

The “Hidden” Story of Latin America and China

The “Hidden” Story of Latin America and China

By

Stephen M. Hart

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



The “Hidden” Story of Latin America and China

By Stephen M. Hart

This book first published 2025

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2025 by Stephen M. Hart

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN: 978-1-0364-5898-0

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-5899-7

For Belle, Olive, Alba, Remy and Clara

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	23
Chinese vs. Maya Time: A Borgesian Approach	
Chapter 2	78
Tegualda Lost in Translation	
Chapter 3	101
Orientalism in Latin America	
Chapter 4	125
National vs. International Literature	
Chapter 5	157
César Vallejo's Political Sublime	
Chapter 6	189
Magical Realism's Post-Truth	
Chapter 7	210
Searching for the "Real" in the Twenty-First Century Video Game	
Conclusion: Latin America as a "Melting Pot"?.....	232
Bibliography	236
Index	262

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1 Korean Map
Figure 2 Close-up of Korean Map
Figure 3 Fantina Polo Map, No. 1
Figure 4 First page of Joseph de Guignes’s paper, “Recherches sur les Navigations des Chinois du côté de l’Amérique & quelques Peuples situés à l’extrémité orientale de l’Asie”
Figure 5 Philippe Buache’s map
Figure 6 Antonio Zetta’s map
Figure 7 Detail of Antonio Zetta’s map
Figure 8 The Mexican calendar as reproduced by Humboldt
Figure 9 Payson Vinson’s map of the Chinese voyage to the Yucatan
Figure 10 Elliptical Refraction of World Literature
Figure 11 From Drama and Poetry to World Literature
Figure 12 First folio of the typescript of “Al revés de las aves del monte...”
Figure 13 Second folio of the typescript of “Al revés de las aves del monte...”
Figure 14 “Memorias de Juan Luis Velázquez”
Figure 15 Video game genres and sub-genres
Figure 16 Moments before Calvin Finch’s death
Figure 17 Moments before Lewis Finch’s death
Figure 18 Moments before Gregory Finch’s death

INTRODUCTION

The Chancay Port vs. the Panama Canal

On 14 November 2024 the Chancay Port project in Peru, supported by an investment of US\$4bn by Chinese companies, was officially opened. The inauguration occurred during the Summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum which was hosted by Peru at that time.¹ The inauguration ceremony was attended by the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, and Peru's President, Dina Boluarte, both of whom spoke of its potential to radically transform economic trade within the Pacific region. Chancay is now the largest deepwater port on the western coast of South America and it can handle the ships that are currently too big for the Panama Canal. It has cut shipping times from China in half, that is, by up to 20 days. China's ambassador to Peru described the new port as the "Shanghai of South America", and Peru's transport minister stated that the goal is for Chancay to become the "Singapore of Latin America".² The first boat to set sail from Chancay Port, the *Xin Shanghai*, arrived in Shanghai on 18 December 2024, after a 23-day journey, opening up a new two-way operational sea link between Shanghai and Chancay, as part of the Belt and Road cooperation between China and Peru.³

But the U.S. hit back almost immediately. On 22 January 2025, barely a month after the Chancay Port opened, President Trump – stung into action

¹ <https://andina.pe/Ingles/noticia-peru-to-host-apec-2024-summit-our-country-will-deepen-position-in-asiapacific-880512.aspx>

² Lea Thome, "Chancay port opens as China's gateway to South America", *AidData's Blog* (14 November 2024); <https://www.aiddata.org/blog/chancay-port-opens-as-chinas-gateway-to-south-america>

³ The State Council of the PRC, "First vessel from Peru's Chancay Port reaches Shanghai" (19 December 2024); https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202412/19/content_WS6763698cc6d0868f4e8ee17c.html.

by what he perceives as a threat to the US's trade relations with Latin America – accused China of taking control of the Panama Canal, and he threatened to “take back” control, unless something was done about this. As a result, Panama has agreed to withdraw from membership of China's Belt and Road initiative, which it had signed up to in 2017.⁴ This spat between China and the US is one cog in the larger syntax of deeply-embedded rivalry between the two nations, which is being played out in a number of fields, including trade, politics, diplomacy, business investment, infrastructure, military technology, space travel, the media, education, sport, digital technology (including AI), tourism, culture, and even video games. What this spat does show, however, is that Latin America has by now become a major player within that rivalry. Gone are the days when it was a spectator of a powerful game played on foreign shores. It is now – clearly – in the game.

How did this happen? Even just 20 years ago, this type of scenario was unthinkable. What this book proposes to do is to think through how this volte-face in world affairs has occurred. I will not be taking the obvious route – that is, by studying the trade boom that has occurred between Latin America and China over the last two decades. This, as we shall note, has already been done. What I want to do is to drill down a bit deeper into that relationship, avoid short-termism, and evaluate some of the tensions and concordances that have characterized the relationship between Latin America and China over a broader period of time. Ask questions such as: did the Chinese visit Latin America before Christopher Columbus? What form did Orientalism take in Latin America? What did Latin America's most important writer, Jorge Luis Borges, think of China?

Backdrop

But before we delve into questions of this type, we need to provide some backdrop on the impact that events of the last 20 years of so have had on the relationship between Latin America and China. Though the original

⁴ Samantha Waldenberg and Michael Rios, “Trump reiterates threat to retake Panama Canal ‘or something very powerful will happen’”, CNN (2 February 2025); <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/02/02/americas/panama-china-belt-and-road-initiative-rubio-visits-intl-latam/index.html> (consulted on 01/03/2025).

connection between China and Latin America was – according to the traditional version – via the Maritime Silk Route, initiated by Emperor Wan Li of the Ming Dynasty (1572–1620), it was only in the 21st century that it really took off when President Xi Jinping visited Latin American and Caribbean countries no less than thirteen times in just five years during the period 2013–2018. Between 2005 and 2020, Chinese banks dished out more than \$137 billion in loans to the region and most of the countries of Latin America have now joined China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global strategy centred on developing infrastructure projects around the world; an example of this project is the impressive “Kise” hydropower station being built jointly by China and Argentina. And, more recently, this trade has expanded even more. According to China’s General Administration of Customs, the trade volume between China and Latin America and the Caribbean exceeded \$450 billion in 2021, and increased by 12.5% in 2022. Foreign direct investment from China in Mexico alone has amounted to close to US\$1bn in the last four years.⁵

China is now the main trading partner of Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay and the second-largest trading partner of several other countries in Latin America. It has free trade agreements with Chile, Costa Rica, Peru and Ecuador (the latter signed on 11 May 2023).⁶ China recently signed a massive trade agreement with Brazil, which included the inaugural introduction of China’s mature wind turbine equipment in Latin America; the LDB Wind Power Expansion Project is helping the two countries to work together in the field of green and low-carbon economic construction.⁷ As a result of this project China and Brazil have decided to ditch the need to have the US dollar as an intermediary.⁸ The Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva paid a return visit to China in March 2023 accompanied

⁵ http://www.china.org.cn/world/2023-03/11/content_85161207.htm

⁶ <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202305/11/WS645c842aa310b6054fad268d.html>

⁷ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2023-01-25/China-Latin-America-ties-to-enter-new-era-of-equality-mutual-benefit-1gSmJFPqi52/index.html>

⁸ “China, Brazil reach agreement to ditch intermediary US dollar”, *China Daily* (30 March 2023); [Chinadaily.com.cn](http://chinadaily.com.cn).

by a delegation of 240 business representatives.⁹ On 22 November 2023, President Xi Jinping held talks at the Great Hall of the People with President of Uruguay Luis Lacalle Pou on his state visit to China,¹⁰ and on 6 November 2023 he met with Cuban Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz.¹¹ Underpinning these visits are a series of major investments by China in Latin America's infrastructure; as noted above, Chinese companies invested around \$160bn in Latin America between 2000 and 2024.¹² There are no signs that this investment is likely to decrease in the coming years.

Literature Review

In the last two decades the new trade relationship between China and Latin America has led to an explosion of studies on the subject. In the period 2006-early 2025, 85 monographs were published on the subject of bilateral relations between China and Latin America, and the break-down was as follows.

Politics & economics¹³ (73 volumes) = 86%

⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazils-lula-go-china-with-240-business-representatives-says-official-2023-03-17/>

¹⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-xi-meets-uruguay-president-upgrades-ties-2023-11-22/>

¹¹ http://gb.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202311/t20231115_11180720.hofftm

¹² <https://www.fdiintelligence.com/content/feature/chinas-growing-footprint-in-latin-america-82014>

¹³ Robert Devlin et al., *The Emergence of China: Opportunities and Challenges for Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington D.C.: IDB, 2006); Javier Santiso, *The Visible Hand of China in Latin America* (Paris: OECD Development Centre, 2007); Yingming Li, *全球化時代下的台灣和兩岸關係* (Taiwan and cross-strait relations in the informational era) (Tapei City: National ChengChi University, 2007); D. Denoon, *The Economic and Strategic Rise of China and India: Realignments after the 1997 Financial Crisis* (London: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2007); Riordan Roett and Guadalupe Paz, *China's Expansion into the Western Hemisphere: Implications for Latin America and the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2008); World Bank, *China's and India's Challenge to Latin America: opportunity or threat?* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2008); Evan Ellis, *China in Latin America: The Whats and Wherefores* (Boulder, CO: Lienne Rienner, 2009); Alex E. Fernández Jilberto, *Latin America Facing China: South-South Relations Beyond the Washington Consensus* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2010); S.N. Yadav, *India, China and Latin America – Strategic, Economic and Political Perspectives* (Delhi: Jnanada Prakashan, 2010); Adrian H.

Hearn, *China Engages Latin America: Tracing the Trajectory* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2011); Marc Alexander Wende, *China's Economic Expansion in Latin America* (Riga, Latvia: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2011); Gaston Fornes, *The China-Latin America Axis: Emerging Markets* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Osvaldo Rosales, *China and Latin America and the Caribbean: Building a Strategic Economic and Trade Relationship* (New York, NY: United Nations, 2012); Julia C. Strauss, *From the Great Wall to the New World: China and Latin America in the 21st century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Wu Baiyi et al., *China-Latin America Relations: Review and Analysis* (Reading: Paths International, 2012); Matthew Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America* (London: Routledge, 2012); Kathleen M. Lopez, *Chinese Cubans: A Translational History* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Hardy Alfredo Toro, *World Turned Upside Down: Complex Partnership between China and Latin America* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2013); Manolo Constaín, *La República Popular China y América Latina* (London: Editorial Académica Española 2014); E. Ellis, *China on the Ground in Latin America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Lucia Dubajová, *China's Modern Geopolitical Strategy in Latin America after 1990* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2014); Juan Antonio Fernández, *América Latina en China* (Tokyo: Bunko, 2015); Guido Zambrano, *Llegaron los chinos* (Autoproduct, 2015); Kevin P. Gallagher, *The China Triangle: Latin America's China Boom and the Fate of the Washington Consensus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Yanran Xu, *China's Strategic Partnerships in Latin America* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016); Margaret Myers and Carol Wise, *The Political Economy of China-Latin America Relations in the New Millennium* (London: Routledge, 2016); Shoujun Cui and Manuel Pérez García, *China and Latin America in Transition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Rebecca Ray et al., *China and Sustainable Development in Latin America* (London: Anthem Press, 2016); Riordan Roett, *Latin America and the Asian Giants: Evolving Ties with China and India* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016); Zhenxing Su and Hongling Zhao, *China and Latin America: Economic and Trade Cooperation in the Next Ten Years* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2017); Luis Alberto Lacalle Herrera, *América Latina: Entre Trump y China* (Madrid: Alfaragua, 2017); Gaston Fornes and Alvaro Méndez, *The China-Latin American Axis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Rhys Jenkins, *How China is Reshaping the Global Economy: Development Impacts in Africa and Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Darcel George, *China's Use of Soft Power in Latin America* (Autoproduct, 2018); Daniel Méndez-Moran, *136: el plan de China en América Latina* (Autoproduct, 2018); Wenyuan Wu, *Chinese Oil Enterprises in Latin America: Corporate Social Responsibility* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Zhen Yang and Juan Jesús Guanche Pérez, *China-América Latina y el Caribe: Memoria, actualidad y perspectiva* (London: Editorial Académica Española, 2019); Bibian Katherine Cuéllar Castro, *La inserción de China en América Latina* (London: Editorial Académica Española, 2019); Miguel Fuentes Cervantes, *Foreign Policy Responses to China's Growing Presence in Latin America: The Case of Chile, Ecuador and*

Peru (Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2019); Eddie Tapiero, *La Ruta de la Seda y Panamá* (Autoproduct, 2019); December Green, *Contentious Politics in Brazil and China: Beyond Regime* (London: Routledge, 2019); Enrique Dussel Peters et al., *China's Foreign Direct Investment in Latin America and the Caribbean: Conditions and Challenges* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 2019); Jhon Valdíglesias, *State Institutional Determinants for China's Intermediate Goals: Comparison with Latin America and Peru* (Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2019); Scott W. Harold, *Countering China's Efforts to Isolate Taiwan Diplomatically in Latin America and the Caribbean* (St Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2019); Raúl Bernal-Meza et al., *China-Latin America Relations in the 21st Century: The Dual Complexities of Opportunities and Challenges* (New York, NY: Springer/International Political Economy Series, 2020); Barbara Stallings, *Dependency in the Twenty-First Century? The Political Economy of China-Latin America Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Alejandro Carlos Uscanga Prieto, *Política exterior y estrategias económicas de Japón, China y Corea del Sur en América Latina para el siglo XXI* (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2020); Carol Wise, *Dragonomics: How Latin America is Maximising (or Missing Out on) China's International Development Strategy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020); Nele Noesselt, *China's Interactions with Latin America and the Caribbean: Conquering the US's Strategic Backyard?* (Baden-Baden: Tectum Verlag, 2020); Alvaro Méndez et. al, *The Political Economy of China-Latin America Relations: The AIIB Membership* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2021); He Li et al., *Taiwan's Relations with Latin America: A Strategic Rivalry between the United States, China and Taiwan* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2021); Andrés López, *China en América Latina* (London: Charlie Books, 2021); Monica DeHart, *Transpacific Developments: The Politics of Multiple Chinas in Central America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2021); Thierry Kellner et al., *China-Latin America and the Caribbean: Assessment and Outlook* (London: Routledge, 2021); Paths International, *China and Latin America: Paths to Overcoming the Middle-Income Trap* (Paths Internaional, 2021); Stephen B. Kaplan, *Globalizing Patient Capital: The Political Economy of Chinese Finance in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Evan Ellis, *China Engages Latin America: Distorting Development and Democracy?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); Barbara Solomon, *Other Voices, Other Vistas: China, India, Japan, and Latin America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2022); Pamela Aróstica, *China y América Latina en una nueva fase* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria de Chile, 2022); Máximo Badaró, *China in Argentina: Ethnographies of a Global Expansion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); Dorotea López et. al, *China's Trade Policy in Latin America: Puzzles, Transformations and Impacts* (Singapore: Springer, 2022); Chiara Olivieri et al., *East Asia, Latin America and the Decolonization of Transpacific Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2022); European Union, *Trade Aspects of China's Presence in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Bruxelles: European Union, 2022); Aaron Schneider et al., *China, Latin America and the Global Economy: Economic, Historical, and National Issues* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); Chris Alden et al., *China and Latin America:*

Military (4 volumes)¹⁴ = 5%
 History (4 volumes)¹⁵ = 5%
 Culture¹⁶ (2 volumes) = 2%
 Literature¹⁷ (2 volumes) = 2%

Development, Agency and Geopolitics (London: Zed Books, 2023); Guadalupe Paz et al., *La presencia de China en el hemisferio occidental: consecuencias para América Latina y Estados Unidos* (Buenos Aires: Libros del Zorzal, 2023); Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, *China’s Role in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Senate, 2023); Virginia Pérez Pérez, *Relación China-Venezuela: Consecuencias para América Latina* (Autoproduct, 2023); Ricardo Lagos et al., *La Nueva Soledad de América Latina* (Santiago, Chile: Debate, 2023); Agustín Barletti, *El Hambre del Dragón: El plan de China para comerse el mundo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Autores de Argentina, 2023); Hugh Peyman, *America as No. 3: Get Real About China, India and the Rest* (Singapore: WSPC, 2023); Casandra R. Veney and Sabella O. Abidde (ed.), *China and Taiwan in Latin America and the Caribbean: History, Power Rivalry and Regional Implications* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024); Li Xing et al., *China-US Rivalry and Regional Reordering in Latin America and the Caribbean* (London: Routledge, 2024); Erik Andres, *United States National Security Concerns with Chinese Artificial Intelligence Initiatives in Latin America: How China’s Tech Expansion Threatens U.S. Influence* (Autoproduct, 2025).

¹⁴ Evan Ellis, *China-Latin America Military Engagement: Good Will, Good Business, and Strategic Position* (CreateSpace Independent, 2013); Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere... House of representatives, *China’s Advance in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: House of Representatives, 2015); U.S. Army Command, *China and Latin America: The Other Option* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Command, 2018); Alexander Odishelidze, *America’s Last Fortress: Puerto Rico’s Sovereignty, China’s Caribbean Belt and Road, and America’s National Security* (San Fernando: Caribbean Horizons, 2022).

¹⁵ Arnold J. Meagher, *The Coolie Trade: The Traffic in Chinese Laborers to Latin America 1847-1874* (Xibris Corporation, 2008); Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Peter Gordon et al., *The Silver Way: China, Spanish America and the Birth of Globalization, 1565-1815* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2017); Meha Priyadarshini, *Chinese Porcelain in Colonial Mexico: The Material Worlds of an Early Modern Trade* (London: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2018).

¹⁶ Romer Cornejo, *La política cultural de China en América Latina* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2018); Enrique Dussell Peters, *China-Latin America and the Caribbean: Infrastructure, Connectivity, and Everyday Life* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 2023).

¹⁷ María Montt Strabucchi, *Representations of China in Latin American Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023); Rosario Hubert, *China, Latin America, and the Shape of World Literature* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2023).

Some of the books published in the last twenty years on the Latin America-China connection have a long-view approach. Peter Gordon and Juan José Morales's study, *The Silver Way* (2017), is an excellent example. They analyse the impact of Andrés de Urdaneta's role in creating the so-called "Ruta de la Plata" ("The Silver Way") that brought the Americas and China together via the maritime journey across the Pacific Ocean. He did this in 1565, by sailing to the Americas from China. By 1580 forty to eighty Chinese junks were arriving from southern China to the Americas, and the world's first global trade network linking the Americas, Europe and the East soon came into being.¹⁸ But the lion's share (86%) of the research focusses on the (extraordinary) trade boom that has sprung up in the last twenty years between China and Latin America.

We could argue that most of these titles suffer from short-termism. We need to remember, after all, that relations between China and Latin America did not emerge *ex nihilo* 15 years ago. A similar story is voiced by many of these books which are written in reaction to an enormously significant turn in the world economy as China has taken the decision to invest heavily in Latin America, with a preponderance of investment in Brazil, Peru and Mexico, even though the investment in other corners of Latin America is also significant – and this had a noticeable impact on geopolitical tensions in the region, as suggested by the recent spat referred to above featuring the Panama Canal vs. the Chancay port.

A significant number of works have addressed, in particular, the link between political agency and trade. An early study was Sergio M. Cesarín and Carlos Moneta's *China y América Latina* (2005), which focussed on China's new-found wealth, economic reform, and the interest in working together with Latin American countries on development, energy and technology issues.¹⁹ Riordan Roett and Guadalupe Paz assemble 11 essays in their study *La presencia de China en el hemisferio occidental* (2009), in order to focus on the meteoric growth of the Chinese economy and the

¹⁸ Peter Gordon and Juan José Morales, *The Silver Way: China, Spanish America and the Birth of Globalization, 1565-1815* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2017).

¹⁹ Sergio Cesarín and Carlos Moneta (ed.), *China y América Latina: nuevos enfoques sobre cooperación y desarrollo: ¿Una segunda Ruta de la Seda?* (Buenos Aires: Instituto para la integración de América Latina y el Caribe, 2005).

strong growth of its trade with a number of Latin American countries, which has led to new questions about how the triangular relationship between Latin America, the United States and China would develop in future years.²⁰ Kevin P. Gallagher, in *The China Triangle* (2016), for his part, tracks how in the twenty-first century China and the United States have been vying with each other to become Latin America’s main trade partner.²¹ As Gallagher shows, the competition with China gives Latin America more bargaining power with the United States, and has the potential to produce trilateral agreements benefiting all three players. Riordan Roett and Guadalupe Paz’s second and more comprehensive collection of essays on *Latin America and the Asian Giants* (2016) brings together 13 essays that assess the dominant economic impact that China had on Latin America in the first decade of the twenty-first century – to such an extent that it has been called “Latin America’s China decade” – which has been somewhat tempered by the growing importance played by India in the Latin American market in the following decade.²² For their part, Shoujun Cui and Manuel Pérez García, in *China and Latin America in Transition* (2016), assemble 12 essays that focus on the tight industrial synergy that has characterized the relations between China and Latin America in the twenty-first century.²³

David B.H. Denoon (ed.), *China’s Grand Strategy* (2021), focusses on three areas (national security, economic and technological development, and diplomacy) in order to focus on China’s strategy in the twenty-first century.²⁴ Denoon’s collection of essays suggest that, while commentary on China was overwhelmingly positive from 1990 to 2010 in terms of its

²⁰ Riordan Roett and Guadalupe Paz (ed.), *La presencia de China en el hemisferio occidental: Consecuencias para América Latina y Estados Unidos* (Buenos Aires: Zorzal, 2009).

²¹ Kevin P. Gallagher, *The China Triangle: Latin America’s China Boom and the Fate of the Washington Consensus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²² Riordan Roett and Guadalupe Paz (ed.), *Latin America and the Asian Giants: Evolving Ties with China and India* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016).

²³ Shoujun Cui and Manuel Pérez García (ed.), *China and Latin America in Transition: Policy Dynamics, Economic Commitments and Social Impacts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

²⁴ David B.H. Denoon (ed.), *China’s Grand Strategy: A Roadmap to Global Power?* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2021).

growth and transformation into a modern society, the mood has begun to shift in the United States since 2010, and issues such as China's trade surplus, its treatment of intellectual property and its occupation of atolls in the South China Sea have emerged as flashpoints of tension. The European Parliament's document, *Trade aspects of China's presence in Latin America and the Caribbean* (2022) sounds a similar warning note. It notes that, over the last 20 years, China has become the second largest trading partner of Latin America and the Caribbean. Between 2000 and 2020, China's trade with Latin America grew 26-fold from US\$12 billion to US\$310 billion. It suggests that, although Latin America has profited from an expansion in economic trade with China, the asymmetrical dependence of Latin American countries on China is problematic. It proposes that the EU should offer a strategic partnership with Latin America based on fair and sustainable trade and technological and political cooperation.²⁵

There are, as one might expect, some flashpoints in all of this, one of them being Taiwan. Yingming Li, for example, in his study *全球化時代下的台灣和兩岸關係* (*Taiwan and cross-strait relations in the informational era*; 2007), suggests that the strategic importance of Taiwan for China's future has been enhanced as a result of the information age in which we all now live in the twenty-first century.²⁶ Monica DeHart's *Transpacific Developments* (2021) is a well-argued and resonant book on a number of pressing issues that join and divide China and Latin America, including diasporic communities, Taiwan, infrastructure, trade and corruption.²⁷ For its part *China and Taiwan in Latin America and the Caribbean* (2024), edited by Cassandra R. Veney and Sabella O. Abidde, brings together 15 essays on China's and Taiwan's continuing engagement with countries in Latin

²⁵ European Union, *Trade Aspects of China's Presence in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Bruxelles: European Union, 2022).

²⁶ Yingming Li, *全球化時代下的台灣和兩岸關係* (*Taiwan and cross-strait relations in the informational era*; Beijing: Chu ban, 2007).

²⁷ Monica DeHart, *Transpacific Developments: The Politics of Multiple Chinas in Central America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2021).

America and the Caribbean, and their implications as a result of the rivalry between the United States and China; Taiwan is very much part of the mix.²⁸

Cultural and Literary Links Between Latin America and China

While the economic and commercial relationship between Latin America and China has dominated the headlines, there has been a steadily growing group of scholars devoting themselves to the cultural and literary links between them, often via the filter of orientalism. These include works by Julia Kushigian,²⁹ Araceli Tinajero (ed.),³⁰ Debbie Lee-DiStefano,³¹ Axel Gasquet,³² Chisu Teresa Ko,³³ Amanda Holmes,³⁴ Ignacio López-Calvo,³⁵ Robin Fiddian,³⁶ and Shlomy Mualem.³⁷ One recent study stands out in this field and this is María Montt Strabucchi’s canonic study, *Representations of China in Latin American Literature (1987-2016)*.³⁸ In her study

²⁸ Cassandra R. Veney and Sabella O. Abidde (ed.), *China and Taiwan in Latin America and the Caribbean: History, Power Rivalry, and Regional Implications* (London: Springer Nature, 2024).

²⁹ Julia Kushigian, *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition: In Dialogue with Borges, Paz, and Sarduy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991).

³⁰ *Orientalisms of the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian World*, edited by Araceli Tinajero (New York: Escibana Books, 2014).

³¹ Debbie Lee-DiStefano, *Three Asian-Hispanic Writers from Peru: Doris Moromisato, José Watanabe, Siu Kam Wen* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

³² Axel Gasquet, *Oriente al sur: El orientalismo literario argentino de Esteban Echeverría a Roberto Arlt* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2007).

³³ Chisu Teresa Ko, “Between Foreigners and Heroes: Asian-Argentines in Multicultural Nation”, in *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, edited by Eduardo Elena and Paulina L. Alberto (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 268–88.

³⁴ Amanda Holmes, “China in Argentine *Exotismo*: Contemporary Inventions of the Orient”, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 85.1 (2008), 71–83.

³⁵ Ignacio López-Calvo, *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008).

³⁶ Robin Fiddian, “*El Oriente* by Jorge Luis Borges: A Poetic Boutique and Emblem of the East”, *Romanic Review*, 98.2/3 (2007), 189–203.

³⁷ Shlomy Mualem, “Imaginative Geography: Dialectical Orientalism in Borges”, *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 6.1 (2016), 131–51.

³⁸ María Montt Strabucchi, *Representations of China in Latin American Literature (1987-2016)* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023).

Strabucchi provides a comprehensive study of a number of contemporary Latin American novels in which the Chinese theme is prominent, including *Una novela china* (1987) by the Argentine author César Aira (1987); *La mujer en la Muralla* (1990) by (also Argentine) Alberto Laiseca; *La escuela del dolor humano de Sechuán* (2001) by Peruvian-Mexican Mario Bellatin (2001); Eduardo Berti's *El país imaginado* (2011); *Un chino en bicicleta* (2007) by the Argentine Ariel Magnus; *El mármol* (2011) by César Aira, *Verde Shanghai* (2011) by Mexican author Cristina Rivera Garza; *Asesinato en una lavandería china* (1996) by Juan José Rodríguez; *59 Ojos de Lagarto* (2009) by the Mexican Bernardo Fernández; *El misterio del Barrio Chino* (2013) by the Peruvian José Güich Rodríguez; *Chinardos* (2014) by the Argentine Fernando del Río; *La casa del dolor ajeno* by the Mexican author Julián Herbert (2015); *Tacos altos* (2016) by the Argentine author Federico Jeanmaire; *Los impostores* (2002) and *Hotel Pekín* (2008), both by the Colombian Santiago Gamboa; *El ombligo del dragón* (2007) by Mexican author Ximena Sánchez Echenique; and *Shanghai* (2011, 2013, 2014), later published as *Los ojos de una ciudad china* (2016), by the Uruguayan author Gabriel Peveroni.

Soft Power vs. Hard Power in US-Latin America-China Trilateral Relations

An important component of the discussion about China's present and future role in Latin America relates to the question of whether China sees itself as rehearsing for a future adoption of the same role in Latin America's destiny that other countries such as Spain, Britain and the United States have played in the past in Latin America.³⁹ Some commentators have argued that, even if this does happen in the future, China's role would be different because of its reliance on Soft Power. In a thoughtful article published in 2018, "The Rise and Fall of Soft Power", Eric Li argued that Soft Power, a term first used in 1990,⁴⁰ was running out of steam, and that the only country that was

³⁹ Some of the ideas contained in this section of the essay were presented in a lecture given in the Latin American Centre, Oxford University, on 23 October 2018.

⁴⁰ The term "Soft Power" was first used by Joseph S. Nye in 1990; see his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990). The term and the theory underpinning it soon became a common linguistic currency within the discussion of diplomatic relationships and international relations.

still taking it seriously was China: “It [China] integrated itself into the post-World War II international order by expanding deep and broad cultural and economic ties with virtually all countries in the world. It is now the largest trading nation in the world and in history. But it steadfastly refused to become a customer of the West’s Soft Power. It engineered its own highly complex transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, yet it refused to allow the market to rise above the state.”⁴¹ Rather paradoxically, this did not mean that China does not believe in Soft Power; rather it created its own version, one that diverged from the western mould, as Li argues:

China is now refocusing from Hard Power to Soft, even as the rest of the world has seemed to go in the opposite direction. President Xi Jinping, for example, has called for “a community of shared destiny,” in which nations are allowed their own development paths while working to increase interconnectedness. (...) It is a new potential Soft Power proposition: “You don’t have to want to be like us, you don’t have to want what we want; you can participate in a new form of globalization while retaining your own culture, ideology, and institutions.”⁴²

Though Li mentions that China has a very broad spectrum of trade and economic partners it is clear that Latin America has a special role to play in China’s vision for the future. As we have already noted, in terms of its trade and its investment portfolio China has a special interest in Latin America.

There is an important question lurking behind all of these points: will China be any different in terms of its treatment of Latin America than other nations? China’s engagement with the Spanish-speaking and the Portuguese-speaking countries of Latin America is, after all, the latest in a line of nations who have “interacted” with Latin America in the last 500 years. Those interactions have taken the form of direct military conquest

Nye further refined this concept in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004). Soft Power is here understood to mean the influence which co-opts rather than coerces (i.e. by hard military power) and aims to shape the opinion of others through culture, political values and foreign policies.

⁴¹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power/>

⁴² <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power/>

(Spain, 1492-1810s), being the main external actor in Latin America's economic and to some degree political affairs (Britain, 1806-1898),⁴³ including limited invasions (Cuba 1762-63; Argentina 1806; Uruguay 1897), and being the main external actor in Latin America's political and economic affairs (United States, 1898-present day), including invasions (Puerto Rico and Cuba, 1898; Mexico 1914-1918; Haiti 1915-1934; Guatemala 1954; Cuba 1961; Dominican Republic 1965; Nicaragua 1981-1990; Grenada 1983; Panama 1989). As an aside we should bear in mind, as Gerald Martin points out, that this changing of the guard was mainly as a result of Britain's self-removal from Latin America at that time: "unlike Britain, the United States had an hegemonic project in Latin America which Britain, in view of its declining economic and military power, world-wide commitments, different priorities and, not least, 'special relationship' with United States, chose not to resist".⁴⁴

So, are China's overtures to Latin America just a slightly tweaked version of the military, trade and investment-based colonialism Latin America experienced in the past from Spain, Britain and the United States? Or can it be genuinely seen as a new type of Soft Power or cultural diplomacy? One intriguing difference is China's attitude towards culture and – though it is not mentioned by Li – the palpable difference in China's attitude towards language. Anglocentrism has arguably been a consistently core ingredient of British and US colonialism,⁴⁵ but an exclusive focus on Chinese – that is, the exclusive use of the Chinese language – has not been in evidence in China's dealings with Latin American countries. In 2018 a significant change occurred in China's educational system. In that year China's

⁴³ As Leslie Bethell points out, "for more than a century, from the Napoleonic Wars and, more especially from the dramatic events of 1807-08 in the Iberian Peninsula which eventually led to the breakup of the American empires of both Spain and Portugal – Britain was the external actor in the economic and, to a lesser extent, the political affairs of Latin America"; see his essay, "Britain and Latin America in historical perspective", in *Britain and Latin America: A Changing Relationship*, ed. Victor Bulmer-Thomas (Cambridge: CUP, 1979), pp. 1- 24 (p. 1).

⁴⁴ Gerald Martin, "Britain's cultural relations with Latin America", in *Britain and Latin America: a changing relationship*, pp. 27-51 (p. 21). See also David Thomas, "The United States factor in British relations with Latin America", in *Britain and Latin America: a changing relationship*, pp. 68-82.

⁴⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglocentrism>

Ministry of Education included Spanish language instruction as an optional foreign language in high school, alongside French and German. The following year, Spanish was included as an option in the national college entrance exam.⁴⁶ This was quite a sea-change. Before this point, not many university students thought much further beyond English. Indeed, by not requiring those Latin Americans who will benefit from China’s investment in infrastructure projects in Latin America to learn Chinese, and by investing in the teaching of foreign languages such as Spanish and Portuguese in its own schools and universities, China may have stumbled on one of the keys to a successful programme of co-designed investment in foreign countries.

Soft Power and Translating Poetry

Can artistic culture be used proactively in the Soft Power process? In a class on Latin American culture and literature I gave at Hunan Normal University in the Autumn Term 2023, I tried this out in a literary experiment involving the translation between Spanish and Chinese. We used one of César Vallejo’s poems, “Los desgraciados” (“The Unfortunates”) as a test-case, and we drew on the excellent translation into Chinese of this poem provided by Zhao Zhengjiang in his 2013 edition of *Poemas humanos* published in 2013.⁴⁷ Vallejo’s poem was written at some time between the end of November and the first week of December 1937. In another poem “Al revés de las aves del monte...” (“Contrary to the Mountain Birds...”) dated 20 November 1937, Vallejo refers to events that were occurring at that time in China. Give this temporal overlap, we decided to adopt the methodology of “critical fabulation” as proposed by Sadiya Hartman, and posit the addressees of “The Unfortunates” as potentially including the Chinese

⁴⁶ <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202208/03/WS62e9d064a310fd2b29e6ff71.html#:~:text=Some%20middle%20schools%20have%20also,trend%20is%20growing%2C%20she%20added.>

⁴⁷ César Vallejo: *Poemas humanos: antología poética*, translated by Zhao Zhengjiang (Beijing: Ren Lingyun Publishing and Distribution Company, 2013).

subaltern.⁴⁸ The following Chinese version of the poem was created by 卢卡 (Lucas Chu), one of the students in the class:

Los desgraciados

Ya va a venir el día; da
cuerda a tu brazo, búscate debajo
del colchón, vuelve a pararte
en tu cabeza, para andar derecho.
Ya va a venir el día, ponte el saco.

Ya va a venir el día; ten
fuerte en la mano a tu intestino grande, reflexiona
antes de meditar, pues es horrible
cuando le cae a uno la desgracia
y se le cae a uno a fondo el diente.

Necesitas comer, pero, me digo,
no tengas pena, que no es de pobres
la pena, el sollozar junto a su tumba;
remiéndale, recuerda,
confía en tu hilo blanco, fuma, pasa lista
a tu cadena y guárdala detrás de tu retrato.
Ya va a venir el día, ponte el alma.

Ya va a venir el día; pasan,
han abierto en el hotel un ojo,
azotándolo, dándole con un espejo tuyo...
¿Tiemblas? Es el estado remoto de la frente
y la nación reciente del estómago.
Roncan aún... ¡Qué universo se lleva este ronquido!
¡Cómo quedan tus poros, enjuiciándolo!
¡Con cuántos doses ¡ay! estás tan solo!
Ya va a venir el día, ponte el sueño.

不幸的人们

白天就要来了：快
给手臂上好发条，好好的在枕垫下
翻找，让你的头脑
站稳脚跟，才能笔直地行走。
白天就要来了，把上衣披上吧。

白天就要来了：把
你的大肠用力握在手中，先想想
再迂思回虑，因为令人难忍的
正是不幸临头，
牙齿坠落之时。

你需要吃饭，但是，我思索道，
你不必伤痛，因为轮不到穷人们
于伤痛下，在自己的坟前抽泣：
振作起来吧，要记住，
相信你面前的那缕白线，抽口烟，清点
你的枷锁并将其收在你的肖像后面。
白天就要来了，把灵魂安放好吧。

白天就要来了：路过，
酒店已开了一扇窗眼，
鞭笞着他，将一面镜子置于其前……
你在颤抖？这是你额前的遥远国度
和胃里的新生国家所致。
他们鼾声依旧……寰宇何处能带走这鼾声！
承受这番控诉，你的毛孔怎能安歇！
多少人成双而行，唉！你却孤苦伶仃！
白天就要来了，把梦景安放好吧。

⁴⁸ Sadiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007). Hartman argues that historical records are often filled with gaps, especially when portraying the lives of subaltern people. In order to redress history's omissions, Hartman uses storytelling to imagine not only what was, but also what could be, and I argue here that this approach is appropriate for an understanding of Vallejo's poem. She named this process of recuperation of lost history "critical fabulation".

Ya va a venir el día, repito
 por el órgano oral de tu silencio
 y urge tomar la izquierda con el hambre
 y tomar la derecha con la sed; de todos modos,
 abstente de ser pobre con los ricos,
 atiza
 tu frío, porque en él se integra mi calor, amada víctima.
 Ya va a venir el día, ponte el cuerpo.

Ya va a venir el día;
 la mañana, la mar, el meteoro, van
 en pos de tu cansancio, con banderas,
 y, por tu orgullo clásico, las hienas
 cuentan sus pasos al compás del asno,
 la panadera piensa en ti,
 el carnicero piensa en ti, palpando
 el hacha en que están presos
 el acero y el hierro y el metal; jamás olvides
 que durante la misa no hay amigos.
 Ya va a venir el día, ponte el sol.

Ya viene el día; dobla
 el aliento, triplica
 tu bondad rencorosa
 y da codos al miedo, nexo y énfasis,
 pues tú, como se observa en tu entrepierna y siendo
 el malo ¡ay! inmortal,
 has soñado esta noche que vivías
 de nada y morías de todo...

白天就要来了，我
 经由你口腔里的空寂重申
 你在焦急中带着饥饿向左
 带着干渴向右；无论如何，
 都不要成为与富人一道的穷人，
 激发
 你的冷意，因为这其中融有我的热情，亲爱的受害者。
 白天就要来了，把身躯穿上吧。

白天就要来了：
 清早，大海，气象，尾随
 于你的疲惫其后，举着旗帜，
 并且，沿着你那经典的傲气，鬣狗们
 伴着驴子的节奏数着脚步，
 面包店老板娘想着你，
 肉铺老板想着你，一边摸着
 那囚禁了钢与铁与金属的斧头；绝对不要忘记
 在弥撒中没有朋友可言。
 白天就要来了，把阳光披上吧。

白天已经来了：拿出双倍的
 勇气，三倍
 记仇的善意
 再与恐惧、纽带和强调碰肘，
 因为你，正如在你腿间人们所见的那般是个，
 唉！不朽的坏种，
 今晚你梦到了自己的一生
 困顿虚无却死得其所……

The Unfortunates (English Translation)

The day is about to come;
wind up your arm, look for yourself under
the mattress, go back to standing
on your head, so that you can walk straight.
The day is about to come, put on your jacket.

The day is about to come; keep
a firm grip on your large intestine, reflect
rather than meditate, because it's horrible
when misfortune falls on you
and your tooth falls deep inside you.

You need to eat, but, I tell myself,
don't grieve, grief isn't
for the poor, nor is sobbing over someone's grave;
patch yourself up, remember,
trust in your white thread, smoke, do a roll call
of your chains and stow it behind your portrait.
The day is about to come, so put on your soul.

The day is about to come, they pass,
they've opened an eye in the hotel,
whipping it, beating it with one of your mirrors...
Are you trembling? It's the remote state of your forehead
and the recent nation of your stomach.
They're still snoring... What a universe that snore carries
within it!
And just look at your pores, passing judgement on it!
Even with all those twos, you're so alone!
The day is about to come, put on a dream.

The day is about to come, I repeat
through the oral organ of your silence,
and you must take the left turn with your hunger
and the right with your thirst; at any rate,
refrain from being poor with the rich,
stoke up

your coldness, because my heat is a part of it, beloved victim.
The day is about to come, put on your body.

The day is about to come;
the morning, the sea, the meteor, all
in hot pursuit of your tiredness, flags flying,
and because of your classic pride, the hyenas
count their steps at donkey pace,
the baker, she’s thinking about you,
the butcher’s thinking about you, stroking
his cleaver in which lie imprisoned
steel and iron and metal; never forget
that during Mass there are no friends.
The day is about to come, put on the sun.

The day is coming: double
your breath, triple
your rancorous goodness
and elbow aside fear, connection and emphasis,
for you, as one can see from your crotch, and given
that evil is alas! immortal,
you dreamed last night that you were living
on nothing and dying of everything...⁴⁹

When reading Vallejo’s poem in the class we noted the presence of language and imagery reminiscent of classical Marxist theory in the poem, as evident in the way in which the workers are reduced to the status of mere “unfortunates” trapped by the “chains” of a capitalist system, and their bodies are simply cogs in the machine (thus, they wind up their arms as if they were clocks, and their intestines have been externalized and, effectively, turned into objects). The alienation of the workers within the capitalist political economy means that – despite their vast numbers (“even with all those twos”) – they find themselves isolated and marginalized (“You’re so alone”). In the sixth stanza we noted that Vallejo was suggesting that the working people have been turned into sacrificial victims for the rich, something that was taking place all over the world in the autumn

⁴⁹ *César Vallejo: The Eternal Dice: Selected Poems*, translated by Margaret Jull Costa (New York, NY: New Directions, 2025), pp. 97-99.

of 1937, from the Battle of Belchite between Republican and Nationalist troops in Spain to the invasion of Shanghai by Japanese troops.⁵⁰ Despite this, it was agreed that the overall mood of the poem was positive in that the Peruvian poet is seen as encouraging the “unfortunates” all around the world, and advising them to “refrain from being poor among the rich” (stanza 5). Each of the final verses of the stanzas becomes a rallying-call to the “unfortunates” of the earth not to give up: “The day is about to come, put on your soul” (stanza 3); “The day is about to come, put on a dream” (stanza 4). Drawing inspiration from Hartman’s praxis of critical fabulation, we proposed that Vallejo’s poem could be used to delineate a line of empathy between the peoples of Latin America and China. Vallejo is creating bridges between three groups of people – the alienated workers trapped within the capitalist eco-economy, the republican soldiers fighting against Franco’s assassins in Spain, and the Chinese civilians struggling against Japanese troops. The word “desgraciados” ties all three groups together in the subliminal moment of Vallejo’s poem.⁵¹

It is moments like these that subtend the growing rapprochement between China and Latin America in the twenty-first century. The Spanish language is now much closer to the Chinese language than it ever was before in its history. Lu Jingsheng, the Chinese government’s National Co-ordinator for Spanish has pointed out that in the last fifteen years the demand for Spanish language education in China has “increased 30 fold”.⁵² Chinese university students nowadays are also finding that knowing Spanish is a big plus in the job market; as Yang Jiaming, a recent graduate from the Spanish program

⁵⁰ The Battle of Belchite, near Zaragoza (24 August 1937-7 September 1937) was the site of a fierce and bloody battle between Republican and Nationalist troops during the Spanish Civil War, which resulted in the destruction of the town such that it became a ghost town; see Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 725-727. The Battle of Shanghai fought between Japanese and Chinese troops began on 13 August 1937, initiating the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Chinese army suffered high casualties, and this battle was the forerunner of a large-scale battle between the two nations that lasted for many months. For more information, see Charles River, *The Battle of Shanghai: The History and Legacy of the Battle that Started the Second Sino-Japanese War* (Charles River Independent Press, 2019).

⁵¹ For further discusión of the connections between “The Unfortunates” and “Contrary to the Mountain Birds...” see Chapter 5 in this volume.

⁵² <https://www.languagemagazine.com/chinas-demand-for-spanish-speakers/>

at Central China Normal University in Wuhan, Hubei Province, found out, he was offered a job straight out of college because the company he was interviewed by liked the fact he knew Spanish since it “has business in Latin America”.⁵³ This focus on Spanish may turn out to be a key ingredient of China’s focus on the use of Soft Power which will allow China to win influence in Latin America.

This book has been written in the subjunctive mood of Soft Power. It addresses the conundrum of how the relationship between Latin America and China has worked itself out over time via a set of test-cases that function like thought-experiments. That’s why the approach adopted in this book is exploratory and multidisciplinary. Rather than seeking to provide empirical answers to the question of how China and Latin America have worked together as national states and powers, it uses a more experimental approach, teasing out the connections between literary-critical speculation and historico-scientific enquiry.⁵⁴ Rather than seeking to extract a single, all-powerful answer to a particular question, the approach I will be using in this book has some important similarities with Manuel DeLanda’s concept of “flat ontology”. As I argue in this volume, the historical relationship between Latin America and China is so complex that settling on one theoretical paradigm to explain that relationship is counter-productive.

Chapter 1, for example, provides an investigation of the proposition: “What if the Chinese got to the Americas before Christopher Columbus?” via 15 different speculations, one of which concerns Joseph de Guignes’s proposition that Yucatán in Mexico was, in fact, the Fusang represented on ancient Chinese maps. The second chapter analyses the portrayal of the figure of Tegualda in Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga’s *La Araucana*, while seeking to uncover an “unconscious” Orientalism within that text. Chapter 3 focusses on a conscious Orientalism which, I argue, permeates the exoticism of Rubén Darío’s exoticist poetry as well as forming the lynchpin

⁵³ <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202208/03/WS62e9d064a310fd2b29e6ff71.html>

⁵⁴ For further discussion, see my essay “Journeying Towards a Practice-Led Quantitative Analysis of Art”, in *Thinking Through Relation*, edited by Florian Mussgnug, Mathelinda Nabugodi and Thea Petrou (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021), pp. 221-244.

of Borges's labyrinth. In the fourth chapter I find Abel Rémusat's French translation of a Chinese novel entitled 玉娇梨 (Yù Jiāo Lí), a caizi jiaren (scholar and beauty) novel authored by 张匀 (Zhang Yun) to be the fulcrum at the heart of the conundrum of the transition that occurred between the nineteenth and the twenty-first century when the national novel was transformed into "world literature". In chapter 5 I tease out the Chinese implications of one of César Vallejo's most important poems, "Al revés de las aves del monte..." (Contrary to the Mountain Birds..."), written in November 1937. In the sixth chapter I focus on the ways in which one of Latin America's most important inventions – magical realism – found its way into the Chinese literary blood stream. Finally, in chapter 7, I provide a subterranean reading of the video game as an allegory of the struggle between China and the West.

The research on which these chapters are based was funded by a research grant provided by the Department of Science of Hunan Provincial Government, China, under the auspices of the College of Foreign Studies, Hunan Normal University (2023-2026). I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Department of Science of Hunan Provincial Government, China, for their generosity in providing this research grant to me. Thanks are in order too for the generous help provided to me by Professor Zeng Yanyu, the Dean of the School of Foreign Studies, Hunan Normal University, and Professor Vice-Dean Lihua Jiang, also of the College of Foreign Studies, in the application for this grant.