

China's Opening to Latin America in the Era of Reform*

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Brown, Jonathan C. (2020), "China's Opening to Latin America in the Era of Reform"

ABSTRACT

The People's Republic of China carried on a modest trade with Latin America in the 1960s. However, even the exchange of Cuban sugar for Chinese rice ended when Fidel Castro chose to side with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet Dispute. In the post-Mao era, China's new leaders sought to engage with Latin America without ideological preconditions. Only Cuba still viewed relations between countries with a regard for political purity. For example, Fidel Castro denounced Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping for visiting Washington, D.C., in 1979. Such objections did not inconvenience China and other countries of Latin America. In the 1980s PRC officials visited right-wing military dictatorships in Chile and Brazil, and returned a decade later when democratic governments replaced the generals. By the 1990s, the growth of Chinese commerce in the region was outpacing that of the United States. Latin American politicians seemed eager to embrace opportunities to offset US economic hegemony by trading with the PRC. What were the causes and consequences of these increasing commercial ties? To answer these questions, the author has investigated the Chinese-Latin American relationship in the digitized database known as the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS).

Key Words: Sino-Latin American Trade, state visits, dictatorships, democracies, Cuba

* The author presented a preliminary version of this paper at the Beijing Forum of Peking University in November 2019. My thanks to Professors Dong Jingsheng of Peking University and Li He of Merrimack College for their comments on this manuscript.

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The initial opening to the West of the People's Republic of China met with mixed reactions. Most governments in Latin America, whether of democratic or dictatorial origin, welcomed Chinese overtures for expanded diplomatic and commercial exchanges. Ironically, so it seemed, the resistance came from Cuba, the only socialist republic in the Western Hemisphere. When Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping traveled to the United States in 1979, Fidel Castro denounced the Chinese government, charging it with embracing 'imperialism' and condoning 'neo-colonialism'. He ridiculed Deng for visiting the White House in Washington, D.C., and for attending a rodeo in Houston, Texas. Thereafter, Castro dispatched to Beijing none of the delegations of Spanish and Portuguese-speaking officials who were visiting the PRC on a regular basis. That is, until late in the 1980s. In 1989 and for the first time in more than two decades, Cuba sent a group of high-level bureaucrats back to China. Why did the Cuban government lag behind other Latin American nations in taking advantage of commercial opportunities offered by the PRC, a fraternal socialist nation?

This essay analyzes the broad outlines of Chinese policy towards Latin America in the two decades following Deng's trip to the United States. Compared to the Cold War tensions that characterized China-Latin America relations in the time of Mao Zedong, the interactions of the People's Republic of China with the Americas in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in the opening of embassies, the exchange of visits by government officials, and the rapid expansion of commercial trade. China's exports of manufactured goods expanded, and its imports of raw materials from Latin America grew even more rapidly. In 1978, China's trade with the Americas barely existed. It traded with only a few countries. Yet by the end of the 1990s, the People's Republic ranked as the region's second most important commercial partner, after the United States.

This paper argues that the People's Republic of China (PRC) succeeded in expanding its diplomatic and commercial reach into Latin America due to several factors. First of all, the Chinese leadership connected its trade worldwide to its rigorous economic transformation at home. Secondly, the PRC rejected the ideological obstacles of the Cold War that previously constrained its own international economic relationships. It dealt equally with anti-communist military regimes as with electoral regimes. Moreover, a wide array of Chinese officials participated in the opening to the West – not just Deng Xiaoping. Finally, nearly all Latin American governments responded enthusiastically to the Chinese opening; it made them feel important. As for Cuba, only the looming collapse of the Soviet Union

in 1989 prepared Fidel Castro for his diplomatic rapprochement with China.

SINO-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS IN THE COLD WAR

Ideological considerations seemed to dominate some of the first ties between the People's Republic of China and Spanish and Portuguese-speaking republics of the Western Hemisphere. As early as 1960, Chairman Mao Zedong's government established an embassy in Havana, more out of political than economic considerations. Cuba's revolutionary leader Fidel Castro had requested Chinese technicians to guide his government in undertaking land reforms. In the following year, his minister of industry, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, arrived in Beijing to negotiate the exchange of Chinese rice for Cuban sugar and to seek credits for military and industrial technologies. The People's Republic hosted Cuban technicians and soldiers for training purposes (Brown 2017, 82-84; Cheng 2007b, 78-114; Rothwell 2013). A few other nations attempting social reforms sought Chinese as well as Soviet assistance in carrying out social projects that the United States considered threatening to US investors already operating in South America. Brazil's reform-minded leader João Goulart came to Beijing for just such purposes in 1961. The socialist President Salvador Allende in 1971 established close relations with the People's Republic as he attempted to carry forward a Peaceful Revolution in Chile (Brown 2017, 243-244; Harmer 2015). Chile and the PRC exchanged ambassadors.

However, China's economy remained overwhelmingly rural based and its industries focused on military defense more than on meeting limited urban demand. The distance to markets in the Western Hemisphere additionally limited trade to the Pacific Coast countries of Mexico, Peru, and Chile. At the beginning of the Great Cultural Revolution, Mao's government saw fit to reduce its rice shipments to Cuba. Fidel Castro took this gesture as an ideological affront and, during the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana, famously denounced the People's Republic as for having "joined the United States in the economic blockade of Revolutionary Cuba." Moreover, Cuba's failure to industrialize, a goal pursued fruitlessly by Che Guevara, reinforced Cuba's dependency on trade with Eastern Europe. Cuba had come to depend on urbanized Soviet consumers for its cane sugar exports and for its imports of manufactured goods. Ideologically, Castro confirmed his alliance with

Moscow by supporting Premier Leonid Brezhnev's armed intervention in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring affair. Cuba also accepted the ideological position of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the Sino-Soviet Dispute (Brown 2017, 97-98; Andrew and Mitrokhin 2005, 119). Fidel Castro thereafter attacked Chairman Mao and his successors for their deviations from Soviet Marxism.

Moreover, US hostility to Chinese penetration of the Western Hemisphere during the Cold War also presented an obstacle to socialist commerce in the Western Hemisphere. Washington tightened its economic boycott of Cuba in the 1960s. American Cold War diplomacy resulted in ideological success in 1962, when Washington pressured the members of the Organization of American States (OAS) to break all diplomatic and commercial ties to Cuba. Only Mexico refused. Two years later in 1964, Brazil's armed forces overthrew the reformist regime of President Goulart. A veritable tsunami of military counterrevolutions followed the Brazilian example until, in the 1970s, two-thirds of Latin America's population lived under the rigid anti-communist rule of the generals (Brown 2017, 451-452). Most military juntas initially proved hostile to the presence of Chinese and Soviet diplomats and technicians. Yet, these Cold War attitudes towards China and the USSR dissipated rapidly even amongst the most repressive dictatorships. Latin Americans no longer felt endangered by socialist subversion from within as leftist guerrilla movements faltered throughout South America. The OAS isolation of Cuba began to crumble in the 1970s, as Chile and Peru defied Washington by renewing its ties to the Socialist World. Other Latin American nations followed suit.

The Soviet alliance with Cuba came at a price for both Moscow and Havana. In the time of intense ideological struggle within World Socialism known as the Sino-Soviet Dispute, Fidel Castro signed on to the Soviet camp. His propaganda machine matched that of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in its denunciations of all things Chinese and particularly of the policies of the Chinese government under Mao and his successors. Moscow's brand of communist doctrine held bragging rights over the USSR's highly symbolic partnership with Cuba, the first and only socialist republic in the Western Hemisphere. The Kremlin touted the Cuban Revolution, occurring under the very nose of capitalism's most formidable power, as the beachhead for an eventual socialization of all Latin America. For Cuba's loyalty, Moscow paid dearly. It had to subsidize the decrepit Cuban economy by many thousands of rubles per day in tourism, training, arms, and technological transfers. The USSR purchased Cuban sugar at prices upwards of eleven times higher than world prices.

It also sold petroleum to Havana at lower than international prices (Balfour 2013, 150-151). Cuba's Cold War dependence on Moscow explains why Fidel Castro initially resisted China's entry into the commercial affairs of the Western Hemisphere.

THAW IN SINO-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS

Less than three years after the death of Mao Zedong, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping and his entourage arrived in Washington, D.C. This event of January 1979 marked the first time ever that a high government official of the People's Republic of China visited the United States. President Jimmy Carter hosted Deng at a White House state dinner. Former President Richard M. Nixon also attended the dinner in view of his first ever trip of an American head of state to China in 1972. Deng and Carter engaged in talks over the relations between the Socialist East and the Capitalist West as well as commercial and financial matters. They signed several agreements concerning scientific and technological exchanges. Deng and his entourage also visited Atlanta, Georgia and Houston, Texas. In the latter city, he toured the NASA Space Center. He also went to a rodeo, wore a cowboy hat, and took a ride in a horse-drawn stagecoach.¹ Castro and the Cubans scoffed at such antics.

However, other Latin Americans took note of Deng's trip as something of a tour-de-force. One of the leading newspapers of São Paulo, Brazil, *O Estado*, commented that the final Carter-Deng Communique did not include any ideological language critical of the USSR. *O Estado* speculated about what Deng's visit might portend for Vietnam, a Soviet ally in the Sino-Soviet Dispute. Vietnam's communist government had just overthrown the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, an ally of China.² Cuban reactions to Deng's diplomacy demonstrated far less generosity. Havana's state television and radio stations charged that the United States was

1 "Havana Radio Comments on Carter-Deng Talks," 29 Jan 1979, Central Intelligence Agency, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS). Foreign Broadcast Information Service was an open source intelligence component of the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Science and Technology. It monitored, translated, and disseminated within the US government openly available news stories from foreign media sources. It represents a little used but informative resource for historians of the worldwide Cold War. The FBIS is available as a database for research purposes in selected university research libraries. The author utilized the database collection at the libraries of Cornell University and the University of Texas at Austin.

2 "O Estado Examines Implications of Deng Visit," 1 Feb 1979, FBIS.

assisting in the rearming of China. Then, following Chinese armed intervention against the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia at the end of February 1979, Fidel compared the People's Republic to the colonial powers that had previously intervened in Southeast Asia, such as the French, the Japanese, and the Americans. Armed aggression in Southeast Asia "is being perpetuated by a country that until a few years ago was considered a bulwark of the world revolutionary movement," he said, "a country that carried out a revolution that was seen by all progressive forces in the world as a sign of hope."³

Yet, at the very same moment, representatives of some of the most repressive anti-communist regimes in Latin America responded favorably to the new openness of Beijing. Admiral Emilio Massera, a hardline member of the military junta that had seized power in Buenos Aires in 1976, arrived in China just two months after Deng had returned to Beijing from Washington. While Massera's junta was actively engaging in widespread repression and executions of suspected leftist dissidents, the Argentinean admiral had several meetings with Chinese officials.⁴

The next Argentinean official to travel to the PRC, Junta President General Jorge Videla, arrived several months later. He signed two cooperative agreements establishing culture and sports exchanges between the two nations. On return to Buenos Aires, Videla told reporters that Argentina wanted to work towards world peace, which was "essential for the developing countries." However, he shied away from criticizing Cuba for its hostility towards the People's Republic of China. "It is not very nice to point one's finger at anyone," he said. In Beijing, General Videla had had personal meetings with the highest officials of the PRC, Premier Hua Guofeng and Vice-Premier Deng. Such talks would not have been possible some time ago, President Videla said. "We would have been unable to make this trip because no one in the world believed that Argentina was important," he continued. "Our country and China have fully agreed that bipolarity is no longer a solution within international politics."⁵ Argentina's foreign minister reiterated several other reasons for President Videla's trip to China. "The importance of the visit is not measured by the number of things that are achieved during the visit itself," said the foreign minister, "but rather by the prospects which are opened and by the relationship and eminence assigned to [Argentina] by such an important nation as China."⁶ The discussions between PRC officials and members of Argentina's

3 "Fidel Castro Speaks," 22 Feb 1979, FBIS.

4 "Former Naval Commander Interviewed in Beijing," 3 Apr 1979, FBIS.

5 "Videla Discusses PRC Trip with Newsmen," 12 Jun 1980, FBIS.

military junta illustrates how the Chinese and the Latin Americans sought to play down Cold War ideological constraints in the search for new diplomatic relationships. Moreover, President Jimmy Carter's criticism of the poor human rights record of Latin American military juntas pushed these anti-communist regimes –ironically– to seek closer relations with both the PRC and the USSR.

Such sentiments of ideological neutrality also suffused the relationship between the PRC and Brazil's hardline military government. On the eve of the departure of a Brazilian delegation to Beijing, an editorial writer for the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *O Globo* offered a rationale for the renewal of close relations between the two countries. China was engaged in a project of economic modernization consisting of four elements – industry, agriculture, science, and technology. “That Brazil is no military threat makes it attractive as China's trade partner,” the commentator wrote. *O Globo* reported that China might invest in Brazil's hydroelectric projects, considering the PRC's success in its Three Gorges project on the Yangzi River. China was also considering the purchase of several buses of Brazilian manufacture.⁷

The biggest and most populous country of Brazil soon emerged as China's top trading partner in Latin America. By 1980, China's trade with Brazil had grown nearly 400 percent from its 1977 total.⁸ Therefore, when Brazil's foreign minister, Saraiva Guerreiro, arrived in China in 1982, the PRC government accorded him preferential treatment. The Brazilian official had appointments with Premier Zhao Ziyang, Foreign Minister Huang Hua, and the new vice-chairman of the Communist Party, Deng Xiaoping.⁹ “The invitation reflects the intentions of furthering rapprochement between the PRC and Brazil,” the Brazilian foreign minister told reporters when he returned home. “The importance Brazil has today on the international scene justified my presence in the PRC.”¹⁰

One other benefit the Brazilian military government and the PRC sought at the time concerned “the opposition to hegemony.” The Chinese defined this concept as resistance to the Soviet Union. But members of the Brazilian military government attributed “hegemony” to the United States, even though Washington had initially approved of the military's seizure of power in 1964. China offered Brazil an opportunity to offset US dominance

6 “Videla Discusses Beijing Talks with Newsmen,” 7 Jun 1980, FBIS.

7 “Possibilities for Trade with PRC Viewed,” 8 May 1980, FBIS.

8 “Meeting with Rojas Galdames,” 20 Nov 1981, FBIS.

9 “Foreign Minister Ends Talks in Beijing,” 24 Mar 1982, FBIS.

10 “Talks with Hua,” 24 Mar 1982, FBIS.

in Brazil's foreign trade and investments. President Carter's human rights policies rankled the military government of Brazil too. Even anti-communist military regimes in Latin America desired a remedy to Washington's hegemony.

CHINA AND LATIN AMERICAN DEMOCRATIZATION

The resurgence of democracies across Latin America in the last two decades of the twentieth century changed nothing in the upward trend of the PRC's political and economic relations with the Global South. The many civilian politicians who criticized the region's military rulers never actually faulted them for their pro-China policies. In fact, elected officials promoted such policies in countries as Argentina, Chile, and Brazil so recently terrorized by the generals. President Raúl Alfonsín of Argentina, elected to replace the military junta in 1983, took a three-day trip to Beijing late in his term of office. He met separately with Deng Xiaoping and President Yang Shangkun and signed several economic agreements. "I was deeply moved by the respect [the Chinese] feel for Argentina," he told reporters on returning to Buenos Aires. "There was great warmth, and we had the opportunity to reach agreements involving trade in steel, sugar, and grains."¹¹ Argentinean democrats and military dictators may have vehemently opposed each other, but they did agree on the benefits of closer ties with the People's Republic.

Alfonsín's successor as elected president, Carlos Menem, also traveled to Beijing. Then Menem invited to Buenos Aires a large delegation of Chinese officials and entrepreneurs led by Vice-Premier Zhu Rongji. President Menem talked to them about wanting to buy "heavy water" for Argentina's nuclear energy projects, and Zhu voiced interest in purchasing local fish products. Argentina decided to join the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperative Forum. Moreover, both countries found agreement in each other's territorial claims. Vice-Premier Zhu expressed support for Argentina's claim to the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands). In return, Menem supported the PRC in its One-China policy of reclaiming Taiwan. "Latin America is rich in natural resources and China has a large market," Zhu said at a press conference. "Our economies are complementary, which can be very profitable for all concerned." China's vice-premier

11 "Alfonsín Terms PRC Relations 'Very Important,'" 17 May 1988, FBIS.

concluded, "Precisely in areas like agriculture, agroindustry, mining, and forestry production, Argentina has practically limitless production potential." News articles cited statistics indicating that Argentina's exports to China grew by 30 percent in 1995 (Brown 2011, 289).¹² That Presidents Alfonsín and Menem represented two different political parties—the Radicals and Peronists respectively—points to a high level of enthusiasm among civilian politicians for closer ties with the PRC.

As in Argentina, Brazil's new democratic leaders acted on pro-China policies embraced previously by the repressive military juntas. President José Sarney became the first Brazilian head of state since the end of the 21-year military dictatorship to pay a visit to the People's Republic of China. He spent time in Beijing and Shanghai. Sarney met with President Yang Shangkun, Premier Li Peng, and the "paramount leader" Deng Xiaoping. The Brazilian president also visited the PRC's modern iron and steel mill at Bausha.¹³ However, the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 caused a downturn in diplomatic and trade relations between the two rapidly developing nations. During his visit to Brazil one year later, Premier Li Peng admitted as much in an interview with the editor of *O Globo*. The PRC's government leader told *O Globo* that "China's economic situation during the first half of 1990" had returned to "an honorable state." Premier Li said, "The most difficult moments have already passed." He also informed his hosts that Deng Xiaoping would be retiring in 1992. "Brazil is the largest emerging industrial country in South America, and China is the largest developing country in Asia. In recent years, the two countries have steadily increased their economic relations and both have promoted their own economic development," Premier Li Peng concluded. "I believe that the development trend now exhibited by the Chinese economy will favor greater cooperation between [our] two countries."¹⁴

While trade with individual nations of Latin America was rising by double digits every year, China protected its domestic industry and agriculture behind high tariff walls. The PRC supported an imbalance of trade vis-a-vis most Latin American countries. The remarks of Chinese officials expressed little inclination to revise their high tariff rates. "Concerning the deficit that the PRC has registered in its trade with Brazil," Premier Li Peng

12 "Argentina's Menem, PRC Official Discuss Trade," 29 Jan 1996, FBIS; "Argentina's Cavallo on IMF Loan, PRC Delegation Visit," 27 Jan 1996, FBIS.

13 "Schedule for Sarney Visit to PRC Announced," 30 Jun 1988, FBIS.

14 "PRC's Li Peng Discusses Economy, Bilateral Ties," 12 Aug 1990, FBIS. On the impact of the Tiananmen Square Incident, see Li (1991, 143-144).

said during his trip to Rio de Janeiro in 1990, “we will not reduce our imports merely to reach a balance. On the contrary, we will make an effort to increase our exports to Brazil. We would also like the respective Brazilian organizations to facilitate the access of PRC products to the Brazilian market.”¹⁵ The seriousness of the Chinese trade deficit came up again in 1992. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen told a visiting Brazilian newswoman “the PRC bought \$500 million worth of Brazilian products while Brazil bought barely \$100 million worth of Chinese products. This must change.”¹⁶ Zhu Rongji signaled a revision of tariff rates during a 1996 trip to Santiago de Chile. Import tariffs averaging 36 percent were to be reduced by one-third, he announced. “Bilateral trade must increase,” Vice-Premier Zhu said. “The Chinese economy must have Chilean products like copper, salt peter, fishmeal, and cellulose.” He even suggested Chinese joint investments in Chile’s copper mining.¹⁷

Other Chinese officials also began speaking about the opportunities to invest in joint ventures in Latin America. Vice-Premier Zhu Rongji in Brazil mentioned that the Chinese government corporation constructing the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River were negotiating with Brazilian contractors to form a consortium to bid on projects in Brazil. Zhu also referred to mining ventures in discussions with Brazilian President Itamar Franco and Finance Minister Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1993.¹⁸

Part of the deficit problem resided with the Brazilian business community being hesitant to export to China. Premier Zhu paid a special visit to São Paulo in 1993 to address this very problem. He spoke to the governor and visited the offices of São Paulo’s State Federation of Industries. Zhu talked about investment opportunities in China’s entrepreneurial zones for Brazilian capitalists. The federal government at Brasilia announced that it was opening a consulate in Shanghai “oriented mainly to commercial promotion.”¹⁹ One Brazilian export company reported another obstacle for expanding exports to China. A representative for Kodak of Brazil talked about China’s large market for photography and X-ray film. “We intend to export films and cameras, probably within this year (1993). Big problem. Brazilian port fees!” he said. “They greatly raise the price

15 “PRC’s Li Peng Discusses Economy, Bilateral Ties,” 12 Aug 1990, FBIS.

16 “PRC Minister Discusses Economic Exchanges,” 8 Mar 1993, FBIS. Also see Li (1991, 62).

17 “PRC Vice Premier Meets Chilean President, Officials,” 31 Jan 1996, FBIS; “PRC Zhu Rongji Visits Chile’s Santiago,” 31 Jan 1996, FBIS.

18 “PRC Explores Investment in Mining Sector,” 1 Jun 1993, FBIS. On joint ventures, also see Li (1991, 83).

19 “PRC Explores Investment in Mining Sector,” 1 Jun 1993, FBIS.

of exports.”²⁰ Apparently, Chinese officials too realized the detriments of Latin America’s obsolete infrastructure.

In the meanwhile, Latin American leaders recognized and celebrated the remarkable economic progress accomplished by the Chinese. They believed that such growth offered unique opportunities to exploit an alternative market beyond the tradition economic partnerships with the United States and Europe. Zelmira Regazzolli, under-secretary for human rights and women’s affairs in Argentina’s Foreign Ministry, spoke highly of her trip to China in 1991. “In the last ten years of economic opening China has become an economic power,” she observed. The Argentinean official outlined the PRC economic projects begun in 1980 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. She mentioned the five “special zones” the Chinese government had created along the coast, where foreign investments received special protections. More than 90 percent of China’s exports derived from these zones, which also became the destination of nineteen out of twenty college graduates. China, Regazzolli observed, had a market of one billion citizens, and its economic opening has “improved the Chinese people’s standard of living.” China joined the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank precisely to facilitate the growth of trade with Latin America and the world. These “pragmatic” policies she attributed to Deng Xiaoping. Under-secretary Regazzolli speculated about what China could offer to Argentina and other Latin American nations. “The visit showed us that if we [Argentineans] do not ‘adapt’ to the changes taking place in the world, we will be left behind by events,” she said.²¹

This essay concentrates in depth on Brazil and Argentina, the two most important Latin American trade partners of China. However, the smaller nations such as Uruguay and Ecuador also participated in these trends. The Pacific Coast countries of Panama, Chile, Peru, and Mexico rounded out the top six import and export destinations for China’s international commerce. Trade between all these countries and China grew exponentially between 1980 and 1997 (See the Table 1). For this analysis, however, one must explain what happened to the nation that refused to participate in China’s growing market opportunities. That is, Cuba.

20 “Interest in Chinese Markets Grows,” 10 Apr 1993, FBIS.

21 “Foreign Ministry Official Assesses PRC Visit,” 14 Oct 1991, FBIS.

Table 1. People's Republic of China: Import-Export Trade with the Americas, 1997

(Unit USD 1,000,000)

Argentina	1,186.5
Brazil	2,533.4
Chile	977.3
Cuba	255.3
Ecuador	157.8
Mexico	597.8
Panama	1,011.6
Peru	718.5
Uruguay	179.4
Venezuela	144.6
Other Latin America/Caribbean	614.2
Total Latin America/Caribbean	\$ 8,376.5
United States of America	\$ 49,016.4
Canada	\$ 3,913

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, [accessed 12 Dec 2019]

www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/yearlydata/YB1999e/q07e.htm

CUBA JOINS THE CHINESE OPENING

Despite his dependence on Soviet subsidies, Fidel Castro spoke to Kremlin officials with a frankness seldom displayed by Communist Party rulers in Eastern Europe. Soviet leaders especially felt Cuban criticism when they had to revise its relations to foreign dependencies in order to save the regime. Mikhail Gorbachev stoically endured a Castro denouncement of his policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) for their “dangerous deviations from Marxist-Leninism.” Already in April of 1989, Premier Gorbachev came to Havana to announce the end of all Soviet military aid to Cuba. Though he showed Gorbachev every courtesy, Castro was not happy with Soviet reforms (Keller 1989). Fidel had anticipated what would transpire when the full impact of the Soviet withdrawal set in. The Soviet Union was ending subsidies based on practical considerations, but Castro criticized Gorbachev on ideological grounds. In 1991, therefore, Fidel finally declared that Cuba had entered the “Special Period in Time of Peace,” just as his Caribbean nation felt the effects of the collapse of Cuba’s major trade and military partner, the USSR. Russian technicians and military advisers returned home, and Soviet foreign aid dried up. The island’s economy, never strongly self-supporting, declined precipitously. Electrical production and

transportation in Cuba shut down for lack of affordable Russian oil supplies. Unemployment spread, and the medical and educational infrastructure grew impoverished (Brown 2008, 250-265). The reasons for this radical policy change are not difficult to understand, given the economic crisis of the Soviet Union and the socialist governments in the Third World.

Fidel Castro and Cuba's socialist regime finally came around to engage positively with China. The Tianamen Square incident offered Havana the opportunity to recalibrate its relations with Beijing. While many nations criticized the PRC for its repression of the demonstrations in Tianamen, Castro leapt to its defense. China's foreign minister, Qian Qichen, came to Havana to a lavish reception. President Castro defended the Communist leadership, saying that it had no other choice to preserve socialism. This kind of "chaos and generalized anarchy [typified by the Tianamen demonstrations] could lead to civil war and to catastrophic consequences," the Cuban leader said (Cheng 2007a, 26-27). He sent off to Beijing a delegation of high officials of the Cuban Communist Party in October of 1989. Members of the Cuban Communist Party met with Deng Xiaoping. They stayed for ten days, attending the 40th anniversary observances celebrating the Communist Party's victory of 1949. President Jiang Zemin bid farewell to the Cubans. "We are anticipating with great enthusiasm Fidel Castro's visit to China."²² During the Special Period, Fidel Castro continued to moderate his hostility towards the PRC. In reorienting the Cuban economy to accept tourism, he compared the tepid Cuban reforms to the bolder restructuring undertaken by the Chinese. Tourism was a logical sector to develop because Cuba did not have oil like Kuwait, Fidel said. "But we can say that the opening we have made in the economic sphere is greater than the opening the Chinese made 10 years ago," he claimed with considerable exaggeration. "They very wisely did it gradually, and they have had great successes." Cuba's state television even began to broadcast Chinese political and cultural programming.²³ In 1995, Fidel Castro did visit China for the first time, although the Chinese leadership remained disappointed that the Cubans did not adopt many of China's "socialist market reforms" (Cheng 2007a, 30-35). Cuba's renewed trade with China, consequently, did not grow as rapidly as did that of most other Latin American nations.

22 "Lionel Soto Meets Deng Xiaoping in Beijing," 3 Oct 1989, FBIS; "Ends 10-Day Visit," 9 Oct 1989, FBIS.

23 "Castro Gives News Conference," 24 Feb 1993, FBIS; "Chinese President Cited on Party's Leading Role," 30 Sep 1994, FBIS.

CONCLUSION

The Chinese opening at the end of the twentieth century pleased political leaders in the Global South. Unlike prior experiences with the British and the Americans, the Latin Americans did not perceive the economic relationship with China as representing an unequal association between an “advanced economy” and a “backward economy.” Even though the Chinese had already earned acceptance as major world power, PRC delegations told Latin American officials that both parties were essentially equal in economic terms. Both China and Latin America had developing economies. In effect, they were partners in development, and trade between equal parties would be advantageous for both.

For another thing, officials of the PRC avoided the kind of interventionism that Latin American heads of state felt they experienced with Great Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States in the twentieth. When Wang Runsheng, the deputy minister of trade, greeted a delegation of Chilean diplomats to Beijing, he stated “We Chinese support all just causes since they are the ones that benefit the people, and we oppose foreign intervention because the domestic affairs of the nations must be resolved by their own peoples.”²⁴ Finally, China had become a major power on the world stage. Latin Americans empathized with its history of dismemberment and domination by foreign powers in the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. However, after the Communist victory of 1949, the People’s Republic had fought successfully against the United States in the Korean War and withstood the “big power chauvinism” of the Soviet Union. It was President Richard Nixon who, in 1972, had come to the homeland of Chairman Mao to seek an accommodation – not the other way around. The PRC had replaced Taiwan in representing all the Chinese peoples on the Security Council of the United Nations. Therefore, being the object of China’s attention made Latin Americans feel important. In this manner, China’s trade with Latin America expanded from practically nothing in 1978 to \$10 billion in the year 2000.²⁵

24 “Meeting with Rojas Galdames,” 20 Nov 1981, FBIS.

25 On Nixon’s trip to China, see Chen (2001, 273-276). China’s trade with Latin America grew from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$257 billion in 2013. Li (2017, 271). This expansion has not always been friction free, as one can learn from articles in the above publication and in the those of the *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Nov 2019). Among those frictions requiring future research is “sinocentrism.”

The Chinese approached the Global South mostly without the ideological baggage of the Cold War, save just one requirement. The new trading partners of the PRC had to accept the One-China policy. To export and import goods with mainland China, Latin American customers did have to delimit diplomatic relations with Taiwan.²⁶ The only other relic of the Cold War in Latin America was Washington's continuing blockade of the Cuban economy.

²⁶ My thanks for this observation from Li He by an email to the author on 30 Nov 2019.

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Article Received: 2020. 04. 08.
 Revised: 2020. 05. 19.
 Accepted: 2020. 05. 19.