



## Exploring New Territory: Recent Contributions to the Study of the Relations between China and Latin America\*

Recibido: 1 de julio de 2013. ● Aceptado: 24 de septiembre de 2013.

**Adentrándonos en nuevos territorios:  
recientes contribuciones al estudio  
de las relaciones entre China y  
Latinoamérica**

**Pour explorer de nouveaux territoires:  
récentes contributions à l'étude sur les  
relations entre la Chine et l'Amérique  
latine**

**Explorando novos territórios: contribuição  
mais recente para o estudo sobre as  
relações entre a China e a América Latina**

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\* Este artículo surge del trabajo de investigación y enseñanza sobre las relaciones políticas y económicas entre China y América Latina, liderado por el autor, en el CESA (Colegio de Estudios Superiores de Administración), Bogotá, Colombia. Deseo agradecer a Margaret Myers por su aportación y recomendaciones, y a Mary Creutzfeldt, Ralf Leiteritz y Evan Ellis por sus comentarios sobre una versión preliminar de este artículo.

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses five recent contributions to the study of the relations between China and Latin America: (1) Hearn & León-Manríquez, 2011; (2) Fornés & Philip, 2012; (3) Fung & García-Herrero, 2012; (4) He, 2012; and (5) Strauss & Armony, 2012. These five books on China, Latin America and the Western Hemisphere are reviewed in light of the question of whether the relationship promises a re-ordering of the region or a repetition of old patterns. Similar to an earlier review essay by Nicola Phillips, which this paper builds on, we observe that studies lack historical context and analysis of deeper repercussions, that the Chinese perspective is very much underrepresented, and there is a lack of differentiation between national and regional identities, in that Latin America is disaggregated into national units while China is treated as a monolithic unitary actor, which is increasingly inadequate, as it diversifies its approaches and interests.

**Keywords.** Relations between China and Latin America, Transpacific Relations, bilateral Trade, Commerce in Chinese-Latin American Relations, Chinese foreign Policy.

**Resumen.** Este artículo es un ensayo que contextualiza y analiza cinco contribuciones recientes al estudio de las relaciones entre China y América Latina: (1) Hearn y León-Manríquez, 2011; (2) Fornés y Philip, 2012; (3) Fung y García-Herrero, 2012; (4) He, 2012; y (5) Strauss & Armony, 2012. Estos cinco libros que versan sobre China, América Latina y el Hemisferio Occidental son reseñados desde la perspectiva de la pregunta de Nicola Phillips, sobre si se debe más bien a una reordenación de la región, que plantea en su relevante ensayo publicado en la Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe, en donde destacaba tres deficiencias de los libros anteriores: un descuido del contexto histórico y repercusiones más profundas, una notable falta de perspectiva china, y una falta de diferenciación entre las identidades nacionales y regionales, en que Latinoamérica ha sido dividida en unidades nacionales, mientras que China es tratada como un actor unitario, monolítico, que resulta cada vez más inadecuado, en su proceso de diversificación de enfoques e intereses.

**Palabras Clave.** Relaciones entre China y América Latina, relaciones transpacificas, comercio bilateral, política exterior china.

**Résumé.** Cet article est un essai autours de cinq contributions récentes à l'étude des relations entre la Chine et l'Amérique latine: (1) Hearn et Leon-Manriquez 2011, (2) Fornes et Philip, 2012, (3) Fung et Garcia-Herrero 2012, (4) He 2012, et (5) Strauss et Armony 2012. Ces cinq livres qui traitent sur la Chine, l'Amérique latine et l'hémisphère occidental sont examinés du point de vue de la question de Nicolas Phillips de savoir si elle a plus d'un réarrangement de la région, les États concernés dans son essai publié en revue européenne des études d'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes, où des lacunes ont souligné trois livres précédents: la négligence du contexte historique et les implications plus profondes, un manque notable de vue chinois, et un manque de différenciation entre identités nationales et régionales en Amérique latine a été divisée en unités nationales, tandis que la Chine est considérée comme un acteur unitaire, monolithique, qui est de plus en plus insuffisante dans le processus de diversification des approches et des intérêts.

**Mots-clés.** Relations entre la Chine et l'Amérique latine, relations transpacifiques, relations commerciales bilatérales, politique extérieure chinoise.

**Resumo.** Este artigo é um teste cinco recentes contribuições para o estudo das relações entre China e América Latina: (1) Hearn e Leon- Manriquez, 2011, (2) Fornes e Philip, 2012, (3) Fung e Garcia- Herrero, 2012, (4) He de 2012, e (5) Strauss e Armony, 2012. Estes cinco livros que lidam com China, América Latina e do Hemisfério Ocidental são analisados considerando-se a questão a partir da perspectiva da pergunta de Nicolas Phillips sobre se ele tem mais de um rearranjo da região, estados importantes em seu ensaio publicado em revista Europeia de estudos da América Latina e do Caribe, onde deficiências apontadas três livros anteriores: a negligência do contexto histórico e as

implicações mais profundas , uma notável falta de perspectiva chinesa, e uma falta de diferenciação entre as identidades nacionais e regionais na América Latina foi dividida em unidades nacionais , enquanto a China é tratado como um ator unitário, monolítico, que é cada vez mais insuficiente no processo de diversificação de abordagens e interesses.

**Palavras-chave.** Relações entre China e América Latina, rotas transpacificas, relações comerciais bilaterais entre a China e a América Latina, política externa china.

## Introduction

The ascendance of China since the 1980's has generated enormous interest in the country well beyond the traditional field of Chinese Studies and related areas: experts from economics and business studies, from political science and other social sciences, have flocked to the study of China's rise. While they bring new methods and concepts into play that enrich and broaden the perspectives, many of them lack specialist knowledge of the country, not to mention the linguistic foundations. The same can be said about journalism of all political colours. This is not a question of the academic vanity of a sinologist (admittedly a rare species in Latin America), but a deeper question as to what enriches a field of inquiry and what needs more focus. As Gregory Moore points out in his 2004 article on the importance of area studies for the study of international relations and politics, "scholars in the Sino-American relations and Chinese foreign policy 'subfields' of IR have done better than the abstract, generalist theoreticians of IR in integrating broader theoretical propositions with local, area studies knowledge." He goes on to state that "most China experts would agree that John J. Mearsheimer's work on China in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001) is indicative of the problems posed by a brilliant theoretician with no area studies training in China making great claims about China's rise, its foreign policy and its intentions, because of his reliance on grand theory" (Moore, 2004, 393).

The academic production of this multidisciplinary effort on China and China-related subjects, both in terms of quantity and quality, is led by the United States and Japan, ahead of Europe where the most prolific analysts and commentators on all things China come from Germany, France, and the United Kingdom (Ash, Shambaugh & Takagi, 2007). In the eighties, one saw predominantly new or re-edited works by the great sinologists and historians of the twentieth century, but by the mid-nineties more and more new studies were being produced, and within China, too, scholars emerged turning out an ever larger body of research for a domestic and international readership.

In regions less engaged with China, such as Africa and Latin America, the knowledge production has been comparatively low and there were (and are) very few centres for the study of Asia to educate and generate material (essentially, limited to South Africa, Mexico and Argentina, respectively). Consequently, the trend described above is true in the extreme when it comes to the study of China's relations with the countries of Latin America. Compared with the United States, Europe or the countries of Asia, Latin America has had scant contact with China, and the linguistic and cultural barriers are very high indeed. This aspect is contemplated for instance by William Ratliff (2012, 27-60). As a result, this gap has been largely filled by external observers: there are more in-depth studies of China-Latin American relations published in the United States and the UK than in any of the countries concerned. There are also sporadic initiatives in Spain. While an outsider's view may often be more incisive for being less immediately involved, the distance can also be a limitation. Aware of this, many of the books cited include co-authors or contributors from Latin America and, in some cases, China. At least as important, however, is the issue of diffusion or knowledge creation: publications in English

have a minute readership in the countries of Latin America – especially in circles that matter, the policymakers, entrepreneurs, and undergraduate students.

Understood or not, the reality of the transpacific relationships has changed radically: beginning with then-president Jiang Zemin's tour of Latin America in 2001 and Hu Jintao's string of visits in 2004, the continent was awakened to the new possibilities of partnership and investment, bilateral exchanges and agreements continued apace: the trade volume grew from ten billion US\$ in the year 2000 to \$184 billion in 2010 (SELA, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. Though there is significant variance from country to country, and from one economic sector to another, the importance of China as a major trading, investment and lending partner helped Latin America sustain its growth even after the 2008 financial crisis. Inversely, during that decade, the region has been the "most dynamic trading partner" for China (Rosales & Kuwayama, 2012, 65), i.e. one of extremely fast growth and diversification, constituting today a little over 5% of the value of China's total imports. The People's Republic is a member of the Asia Pacific Economic Council (APEC) which also includes Chile, Mexico, Panama and Peru, and became a shareholder in the Caribbean Development Bank in 1998 and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) in 2009. It enjoys observer status in the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), the Latin American Parliament, and the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). It is also in permanent dialogue with regional economic organizations Mercosur, the Community of Andean Nations (CAN) and the Caribbean Community (Caricom)<sup>2</sup>. The Chinese government has initiated bilateral dialogue forums, such as the China-Latin America business summit (since 2007, under the auspices of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, CCPIT) and the China-Latin America Think Tank Forum (since 2010, sponsored by the Institute of Foreign Affairs, CPIFA).

Faced with the evidence of China's growing interest and involvement in regional affairs, the governments of some countries were quicker to react than others, motivated primarily by ideological (Cuba, Venezuela) or pragmatic (Chile, Brazil) considerations. In late 2008, the Chinese government published its first Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean (People's Republic of China, 2008), and although it was not widely discussed in the press or the political circles of the region, it did coincide with a more intense academic interest in the relations between the two regions, albeit largely restricted initially to trade relations. Given that the primary impulse of bilateral relations has been, and continues to be, commerce, it is justifiable that the literature continues to tread this path. Since 2009, however, there has been greater diversity in the approaches, and in the reviews that follow I try to tease out the multi-dimensional aspects of the works and consciously emphasize discussions of cultural, social, political and international relations elements, over trade and business. Picking up from Nicola Phillips' 2011 review essay (Phillips, 2011; Feinberg, 2011), I discuss and assess the books that stand out the field of Sino-Latin American relations in 2011 and 2012.

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1 Sources vary on the exact figures of growth, and in cash-based economies such as China and many South American countries, the actual transactions are likely to be more than double the declared values, even without accounting for contraband and illegal goods, but the tendency is clear.

2 For a longer list and an analysis of China's multi-layered involvement in Latin America, see Soliz & Sören, 2011.

## 1. Adrian H. Hearn and José Luis León-Manríquez

This expertly edited collection, entitled *China Engages Latin America: Tracing the Trajectory*, the result of five years of research, writing and editing, offers the disciplinary breadth missing in previous works on transpacific relations. Incorporating essays by anthropologists and historians, political scientists, economists, and international relations scholars, it presents multiple facets of China's growing involvement in South and Central America and the Caribbean. It is always an enormous challenge to give a common voice to a diverse (and dispersed) selection of contributors. For sure, not all essays are alike in terms of their depth or fluency, but the editors' first and last chapters tie the bundle neatly, the cross references within chapters gives a sense of coherence, and the boisterous foreword by David Shambaugh, the towering figure in the field of Chinese political studies, go a long way toward achieving their self-declared goal of presenting "a profile of Sino-Latin American relations that builds on previous studies while foregrounding fresh disciplinary approaches to the topic" (p.6).

The sources and methodologies used are as varied as the specialties of the authors. The economists, aware since the 2008 financial crisis of having failed, as a profession, to predict the future and control the fallout, do here what they excel at: quantifying, describing and analyzing trade relations and business trends. This is an enviable art, one that Javier Santiso and Rolando Avendaño (ch.4) showcase at its best, with solid data configured into highly readable tables as a basis for their insightful (though partly arguable) observations. The anthropologists, for their part, offer what are doubtless the most colourful studies in this book and – I echo other reviewers – the ones most likely to be referenced for years to come, as they illustrate multicultural dynamics within national histories (chs.8 & 10). Aside from Shambaugh, cited above, China-insiders are featured in three familiar incarnations: a true sinologist (Jorge E. Malena, ch.14) who knowledgeably intersperses the Argentine narrative with key features from China's development (though his actual use of Chinese language sources is sparse); a token Chinese scholar (Jiang Shixue, ch.3) who has become a fixture in this burgeoning field and excels at the highly structured – in this case even numbered – canonical representation of the relevant facts and developments; and the casual China-explorer who outdoes the former two in the usage of terms rendered in pinyin romanization, in what one might call *trompe-l'oeil* – it looks three-dimensional but is in fact flat. Overall, therefore, while the balance of specialty given voice in this volume could be improved, the spread is satisfactory.

Given the grand total of twenty contributors, it is not possible to do each of them justice here, but there are several unifying arguments that reappear throughout the collection. For one, they are all motivated by the conviction that China's activities in Latin America are understudied and overvalued: understudied in that there is a huge need in the region to generate and propagate knowledge about China in every aspect, and overvalued in being given too much weight by the polemics of the press and the superficial readings of governments the world over: it is inaccurate, simplistic and disingenuous to blame China's rise for one's own inadequacies (or misplaced priorities). In this, they coincide with Shambaugh's findings when he describes China as a "partial power" (partial not in that it takes sides but that its extent is limited) (Shambaugh, 2013). Secondly, the authors are united in their prudent avoidance of the overuse of such stale terms as "China Model" (except in the chapter on Cuba) and "Beijing Consensus" (favoured only by Ariel Armony, ch.2), both of them somewhat contentious as they are hats China neither designed nor likes to wear.

A recurrent feature of the language used that causes slight discomfort is the way most authors take a very "international relations" approach in treating China and the countries of Latin America as unitary actors. For sure, this is often no more than a short-hand, but Enrique Dussel Peters (ch.5)

consciously justifies this when he points out that “China’s public sector, institutionalized at the municipal, city, provincial, and central levels, plays a critical role in policy design and implementation [and] exerts a strong degree of influence over the private sector...” (p.97). While this is true, it seems to me to obscure a large part of the picture, that of the many agents – diplomats, representatives of state-owned enterprises, language teachers, private entrepreneurs and adventurers – that make the relations happen. The closest we get to scrutinizing the human and social nature of Chinese activities is in the country study of Mexico (ch.8), where the talk turns to *guanxi*, group interactions and individual experiences, memories and dreams of transpacific relations: these are the flesh and bones beneath the cloth of words defined by political fashions. It is also on these issues that Ariel Armony (ch.2) bases his somewhat awkwardly named idea of “GPS capital” to describe the human instinct to identify key points of reference and triangulate for the purpose of mapping location, a term which I doubt will catch on, though it is worth reflecting on the usefulness of drawing cultural *parallels* instead of underscoring cultural *differences* when teaching Latin American students and businessmen about China.

What most commends this collection is the diversity not only of its approaches but of its observations and suggestions, and here it is worth highlighting some of them. Just as there are conflicting perceptions within Latin America as to the pros and cons of China’s growing involvement, so there are in the United States: building on the broad picture of the regional and global dynamics that Cynthia Watson (ch.6) paints with great aplomb, giving different colours to various relationships, Daniel P. Erikson (ch.7) offers fascinating insights into the feelings and thoughts that end up defining Washington’s policies. He illustrates the lack of certainty as to whether China is “good” or “bad” for US interests in Latin America. The section on Cuba (ch.10) offers up a heartening answer to this conundrum, observing that China has been instrumental in the gradual diluting of revolutionary socialist ideas on the island and that its investment patterns there, and by implication elsewhere, are an opportunity for US companies and agencies to break new ground, in cooperation with the Chinese.

The chapter on Brazil by Rodrigo Tavares Maciel and Dani K. Nedal (ch.13) is perhaps the most ambitious and portentous, not only because of its subject matter – the largest country and biggest economy in the region, member of the BRICS group (and more recently, the BRICS bank), has its very own dynamic in relating to China – but moreover because the authors offer an innovative dual conceptualization of this special relationship: distinguishing the bilateral from the multilateral. These words seem small, but they help resolve contradictions in a very Chinese way, by putting them on different planes. Add to this a string of research directions offered up (p.253) and the Institute of Brazilian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS) in Beijing, founded in May 2009, has its work cut out.

In sum, the huge effort of drawing together and linking up multiple disciplines and visions on the relationship between China and Latin America, results in a highly readable and inspiring collection: a rich and solid base for future research but also a mosaic that calls out for further detailing and filling-in of gaps. If this book achieves the ample readership it deserves, perhaps something will be done to address the lack of infrastructure that is the main barrier to growth in Latin America, and to change “the absence of sufficient interaction between business and research communities [where] competition prevails over collaboration” (p.88): it’s not about a China model, but about how to make the best of China’s interest in the region while it lasts.



## 2. Gastón Fornés and Alan Butt Philip

*The China-Latin America Axis: Emerging Markets and the Future of Globalisation* in many ways constitutes a complement to the above collection: where economists and anthropologists meet could be said to be the realm of business administration and the study of how humans strategize, explore, interact and trade. And it is not much longer than a bulky version of any of the above chapters, for of the book's 183 pages a good 50 are taken up with tables and graphs and the final 50 with appendices, making it a highly informative compendium. Argentine Gastón Fornés turned to academia after ten years in industry and has done extensive research on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in China and Latin America, from his base in the UK. Co-author Alan Butt Philip contributes a political background and a special interest in regional integration to this study. Together, they present a study packed with data on the relevant economies and businesses in thoughtfully structured sections. The target audience is very much a European MBA student readership, as it includes basic introductions to China and the countries of Latin America, as well as the trading blocs of the region. However, it also goes well beyond that scope, thus constituting a valuable source of information on the composition, perspectives and strategies of Chinese and Latin American SMEs, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and multinationals (MNEs).

The bibliographical references underscore the business administration character of this volume, which sets the sections on "the benefits of this growing relationship in political, economic, and social terms" (ch.4, and elements of ch.7) on rather wobbly feet: neither Ellis or Shambaugh, Wise or González-Vicente can be found in the notes, to name but a few obvious candidates for citation. Setting aside the shortcomings of that particular section, the value of the book lies in chapters 2 and 3 on emerging markets (EMs) and chapter 5 on the Chinese companies in Latin America. After surveying a range of definitions for "emerging markets," the chief characteristics are brought to the fore (p.14): information problems, misguided regulations, and an inefficient judiciary; in other words, imperfect markets with institutional voids that typically result in higher transaction costs and, in some cases, market failures that must be replaced by firms or networks operating here. These characteristics are exacerbated by the disparity in income distribution, and are concentrated in large cities (p.24). Anyone with first-hand experience of living and working in Latin America or China will instantly recognize these features. Based on this understanding, the authors proceed to outline the way companies in China and Latin America deal with these "shared realities and challenges" (p.68), and build to the core argument of the book, that the "last decade has seen the development of the China-Latin America commercial relationship as the emerging markets' axis" (p.26). Whether this can be equated with "substantial soft power" for China (p.41) is arguable, but it certainly goes a long way to explaining the increased competition European and North American companies are faced with in Latin America (p.49).

Chapter 5 leads with an irritating and misleading header, speaking of "Chinese dragons," a tempting cliché widely overused: dragons in Chinese mythology are playful beasts representing wisdom and benign power, whereas in the Western conception they are threatening, fire-breathing monsters that capture fair maidens and draw men into battle. This very image may embody many misunderstandings between East and West. However, the material presented here is far more nuanced than the title suggests, portraying various stages of China's arrival on the global stage since 1978, and in Latin America since 2001: citing several specific examples, the authors describe the first stage from 2001-2007 as "dominated by Chinese SOEs looking for natural resources [...] and a trade surplus for South American countries" (p.96), and the second stage, since 2007, as an inverted (or level) trade balance with many privately owned companies from diverse industries beginning to invest. Considering that an estimated 99% of Chinese companies are private or semi-private SMEs

(p.93), this is unquestionably where the future of transpacific trade lies. These two stages help resolve the subtle yet consequential contradiction, when the authors state (p.84) that “although most [international Chinese companies] have been corporatized [they nonetheless] align their operations with the five-year plans and national imperatives,” and yet “Chinese MNEs investing in Latin America do so for largely instrumental commercial reasons, and not at the behest of the Chinese government” (p.75). Whatever the case, it becomes clear that China is not a unitary actor with a master plan.

The extensive research on trade connections between China and Latin America presented is essential reading for anyone trying to understand the nature and likely future trajectory of relations between the two regions. It is at the corporate level that this new “axis” is strengthening and growing in complexity, and even though it becomes clear that Chinese companies follow their own agenda and adapt to the conditions in each country, the authors leave no doubt as to their conviction that this dynamic is a game changer for the incumbent economic powers, and that China’s capacity is sure to constitute a growing challenge for a region notoriously unable to develop a unified agenda through economic integration and more astute policymaking.

### 3. K.C. Fung and Alicia Garcia-Herrero

This volume makes no excuses for presenting anything other than purely economic analysis: entitled *Sino-Latin American Economic Relations*, the editors, both prolific heavyweights in the field of economic analysis and advisory, gathered a group exclusively composed of economists for a conference organized by the BBVA bank’s Hong Kong branch (no date given). The purpose of the conference was to analyse in detail, using a number of methodologies, the character, extent, and prospects, of financial and trade cooperation between China and Latin America. Of the papers presented, seven studies and two case studies were included in this volume, complete with extensive data tables. The nature of the material doesn’t make for light reading, the data sets only reach up to the year 2006 (occasionally 2008, but all pre-crisis), and given the absence of political and social considerations, the usefulness of the analyses for the study of bilateral relations today is somewhat limited. Having said that, some valuable insights and surprising findings are offered, in particular in chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 1, by Masahiro Kawai and Fan Zhai, restates a known theme, that institutional quality and infrastructure positively affect trade volume. However, they also make passing reference to the degree of intra-regional trade – something East Asia excels at (as does Europe), and which in Latin America is worryingly weak at a mere 21.5% of total trade (p.10). Their models point to another important factor in explaining the low development of Latin America compared to China, and that is a country’s capacity to absorb export-oriented FDI (p.27). What worries this reviewer, however, is their concluding recommendation that “Latin American countries need to further liberalize their trade and FDI regimes and regulatory policies” (p.28): this is of course the core of neoliberal policy, one that has extensively been discredited by events and partly discarded by many economists – and after all, Britain did rather well in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with protectionist tariffs to nurture its infant textile industry.

Chapter 2, by Avendaño and Santiso, is an earlier, more technical version, of their paper in Hearn and León-Manríquez, though here they incorporate additional data on India and profiles of successful strategies by Chile and Brazil (pp.54 ff). They insist that Latin America should “not be particularly threatened by China” (p.36) and offer clear policy advice with regards to the need to use the current commodities bonanza to build infrastructure and overcome other shortcomings: Chile is indeed a model in this respect. Nonetheless, one does feel that their analysis – and indeed that of several other



authors in this volume – rather ignores or minimizes the geographical distance and related transport costs between China and East Asia: how much “deep integration” (ch.4) is realistic across the Pacific Ocean? The authors of chapter 3 open the window on an exciting new field when they bring India into play: “can India replicate the sort of explosive trade that LAC had with China in the last decade?” they ask, and answer with “a qualified ‘yes’” (p.82). The obvious admonition to academics in Latin America is: if it has taken almost ten years to build so much as a reasonable understanding of China, and considering the time it may take for this knowledge to filter through to policymakers in the region, then it is high time India were made an object of study, in anticipation of the next wave.

Chapters 5 (on SMEs) and 6 (on pension schemes) are noteworthy for offering the study of innovation in Latin American institutions as examples for China. Jing Gao zooms in on an important element of SMEs omitted by Fornés and Butt Philip: the access to financing necessary for growth. Both in China and in Latin America, the author states, the market “despises the poor and carries favour with the rich” (p.174) and he likens SMEs in China to “an illegitimate child born into an intolerant society, whose infancy and adolescence are soaked with discrimination and humiliation” (p.169). Chile is cited as a beacon of pragmatist economic reform and in improving SME access to finance (p.165). Chapter 6 puts forward another model for China: the reform of contributory pension schemes in some countries in Latin America. Given the ominous size of China’s ageing population, it is a subject of considerable weight. Though not a very sexy topic, it does appear with increasing frequency in publications of the Institute of Latin American Studies in Beijing (see for instance: Zheng & Zhang, 2011; Gao, 2011; Tang, 2011). Chapter 7 again broadens the perspective on Asia by comparing China’s FDI outflows to those of its regional peers, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, while the last two essays are country-focused studies on China’s impact on Brazil’s international trade and Mexico’s US trade, respectively.

Almost 120 pages of numerical tables and graphs round out this group of studies, offering ample material to delve deeper, though as mentioned above, the majority of the figures require updates. In this sense, the collection is testament to the limited usefulness of this type of data – in terms of their longevity, their core bias, and the narrow dimension of this type of study.

#### **4. He Shuangrong**

*China-Latin America Relations: Review and Analysis* is a collection of twelve essays by Chinese scholars, all but three of whom are researchers at the authoritative Institute of Latin American Studies in Beijing (ILAS) (for more information, refer to the Institute’s website, <http://ilas.cass.cn/cn/index.asp>). ILAS was founded in 1961 and is China’s only centre dedicated exclusively to the study of Latin America and the Caribbean, publishing a bimonthly journal in Chinese (with English abstracts). This tends to place their work out of reach for most Latin American and other Western scholars, so the principal purpose of this volume, part of a ten-book series on China’s international relations globally, is to weigh in on the worldwide study and debate about this transpacific relationship by presenting a perspective from China, though it might have been preferable to publish it in Spanish in the first instance.

The goal is laudable and several chapters shed new light on the Chinese approach to foreign policy and foreign relations. Most of the essays are quite short (ten pages or less), rendering them very “reader-friendly.” It is also worth noting that the authors make a point of citing not only sources in their own language, but also Spanish, Portuguese and English sources, which is in itself an improvement on many Western publications on the subject, which tend to be more lopsided, as previously noted. On the other hand, the predominant style can only be described as terse and somewhat dry, and

the approach as cautious, for the objective, clearly, is neither to engage or debate nor to question government policy but instead to inform and explain certain aspects of the relationship in a highly structured way, with the result that there is much quoting of policy documents and presidential speeches, tight structuring of historical periods and national characteristics, often under headings resembling CCP political slogans, such as “the five influential factors” and “the eight anxieties.”

Given these reservations, there are several sections worth highlighting, the most important being chapter 1<sup>3</sup> by the Institute’s long-time director Zheng Bingwen and collaborators. Looking back on China’s relations with Latin America since the founding of the PRC, the authors divide the developments into chunks, summarising the first fifty years as “accumulation development” and the period since 2001 as the “leapfrog” stage (p.5, illustrated on p.16). This latter stage (at times referred to as a “strategy”) is defined by massive trade growth, the establishment of “strategic partnerships” with five Latin American countries, the 2008 policy paper, and the signing of three FTAs. The positive commercial trend and China’s outward direct investment are shown to be the driving factors in the increasing exchanges and numbers of state visits, supported by graphs incorporating data up until 2010, as well as some projections into the future. China is named as a “trade angel” and “a source of foreign aid” (pp.15-16), these and other terms – “development benefit” being another – interestingly set in inverted commas in the book itself, indicating that they are official expressions, though there is no evidence that the authors disagree. The final section (pp.18 ff.) most closely resembles a critical approach with difficult arguments advanced, calling for the “exploration of new growth points,” further Chinese investment in Latin American resource product bases, the “proper handling” of trade frictions, and multilateral cooperation to “deepen strategic confidence.”

Most of the subsequent chapters pick up on elements of this introductory essay, many of them in a somewhat repetitive way. This is also due to the authors being presented broadly in descending order of seniority: after Zheng sets the tone, two other preeminent scholars, Su Zhenxing and Xu Shicheng, contribute their ideas, followed by younger voices. Su (ch.2) makes an amusing reference to the Republic of China, describing the “Taiwan factor” as no more than “a disturbance in China-Latin American relations” (p.22). This is a far cry from Francisco Haro Navajas’ rather out-dated characterisation as the Caribbean being “one of the world’s hottest diplomatic battlegrounds” (Hearn & León-Manríquez, 203) and probably more accurately describes the current situation since China effectively articulated a diplomatic truce in 2008 (for a more detailed discussion of the current status of the Taiwan issue, confer Colin, 2011, 271-88). If it is true that senior scholars are voices of greater impact in policymaking circles, then it is certainly worth noting that he describes China being “at a historic point in which it is moving from regional power to global power” (p.33). Perhaps China is more confident than David Shambaugh tends to give its government credit.

Xu Shicheng, the grey eminence of considerable authority in the field of Latin American studies in the People’s Republic, tries to explain in detail what Latin America’s “New Left” signifies to Chinese scholars and, by extension, its government: there is clearly much nervousness when it comes to what the Chinese perceive as politically motivated *rapprochement*. While he takes a strongly assertive stance in declaring that the quality of bilateral relations is “not decided by whether the US relations are good” (p.44), he nonetheless admits that the US factor is continually on the radar for China’s policymakers (p.40), because it does matter: Wang Peng (ch.12) explains that “China did not foresee China-Venezuelan relations harming US interests.” Having got this far, however, he does worry that

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3 This chapter was simultaneously published in Spanish as chapter 2 of: Creutzfeldt, *China en América Latina: Reflexiones sobre las relaciones transpacificas*, pp. 61-85.

"once Venezuela has a change of government, present foreign policy with China may be halted" (p.148).

Out of all the essays included in this volume, it is Lin Hua (ch.9) who offers the only outlying viewpoint: she explores the subject of Chinese immigration to Latin America, and considers to what extent trade relations with specific countries are in fact determined by the Chinese overseas communities. Were there more such multidirectional studies in this volume, it would be a mosaic that much more accomplished. As it stands, it is somewhat limited in its scope, but is nonetheless a valuable contribution to the global debate in the field and one of the rare opportunities for non-Chinese speakers to hear expert voices from inside the rising power, while offering some additional background and analysis beyond official government documents.

## 5. Julia C. Strauss and Ariel C. Armony

*From the Great Wall to the New World: China and Latin America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* is a special issue of the China Quarterly initiated by the outgoing editor Julia Strauss and her Miami-based collaborator Ariel Armony. This collection of nine essays has the same stated goal as others concurrently published: to broaden the disciplinary approach to the relations between China and Latin America and raise the plateau of scholarship in this field. The introduction is a fascinating excursion through the many subjects breached in the book, though reading it is not unlike following a will-o'-the-wisp through bushland after dark. Leaping between the trees, many important insights are briefly illuminated and some key points outlined, such as the contradictions inherent in speaking about China a unitary actor, the two-way street that this transpacific relationship is (or should be), the latent conflicts between Chinese and US narratives of Latin America, and, gratifyingly, the necessity to encourage more research in this field by scholars with a working knowledge of both Spanish/Portuguese and Chinese (p.14). The underlying theme is that of motion and flux, with special attention paid to perceptions of the Other. Nonetheless, there is a strong impression that Latin America is the passive recipient of action by this particular Other, China, perhaps inevitable given the driving force in this relationship. After this peripatetic introductory sketch, we emerge into a clearing in the essays that follow.

The choice to lead with the essay on China as a hegemonic challenger to the US, by Gonzalo Sebastián Paz, is an odd one, as it sets a context squarely within the thinking of Latin America as a 'backyard' of the United States, something expressly questioned in the introduction. Nonetheless, the abstract and several footnotes make promising (if somewhat self-aggrandizing) references to "high-ranking officials" as sources for the information provided and discussed<sup>4</sup>. The peculiar use of abbreviations should not distract from some interesting historical considerations on what are portrayed as previous hegemonic challenges to US predominance in Latin America, specifically Nazi Germany<sup>5</sup>, the USSR, and Japan. In contrast, Ruben González-Vicente's chapter on Chinese mining in Latin America is methodologically thorough and tightly argued. Mining (by any country, anywhere) is a controversial topic of utmost importance deservedly enjoying increasing scholarly attention of late. A carefully calibrated quantitative analysis combined with interviews and a special "case study"

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4 My own experience with high-ranking officials from Latin American countries, off-the-record or not, is that they are often political appointees with limited understanding of diplomacy or international politics, and thus of questionable value for this kind of analysis. Brazil is an important exception to this rule.

5 In what can only be a slip of judgment, the author refers to the perception of a German threat "for four decades or so" (p.28). This argument is difficult to uphold in view of Germany's European continental preoccupations up until the 1930s. "It is important to keep in mind that there is an immense bibliography that points to the fact that the Nazi threat [i.e. after 1933] in Latin America was a myth, partly created by the U.S." (cf. Boserberg, 2009, 2).

focus on Peru allow the author to re-evaluate the widespread assumption that Chinese overseas foreign investment is guided by political and geostrategic concerns rather than market priorities. His argument, that Chinese mining investment in Latin America gravitates towards liberal economies, is slightly weakened by his decision to omit oil investment – where of course Venezuela leads the region in terms of Chinese commitment – and his skipping over the fact there is a relatively tiny Chinese presence in Colombia, a (neo-) liberal economy by any standard. González-Vicente's work should (and will surely) be further fleshed out, but it underscores what good research in this field must do: question wide-spread assumptions (about China) through the critical and comparative analysis of well contextualized first-hand data.

The next two chapters discuss the Chinese impact on the manufacturing industry in the region's two largest economies, Brazil and Mexico. They are both well-researched balanced studies, and Jenkins and Freitas Barbosa make the excellent observation that "there are no studies available which indicate the extent to which Chinese goods compete with other imports or with domestic production in other Latin American countries and this would be an interesting avenue for future research" (p.78) – indeed a long overdue call for an area of research whose results would almost certainly take the teeth and claws out of many a China-bashing news report and presidential anti-dumping decree, by showing that imported products are more often than not filling gaps in the market, rather than weakening or supplanting domestic industries. Despite the challenges that Chinese trade means to many sectors of industry in both countries, both essays end on an upbeat note and positive possibilities for the future of bilateral relations.

Adrian Hearn's chapter on the Chinese in Cuba and Mexico picks up on the same themes presented in his own edited book (reviewed above), while Julia Strauss opens the windows on a key aspect of China's foreign relations: the meaning of government rhetoric in its foreign policy. While this is a diligent study of Chinese sources on multilateral cooperation, it avoids delving into the very different understanding the people and nations of Africa and Latin America have *of themselves*. The final three chapters turn their gaze more directly toward perceptions of the Other, adding an important dimension to the study landscape of bilateral relations. Simon Shen's chapter addresses perceptions most specifically – in this case the perception of Latin America by Chinese tens of millions of netizens – and points to a large discrepancy between what the government appears to see and the general (online) public's view: "they see it as almost as poor and backward as Africa" (p.167). Multiple quotes from the selected discussion groups illuminate the degree to which Chinese netizens have sound judgment of the countries of Latin America, describing them as corrupt, lacking social and class cohesion, exploited by the US, and incapable of sustainable development. In this way, Latinamericanization (拉美化 *lameihua*) has evolved from a description in academic circles of certain negative social and political characteristics encountered in many Latin American countries, into the embodiment of all evil to be avoided in China at all costs – and an inclination to view the "China model" as the way out for these countries. Ariel Armony follows up on this with a panorama of the view of China in the Colombian press. This goes much less under the skin than Shen's perspective, but serves nonetheless to highlight the dichotomy of ignorance that defines reporting on China in Colombia and much of Latin America. Cheng Yinghong explores the more politically coloured relationship of words and ideas between Cuba and China – the "socialist Other."

Overall, this collection of essays appears a little fractious as each piece stands very much on its own in subject, style and depth, though themes covering several contributions are discernible: the bilateral processes that have taken place and the direction they need to take to enhance relations in the future, the importance – and the elusive nature – of positive image projection, and the role of

US interests in the region. The strength of this collection lies in its diversity and the emphasis on the intangible, as well as the multiple, thoughtful new approaches it instigates.

## Conclusion

In her essay referenced previously, Phillips lamented three shortcomings of the five books she reviewed: their "snapshot" focus on recent data, to the detriment of the historical context and the deeper repercussions; the largely absent Chinese perspective; and the lack of differentiation between national and regional identities, in that Latin America is disaggregated into national units – often so diverse that statements on one have limited application to another – while China is treated as a monolithic unitary actor, which is increasingly inadequate as it diversifies its approaches and interests (Phillips, 2011, 95 ff.). I share these observations and concerns and consider it convenient, therefore, to ask whether the new major contributions to the field respond adequately to these failings.

*Adrian Hearn and José Luis León-Manríquez* offer what is undoubtedly the richest and most solid group of studies with new perspectives and important foundations for future research. The diversity of expertise and nationalities constitute trunk roads paving the way for further exploration of the unexplored land lying ahead.

*Gastón Fornés and Alan Butt Philip* show what first-hand knowledge and a real-life understanding of the nature of commerce – the activities of SMEs both in China and in several countries of Latin America – can do to enrich the study of transpacific relations. This, too, is work that deserves many followers.

*K.C. Fung and Alicia García-Herrero* offer an agglomeration of data on bilateral commerce with the inherent limitations of such studies. Instead of offering figures to present a firm basis for other explorations and constructions, this collection presents a snapshot of data that has only narrow usefulness.

The gathering of voices under the editorial supervision of *He Shuangrong* is an important first step towards greater inclusiveness of the academic discussion on Chinese-Latina American relations, as it offers many researchers less familiar with Chinese scholarship the opportunity of adjusting to a different style of dialogue and rhetoric.

*Julia Strauss and Ariel Armony* spread the fan of ideas wide and suggest not only new facets to the field in the search for a more complete understanding of the transpacific dynamic, but also introduce new sources and methodologies.

Clearly then, the field of study "Sino-Latin American relations" has progressed enormously over the past couple of years, now including many more disciplines and subfields of research. Publications have moved beyond the "snapshot" focus and now explore broader contexts and longer-term repercussions. It continues to be a field dominated by English-language scholars with valid but limited external perspectives, and though there is now a Chinese perspective of varied content, much of it does not yet appear to be in full-frontal dialogue with the rest. And with the exception of Brazil and Mexico, there is still a conspicuous lack of specific "inside-outward" view by well-informed scholars in Latin America. Simultaneous with the proliferation of voices, however, there needs to be a gradual consolidation of the field, because while this is a new area, there is no "levelling" of the playing field, no consistency of scholarship. It is still a highly attractive area for half-baked research



and writing: this is the case most acutely in Latin America itself, where self-nominated China experts have sprouted out of the ground like wildflowers after a spring rain. It is hoped that as the body of scholarship matures and grows, as all the reviewed works demonstrate, this will create a firm body of reference works and enable closer collaboration, including co-authored studies by scholars from all quarters, and in particular from China and the countries of Latin America. Moreover, it is time for more in-depth arguments to be developed in full-length monographs, building on the diversity of themes and data offered so far.

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