

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA*

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While information regarding Latin American studies programs in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union is becoming widely available to North American scholars, Latin Americanists in the United States may be surprised to know that a small, but growing, number of scholars, teachers, and researchers are studying Latin America in the People's Republic of China. This report describes the state of Latin American studies in China, its principal universities, research centers, scholarly organizations, and periodicals devoted to research on Latin America, as well as the research topics that interest Chinese scholars and the professional problems confronting Latin American studies in China. The interviews and research were conducted, usually in Chinese, in Peking and Shanghai.

THE EVOLUTION OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES IN CHINA

The most important factors that have influenced Latin American studies in China are the distant historical relationship between the two regions, the recentness of Latin American studies in China, and the ten-year interruption in studying Latin American affairs that occurred during the 1966–76 Cultural Revolution.

Prior to 1949, no specialized study of Latin American affairs existed in China, largely because of the extremely limited opportunities for contact between China and Latin American countries and the lack of Chinese experts in international history, politics, literature, and other international fields. From 1949 to the end of the fifties, more basic in-

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formation about Latin America became available through newer textbooks and reference materials, many of which were not written in China, but were translated from Russian publications. During the 1950s, however, virtually no specialized research on Latin America was carried out in China, and university students studied only the most rudimentary geographical, political, and historical information on the area. This situation is not surprising because in addition to the wide geographical distance separating the two areas was an unbridgeable gulf as well. During this period, Latin American nations followed the United States' lead in recognizing the Kuomintang government of Chiang Kai-shek on Taiwan as the legitimate government of China and voted regularly with the United States to maintain the Republic of China's seat in the United Nations. During the 1950s, not one Latin American country had diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, and as a result, little scholarly work on Latin American affairs was undertaken in China.

According to Latin Americanists in China, it was the victory of the Cuban Revolution that spurred Chinese interest in Latin America. The Chinese became deeply interested in the Cuban Revolution, partly because it was occurring in a region that China previously had little noted. The establishment in Havana of a branch of the New China News Agency in 1959 and of a Chinese embassy in 1960 represented the first opportunity for the People's Republic of China to send diplomats, journalists, and students to Latin America in significant numbers. During the early sixties, hundreds of Chinese went to Cuba in these capacities and became the first group of Chinese with practical expertise in Latin American affairs.

At about the same time, small groups were formed within Chinese government ministries and official organizations to study Latin American affairs and develop trade, diplomatic, and cultural exchanges. Because the political significance of the Cuban Revolution caused China's increased focus on Latin America, interest in Cuba and in the possibilities for other revolutions in Latin America grew largely within the Chinese Communist Party. In the early 1960s, the first Chinese organization devoted wholly to the study of Latin American affairs, the Institute of Latin American Studies, was opened in Peking. Significantly, the institute was formed as an arm of the Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist party, the party ministry responsible for relations with and research on foreign Communist parties and revolutionary movements, rather than as a university-based research institute.

At the same time, a handful of scholars in Peking and Shanghai whose original fields of study had been world history or North American history turned to the study of Latin America. For example, the first and only survey history of Latin America written in China was published in Peking in 1964—a two-volume, seven-hundred-page work en-

titled "A Survey of Latin American History" that was written by Li Chun-hui, Professor of History at China People's University in Peking, and that relied largely on North American source material. Professor Li, who remains at People's University, is now the recognized dean of Latin Americanists in China. During a series of interviews in Peking in the fall of 1980, he reported that a revised version of his book had been completed for publication in Peking in 1981 or 1982.

This kind of work on Latin American affairs, which was limited to a handful of universities, government ministries, and the official Institute of Latin American Studies, continued until 1966. With the advent of the Cultural Revolution, the Institute of Latin American Studies closed, as did research centers and university departments in almost all other fields. Work on Latin American affairs ceased in the late 1960s, except for a few contacts between the Chinese Communist party and some Latin American revolutionary parties and movements. This decade-long interruption has visibly affected Latin American studies research, personnel, and resources in China today. Because no specialists in Latin American affairs were trained in China between 1966 and 1976, Latin Americanists in China today usually are either older specialists trained in related fields prior to 1966, or younger researchers and graduate students who received their training since the 1970s. Some governmental work on Latin America was restarted in the early 1970s, primarily in the ministries involving foreign affairs and foreign trade, partially in response to the election of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1970. China established diplomatic relations with Chile in 1971, and over the next several years, with Peru, Mexico, and several other Latin American countries. Yet during this period, Chinese research on Latin America was limited largely to governmental contacts and diplomatic, trade, and cultural affairs. Scholarly research, university teaching, or other professional activities in Latin American studies were not restarted, although some translation of Western and Russian publications on Latin America continued. The Institute of Latin American Studies was reopened only in the mid-seventies.

Thus although Latin American studies as a field of professional work has existed in China since about 1960, its research and teaching experience extends little more than ten years, from 1960 to 1966 and from 1976 to the present. Many Chinese specialists on Latin America consider their work in the late seventies and early eighties as a continuation of work begun during the early and mid-sixties.

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES IN CHINA TODAY

Opportunities for research, teaching, and other professional activities in Latin American studies have increased considerably since 1976, when

the so-called "Gang of Four" were arrested and more liberal policies toward intellectuals were adopted. At the same time, because of limitations on facilities, finances, and personnel, Latin American studies remains at an incipient, but now vigorous, stage. Now, to describe some of the major centers of Chinese Latin American studies.

The Institute of Latin American Studies (Peking)

The Institute of Latin American Studies remains China's most important center for the study of Latin America. The institute has long functioned as a research arm of the Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist party, but on 1 January 1981, administrative and political responsibility for this institute, the Institute of Soviet Affairs, and the Institute of African Affairs was transferred to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, also in Peking.

At present the Institute of Latin American Studies has approximately a hundred staff members, of whom about seventy are administrators and researchers working on Latin American affairs. The remainder are support personnel. Some of the researchers are older scholars or officials who received their professional training as diplomats, translators, or social scientists prior to the Cultural Revolution. Quite a few of them have language skills in Spanish, Portuguese, or English, although it is rare for one of them to be able to speak more than one of these languages. The younger researchers at the institute usually have not received formal training in Latin American studies because of the Cultural Revolution. Some of these younger researchers, however, have served abroad in Chinese embassies or trade missions in Latin America and thus have a practical competence in Spanish or Portuguese and in Latin American affairs. In addition to the seventy researchers are some graduate students who entered the institute in 1978 for a three-year course of study. These students, who knew some English before entering the graduate program, are expected also to learn Spanish or Portuguese. Following a Chinese institutional practice of retaining graduate students, the Institute of Latin American Studies may well keep the students on as researchers after they graduate.

At present the Institute of Latin American Studies is headed by a director, an older expert in international relations, and two deputy directors, who run the institute on a day-to-day basis. According to institute researchers, one of the deputy directors is responsible for "administrative work," which probably means that he is the leading Communist party official in the institute. The other is a well-known Chinese historian, Professor Sha Ding, who is responsible for academic affairs. The institute has six departments devoted to research and bibliographic work. The first research department is responsible for general research

on Latin America spanning more than one country or region and conducts political, historical, and economic studies. Members of this department said that they are now concentrating some of their research on international economics and Latin America's place as a developing region in the world economy. The second research department is responsible for the institute's periodical, *Latin American Review*, which is described below.

In addition to these two research departments, the institute has four other departments. Three focus on area research, concentrating on politics, history, economics, and other subjects in (1) Central America and the Caribbean, (2) Chile, Argentina, and Brazil, and (3) the remaining South American countries. The sixth department administers the library, gathering and cataloguing research materials.

The institute's quarterly periodical, *Latin American Review*, began publication at the beginning of 1980. According to members of the institute staff, it is intended to be a journal for both specialists and non-specialists and thus includes detailed articles on Latin American politics, economics, and history, as well as shorter, more general features on geography, art, and scenery. The *Review* has also printed translations of North American, South American, Russian, and French articles, including essays or excerpts from books by Carmelo Mesa-Lago on Latin American Studies in the United States and Europe, Robert C. West on Central America, and Joseph Grunwald on Latin America and the new international economic order, as well as translations from the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Inter-American Economic Affairs*. The first issue of *Latin American Review* contains, for example, articles on agriculture and industry in Argentina, Mexican history and economy, Japanese immigrants in Brazil, Venezuelan oil, and nuclear energy in Latin America.

Researchers at the institute reported that a lack of facilities and research materials constitutes their greatest obstacle to research at this time. Although the institute's library was not open to foreign visitors, the researchers interviewed there were familiar with most English-language journals on Latin America. Regularly received and read are such English language journals as the *Latin American Research Review*, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, *Latin American Perspectives*, *NACLA Report on the Americas*, *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, *Cuba Report*, and the *Journal of Latin American Studies*. Many other English- and Spanish-language magazines, newsletters, and journals are also received.

The new parent organization, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, is China's leading research center for intellectuals. Also based in Peking, it now administers more than twenty research institutes in fields ranging from archeology to linguistics to industrial economics,

and the Institute of Latin American Studies thus took its place as one of the constituent research institutes of the Academy in 1981.

As a result of the transfer to the Academy of Social Sciences, the institute is now in the process of delineating academic ranks similar to those in other research institutes and parallel to the academic system in Chinese universities. The system includes the following categories: research fellow, a position equivalent to professor in a Chinese university, a rank extremely difficult to achieve; associate research fellow, equivalent to associate professor in either a Chinese or American university and also difficult to achieve; and assistant research fellow, roughly equivalent to the American assistant professor or a Chinese university lecturer (their system does not have the title of assistant professor). Chinese universities and research institutes do not have a tenure system because most scholars are likely to stay at the same institution for most of their careers.

Research interests at the Institute of Latin American Studies are varied, with researchers interviewed working on topics including the independence movement in Mexico, Chinese and Japanese immigrants in Cuba and Brazil, contemporary economic conditions and policies in Brazil and Argentina, Latin American energy problems, Mexican and Venezuelan oil, Cuban literature, U.S. investment in Latin America, and peasant rebellion.

The Institute of World History (Peking)

Scholarly work on Latin America in Peking is also carried out at the Institute of World History, another research institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Within the Institute of World History exists a division of Latin American history, staffed by eight researchers and several graduate students now studying Latin American history there. Although not as well-staffed or -equipped as the Institute of Latin American Studies, the Institute of World History's researchers are now studying such topics as the nineteenth-century independence movement in Latin America, Brazilian history, Chinese emigration to Latin America, and early Chinese trade relations with Mexico via Manila. In 1979 this institute began to admit graduate students. Applicants to the graduate program in Latin American history take a series of examinations on politics, a foreign language, Chinese language, world history, and Latin American history, their specialty field. The entrance examination for graduate students in Latin American history, an internal document of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, is reproduced in English at the end of this article (see appendix).

Fudan University (Shanghai)

A third major center for study and research on Latin America is Fudan University in Shanghai, one of China's best comprehensive liberal arts universities and one of the most prestigious of China's six hundred colleges and universities. The History Department at Fudan University contains a Latin American Research and Teaching Division with seventeen faculty members and researchers, and five graduate students.

In August of 1980, some of the Latin American historians at Fudan University described their work as both teaching and research. They teach sections of Latin American history in the required courses on ancient and modern world history for undergraduate history majors, as well as optional courses on Latin American history, either on Latin America as a whole or on regions such as Chile, Brazil, and Argentina, to history majors in the third and fourth years of undergraduate work.

Graduate students in Latin American history are required to take five year-long courses during their first two years of graduate study, prior to beginning work on their theses. These five required courses are modern world history and historiography in the first year, and international economics, Latin American history, and contemporary Latin America in the second year. In addition, they must study politics and two foreign languages, usually English and Spanish.

The historians in the Latin American Research and Teaching Division at Fudan University also described their group research plans for 1981 and 1982, when the division planned to complete two major projects on Latin America for publication. The first was a history of Cuban-Soviet relations since 1959, tentatively entitled *The Origins of Cuba's Fall into Soviet Dependency*. The second was to be a more general work entitled *A Survey of Latin American Economies*, which would cover Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina, including such topics as natural conditions, population and demography, land ownership, capital structure, and wealth and income distribution. These research projects demonstrate that the interests and expertise of the members of the Latin American Teaching and Research Division extend beyond Latin American history to contemporary political and economic analysis, a statement with which the specialists at Fudan readily agreed.

Brazil Research Center (Wuhan)

The fourth major research center for the study of Latin America in China is the Brazil Research Center at Wuhan Teacher's College in Wuhan, one of China's most important industrial cities, located on the Yangtze River in south-central China. Although too far distant to visit, the Brazil Research Center reportedly has a research staff of about fifteen working on

contemporary Brazilian politics, economics, and society. It produces monographs on Brazil for nationwide distribution.

In addition to the four major research centers discussed above are two recently formed scholarly societies devoted to research and scholarly discussion on Latin American questions. These are not research centers, but independent membership organizations having academic affiliation with the Academy of Social Sciences that are designed to bring together scholars in the same field from all over China.

The Chinese Society of Latin American History

The Chinese Society of Latin American History was founded in December of 1979 at a meeting of about forty scholars at the Brazil Research Center in Wuhan. The society's bylaws state that its purposes are to "study and research Latin American history, promote scholarly discussion, exchange research and informational materials, promote mutual understanding and friendship between the Chinese people and the people of Latin America, and contribute to the socialist modernization of China." The work of the society includes a membership and scholarly discussion meeting to be held every two years, editing and publishing reference and scholarly materials on Latin American history, and "promoting international scholarly exchange."

The society publishes its own periodical, the *Latin American History Newsletter*, twice a year. The first issue of the *Newsletter*, published in June of 1980, includes articles by Chinese scholars entitled "Chinese Workers in Latin America in the Nineteenth Century," "Juárez's Leadership of the Mexican Reform Movement," "The United States and the Cuban War of Independence," and a historiographic article on North American studies of Brazil that cites books and articles by E. Bradford Burns, Robert Levine, Joseph Love, Richard H. Morse, Riordan Roett, A. J. R. Russell-Wood, Stanley Stein, and John Wirth. The society is also working with the Brazil Research Center to compile for publication a *Catalogue of Books on Latin American History in China*, with information gathered from all Chinese libraries holding books on Latin America. The society also sends representatives to national conferences on world history and historiography.

The Chinese Society of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Literature

The Chinese Society of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Literature was founded in October of 1979 at a national conference on Iberian and Latin American literature held at Nanking University that drew sixty scholars from twenty-nine universities and research institutes from

all over China. This society intends to commission translations and publication of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American poetry, short stories, and novels, and to foster research by stimulating scholarly contacts and discussion. It is expected that the national meeting of the society will be held every two years.

Translation Projects

Translation of foreign publications has always played an important part in Chinese scholarly work on Latin America and will continue to do so. During the sixties and seventies, even when teaching and other academic work on Latin America was impossible for political reasons, translation continued of North and South American works on Latin America, and these eventually were published in limited editions in Chinese in Peking. A complete listing of the foreign books and articles on Latin America that have been translated into Chinese is not available, but would include *Cuba in the 70s* by Carmelo Mesa-Lago and *Outline Political History of the Americas* by William Z. Foster.

SUMMARY

Although research on Latin America in the People's Republic of China is still incipient, it is now possible to identify the research problems that most interest Latin Americanists in China and those likely to interest them over the next few years. In terms of historical studies, Chinese researchers are devoting extensive efforts to such problems as the Latin American independence movements of the early nineteenth century, United States relations with Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, early Chinese trade and diplomatic relations with Latin America, the experience of Chinese laborers in Latin America, and studies of Cuba and Brazil. Second, in political and economic research, great interest exists in such areas as present-day economic conditions and trends in Mexico, Brazil, Cuba, and Argentina, and contemporary politics in Cuba, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. Third, in terms of literary and cultural work, the present stress is on the translation of Latin American literature, primarily novels and short stories. This emphasis on translation of fiction is likely to continue for at least the next few years.

Among all these research topics, the ones most likely to be of interest to North American scholars are those that involve untapped Chinese sources on early Chinese trade with Latin America (in the context of the economic history and trade relations of colonial Latin America, especially colonial Mexico) and Chinese data and interpretations on Chinese workers in Latin America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (as part of the study of Latin American working-

class and immigration history). Although until now, no major publications have been issued relating to the first topic, Chinese attitudes toward and interpretations of the experience of Chinese immigrant laborers in nineteenth-century Latin America are discussed in a recent article on the subject by Peking University historian Lo Rongqu entitled "Chinese Coolies in Latin America in the Nineteenth Century," published in the bimonthly journal *World History* in August of 1980.

Despite the beginning, yet vigorous, stage of Latin American studies in China today, there are still substantial obstacles. Perhaps the most important problem facing Latin Americanists in China today is one of research materials. Each of the institutes and university departments visited and all the Latin Americanists interviewed mentioned the same problem—the scarcity and difficulty in obtaining books, journals, newspapers, and other research materials. According to the Chinese Latin Americanists, the problem arises from two major factors, neither of which is political. First comes the problem of limitations on spending of foreign exchange, a problem that poses difficulties for scholars in all areas of the social sciences and to some degree in the natural sciences as well. Second is the more limited difficulty of irregular postal routes and deliveries, which complicates receiving books and newspapers from Latin America on a regular basis.

A second fundamental problem that Latin Americanists in China emphasize is their unfamiliarity with the work of foreign scholars on Latin America and the resulting limitations on their own research. Although this situation has slowly improved over the last several years as foreign journals and other materials have begun to be received by Chinese institutes and university departments, the difficulties in carrying on scholarly discussion with representatives and scholars limits the effectiveness of merely reading foreign journals. Chinese scholars of Latin America thus are looking forward to increased opportunities for contact with North American, South American, and European Latin Americanists, contacts which should increase gradually in China and the West over the next few years.

In conclusion, Latin American studies in China is a field that the Chinese Latin Americanists themselves recognize as being in its beginning stages, yet work on Latin American affairs in China is more extensive than North American scholars might have imagined. For a developing country whose extensive contacts with Latin America date back only twenty years, the People's Republic of China is sponsoring a good deal of academic teaching and research work in Latin American studies. At the same time, many problems remain, and all the Chinese Latin Americanists interviewed expressed the hope that as these problems are resolved, contacts will increase between Latin Americanists in the West and their colleagues in the People's Republic of China.

APPENDIX

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Institute of World History

1979 Entrance Examination in Latin American History (Graduate studies)

1. Explain the following historical terms and their concrete meaning. (21 points)
 - Encomienda*
 - Pan-American Conference (Pan-American Union)
 - the Panama Canal question
2. Describe the following historical figures, their period of activity and principal political stands, and briefly explain their historical role. (15 points)
 - Simón Bolívar
 - Juan Manuel de Rosas
3. Answer the following questions:
 - a. Explain the social, economic, and political causes and the historical background of the Latin American independence movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century. (20 points)
 - b. According to what you know, what are the differences in opinion among historians on the question of the nature of social patterns in the three cultural centers of the ancient Indians—the Mayan, Aztec, and Inca societies. (24 points)
 - c. Describe Lázaro Cárdenas's domestic and foreign policies during his time in office (1934–40) and the effects of those policies. (20 points)
4. Reference questions:
 - Why do you want to study Latin American history?
 - Which works relating to Latin America have you read? (Chinese and foreign languages.)
 - Which aspects of Latin American history are you interested in studying?

Source: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1979 *Graduate Studies Entrance Examinations* (internal document).