

Section One: The Chinese Conceptual Approach to the World and Its Divergence from the Global Context:

This section examines the concepts associated with Chinese foreign policy, including key ideas such as "Peaceful Rise," which is linked to China's rapid growth and peaceful development, and the "Community of a Shared Future," which constitutes a foundational tenet of its foreign policy. Furthermore, it will address the concept of Chinese soft power and its intrinsic link to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a significant instrument of China's global outreach.

Through this policy, China seeks to achieve a range of objectives, including strengthening its economic and political influence towards the states of the Global South, preserving its national security, and curtailing American hegemony. Hence, China's interest in the South lies in expanding its sphere of partnership across all political, economic, social, and cultural domains. Perhaps one of the most prominent manifestations of this partnership is the construction of the Silk Road, which is intended to serve as a bridge between Beijing and all nations of the world (Dorsey, 2017).

The significant developments and changes witnessed by the global system in the 1970s led to a radical transformation in the pattern of traditional relations between major industrial and developing countries, particularly between oil-exporting and oil-importing nations. These changes revealed the extent of interconnected interests and mutual dependence among all parties. They also demonstrated that increased cooperation is the optimal path toward stable and mutually beneficial international relations for the development of the global economy and to assist developing countries in overcoming the challenges they face (Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, 1986).

Chinese foreign policy is anchored in reformulating the concept of interdependence, transforming it into a tool for building developmental partnerships rather than imposing dependency, especially with the states of the Global South. Contrary to Western conceptions, which often link interdependence with notions of hegemony or control over supply chains, China presents itself as a non-interventionist actor that champions "development for cooperation." This is evident in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to enhance regional connectivity through infrastructure and investment without direct political conditionalities, making interdependence a vehicle for promoting shared stability and development, not a tool for geopolitical pressure as it is often portrayed in Western literature (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

The Chinese conception of interdependence reflects a civilizational logic grounded in Confucian ethics, such as "mutual benefit" and "harmony without uniformity," which contrasts with the Western perspective that proceeds from a materialist rationality that views interdependence as an instrument for reducing anarchy in the international system through institutions and mutual deterrence (Zhao, 2009). Therefore, the Chinese model does not seek to build closed alliances or restrictive systems, but rather to formulate flexible models of relations characterized by long-term stability without political escalation—a feature evident in China's relations with Africa and Central Asia.

This Chinese civilizational perspective on interdependence does not merely represent a cultural variance from the Western liberal model; it constitutes a radical redefinition of the philosophy of international cooperation. This stems from a Confucian heritage that emphasizes gradualism, non-imposition of hegemony, and respect for differences without undermining integration. The concept of "harmony without uniformity" (和而不同) (Zhao, 2009) enshrines the idea that cooperation does not require ideological or political system conformity but can be a harmony based on respecting particularities, which imparts a non-confrontational and open character to China's philosophy of interdependence.

In contrast, Western liberal thought—particularly as it appeared in the work of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye on "Complex Interdependence"—presents a conception based on a set of core assumptions: the absence of

a rigid hierarchy among states, the multiplicity of channels for interaction, and the diminished role of military force. However, this model presupposes a unified international institutional architecture (such as the UN, IMF, WTO) to regulate behavior and guide relations, with a tendency to impose "global governance" that subjects state behavior to external standards described as "universal" but which often reflect Western liberal values (Callahan, 2008).

Whereas liberal thought proceeds from a utilitarian rationality that analyzes relations according to a cost-benefit calculus, the Chinese perspective relies on a duality of ethics and interest, where cooperation is viewed as a shared ethical commitment that enhances long-term stability, not a temporary transaction contingent upon the balance of power or networks of influence. This philosophy is clearly manifested in China's approach to partnerships with African nations, where loans and projects are provided without direct political conditionalities, and are instead framed as developmental cooperation contracts with a civilizational dimension.

Consequently, the fundamental difference lies not merely in the "how" of implementation, but in the deep philosophical premises from which each approach originates. Western liberalism anchors international relations in solid institutions and legal systems, whereas the Chinese proposition favors the construction of a "Community of Shared Future" that grows organically and adapts to local contexts without imposing a pre-determined normative template. This is what makes the Chinese model more appealing to the Global South, which has historically suffered from being subjugated to Western standards in the name of modernization or democracy (Zhao, 2009).

China has employed numerous tools and concepts to ensure its effectiveness and presence in various international forums. It utilizes diplomatic power in its foreign policy, which is linked to the core concepts of "Peaceful Rise," "Peaceful Development," and "Community of a Shared Future." It also uses cultural instruments that favorably represent Chinese culture, which has been applied in many situations and is manifested through media, direct discourse, and international forums. This influences global populations by introducing Chinese culture and customs, portraying them as a peaceful and non-aggressive people. From this, new relationships are formed, and China gains new friendships that contribute to its leadership, expansion, and outreach, leading to its further ascent. It can be argued that these are the primary factors that have significantly caused and aided China's rise (Bräutigam, 2009).

China employs the concepts of "developmental diplomacy" and "peaceful rise" as a natural extension of its civilizational thought based on harmony. It seeks to build a "community of a shared future for mankind" rather than imposing a single development model. This contrasts with the Western liberal approach, which has linked development aid to the implementation of political reforms or financial conditions, a practice that has caused numerous crises in Africa and Latin America. China, conversely, emphasizes partnership without interference, a stance that has been widely welcomed by the states of the Global South in their search for an alternative to the hegemony of international financial institutions.

Comparison Table: Chinese vs. Western Models in the Application of Interdependence Theory

Aspect	The Chinese Model (Civilizational Interdependence)	The Western Model (Neoliberal Interdependence)
Philosophical/Value Framework	Based on Confucianism: "Harmony without Uniformity," ethics, mutual benefit, and non-interference.	Materialist rationality: Cost/benefit analysis, international institutions as governing intermediaries, preference for democratic systems.
Vision of International Relations	Flexible, non-confrontational relations based on mutual respect; adaptive to local contexts.	A regulatory institutional network governing relations, based on uniform standards and a preference for codified multilateralism.
Primary Locus of Interdependence	Society and the State together, in an ethical and integrative relationship.	States and international institutions operate according to the laws and standards of global governance.

Aspect	The Chinese Model (Civilizational Interdependence)	The Western Model (Neoliberal Interdependence)
Pattern of State Interaction	Open developmental partnerships, without closed alliances or political conditionality.	Formal alliances, institutional arrangements, economic and political conditionality attached to loans and agreements.
Motivation for Cooperation	To achieve long-term civilizational stability and common interest.	To avoid international anarchy and reduce the cost of conflict by regulating institutional behavior.
Tools of Implementation	Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), development funds, economic and cultural diplomacy.	Financial institutions (IMF, World Bank), multilateral agreements, tools of economic and institutional deterrence.
Stance on National Sovereignty	Strict respect for sovereignty and non-interference, even on human rights issues.	Amenability to political and economic conditionality in the name of democracy and good governance.
Impact on the Global South	Offers an attractive path for independent development that is politically and culturally acceptable; avoids imposing a single model.	Generates resentment of institutional conditionality, creates economic/political vulnerability, and fosters resistance to imposed models.
Main Challenge	Accusations of "expansionist diplomacy" or disguised economic hegemony.	Loss of trust in the model due to repeated failures in the South and the recurrence of neocolonial patterns.

First: The Concept of Peaceful Rise:

The concept of China's "Peaceful Rise" was articulated in October 2003 by the influential Chinese political advisor Zheng Bijian. Through this concept, he sought to reassure the international community that China's return to the global stage as a major player would not threaten the international system or its security and stability, as is typically the case when new international powers emerge or old ones return. On December 9, 2003, during his official visit to the United States, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao stated: "China's rise is a peaceful one because China is developing by relying on its own strength... In foreign relations, we have always advocated for the development of friendly and cooperative relations with different countries, which we always regard as brothers" (Hekmat Al-Abd Al-Rahman, 2015, p. 58).

In light of this, the concept of Peaceful Rise was officially adopted by President Hu Jintao. In 2004, the term was replaced with "Peaceful Development." China championed this concept in response to the "China Threat Theory" to reassure the world, particularly the United States and its Asian neighbors, about the peaceful nature of its ascent. Based on this concept, China asserts that it is a responsible power that supports soft power, economic prosperity, and constructive issues like climate change. The concept, established after a long period of internal conflict over its identity, reflects a new identity derived from its historical values. Accordingly, China ultimately formulated its foreign policy on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, which have significantly contributed to the development of its relations (Sorensen, 2015). This concept forms the core of the Belt and Road Initiative, and the initiative's action plan placed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence at the forefront of its guiding principles.

In this context, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence gained wide acceptance in international forums like the Geneva Conference, becoming the greatest common denominator in managing relations between states. They were included in a series of bilateral and multilateral documents, becoming fundamental rules of modern international relations and basic principles of international law. In this vein, President Xi Jinping stated that these principles "set a historic benchmark for international relations and the rule of law," were the "main guide for establishing and developing relations between countries with different social systems," and served as a

"powerful rallying force behind the efforts of developing countries to achieve cooperation and self-strengthening through unity." This indicates that Xi Jinping's thinking within the Chinese leadership remains committed to China's peaceful identity, but through new methods and concepts suited to China's new global role, such as the "Community of a Shared Future" (Farid Mohammed, 2023).

The concept of Peaceful Rise sparked debate within China. Some opposed its use, while others, particularly the faction of President Jiang Zemin, known as the pragmatic nationalists, expressed reservations. The objections centered on several reasons, the most prominent being that the term "rise" itself might provoke the concerns of others, whether it was peaceful or not. Amid this debate, this faction proposed replacing "rise" with the concept of "Peace and Development," which has its roots in the strategy of Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China's policy of "Reform and Opening Up" and its contemporary cultural, social, and economic modernization since 1978. Nevertheless, Peaceful Rise remains the officially adopted policy in China, with its leaders consistently emphasizing it as their country's strategic choice (Gong, 2006). Under Xi Jinping, China has taken remarkable steps and initiatives to support its peaceful rise and its role as a responsible great power, for example, its leading role on the issue of climate change and the nuclear crises of Iran and North Korea, as well as initiating its Asian neighborhood policy.

Second: The Concept of Peaceful Development:

The concept of "Peaceful Rise" emerged as official policy in 2004 under the leadership of President Hu Jintao, and was subsequently developed into "Peaceful Development" by Chinese specialists in international relations with the support of leaders from the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the government. This term was an attempt to refute the "China Threat Theory." The concept sought to portray China as a responsible global actor, emphasizing soft power and that China is committed to its domestic issues and improving the welfare needs of its citizens before intervening in global affairs. It was Jiang Zemin who suggested changing the term from Peaceful Rise to Peaceful Development (Bustelo, 2005). The use of the term "rise" was seen as controversial, as the word could lead to perceptions that China's "rise" posed a threat to the existing international order. Therefore, since 2004, the term has been replaced with "Peaceful Development." In addition to promoting this concept, the country's leadership also embarked on a "neighborhood diplomacy" program, focusing on good-neighborliness, friendship, and partnership. Furthermore, China has asserted that, unlike Western powers, it is capable of rising peacefully due to its Confucian cultural traditions, without needing to seek hegemony (Pathak, 2015).

Notably, on October 16, 2022, at the 20th National Congress of the CPC, the Party's General Secretary indicated that China steadfastly pursues an independent foreign policy of peace, adheres to developing friendly cooperation with other countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and upholds the fundamental national policy of opening up. He added that the Chinese people are willing to work with the people of the world to create a better future for humanity. He further stated that pursuing an independent foreign policy of peace means steadfastly following the path of peaceful development, opposing a Cold War mentality, opposing interference in other countries' internal affairs, and opposing double standards. China will never seek hegemony or engage in external expansion. China is the only country in the world that has written "adherence to the path of peaceful development" into its constitution. It actively participates in UN peacekeeping operations and international arms control and disarmament processes, and is committed to building a world of lasting peace. Through its grasp of these realities, China was able to avoid the trap of being prematurely classified as a rising threat, thereby neutralizing such directed perceptions through internal intellectual efforts that led to the birth of new concepts like Peaceful Rise. This concept was leveraged to counter preconceived notions and was employed in the service of the country's foreign policy and supreme national interest in a unique model within the field of international relations, transforming a challenge into an opportunity through exceptional policies for economic and military ascent (Bakir, 2016). China's efforts to enhance transparency, social justice, and environmental sustainability reflect key features of the "Peaceful Rise" theory it has adopted in its foreign and development policy since the turn of the millennium. Unlike Western imperial models, China seeks to establish a model of ascent that is not based on military expansion or interference in the internal affairs of other nations. Instead, it is founded on "peaceful internal development" and the presentation of a "mutual benefit" model rooted in cooperation rather than hegemony.

This vision is evident in China's commitment to promoting social justice domestically through its "Common Prosperity" initiative, which aims to reduce the gap between urban and rural areas, as well as between the rich and the poor. This enhances its domestic stability and prevents the emergence of social conflicts that could hinder its rise. Furthermore, its expanded investment in environmental protection and clean energy underscores that Beijing views sustainable development as a peaceful path toward advancing in the

international system, leveraging the global shift toward a green economy without engaging in confrontational geopolitical rivalries (IEA, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

On the other hand, the gradual transparency of the Chinese model is manifested not as a response to external pressures but as a component of its "Peaceful Rise" strategy. This approach allows China to present itself as a reliable partner, especially to the nations of the Global South, through instruments like the Belt and Road Initiative and its "Green Development" and "Development Assistance" programs. This offers these nations an alternative to traditional Western models, which are typically associated with political conditionalities and sovereign interference (Xinhua, 2024; UNDP, 2024).

Therefore, these reforms are strongly linked to China's "Peaceful Development" thesis, which posits that domestic stability, based on balanced development, is the cornerstone of its continued ascent as a rising power without resorting to conflict or undermining others. Moreover, this model grants China the moral high ground in international discourse, positioning it as a power that champions the principle of "development for security, not security for development," in contrast to Western approaches that often conflate intervention with development (OECD, 2024).

Third: The Concept of a Community of a Shared Future:

The concept of a "Shared Future" is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, which has been inherited over thousands of years, inspired by the Chinese adage, "When the great way prevails, the world is for all." This is what China aims to achieve through the concept of a shared future (Yang, 2010). The concept is based on establishing an equal partnership founded on mutual understanding, instituting a security model characterized by justice, fairness, joint construction, and shared benefits, and striving for development horizons marked by openness, innovation, tolerance, and mutual benefit (Jamal, 2022).

The strategy of "Joint Construction of a Shared Future" for the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, known succinctly as the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), is considered the primary driver of Chinese domestic policy and its foreign diplomacy. It aims to hold high the banner of "Peaceful Rise" and "Peaceful Development" based on the history of the ancient Silk Road, and to initiate economic cooperation partnerships among countries across three continents—Asia, Europe, and Africa—traversed by the Belt and Road. This is undertaken in pursuit of jointly building a community of shared interests, a community of a shared future, and a community of shared responsibility, which are embodied in mutual political trust, economic integration, and cultural tolerance between China and other nations (Makhloufi, 2017).

From this standpoint, in March 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping first proposed the concept of a "Community of a Shared Future for Mankind" in a speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. Since then, this concept has been continuously enriched and developed. It has been adopted in numerous resolutions, statements, and declarations of the UN General Assembly and multilateral mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS alliance. It has garnered broad appreciation and support from the international community for the common ground it establishes between China and the world, and among the world's nations themselves (Zhu Xiuyuan, 2023).

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the concept's introduction, the Chinese government published a white paper on September 26, 2023, titled "A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions." The lengthy document contains a long list of statements expressing China's concerns regarding the increasing instability of the international system and clarified the intellectual content and practical achievements of the concept. It emphasizes that all nations and peoples are bound by a common destiny, and that what affects one country—regardless of its size—will consequently affect others. It calls for building a world of lasting peace, universal security, common prosperity, openness, and tolerance to achieve a beautiful world. It commits to the principle of "consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits" in global governance, enabling all countries to be participants, contributors, and beneficiaries of global peace and development. China sees in this concept a solution to the international problems that have arisen, and many view it as a lifeline for a world damaged by intense conflict and competition (China Studies Unit, 2023).

In this context, the Belt and Road Initiative, proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, has become a widely welcomed public good and an important platform for building a community of a shared future for mankind, based on the principle of consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits. As of October 2022, China had signed more than 200 cooperation documents with 149 countries and 32 international organizations under the BRI framework. The important concept of a community of a shared future for mankind not only provides a Chinese solution to the major challenges facing the world today but also points to the correct direction for human society to advance towards peace and prosperity (Xu Xiujun, 2022).

Fourth: The Concept of Chinese Soft Power:

China's interest in soft power began in the early 1990s, but this interest became firmly established by the mid-2000s. In this context, China's rise and subsequent peaceful development led to an increase in its core interests worldwide, with the Arab region becoming one of the regions of vital importance to Chinese foreign policy. China chose a soft power strategy as its approach to strengthening relations with the states of the Global South. It does not seek to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, nor is it based on a clash of civilizations. Instead, it aims to disseminate the values of Chinese culture through diplomatic and cultural relations and economic cooperation (Naama, 2017).

From this perspective, China employs a broader conception of soft power that includes all elements of power outside the security and military domains, including investment and aid tools for developing countries, which serves as an effective instrument for China in its dealings with various nations, especially the Arab region. Through the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor of the BRI, China is developing numerous infrastructure and joint construction projects with countries in the region and beyond. This demonstrates that China is pursuing a multidimensional strategy that includes soft power, which supports its broader military modernization and power projection efforts to secure its energy needs. It is noteworthy that a key requirement for the use of soft power is the expansion of economic relations, which ultimately leads to the deepening of soft power ties (Sharma, 2024). Critics argue that the COVID-19 pandemic is a vivid example of China's "soft" economic diplomacy, in what has been termed "mask diplomacy." While reactions were mixed, it is undeniable that China was able to provide assistance in various forms to many countries, thanks to its economic capabilities (Carminati, 2020).

Therefore, China relies on a number of soft power tools in its foreign policy, most notably:

- **The Diplomatic Tool:** China uses its diplomacy to strengthen its international relations through initiatives such as the "Belt and Road Initiative," where it seeks to solidify its relationships with developing countries via massive infrastructure projects and trade agreements, which is termed economic diplomacy.
- **The Media Tool:** Chinese media plays a major role in disseminating China's image globally. Through major media networks like CGTN, China strives to present a positive image of itself and enhance understanding of its policies and culture. Chinese media also aims to counter the negative stereotypes that may be entrenched in some countries.
- **Culture and Education:** China invests heavily in spreading its culture and language across the world. Through "Confucius Institutes" located in many universities worldwide, it teaches the Chinese language and culture to foreigners. Additionally, China offers scholarships to international students, which promotes understanding and rapprochement between China and the rest of the world.

Accordingly, through these soft power tools, China seeks to build a positive image and enhance its influence in a way that relies not only on hard power but also on cultural appeal and international cooperation.

Section Two: The Correlational Relationship between the Global South and China

The relationship between China and the states of the Global South constitutes a distinctive model of unconventional interdependence, based on a civilizational and political vision that differs from the Western liberal model. China's engagement with the Global South proceeds from a philosophy of "mutual benefit and shared development," which aligns with its Confucian principles, especially "harmony without uniformity." This is evident in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is one of China's most prominent tools for translating the concept of interdependence into practice.

The Belt and Road Initiative is distinguished by being not merely a global infrastructure project, but a strategic framework for building economic networks and development corridors that connect China to the world, particularly to the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In this context, interdependence is understood as a network of long-term interests that does not aim to impose political models or supra-national legal frameworks, but rather seeks to adapt to the actual developmental needs of each country. For example, in Africa, China has financed railway projects, ports, and industrial complexes without political conditionalities, offering an attractive alternative to the model of Western loans conditioned on structural reforms.

In light of this, China's tools within the BRI appear as non-confrontational instruments of economic and political integration, which include:

1. The Silk Road Fund:

The Silk Road Fund, established in 2014 with an initial capital of \$40 billion, is a financial instrument aimed at funding infrastructure, energy, and transportation projects in partner countries within the BRI framework. This fund provides China with the ability to shape a form of flexible interdependence, enabling countries to obtain

development financing without binding political conditions, as is the case with Western institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This financing solidifies China's role as a global provider of public goods and strengthens its network of relationships in the Global South, especially in Africa, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe (Lin, 2015).

In this context, the Silk Road Fund is not used as a tool of political pressure but as a developmental bridge connecting developing countries with China, which grants it broad political acceptance. Countries like Pakistan, Kenya, and Ethiopia have benefited from massive projects directly financed by this fund, which translates into a form of Chinese soft partnership exercised not through rules or sanctions, but through development and partnership in major projects (Hurley et al., 2018).

In 2024, the Silk Road Fund continued to play a critical role in enhancing China's soft power in the Global South by financing large-scale projects that support development without imposing political conditionalities. This has solidified China's image as an "alternative development partner" to traditional Western institutions. Prominent recent examples include the Fund's financing of the second phase of the Mombasa Port in Kenya with 1.5 billion, which increased its operational capacity by 351.5 billion, which increased its operational capacity by 351.2 billion railway line between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, aimed at enhancing regional trade (AIIB Annual Report, 2024).

These projects reflect how China employs its financial instruments to project soft power through tangible development rather than political rhetoric. They highlight its ability to build flexible relationships with Global South nations by providing developmental public goods that foster peaceful mutual interdependence and shared development. This is consistent with China's vision of a peaceful rise based on the tools of development, not hegemony.

2. **The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB): Towards a New Financial Multilateralism**

Established through a Chinese initiative in 2016, the AIIB is a structural tool for expanding the developmental financing model beyond the Western institutional framework. Unlike the World Bank, the AIIB focuses on transportation, energy, and green development projects. Its participation in financing BRI projects is a means of lending institutional legitimacy to the Chinese model of developmental cooperation (Chin, 2016). This approach expresses a Chinese logic of interdependence based on mutual benefit and non-imposition of neoliberal economic policies on borrowing countries. The AIIB is considered an important lever for reshaping global financial governance; while led by China, it operates with multilateral participation, which enhances China's image as a partner in multilateralism, not a hegemon. This constitutes an alternative model for the states of the Global South seeking development without political dependency or ideological conditions, as seen in renewable energy projects in Egypt, Azerbaijan, and Mongolia, jointly financed by the AIIB and other development banks. In 2024-2025, the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) continued to consolidate its role as an effective instrument for enhancing Chinese soft power in the Global South. It has done so by providing flexible, politically unconditional development financing, which stands in contrast to Western models that are often tied to liberal policy conditionalities. Among the most prominent recent examples is the bank's co-financing of the Aswan Solar Power Complex in Egypt, a 200 million project in partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). This initiative enhanced Egypt's renewable energy generation capacity and is projected to reduce carbon emissions by 12200 million project in partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). This initiative enhanced Egypt's renewable energy generation capacity and is projected to reduce carbon emissions by 12100 million smart transport networks project in Azerbaijan to improve sustainable infrastructure (AIIB, 2025), and supported the Green Energy Hub project in Mongolia, which aims to increase the share of clean energy to 30% of the national grid by 2030 (AIIB, 2025). These projects reinforce China's image as a partner in sustainable development and support its narrative of a peaceful rise achieved through the instruments of development, not hegemony. These recent projects demonstrate how the AIIB is utilized as a soft power instrument for China to promote its alternative development model—one founded on multilateral partnership rather than hegemony. By offering the Global South development financing that bolsters its economic autonomy, the AIIB entrenches the narrative of a peaceful Chinese rise achieved through development, not coercive influence. This also solidifies China's position as a responsible actor in restructuring global financial governance, moving beyond traditional Western paradigms (Asian Development Bank Institute (ADB), 2025).

3. **Health and Cultural Diplomacy: Soft Tools for Enhancing International Image:**

Health and cultural diplomacy are among the most prominent features of China's outreach in the Global South, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, during which China provided vaccines and medical aid to more than 80 countries. In addition, Beijing has used university scholarship programs, the establishment of Confucius Institutes, and the expansion of media exchanges as means of shaping a new global discourse based on civilizational understanding and shared development (Huang, 2021). This approach represents a practical translation of the principle of "harmony without uniformity" in international relations and enhances China's image as a responsible global power.

This diplomacy aims to build symbolic capital in non-Western societies through civilizational narratives and cultural partnerships that offer an alternative to the Western model based on cultural globalization and Westernization. This dimension harmonizes with Joseph Nye's theory of soft power, but in the Chinese context, it is employed within a political-cultural framework that reflects the centrality of Confucian values and ethical development in Chinese foreign policy.

In recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, China has continued to intensify its use of health and cultural diplomacy as soft power instruments to strengthen its standing in the Global South. For instance, as of mid-2024, China officially announced it had provided over 3 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to 119 countries, with 70% directed to nations in the Global South across Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2024). China has also signed new medical agreements to establish joint Sino-African hospitals in Kenya, Ghana, and Algeria as part of the "Health Silk Road 2030" plan.

In the cultural sphere, the number of Confucius Institutes rose to 555 in 2024, spanning over 160 countries, with 60% of them concentrated in the Global South (Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2024). During 2023-2024, China also provided more than 50,000 university scholarships to students from Africa alone under the "Belt and Road Academic Exchange" programs—the highest figures since the initiative's launch. In Latin America, countries such as Argentina and Brazil witnessed the signing of cultural and media exchange agreements that included over 200 Chinese-supported artistic and cultural projects during 2024, thereby enhancing China's cultural influence in those regions (Xinhua, 2024).

These quantitative indicators demonstrate how China is building soft power in the Global South through mechanisms that diverge from traditional Western patterns of globalization, offering an alternative based on civilizational partnership and mutual respect. This intersects with the core of China's peaceful rise, which links internal development with non-confrontational external engagement, solidifying China's image as a source of development, not hegemony. This approach is in harmony with the principles of "Peaceful Development" and "South-South Cooperation."

Infrastructure Diplomacy:

Investment in massive infrastructure projects represents the cornerstone of the BRI, such as the Gwadar Port in Pakistan, the Nairobi-Mombasa Railway, and energy complexes in Ethiopia. These projects, unlike the Western model, are not bound by political conditions but are instead framed as investment partnerships aimed at achieving common developmental interests. Therefore, "infrastructure diplomacy" is considered a Chinese tool for entrenching a model of "stability through development" in politically and security-fragile environments, which enhances the trust of local governments in Beijing as a non-interventionist partner (Rolland, 2017). From a Chinese perspective, this is justified as part of a long-term developmental vision that allows developing nations to build their economic capacities. This has led the initiative to gain the support of the African Union and Southeast Asian nations, given the absence of realistic Western alternatives for financing and infrastructure in these regions.

From this standpoint, China views the states of the Global South as important trade partners, which reflects the depth of the Global South's relations with China and its interest in moving forward with greater cooperation. China diversifies its areas of cooperation with these countries and combines several mechanisms, but at the forefront is the securing of energy sources, which China critically needs to achieve mutual benefit, while supporting Arab countries in generating new energy sources through Chinese technology. It combines economic mechanisms such as cooperation in financial markets, international trade, and infrastructure projects, one of the most prominent areas of the initiative. This is in addition to civil society mechanisms and the establishment of new platforms like various forums (HKTDC, n.d.).

Therefore, it can be said that the distinctive policy of President Xi Jinping, through the Belt and Road Initiative, relies heavily on investment in these countries to facilitate trade routes across Eurasia. It is considered a direct attempt by the Chinese government to provide capital investment in infrastructure in the Middle East. It is characterized by the significant participation of Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in strategic assets in many countries of the Global South. Alongside the BRI, Chinese companies are heavily involved in ports along

the Suez Canal, the resources sector, and the transportation industries in the Middle East and North Africa. Hence, Chinese investment is not solely financial in nature, and these growing interests have led to a steady intensification of diplomatic exchanges between China and the Middle East over the past fifteen years (Fuhr, 2021).

Consequently, the Chinese vision translates into soft and flexible tools in China's diplomacy, where development aid is not used as a tool for pressure, but as a means of building a "Community of a Shared Future for Mankind." For example, in Africa, tools such as low-interest infrastructure loans, the construction of hospitals and schools, and cultural exchanges are used as channels for creating long-term developmental linkages without imposing political reforms. Likewise, in Southeast Asia, China adheres to the principle of "decentralization in cooperation" through flexible institutions like the China-ASEAN Forum, which allows each party to determine its priorities without conflict over leadership or values (Shambaugh, 2013).

Unlike Western systems that assume the centrality of international institutions as a regulatory framework for interdependence, China builds parallel networks that are more adaptive to the specificities of the Global South, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative. These are designed specifically to meet the needs of countries according to the principle of "building a common dream," not imposing a monolithic model. These tools reinforce what can be termed "**pluralistic interdependence governed by civilizational values**," where the relationship originates from a developmental-sovereign foundation, not from institutional-regulatory engineering in the Western style. This makes it more sustainable in post-colonial environments and creates a form of strategic flexibility (Zhao, 2005).

China seeks to present a model that diverges from Western practices in its relations with the Global South by translating its civilizational values, rooted in Confucian philosophy—such as "harmony without uniformity," "non-interference," and "mutual respect"—into tangible practices in its foreign policy. This approach is embodied in the principle of "development without political conditions," which China is keen to apply in all its development initiatives across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This stands in contrast to Western institutions, which typically link their aid to conditionalities related to democracy or governance. These values form the moral and political foundation of what China calls a "common development partnership," reflecting a balance between economic interests and civilizational considerations in its policies toward the Global South (Huang, 2024).

In the practical application of these values, China employs its diplomatic tools with flexibility. These include the Belt and Road Initiative, granting thousands of annual scholarships to youth from the Global South, establishing over 40 Confucius Institutes in Africa and Latin America, and providing medical assistance during crises, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. These instruments are utilized with the aim of building China's image as an alternative civilizational and developmental partner to the West, while promoting a diplomatic narrative based on mutual respect for national sovereignty and refraining from imposing any specific political model. Consequently, China has come to be viewed in these nations as a partner that prioritizes developmental needs over political agendas (Zhang, 2025).

These initiatives represent one of the pillars of modern Chinese soft power, as they contribute to cementing China's image as a non-colonial actor that supports civilizational and developmental partnership, not dependency. This is why it has garnered widespread acceptance in many nations of the Global South. Through this approach, China has managed to counter the Western discourse that portrays it as merely an economic competitor, instead presenting itself as an alternative model that respects civilizational specificities and provides development paths free from political conditionality, as demonstrated in its cooperation with countries like Pakistan, Kenya, and Ethiopia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2024).

This correlational relationship between the Global South and China, founded on peaceful development and the concept of a community of a shared future for mankind, reveals important strategic dimensions that transcend mere economic cooperation to restructure relations of power, knowledge, and interdependence on non-confrontational grounds. Below is a detailed analysis of the most prominent of these aspects:

First: Liberation from Western Dependency and Conditional Models:

The Chinese vision offers the states of the Global South an alternative model to the Western liberal system, which often attaches support to strict political and economic conditions related to good governance, transparency, and "liberal democracy." China, in contrast, follows the principle of non-interference and focuses on peaceful development as a form of balanced cooperation based on mutual benefit and national sovereignty. This grants the states of the Global South wider latitude in formulating their national policies without external ideological pressure.

For example, countries like Ethiopia, Zambia, and Sri Lanka have benefited from Chinese loans and investments in infrastructure without the imposition of conditions related to reforming their political or economic systems, as is done by Western institutions like the IMF.

Second: Re-engineering International Economic Balances:

Through the Belt and Road Initiative and institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund, China is contributing to the reshaping of the global financial system and providing new financing tools that bridge the gaps in infrastructure, energy, and technology projects in the Global South. These tools allow for increased financial independence and the capacity to implement national development plans without being beholden to externally imposed economic policies.

In doing so, China brings the idea of "South-South Cooperation" back to the forefront, but implements it with massive tools and tangible projects, which lends it practical credibility in contrast to the often-unfulfilled promises of the West.

Third: An Alternative Discourse That Elevates Civilizational Specificity:

The concept of a "Community of a Shared Future for Mankind" (人类命运共同体) is based on transcending the idea of polarity and binary classifications (North/South, center/periphery). It restores consideration for civilizational and cultural diversity in the formulation of international relations. This is reflected in China's adoption of non-confrontational approaches centered on integration rather than hegemony, and partnership rather than dependency. This suits the states of the Global South, which have suffered from epistemic and historical exclusion in the prevailing international system. In Africa, for instance, China's call to respect "harmony without uniformity" resonates strongly with political and cultural elites because it legitimizes local development paths that are not constrained by rigid Western models.

Fourth: Building Unconventional Security and Developmental Partnerships:

Through the tools of "developmental diplomacy," China integrates development with security, especially in regions of conflict or instability. Instead of military intervention or imposing systems, China seeks to strengthen economic and social structures, proceeding from its vision that security stems from development, not from deterrence or military alliances. This approach is well-suited to the fragile contexts in the South and redefines the concept of security away from the Western military perspective. For instance, in the Horn of Africa, China invests in infrastructure, ports, and energy without tying these investments to security alliances or political agendas, which enhances local acceptance and fosters long-term stability.

Fifth: An Adaptable Model, Not Forcibly Exported:

Unlike the Western model, which presents its paradigm as a universal standard that other countries are expected to follow, China offers a practical model that is not promoted as a comprehensive formula. Instead, it is a system of values and experiences that can be drawn upon according to context. This enhances local adaptability and reduces the political tensions that result from "value imposition" or "cultural supremacism."

Concluding Remarks:

- The Chinese vision, with its concepts such as "Peaceful Development," "Community of a Shared Future," and "non-interference," provides the states of the Global South with a strategic horizon for liberation from the structural constraints of the international system, while preserving national specificity and fostering partnership in a more balanced and pluralistic international environment. However, the challenge remains in ensuring transparency, social justice, and environmental sustainability within this model, which are promising areas for future critical research.
- Therefore, it can be said that the interdependence between China and the Global South via the BRI reflects a hybrid model of cooperation that combines development, mutual respect, and non-interference, with the long-term goal of reshaping the international system on more balanced and just foundations, outside of traditional Western hegemony.
- Regarding the research questions, they have been answered through an integrated theoretical and practical analysis that reflects the differentiation of the Chinese model in international relations from the Western normative model. The study revealed that Chinese diplomacy is understood not merely as a foreign policy tool, but as a parallel civilizational paradigm that establishes an alternative theoretical model based on an ethical system with Confucian roots, such as the principles of "harmony without uniformity" and "mutual benefit." These values reflect China's rejection of the logic of closed alliances or interference in the internal affairs of states, offering a more flexible and gradual alternative for building relationships. This contrasts with the Western liberal model, which is based on materialist

rational assumptions that subject interdependence to rules of institutional deterrence and conditionality, often linked to the imposition of political and economic models on weaker states.

- The study has demonstrated that Chinese foreign policy embodies this theoretical proposition through multiple instruments that respond to the aspirations of the states of the Global South, giving this model a practical dimension that transcends theoretical postulation. The Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank function not only as financing tools but as mechanisms for rebalancing the international financial system away from Western dominance. Furthermore, infrastructure diplomacy, along with health and cultural diplomacy, is based on mutual respect and the non-imposition of various conditionalities, which has made these initiatives officially and popularly accepted in the countries of the South, unlike Western models that are often coupled with economic and political conditionality.
- Thus, Chinese policy embodies a theoretical and practical exit for the states of the South from the predicament of Western dependency by building equal partnerships that respect sovereign specificities and respond to local development priorities. This path provides an alternative framework to traditional concepts of interdependence and redefines international relations from a non-Western perspective, opening the door for modes of cooperation that move beyond the traditional liberal-institutional concept to one that is more flexible and tolerant of civilizational and political diversity.
- This Chinese model of diplomacy is still crystallizing, but it represents a genuine opportunity for the states of the Global South to reposition themselves within the international system without engaging in sharp polarizations or submitting to traditional patterns of hegemony. Therefore, this study calls for more critical comparative research between different civilizational models in managing international relations and for opening a new horizon for post-Western hegemony approaches, whether through political theorizing or tangible development policies.
- Testing the capacity of the Chinese model to bring about a theoretical transformation in the approaches of International Relations is one of the most significant conceptual challenges facing theorists and policymakers in the Global South. The Chinese model, with its values that diverge from the Western liberal frame of reference, seeks not only to offer alternative tools in foreign policy but also to redefine the foundational concepts of the international system, such as sovereignty, interdependence, development, and even the concept of power itself. Instead of viewing international relations from the perspective of "hegemony and balance," entrenched by realism, or "cooperation through institutions," adopted by liberalism, the Chinese model is based on a civilizational-value-based logic. It treats international relations as a network of ethical-pragmatic interests founded on the principles of "mutual benefit" and "harmony without uniformity" (和而不同, *Hé ér bù tóng*). This gives the approach an ability to adapt to non-Western contexts without imposing cultural or political conditionalities.
- Despite China's growing presence on the international stage, some Western analyses continue to raise questions regarding several aspects of the Chinese model, particularly concerning transparency, governance, human rights, and the long-term impact of its development projects on recipient nations. According to this perspective, the Chinese model is observed to focus on economic development without directly linking economic progress to democratic transitions or liberal governance. This represents a stark departure from the Western model, which often stipulates a connection between development and democracy in its aid policies. Furthermore, some Western studies suggest that Chinese financial institutions, such as the Silk Road Fund or the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), are presented as less committed to transparency standards compared to their Western counterparts like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Concerns are also periodically raised about the potential impact of these projects on the debt sustainability of some Global South nations, although there is no conclusive evidence to suggest this phenomenon is systemic across all projects.
- In contrast, the Chinese model presents itself as a pragmatic alternative to the Western model, founded on the principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and pragmatism. This appeals to nations in the Global South that have grown weary of Western political conditionalities tied to neoliberal reforms. China does not impose political or ideological criteria for partnerships, focusing instead on mutual interests and tangible development through infrastructure, transport, energy, and technology. This approach has granted it growing acceptance in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These nations view

China as a practical partner that acknowledges their right to develop according to their own civilizational contexts, free from attempts at Westernization or the reproduction of Western-centric paradigms.

- On a political level, the Chinese model challenges the concept of "liberal globalization" by introducing new paradigms such as the "community with a shared future" and "shared development," which advocate for an international balance based on cultural pluralism and respect for diverse development models. The future of this model appears increasingly attractive to the Global South amid the escalating crises of Western liberal democracy and declining trust in traditional Western-led international institutions. Moreover, China's peaceful rise is anchored in developmental tools rather than instruments of hard power, which enhances its image as a non-colonial partner that does not seek to reproduce hegemony, but rather to build mutually beneficial partnerships.
- The theoretical effectiveness of this model is tested by its potential for generalization beyond the Chinese context, particularly in the states of the South that share with China historical experiences of colonialism and marginalization, as well as a desire to break free from patterns of structural dependency. If this model succeeds in presenting a developmental vision that does not undermine sovereignty, a diplomatic style that avoids a confrontational disposition, and is coupled with an alternative financial system like the Silk Road Fund and the AIIB, then it will be a candidate for making a genuine theoretical contribution to redrawing the field of International Relations, or at the very least, breaking the monopoly of Western-centrism in the production of international knowledge. However, the real challenge remains the extent to which the Chinese model can develop a theoretical flexibility capable of dialogue with other schools of thought and move beyond its implementation tools toward crystallizing a systematic conceptual framework that is amenable to academic testing and critique.

IV. CONCLUSION

In light of the theoretical and conceptual analysis of interdependence, Chinese developmental diplomacy emerges as a distinct model that challenges the traditional framework imposed by the West on the concepts of international cooperation and development. While interdependence in Western liberal thought has been linked to rationalist concepts based on economic interests and conflict deterrence within an international institutional system, the Chinese approach stems from an alternative civilizational vision. It establishes relations based on "mutual benefit," "mutual respect," and "harmony without uniformity," reflecting its Confucian background and prioritizing gradual stability and shared interests without interfering in internal affairs or imposing specific political models.

Therefore, the fundamental difference between the Chinese and Western models lies in the essence of their relationship with the Global South. While the West seeks to reproduce structures of dependency through a neoliberal political economy, China offers a pragmatic alternative that prioritizes development first, sovereignty second, and cooperation free from political conditionalities. Consequently, China is gaining increasing strategic acceptance in the Global South as a rising power that presents a different development model, one that aligns with these nations' aspirations to break free from historical patterns of hegemony. The profound difference between the Chinese and Western models is manifested in the nature of the philosophy governing their respective relationships with the nations of the Global South. While the Western model operates from an institutionalist standpoint governed by standards of good governance and a neoliberal political economy—often imposing conditions related to economic restructuring, political liberalization, and human rights—the Chinese model is founded on the principle of respecting sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, with a clear focus on achieving economic development as a gateway to political and social stability. This approach gives China a flexible advantage in building strategic partnerships with Global South nations, as they are not subjected to ideological or political conditions but are treated as sovereign entities pursuing their national interests without dictates.

This Chinese model, based on "development first, cooperation second," redefines the concept of mutual interdependence in a manner not linked to hegemony but to the exchange of practical benefits. This is why China is increasingly presented in the political discourse of the Global South as a rising power representing a realistic alternative to the Western model, which has long been associated with a history of tutelage or conditionality. As challenges associated with the liberal international order mount, nations of the Global South have come to view the Chinese experience as a practical model for achieving their interests beyond the constraints of Western institutions, especially in the fields of infrastructure, energy, and the green economy.

The first research question, concerning the explanation of Chinese diplomacy as an alternative theoretical model to the Western model in international relations, has been answered. The research concluded that Chinese diplomacy indeed represents a divergent model. It is based on a set of principles that differ fundamentally from traditional Western foundations, which are centered on hegemony, intervention, and tying aid to political conditions. The research has shown that the Chinese model is based on the concepts of developmental partnership, respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and working through multilateral institutions. It also highlighted that these principles are organically linked to China's soft power tools, which seek to build an image of a state that sponsors development and partnership, not hegemony, thereby reflecting an alternative vision for international relations that transcends Western-centrism.

Regarding the extent to which Chinese foreign policy embodies a theoretical and practical exit for the nations of the Global South from the predicament of Western dependency, the research has demonstrated that it represents both. Chinese foreign policy offers a viable path for many Global South nations seeking to liberate themselves from the asymmetrical dependency relationships imposed by the Western system. It was emphasized that China's mutual interdependence with these countries is pragmatic and developmental in character, differing from the logic of exploitation or hegemony. China presents itself as a development partner in infrastructure, technology, and trade through initiatives like the Belt and Road, without political or ideological strings attached. This policy has thereby proven its ability to reshape the concept of mutual interdependence into a tool for enhancing national development and political independence for developing countries, rather than a gateway to entrenching dependency, as is often the case with the Western model.

As for the success of the Chinese model in bringing about a theoretical shift in international relations approaches, the research has shown that the model possesses attributes qualifying it to induce a gradual transformation in the theory and practice of international relations, especially in the post-unipolar environment. China does not propose a confrontational alternative to Western concepts but rather offers an essentially different path based on shared development, multipolarity, and respect for civilizational diversity. Through an analysis of the perceptions of Global South nations, the research revealed that these countries now see China as an alternative development partner rather than a new hegemonic center. This reinforces the hypothesis of a theoretical shift toward a more pragmatic and integrated model of international relations—one more closely linked to concepts of development and sovereignty instead of hegemony and Western-centrism. The research objectives were achieved through theoretical and applied analysis of China's relations with the Global South, demonstrating how this policy combines soft power, developmental interdependence, and the provision of an alternative to Western hegemony. It was also concluded that the perception of China by Global South nations as a development partner, not a new colonial power, reflects the success of this model in building its soft power tools on the foundations of respect for sovereignty and development. This grants these nations new spaces for strategic maneuvering and enhances the potential for multipolarity in the international system.

Chinese developmental diplomacy has emerged in the Global South, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative, as a gateway to redefining the standards of cooperation. Development is no longer conditioned by neoliberal reforms or linked to Western financial structures; rather, it is now achieved through new tools: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Silk Road Fund, and health and cultural diplomacy. These are tools presented in a framework of partnership, not hegemony, and sustainability, not dependency. This conceptual shift offers the states of the Global South an opportunity for gradual disengagement from dependency on Western donors and reopens the debate on the centrality of the West and the marginality of the less developed South in International Relations theory.

From this perspective, Chinese developmental diplomacy is not just a foreign strategy but a theoretical model that intersects with alternative concepts of interdependence and establishes a new vision for international relations more consistent with the specificities of the Global South. It thereby poses a dual challenge: theoretically, to the centrality of Western thought in framing international relations, and practically, to the dominant patterns in development and cooperation. Continuing to study this model will open new research horizons for understanding "the world from outside the West" and for redrawing the lines of interaction between the North and South in light of post-hegemonic transformations.

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