

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: Current and Future Prospects*

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Relations between China and Latin America date back hundreds of years and have intensified since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Recognizing that meaningful relations with Latin America require an understanding of that varied region, China has established appropriate study and research programs. This essay on current Latin American programs in the People's Republic of China will report on research organizations, research interests of Chinese scholars, and current trends within Latin American studies. The double objectives are to describe China's interest in Latin America and to establish closer contacts between Latin Americanists in China and the United States.

Background

Formal Latin American studies started in China in the early 1960s with the establishment of the Institute of Latin American Studies. A comprehensive research organization, it first affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Philosophy and Social Sciences. Following the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the institute became part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which had been founded in the late 1970s. Although the institute has existed for more than a quarter of a century, its research activities were completely suspended for a decade due to the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. Research activities returned to normal only at the end of 1978. In one sense, then, systematic research on Latin America remains in its early stages. But Latin American studies nonetheless occupy an important position in academic circles in China.

Several reasons account for its significance. First, Latin America offers useful examples of national development. The Chinese believe that after 1930, Latin America entered a new stage of rapid economic

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growth, development, and social transformation. During the past half-century, profound economic, social, and class structural changes have occurred in several of the major Latin American countries. Industrialization and economic modernization have strengthened those countries. The economic gap between the highly developed United States and underdeveloped Latin America has begun to narrow. For example, in 1960 the value of economic production in the United States was 7.7 times higher than that of Latin America, but by 1980 it was only 3.9 times higher. Some Latin American economies have reached a fairly advanced stage of development. Although in general terms, Latin America forms part of the Third World, some countries in the region play significant international roles in the North-South dialogue as well as in the leadership of the Third World. Latin America is struggling against economic hegemony in various ways: by defending national economic rights, promoting regional economic cooperation, promoting regional integration, controlling the activities of multinational corporations, and extending territorial waters to the two-hundred-mile limit. Latin American countries have also proposed and promoted a New International Economic Order (NIEO). The Chinese people greatly admire these new international roles that Latin American countries are playing.

Second, China and Latin America are characterized by many commonalities. Both have suffered foreign invasions; both have borne the burdens of underdevelopment; and both need peace in order to pursue rapid economic development. Furthermore, conditions are favorable for promoting trade and technological cooperation between the two. Both possess rich natural resources, have developed their own technology, pursue economic development, relate to common problems, and manifest a willingness to adhere to the principle of equality and mutual benefit in order to strengthen trade and economic relations. China currently enjoys economic relations with ten Latin American nations. The value of trade between China and Latin America totaled only \$200 million dollars in 1960, but the figure rose to \$1.65 billion by 1984. Trade between China and Brazil has increased impressively from \$215 million in 1979 to \$800 million in 1984. When Premier Zhao Zi-yang visited Colombia in October of 1985, he expressed the hope that trade between the two countries would rise sharply in the next five years. China recently established the Sino-Latin American Trade Corporation to encourage further bilateral trade relationships. The government is currently studying the usefulness of increasing the number of Latin American ports with which the Chinese trade. The Chinese hope and believe that political, economic, technological, and cultural relations between the People's Republic and Latin America will grow steadily during the next decade and a half.

Research Organizations and Programs

Reflecting China's increasing interest in Latin America, study of the region has intensified since 1978. Several research institutes for Latin American studies have been established within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, universities, and different ministries. Three national associations were also created: the Association of Latin American Studies, the Society for the Study of Latin American History, and the National Society for the Study of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Literatures.

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) is a state research institution under the direction of the central government. It operates branches or affiliates in various provinces and cities throughout China. Although most Latin American research is concentrated in the Institute of Latin American Studies of the CASS, other Latin American specialists in CASS branches and affiliates (such as the Institute for the Study of World History, the Institute for the Study of World Politics and Economics, and the Institute for the Study of Foreign Literatures) also contribute to the study of Latin America.

Founded in 1961, the Institute of Latin American Studies employs about one hundred persons, 70 percent of whom engage in research and the remaining 30 percent are librarians and administrators. Among the researchers, thirteen hold the rank of research associates and fifty-seven are research assistants (comparable U.S. ranks would be associate and assistant professors). The directorship of the institute being vacant, it is currently headed by the Deputy Director, Associate Professor Su Zhen-xing. The institute now has four research divisions: Economic and International Research; Political and Historical Research; South American Research; and Mexican, Central American, and Caribbean Research. Other units of the institute deal with administration, research programs, the library, and the editorial board of the *Latin American Review*.

Published bimonthly by the institute, the *Latin American Review* circulates inside China and abroad. Renamed *Latin American Studies* on 1 January 1986, its table of contents is printed in both English and Spanish. A monthly publication, *Latin American Research Materials*, is distributed among the researchers. The library contains about twenty thousand books and subscribes to more than three hundred periodicals, foreign and domestic. It has established exchange agreements with foreign university libraries. Further, many Latin American governments and their embassies have donated appropriate books on their respective countries to the institute's library.

The institute also publishes books about Latin America. Recent titles (translated into English) include *The Handbook of Latin America*,

Political Parties of Latin American Countries, *The Economy of Brazil*, *The Economy of Argentina*, and *The Economy of Mexico*. Current titles in press are *The Economy of Latin America*, *Studies on the Strategy of Latin American Economic Development*, *The History of Sino-Latin American Relations*, and *Who's Who in Latin America*. An encyclopedia of Latin American history has been accepted for publication.

The institute also trains graduate students, enrolling four or five a year in the Master of Arts program. Associate professors teach such courses as Introduction to Modern Latin America, Latin American History, and Economies of Latin America. Since 1978 the institute has developed exchange programs with several Latin American centers in foreign countries. With grants from the Ford Foundation, the institute sends researchers to centers in Latin America and the United States for study and research for three-month or one-year periods. Several young researchers are currently working toward master's and doctoral degrees at different Latin American centers. About a quarter of the institute's research personnel have already studied or conducted research abroad.

Apart from the institute, various universities and colleges contribute significantly to the study of Latin America in China. Beijing University, Fu Dan University in Shanghai, and Wuhan Teachers College in Hubei Province offer courses on Latin American history, economic development, and other major topics. Central China Teachers College offers a course on Latin American geography. Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute, and the Department of Foreign Languages of Nanjing University all offer introductory courses on modern Latin America as well as literature courses for majors in Spanish and Portuguese. The Latin American Center of Fu Dan University initiated a master's program in Latin American history in 1960, and several of its graduates now work as researchers in the CASS Institute. The History Department of Wuhan Teachers College offers special studies in the history of Brazil that involve ten faculty members. Other universities and colleges often give special seminars on Latin American studies and invite Chinese as well as foreign experts to lecture.

Latin American specialists can also be found in different organizations, departments, and ministries, such as the New China News Agency, *People's Daily*, Radio Beijing, the Central Radio and Television Department, the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, the Federation of Trade Unions, the Youth Federation, the Women's Federation, and the Friendship Association. Most of them have studied Spanish, Portuguese, or English and have worked or are working in Latin America.

Since 1980 several societies for Latin American studies have been established in China: the Society for the Study of Latin American His-

tory (led by Professor Li Chuen-lui), the National Society of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Literatures (led by Professor Wang Yong-le), and the Association of Latin American Studies (led by Zhang De-qun, former ambassador to Cuba and the Soviet Union). Researchers from different institutions join these societies according to their interests. The three societies hold annual meetings and seminars. Topics recently discussed include characteristics and trends in Latin American nationalist and democratic movements, the role of foreign capital in economic development, the nature of nineteenth-century independence movements, the significance of Bolívar, and the Nicaraguan Revolution and Central America.

Although the Cultural Revolution temporarily reversed and delayed the development of Latin American studies, since 1978 they have gradually resumed their forward momentum and have made significant research progress in recent years. New government policies have encouraged research on economic development and an increasing number of other topics.

Major Issues in Latin American Studies

In the last few years, the discussions and debates among Chinese Latin Americanists have centered around five major issues. The first concerns the economic nature of Latin American societies. Most Chinese consider Latin American countries to be part of the capitalist economic system, but the question remains open as to which type of capitalism dominates. Those who believe that Latin American capitalism developed only after the Western industrialist nations entered the "imperialist stage" label Latin American capitalism as "national" or "developing." This "late" capitalism represents a new form of production capable of creating a new and increasingly significant economic and social force. A basic difference exists between this type of capitalism and the monopolistic capitalism found in the Western capitalist countries. In the international arena, Western monopoly capitalism oppresses and exploits Latin American national capitalism. Other researchers take a different point of view in characterizing Latin American capitalism as "dependent." Still others apply conventional labels such as "national," "developing," "peripheral," or "lopsided" to describe the Latin American situation. They suggest that capitalism manifests different characteristics in different countries and that each Latin American country demonstrates a distinct version of capitalism attendant on its national experiences. Labels blur significant differences, however.

Some Chinese scholars have concluded that in several major Latin American countries, a "three-in-one" mixed system exists of state,

private, and foreign monopoly (multinational corporations) capitalism. The particular mix varies according to the country, the economic sector, and the time period involved. While the combination can remain relatively stable and balanced, it does react to international economic conditions, state policy, revolution, and reforms, factors that can effect change singly or in combination.

Some Chinese Latin Americanists are cautious about applying such terms as "semifeudal" and "semicolonial" to Latin American capitalism. For one reason, those terms carry a special meaning within the Chinese historical experience. Although China shares some similar experiences with Latin America (such as foreign influence and the pursuit of economic development), prerevolutionary Chinese capitalism differed from Latin American capitalism. Each version displayed its own unique characteristics. Chinese scholars therefore take care not to impose Chinese concepts of capitalist development and class stratification on Latin America.

A second debate in Chinese Latin American studies revolves around the concept of dependency and its meaning. Many analysts want to avoid broad generalizations about Latin American dependency. On the one hand, a temporal demarcation complicates this concept. The Second World War marks one division in the study of the relations between the imperialist powers and the "dependent" or "semidependent" nations. On the other hand, relations between nations are more complex than generalizations can acknowledge. Dependency may exist between developed and developing countries. A dependent relationship can also exist between developing countries, between developed countries, between a capitalist country and a socialist country, and between socialist countries. Latin American dependency is deeply rooted in the past and will be difficult to eradicate in several decades. Furthermore, Latin American economic dependency does not necessarily affect political independence.

Views also diverge as to the degree of Latin American dependency. Some analysts believe that a given economic condition must be either dependent or independent. Others conclude that as national economies develop, dependency decreases; and they emphasize the rapid economic changes characterizing parts of Latin America after World War II. Latin America's economic growth surpassed that of the developed capitalist nations during their first period of industrialization. Several large countries have already moved beyond the economic stage of depending primarily on agrarian and mineral exports for economic growth. National per capita income in Latin America is steadily rising. Other scholars think that Latin American dependency deepens with economic development. Although political dependency may have lessened, economic dependency has increased. The current debt crisis

best exemplifies this deepening dependency, also reflecting the international monopoly of capital accumulation.

The nature of the economic crisis in Latin America provides a third theme for lively discussion among Chinese Latin Americanists. Some argue that the "debt crisis" or "structural crisis" of the early 1980s reflects the long-term Latin American trend toward import substitution. This kind of crisis differs from those in Western societies and partially results from the West shifting some of its economic burden to Latin America. Others hasten to point out that Latin Americans have been caught in their own capitalist contradictions of production, trade, income distribution, and consumption. Between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, internal factors largely accounted for the economic crisis. The shift of the economic crisis from Western countries to Latin America played only a secondary role. Some scholars contend that as long as Latin American countries readjust their development strategies to avoid uneven growth rates, large investments, and high consumption, their economies will not be much affected by external factors. Others emphasize the predominant role of multinational corporations in economic decision making and performance within Latin America. According to the latter view, once an economic crisis strikes the capitalist center, it inevitably reverberates in the periphery, including Latin America.

Fourth, the proposed New International Economic Order continues to provoke discussion. Chinese specialists regard Latin Americans as the initiators and promoters of the NIEO. Latin America was the first region to promote and practice economic integration, and it also participates actively in Third World economic organizations. For example, Venezuela helped found OPEC (Oil Producing and Exporting Countries) and also served as a chair for the Paris North-South meetings between 1975 and 1977. Mexico, too, plays leading roles in the international economic and political arenas. Latin America thus enjoys a special position in the Third World, often serving as a communication bridge between North and South.

Many scholars find the struggle for an NIEO to be a continuation of previous anti-imperialist and national liberation movements in Latin America and consequently classify it as progressive. Other Chinese researchers believe that Latin America's struggle against imperialism seeks only to decrease, rather than to eradicate, exploitation and oppression by international capitalist monopolies, with the goal of enhancing the position of the developing capitalist nations within the international capitalist system. Still others argue that the Latin American campaign for an NIEO creates a centrifugal force within the capitalist system. The struggle and proposed new order reflect the weakening of U.S. hegemony, a dichotomization between developed and underdeveloped capitalist nations, and the increasing polarization of the two

camps. Many Chinese scholars disagree with Samir Amir, who favors abandoning efforts to create an NIEO. They believe that the best way to escape dependency is for Latin America to be increasingly self-reliant, wary of the international division of labor, and bold in challenging the old international economic order.

Finally, many Latin Americanists in China believe that the ideas of Social Democratic parties are now reaching a larger audience of Latin Americans. In general, broad trends of urbanization, industrialization, and economic modernization have favored the spread of their ideology. Since the Socialist International convened in Caracas in the mid-1970s, its influence has become more pronounced in the Western Hemisphere as its membership continues to rise. The middle class, opposed to communism and traditional capitalism, dreams of a third road to a "utopian" society and provides the social base for enlarging the membership and influence of the Socialist International. Other scholars attribute the increasing influence of Social Democratic ideology to the seeming inability of some Latin American revolutionaries to distinguish among various "ultra-left" and "ultra-right" interpretations of Marxism. Dogmatism and "ultra-left" interpretations have rendered Marxism more theory than practice. The fact that most of the population does not accept Marxism facilitates the penetration of European-centered Social Democratic ideology into Latin America. Indeed, some Chinese Latin Americanists have concluded that the increasing penetration of the Socialist International heralds a return of European influence in Latin America to compete with the lengthy U.S. monopoly of the region.

The Future of Latin American Studies in China

Latin American studies in the People's Republic of China have progressed considerably since 1978. By the end of the century, the first generation of Chinese Latin Americanists will have laid a solid foundation in area studies and set a course for the future. Meanwhile, much remains to be done to establish systematic and thorough study and research programs.

Still limited by insufficient data and small research staffs, Latin American studies in China concentrate on qualitative, area, and macro-level studies. These approaches need to be balanced with quantitative studies as well as investigations of specific topics and individual country studies. One goal is to achieve a better combination of general and specific studies. Another is to depart from simply confirming Chinese government policy to influencing the shaping of that policy. Future work should combine studies of the relations between production and superstructure with studies of the modes of production and economic

structures. Further, the historical conditions that shaped the present and will help forge the future need to be specified. Research should expand beyond political and economic topics to embrace social, cultural, educational, scientific, ideological, ethnic, and religious subjects as well.

At present three kinds of research organizations dedicated to Latin American studies exist in China. Their independence of each other has prevented good communication. For example, Chinese universities and colleges have competent researchers who experience difficulties in completing their projects because they lack sufficient data. At the same time, the ministries contain plenty of useful data, but their research staffs cannot fully utilize them because daily bureaucratic tasks absorb most of their time. The current urgent need is to combine the Institute of Latin American Studies of CASS with the research staffs in the universities, colleges, and ministries in an effort to coordinate research and make better use of resources.

Before the year 2000, Latin Americanist research staffing will improve in numbers and level of training. Personnel currently fall into two categories: those who have studied foreign languages (Spanish, Portuguese, English, or Russian) and those with background in the social sciences (history, economics, political science, journalism, ethnology, or philosophy). Both groups manifest weaknesses. Although the first group has linguistic access to research materials, they usually lack training in the social sciences. The opposite is true of the social scientists—they possess social science research skills but lack training in foreign languages and must therefore depend on translations. To resolve the situation, we suggest that middle-aged researchers be trained in China while young researchers be allowed (conditions permitting) to study and work for at least a year in the country of their research topic in order to gain valuable field experience and language competence. Graduate students in the social sciences should be required to pass proficiency tests in two foreign languages. Such training would allow second and third generations of Chinese Latin Americanists to fulfill the goals of the field.

Limited finances have restricted a systematic exchange program between Chinese and foreign colleagues. Although some exchanges have occurred between China and Canada, the United States, and a few Latin American countries, they have involved very few researchers. In such exchanges, Chinese scholars rarely discuss their own viewpoints, only listening to their foreign colleagues. For that reason, foreigners do not know about our research or understand our viewpoints. We hope that within a short time, Chinese Latin Americanists will begin publishing a periodical in either Spanish or English to be circulated in China and abroad. Such a publication, whether annual or semian-

nual, would indicate the directions of our research and elucidate our ideas and insights. It would integrate Chinese Latin Americanists more closely into Latin American studies throughout the world. We would like to see periodical contact supplemented by increased field research in Latin America and fuller interactions with our Latin American counterparts. As the study of Latin America grows within the People's Republic of China, Chinese scholars feel the need to draw on international and, most particularly, on Latin American sources and to share the findings of their research with others.