

MAOISM ACROSS LATIN AMERICA: LEGACY FOR CHINA'S ADVANCEMENT IN THE REGION

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Abstract

China's current economic advancement in Latin America and the Caribbean is not an unprecedented phenomenon. The current economic scope of Sino-Latin American relations is the continuation of a historical connection that China built with the region, thanks to Maoism. Looking at Cuba, Peru, Mexico, and Brazil, this paper deconstructs the different adaptations that Maoism received in the four countries. Maoist China also enhanced people-to-people and party diplomacy to widen its influence in the region on various levels. All the studied Latin American countries show that Maoist China reacted to insert itself into the US-USSR competition, with less influential results in Cuba and Mexico. In Peru and Brazil, with current consequences, Maoism gave China an advantageous legitimacy because of its interactions with rural-socialist movements and national governments, or leftist political parties. Maoism appears to be the political legacy that benefited China in its new expansion in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Keywords: Maoism, Latin America, China, influence, legacy.

O MAOÍSMO NA AMÉRICA LATINA: LEGADO PARA O AVANÇO DA CHINA NA REGIÃO

Resumo

O atual avanço econômico da China na América Latina e no Caribe não é um fenômeno sem precedentes. O atual escopo econômico das relações sino-latino-americanas é a continuação de uma conexão histórica que a China construiu com a região, graças ao maoísmo. Analisando Cuba, Peru, México e Brasil, este artigo desconstrói as diferentes adaptações que o maoísmo recebeu nesses quatro países. A China maoísta também fortaleceu a diplomacia entre povos e partidos para ampliar sua influência na região em diversos níveis. Todos os países latino-americanos estudados mostram que a China maoísta reagiu para se inserir na competição entre EUA e URSS, com resultados menos influentes em Cuba e no México. No Peru e no Brasil, com consequências atuais, o maoísmo deu à China uma legitimidade vantajosa devido às suas interações com movimentos rurais-socialistas e governos nacionais, ou partidos políticos de esquerda. O maoísmo parece ser o legado político que beneficiou a China em sua nova expansão na América Latina e no Caribe.

Palavras-chave: Maoísmo, América Latina, China, influência, legado.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Usually, China's presence in Latin America is perceived as an unprecedented phenomenon. There are different reasons for this line of thinking. First, unlike Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, and the United States, China approached Latin America, throughout history, in a silent way. For sure, the lack of colonial heritage helped Beijing in this operational method. Secondly, and particularly from the US perspective, China is seen as an extra-regional actor with less legitimacy for being active in Latin America. Allow me to focus, for introductory purposes, on this last point. The last two US National Security Strategies, from the Trump (2017) and Biden (2022) administrations, refer to Latin America mainly as the Western Hemisphere, suggesting a unified American concept from Alaska to Patagonia, implying that any other international actor is external and foreign, in the exclusive sense. We are not dealing with an updated US posture; instead, it is a legacy of the Monroe Doctrine, replacing only the back-then European countries with China.

This paper acknowledges the Global North's surprise for China's economic advancement in Latin America, which indeed is a new geopolitical paradigm. However, the argument is that China's political legitimacy in Latin America lies in the historical attention that Communist China has paid to Latin America under Mao Tse-tung. Words here are chosen to outline this paper's focus on the post-1949 period, specifically since Mao's foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In fact, this work aims to show how Maoism spread across Latin America, promoting Chinese legitimacy in the region despite geographical distance, Soviet presence, and US ostracism.

The paper provides a different understanding of Sino-Latin American relations, which are not a recent development of pragmatic economic interests limited to loans, infrastructures, or trade. Instead, China benefits from relevant political interactions undertaken during the Cold War in Latin America. In other words, I try to defeat the common and almost dogmatic discourse that sees China as a cynical entity without soft power capacity. Surely, in the context of Latin America, China cannot rely on the same expertise of the US in soft power. Nonetheless, it does not mean that China has no soft power at all. For Maoism, soft power concerned the

empowerment of rural communities to drive political, social, and economic changes through the influence of traditional Marxist class struggle. Given the premise, it will be possible to describe how Latin American peasants, whereas in countries ideologically aligned or not with Maoist China, were inspired by Mao's peasantry narrative, therefore deepening their appreciation for China. It is reasonable to include that the efforts of the Chinese government, not always through its embassies, were essential for the diffusion of Maoism in Latin America. If, on one hand, there is an intuitive input to perceive significant Maoist influence in Cuba after 1959 and Peru because of Shining Path, this paper instead retakes Peter Smith's "counterintuitive" theoretical approach (2013, p. 7), to include that also other countries, Mexico and Brazil, saw a significant Maoist influence. Initially, there will be a brief review of Maoism in Cuba and Peru, which are two of the most studied and known cases of China's early influence in Latin America. The core cases for the argument, Mexico and Brazil, serve as relevant comparative studies for the following reasons.

Scholars have found that the past driver for China's Latin American agenda has historically been to counter US and Soviet influence in the region (León-Manríquez & Alvarez, 2014). Because of the aforementioned aspects, Mexico is a primary scenario for the logical long-standing predominance of US influence due to geographic factors, among others. Moreover, Mexico has also been analyzed as a country with durable and robust relations with the Soviet Union (Blasier, 1983), making it a natural attraction for China's foreign policy. The vital item that indicates Mexico as an appropriate scope of analysis is its rural and peasant conformation, see the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917). This has been the key to the diffusion of Maoism in Latin America and the Global South.

In Brazil, Maoism and China's influence had two different stories before and after 1964, showing Beijing's resilience in maintaining its political and economic leverage until now, with the BRICS initiative and Brazilian rural movements. It is important to outline a possible correlation between Maoism in Latin America and current relations with China. For Cuba, Peru, Mexico, and Brazil, China's partnership has been a reality since Maoism. If, during the Cold War, China had a political and social role through Mao Tse-tung in the four countries, it has now changed to an

evolving economic focus. China's legitimacy in Latin America is not a new coincidence of interests, but a transformed political continuation.

2. CUBA AND PERU: WHERE MAOISM COMES TO LIGHT

2.1. The Cuban Revolution and Delimited Maoism

A decade after Mao Tse-tung proclaimed the PRC, Latin America, particularly the Caribbean, started to prove that Maoism could find fertile ground in the region. It is essential to draw some insights into the Sino-Cuban relations. The revolutionary character of the two regimes and the ideological, in theory, commonality were the pillars of the dialogues between China and Cuba around the figures of Mao Tse-tung, Fidel Castro, and Ernesto *Che* Guevara. The mention of these central personalities is not of secondary relevance. The relationship between the two Marxist-socialist realities, which is a more accurate categorisation than solely communist, was mainly strengthened because of these political leaders. Aside from the interpersonal agreements and public affection among them, we must address that Sino-Cuban relations were not intuitively smooth.

The guerrilla warfare of the 1959 Cuban Revolution did have a Maoist component, mainly through *Che* Guevara's theoretical and organisational formation of the revolutionary guerrilla, being rural and agrarian (Barrera, 2009). However, there are evident differences between the two Revolutions' geographic, territorial, and socioeconomic natures, but this does not erase the *Barbudos'* inspiration from Mao. It is also for this ideological similarity that Maoist China supported Fidel Castro's overthrow of Fulgencio Batista, implementing, since 1960, diplomatic relations with Havana, political mutual exchanges, and commercial activities, mainly about sugar. China-Cuba relations relied on a robust ideological structure through Mao and Fidel, but at the same time, had to play into a triangular competition with the Soviet Union, leading to both burdensome inconveniences and achievements, like the opening of the first *Xinhua* press office in the Americas (Connelly & Cornejo Bustamante, 1992).¹¹

¹¹ Reactions to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 exacerbated the relations between Cuba and China, also because of the USSR's role. From a geopolitical struggle for socialist influence in the Caribbean, Cuba-China relations moved into an ideological controversy, leading to a major cooling of bilateral relations between Beijing and Havana "from 1967 to 1970" (Connelly & Cornejo Bustamante, 1992, pp. 68-70).

I insist on the interpersonal nature of Sino-Cuban relations under Mao, because “[d]uring the twenty years or so after the founding of New China in 1949, China and Latin America and the Caribbean mainly conducted people-to-people exchanges” (USC US-China Institute, 2009, II).¹² Arguably, Maoist China’s initial relations with Cuba are a primary example of the maintained centrality, until nowadays, of people-to-people diplomacy in Chinese foreign policy for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Fidel Castro represented himself as the vital motivation for China to strengthen its Cuban *dossier*. The Maoist government saw in Fidel a revolutionary leader with those ideological features praised by the PRC, such as the use of armed guerrilla, the reliance on a–different kind of–peasantry, and even most importantly, Fidel’s anti-imperialist discourse regarding the US (Johnson, 1970). For Cuba, as per the other Latin American countries studied here, Maoism was a critical theoretical tool, a line of political philosophy for building the 1959 revolutionary project. In the case of Cuba, China provided, with Maoist guerrilla warfare, an inspirational military framework that later inherited a Cuban adaption (Urrego, 2017).

As I will show for Shining Path in Peru, Maoism was not a dogmatic constitution or a Bible on which China forced its presence in Latin America. Instead, it was a set of ideas that survived the rivalry between the USSR and China over Cuba because of a humanistic legitimacy that the Maoist PRC obtained, perhaps even more strategically than the Soviets. Aside from the resilient ideological affinity between Xi Jinping’s China and Miguel Díaz-Canel’s Cuba around initiatives like BRICS, the United Nations Group of 77 plus China, and the shared “paths of socialism with respective characteristics” (State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2023, 10), there is also a history of not only economic partnership, thanks to Maoism.

2.2. Shining Path: Complex Maoist Legacy for China in Peru

No era in Peru’s history does not offer the most prominent ingredient for Maoism diffusion: the rural-urban cleavage. The severity of Peru’s inequality can be defined as a “socioeconomic” reality, starting from ethnic discrimination between

¹² The Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the US-China Institute at the University of Southern California made available through the USC website the first *China’s Policy Paper On Latin America And The Caribbean* in 2009. However, the Chinese government officially released its White Paper for LAC in 2008.

indigenous people and European descendants to the geoeconomic cleavage between Lima and the vast rural regions of the interior (McClintock, 1989, p. 129). The availability of an extensive rural population, underrepresented politically and subjugated in economic and social terms, made Peru a perfectly fertile ground for Maoism. This consideration exists to counter a superficial analysis that sees Shining Path as the inauguration of Maoism in Peru or for all of LAC. Instead, Maoism had two different openings in Peru prior to Shining Path. The aspects I will touch on could explain why, despite the Peruvian negative imaginary about Shining Path and Maoism, it did not undermine China's legitimacy as a partner for the Andean country, regardless of the different government ideologies in Lima.

Maoism grew in Peru because of the rural element and a Soviet influential threat perceived by Maoist China. In the 1960s, inside the Peruvian Communist Party (PCP), debates were generated over what socialist way to follow, whether the Maoist or the Soviet, a real political dichotomy that split the Peruvian leftist party for years (Rothwell, 2012). Moreover, we can also speculate that Shining Path, to remember founded in 1969, did not even have a creative monopoly over Maoist guerrillas in Peru. Proof of that is the vision of the revolutionary philosopher Régis Debray, who wrote about the little-known *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR). The MIR had the potential to merge the Maoist guerrilla paradigms with a Cuban-inspired proletarian revolution (Debray, 1967).¹³ Unlike Cuba, Maoist China had two different affinities with Peru. The PRC had to work on trade and political relations at a government level to compete with the USSR in Peru (Ginsburgs & Stahnke, 1970). About the official Sino-Peruvian ties before and during the times of Mao and Peru's President Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975) who indeed officialised diplomatic relations with Beijing, authors explained that the degree of interest in the Peruvian government, for the PRC, was even limited because of a significant USSR influence in collaborating with Lima's army (Díaz Guevara, 2022).

Maybe for this reason, there was an alternative bilateral relation that did not involve the Peruvian government but was focused on diffusing Maoism within

¹³ Régis Debray is a French philosopher who followed *Che* Guevara in his mission in Bolivia, where Guevara was eventually killed in 1967. In Debray's famous book *Revolution in the Revolution?* (1967), the Peruvian political activist Luis de la Puente Uceda, a prominent interpreter for Maoist guerrilla strategy in Latin America, is mentioned as having, by leading the MIR, "superimposed its image on their conception of the Cuban guerrilla struggle" (p. 59).

radical leftist Peruvian formations. This latter option, which happened before and was not directly connected with Shining Path, could have given China an advantage in its consensus across the Peruvian political spectrum, allowing Beijing still now to have favorable communications with Lima. The mastermind of Shining Path, Abimael Guzmán, reproduced a people-to-people relationship with Maoist China similar to that of Fidel. Guzmán traveled several times to China to understand the realities of the Maoist Revolution, building political relations with the Maoist ideologues, for both financial support to the PCP and pure ideological inspirations (Rothwell, 2020a), that would eventually channel into Shining Path's Maoist guerrilla warfare after the 1980s.

Given the complicated experiences of Shining Path and the Peruvian Communist Party, scholars have argued how difficult it is to evaluate the quality of Mao's legacy in Peru, at least from a political point of view (Rothwell, 2020b). China's policy for Latin America keeps a narrative of continuity because, in the case of Peru, apart from the people-to-people strategy, there was also, with the PCP, the "[e]xchange with political parties" that China keeps pushing for its LAC foreign policy (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2016, IV[1]). China's diversified political agenda for Peru could have reduced its direct involvement in Shining Path's action, an issue that would have ruined the Chinese image in the country. Instead, Maoism introduced China as an entity in Peru, regardless of the Shining Path-linked violent evolutions, making Beijing a familiar and not extraneous actor. Together with China's economic advancement, this political legitimacy can be seen as a help to China's major projects in Peru, such as the latest port of Chancay, an impressive investment that will maritimately connect China and South America (Fundación Andrés Bello, 2023).

3. ACTIVE IN THE BACKYARD: MAOIST INFLUENCE IN SINO-MEXICAN RELATIONS

Mexico's proximity to the US made it a complicated territory for Maoist and Chinese influence. The absence of ideologically sympathetic governments was an issue for spreading Maoism into the Mexican political arena. Nevertheless, Mexico has an extensive rural territory and population, with accents of inequality that reach the reasons behind the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) start of

operations in Chiapas, in 1994. To better understand the blocks China had to overcome in Mexico during the Maoist years, Ratliff (1969) calculated that between 1959 and 1961, Cubans were the principal travelers to China from LAC, but Mexicans accounted for the lowest numbers.¹⁴ If Maoist China had encountered problems in penetrating Mexico, this would not have been the case for the USSR. In fact, in Cuba and Peru, as in Mexico, we find that Maoist China tries to compete more with the USSR than the US in a Latin American country, and again with a mix of people-to-people and party-level diplomacy. A repeated triangular challenge exists between Maoist China, the USSR, and the relative LAC nation. In the eyes of Maoist China, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, a prominent Mexican labor leader, was the correspondent of Fidel Castro in Cuba and Abimael Guzmán in Peru.

However, after the ideological rupture between the two socialist regimes, Lombardo Toledano was more inclined to embrace the Soviet alliance under Nikita Khrushchev than the Chinese (Zolov, 2020). In various instances, this paper implied that, in LAC, the competition between Maoist China and the USSR was a non-exclusive ideological struggle. Also for Mexico, a politician's attraction to the USSR did not mean the complete exclusion of China. Maoism spreading was the survival tool for Chinese influence in Mexico. Maoism found in Mexico a perfect element.

In 1968, the students' uprising allowed the concept of the Maoist proletarian Revolution to navigate into the socialist Mexican movements, relying on the introduction to Maoism that the very Lombardo Toledano gave to Mexicans, through the narration of his trip to China (Soldatenko, 2018). It is worth comprehending China's flexible diplomacy in LAC to draw connections with the current Chinese advancement in the region. Maoist China did not univocally center its Mexican agenda through Lombardo Toledano or any other specific leader. Since the 1960s, Maoist China identified the leftist parties more prone to embracing the Maoist path for socialism rather than the Soviet one. The *Partido Revolucionario del Proletariado Mexicano* (PRPM), created in 1969, was the organisation that Maoist China blessed for its purposes, with trips of the PRPM leadership to China to study the Maoist political vision (Velázquez Vidal, 2018).

¹⁴ In the same study, Ratliff aimed to show that, in Latin America during Mao's years, there was no direct "correlation between the population of a country and the number of persons travelling to China" (Ratliff, 1969, p. 59). The author focused instead on the cultural diplomatic efforts that Maoist China made to attract Latin American politicians and intellectuals.

It has been previously mentioned that Maoism in general, and much more in Latin America, should not be analyzed as a dogmatic or religious sacred text. It was, and still is, a philosophical and political line of thought to reverse the capitalist liberal state in favor of the lower, agrarian, and proletarian classes. Maoism in Mexico had different connotations than in Cuba or Peru. Within the Mexican political arena, actors and parties in or outside the official government interacted with Maoist China in their own interests. Despite the US proximity and the USSR competition, China kept its influence in Mexico because Maoism was an introductory sign of legitimacy for the Chinese socialist philosophy.

Before the Mexican government officially established diplomatic relations with the PRC, the PRPM was the voice of China in Mexico through the verb of Maoism. The Maoist function of the PRPM evolved into a practice of guerrilla warfare in rural areas that attained the repression and criminalisation of the Mexican state, being the PRPM members directly trained in China (Velázquez Vidal, 2023a). Despite the state reaction to the Maoist guerrillas, in terms of ideological and political discourse, certain traits of Maoism were not so different from the popular appeal of the Mexican Revolution and the long-standing governing *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), in the emphasis on the rural people and the poorer sectors of the Mexican population, but also concerning the anti-imperialist soul that the PRI exposed (Alcocer, 1993). If Maoism and China had a better consensus in Mexico than Marxism or Leninism., it was because of the economic stress on the peasantry, and not only the industrial proletarians, united with an anti-imperialist connotation that attracted local leftist activists.

Had this not been the case, it would be hard to explain otherwise why, if China directly collaborated with Mexican guerrillas, the Mexican government would not have perceived China as a dangerous threat, favoring Sino-Mexican relations even today. Returning to the people-to-people Chinese approach under Mao, we need to understand Maoism's leverage on Mexican rural leaders. Florencio Medrano and Javier Fuentes were Mexican political figures, active among the proletarians, who started to claim that Maoism was an economic and politically helpful theory to break the Mexican exploitative structure, similar to the Chinese (Lemus-Delgado, 2021). When talking about the exploitative structure, I mean that in pre-Maoist China, Latin America, and almost all of the Global South, there remains a rural-urban cleavage

enforced through the political underrepresentation of the proletarians in favor of urban elites. I am not assuming that conditions in Mexico were identical to those in China. The sociopolitical differences between China and Mexico have been studied as the drivers for Florencio Medrano's unfinished Maoist revolution in the Mexican State of Morelos (Pinkoski, 2012).¹⁵

To conclude on Mexico, we can point out that Maoism had a bipolar reception in the so-called US backyard. When merged with proletarian guerrilla activities, the PRI repressed the movement as subversive, but not for being Maoist. It is no coincidence that the Mexican government officially recognised the People's Republic of China in 1972 (Embassy of Mexico in China, 2021), with Mao still in charge of the PRC. Maoism in Mexico is not a *reliquiae* belonging to the Cold War. The continuous leverage of Maoism in Mexico is proven in studies that see Maoism as a "precursor of [Z]apatismo" (Pinheiro Barbosa & Rosset, 2023, p. 21), the ideological spirit that motivated the EZLN in the 1990s.

The first Mexican ambassador to China, Eugenio Anguiano, recognised the political and economic benefits of Sino-Mexican relations, even in light of the actual superpowers' competition with the US (2019). When interviewed, former Ambassador Anguiano also outlined that Sino-Mexican relations offer more opportunities than risks (Parra, 2016). Mexico is a perfect example of how Maoism gave China legitimacy in Mexico, somehow an incentive for the Mexican government to encounter Beijing, with a positive political legacy that influences the current economic Sino-Mexican relations.

4. BRAZIL: MAOISM FOR THE LANDLESS

In this paper, I stressed that Maoism found fertile grounds—or lands—across Latin America and the Caribbean. The Brazilian case differs from the other countries because, in Brazil, Maoism and by extension China played an essential role in giving land back to those deprived of it, under a Maoist rural and theoretical framework. A

¹⁵ In a different work, Velázquez Vidal (2023b) reports the events that in 1973 led Florencio Medrano, alias *El Güero*, to found, together with local farmers, the proletarian colony of Jaramillo in the Morelos State. It took months for the PRI government to overtake the Jaramillo colony and stop Medrano's actions, which were inspired by *El Güero's* training received in China, directly from Maoists.

straightforward realist analytical approximation can lead to erroneous explanations about the strong Sino-Brazilian relations celebrated during the XXI century. If we think that, suddenly, Brazil and China met because of shared economic interests, and from this point they consolidated bilateral exchanges, we are drawing only part of the story. Moreover, still on a realist understanding of international relations, phenomena like the BRICS are the direct result of a –temporarily–common political willingness between Brazil and China to lead, through their economic potential, the new mechanisms of the multipolar international order from the Global South.

These explanations are correct, but they miss a vital point. Maoism not only presented China to the Brazilian political actors but also provided a theoretical power for the participation of the rural sector. Regarding land ownership, distribution, and the general importance of agriculture, we should start wondering if the influential Brazilian agribusiness would now exist in a massively industrialised economy without Maoism being diffused in Brazil. We have already seen that Maoism has been able to enter Latin America because of similar sociopolitical conditions in terms of inequality between the LAC contexts and China, despite the vast differences. Land distribution, political participation, and agricultural plans were the main topics Latin American leftist leaders tried to import from Maoist China, mainly in Mexico.

For Cuba and Peru, guerrilla tactics were the main Maoist inspirations. About Brazil, Oliveira (2017) asserted the centrality of the Marxist class struggle related to land distribution in Brazil, essential to Brazilian development as it was for Mao Tse-tung, even more than the integration into the capitalist economy. Therefore, although the current Brazilian agribusiness pushes for private ownership, the concept of agricultural focus in Brazil relies on a Maoist inspiration that keeps the bilateral relations with China linked with the rural economy. Whether the proliferation of Brazilian agribusiness is an *action* or a *reaction* to the Maoist agricultural focus, the result has been a permanent Chinese presence inside Brazil. It is needed to identify the roots of Maoism in Brazil. We need to rely again on people-to-people Chinese diplomacy in its most literal sense. In 1960, Mao Tse-tung personally welcomed and met with friends and delegations from Brazil, assumably trade unionists visiting Chinese cities like Wuhan and Shanghai (Mao Tse-tung,

1966).¹⁶ Unlike Cuba, Peru, and Mexico, Brazil's relations with Maoist China were not centered around one outstanding political figure but were relatively broader. The political party element should be noted for Brazil as well. Halperin (1967) described the profound relations between the *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* (PCB), which openly preferred the Maoist over the Soviet way for socialism, and directly received political indications from the Chinese Communist Party. I assert that for Maoist China, Brazil was the leading Latin American country in which the geographic, political, and social conditions allowed a political line for rural revolution and not a Soviet and Cuban-inspired petty-bourgeoisie uprising. Furthermore, in Brazil, the Sino-Soviet competition tended to be favorable to Mao, given the PCB's orientation. US leverage before 1964 was low compared to the rest of Latin America and especially the Caribbean; hence Maoism found a fertile ground in Brazil. The year 1964 is not a casual reference.

Sino-Brazilian relations were highly prolific before the US-backed *coup d'état* against Brazilian President João Goulart in 1964. In the immediate moments before Goulart's overthrow, Chinese delegations scheduled programs with Brazil on various issues, from politics to trade, which suffered restrictions with the following Brazilian dictatorship, blessed by Washington (Fares, 2016). In 1961 Goulart himself traveled to China as Vice President of Brazil. During this visit, Goulart dialogued with Mao, but the essential exchange happened with the Mayor of Beijing, Peng Chen, who "wish[ed] the Brazilian people even greater successes in the cause of building a new Brazil" (*Peking Review*, 1961, p. 22). As the *Peking Review* reported in the same volume, Goulart's visit to Maoist China also had the economic function of diversifying the US-oriented Brazilian agricultural export economy, mainly related to "coffee exports" (p. 23). These brief historical lines should lead to three assertions. First, without Goulart's visit to China, his engagement with Mao, and the Maoist orientation of the Brazilian communists, the 1964 *golpe* would not have happened.

¹⁶ The Peking Foreign Language Press from the Chinese capital reported that, in the months of May and June 1960, Mao Tse-tung interacted with delegations from Argentina, Cuba, and Brazil. The Latin American delegations were mainly composed of communist politicians and unionists for Brazil and Argentina, while Cuba possibly sent an official diplomatic delegation, being in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, when relations with China were at its highest. The meetings were mainly centered on the anti-imperialist struggle against US foreign policy.

Second, Maoism projected a major degree of influence inside Brazil on a political and economic axis. When the military dictatorship, for its Western orientation, refused any foreign policy connection made by the perceived communist Goulart, China was able to patiently wait for its economic comeback, now taking place. Third, Maoist China's relationship with any Latin American country always had a strategic aim to counter either the USSR or the US influence, through local political parties, guerrilla movements, or national governments. Chinese influence in Brazil has been present, during and after Mao, through all these elements. Connelly (1983) informed us about Mao's involvement of landless farmers in his Revolution, and we find the diffusion of this particular Maoist concept in Brazil. The military dictatorship after Goulart implemented, in the 1970s, a liberalised economic model that, through privatisations, enhanced the undignified working and living conditions of farmers without land—landless (Almeida, 2015), better known as *Sem Terra*. Without deconstructing the entire history of the *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST), this Brazilian farmers' movement, founded in the 1980s, began since then a political, economic, and social struggle for land redistribution.

The MST has an evident Maoist component, to the point that some territorial “brigades” of the MST, decentralised groups of the MST in different rural regions of Brazil, were named after Mao Tse-tung (Ortiz Pérez, 2015, p. 66). During all of Lula's terms at the Brazilian presidency, the MST played an active role in competing with the mentioned agribusiness for the much-needed rural reforms in Brazil. The Chinese contributions to the MST plans have been renewed, changing from Mao's philosophical thought to a more pragmatic economic focus.

Recently, the MST announced the receipt of Chinese agricultural machinery that, together with the help of Beijing's technicians, will improve agricultural practices in the northeastern part of Brazil, in the Rio Grande do Norte State (MST, 2024). China's closeness to the MST and Brazilian agricultural sectors cannot be unlinked from the Maoist influence in Brazil.

5. CONCLUSION

Chinese current economic advancement in LAC is a diversification of an earlier political presence in the region through Maoism. The cases studied of Cuba,

Peru, Mexico, and Brazil offer different insights into how Maoism was adapted to those national contexts. These four countries share that their introductory exchanges with Maoist China relate to the current strong relationship with Beijing. China's role in diffusing Maoism saw a process of people-to-people diplomacy merged with interactions between political parties. Maoist China had an ideological advantage in Cuba thanks to *Che* Guevara's admiration for Mao's guerrilla strategies. Still, the biggest of the Antilles posed a constraint because of the USSR's influence. The Cuban situation provides the framework through which Maoist China operated in LAC into the US-USSR competition as a non-imperialist actor. China found in Peru a fertile ground because of a vast rural-urban cleavage and peasantry inequality that was a natural condition for Maoism. Despite Shining Path, China did not undermine its image *vis-à-vis* Lima's government. That could be the reason for the current Chinese expansion in Peru. In Mexico, instead, we had people-to-people and party diplomacy, with Florencio Medrano and the PRPM, identified by Maoist China as key to its advancement. However, Mexico has been a complex territory for Chinese expansion because of the US limitations.

Beijing worked patiently, stressing the two countries' shared rural and developmental challenges and obtaining an essential degree of legitimacy inside Mexico, which, without Maoism, would not have been possible. Lastly, we can conclude that the crown jewelry of the Chinese influential continuation has been Brazil. Maoism reached significant influence with Goulart's government and the Brazilian Communist Party. When, after 1964, the political conditions in Brazil did not favor China anymore, the Maoist legacy worked to maintain China's influence in rural areas. The raising of the MST and the Brazilian agricultural issues as vital for Brazil's development put China at the center of Brazil's agenda in projects like BRICS. Again, without a robust Maoist influence, China would have lost its position in Brazil. China's advancement in LAC is not the sole result of a realist economic attraction from the region toward a distant and culturally different power.

Instead, it is a diversification of previous Sino-Latin American connections forged under Maoism and its values, such as anti-imperialism and land redistribution, which have been moved to the current economic focus.

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