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China vs. the United States in the race for Chilean lithium: new cooperation or new dependency?

A case study from the perspective of energy neocolonialism (2010-2025)

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“The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”
Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War.*

Abstract:

In the context of the global energy transition, lithium has become a strategic resource because of its role in batteries, electric mobility, and renewable energy storage. In this setting, Chile, which holds a major share of the world's lithium reserves, has turned into a key site of geopolitical competition between China and the United States. This thesis examines why, between 2010 and 2025, Chile deepened its energy and economic ties with China rather than with the United States in the lithium sector, and how this choice should be interpreted through the lens of energy neocolonialism.

The theoretical framework combines critical approaches to International Relations, especially Dependency Theory, with insights from structural realism, constructivism, and Joseph Nye's concepts of hard and soft power. Methodologically, the study follows a single-case, comparative design and combines document and discourse analysis with secondary data on trade, investment, corporate presence, and industrial initiatives. Its purpose is to compare the material and diplomatic strategies deployed by both powers, assess how Chilean political discourse interprets and legitimizes these relations, and evaluate whether Chile's growing relationship with China expands its room for maneuver or instead reproduces a new form of structural dependence.

The thesis argues that China has achieved a stronger material position in Chile's lithium sector, while the United States has projected a more securitized and conditional approach. Even so, Chile's preference for China does not amount to a full break with older patterns of subordination, but rather points to a possible reconfiguration of dependency under a different external actor.

Key words:

Chilean lithium, energy transition, China-Latin America relations, energy geopolitics, energy neocolonialism, energy sovereignty.

Resumen:

En el contexto de la transición energética global, el litio se ha consolidado como un recurso estratégico por su papel en las baterías, la electromovilidad y el almacenamiento de energías renovables. En este escenario, Chile, que concentra una parte central de las reservas mundiales, se ha convertido en un espacio clave de competencia entre China y Estados Unidos. Este trabajo analiza por qué, entre 2010 y 2025, Chile ha profundizado más sus vínculos energéticos y económicos con China que con Estados Unidos en el sector del litio, y cómo debe interpretarse esta decisión desde la perspectiva del neocolonialismo energético.

El marco teórico combina enfoques críticos de las Relaciones Internacionales, especialmente la teoría de la dependencia, con aportaciones del realismo estructural, el constructivismo y los conceptos de hard y soft power de Joseph Nye. Metodológicamente, la investigación adopta un estudio de caso único con enfoque comparativo, y combina análisis documental y discursivo con datos secundarios sobre comercio, inversión, presencia empresarial y proyectos industriales. El objetivo es comparar las estrategias material y diplomática de ambas potencias, examinar el modo en que el discurso político chileno legitima esa relación, y evaluar si el acercamiento a China amplía el margen de maniobra de Chile o, por el contrario, reproduce una nueva dependencia.

La investigación concluye que China ha logrado una posición material más sólida en el litio chileno, mientras que Estados Unidos ha tendido a proyectar una estrategia más securitizada y condicionada. Aun así, el mayor acercamiento chileno a China no implica una ruptura plena con las estructuras tradicionales de subordinación, sino una posible reconfiguración de la dependencia bajo un nuevo actor.

Palabras clave:

Litio chileno, transición energética, relaciones China-América Latina, geopolítica energética, neocolonialismo energético, soberanía energética.

List of abbreviations and acronyms.

BCN: Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional

BYD: Build Your Dreams (company)

CEPAL: Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe

Cochilco: Comisión Chilena del Cobre

Codelco: Corporación Nacional del Cobre de Chile

CORFO: Corporación de Fomento de la Producción

FNE: Fiscalía Nacional Económica

IEA: International Energy Agency

IRA: Inflation Reduction Act

LFP: Lithium Iron Phosphate

NRGI: Natural Resource Governance Institute

OEC: Observatory of Economic Complexity

PSNR: Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources

SERNAGEOMIN: Servicio Nacional de Geología y Minería

SQM: Sociedad Química y Minera de Chile

SUBREI: Subsecretaría de Relaciones Económicas Internacionales

UNCTAD: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

USGS: U.S. Geological Survey

USTR: Office of the United States Trade Representative

WITS: World Integrated Trade Solution

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Introduction.

The 21st-century energy transition, often framed as the "Great Transformation", marks a global shift in which decarbonization moves the center of gravity from fossil fuels to strategic minerals (Hafner & Tagliapietra, 2020). Jones (2024, p. 1) argues that the emerging clean-energy system depends on technologies that use larger volumes of minerals, yet those inputs stay embedded in equipment across most of the lifecycle, which lowers total extraction needs, especially when recycling follows at end of its useful life. In this context, oil no longer sits at the top of the hierarchy, and the so-called "transition minerals" take center stage (Riofrancos, 2022, p. 20). Among those materials, lithium stands out and often appears in public debate as "white gold" or "the oil of the future" (Lastra-Bravo, 2024, p. 2), since it provides the material base for electromobility by replacing internal combustion with electric propulsion systems that depend on high energy-density batteries (Graham et al., 2021; Yang, 2024). Lithium storage also supports clean power systems by helping manage the variability of solar and wind generation, which strengthens grid stability (Mares, 2022; Pata & Pata, 2025).

In this regard, competition for resource control has deep roots. States have long treated access to primary resources as a pillar of power and national security (Buket Kilinç-Pala, 2021, p. 15; Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 140). Nonetheless, lithium raises the stakes because of limited geo-chemical availability and because reserves and industrial processing concentrate in a small number of locations and firms (Mares, 2022, p. 10). For this reason, the United States classifies lithium as a "critical mineral" tied to economic and military security (Nygaard, 2022, p. 1106), warning that reliance on an adversary creates an unacceptable strategic vulnerability. Under international anarchy, a lithium supply shock would disrupt technology and automotive sectors at scale and reshape global power relations (Gulley, 2024; Nye, 2011).

The core of this contest sits in the Lithium Triangle, spanning Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile, which together hold more than 60% of global reserves (Dorn & Gundermann, 2022, p. 342). Chile occupies a leading position through the brines of the Salar de Atacama, where lithium concentrations rank among the highest worldwide and climatic conditions favor profitable extraction through solar evaporation (Graham et al., 2021, p. 10). In this context, China-United States rivalry around Chilean lithium has intensified since 2010, because control over this resource shapes leadership in the new industrial era and across the electric-vehicle value chain (Gulley, 2024, p. 619). Therefore, this study starts from an observable shift in Chile's external

economic policy: while the country has historically maintained close ties with the United States through political alignment and normative reference points, in terms of critical minerals, and especially lithium, Chile has recently strengthened links with China.

The existing literature has approached this issue from several angles, but without fully resolving the Chilean case at the intersection of lithium geopolitics, great-power rivalry, and structural dependence. Barandiarán (2019) shows that lithium debates in Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia have increasingly been legitimized through sociotechnical imaginaries that promise development, innovation, and industrial upgrading. Riofrancos (2022) argues that lithium has become central to a new "security-sustainability nexus", in which the United States and the European Union seek to secure supply chains and reduce vulnerability to China while presenting new extraction as sustainable.

Dorn and Gundermann (2022) conclude that lithium mining in Chile and Argentina reproduces strong power asymmetries between the state, mining companies, and indigenous communities, even where institutional settings differ. Jerez et al. (2021) show that lithium extraction in the Salar de Atacama generates water injustices and reproduces a "colonial shadow of green electromobility", whereby the environmental costs of decarbonization are displaced onto indigenous territories in the Global South. In a similar vein, Babidge et al. (2019) argue that ecological exhaustion in the Salar de Atacama is not only material but also political and epistemic, because fragmented regulation and partial knowledge obscure the full effects of extraction. Bridge and Faigen (2022) move the debate beyond raw-material supply by showing that lithium must be understood within a broader global production network in which value, control, and strategy are distributed across mining, refining, battery manufacturing, automotive production, and state policy. At the regional level, Jovine and Paz (2025) conclude that the lithium models of Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina only partially depart from neo-extractivism, since the region still remains tied to primary-export dynamics and dependent on external demand, technology, and markets.

From the angle of China-Latin America relations, Gao (2025) argues that Beijing is consolidating a form of functional dominance across resources, technology, governance, and finance, which amounts to a new pattern of neo-dependency in the region's energy transition. At a broader theoretical level, Quijano (2014) explains how modern forms of economic domination in Latin America continue to reproduce a colonial structure of power, in which

peripheral territories are inserted into global capitalism through unequal and externally oriented roles.

Yet an important gap remains. Much of the literature analyzes lithium either as a development strategy, as a socio-environmental conflict, as a value-chain problem, or as part of China's broader rise in Latin America. Far fewer studies compare, within a single case, the distinct strategies of China and the United States in relation to lithium, and even fewer connect this external rivalry to Chilean political interpretation and to the structural consequences for sovereignty, industrialization, and dependence over time.

This thesis addresses that gap by analyzing the China-United States struggle for access to Chilean lithium and by examining how "green extractivism" (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2021, p. 4) reproduces patterns of structural subordination in Latin America (Lastra-Bravo, 2024, p. 14). At the political level, energy dependence functions as a form of neo-colonialism, in the sense that Chile risks moving from reliance on Western powers toward a "neo-dependence" on China. In this regard, South-South solidarity narratives coexist with a strategy often described as exchanging "infrastructure for resources" and with China's command of around 80% of refining capacity (Riofrancos, 2022, p. 22). These features point thus to a "silent monopoly" (Gao, 2025) that constrains strategic autonomy and weakens Chilean energy sovereignty.

More specifically, the study seeks: (1) to map the material and strategic competition between China and the United States in Chile's lithium sector through trade, investment, corporate participation, and value-chain presence; (2) to compare the repertoires of power used by both actors, with particular attention to the contrast between economic leverage, diplomatic conditionality, cooperation narratives, and securitized language; (3) to examine how Chilean political and diplomatic discourse interprets, legitimizes, and channels this competition; and, (4) to assess whether Chile's growing relationship with China expands room for maneuver or, on the contrary, reproduces a new form of structural dependence.

To do so, this thesis adopts a mixed-method single-case study focused on Chile, with a comparative approach between two external actors, China and the United States. Rather than treating interstate rivalry, domestic interpretation, and structural effects as a single undifferentiated process, the research separates the analysis into three linked levels: interstate rivalry over a strategic resource (in *Chapter 2*), Chilean political and diplomatic

discourse (in *Chapter 3*), and the structural outcomes of this relationship in terms of value capture, technological dependence, and energy neocolonialism (in *Chapter 4*).

This design combines a longitudinal perspective, tracing change across 2010-2025, with a cross-sectional one, comparing both powers at key moments within the same case through documentary analysis, discourse analysis, and secondary quantitative data. Against this background, the research is guided by the following question: *Why has Chile prioritized its energy relations with China over the United States in the lithium sector between 2010 and 2025, and how should this decision be interpreted from the perspective of energy neocolonialism?* The central hypothesis holds that, in the absence of an effective global watchdog, Chile adopts a hedging strategy that attracts investment and enlarges its short-term options, but at the same time deepens a peripheral insertion shaped by external technological demand.

1. Literature review and contextual framework.

1.1. International Relations theories applied to the study.

1.1.1. Structural realism as the main framework for analyzing interstate competition over strategic resources such as lithium.

Structural realism, also known as neorealism, offers a core framework for understanding competition over resources such as lithium. The theory starts from the structure of the international system, defined by anarchy (meaning the absence of a higher central authority), and argues that this setting pushes states to behave as rational, unitary actors focused on survival (Buket Kilinç-Pala, 2021, p. 5; Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 40). From this standpoint, natural resources are more than tradable goods. They function as assets tied to national power and security since, following this theory, control over primary energy resources shapes economic development as well as military capacity.

Hafner and Tagliapietra (2020) make this point in the preface to their book, explaining how geopolitical influence rests on the ability to shape other states' behavior and how command over physical resources, especially primary energy resources (such as oil), affects development, security, and military strength, with international relations shaped by how energy resources and related technologies are distributed and used. Bridge and Faigen (2022) deepen this point by arguing that lithium's strategic relevance cannot be understood only at the level of extraction, since it becomes truly geopolitical within a broader battery production network linking mining, refining, cathode manufacture, cell assembly, automotive production, and energy storage systems. From this perspective, states do not compete only for access to deposits, but for position within an organizationally integrated and geographically dispersed industrial structure where control over transformation nodes is also a source of power.

As the energy transition unfolds in a self-help system, major powers face strong incentives to doubt others' intentions and to lock in strategic supplies in order to reduce vulnerability. In practice, this shifts lithium access into the realm of high-stakes geoeconomic strategy (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 42). Kenneth Waltz, the key figure in defensive realism, argues in his foundational work that states primarily pursue security rather than power for its own sake, so they tend to preserve the balance of power instead of seeking total domination (Waltz, 1979, as cited in Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 31). For Waltz, the distribution of material capabilities is the

central variable that changes system structure, which helps explain why states copy successful practices to avoid falling behind (Waltz, 1979, p. 93).

John Mearsheimer's offensive realism takes the opposite view. In his account, states are rarely satisfied with their existing power and instead seek to increase their share of relative power, aiming for regional hegemony as the end state (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 131). Since intentions cannot be known with confidence, the system rewards calculated aggression and opportunistic steps that weaken rivals (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 46). From this angle, China's dominance in processing critical minerals and its vertical integration across the battery value chain appears as a strategic move to secure long-term advantage and technological leadership relative to the United States and Europe (Graham et al., 2021, p. 10).

Regardless of which variant of structural realism one emphasizes, access to these resources is shaped by the security dilemma. Steps taken by one state to improve its own security, such as building lithium stockpiles to reduce exposure to rivals, often raise threat perceptions elsewhere and intensify competition in a zero-sum setting where one actor's gains are read as another's losses (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 44). This dynamic becomes sharper when resources concentrate in specific areas, such as the Lithium Triangle in Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile, because scarcity and geography heighten great-power anxiety. Since states cannot be sure about others' intentions, control over these strategic zones can be treated as political leverage and framed as a tool that can be used against consuming countries, putting economic stability and technological sovereignty at risk (Altiparmak, 2022). Uncertainty over supply is reinforced by the "911 problem", understood as the absence of a global enforcer states can turn to in emergencies. This pushes major powers toward resource nationalism and toward direct control over critical infrastructure (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 42).

As the international system moves toward multipolarity, competition between China and the United States extends beyond classic balance-of-power dynamics and becomes a struggle over who sets the rules of the emerging global order (Bórquez Basáez & López Giral, 2025, p. 1). China uses economic and technological gains to challenge the U.S.-led Bretton Woods model, advancing alternative financial and institutional arrangements through platforms such as the BRICS and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Rosales, 2020, p. 13). At the same time, the functional dominance China has consolidated in strategic-mineral processing (Gao, 2025) is viewed in the United States and the European Union as a structural threat to energy and

technological sovereignty. This rivalry intensifies because both powers see the other as a long-term strategic opponent.

1.1.2. Constructivism, especially as applied to Chilean political and diplomatic discourse.

Neorealism helps make sense of the U.S.-China rivalry, but it does not fully explain why Chile leans toward China in the governance of strategic resources. To move past a strictly material reading, constructivism offers a better lens because it focuses on how shared ideas and intersubjective meanings shape national preferences. As Wendt (1999) argues, the structures of human association are driven mainly by shared ideas rather than material forces alone, which means state identities and interests are socially constructed rather than fixed, exogenous facts. Where realism treats states as "billiard balls" colliding over power, constructivism opens the door to studying how political and diplomatic discourse produces international outcomes, starting from the claim that "anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt, 1992, p. 395).

From this perspective, Chile's choice is not simply a matter of relative gains. It reflects instead a convergence of development visions and an ongoing redefinition of Chile's identity as an actor in the global system (Barandiarán, 2019; Vásquez Torreblanca, 2024). A central goal of this identity-building effort is to move beyond the historic primary-export model and stop projecting Chile as a country whose role is to ship unprocessed commodities abroad (Jovine & Paz, 2025, p. 15). Through its *National Lithium Strategy*, Chile frames lithium policy as a route toward industrial upgrading and greater value added, tied to building local human and technological capabilities in order to escape the "commodities trap" (Jovine & Paz, 2025, p. 14; Rodrik, 2011, p. 186).

A useful concept for capturing the agency of countries such as Chile is norm subsidiarity, which describes how local actors create rules to protect autonomy when more powerful central actors dominate or neglect them (Acharya, 2011). This approach foregrounds ideas as "weapons of the weak", used by Global South states to push back against great-power universal narratives and to design regional solutions for local problems (Acharya, 2011, p. 118). In Chile's case, this shows up as an attempt to loosen the long-standing shadow of Washington while carving out room to maneuver, balancing security dependence on the

United States with commercial interests tied to China. The literature often labels this posture as strategic hedging, an intermediate strategy through which small and middle states cautiously balance relations with competing great powers in order to maximize economic benefits while preserving autonomy, security, and internal legitimacy (Kuik, 2024, as cited in Bórquez Basáez & López Giral, 2025, p. 5).

Chile's relationship with China is easier to sustain because both sides help construct a shared discourse around South-South solidarity and mutual respect, a narrative Beijing has actively promoted (Maiza-Larrarte & Bustillo-Mesanza, 2025, p. 274; Xinhua, 2025, December 10). In Chilean discourse, China is framed less as a buyer and more as a partner whose national "dream" of revitalization aligns with Chile's own ambition to reduce chronic dependence on commodity exports (Rosales, 2020, p. 17). This framing appeals to Chilean political elites who want large-scale investment in infrastructure and technology without the ideological conditions associated with the *Washington Consensus* (Cattafi & Papp, 2025, p. 5).

Gao describes the first major phase of Chinese finance in the region, roughly 2010-2019, as driven mainly by the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China, which directed large sovereign loans to Latin American governments and state-owned firms. A common format was "infrastructure for resources", where major projects were funded in return for securing long-term supplies of raw materials and energy inputs for China (Gao, 2025, p. 8).

1.1.3. Dependency theory and neocolonialism as a critical approach for understanding Chile's structurally subordinate position in the global economy.

To assess the outcome of this reorientation, dependency theory helps explain why a foreign-policy strategy can draw investment while still reinforcing a peripheral pattern of integration. Dependency theory argues that a country's development prospects depend on where it sits in the world-system structure, divided between a dominant "core" and a subordinate "periphery" (Goldthau et al., 2020, p. 333). From this view, dependence, especially in the Marxist tradition, refers to a situation where the economy of some nations is shaped by the expansion and development of others, so the accumulation process cannot develop its own internal momentum within the national system (Dos Santos, 1970, p. 231, as cited in Antunes

de Oliveira & Kvangraven, 2023, p. 1683).

In the 21st-century context, Chile reproduces this logic by entering global markets mainly as a supplier of critical raw materials, such as lithium and copper, while importing manufactured goods and high-complexity technologies from China and other power centers (Fernández Franco et al., 2024; Goldthau et al., 2020, p. 333). Chile's persistence as a supplier of raw materials reflects, as Quijano (2014, p. 785) explains, the international division of labor imposed since colonial times, where less complex forms of work or resource extraction were historically assigned to the "inferior races" of the peripheries, while wage and technological work was concentrated in the "white" or western centers.

This relationship tends to generate unequal exchange and pushes the Chilean economy toward "re-primarization" (Maiza-Larrarte & Bustillo-Mesanza, 2025, p. 280; Romero Stevens & Valdés-González, 2023, p. 25), where gains concentrate in the core's technological segments, keeping center-periphery development patterns in place (Jovine & Paz, 2025). Jerez et al. (2021) allow this structural argument to be grounded in the Chilean lithium case, since they show that extraction in the Salar de Atacama should be read as a form of green extractivism in which the ecological costs of decarbonization are displaced onto indigenous territories in the Global South. Along similar lines, Babidge et al. (2019) argue that the problem is not only depletion in a narrow material sense, but a broader condition of ecological exhaustion shaped by extraction, weak regulation, fragmented environmental knowledge, and social disruption in local communities.

A key idea in this tradition is the role of local elites, or the peripheral country's "bourgeoisie", understood as actors who align their interests with foreign capital (Stallings, 2021, p. 3) in order to secure their own accumulation of power and rents, rather than advancing an autonomous national development project (Antunes de Oliveira & Kvangraven, 2023; Fernández Franco et al., 2024). This "bourgeoisie buyer" makes choices that adapt the national growth model to world-system demands, becoming a partner that enables surplus transfers and resource extraction in exchange for preserving privileged status (Amin, 1997, p. 26).

In contemporary settings, this role often appears in a more institutionalized form described as "corporate capture", where political and economic elites act as a "two-headed subject" and use legal frameworks to guarantee foreign-capital access to strategic territories, often framed through narratives of "modernization" or a "green transition" (Pinheiro Barbosa & Nogueira

Nóbrega, 2025, pp. 11, 13). Neocolonialism theory complements this analysis by focusing on how economic and financial control can replace the formal political domination associated with classical imperialism. In this sense, even if Chile holds legal sovereignty, or "flag independence", as Barriteau puts it (2007, as cited in González-Vicente & Montoute, 2020, p. 223), it still operates within international hierarchies that narrow its real decision space over development strategy (González-Vicente & Montoute, 2020).

Finally, Chile's incorporation into China's global strategy can be described as a form of neo-dependence, or a "silent monopoly" (Gao, 2025). Unlike direct colonial rule, this model works through functional dominance built on technological and financial dependence in sectors that matter for the future, including clean energy (Nygaard, 2022, p. 1108). As Chile adopts Chinese technology standards and investment in lithium and electromobility, it can become locked into a path of technological dependence that makes it harder to build an autonomous industrial base (Gao, 2025, p. 11). In that sense, rhetoric about "South-South" solidarity risks serving as a cover for a renewed architecture of structural domination, less overtly coercive but embedded in the institutional and financial fabric of the Chilean economy, narrowing Chile's strategic autonomy as the global order shifts (González-Vicente & Montoute, 2020, p. 221).

Before concluding this first part of the theoretical framework, it should be acknowledged that structural realism and dependency theory rest on different epistemological foundations: the former prioritizes state behavior under anarchy and tends toward positivist explanation, while the latter focuses on historical structures of accumulation and operates within a more critical tradition. This thesis does not seek to resolve that tension but rather uses each framework at a distinct analytical level (realism to explain the interstate rivalry, dependency theory to evaluate its structural consequences for Chile) treating them as complementary lenses rather than a unified theory. Lastly, constructivism, for its part, is used to explain why Chile leans toward China at the level of discourse and identity formation.

1.2. Power toolkit: hard, soft and smart power to map China and United States strategies in Chile's lithium sector.

1.2.1. Joseph Nye and the concepts of hard and soft power, analyzing how China and the United States use material, diplomatic and symbolic power.

To sharpen the analysis of China-U.S. competition over Chilean lithium, it helps to bring in Joseph Nye's framework on different forms of power in international relations. Nye defines power less as the simple possession of resources and more as a relational capacity, the ability to shape other actors' behavior in ways that produce preferred outcomes (Nye, 2011, pp. 5, 7). Under this approach, influence depends on how a state deploys hard power and soft power, or how it blends both through what Nye calls smart power (Mahmood, 2025, p. 31; Nye, 2011, p. 16). Hard power relies on tangible tools such as military force or economic sanctions that pressure another state to act against its preferences. Soft power works differently. It rests on attraction and co-optation through culture, political values, and the perceived legitimacy of a country's foreign policy (Nye, 2011, p. 15).

In competition over strategic resources, the United States has historically relied on a comparatively strong hard-power position in Latin America, supported by geographic proximity and a military presence in the region that far exceeds China's (Maiza-Larrarte & Bustillo-Mesanza, 2025, p. 278). This influence traces back to the *Monroe Doctrine* of 1823, framed as a warning against outside interference in the hemisphere and used to reinforce the United States' status as the region's sole hegemon (Cattafi & Papp, 2025, p. 2). China's rise, however, adds a different kind of hard power rooted in economics. It shows up in China's ability to shape markets and build dependencies through large-scale trade, control over critical-mineral supply chains, and financing for strategic infrastructure (González-Vicente & Montoute, 2020, p. 226; Nye, 2011, p. 49).

The contest also plays out in the realm of soft power, where the U.S. model has seen a relative decline compared with Beijing's alternative pitch (Maiza-Larrarte & Bustillo-Mesanza, 2025, p. 285). U.S. soft power has long drawn on its liberal-democratic model and on cultural ties built through decades of exchange and migration, allowing Washington to present itself as a "benevolent force" defending a rules-based order (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 36). This creates a space China has tried to occupy by branding itself as a Global South leader committed to solidarity and mutual benefit (Xinhua, 2025, December 10).

1.2.2. Post-Cold War context and its legacy.

The post-Cold War setting helps explain why these models clash today. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States consolidated a unipolar order tied to the *Washington Consensus*, which promoted liberal democracy and economic opening linked to structural reforms (Gudynas, 2015, p. 335; Rodrik, 2011, p. 103). Within this framework, and in line with Washington's belief that exporting its value system would improve governance and stability abroad, access to Western financing and markets often required peripheral countries to adopt specific standards related to governance, human rights, and fiscal policy (Rodrik, 2011, p. 203). Over time, this political conditionality fueled resentment in countries that saw their national sovereignty constrained by demands coming from Washington-led Bretton Woods institutions (González-Vicente & Montoute, 2020, p. 227).

China has positioned itself as a response to that approach through what Nye calls the *Beijing Consensus* (Nye, 2011, p. 58), framed as a version of state capitalism or a "socialist market economy" that enables rapid growth under authoritarian governance. Rosales (2020, p. 59) highlights how Deng, often treated as a key architect of China's modernization, launched a three-part shift, from a closed economy to an open one, from central planning to markets, and from a rural society to an urban one. Given China's scale, this transformation reshaped the global economy.

In Latin America, including Chile, China's strategic advantage lies in offering trade, loans, and infrastructure investment without "political strings" (Cattafi & Papp, 2025, p. 6) or demands for domestic reforms, consistent with a stated principle of non-interference (Maiza-Larrarte & Bustillo-Mesanza, 2025, p. 285). A model without conditionality appeals to governments seeking autonomy along with fast financing for development projects, which helps explain why Chile can portray China as a pragmatic partner that accepts each country's chosen development path (Xinhua, 2025, December 10).

1.3. Key concepts: energy sovereignty, energy neocolonialism, energy diplomacy, and energy geopolitics.

Across this analysis, *energy sovereignty* stands as a key concept. As an extension of the right to self-determination, it is now defined as the right of nations and communities to exercise

authority and agency over the energy produced and consumed in their territories, seeking autonomy from the dominance of transnational corporations and political elites (Castro et al., 2024, p. 6). In Latin America, this idea has been strengthened through Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources (PSNR) (Vásquez Torreblanca, 2024, p. 59), a principle that recognizes an inalienable right to manage strategic assets to support domestic economic development and reduce political instability.

Operationally, energy neocolonialism is defined here as the functional control over advanced technology, standards, and value capture by core economies, which restricts the strategic autonomy of peripheral states despite their formal legal sovereignty. Strategic autonomy, in turn, is operationalized as the state's verifiable capacity to dictate the industrial upgrading and technological destination of its resources, rather than merely maximizing fiscal rents.

Yet the global energy transition is shifting the focus from formal ownership of raw resources to a more complex web of technological dependence. Countries such as Chile may hold major lithium reserves, but they often lack, in part because they have not had the opportunity to develop them, the technical capabilities for advanced battery manufacturing (Jovine, 2025). As a result, they become dependent on standards and patents set in core economies, and adopting external infrastructure can lock countries into paths of dependence that make it harder to build an autonomous industrial base (Fernández Franco et al., 2024).

Under these conditions, the shift to clean energy can reproduce a form of *energy neocolonialism* through “green extractivism”. In this paradigm, intensive resource extraction in the Global South is framed as unavoidable for climate mitigation in the Global North, while local ecological and social costs are pushed out of view (Jerez et al., 2021; Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2021, p. 4). The result is continuity rather than rupture in Latin American extractivism. It reinforces a primary-export pattern that channels wealth toward consumption centers while turning producing territories into “green sacrifice zones” (Flores Fernández & Alba, 2023, p. 13), where water depletion and biodiversity loss are treated as acceptable trade-offs to support the electrification of transport in core economies (Bustos-Gallardo et al., 2021, p. 188; Pinheiro Barbosa & Nogueira Nóbrega, 2025).

To manage these asymmetries, states rely on *energy diplomac*y, understood as a “social practice” of interaction aimed at securing supply and embedding national interests within the infrastructure of world politics (Barragán-Ocaña et al., 2025, p. 4; Vásquez Torreblanca, 2024,

p. 56). In Chile's case, this has evolved into entrepreneurial diplomacy, marked by a search for strategic autonomy and by flexible coalition-building that expands room for maneuver between rival powers (Bywaters et al., as cited in Vásquez Torreblanca, 2024, p. 64). This approach uses diplomatic niches, including environmental protection and the green transition, to offset limited military hard power and to elevate Chile's international standing through leadership on critical resources.

At the same time, these moves unfold within an *energy geopolitics* that links national security to control over critical nodes in the value chain (Barragán-Ocaña et al., 2025, p. 6). In this setting, contemporary security depends less on physical access to the deposit itself and more on functional control over refining and over the intellectual property behind storage technologies (Altiparmak, 2022). This new geopolitics is reinforced through the security-sustainability nexus, where Global North powers prioritize onshoring supply in order to reduce vulnerability to systemic rivals such as China (Riofrancos, 2022, p. 22).

These definitions will serve as the evaluative criteria in *Chapter 4* to assess whether Chile's relationship with China expands or constrains its energy sovereignty and strategic autonomy in practice.

1.4. Research design and methodology (2010-2025).

1.4.1. Overall approach and cross-method logic.

This thesis adopts a mixed-method, longitudinal, and non-experimental research design centered on a single case study, Chile, with an embedded comparative dimension between China and the United States. The case is selected because Chile occupies a strategic position in the global lithium economy and because it allows the study to examine, within one bounded setting, how great-power rivalry, domestic preference formation, and structural dependency interact over time.

The design is longitudinal insofar as it traces change across 2010-2025, from the early deepening of commercial ties to the later phases of equity participation, industrial announcements, regulatory responses, and diplomatic repositioning. The quantitative component analyzes observable patterns of economic linkage. It focuses on trade flows, investment dynamics, corporate participation, and presence in relevant value-chain segments

connected to lithium and electric mobility. The qualitative component relies on documentary and discourse analysis. It reconstructs how Chilean political elites, and the two competing powers, publicly frame lithium in relation to development, industrialization, sovereignty, security, and foreign policy.

Bringing both components together makes it possible to connect material incentives with legitimation processes. The quantitative evidence shows how linkages shift in scale, direction, and sectoral depth, while the qualitative evidence explains how those shifts are narrated, justified, and converted into decisions. In this sense, the thesis does not treat discourse as separate from material change, but as one of the mechanisms through which external offers and domestic priorities become politically meaningful.

Given its non-experimental character, the thesis does not seek to establish deterministic causality in a strict sense. Instead, it aims to identify patterned associations, temporal sequences, and plausible explanatory mechanisms that are consistent with the theoretical framework and with the available evidence.

1.4.2. Working hypotheses.

- *Hypothesis 1*. China holds greater economic and productive weight than the United States in Chile's lithium sector. This hypothesis expects China's relative prominence to increase across 2010-2025 in trade, investment, corporate presence, and participation in strategic segments linked to lithium and electric mobility. The key criterion is the comparative evolution of each actor's material position in the Chilean lithium ecosystem.
- *Hypothesis 2*. The United States deploys a more aggressive and securitized strategy than China. This hypothesis expects the U.S. approach to display stronger patterns of pressure, conditionality, and security-centered framing than the Chinese approach. The contrast should be visible in official discourse, diplomatic signals, and public positions concerning technological risk, critical minerals, national security, and alliance politics.
- *Hypothesis 3*. Chile shows a relative preference for China because China is perceived as a less intrusive and more pragmatic partner. This hypothesis expects Chilean political and diplomatic discourse to frame China more positively in relation to cooperation, industrialization, and room for maneuver, and it expects this framing to be consistent with

concrete public decisions and partnership choices made during the period.

- *Hypothesis 4.* The relationship with China tends to reproduce a new form of dependence, while Chile falls short of consolidating a domestic lithium industry in higher value-added segments. This hypothesis expects that modernization and industrialization promises will coexist with continued dependence on external capital, technology, and markets, leaving Chile largely concentrated in extractive and lower value-added activities.

1.4.3. Minimum operationalization of variables to connect theory and evidence.

Most of the evidence used is secondary and publicly available. The quantitative evidence is drawn from international trade databases, FDI statistics, institutional reports, and corporate filings. The qualitative evidence comes from presidential and ministerial statements, official policy documents, bilateral agreements, regulatory resolutions, company communications, and high-quality press coverage used to reconstruct key episodes and public positioning. Sources are selected according to four criteria: relevance to the variables under study, institutional reliability, temporal coverage across 2010-2025, and comparability across actors.

- For *Hypothesis 1*, the analysis tracks China's and the United States' relative weight across three dimensions. First, lithium-related trade, with attention to export destination, commercial concentration, and import structures tied to relevant technologies. Second, investment and corporate presence in activities associated with lithium extraction, processing, and downstream industrial projects. Third, participation in strategic segments linked to batteries and electric mobility, where publicly traceable evidence makes comparison possible.
- For *Hypothesis 2*, the analysis compares signals of pressure, conditionality, and securitization in Chinese and U.S. approaches. The main indicator is the content and tone of public discourse on lithium, critical minerals, economic security, national security, technological risk, supply-chain resilience, and strategic alignment. The analysis also compares hard- and soft-power repertoires, paying attention to continuity and shifts in intensity at key moments.
- For *Hypothesis 3*, the analysis identifies recurring frames in Chilean political and diplomatic discourse on development, industrialization, lithium sovereignty, strategic autonomy, and

foreign economic relations. The key criterion is not only the presence of these frames, but also their connection to verifiable policy choices, institutional decisions, and public signals of preference.

- For *Hypothesis 4*, the analysis evaluates whether Chile captures greater value or remains locked into a subordinate role within the global lithium chain. The main indicators are productive structure, technological dependence, financial dependence, and the effective materialization of industrial upgrading projects. The objective is to assess whether the Chilean case points toward greater strategic autonomy or, by contrast, toward a renewed form of extractivist dependence under greener and more technologically sophisticated terms.

2. China and the United States in Chile's lithium policy.

2.1. China's energy and diplomatic strategy.

2.1.1. Chinese material presence: evolution, investment, corporate participation, and asset control.

China's projection into Chile's lithium sector did not emerge overnight. It developed through a gradual sequence in which a favorable bilateral framework came first, China's commercial centrality grew later, and more stable forms of productive insertion were pursued afterward. In the early 2010s, this presence was not yet visible as direct control over strategic assets. What took shape instead was an institutional environment that later made expansion easier. According to the *Subsecretaría de Relaciones Económicas Internacionales* (SUBREI), Chile's foreign trade agency, the *Supplementary Agreement on Trade in Services* entered into force in August 2010, the *Supplementary Investment Agreement* began to apply in February 2014, 97.2% of Chilean goods had duty-free access to the Chinese market from January 1, 2015 onward, and the *Protocol for the Deepening of the Free Trade Agreement* was signed in November 2017, adding new provisions on competition, e-commerce, and the environment (Subsecretaría de Relaciones Económicas Internacionales [SUBREI], n.d.). This first stage did not yet amount to dominant business presence, but it did establish the political and commercial conditions for it.

That bilateral framework coincided with a broader transformation in the global lithium market, in which China was becoming a major center of demand. In 2013, the *Comisión Chilena del Cobre* (Cochilco), Chile's public mining-sector agency, already reported that China accounted for 35% of global lithium consumption out of an estimated total of 150,000 tons of lithium carbonate equivalent, the standard unit used to compare different lithium compounds, while Asia as a whole absorbed more than half of world demand (Comisión Chilena del Cobre [Cochilco], 2013, December). At the same time, Chile and Argentina represented more than 80% of global lithium carbonate exports in 2012, which positioned the Southern Cone as a structural supplier for Asia's industrial expansion (Cochilco, 2013, December). From this perspective, Chilean lithium had already become strategically valuable to China before the relationship took the form of highly visible corporate deals.

Even in those early years, signs of growing material links between Chilean producers and

Chinese processors were already visible. Cochilco recorded shipments from Chile linked to supply agreements with Ganfeng Lithium, a Chinese company specialized in lithium extraction and processing, which suggests that the relationship initially developed as a supply-oriented commercial connection (Cochilco, 2013, December). This pattern also reflected structural constraints within China's own supply base. Perotti and Coviello (2015, September) noted that Chinese brines faced difficulties in producing battery-grade high-purity lithium carbonate, while domestic spodumene also lacked the quality required for that use. In that context, Tianqi Lithium's acquisition of 51% of Talison Lithium, an Australian mining company with major spodumene assets, already pointed to a broader strategy aimed at securing access abroad to higher-quality resources. In other words, before China moved more forcefully into Chile, it had already begun building an international supply strategy tied to its expansion in batteries and electric mobility.

A major turning point came in 2018, when China's presence stopped operating only and mainly through trade and reached the core of the sector itself. Reuters explicitly linked Tianqi Lithium's interest in *Sociedad Química y Minera de Chile* (SQM), one of the world's leading lithium producers, to China's push into electric vehicles and to the need to secure resources for that industrial transition (Reuters, 2018, May 17). The deal was finalized through the purchase of 23.77% of SQM for US$ 4.066 billion, which gave China direct entry into one of the most important assets in Chilean lithium (Reuters, 2018, December 3). Even so, this move did not amount to full control. The extrajudicial settlement signed with the *Fiscalía Nacional Económica* (FNE), Chile's competition authority, imposed restrictions because the Chilean state viewed the transaction as a potential concentration risk in a strategic market (Fiscalía Nacional Económica [FNE], 2018, August 23). Tianqi's entry therefore fits better as a high-impact insertion into the ownership structure of Chile's main lithium business ecosystem than as outright control.

From 2019 onward, China's centrality became clearer: for instance, data from the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), a World Bank database, show that in that year China imported US$ 93 million in lithium carbonate from Chile, compared with US$ 44.7 million for the United States. By 2022, China accounted for 72% of the total value of Chilean lithium exports. China's position thus solidified first and foremost as market centrality, even before the promised industrialization process was able to take firm shape (World Bank, n.d.; SUBREI,

2023).

Aggregate investment figures reinforce the idea of strong sectoral influence, though not of overall Chinese capital dominance in Chile. Although this will be examined in further detail in the following sections, it is important to note that series from the *Banco Central de Chile*, systematized by the *Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional*, show that in 2024 the United States remained Chile's main foreign investor. Even so, Chinese capital appears to have expanded at an average annual rate of 22.79% between 2012 and 2024 (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional [BCN], 2026; Banco Central de Chile, n.d.). Along similar lines, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warns that FDI measured by country does not always accurately capture the ultimate origin of capital or the strategic logic behind certain acquisitions (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). For that reason, in China's case, the most revealing issue is less the aggregate volume than its concentration in critical lithium nodes.

In that sense, SQM's own corporate reporting confirms this structural relevance. In its *Form 20-F* for fiscal year 2023, the annual report foreign listed firms submit to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, SQM stated that Tianqi still held 22.16% of the company's shares and that Asia accounted for 92% of lithium sales revenue, while North America represented only a small fraction of that business (SQM, 2025). China's presence therefore appears in two overlapping dimensions, a significant equity stake and a commercial geography increasingly oriented toward the Asian market.

The same pattern also appeared in the industrial sphere. In 2021, the *Corporación de Fomento de la Producción* (CORFO), Chile's state development agency, launched a process to select Specialized Lithium Producers, a mechanism that offered preferential access to lithium for value-added projects tied to the battery chain (CORFO, 2021). On that basis, two Chinese firms were selected in 2023. BYD Chile, the local subsidiary of BYD, the Chinese battery and electric vehicle manufacturer, announced a US$ 290 million investment to produce LFP (Lithium Iron Phosphate) cathode material, a battery chemistry widely used in electric mobility. Yongqing Technology, a Chinese firm linked to battery materials, announced a US$ 233 million investment for a second project in the same segment (Corporación de Fomento de la Producción [CORFO], 2023, April 19; CORFO, 2023, October 16). The important thing to note here is that Chinese firms secured the main state-backed instruments designed to move Chile

beyond extraction and into manufacturing-related segments. This progression from commercial access to industrial influence directly supports *Hypothesis 1*, demonstrating that China's material preponderance is built not just on aggregate investment, but on functional control over the value-added segments of the lithium chain.

That final stage quickly revealed its limits. Reuters reported in 2024 that BYD was postponing its cathode plant in Chile and, in 2025, confirmed that both BYD and Tsingshan, a Chinese industrial group with a presence in metals and battery materials, had dropped their plans to develop lithium plants in the country, in a context marked by falling international prices and weaker economic incentives for those investments (Reuters, 2024, May 16b; Reuters, 2025, May 7). In short, the 2010-2025 trajectory shows that China's material projection moved from a favorable bilateral framework to strong commercial and ownership centrality, followed by an attempted industrial deepening that never fully took hold; and the underlying pattern across the period was the consolidation of Chile as a strategic raw-material supplier for China's industrial expansion.

Table 1. China's strategic position in Chile's lithium sector, 2010-2025.

Dimension	Evidence on China	Analytical meaning
Aggregate FDI stock in Chile	In 2024, China's aggregate FDI stock in Chile stood at US$ 959 million.	China's overall capital presence in Chile remains limited in aggregate terms, so its weight is not best captured by broad FDI stock alone.
Recent capital dynamics	Chinese capital in Chile grew at an average annual rate of 22.79% between 2012 and 2024.	The key pattern is rapid expansion from a lower base, not aggregate dominance.
Strategic entry into lithium assets	Tianqi Lithium acquired 23.77% of SQM for US$ 4.066 billion.	China's advance took place through a major equity position in a core lithium firm, not through dispersed or marginal investment.
Current shareholding position	In SQM's 2023 Form 20-F, Tianqi held 22.16% of the company's shares.	China achieved durable relevance inside a strategic producer, while remaining below full ownership or full command.
Regulatory limits on influence	The FNE extrajudicial settlement imposed restrictions on the Tianqi operation.	Chinese participation was treated as strategically sensitive and subject to safeguards, which limits any claim of unrestricted control.
Market orientation linked to China's sphere of demand	In SQM's 2023 Form 20-F, Asia accounted for 92% of lithium sales revenue, while North America represented only a very small share.	The commercial geography of lithium already aligns much more closely with Asian demand, reinforcing China's structural relevance even without full operational control.

Source: Compiled by the author from the evidence discussed in *Section 2.1.1*.

2.1.2. Chinese soft power: cooperation and South-South discourse.

China's projection toward Chile did not rely only on material instruments. It also rested on a consistent diplomatic narrative that combined South-South cooperation, sovereign equality, mutual benefit, and a rejection of political conditionality. The 2016 *Policy Paper on China-Latin America and the Caribbean* presents the China-LAC relationship as a cooperative one based on equality and mutual gain, aimed at shared development and not directed against third parties. In that same document, China states that it respects Latin American countries' sovereign right to choose their own development path, links the relationship to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and proposes the 1+3+6 framework, which structures

China-Latin America relations around one general plan, three main drivers, namely trade, investment, and financial cooperation, and six priority sectors, including energy, natural resources, infrastructure, manufacturing, scientific innovation, and information technology (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República Popular China, 2016, November 24; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2016, November 24). China's offer to Chile was thus framed as a combination of market access, capital, cooperation, and possible industrialization, all presented through the language of sovereign respect and the absence of political conditions.

From an early stage, this rhetoric was backed by stable bilateral mechanisms. Chile's Ministry of Foreign Affairs annual report for 2013 records the signing of the *Memorandum of Understanding* for the establishment of the Permanent Binational Commission between Chile and China, along with the Strategic Dialogue Mechanism for Economic Cooperation and Coordination (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile, 2013). As stated, China's projection did not rest on symbolic messaging alone; it was also anchored in institutional channels that reinforced an image of continuity, predictability, and structured cooperation.

Moreover, as the economic relationship deepened, that narrative increasingly incorporated a more explicit language of strategic partnership. In March 2016, Chile's minister of mining stated that Chile would not block a possible foreign sale of SQM, which revealed a state position open to an international reconfiguration of ownership in the sector (Reuters, 2016, March 6). Later that year, in November, Foreign Minister Heraldo Muñoz said that China and Chile intended to deepen their bilateral trade ties, while Xi Jinping called for broader cooperation in areas such as mining, infrastructure, clean energy, and information technologies (Reuters, 2016, November 22). The diplomatic dimension was therefore not a later rhetorical addition, but a constitutive part of the Sino-Chilean rapprochement.

Chile's 2018 accession to the *Memorandum of Understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative*, China's global strategy for connectivity, infrastructure, and investment, strengthened that pragmatic dimension. In Chile's official announcement, the *Belt and Road Initiative* appears as a platform centered on connectivity and cooperation through infrastructure, trade, and investment, revealing that, at least at the discursive level, China's proposal to Chile took the form of material usefulness presented through cooperation rather than pressure.

Ambassador Niu Qingbao's 2023 speech brought that broader doctrine into the Chilean case

in an openly legitimizing tone. Niu portrayed Chile as one of China's closest partners in the region and as a leading case of China-Latin America cooperation, emphasized the economic complementarity between the two countries, and argued that clean energy, the digital economy, and new infrastructure offered broad room for mutually beneficial cooperation (Embajada de la República Popular China en Chile, 2023, April 26). The same logic appeared again in the Belt and Road seminar held in November 2023, where the initiative was presented as a platform for international cooperation and as a provider of global public goods. In that setting, the Chinese ambassador highlighted investment, employment, and poverty reduction, together with projects in lithium, energy, trains, and 5G in Chile (Embajada de la República Popular China en Chile, 2023, November 16).

At this level, what China offered Chile was not limited to demand for lithium. It also offered a relationship framed around markets, investment, infrastructure, technological cooperation, and even the possibility of industrialization. That offer was especially useful for a country seeking to widen its external room for maneuver without placing the relationship inside an openly geopolitical language of rivalry. Although following sections will focus deeper on this, it all helps to explain why Chinese soft power gained traction: not only because of what it promised, but because of how it was presented. The tone avoided turning lithium or technology into explicit security issues, rejected overt confrontation, and grounded its legitimacy in economic pragmatism, non-interference, and formal respect for the partner's sovereignty.

The main tension in this discourse lies in the fact that its image of horizontality coexists with clear material asymmetries. The promise of no conditionality does not mean the absence of strategic interests, and the language of mutual benefit does not erase the unequal capabilities of the two sides. Even so, at the level of the public discourse examined here, China's strategy was able to present itself to Chile as a less aggressive, more pragmatic, and more development-oriented formula, one that appeared more compatible with Chilean priorities of industrialization, diversification, and economic development.

2.2. U.S. energy and diplomatic strategy.

2.2.1. U.S. firms, strategic interests, and material projection in Chilean lithium.

The U.S. presence in Chilean lithium did not emerge as a late response to China's advance. It began from a prior foothold in the extractive core of the Salar de Atacama. At the start of the decade, Rockwood Holdings' corporate documentation, from a U.S. chemical and mining company with lithium assets in Chile, showed an already established presence in the country. That position rested on its processing facilities in the industrial complex La Negra, in Antofagasta, and on its long-term access to Atacama brines, meaning underground waters with high concentrations of salts and minerals, including lithium. Reuters likewise identified Rockwood, alongside SQM, as one of the firms already operating in the country's main lithium enclave (Rockwood Holdings, Inc., 2013; Reuters, 2013, August 22). In this first stage, then, the United States did not appear as a newly arriving outside actor. It was already part of the existing productive structure, with a settled position in extraction and processing.

That base was corporately reorganized between 2014 and 2016, when Albemarle Corporation, a U.S. chemical company and one of the world's largest lithium producers, acquired Rockwood and with it its Chilean assets. Albemarle's 2014 *Form 10-K*, that is, the annual report to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, presented the US$ 5.6 billion deal as the starting point for a new phase in the scale of its lithium business. Soon after, Reuters reported in March 2016 that rising global demand was pushing firms already active in the Lithium Triangle to expand capacity, and that in Chile the center of that expansion remained the Salar de Atacama (Albemarle Corporation, 2015; Reuters, 2016, March 17). The U.S. trajectory in those years therefore reflected business continuity from an already established position rather than a fresh entry into the sector.

When the scale of analysis is widened, that sectoral continuity appears to have rested on an investment platform far broader than China's. Data from the *Banco Central de Chile* show that in 2024 U.S. foreign direct investment stock in Chile reached US$ 29.455 billion and remained well above the Chinese figure (BCN, 2026). This suggests that the U.S. presence in Chilean lithium did not operate in isolation, but rather within a deeper and more structural economic relationship with the Chilean economy as a whole.

Even so, the meaning of that presence shifted in recent years. From 2021 onward, U.S. public

policy began to place lithium within a broader agenda focused on economic security, industrial resilience, and the reduction of external vulnerabilities. The U.S. Department of Energy's *National Blueprint for Lithium Batteries 2021-2030* marked that shift by stressing the need to secure reliable and diversified sources of critical minerals together with allies and partners (U.S. Department of Energy, 2021); indeed, a previously existing business presence began to be reinterpreted in Washington through a more explicit geoeconomic lens.

Against that strategic backdrop, the U.S. presence in Chile is organized on the business side around Albemarle, the main U.S. corporate actor in Chilean lithium. The company's own corporate information shows that Chile occupies a central place in its lithium business, both because of its extraction activity in the Salar de Atacama and because of its conversion and processing capacity there (Albemarle Corporation, n.d.). This centrality also appears indirectly in SQM's Form 20-F, where Albemarle is listed as one of SQM's main global competitors and is assigned an important share of the world lithium chemicals market, roughly 17% (SQM, 2025). More than immediate purchase volume, the U.S. strategic interest here lies in sustaining an anchor company, embedding it in a treaty network, and using its presence to secure access to critical minerals over the long term.

The material continuity of that position became visible again in 2024 through the agreement reached between the *Corporación de Fomento de la Producción* and Albemarle. Reuters reported that the U.S. company secured the option to increase its production quota by 240,000 metric tons of lithium metal equivalent, close to 50% above the quota then in force, in exchange for meeting sustainability, Indigenous consultation, and environmental permitting requirements. The agreement also required settling an earlier dispute with CORFO through a US$ 15 million payment for royalties allegedly underpaid since 2021 (Reuters, 2024, May 16a). Rather than opening a wholly new phase, this agreement confirmed the persistence of the United States as a first-order operating actor in Chilean lithium.

Therefore, the evolution from 2010 to 2025 shows a clear sequence (*see Table 2*). First, a U.S. presence already embedded in the extractive and processing base of Chilean lithium. Then, a corporate reorganization that reinforced that continuity through Albemarle. Finally, a recent repositioning in which that prior presence acquired a broader meaning within the U.S. strategy on critical minerals and supply chains. The key to this period, then, is not a late U.S. arrival in the sector, but the strategic reinterpretation of a position that had existed for years.

Table 2. United States strategic position in Chile's lithium sector, 2010-2024.

Dimension	Evidence on the United States	Analytical meaning
Strategic policy framework	The National Blueprint for Lithium Batteries 2021-2030 frames lithium as part of a broader strategy to build a domestic and allied battery supply chain less exposed to external dependence.	Lithium is treated as an economic security issue rather than as a standard commodity.
Main corporate actor in Chile	Albemarle is the main U.S. corporate actor in Chilean lithium and occupies a central place in its Chile-based lithium business through extraction in the Salar de Atacama and related conversion and processing capacity.	The U.S. position in Chile rests on an established operating company with direct industrial presence.
Position in the global lithium market	SQM's Form 20-F identifies Albemarle as one of its main global competitors and attributes to it a relevant share of the global lithium chemicals market, around 17%.	The U.S. presence is linked to a globally significant firm, not to a marginal or secondary player.
Type of insertion in Chilean lithium	Unlike the Chinese pattern, the U.S. presence relies mainly on direct operational control over existing assets.	The core U.S. advantage lies in operating assets already in place rather than in equity penetration or new industrial commitments.
Broader financial and institutional base	Banco Central de Chile data show a wide gap between the U.S. and Chinese FDI stock in Chile, with the United States holding a much deeper aggregate financial position in the Chilean economy.	Washington benefits from a broader financial and institutional base in Chile, even though this does not automatically translate into commercial dominance in lithium exports.
Expansion under regulatory conditions	Reuters reported in May 2024 that Albemarle secured the option to increase its production quota by 240,000 metric tons of lithium metal equivalent under new regulatory and environmental conditions agreed with CORFO.	The U.S. presence remains materially strong, but expansion is conditioned by stricter Chilean regulatory, environmental and territorial requirements.

Source: Compiled by the author from the evidence discussed in *Section 2.2.1*.

2.2.2. U.S. discourse on security, risk, and dependence: political and diplomatic conditionality.

U.S. discourse on critical minerals gradually moved away from a framework centered on economic efficiency and toward one focused on security, vulnerability, and resilience. As early as 2011, the U.S. Department of *Energy's Critical Materials Strategy* warned that certain

materials were essential for clean energy technologies and that their supply could be affected by geographic concentration, market restrictions, and disruption risks (U.S. Department of Energy, 2011). One year later, the *National Strategy for Global Supply Chain Security* directly linked supply chain security to economic prosperity and national security (The White House, 2012). The clearest turning point came with *Executive Order 13817* in 2017, which defined dependence on imported critical minerals as a strategic vulnerability capable of affecting the U.S. economy, industrial base, and military readiness (The White House, 2017, December 20).

On that basis, the U.S. administration presents China not simply as an economic competitor, but as an actor able to turn interdependence into a tool of pressure. In her 2023 speech on supply chain resilience, Katherine Tai, former U.S. Trade Representative, argued that U.S. trade policy must respond to pressure exercised through economic dependence, to strategic bottlenecks, and to excessive dependencies that allow certain actors to use their dominant position for geopolitical purposes (Office of the United States Trade Representative [USTR], 2023, June 15). The same line appears in the 2024 *Trade Policy Agenda*, where the USTR defends a labor-focused trade policy, criticizes competitive models based on subsidies, overcapacity, and non-market practices, and uses those concerns to justify a reorientation of U.S. economic policy toward resilience, diversification, and reindustrialization (USTR, 2024). The 2025 agenda pushes that language further by insisting on the need to correct structural deficits, strengthen the country's productive base, and reduce strategic exposure (USTR, 2025). Compared with China's discourse of cooperation and mutual benefit, Washington adopts a much clearer vocabulary of threat, pressure, and strategic correction.

The U.S. proposal toward Chile fits into that same logic, although it is framed as selective partnership with trusted partners. In Antofagasta, Janet Yellen argued in 2024 that key parts of clean energy supply chains were too heavily concentrated in China and defended the strategy of relocating sourcing toward reliable partners in order to build more resilient chains with countries sharing similar goals and basic principles (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2024, March 2). In that speech, Chile appears as a valuable partner because of its resources and because it could be integrated into a safer supply architecture for the United States. From a similar angle, also in 2024, the U.S. Department of State described the development of lithium extraction and its value chain in Chile as a concrete opportunity for U.S. firms (U.S. Department of State, 2024, March 4).

This difference becomes even clearer when the normative dimension of the U.S. proposal is considered. The 2024 *Joint Statement of the Minerals Security Partnership*, an initiative promoted by the United States and its partners to coordinate critical minerals projects, presents cooperation on critical minerals as an effort among politically aligned partners to build diverse, secure, and sustainable supply chains. At the same time, support is tied to projects that comply with environmental, social, and governance standards, labor rights, community participation, and local value creation (U.S. Department of State, 2024, March 4). In the same direction, the 2023 critical minerals agreement between the United States and Japan includes commitments related to internationally recognized labor standards, environmental protection, investment screening, and cooperation in response to the practices of non-market actors (USTR, 2023, March 28). The U.S. approach therefore carries a level of conditionality absent from the Chinese discourse examined earlier.

In the Chilean case, that conditionality also operates through concrete incentives. In July 2024, the *Subsecretaría de Relaciones Económicas Internacionales* (SUBREI) also reported that certain inputs made with Chilean lithium would qualify for tax benefits in the United States because they would be treated as domestic in origin for purposes of the *Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA), the 2022 U.S. law that includes tax incentives for clean technologies and supply chains (SUBREI, 2024, July 11). The United States thus offers relevant material opportunities, but it does so through instruments that steer partner behavior and reward integration into its own regulatory and industrial framework. Unlike the Chinese proposal of market access, capital, and infrastructure under the principle of no political conditionality, the U.S. proposal combines access, incentives, and diplomatic backing with more explicit demands related to standards, governance, and strategic alignment.

This discourse is not free of debate. The USTR criticizes China for market distortions, non-competitive practices, and the strategic use of interdependence, yet the U.S. response itself relies on large subsidies, rules of origin, partner selection, and unilateral tools that also reorder trade around national priorities (USTR, 2024; USTR, 2025). In the same way, the appeal to resilience and shared values sits alongside a tension between reliance on trusted partners abroad and the push for domestic reindustrialization. Overall, the U.S. discourse on lithium and critical minerals is clearly more securitized, more normative, and more conditional than the Chinese one, which strengthens, as it will be shortly discussed, *Hypothesis 2* at the

discursive and diplomatic level.

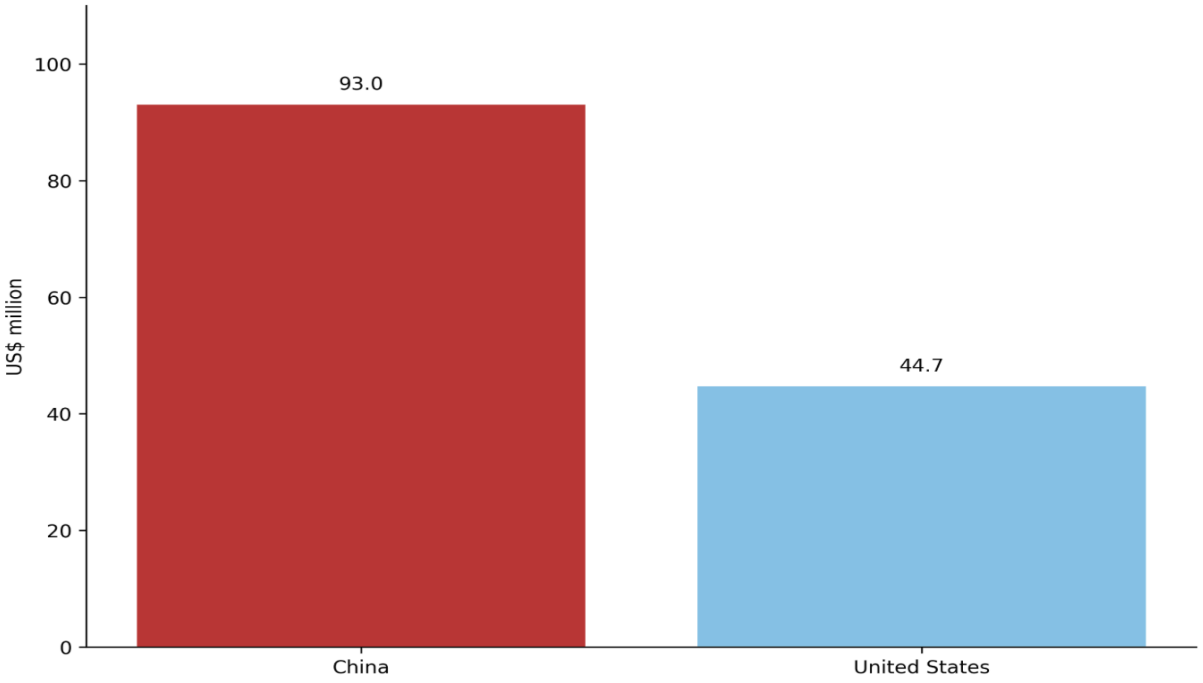
2.3. Comparative analysis: China vs. the United States.

2.3.1. Comparative assessment of material weight and power repertoires.

A comparison of China and the United States in Chilean lithium reveals an asymmetry that is not expressed in exactly the same way across all indicators, but whose strategic meaning is still clear. China leads in commercial absorption of Chilean lithium and, above all, in the downstream and higher-technology segments where contemporary structural power is increasingly concentrated. The United States, by contrast, retains stronger positions in aggregate foreign direct investment stock and in direct extractive operation. *Hypothesis 1* is thus confirmed in the dimensions that matter most for long-term control over the contemporary lithium economy, namely market centrality and position in the value chain, even if the hypothesis requires nuance in relation to aggregate capital stock and direct operating presence in extraction.

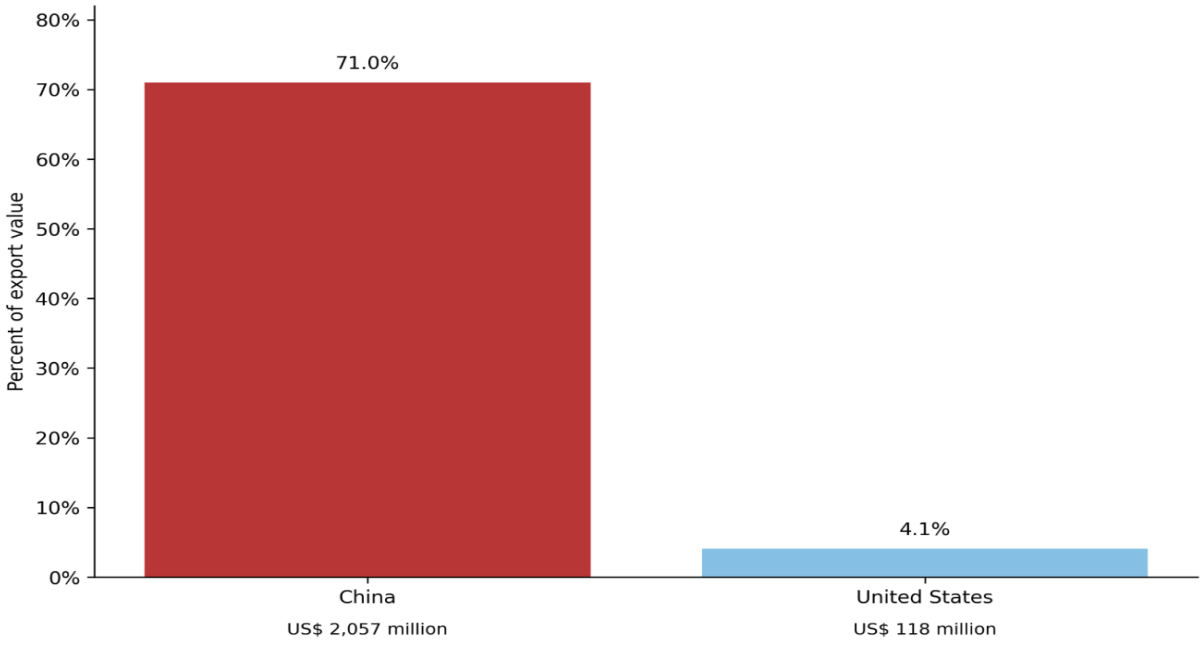
China's advantage is especially visible in trade. WITS data show (*see Figure 1*) that in 2019 China imported US$ 93.0 million in lithium carbonates from Chile, compared with US$ 44.7 million for the United States (World Bank, n.d.). SUBREI's first snapshot reported that in 2022 China absorbed 72% of the total value of Chilean lithium exports, and the third snapshot shows (*see Figure 2*) that in 2024 it still accounted for 71% of export value, equal to US$ 2.057 billion, while the United States represented only 4.1%, with US$ 118 million (SUBREI, 2023, 2025). Data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), an international trade visualization and analysis platform, reinforce the same pattern of concentration by once again placing China as the dominant destination and the United States as a marginal buyer in Chile's lithium carbonate trade (Observatory of Economic Complexity [OEC], n.d.). This is not a minor commercial difference. It places a large share of Chilean lithium exports within a demand structure centered on China, which strengthens Beijing's leverage not only as a buyer, but as the main external market around which Chilean export orientation is organized.

Figure 1. Imports of lithium carbonates from Chile, 2019.



Source: Compiled by the author based on World Bank WITS, SUBREI, and OEC.

Figure 2. Share in Chilean lithium export value, 2024.



Source: Compiled by the author based on World Bank WITS, SUBREI, and OEC.

**Note: in 2022, China absorbed 72% of the total value of Chilean lithium exports, according to SUBREI.*

The investment dimension, by contrast, offers a different picture. Data from *the Banco Central*

de Chile show that in 2024 the stock of U.S. foreign direct investment in Chile reached US$ 29.455 billion, compared with US$ 959 million for China (Banco Central de Chile, n.d.). Even so, this gap needs to be read carefully, since it refers to aggregate investment in the Chilean economy rather than investment limited to the lithium sector. The indicator clearly captures the deeper historical financial footprint of the United States, yet on its own it does not establish an equivalent primacy within this sectoral dispute. In other words, aggregate FDI stock reflects the long historical embeddedness of the United States in the Chilean economy, but it does not by itself disprove China's stronger position in the specific lithium ecosystem, where trade concentration, shareholder entry, and downstream industrial centrality matter more than broad capital accumulation alone (OECD, 2023; Bridge & Faigen, 2022).

A comparison of corporate presence and productive weight makes the picture more complex again. On one side, Tianqi Lithium's 2018 purchase of 23.77% of SQM for US$ 4.066 billion gave China a stake in one of the main assets in Chilean lithium, even though it did not make Tianqi the company's full controlling actor (Reuters, 2018, December 3). In addition, the *Anuario de la Minería de Chile* 2024 identifies SQM S.A. as the main holder of hectares under exploitation, with 17.3% of the total (Servicio Nacional de Geología y Minería [SERNAGEOMIN], 2026). On the other side, Reuters reported in 2024 that Albemarle secured the option to expand its production quota by 240,000 metric tons of lithium metal equivalent, and Cochilco assigns Albemarle 31% of world lithium production in 2023, compared with 18% for SQM (Reuters, 2024, May 16a; Cochilco, 2025). The resulting pattern is not one of simple dominance by a single actor across all stages, but of differentiated modalities of control. China advanced through strategic shareholding and linkage to SQM, while the United States preserved a stronger role in direct extractive operation through Albemarle. This distinction reflects an influence over Chilean lithium that is distributed across ownership, extraction, market access, and industrial articulation, rather than concentrated in a single variable.

China's superiority becomes much more pronounced once the analysis moves up the value chain. Cochilco reported that in 2022 China accounted for 77% of global battery production capacity, while the United States stood at 6% (Cochilco, 2025). The IEA deepens that picture for 2024. Around 85% of global cell manufacturing capacity was located in China, more than 75% belonged to Chinese producers, almost all LFP batteries sold in the United States or Europe were manufactured in China, and the country supplied almost 85% of active cathode

materials and more than 90% of anode material (IEA, 2025). The USGS completes the picture from the extractive side, showing that in 2024 Chile produced 49,000 tons and China 41,000 (U.S. Geological Survey [USGS], 2025). The underlying paradox is clear. A substantial share of the lithium extracted in Chile ends up inside a technological chain whose center of gravity remains in China, even when extraction itself relies heavily on operations with strong U.S. involvement.

This material contrast also appears in the power repertoires of both actors. China tends to turn its economic weight into political acceptability. Its hard power is expressed less through open coercion than through its ability to structure material incentives that are difficult to replace, namely market access, investment, promises of industrialization, and entry into the most dynamic Asian segments of the chain. Tianqi's entry into SQM and CORFO's selection of BYD and Yongqing showed precisely this kind of material power, one that fit into the Chilean state's productive priorities without being publicly framed as external tutelage (Reuters, 2018, May 17; Reuters, 2018, December 3; FNE, 2018, August 23; CORFO, 2023, April 19; CORFO, 2023, October 16). This framing is especially effective because it resonates with what Barandiarán (2019) identifies as development imaginaries around lithium, in which extraction is legitimized through promises of modernization, value addition, and industrial upgrading. It also aligns with the broader appeal of Chinese non-conditionality in Latin America, where Beijing is often presented as a pragmatic partner rather than as an actor demanding domestic political alignment or regulatory discipline (Cattafi & Papp, 2025; Maiza-Larrarte & Bustillo-Mesanza, 2025).

The United States operates through a different logic. Its material power in Chile remains important, yet its political translation does not rest on a narrative of neutrality or non-conditionality. Instead, it is framed through an openly strategic understanding of the relationship. Albemarle's presence, the historical depth of U.S. investment, and Washington's ability to open access to high-value regulatory circuits are not presented as disinterested cooperation, but as part of a broader architecture of economic security (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2024, March 2; Reuters, 2024, May 16a; SUBREI, 2024, July 11). This strategic bias becomes even clearer in discourse. From *Executive Order 13817* to the speeches of Katherine Tai and Janet Yellen, U.S. language revolves around vulnerability, economic coercion, resilience, chokepoints and especially friendshoring (understood as the strategy of

rerouting supply chains to politically and economically allied nations) to reduce dependence on China. The result is a much more securitized interpretive frame than the Chinese one. The relationship Washington offers is valuable, yet also more rule-bound. It offers market access, incentives, and cooperation, though within a framework of regulatory alignment, traceability, standards, and supply security (U.S. Department of State, 2024, March 4; SUBREI, 2024, July 11). This contrasting approach to conditionality validates *Hypothesis 2*, showing that while both powers deploy distinct diplomatic repertoires, the U.S. reliance on strategic risk and normative alignment creates a more rigid framework for cooperation than China's pragmatic discourse.

Table 3. Comparison of Chinese and U.S. power repertoires in Chilean lithium.

Dimension	China	United States	Main conclusion
Core discursive logic	Mutual benefit, sovereign respect, comprehensive cooperation, shared development	Risk management, vulnerability reduction, resilience, security of supply	China frames the relationship through partnership and development, while the United States frames it through security and strategic protection.
Political tone	Low-friction, non-intrusive, less norm-heavy	More strategic, more norm-based, more conditioned	The Chinese repertoire is easier to accommodate politically in Chile, while the U.S. repertoire carries greater regulatory and strategic density.
Soft power profile	China appears as a partner that accompanies a Chilean agenda already defined domestically	The United States appears as a partner that supports Chile through trusted networks, standards, and alignment mechanisms	The difference lies in how each actor presents cooperation, not only in what each actor offers.
Effect on Chilean perception	More pragmatically compatible with sovereignty, development, and value-added ambitions	More associated with supply-chain discipline, trusted partnerships, and external vulnerability management	China is more easily perceived as politically usable within Chilean discourse, while the United States appears more selective and more conditional.
Comparative synthesis	Horizontal, useful, and discursively flexible	Strategic, securitized, and institutionally structured	The Chinese repertoire reduces political friction. The U.S. repertoire increases strategic reassurance, but also raises the sense of conditionality.

Source: Compiled by the author from the evidence discussed in *Section 2.3.1*.

Taken together, the comparison points to a divided but still intelligible structure. China dominates the destination market and the decisive downstream segments, and it converts that material centrality into a politically usable offer that is easier for Chilean elites to incorporate into a domestic discourse of sovereignty, industrialization, and development. The United States retains an important financial base and a significant operational presence in extraction, but it translates that position through a repertoire that is more selective, more

securitized, and more norm-dense. For this reason, *Hypothesis 2* is reinforced at this level, not because Washington exerts greater material pressure in every dimension, but because its offer is embedded in a grammar of strategic risk, trusted alignment, and supply-chain discipline that generates more political friction than the Chinese discourse of pragmatic partnership and mutual development.

2.3.2. Interpretive assessment from structural realism and dependency theory.

The evidence examined in this chapter allows the rivalry between China and the United States over Chilean lithium to be interpreted, first, as an interstate struggle over relative power, influence, and functional control over a strategic resource. From the perspective of structural realism, lithium stops being a simple commercial good and becomes part of the security logic of a competitive international system, where major powers seek to reduce vulnerabilities, secure supply, and prevent a rival from controlling decisive nodes of the value chain (Buket Kilinç-Pala, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2001; U.S. Department of Energy, 2021). Within that framework, the conduct of both actors confirms that Chile matters not only because of its reserves or its extractive capacity, but because it serves as a platform for projecting power over the energy transition and over industries regarded as strategic.

Still, the rivalry does not take symmetrical forms. China has been more successful in articulating market absorption, shareholder presence, and downstream industrial dominance into a broader structural advantage. Its position links Chilean lithium to the world's main destination market and, at the same time, to the industrial segments where value capture and strategic leverage are concentrated. The United States, by contrast, preserves stronger positions in direct extractive operation and in the broader financial history of the Chilean economy, yet its current posture appears more defensive and more clearly tied to the management of an already recognized vulnerability, namely the concentration of strategic-mineral processing and battery manufacturing in China (IEA, 2025; Riofrancos, 2022; Reuters, 2018, December 3; SUBREI, 2023, 2025). From a realist angle, then, the central issue is not simply who extracts more lithium or who has invested more in aggregate terms. The deeper issue is which actor is better positioned to turn presence in Chile into durable influence over the future direction of the value chain.

This point is crucial because it shows why U.S. discourse is so explicitly securitized. Washington's concern is not only access to a raw material, but rather the risk that China's control over processing, battery materials, and industrial standards could be converted into broader geopolitical leverage. In that sense, U.S. policy toward Chilean lithium fits the logic of a power confronted with the rise of a systemic rival and trying to reorganize supply chains through resilience, friendshoring, and trusted partnerships (Nygaard, 2022; Riofrancos, 2022). China, by contrast, projects a less confrontational and more cooperative public image, but this softer political language does not remove the underlying realist logic. It is precisely because Beijing combines market centrality, industrial power, and a discourse of mutual benefit that its influence expands with lower visible friction. In strategic terms, that lower-friction form of expansion is itself an effective way of accumulating power.

Dependency theory introduces a decisive qualification. The fact that two great powers compete intensely over Chilean lithium does not mean that Chile thereby escapes its peripheral position, nor does rivalry by itself produce structural transformation. The comparative evidence instead suggests that interstate competition coexists with the continuity of a subordinate insertion, in which Chile remains central as a site of extraction and primary processing, yet marginal in the higher-value segments where advanced technology, standards, intellectual property, and industrial decision-making are concentrated (Goldthau et al., 2020; Bridge & Faigen, 2022; Jovine & Paz, 2025). In other words, Chile's geopolitical relevance rises, but its structural location within the chain does not change at the same pace. Read together with Quijano's (2014) account of the coloniality of power, the implication is clear: a shift in dominant external partner does not necessarily alter the hierarchical logic of insertion into global capitalism. It may simply reorganize it.

The interpretive balance, then, is double. On one level, the China-United States dispute over Chilean lithium follows a logic of power competition fully consistent with structural realism. On another, its effects on Chile fit the concerns of dependency theory. Chile's hedging strategy expands room for maneuver in the short term and helps explain why China appears politically more usable than the United States, but the evidence examined here still leaves open a deeper question that the following chapters must address, namely whether this widening of external options represents a real increase in strategic autonomy or whether it instead reproduces a new form of dependence (Bórquez Basáez & López Giral, 2025; Gao, 2025; Jovine & Paz, 2025).

3. Chilean preference for China and a critical interpretation of its effects.

3.1. Chilean political discourse on lithium and external actors.

Official Chilean discourse constructs an image of China that evolves from a central trade partner into a broader strategic partner associated with investment, political coordination, and development prospects. The *Annual Reports of Chile's Ministry of Foreign Affairs* for 2010, 2012, and 2013 show a relationship that steadily deepened through high-level visits, expanding economic exchange, and the creation of formal bilateral coordination mechanisms, including the Permanent Binational Commission and the Strategic Dialogue Mechanism for Economic Cooperation (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile, 2010, 2012, 2013). In this first phase, China appears above all as a priority interlocutor that is stable and reliable.

That representation later took on a more clearly productive and sovereignty-centered meaning. In January 2016, Michelle Bachelet stated that Chilean lithium would not become another case of failed development, but rather an example of a well-built future, linking the resource to a national strategy based on value added, knowledge, and development (Bachelet, 2016, January 25). Along the same lines, the 2016 book of presidential speeches reinforces the idea that lithium should become a lever for productive transformation under state leadership, while *Decree 23 of 2021* consolidates a regulatory framework in which the state sets the conditions for the exploration, exploitation, and beneficiation of the resource (Ministerio Secretaría General de Gobierno de Chile, 2018; Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2021). Within that framework, China does not appear in Chilean discourse as a threat to state control, but as an actor that can fit within a sovereignty-based strategy for the resource.

The clearest formulation of this image took shape between 2018 and 2023. In the official announcement of Chile's accession to the *Belt and Road Initiative*, Roberto Ampuero presented it as an opportunity to attract investment, improve connectivity, and consolidate Chile as a gateway for Chinese and Asian capital in Latin America (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile, 2018, November 1). That reading became even stronger under Gabriel Boric's government. When the government presented the national strategy for lithium use in April 2023, it stressed that Chile should not remain limited to extraction, but instead move toward a stage with greater value added, state leadership, and partnerships aligned with that goal (Gobierno de Chile, 2023, April 20). A few months later, during his meeting with the Chile-

China Business Council in Beijing, Boric described China as a leader in global knowledge, emphasized the need for mutual learning, and framed the bilateral relationship as a reciprocal opportunity within a reliable environment for investment and cooperation (Presidencia de Chile, 2023, October 16). China therefore stops appearing only as a market or buyer and is increasingly represented as a technological partner, a desirable investor, and a source of learning for Chilean industrialization.

The image of the United States is built in a different way. In Chilean discourse, it does not appear primarily as an openly coercive power, but as a longstanding and technically relevant partner whose presence can operate within a framework regulated by national sovereignty. Rockwood's corporate documents, and later those of Albemarle, show an early business presence in Chilean lithium, based on long-term operations and on a contractual relationship subject to the rules of the Chilean state (Rockwood Holdings, Inc., 2013; Albemarle Corporation, 2015). In this first image, then, the United States appears less as a rival than as a relevant economic actor whose presence can be incorporated into a national architecture of public control.

That representation shifted once lithium began to be explicitly named by the Chilean state as a strategic resource under public leadership. Janet Yellen's visit to Chile in March 2024 gave the relationship a new meaning. In statements from the Ministry of Finance, the meeting between Mario Marcel and Yellen is presented as evidence of Chile's importance for clean energy supply chains and as recognition of the country's role in areas such as sustainable finance, the energy transition, and critical minerals (Ministerio de Hacienda de Chile, 2024, March 1; Ministerio de Hacienda de Chile, 2024, March 2). At the discursive level, then, U.S. language about supply security and critical minerals is not translated into visible pressure, but into recognition of Chile's strategic value within the global energy transition.

Seen side by side, the contrast is clear. In Chilean discourse, China appears as a partner, an investor, an opportunity, and a source of knowledge tied to industrialization, with notable continuity across governments of different political orientations. The United States, by contrast, appears as a historic strategic partner that is prestigious and institutionally relevant, but also associated with a more rule-bound, more demanding relationship, one more closely tied to external regulatory frameworks. The difference, which confirms *Hypothesis 3*, does not lie in Chile describing one as good and the other as bad. Instead, it lies in the fact that China is

constructed as a more pragmatic partner, more willing to invest, and easier to integrate into Chile's narrative of sovereignty, value added, and industrialization. In that sense, Chilean discourse represents China more consistently as the less confrontational partner and the one more functional to its declared development goals.

3.2. Chilean preference for China: from discourse to political decision-making.

That discursive hierarchy is later translated into concrete decisions. Chile's preference for China is not explained only by trade or investment volume, but by a closer fit between the Chinese offer and the priorities that the Chilean state itself defines for lithium. When the Chilean government stated in 2023 that the goal was not to remain limited to extraction, but to move toward greater value added under state leadership, it established a framework in which partners willing to invest, transfer technology, and accept public direction of the process became especially attractive (Gobierno de Chile, 2023, April 20). On this terrain, the Chinese language of development, cooperation, and industrialization finds a more direct translation in Chilean institutional practice.

The first visible material expression of that rapprochement appears in Chile's own accession to the *Belt and Road Initiative* in 2018. Beyond its discursive framing, the agreement institutionalized a favorable opening toward China in terms of opportunity, connectivity, and investment (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile, 2018, November 1). That convergence became even more explicit with the *National Lithium Strategy* and with presidential discourse in Beijing, where China was linked to science, technology, and industrialization, meaning the very same pillars Chile uses to legitimize its effort to move beyond a purely extractive pattern (Gobierno de Chile, 2023, April 20; Presidencia de Chile, 2023, October 16).

That affinity later took the form of concrete institutional selection when the Chilean state awarded BYD Chile and Yongqing Technology the most emblematic industrial projects of the period under the Specialized Lithium Producers scheme. CORFO's announcements present them as instruments to promote cathode material production, industrial investment, employment, and technology transfer. China is therefore positioned not only as a market or investor, but as the preferred partner for carrying out the industrialization that state discourse itself declares as a goal (Corporación de Fomento de la Producción, 2023, April 19; 2023,

October 16). At this point, the preference for China stops being merely discursive and begins to appear in concrete public decisions.

The documents between Codelco and SQM reinforce that conclusion at a more structural level. The *Memorandum of Understanding* of December 2023 and the *Partnership Agreement* of May 2024 organize the future governance of the Salar de Atacama around stronger state involvement, yet they do so without breaking with assets and processes linked to China, including the Sichuan plant mentioned within the corporate structure of the agreement (Corporación Nacional del Cobre de Chile [Codelco], 2023, December 27; Codelco, 2024, May 31). This suggests that the discourse of sovereignty did not lead to disengagement from the Chinese node, but rather to a formula of state control compatible with an already existing productive interdependence.

The contrast with the U.S. proposal helps clarify the meaning of this preference. Washington frames its offer around resilience, the reduction of strategic dependencies, and environmental, social, labor, and governance standards (Office of the United States Trade Representative [USTR], 2023, June 15; U.S. Department of State, 2024, March 4). Against that backdrop, SUBREI's July 2024 statement shows that Chile does value the possibility that products made with lithium could obtain U.S. tax benefits under the *Inflation Reduction Act*, yet it does so from the perspective of trade competitiveness and investment attraction, not as the central axis of its productive strategy (Subsecretaría de Relaciones Económicas Internacionales, 2024, July 11). In other words, the relationship with the United States appears useful for selling under better conditions in high-value regulated markets, but less aligned with the Chilean narrative of sovereign industrialization.

All in consideration, the political and institutional evidence suggests that Chile leans toward China because it sees the Chinese proposal as less intrusive and more functional to its own public priorities. The signing of *the Belt and Road* agreement, the discursive centrality given to China in 2023, the awarding of the main industrial projects to Chinese firms, and the continuity of China-linked assets within the new governance structure of the Salar de Atacama all point to a more favorable approach toward Beijing at the productive and institutional levels. This does not mean abandoning the United States, since the effort to secure access to the *IRA* shows that Chile still values its trade and regulatory usefulness. Nonetheless, it does reveal a differentiated hierarchy among partners.

4. Critical assessment through dependency theory and neocolonialism.

4.1. Chile's position in the global lithium value chain and the limits of value capture.

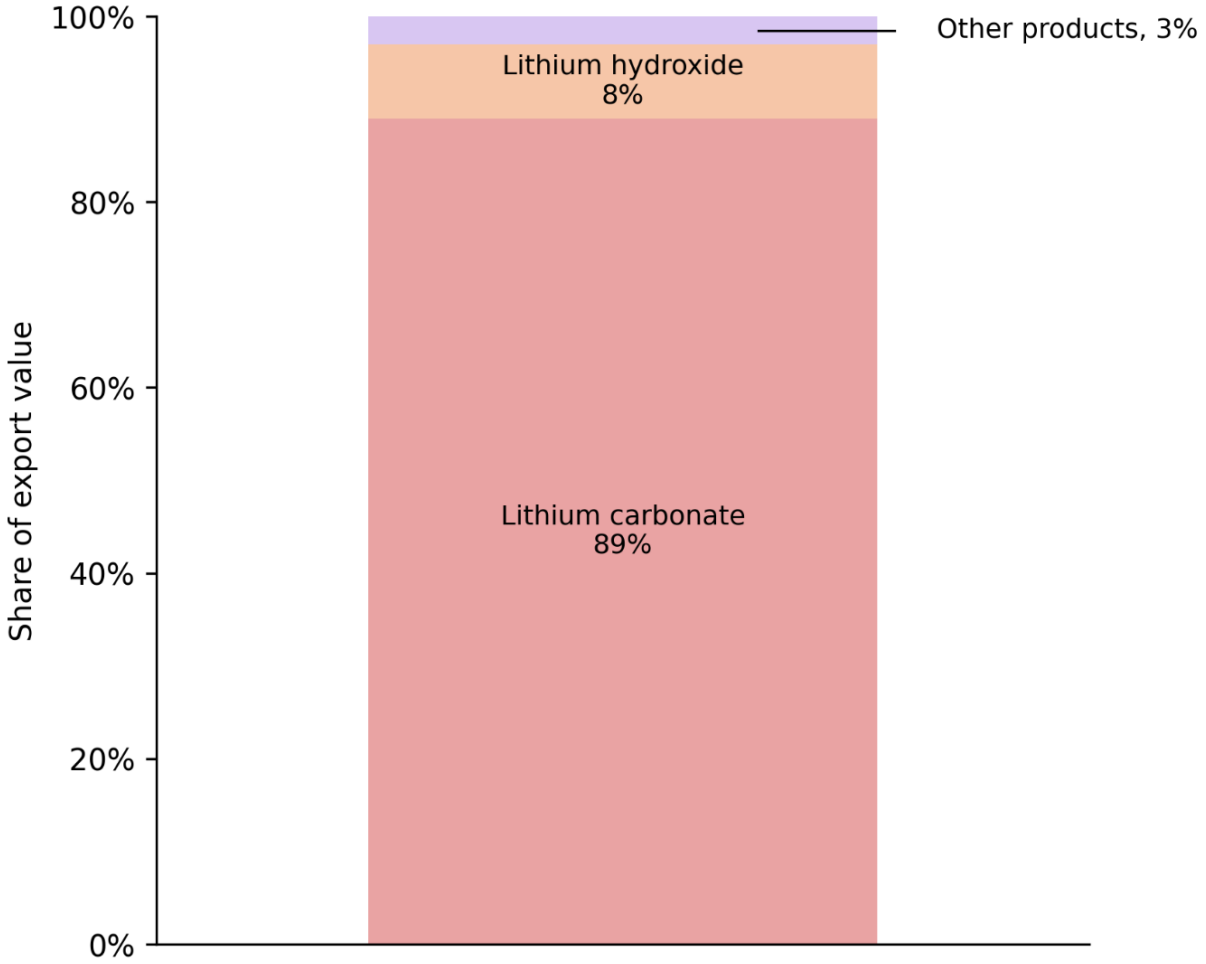
Chile's place in the global lithium value chain needs to begin with a basic distinction between the strategic centrality of the resource and the country's actual position within that productive sequence. Lithium has become a key input for the lithium-ion batteries used in electric vehicles and energy storage systems (U.S. Geological Survey [USGS], 2012, 2014). Even so, the importance of the resource does not automatically translate into an advantageous place in the chain. The OECD places Chile in a predominantly early-stage position, with stronger forward than backward integration. In practice, this means Chile supplies inputs for production elsewhere, while playing a limited role in the segments with greater technological complexity (OECD, 2023). The problem, then, is not that Chilean lithium lacks importance, but that its importance is expressed from a subordinate position.

That position becomes clear when one looks at the segments in which Chile does participate. WITS data show that, by 2019, Chile's external insertion was already organized around the export of lithium carbonates as an intermediate product (World Bank, n.d.). SUBREI's third snapshot reports that in 2024 Chile was the world's leading exporter of lithium carbonate, with shipments equal to 65% of the global total, and the second-largest exporter of lithium hydroxide, with 9%, while China led that segment with 78% (SUBREI, 2025). In the same direction, the *Anuario de la Minería de Chile 2024* records national production in the form of lithium carbonate, hydroxide, chloride, and sulfate, confirming that Chile does participate in extraction and in primary chemical refining (SERNAGEOMIN, 2026). To that, one can add USGS data placing Chile among the major global producers, with 49,000 tons in 2024 (USGS, 2025). Chile is therefore involved in more than brine extraction alone. It also participates in the initial chemical processing of the resource.

Still, that insertion remains concentrated in intermediate stages with lower technological sophistication. SUBREI shows that in 2024 Chilean lithium exports totaled US$ 2.895 billion, down 57% from 2023, although export volume reached a record 314 thousand tons of lithium carbonate equivalent. At the same time, 89% of export value came from lithium carbonate and only 8% from hydroxide (SUBREI, 2025). Cochilco helps explain this dynamic by showing that the earlier market boom was driven by the expansion of electric mobility and by expectations of rising demand for lithium compounds used in batteries. This increased the

strategic value of the resource without changing Chile's structural position within the chain (Cochilco, 2025). Chile has gained weight as a chemical actor, but it has not substantially altered the place it occupies in the global productive hierarchy.

Figure 3. Composition of Chilean lithium export value, 2024.



Source: Compiled by the author based on SUBREI.

The main gap appears when attention shifts to the later stages of the chain, where manufacturing and technology are denser. As it has been discussed, the IEA indicates that in 2024 most of the global battery cell manufacturing capacity was located in China, belonged or was related at some stage to Chinese producers (IEA, 2025). Chile does not appear in any of these segments, which shows that its insertion does not reach the manufacture of active materials, cell production, battery assembly, or electric vehicle manufacturing. Said differently, Chile is present in extraction and primary chemical refining, but not in the stages where lithium is turned into a high-value technological component.

The key issue, then, shifts from presence in the chain to the autonomy generated by that presence. In general terms, UNCTAD argues that increasing domestic value added helps reduce dependence on primary exports, lessen external volatility, and raise income, employment, and technological capabilities (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2024). In Chile's case, the evidence points to a more ambivalent trajectory. The OECD continues to place Chile in the early stages of the chain, while Gutiérrez and Ruiz-León argue that lithium has strategic potential to drive sovereign technological development, a possibility that in practice has still not been fully realized (OECD, 2023; Gutiérrez & Ruiz-León, 2024). The paradox is therefore not a lack of revenue, but the distance between rent capture and productive autonomy.

Fiscal value capture has indeed been significant. The BCN report shows that the renegotiated contracts with Albemarle and SQM introduced variable royalties ranging from 6.8% to 40%, depending on the lithium price, mandatory contributions to R&D, and a value-added incentive reserving up to 25% of production at preferential prices for industrial projects (BCN, 2024). Along similar lines, NRGI notes that in 2022 lithium-related fiscal revenues exceeded USD 5.4 billion, equivalent to 1.8% of GDP and 6.9% of total fiscal revenues that year (Natural Resource Governance Institute [NRGI], 2024). Even so, this fiscal progress does not by itself amount to autonomous productive transformation, because the contractual design itself links part of the move toward value added to the installation of capabilities by external actors, not to an already consolidated national technological base.

Market dependence also remains high. As discussed in *Section 2.1.1.,* SQM's *Form 20-F* states that in 2023, 92% of its lithium sales were made in Asia (SQM, 2025). This commercial exposure becomes especially sensitive when price cycles are taken into account. NRGI shows that after the 2022 boom, the price of lithium carbonate fell by 67% during 2023 and links that decline largely to slower electric vehicle consumption in China (NRGI, 2024). Chile captures more rent when the external cycle is favorable, but it still depends on a market whose evolution it does not decisively control.

Financial dependence has not disappeared either. The *Banco Central de Chile* series on foreign direct investment by country, sector, and region shows the strong concentration of foreign capital in mining (Banco Central de Chile, n.d.). That pattern also appears at the corporate level. SQM's *Form 20-F* lists debt maturities with institutions such as Bank of Nova Scotia and

Santander/Kexim, as well as financial restrictions associated with bondholders and bank loans (SQM, 2025). Even if the state captures a larger share of the rent, the material reproduction of the sector still depends on ownership structures, credit, and expansion dynamics that remain outside national control.

Technological dependence is equally persistent. The OECD stresses that Chile participates in global value chains mainly through forward linkages, with 26% of its value added incorporated into the exports of third countries, while backward participation stands at 14%. At the same time, it places total public support for business R&D at only 0.03% of GDP (OECD, 2023). This weak innovation base combines with a longer international pattern. Back in 2013, Cochilco already noted that production of special lithium compounds, battery materials, and batteries was concentrated mainly in China, Europe, Japan, South Korea, and the United States, which together accounted for 90% of global demand. It also recorded Chilean shipments of brine or lithium chloride in solution under supply agreements with Ganfeng Lithium in China (Cochilco, 2013, December). Chile participates in the initial chemistry of lithium, but remains outside the technological core where the decisive capacities in manufacturing, design, and innovation are concentrated.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that Chile's position remains concentrated in the early stages of the chain, where revenue has grown but structural autonomy has not. Dependence therefore does not take the form of a simple loss of fiscal control, but rather of an insertion in which rent is captured domestically while manufacturing, applied knowledge, and decisive markets remain elsewhere. This structural outcome provides the empirical basis for *Hypothesis 4*. The causal mechanism here is clear: increased fiscal capture without corresponding technological capabilities merely modernizes dependency rather than dismantling it.

4.2. Promised industrialization versus actual results.

The promise of lithium industrialization in Chile did not begin with the *National Lithium Strategy*. It has earlier roots in the sector's own expansion cycle. In 2016, the Ministry of Economy presented the agreement between Corfo and Rockwood Litio as an opportunity to increase production of battery-grade lithium carbonate, develop lithium hydroxide technology in Chile, and thereby recover industrial leadership, while Reuters reported that

same year that Albemarle planned to more than double its production in Chile (Ministerio de Economía, Fomento y Turismo de Chile, 2016, February 1; Reuters, 2016, February 2). From that point on, industrialization was framed as a promise of productive upgrading, but that expectation rested more on attracting foreign capital and technology than on an already existing national manufacturing base. In addition, that horizon became more clearly institutionalized through the already discussed Specialized Producers mechanism designed by Corfo in 2021 (CORFO, 2021), as a way to move further along the value chain, generate employment, and encourage technology transfer (CORFO, 2023, April 19; CORFO, 2023, October 16).

The actual results of the period, however, contradicted that expectation. In May 2024, Reuters reported that BYD had postponed its cathode plant, citing uncertainty and project complications (Reuters, 2024, May 16b). One year later, the same agency confirmed that both BYD and Tsingshan had definitively abandoned their plans. CORFO attributed the decision to the sharp fall in lithium prices and also recalled that a similar industrial promotion effort had already failed in 2018 (Reuters, 2025, May 7). The main instrument designed to move Chile toward manufacturing segments therefore did not produce operating plants, but another cycle of unmet expectations.

A more structural limit reinforces that short-term failure. The 2024 *Partnership Agreement* between Codelco and SQM, which organizes the main future governance framework for the Salar de Atacama, expressly defines the business scope of the joint venture and excludes the industrial production of goods with greater value added than the products covered by the venture's core business (Codelco, 2024, May 31). This clause introduces a particularly significant tension between discourse and institutional design. Public policy insists on the need to move across the entire chain, yet the sector's main corporate framework legally excludes higher-complexity manufacturing from the center of the business itself.

It is important to consider alternative explanations for these setbacks. Rather than resulting solely from an intentional neocolonial strategy by external actors, the failure of these industrial projects can also be attributed to domestic bureaucratic bottlenecks, limited specialized human capital in advanced manufacturing, and the high volatility of international lithium prices, which altered the cost-benefit calculus for foreign investors. Nevertheless, the structural outcome, the perpetuation of an extractive model, remains consistent with the

dependency-theory framework.

4.3. Continuity of extractivism in new forms: strategic autonomy or new dependence?

Read through dependency theory, the central issue is not only whether Chile has diversified partners or improved its bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the United States, but whether this reorientation has actually changed its place in the international structure of production. In this framework, dependence refers to an asymmetrical bilateral relationship, while also to a systemic insertion in which peripheral economies participate mainly as suppliers of resources and buyers of technology; still, the centers concentrate the segments with greater complexity, accumulation, and innovation (Goldthau et al., 2020; Antunes de Oliveira & Kvangraven, 2023). From that perspective, Chile's rapprochement with China should not be assessed only through higher trade or investment, but through its capacity, or lack of it, to alter that structurally subordinate position.

Seen in that light, the Chilean case points more toward a reconfiguration of dependence than a break with it. As dependency theory has long argued, a peripheral economy can widen its room for maneuver and still remain trapped in an international division of labor that reserves the technologically denser segments for the centers while leaving the periphery specialized in extraction or initial processing (Quijano, 2014; Jovine & Paz, 2025). That is precisely why it makes sense to speak here of continuity of extractivism in new forms. The relevant change is not that Chile has stopped depending on external actors, but that dependence is no longer organized mainly around the historical Western circuits. It is increasingly tied to a closer articulation with the Asian market, refining capacity, and technological base, especially the Chinese one (González-Vicente & Montoute, 2020; Gao, 2025).

This reading becomes even stronger when the case is approached through the concept of energy neocolonialism which, instead of requiring formal political domination or a loss of legal sovereignty, it works through mechanisms of functional control operating through markets, technology, finance, and the international organization of the value chain (González-Vicente & Montoute, 2020; Nygaard, 2022). In that sense, the problem does not simply rely on the fact that China buys large amounts of Chilean lithium or invests in certain assets. The deeper issue is that the resulting pattern of articulation still rests on extraction and primary chemistry,

while the capacity to define standards, capture technological value, and control the advanced transformation of the resource remains outside Chile. Formal sovereignty over lithium does not automatically amount to effective energy sovereignty, because the latter also requires the ability to decide the industrial, technological, and strategic destination of the resource (Castro et al., 2024; Vásquez Torreblanca, 2024).

From this angle, the narrative of strategic autonomy (understood here as the state's verified capacity to dictate the industrial and technological destination of its resources, as defined in *Section 1.3*) needs to be qualified carefully. Chile has tried to build a more active policy, with greater state involvement, a discourse centered on value added, and a diplomacy designed to widen room for maneuver between rival powers. This effort fits with the idea of entrepreneurial diplomacy and with a search for relative autonomy typical of peripheral actors trying to take advantage of systemic competition without becoming fully subordinated to a single power (Barragán-Ocaña et al., 2025; Vásquez Torreblanca, 2024). Even so, dependency theory requires a distinction between autonomy in management and structural autonomy. The first can grow through better contracts, higher revenue, or stronger bargaining capacity. The second requires transforming the economy's place in the global chain, reducing technological and financial dependence, and building a domestic industrial base. It is precisely at this second level that the Chilean case shows its clearest limits (OECD, 2023; Fernández Franco et al., 2024).

As a result, the relationship with China does not seem to have dismantled the logic of extractivism. It has instead rearticulated it within a new geopolitics of the energy transition. The literature on green extractivism warns that the transition does not eliminate global hierarchies. It can relocate them onto new minerals, new territories, and new legitimizing devices, presenting as development what remains an unequal transfer of value from producing territories to technological and consumption centers (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2021; Lastra-Bravo, 2024; Pinheiro Barbosa & Nogueira Nóbrega, 2025). In the Chilean case, this means that South-South cooperation, the promise of industrialization, and the greater geopolitical centrality of lithium are not enough on their own to demonstrate an exit from the peripheral pattern. They can, in fact, function as renewed forms of legitimation for an insertion that remains subordinate in its most decisive dimensions.

5. Conclusions.

This thesis has analyzed the strategic competition between China and the United States for access to Chilean lithium between 2010 and 2025, seeking to understand why Chile has prioritized its relationship with China and what structural consequences this choice entails. Through a mixed-method approach combining quantitative data on trade and investment with qualitative analysis of political discourse, the study has addressed its central research question and largely supports its four working hypotheses, while introducing important qualifications.

The first finding, corresponding to *Hypothesis 1*, establishes China's material preponderance in the sectors that define the future of the lithium economy. While the United States maintains a historically deep financial footprint in Chile and a direct extractive presence through Albemarle, China has secured dominant market absorption, accounting for over 70% of Chilean lithium exports by 2024 (SUBREI, 2025). More importantly, China controls the decisive downstream segments of battery manufacturing and active materials, with approximately 85% of global cell manufacturing capacity located in China in 2024 (IEA, 2025). This functional dominance allows Beijing to project influence not merely as a buyer, but as the unavoidable center of gravity for the entire value chain. The United States, by contrast, retains stronger positions in direct extractive operation and in aggregate investment stock, but its strategic position in the lithium economy is comparatively weaker in the segments where contemporary structural power is increasingly concentrated.

The second finding, corresponding to *Hypothesis 2*, is confirmed by the contrasting diplomatic repertoires of the two powers. The United States has increasingly framed critical minerals through a securitized lens, emphasizing supply-chain resilience, friendshoring, and the reduction of strategic vulnerabilities, as evidenced by documents ranging from Executive Order 13817 to the speeches of Katherine Tai and Janet Yellen (The White House, 2017; USTR, 2023; U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2024). Its offer to Chile, while economically valuable, is embedded in normative conditionality regarding labor, environmental standards, and geopolitical alignment. In contrast, China deploys a softer, more pragmatic discourse centered on South-South cooperation, mutual benefit, and non-interference, as reflected in its *Policy Papers on Latin America and the Caribbean* and in the *Belt and Road Initiative* framework (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República Popular China, 2016). This approach converts material weight into political acceptability, minimizing friction and aligning smoothly

with Chile's own development imaginaries.

The third finding, corresponding to *Hypothesis 3*, explains Chile's revealed preference for China as a productive and institutional partner. Chilean political elites do not necessarily view the United States as an adversary, but they perceive China as a more functional partner for their stated goals of industrialization and value addition. This preference is not merely discursive: it materializes in concrete decisions such as Chile's accession to the *Belt and Road Initiative* in 2018, the awarding of the main industrial projects under the Specialized Producers scheme to BYD and Yongqing Technology in 2023, and the compatibility of China-linked assets within the new governance structure of the Salar de Atacama (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile, 2018; CORFO, 2023; Codelco, 2024). The narrative of Chinese cooperation fits seamlessly into Chile's entrepreneurial diplomacy, allowing the state to legitimize its decisions as exercises of sovereignty rather than submissions to a new hegemon. It is important to note, however, that this preference also reflects domestic political dynamics and the pragmatic calculation of economic elites, not only an externally imposed structural logic.

The fourth and most critical finding, corresponding to *Hypothesis 4*, reveals the structural limits of this strategic reorientation. Despite significant fiscal gains from renegotiated contracts with SQM and Albemarle, and elevated lithium revenues that reached 1.8% of GDP in 2022 (NRGI, 2024), Chile remains locked in the early stages of the global value chain. The industrialization promised through the Specialized Producers mechanism has not materialized: BYD and Tsingshan abandoned their Chilean projects in 2025, replicating a failed industrial drive from 2018 (Reuters, 2025). Moreover, the 2024 Partnership Agreement between Codelco and SQM explicitly excludes higher-value manufacturing from its core business scope (Codelco, 2024), creating a structural tension between the rhetoric of industrialization and the contractual design of the sector itself. Alternative explanations for these setbacks, including domestic bureaucratic bottlenecks, limited human capital in advanced manufacturing, and the high volatility of international lithium prices, do not negate the structural outcome, but they do suggest that the reproduction of extractivism is not solely the result of an intentional neocolonial strategy by external actors. It also reflects the limits of Chile's own institutional and technological capabilities.

Taken together, these findings address the central research question of this thesis. Chile has prioritized China because it offers a combination of market access, investment, and

cooperative discourse that is more compatible with domestic political priorities and more functional to the country's narrative of sovereign industrialization. However, interpreting this choice through the lens of energy neocolonialism reveals its structural limits. The answer to whether this represents new cooperation or new dependency is not binary: elements of both coexist. Chile has widened its diplomatic room for maneuver, diversified its external partners, and captured greater fiscal rents. Yet it has not escaped the peripheral insertion that dependency theory describes, whereby extraction and primary processing remain its core contribution to global capitalism while technological value, industrial standards, and decisive markets remain concentrated outside its territory. Extractivism has not been dismantled; it has been rearticulated within the new geopolitics of the energy transition, with China progressively replacing the historical Western circuits as the primary axis of functional dependence.

These conclusions carry implications beyond the Chilean case. They suggest that the energy transition, far from resolving global hierarchies, can reproduce them on new minerals and new territories, legitimized through green development narratives and South-South solidarity frameworks. For countries in the Global South endowed with critical minerals, the strategic challenge is not only how to attract investment or diversify partners, but how to build the technological and institutional capabilities needed to capture decisive value in the emerging industrial order. Chile's experience between 2010 and 2025 illustrates both the opportunities and the structural limits of a hedging strategy in a world where geopolitical competition over clean energy intensifies but the productive hierarchy of global capitalism remains largely intact. Future research could deepen the analysis by comparing Chile's trajectory with other lithium-producing countries in the region, by tracing how the Codelco-SQM partnership evolves in practice, or by examining whether the recently announced Chinese industrial withdrawals trigger a strategic reorientation in Chilean lithium policy.

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Anexo: Declaración de uso de herramientas de IA generativa.

Nombre Grado/Máster:	Grado en Relaciones Internacionales
Nombre Alumno:	María Vallejo
Coordinador/a TFG/TFM:	Gil Pérez, Javier; García-Noblejas Floriano, Belén
Nombre Director/a de TFG/TFM:	Solovei, Galyna

Declaro que para la elaboración del presente Trabajo Fin de Grado / Trabajo Fin de Máster se ha utilizado inteligencia artificial generativa como herramienta de apoyo.	**SÍ**	NO

1) Uso de la IA Generativo

Si tu respuesta ha sido SÍ, contesta a las siguientes preguntas. Si has contestado NO, pasa al apartado 2.

Uso ético

	SÍ	NO
¿A la hora de usar la herramienta IA, en los *prompts* utilizados has incluido datos de carácter sensible o de carácter personal (fotos de personas reales, datos personales, etc.)? *Si tu respuesta es afirmativa especifica cuáles.*		X
¿Has orientado tu uso a suplantar tu trabajo personal sin hacer una revisión crítica de la extraído en la herramienta IA? *Si tu respuesta es afirmativa especifica cuáles.*		X
¿Has tenido en cuenta las recomendaciones académicas que te han hecho específicamente en el Grado/Máster sobre lo que está permitido o no con la IA?	X	

Uso técnico realizado:

¿Qué herramientas has utilizado (ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude, Nano Banana….)? Especifica la versión o tipo de licencia.

He utilizado ChatGPT (en su versión de pago más básica), Claude (en su versión gratuita), Notebook LM (en su versión gratuita) y Consensus (en su versión gratuita).

Marcar lo que corresponda:

☒ Generación de texto *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → ChatGPT, NotebookLM

☒ Reformulación *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → ChatGPT

☒ Traducción / corrección *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → Claude, ChatGPT

☒ Sugerencia de estructura *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → Claude, ChatGPT

☒ Apoyo metodológico *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → ChatGPT

☒ Buscar o citar bibliografía *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → Consensus, ChatGPT

☐ Generar contenido audiovisual (videos, infografías, audios, imágenes, gráficos. *Especifica en concreto qué contenidos has generado con IA además de citarlo correctamente en el trabajo.*

☐ Otros *(Especificar qué herramientas)*

Confirmo que el contenido final ha sido revisado, corregido y validado íntegramente por mí como autor/a y asumo la plena responsabilidad académica del mismo.

La utilización de la IA no ha sustituido el análisis crítico, la reflexión personal ni el trabajo intelectual propio exigido en un TFG/TFM.

Firma:

Fecha: 30/04/2026

Signature: María Vallejo Fernández