

Interregionalism and the Americas

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Chapter 10

Remapping Latin America and East Asia Interregional Relations

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INTRODUCTION

The relations between Latin America and East Asia have experienced dramatic changes after the end of the Cold War, after the accession of China in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, and again after the 2008 financial crisis. Since the beginning of the century, however, there has been a spectacular growth of economic relations, fueled by China's economic development. Today, China is the first or second most important trade partner of most countries in the region. The impact of these relations with Asia (mainly China) is, then, structural. It creates opportunities and risks in both the economic and political realms. Among the spillover effects of this process, there has been a slow but growing effort in the institutionalization of the relations. This has happened more visibly in the form of the creation of bilateral free trade agreements such as the one between China and Chile (the first of this type signed by China), China and Peru, and so on. Additionally, there have been several other economic agreements signed between countries located on both sides of the Pacific or are currently under negotiation, with other Asiatic partners, such as Japan and South Korea. China has also developed bilateral preferential political relations, collectively labeled as "strategic partnerships" (although there are nuances in many bilateral relations), with Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, for example, and the special cases of Cuba and Venezuela.

In this process of progressive institutionalization, interregionalism has also emerged. There are several cases being part of a broad conceptual family of interregionalism: the participation of Mexico, Chile, and Peru in APEC; the creation of Forum for East Asia Latin American Cooperation (FEALAC); the relations between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and

Mercosur; the participation of Mexico, Chile, and Peru in the negotiations of the Transpacific Partnership (TTP) and since March 8, 2018, the successor of TPP: The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Transpacific Partnership (CPATTP).

Before or at the same time, other cases of interregionalism emerge in the international arena, such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM). Particularly in Europe, a new theoretical endeavor was attempted to try to go beyond the “new regionalism” literature (Mansfield and Milner, 1999), to try to capture this new phenomena: Inter-regional “Theory” (Bersick, 2002; Fasut and Mols, 2005; Gilson, 2002a and 2002b; Hänggi, 1999 and 2000; Lawson, 2002a and 2002b; Ruland, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, and 2002c; Yeo Lay Hwee, 2002). The literature dealing with globalization begun to call for an understanding of “new layers of global governance” (Held et al, 1999). Also the revival of the so-called English School of international relations called to put “geography back in” in the study of international systems (Buzan, 2004). The ensuing theoretical discussion has been presented in Introduction and chapter 1 and this chapter is written under this light.

So, the purpose of the chapter is threefold: first, to describe and explain the evolution of the relations between Latin America and East Asia; second, to assess several important cases of interregionalism (FEALAC, the Pacific Alliance, the Forum China-Latin America); and third to assess the theoretical relevance of “interregionalism” for the study of the relations between both regions¹ since it remains as an understudied case of interregionalism.

BACKGROUND: THE EVOLUTION OF LATIN AMERICA-EAST ASIA RELATIONS

The relations between Latin America and East Asia must be approached under the idea of the *longue dureé*, and this is a story of high impact events and processes and also remarkable discontinuities.² The prehistory of the relations is constituted by immigrations. Probably the first humans in the Americas came through the bearing area and maybe by sea too, providing the genetic stock of the so-called first Americans.³ Much later, the first historic regular relation was that of “Galeón de Manila.”⁴ The Galeón was a type of Spanish ship. Starting as earlier as 1565, a galleon (also called “Nao de China” and “Nao de Manila”) begun to sail from Acapulco, Mexico, to Manila in the Philippines, and thus establishing a regular annual trip that lasted until 1815, for long 250 years. Manila was a “hub-and-spoke” center, as we say today: Chinese junks delivered goods from and to Manila, from and to East and South East Asia, and the galleons crossed the Pacific.

The importance of the galleon rested in several factors. First, it was the first regular connection between East Asia and the Americas. Second, it was an endeavor promoted by a power external to the regions (Spain, the new empire of the time). Third, it established a pattern of trade consistent of the export of raw materials (basically silver and also some gold) from America (Peru and Mexico) to Asia, and importing manufactured goods (such as silk, clothes, and porcelain) from China and South East Asia to America and to Europe. Goods, ideas, and people also traveled from one side to another of the Pacific.

Since the end of the Manila galleon in 1815 there was a hiatus till the last part of the 19th century, when again migrations from Asia to the Americas become important. Chinese people settled in the United States but also in Mexico, Cuba, and Peru. People from Japan emigrated to Mexico, Peru, and Brazil, until as recently as the 1960s. People from Korea also came to Mexico and again after the Korean War (1950–1953) to Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. People from Indonesia also settled in Guyana.

Also by the end of the 19th century Japan and China signed treaties with some of their Latin American counterparts. Their importance has not to be underestimated. In a time in which the “old” Asia was “encountering” the “West,” and was dominated by it, those treaties provided a way to begin to reconstruct self-respect. This was because it is apparent that the treaties were signed as equals states (what today usually we called “sovereign” states), or at least as “non-unequal” imperialist treaties. This was a major contribution of Latin American countries, a kind of “export of recognition,” changing the practice and prevalent pattern of recognition (which is a key part of sovereignty as a legal concept). Before these treaties, the concept of respect for sovereignty was not accepted and even less so included in the treaties signed by Asian countries with Western powers. One of the clearest manifestations of this was extraterritoriality, which was eliminated for the first time in the treaties with the Latin American countries.⁵ Thus, Asian countries’ identity as sovereign states was enhanced through these initial treaties. They also became the first institutionalized and binding links between countries of both regions, after the legal dependency of Philippines from the Viceroyalty of New Spain (current Mexico).

The Cold War and the division of the world in “spheres of influences” shaped much of the interaction between both regions. Colombia fought in the Korean War, the only Latin American country doing this, and most of Latin America recognized the Republic of China (ROC-Taiwan) as the sole and legitimate China, until the 1970s. Some countries, such as Paraguay and many Central American countries, as well as countries in the Caribbean, still do this. Roughly half of all the countries that recognize Taiwan as “China” are in Latin America, but Costa Rica in 2007 and Panama in 2017 switch

recognition toward Beijing. In the 1960s and the 1970s a certain spirit of "Third Worldism," reflected in the Non Alignment Movement, for first time created some kind of loose solidarity, which disappeared after the Cold War.

The end of the Cold War (circa 1989–1991) is widely accepted as the start of a new era for both regions. The pace of the relation between both regions has been accelerating in recent decades. In particular, the chapter will propose a loose periodization of the relations since the early 1990s, setting stages that capture this process. A key issue to explore is that of the proliferation of bilateral and multilateral efforts in the institutionalization of the relations, and what accounts for them.

The relations between Latin America and East Asia have shown a remarkable growth after the end of the Cold War, particularly in the economic realm but also in the political field. This process happened in a three phase process: first, in the 1990s bilateral political dialogue increased, well reflected in the openings of new embassies and consulates and in an increase of high profile visits, including presidents, prime ministers, ministers, officials, head of House of Representatives, and so on (Nishijima and Smith, 1996). In a parallel way, economic transactions also increased, in part due to export-oriented model in East Asia, the unilateral opening of Latin American markets under the influence of the so-called Washington Consensus, and in some cases, the overvaluation of some Latin American currencies, such as the peso in Argentina before 2001.⁶ During this phase Latin American countries pursued bilateral relations, but also begun to pursue membership in existing framework of the Pacific, such as the APEC, the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), Pacific Basin Economic Cooperation (PBEC) and others, sometimes successfully (such as Mexico, Chile, and Peru cases in APEC, the same countries plus Ecuador and Colombia in PECC). Mexico was promoted by the United States. Chile obtained the support of some Asian countries, such as Malaysia, and Fujimori's Peru was backed by Japan. A moratorium on new memberships was then declared (Wilhelmy and Mann, 2005; Paz, 1999). So, in this first phase, bilateral contacts increased, political and diplomatic relations were established or resumed, and Latin American countries sought (with limited success) to have a place under the new multilateral governance and cooperation structure being created in the Pacific. This development made possible processes of socialization, of learning and also of identity adaptation as countries of the Pacific for Latin America.

Nonetheless, the "remapping" of the Pacific neglected the "Latin American" side of it. Literally, many maps of those days, displayed on the press, international fora, and so on showed a Pacific rim with certain precision except south of the United States and/or Mexico. The shore faded south of Mexico. Latin America (or at least Latin American countries with shores on

the Pacific) was neglected until recently. "Pacific rimness" and the identity of the Pacific were shaped in a way that excluded Latin America.

Another tectonic event opened a new phase of the relations. The Asian economic crisis started on July 2, 1997, in Thailand, ending the so-called Asian economic miracle.⁷ East Asia's countries embarked in a process of reconsidering regionalism, regional coordination, and regional dialogues. This process had two clear dimensions: on one hand, increase awareness and a sense of urgency, and a concern for the lack (or, at best, weakness) of regional institutions; on the other, the establishment or reinforcement of inter-regional dialogues, such as ASEM and FEALAC.

This wave of "new regionalism" in Asia was quite remarkable and quite new, considering the East Asia lack of tradition of regional institutions and also of legalization, areas in which Latin American had a stronger record.⁸ To some extent it was a reaction to the perceived failure of traditional global multilateral mechanisms (such the International Monetary Fund-IMF) and alliances to address the 1997 financial and economic crisis, and a new concern of political imbalance vis-à-vis the United States, which saw its influence in the region increased after the crisis, at the same costs, but also a growing resentment against "America."

The usual distinction between "regionalization,"⁹ as a market-driven process, and "regionalism,"¹⁰ as a politically driven process, is useful here to roughly capture the differences between East Asia and Latin America in this regard. It has been argued that "regionalization" was a process that spontaneously took place in East Asia,¹¹ while more European "regionalism" type took place historically in Latin America. However, after the crisis, introspection in East Asia brought change and "regionalism" became suddenly a serious matter of discussion in the East Asia capitals. So, an interesting issue here is that the sequence regionalism-interregionalism that both Europe and to some extent Latin America followed, never happened in East Asia, where the two processes began to take shape almost simultaneously. I will go to return to this point.

Interregionalism between East Asia and Latin America countries developed around the time of the Asian crisis.¹² The East Asian-Latin American Forum (latter called Forum for East Asia Latin American Countries-FEALAC) was proposed immediately after the crisis, in 1998, by a highly respected Asian leader, Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. This was a key event of the relations between both regions, because for the first time, a serious step in the direction of institutionalization took place.¹³ I called it "soft institutionalization" since 1997, an approach sensitive to the different legal cultures of both regions. FEALAC also was a way to circumvent the APEC membership restriction of "Pacific coast countries," which was an obstacle for Asian

countries to have close contact with three of the “big” economic and political countries in Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela). For the first time there was a forum for regular face-to-face encounters between the leaders and bureaucracies of both regions (Hosono, 2002).

In other important Pacific organizations, such as APEC (the most important one), certainly the perceptions about Latin America and East Asia were modified, at least to some extent. Some APEC summits—the most important political ritual of the Pacific, the meeting of all the heads of state and governments—even took place in Mexico (Los Cabos, 2002), Chile (Santiago, 2004), and Peru (2008 and 2016), something unthinkable until early 2000s. It has also been reported that by that time some Asian leaders sought advice of their Latin American counterparts in how to deal with the IMF’s conditionalities (Mols, 2005). These new attitudes and the development of the interregional platform of FEALAC opened a window of opportunities for a new phase in the relations between the two regions.

In the first years of the 21st century, a third phase started, clearly marked by the rise of China, and particularly by China accession to the WTO in 2001 that marked a process of sharp increase in the economic relations between the two regions, and strongly focused on economic issues. Soon economic bilateral agreements were signed, too. The leading case was the Free Trade Area Agreement signed by South Korea and Chile. This was the first done by South Korea, but also the first for an East Asian country, that were until this point usually very reluctant to any kind of regulated bilateral trade. Other agreements were signed after this, such as the Japan-Mexico Economic Partnership Agreement of 2005 (upgraded in 2011). In 2005, China and Chile signed a free trade agreement that entered into force on October 2006 (upgraded in November 2017). A long list followed in the next years.

This phase was also a dramatic development comparing with the recent past. For example Japan after World War II considered Latin America as the “backyard” of the United States, and thus it has avoided to intervene in this area, or to have a much visible role in it, indeed focusing its political and economic efforts mostly in South East Asia since the 1970s. NAFTA—and to some extent the perspective of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)—and the Central America Free Trade Area (CAFTA) begun to change this Japanese modesty in its Latin America policy, and the fear to be excluded from the American market begun to grow among business circles, academia, and certainly policy makers.¹⁴

The financial crisis that started in Wall Street in 2008 certainly opened a new phase. If explosive trade increase was characteristic in the first part of the century, after 2008 there was a new focus on investment, currency swaps, and loans, particularly in the economic relations between China and most of

its partners in the region (Ellis, 2018). Generally speaking commodities prices declined, although total trade amount more or less remained high. Oil, for example, has expanded (Vasquez, 2018). China became an extremely important investor, particularly since 2012 (albeit concentrated on few countries, such as Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, and Peru). The importance of Chinese financing to the region cannot be underestimated. From 2005 to 2016, the Chinese Development Bank (CDB) and China EximBank provide \$141 billion dollars in finance to Latin America (Myers and Gallagher, 2017). A recent report calculated that in 2017 Chinese lending to Latin America was higher than that of the World Bank, the Inter-American Bank (IDB), and the CAF-Development Bank *together* in the same period (Myers and Gallagher, 2018).

The beginning of the presidency of Donald Trump is opening a new phase, the current phase, “bringing politics back in.” In February 2018, then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson resurrected the Monroe Doctrine, the same one that another Secretary of State, John Kerry, had declared over few years ago. He attacked China’s engagement in the region, saying that “often involves trading short-term gains for long-term prosperity,” went further comparing China’s model versus the United States, and asking: “Today, China is gaining a foothold in Latin America. It is using economic statecraft to pull the region into its orbit. The question is: At what price?” (Tillerson, 2018). His statement, considered in Washington an important policy speech, was not isolated. Before the end of 2017, The National Security Strategy contained the following statements: “China seeks to pull the region into its orbit though state-led investments and loans”; US action “limits the malign influence of non-hemispheric forces”; “competitors have found operating space in the hemisphere”; “limit opportunities for adversaries to operate from areas of close proximity to us” (White House, 2017). The National Defense Strategy, the first produced during Trump administration, additionally declared that the central challenge to US prosperity and security is the *reemergence of long-term, strategic competition* with China and Russia, considered by NSS to be revisionist powers (NDS, 2018). This new policy of the Trump administration will create a new political environment that cannot be ignored in appraising any process of interregionalism not only between China and Latin America but also between Asia and the Americas.

The phases described here were not sequential and simplistically linear, and must be considered more as an explanatory device than an accurate description. The new phases fairly coexist with the previous ones. However, it is possible to establish certain links between them, and the existence of the previous ones has made the emergence of the next ones possible. Let us move to address in more empirical and theoretical detail the issue of current interregionalism, particularly between East Asia and Latin America, focusing on FEALAC.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EAST ASIA-LATIN AMERICA INTERREGIONALISM IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

As a historical phenomenon, interregionalism is a new development of broad international and global governance. It has also been declared that “inter-regionalism is merely the addition of a minor fourth level in international relations bargaining” and that is “a foreign policy milieu goal designed to frame the international environment in which individual nation-states act” (Camroux, 2010). As a concept or theory, interregionalism has been developing as an important analytical tool to understand relations between two regions, particularly to explain the cases in which the European Union is engaged, such as the ASEM. In order to understand this international phenomenon, initially scholars borrowed insights from integration and “new regionalism” literature, but also from international organization literature and the “regime” one. There was a clear connection between the rise of “inter-regionalism” as a phenomenon and the way in which the new “interregionalist” literature was developed in Europe (mostly in Germany and the United Kingdom). It has been stated that “international relationships have become an increasingly common form of international engagement, generating a dense web of dialogue” (Doidge, 2012). Is this the case of East Asia-Latin America relations? Additionally, serious doubts remain to what extent can the now available theory capture the nuances of the Latin America-East Asia case? Additionally, to what extent the theory can be generalizable? Which are the lessons the Latin America-East Asia relations case can provide us? In this sense, the value of this book certainly extends beyond the Americas.

The first obstacle to answer this set of questions is that, as discussed in Introduction and chapter 1, there is no a single template for interregionalism, and thus consensus about its scope, impact, and future have not been achieved. Empirically, there are cases of interregional or region-to-region relations (such as EU-MERCOSUR economic negotiations). There are also cases of countries of three different regions belonging as countries in a “trans-national” forum, such as APEC. There is also room for some hybrid cases like country-to-region cases, such as EU-Mexico (Dosh, 2005). In any case, there is no clear cut definition of interregionalism, which remains a “fuzzy concept” (Gardini and Malamud in chapter 1 in this volume), and consequently there is no agreement in empirical research about the cases to be considered.

In the theoretical realm, initial explanations for interregionalism were basically clustered in two groups. One group can be labeled as that of the followers of the “Trilateral thesis.” They posit that interregionalism is empirically organized around three economic and power “poles,” the United States, the European Union, and a loose East Asian one, called collectively as the “New Triad” (Hänggi, 1999 and 2000; Ruland, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, and

2002c). This Triad becomes a new layer in the global governance, helping to achieve some degree of cooperation, overcoming collective decision-making problems. In this group it is relatively easy to detect, in terms of international relations theory, a “realist” or “neorealist” rationale, which put an emphasis on balancing vis-à-vis the United States, and a neoliberal institutionalist logic, which stresses economic issues.

The other group, which sustains what I call the “European thesis,” explicitly or implicitly argues that interregionalism as such is not an international phenomenon but an intrinsically European phenomenon, linked with the attempt to set up an EU common foreign policy and/or with the external projection of a European identity. This new role of the institutions of the EU in international affairs is called “actorness” and has given rise to a large body of literature (Bersick, 2002; Gilson, 2002a and 2002b; Lawson, 2002a and 2002b; Yeo Lay Hwee, 2002; Yeo Lay Hwee and Gilson, 2002; Camroux, 2010; Doidge, 2012). The studies on identity and images, the role of the “other” are also emphasized. A particular hypothesis is that because the EU is a highly institutionalized region, it impose to (or help) the “other” to develop similar characteristics. A mechanism in which this is apparent is that before the meetings of ASEM, East Asia had to sit together to develop a common position vis-à-vis the EU. To some extent, it was an attempt to impose “regionness” to East Asia, that is, the countries participate in ASEM not as such, but as a “region.”¹⁵

Why interregionalism has emerged is not so clear, and which functions and goals the institutions must fulfill, beyond the declarations about multiple purposes (Segal, 1997). Ruland (2001) has elaborated on the functions of interregional organizations. As noted by realists, balancing or coalition making is one. Institution-building is another one, interregionalism is a new layer of global governance (in a moment of weak multilateralism). Interregional institutions can also function as rationalizers, that is, as a mechanism and a place in which some initial consensus and collective action problem solving can be achieved around hot issues being debated in the WTO and the Organization of United Nations (UN).¹⁶ Agenda setter is another potential function, linked with the previous point; in this case the group of countries of an interregional process can try to set the agenda in international negotiations.

In any case, neither the “Trilateral thesis” nor the “European thesis” is able to explain or to understand the Latin America-East Asia case. There may be room for another explanation, a “reductionist” one to follow Kenneth Waltz. That is, considering the fact that both ASEM and FEALAC were proposals made by Singaporean prime minister, one can look for “second image” (government or bureaucratic level) and “first image” explanation (great man theories or leadership theories). The recent creation of the Asia-Middle East Dialogue (AMED), in June 2005, also proposed by the now former Prime

Minister Goh Chok Tong, makes this hypothesis plausible. Against it, one must consider why so many countries are engaging so many resources in such difficult collective endeavors, if these only promote Singaporean leaders' national objectives.

The economic relations between East Asia and Latin have been growing quite strongly during this century and in some cases there is some growing economic interdependence, but still asymmetric effects are more common. While China is the most important trade partner of Brazil, Brazil is certainly not the most important partner for China. A realist theory based on the old triad cannot be applied, but certainly the new role of China need to be accounted for. A theoretical expansion of the available theories of inter-regionalism is urgently needed. And of course, since the EU is not engaged in the interregionalism between East Asia and Latin America, "regioness" is not being imposed. Dosh (2005) proposed a "peripheral interregionalism" to label the East Asia-Latin America case. At the core of the "peripheral regionalism" is an attempt of diversify external relations. The main strength of this conceptualization may be useful to capture other cases such as that of AMED. The main weakness is that we still have to come about with a way to capture most of the variety of the interregional phenomena between East Asia and Latina America.

THE FORUM FOR EAST ASIA-LATIN AMERICA COOPERATION (FEALAC)

It is clear that interregionalism in its different types has become a visible feature of the international scene. Following the long historical evolution of the relations of Latin America and East Asia, with its contingent events and discontinuities, it is also clear that FEALAC shows a modest level of regularization and "soft institutionalization." As an intergovernmental forum FEALAC reasserts a commitment to a traditional legal conception of sovereignty. It remains to be seen whether or not in a not yet visible future it may develop some sense of actorness too.

As an international organization, FEALAC is a forum of dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. It is easy to say that it is just "cheap talk," although in terms of Habermas' communicative theory it can be argued that there is now a discrete public space for the dialogue between the two regions. The constitutive effects of this process are not easy to gauge, nevertheless they are taking place. Following Johnston (2001), a "social environment" is being formed. In terms of identity though, the idea of the "other," at least for some leaders and bureaucrats, is being shaped more by their own experiences and contacts. This means that, if any identity is in fact in the making,

it follows the direct experiences of Asians and Latin Americans, and that it is not shaped by uncritically and almost unconsciously imported assumptions, crafted by third parts in third places.

At least four important things must be mentioned about membership. First, FEALAC was created without the presence of the United States and Canada. This reflected the situation after the end of the Cold War, when the countries in Latin America felt free to pursue more autonomous foreign policies. Second, FEALAC provides Latin American and Asian countries to engage with each other even if they do not have access to the Pacific Ocean, thus bypassing the membership rule of APEC. Third, one of the most interesting features of FEALAC is the particular situation of Australia and New Zealand as members of FEALAC. The very name of the institution and most of its documents speak of two regions (East Asia and Latin America), and I am not aware of any protest by these two countries, which clearly do not belong to either region. Their memberships were originally resisted by China and Malaysia, but it was Latin America that supported their inclusion as members of the other region, East Asia. Both Australia and New Zealand have been changing their identities and self-images in the last decades, from being white outposts in the Pacific to embrace multiple faces and to add an Asian dimension, imposed by immigration, economics, geopolitics, and so on. FEALAC, then, is a way to enhance their visibility in Latin America, but also to become one of the members of the "other" region, to make this new status official. Last but not least, South East Asian countries also surprisingly became part of the "East Asia" category.

FEALAC remains almost unknown to the public of the member countries. There are several reasons for this, but the key one are the low profile of the organization and the fact that historically FEALAC failed to engage with non-state actors. A serious problem of FEALAC is the lack of political leadership and the lack of a secretariat that embodies and represents the organization, providing at the same time "public goods" to the members. This situation is partly due to the very modest economic resources made available by the member countries. A "cyber" secretariat created by South Korea has supplied some minimal degree of support for coordination, but inertia and low productivity have characterized most of the history of the organization, despite the initial hopes and the evident potential.¹⁷

THE CHINA-CELAC FORUM

The most recent case of interregionalism and probably the more consequential is the China-CELAC Forum.¹⁸ It is a case of hybrid interregionalism (between a single power, China and CELAC). China created similar fora

before (i.e., the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation, FOCAC, with the first ministerial conference held in Beijing, in 2000), but it deliberately delayed the creation of a forum with Latin American countries. The reason for this delay was the long hold Chinese consideration of Latin America as the American “backyard,” following the same consideration done by Japan and South Korea in previous decades. China’s relations with the region have grown exponentially since the beginning of the century. China developed a handful of strong bilateral relations, labeled them as “strategic partnerships,” and also negotiated several free trade areas and other economic agreements.

The Chinese, however, decided to upgrade their relations with the region adding a multilateral layer after the launching of the policy of the “pivot” to Asia by the Obama administration, and particularly with the decision of the United States to promote economic statecraft to isolate China, the push for the TTP. China’s dominant perception was of “encirclement,” and this promoted several initiatives to counteract this US strategy. In the same line, in September 2017 China invited Mexico to become a member of BRICS PLUS, an expanded BRICS, taking advantage of the deterioration of the relations between the United States and Mexico since the victory of Donald Trump in the presidential elections of 2016, but the initiative was blocked by Brazil similarly to how India vetoed Pakistan.

For a while China had considered UNASUR and ALBA as potential partners in Latin America, but finally chose CELAC as the preferred multilateral partner in the region because UNASUR was perceived as Brazil’s child and did not include Cuba and Mexico, and ALBA was simply too controversial and such choice might have been considered in Washington and in other Latin American circles as a provocation. There have been two ministerial summits of the China-CELAC Forum so far, the first in Beijing in 2015 and the second in Santiago in 2018. The China-CELAC Forum has become an important arena for China to deploy a mitigation effort, in order to assuage the criticism that has emerged in many quarters of the region regarding the asymmetric economic relationship, the impact of the extractive industries, even on non-internationally competitive industrial sectors.

CONCLUSIONS

The case of East Asia-Latin America interregionalism is one of the least known cases of interregionalism. Modest theoretical advance has been achieved in the study of interregionalism beyond typology, and even typology remains controversial. The expansion of the relations between Latin America and East Asia after the end of the Cold War is an undeniable fact.

Almost three decades after the end of the Cold War, the picture of the relations between both regions is qualitatively very different when compared with those days. The density of relations was significantly expanded after the end of the Cold War, which allowed countries to seek new relationships and to diversify them. The periodization offered here gives a glance of how they evolved and the stages through which they have come. Bilateral (i.e., China “strategic partnerships”), minilateral (Asian observers and potential membership in the Pacific Alliance), and multilateral formats have been sought (FEALAC, China-CELAC Forum).

FEALAC promise as a stepping stone in the process of institutionalization (soft institutionalization) of the relations between both regions established a modest benchmark. The China-CELAC Forum, on the other hand, seems to have more content and to raise more political interest than FEALAC. To some extent the Forum is a feature of Chinese’s foreign policy, since China was the main actor in its creation, controlling the timing, the content and providing most resources for cooperation, but at the same time allowing Latin American countries to show some agency in the hemispheric relations, agency that the Trump administration plans to test soon.

Overall East Asia-Latin America interregionalism embodies the multiple features, the fuzzy contours, and indeterminacy of interregionalism. All the typologies of interregionalism proposed by Hänggi and discussed in the conceptual chapter of the book can be detected in this case study, although definitions have to be taken with a degree of flexibility. East Asia-Latin American interregionalism, in spite of aspects of bureaucratic institutionalization, largely rests on summitry, thus confirming one of the central hypotheses of the book, that is, that summits at the highest and also at the lower political, mainly executive, levels are not only a fundamental feature of interregionalism but they are also essential to the maintenance and functioning of the interregional system. Ultimately the case shows how there is no common strategy or common interregional planning and coordination in the Americas. Yet East Asia-Latin American interregionalism corroborates a long-standing characteristic of the Americas: the US way is the US way, and the Latin American way is simply a different thing altogether.

NOTES

1. “Region” not only has a geographical meaning but also fundamentally as a social construction. In the context of the discussion of interregionalism it is generally assumed that region means an institutionalized region, not necessarily a geographical one. Yet the geographical aspect is prevalent in the discussion about the East Asia and Latin American “regions.”

2. Again, language is consequential. To speak about relations is to accept "separateness." The sea (an "empty" sea) separates both regions. As the new geography knows now well, geography is a highly socially constructed discipline aimed to control space. Contemporary environmental concerns are also eroding this idea of separateness.

3. It is still highly debated when this happened, and how. This genetic connection today is quite important in the growing area of prevention and cure of illness based on genetic research.

4. There is a discussion whether there was a possible Chinese expedition to Mexico, and whether latter a Japanese one happened.

5. Sovereignty issues were always important in Latin America, and some of them were created and incorporated into accepted international law, let us only remember the Calvo and the Drago doctrines.

6. This asymmetry explains in part the aggravation of the "Manila Galleon" type of bi-regional trade, that is, Latin America exporting raw material to East Asia and importing manufactured goods, an early example of a pattern that would be repeated in this century with other raw materials and manufactured products.

7. It was during the Asian economic "miracle" (also called by some authors "development by invitation") and the parallel lack of good performance in Latin America (in particular during the "lost decade"-1980s) that the prevailing images of Asian dynamism and Latin American decline took root. At the same time, economic comparative studies flourished in order to explain the "anomaly" of the different economic performance in both regions. Many scholars oriented to policy research and also international organizations such as the IMF, World Bank, and IADB promoted studies that provide Asiatic "lessons" to be learned by Latin American countries. Mainstream classic or liberal economist posited that liberal market friendly policies (export-oriented policies) explained East Asian success and state intervention explained Latin American failure.

8. See Kahler (2000) about legal cultures in Asia and Latin America. See Mansfield and Milner (1999) for an account on "new regionalism." For an account on the lack or weakness of regionalism in Asia see Aggarwal (2003), Dosh (2005), Katzenstein (2000), Lincoln (2004), Ravenhill (2001, 2003), and Rozman (2004).

9. This concept was related with the idea of "open regionalism," and idea compatible with globalization, very popular in this period.

10. It is also linked to the idea of close regionalism, more related to the old protectionism of post World War II.

11. It is ironic that this "market driven," "spontaneous" process of regionalization (also called "bottom-up" approach) was certainly induced, and promoted, by state decisions (i.e., the Plaza Accord, Japan's new industrial policy, "desarrollista" states in East Asia, etc).

12. ASEM formally started in 1996, but clearly became more important after the crisis. The leaders Summits became annual in 1993.

13. "Institutionalization comprises the regularization of patterns of interaction and, consequently, their reproduction across space and time" Held and McGraw, p. 19.

14. It is interesting to analyze how, at this time, China was perceived as a threat in Central America, but largely as an opportunity in the Southern Cone. For a survey of China relations with the Caribbean, see Wenner and Clarke (2016).

15. For many Asian countries “region” affects the idea of sovereignty, usually strongly defended in East Asia, in particular due to the sad experiences of the 19th century. The process also defines what is to be “European”: to belong to the EU, and thus neglecting the non-member countries, such as Switzerland.

16. For example, the Manila Plan Action (2004) of FEALAC called precisely for this.

17. For more information see www.fealac.org.

18. For more information about the history and content of the forum see <http://www.chinacelacforum.org/eng/> and particularly the document http://www.chinacelacforum.org/eng/ltjj_1/P020161207421177845816.pdf.

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