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Book Review/Reseña

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***Latin America, China, and Great Power Competition: New Triangular Relationships.* By Enrique Dussel Peters. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2025. Pp. 193. Hardcover, $110.00; paperback, $29.95; ebook, $29.95.**

How are we to make sense of the rising global hegemonic rivalry between the United States and China, and what role does Latin America have in it, given that its historical ties with the US are being redefined by China's growing influence in the hemisphere? This is a central question that Latin American and Caribbean societies (LAC) confront today, and it is one that has inspired a growing body of scholarship, now enriched by the publication of *Latin America, China, and Great Power Competition: New Triangular Relationships*. The book is written by Enrique Dussel Peters, a professor of Economics and the director of the Center for Chinese-Mexican Studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

Adding to his previous articles on the subject, Dussel Peters's new book examines Latin America's growing and transformative economic exchanges and partnerships with multiple Chinese actors as a way to assess how these developments create new historical dynamics that place LAC at the center of the on-going disputes between the US and China. Indicating the applied motivation for writing the work, from the onset the author states that his goal is to offer new data-driven knowledge that could assist in formulating better regional developmental policies. To do so, Dussel Peters divides the work into six thematic chapters dealing with different aspects and the significance of the growing presence and influence of Chinese markets, investment, and technology in the recent developmental trajectory of Latin American economies. Rather than a detailed summary of each chapter, I highlight below some of the main claims and contributions the book advances, engaging more directly with key elements of some of its most relevant sections.

One of these central assertions is that it is impossible to make sense of the recent rise of China and of its growing influence around the world unless one considers the vital role of the country's massive public sector. Though structuring the entire work, this notion is

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particularly developed in Chapter 3, where Dussel Peters demonstrates that the public sector makes China's economy and its presence in the world unique, as those of a country which cannot be explained by notions such as a market-based, state-planned economy. To him, it would be more accurate to say that China has a hybrid economy, where multiple sets of public-sector actors from the federal to local levels organize a dynamic economy that benefits from market incentives and the massive resources provided by multiple public actors—interestingly, often by competing between themselves, especially through State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) at various levels. This offers a unique dynamism to the Chinese economy where developmental plans can be consistently pursued without the ossification of the Soviet experience.

This logic is also applied to China's growing international presence, which is defined by Dussel Peters, in line with the official phrasing held by the country's leaders, as a process of globalization with Chinese characteristics. In this, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been playing a central role, especially through its commitments to providing something Western actors have given up since the height of the Cold War, i.e., infrastructure investments that have played increasingly major roles in the areas of South-South cooperation. The place for LAC in this process has been formally outlined in two main policy papers that the Chinese government published in 2008 and 2016, which argue for closer relations based on mutual advantages grounded in public-private partnerships strengthening productive capacities on both sides. This has been indeed happening through bilateral as well as multilateral lines, which have gained ground in the last decade with growing interfacing between China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). But the author argues for more long-term strategic planning on devising new lines for cooperation, especially as the United States seeks to reassert its influence in the region (51–52).

In Chapter 4, Dussel Peters examines how the US sees the growing presence of Chinese actors in the hemisphere. He claims that, thus far, the US responses have mostly been centered on security concerns that assume that LAC have been naïve in not seeing the (alleged) real intentions of China (65–66). Though this reading of things was first voiced in Trump's first term in office, it continued under Biden and is today one of the few areas of bipartisanship in DC. And although both US political parties have tried to offer some incentives to reverse the course of recent events, these actions pale in comparison to China's massive regional investments. Instead of this having led to the US increasing offerings to LAC to incentivize them to move away from China's influence, what is seen in Washington is growing concerns about the region's recent unwise decisions. Dussel Peters claims that this type of dynamics, where an extra-hemisphere power gains such a level of influence, is new for the region which, in his view, is still learning to navigate (72–73). This sense of optimism or hope on the part of the author is coherent with his main purpose for writing the book, as indicated above. But it is hard to see how accommodations could be found in today's administration in the US, which considers the expulsion of what it calls "outside powers" from the hemisphere and returning the region to US hegemonic control as the main tenets of its LAC's foreign policy.

In the book's main and longest chapter (Chapter 5), the author scrutinizes the main areas of Chinese growing influence in LAC: trade, finance and investments, infrastructure projects, and employment generation. The main argument here is that, given the impressive gains on all these fronts, it is hard to imagine any of these being easily reversed. But, as important as they are, Dussel Peters claims that these connections have thus far been mostly in the economic dimension—wherein there continues to be a persistent trend of commodity exports going to China and high-technology goods going in the opposite direction—and that there needs to be a similar deepening of interaction in other areas such as academic and civil society partnerships and more political strategic planning on both sides, especially to face rising bilateral tensions (83).

This seems especially important considering that the region manages to export some value-added products (e.g., cars and airplanes) to the US, whereas its exports to China consist mostly of commodities, though Chinese investments in much-needed infrastructure are growing, and Chinese loans are more favorable than those the West provides (96–103). This is one of the main reasons why Dussel Peters advocates for more pragmatic and strategic policies from LAC in future global economic engagements. In effect, in his view, in trying to navigate between these two hegemons, LAC should try to assess which partner offers more in different areas, such as trade, investment, and technology. Though certainly wise, this advice seems increasingly difficult to implement.

Better understanding of the complexities and variation among countries and sectors and pursuing different types of interactions between multiple economic actors, so that beneficial partnerships can be assured, do seem vital for the region's future. But while China acts pragmatically in its international pursuits, the US is rapidly reviving old geopolitical and security concerns, particularly in the Western hemisphere, which it sees as its exclusive sphere of influence (when not control).

And though the book argues for managing this triangular relation on more strategic grounds, including by trying to ensure that the US and China work out together some level of coexistence in the region, it is hard to see how this could be pursued in today's turbulent global scenario. It might indeed be that, already entangled in great powers' economic competition, LAC may find themselves increasingly at the center of rising geopolitical hegemonic disputes—a challenging scenario that Dussel Peter's new book helps us understand, but one to which it naturally does not offer all the answers.

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