

Reporting Mexico in China: ‘China’s economy is developing robustly and rapidly’

Reportando México en China: ‘la economía de China se está desarrollando de manera robusta y rápida’

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Abstract

Though China looms large in the Mexican consciousness as an economic competitor, the same is not the same from the Chinese perspective. This study of the reporting of Mexico in China reflects on the lack of understanding of Mexico in China other than as a function of China’s international political economy. Though the prospects for greater cooperation may appear significant, the likelihood of this happening should clearly not be exaggerated. Mexico-China relations are asymmetrical and likely to stay that way for some time. Mexico’s value to China lies in its relationship to the USA, and not for anything intrinsic in the Mexican economy or society.

Keywords: China, Mexico, Public consciousness, international political economy

Resumen

Aunque China ocupa un lugar preponderante en la conciencia mexicana como competidor económico, no es lo mismo desde la perspectiva china. Este estudio de los informes de México en China refleja la falta de comprensión de México en China, aparte de como una función de la economía política internacional de China. Si bien las perspectivas de una mayor cooperación pueden parecer importantes, la probabilidad de que esto ocurra no debe ser exagerada. Las relaciones México-China son asimétricas y es probable que se mantengan así por algún tiempo. El valor de México para China radica en su relación con los Estados Unidos, y no en nada intrínseco a la economía o la sociedad mexicana.

Palabras clave: China, México, conciencia pública, economía política internacional

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Even the most casual visitor to Mexico during the last ten years must have gathered that a significant proportion of the Mexican population has a less than totally positive view of China's economic growth in the last four decades and the consequences for the Asia Pacific Region. It is certainly reflected in the media and even in academic writing on the topic. As a medium-sized manufacturing economy, from the early 1990s on Mexico has not only felt itself to be in direct competition with the People's Republic of China [PRC] for market share, but also for access to FDI and the attention of those multinational corporations who had previously operated in Mexico but were now following cheaper labour costs to China. Under the Fox Presidency these concerns culminated in open expression of a 'China Threat' that Mexico was being swamped or pushed aside. These concerns were not allayed in 2003 when China supplanted Mexico as the second major source of imports into the USA. By 2004 there were occasional wars of words between the Mexican Presidency and the Chinese Ambassador to Mexico and in January 2005 when Fox welcomed PRC Vice President Zeng to Mexico, he described China explicitly as a 'competitor' (Carrillo, Chen, & Goodman, 2011).

This article considers how Mexico is viewed, reported on and studied in China. The original idea was to research how the Mexican reactions to and reporting of China's rise were themselves reported in China. There were two purposes to that exercise. The first was, not without a certain exercise of *schadenfreude* to try and see how Mexican resistance to the miracle of the current Chinese model was negotiated in the PRC media. The second was to try and understand the dimensions of Chinese public opinion in its understanding of Mexico. While the second goal remains and is examined in the bulk of this article, the official media has unfortunately thwarted the first of this paper's goals.

Over the last few years Mexico has most definitely not been a hot news topic for the PRC media, and when it has, the focus of interest has largely been elsewhere than on any reporting of resistance to the idea of China's economic rise. On the contrary, a reading of the PRC media on Mexico's reactions suggests that all is for the best in the best of all possible socialist worlds. It would appear that the Chinese Communist Party's [CCP] Propaganda Department has negotiated away any difficulties in the time-honoured manner of not publicising that there is a problem at all. Two examples of this reporting really tell the whole story. In July 2011 Alberto Anaya, leader of the Mexican Labour Party and a member of the Mexican Parliament was reported to have given China's three decades of

growth his imprimatur: 'China's economy is developing robustly and rapidly' ('Hexie shije,' 2011). This comment is far from being a-typical of the coverage of Mexico and its reaction to China's economic growth and increasing political importance in international affairs as reported in China. It is however considerably trumped by the comments of an academic from Mexico, often widely reported in the Chinese media: 'China has managed to feed almost 1/5 of the world's population, which is a great contribution to the world's peace and development. The rapid economic growth of China has brought real benefits to Mexico and other Latin American countries' (Zou, 2010).

Chinese public opinion relies on the public media for their sources of knowledge about Mexico. It is then little wonder that there is a low level of understanding of Mexico. A survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) across the country on the understanding of Latin America (Zheng et al., 2008), shows that a quarter of Chinese people do not know that Mexico is a Latin American country. Cactus, Mayan culture and soccer are the only things associated with Mexico. Most people revealed that they 'know little and do not pay much attention' to Mexico. Geographic distance and cultural difference between the two countries account for much of this mutual ignorance. In addition though there is also a lack of shared interests and few efforts from either media or academia in either country to bridge the gap. To some extent that mutual stand-off reflects the attitudes of the two governments, if for different reasons.

PRC public media on Mexico

The key source for official information in the PRC is *The People's Daily* (Renmin Ribao, s.f.) – the official newspaper of the CCP. Though there is now greater competition in the media, *The People's Daily* remains the most authoritative and influential media source in the PRC, even outranking CCTV.

To take one year by way of example, from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011, *The People's Daily* published 41,970 articles altogether, among which only 36 were about Mexico. Of these Mexico-related articles, the most popular focus was on drug trafficking and its violent consequences. There were ten published stories on this topic. For the rest, there were three stories on Mexico's economic development; two stories on each of Mexican immigrants to and in the USA, two stories each on water shortage and sports; and one story each on Mexican politics. The rest were reports of a Chinese high-level

official meeting Mexican politicians, Mexican society and Mexican people being interested in Chinese culture and language.

In the previous year, from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2010, *The People's Daily* published a total amount of 44,300 articles, with 57 of them on Mexico. Among them, the most common topic was again on drug trafficking and the consequent violence (21 out of the 57). Ranked second were reports on high-level officials visiting each other's countries. These included the Vice President of the People's Congress of China visiting Mexico; the leader of the PRI visiting China; Mexico's ministers of National Defense and the Navy visiting the PRC; as well as both Ministers of Foreign Affairs exchanging visits. In 2010 five articles dealt with the Mexican economy; five with accidents and natural disasters that occurred in Mexico; and another five about the Mexican soccer team's performance in the World Cup. Four articles reported on Mexican society, and academia's positive opinions about China.

In the year 2009 when the H1N1 pandemic spread globally, there were 32 articles on Mexico in *The People's Daily* and nearly a half (14 out of 32) were related to the outbreak, including those that detailed the events surrounding the chartering of planes to bring back PRC citizens from Mexico; China suspending flights from Mexico; and Mexican travellers being quarantined in China. Despite this, the Mexicans were still reported to be understanding (about the situation) and grateful (to medical and financial aids from China), even though in reality there was hostility and aggression from both sides on this issue (Carrillo et al., 2011).

These statistics well summarize a few facts about media coverage of Mexico in China. First of all, Mexico receives little attention from both official and public Chinese media in general. On the few occasions when it does receive coverage, more often than not negative information is conveyed, whether it is about drug trafficking, social violence, landslides, hurricanes or storms. Interestingly, but probably not surprisingly, the friendly relationship between China and Mexico is only mentioned when both countries send high-profile delegations to visit each other, although such visits are not infrequent.

For special international events such as the World Cup, the Olympic Games or the World Expo, Mexico would make it into the Chinese news media, but in the same way as any other country does. Sometimes, Mexico's economic situation has been discussed, roughly equally in one of two ways: its problems, and the lessons China could learn from the Mexican experiences. Apart from these examples, any other discussion on Mexican culture and society is rare,

whereas the reporting in China suggests that for Mexicans China and Chinese culture are always attractive and admirable. For example, in March 2011 a PRC reporter in Mexico wrote:

In Mexico, when I talk with people of all kinds of backgrounds, the topic is always about China and Chinese language. Ordinary people talk more about Chinese products or news about China that they have seen on TV, whileas students—especially university students—are more and more interested in Chinese language. As I know, there are 5 Confucius Institutes in Mexico and the first Chinese school in this country has developed into the College of Chinese Culture with 1,500 students and been authorised by Hanban to set up a Confucius Institute. The founder of the college has told me, quite excitedly, that some private schools in Mexico City are having Chinese as one of the compulsory subjects and have invited teachers from her college to teach (Zhang, 2011).

Reporting Mexican reactions

Coverage of Mexican reactions to China's rise in *The People's Daily* has been very one dimensional and muted. There were 24 occasions in the three years of 2009-2011 when Mexicans were quoted in *The People's Daily* commenting on China's economic development and its impact on Mexico-China relations. Of these, half were from three academics, with Liljana Arsovska (Colegio de Mexico) being quoted six times, usually at length. For the rest, three were federal politicians (Chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, and leader of the Labour Party) and the remainder of those cited were with one exception (a journalist) leaders of the Sino-Mexican Friendship Society and the Mexican Overseas Chinese Association.

Given Prof Arsovka's dominance in PRC reporting of Mexican views, her statements, which are wide-ranging, take on an additional interest. A representative selection of her views as reflected in *The People's Daily* indicates her highly positive stance towards the PRC though the criticism of Mexico does seem a little gratuitous:

What magical factors have led to one and another 'China miracle'? I think the reason China is so successful is because the Chinese have great abilities to learn and adapt.

Mexico had a similar plan to develop special economic zones, but failed. China's success, to a large extent, is due to the superiority of socialism with

Chinese characteristics. China's leadership has been very brave to combine planning with the market and to introduce foreign investment, technology and managerial skills into China (Xi, Wu, Zou, Sun, & Liao, 2010).

China has managed to feed almost 1/5 of the world's population, which is a great contribution to the world's peace and development. The rapid economic growth of China has brought real benefits to Mexico and other Latin American countries (Zou, 2010).

China has become the stabilizer of the world economy after the GFC. China was not only promoting a restructuring of its domestic economy, going in for energy saving, with less carbon dioxide emission and poverty relief, but had also provided generous aid to other developing countries and helped Europe in the crisis. This had given confidence to the world. China's success is beyond the description of any words ('Shengzan huihuang,' 2011).

The China threat is nonsense. The Chinese leadership has explicitly stated that China would keep on the path of a peaceful rise. This can be seen as a legacy of China's historical and cultural traditions on its foreign policies. In the past and at present, the Chinese people have pursued peace.

China's achievements today indicate that the model of socialism with Chinese characteristics has been very successful. However, China is not interested in exporting this model to any other country. Instead, China respects the diversity and differentiation of civilizations in the world. This reflects the oriental values of 'harmony and mutual-benefit' ('Guoji yulun,' 2011).

The reflection in *The People's Daily* of a highly positive view of China's development is echoed by many others. A Mexican journalist Raoul Verchez was quoted in March 2010 as having said, 'The Chinese Government is innovative in governance. It is willing to adopt new ideas, set goals and achieve them. I think in this way China could be a model for many other countries, not least because China in recent years has achieved more than many countries could have achieved' ('Zhongguo daolu,' 2010). Less surprising though no more critical were the views of the Vice President of the Mexico-China Friendship Association who was reported to have said: 'The Mexican media often does not report on China's situation in a sincere way. So I prefer to know about China through China's Spanish media and the Chinese Embassy in Mexico' (Wen et al., 2010).

Of the twenty-four occasions on which Mexicans were quoted in *The People's Daily* during 2009-2011 only one was not totally fulsome in its praise. Enrique Dussel Peters (UNAM) was reported in November 2011 as having

mentioned trade conflicts, especially in textile, clothes and shoe manufacturing. But even this was offset by a positive, direct quote: 'In order to further develop their strategic partnership, China and Mexico need to focus on mutual economic complement, actively look for business opportunities from each other and be more understanding' (Zou, 2011).

Chinese academia on Mexico

Mexican Studies does not exist as an independent field of study in Chinese academia. Instead, it is an element of Latin American studies, which is a much-neglected research area itself. Among China's thousands of research institutions, only a handful has strength (if any) in Latin American Studies. The most significant and active is the Institute of Latin America, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Under the Institute, there are research centres on Cuba, Brazil and Central America and the Caribbean, while Mexico is not a focus of regional studies. Outside CASS, the biggest congregations of Latin America specialists are in the renowned universities of Beijing, Fudan and Nankai. Other higher education and research institutions with more or less academics specializing on Latin America are the China Foreign Affairs University, Hubei University, Hebei University, Shandong Normal University, the Southwest University of Science and Technology, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations and the Guangdong Research Institute for International Strategies. Considering the scale of scholarship in arts and social sciences in China, this is a rather limited scope. And *Lading Meizhou Yanjiu* [Journal of Latin American Studies] based at the Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS is China's only academic journal on Latin American Studies officially published both within and outside the country.

Chinese scholars are well aware of Latin American Studies' marginalised status in China. Firstly, there is insufficient funding from the government. For example, according to Wang Xiaode, 'from 2001 to 2005, the National Social Sciences Fund supported 80 research projects on world history, of which none was on research of Latin American history' (Wang, 2007). Secondly, there is a lack of library resources, especially first-hand sources (Dong, 2007; Sun, 2003). Language barrier exists too—few Chinese scholars in Latin American Studies are equipped with efficiency in Spanish or Portuguese (Dong, 2007). All these factors lead to not only poor quantity but also relatively poor quality of academic work on Latin America (Sun, 2000; Sun, 2003; Wang, 2007;

Dong, 2007; Zhang, 2006; Cheng, 2000). There is a distinct lack of systematic, in-depth, innovative research, with the result that there is likely to be ungrounded advice for policy makers.

Despite it being a major player in Latin America's economics and politics, Mexico has not much drawn the attention of China's Latin American Studies scholars, as can be seen from its coverage in *Lading Meizhou Yanjiu* between 2004 and 2011. In 2004, eight out of the total 90 articles published in that journal were about Mexico; in 2005 there were 13 out of 100; in 2006 five out of 94; in 2007 eight out of 96; in 2008 four out of 92; in 2009 six out of 100; in 2010 six out of 91; and in 2011 six out of 76. Notably, the 2004 and 2005 percentage was slightly higher because of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of NAFTA. Otherwise Mexico was a neglected topic. The CASS Institute of Latin American Studies website ³ has a column 'Latin American studies in China' which is a collection of academic articles written by researchers of the institute since 1996. Among the papers presented there, only 4 percent are about Mexico.

Mexico-China economic interaction

One reason for the apparent relative neglect of Mexico in China's media and academia is the economic relationship between the two countries, and especially the imbalance that minimizes Mexico's role in the development of the Chinese economy. Unlike most Latin American economies, Mexico's economy is clearly not complimentary to that of the PRC, and indeed from a standing start they would have to be seen as being in direct competition, and in many ways to be similarly structured (Dussel, 2009).

Table 1 details figures available from the PRC Minister of Commerce on China's global trade and investment in 2016-2017, and Mexico's place in those international economic relations. Clearly, Latin America in general and Mexico in particular are not China's major global trade partners. Calculated from these figures, Latin America only accounts for 6.3 per cent of China's total trade volume in that year. China is now Mexico's second largest trade partner, though that statement is clearly distorted by Mexico's overwhelming economic relationship with the USA.

3. <http://ilas.cass.cn>

At the same time for China, trade with Mexico is of almost no significance. Even inside Latin America, Mexico does not stand out as an important trade partner for China. In 2017 China imported 0.63 per cent of total imports (about US\$ 11.8 billion) per annum from Mexico; and exported 1.6 per cent of its total exports (about US\$36 billion) to Mexico. On the whole, trade with Mexico accounted for just over one percent of China's trade volume that year.

US\$ 578 million (2016 figures for accumulated FDI) of Chinese FDI into Mexico may have some impact especially in clothing and plastic products. At the same time this figure represents only 0.04 per cent of the PRC's total worldwide accumulated FDI. In 2016 US\$211.84 million of China's outbound FDI went to Mexico, which accounted for as little as 0.1 per cent of its annual outbound FDI. As a source of investment, Mexico means equally little. Of the US\$144 billion FDI China has received from other countries, Mexico contributes 0.1 per cent.

Table 1
Mexico's Place in China's International Trade
and Investment, 2016-2017
US\$ million

China's Global Trade 2017	4,104,470
China's Global exports 2017	2,263,490
China's Global imports 2017	1,840,980
China Trade with Latin America 2017	260,000
China Trade with Mexico 2017	47,670
China exports to Mexico 2017	35,900
China imports from Mexico 2017	11,770
China's Inbound FDI 2017	144,000
China's Inbound FDI from Mexico 2017	145
China's Outbound FDI 2016	196,150
China's accumulated outbound FDI 2016	1,357,390
China's Outbound FDI to Mexico 2016	212
China's accumulated outbound FDI to Mexico 2016	579

Sources: Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China (2017, 2018a, 2018b); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2018a); Xinhuanet (2018); Ministerio de Comercio del Ministerio de Inversión Extranjera y Cooperación Económica (2017); Outbound FDI to Mexico (2017).

The sourcing of natural resources such as minerals and oil is often a major concern in China's developing economic relations with Latin American countries (Camarena, 2011). However, such is not the case with Mexico. To the extent that economics is involved in China's perspective on the bilateral relationship, there would seem to be two main, general goals. The first and probably the least important is the size of the Mexican market. Mexico's consumers are a sizeable proportion of the Latin American market and the PRC likes to have its markets diversified. It would see selling into the Mexican domestic market as inevitable rather than particularly desirable for a whole range of cheaper domestic consumables, clothing, footwear and textiles. The second and perhaps more important is that economic cooperation with Mexico, if and when it can be achieved, could and does ensure better access for the PRC to the USA market and to the continued development of more and more technologically sophisticated global chains of production. It is this involvement in global chains of production that have placed Mexico and China in direct competition – especially in yarns, clothing, footwear, textiles, electronics, automobile parts and automobiles – and are likely to be a continuing cause of tension.

Since the early 1990s Mexico has become increasingly concerned about the economic threat to Mexico resulting from the growth of the PRC economy. The Mexican Government has variously expressed concerns about a number of aspects of trade and investment in China including the relative price of labour; competition globally for FDI, especially from the USA; the role of the (PRC) state in price fixing for key commodities in the PRC, as well as its involvement in enterprise development generally; and the increasing importance of the role of China's economic growth in strategic planning undertaken by and for multinational corporations; as well as the impact of China's economic growth generally on the world's macro-economic equilibrium. Since the 1990s, Mexico's critical reactions to the growth of the PRC economy and the trade imbalance between the two countries has also led to a number of anti-dumping investigations, as well as its attempts to impose duties on imports from China (Carrillo et al., 2011).

On the other hand, China has adopted a far more relaxed attitude in this regard, not least because the negative impacts of competition with Mexico on its overall economy are rather negligible. In order to soothe Mexico's uneasiness, the previous, current and possibly future-to-be leaderships of China have tried to point out that China and Mexico are partners rather than

competitors, repeatedly and on various occasions: Jiang Zemin in 2001 when welcoming Vicente Fox then President of Mexico in Beijing (Wu, 2001); Wen Jiabao in 2003 at a breakfast reception with Mexican entrepreneurs in Mexico City (Lü & Xu, 2003); Xi Jinping in 2009 at a lunch reception with Chinese and Mexican entrepreneurs in Mexico City (Luo & Wang, 2009). One Chinese scholar, Cao Nan, has gone so far as to suggest that 'in the longer term... the "challenge" from China will propel Mexico's economic development. (Mexico will have to) abandon its previous trade protection policies. (Mexico) should not always rely on the hope of receiving favourable trading conditions from the USA in order to develop its economy and should give up import protection on inefficient manufacturers, because it will only undermine its own competitiveness (Cao, 2005).'

A strategic political partnership

Though China clearly does not invest too much in its economic relations with Mexico, nonetheless consideration of wider political relations suggests that there may be more to the Mexico-PRC relationship. As Henry Kissinger began the process of improving relations between the USA and the PRC through his visits to Beijing, Mexico in 1972 became the third Latin American country to diplomatically recognize the PRC (after Cuba and Chile) and arguably the first for non-ideological reasons. But a close relationship between the PRC and Mexico started even earlier. In 1971, then Mexican President Echeverría pointed out in his speech at the 26th session of the UN General Assembly that 'China's sovereignty and territorial integrity are legally inseparable'. After the PRC's legal status in the UN was ascertained in the session, Mexico was among the first to recognize the People's Republic of China as the 'sole legal representative' of China (Xinhuanet, 2007). Echeverría's strong support for the PRC gained him the title of an 'old friend of the Chinese people'. Research undertaken by a *Southern Weekly* reporter on articles in *The People's Daily* 1949-2000 (Fang, 2011) shows that in China's diplomatic vocabulary, this term is normally used to address foreign political figures who are supportive to the PRC either politically or economically: 'At times when we want to fully restore diplomatic relations, and at times when we are faced with difficulties in international relations, we need the help of old friends'. Since 1975, Echeverría has been repeatedly referred to as an 'old friend of the Chinese people' in *The People's Daily*: the only Mexican to have been awarded this soubriquet (Renmin Ribao, s.f.).

Throughout the 1970s, 1980s and until 1993 there was a close working relationship between China and Mexico in international politics, and very little friction on any issue. The two countries signed important agreements on cooperation in fields of trade (1973), science and technology (1975), culture and tourism (1978), marine transportation (1984), socio-economic planning (1986) and social security (1990) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2018b). Echeverría was the first Head of State from a Latin American state to visit the PRC, and every subsequent Mexican President has followed in his footsteps. In recent years, high-level Chinese political figures have paid frequent visits to Mexico, including Jiang Zemin (then President) in 1997, Wen Jiabao (Premier) in 2003, Hu Jintao (President) in 2005 and Xi Jinping (Vice President) in 2009. Mexico and the PRC started to work together closely in a number of multilateral organisations. During the sessions of the UN Human Rights Commission Mexico has supported China's stand through abstaining from voting. The Mexican Government has on a number of occasions reiterated its stand of recognizing only one China, and not developing official relations with Taiwan (Xinhuanet, 2007). In the 1980s, China and Mexico shared a common position on Central America with Mexico's policies towards those countries, particularly Nicaragua and Guatemala, as well as Cuba, being criticised by the USA. The PRC publicly lauded Mexico for its multilateral approach to solving problems, and its independent stand (different from the USA) on these matters (Connelly & Cornejo, 1992, p. 112).

Mexico was an elected member of the UN Security Council during 2002-2003 as the USA was preparing for the invasion of Iraq. The Mexican Ambassador, Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, was outspoken in resisting the various requests by the USA for support. The government of the USA retaliated with criticism of Mexico's role in eliciting support from the PRC for the former's position on Iraq. While the view that Mexico was leading China on this issue might have been equally insulting to both countries there is no doubt that the two governments exchanged views in some detail before and during the Security Council's discussion of USA-Iraq relations.

Towards the end of Mexico's tenure of a seat on the UN Security Council, the relationship between China and Mexico was stepped up a gear through the action of the PRC Government. China characterises its relations with other countries in terms of that country's importance and bilateral relations with China; and the extent of bilateral collaboration. The PRC recognizes three categories of relationship (in descending order): a strategic partner; a

cooperative partner; and friendly, cooperative relations. At the end of 2003 Mexico was designated as a PRC 'strategic partner' (Xie, s.f.). A year later, the China-Mexico Intergovernmental Standing Committee was established, to further bilateral cooperation. This is the only intergovernmental standing committee that China has ever had with another country.

However, one should not overestimate the strength of the political relationship between China and Mexico. The China-Mexico Intergovernmental Standing Committee only met five times until 2012 and seems to have been more of a symbolic organization rather than having any substantial functions. On both the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC ⁴ and *People's Daily* (Renmin Ribao, s.f.), the committee only gets to be mentioned when political leaders visiting each other's countries, as a symbol of the friendly relationship between China and Mexico. As to the China-Mexico strategic partnership, a more cautious attitude is also necessary. As Horta argues, when examining China-Brazil relations

the term strategic partnership is vague and susceptible to many different interpretations, to the point of becoming vulgarized and having no real meaning. As of 2006, China had signed strategic partnerships with over 20 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas. The PRC has signed strategic partnerships with nations such as India, with which it is also engaged in serious strategic and military competition. Great Britain, a close ally of the United States and one of the strongest supporters of the EU arms embargo on China, is also a so-called strategic partner of the PRC. This is not to suggest that all cases of strategic partnerships with China are meaningless and nothing more than a pompous diplomatic term. But one must raise some caution over the fluidity of their meaning (Horta, 2007).

China's application to join the WTO, though eventually achieved in 2001, was another source of trade conflict between the two countries. Indeed Mexico was the last of the then 142 partner countries to agree to China's membership. Similar kinds of labour-intensive trade competition were the difficulty for Mexico and its entrepreneurs who could reasonably see their markets disappearing. Their opposition took off from discussions of anti-dumping procedures and focused on the potential for unfair trade competition under the shelter of PRC state action. Mexico argued that China's accession to the

4. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/gxh/tyb/>

WTO should be accompanied by a clause that denied the PRC the ability to call on WTO dispute settlement mechanisms for twenty years were Mexico to levy compensatory tariffs on PRC imports, in cases where the Mexican Government, after investigation, had determined that there had in fact been state-sponsored unfair competition. Twenty years proved to be too long a moratorium and in the event the clause came into operation only until 2008. A provision that Mexico did apply, raising tariffs from 800-1000 per cent on various tools, toys and textiles (CEPAL, 2004). Despite its strategic partnership with China, Mexico refused (and still refuses as of 2011, along with most other OECD countries) to recognize the PRC as a market economy and does not afford it that status in trade negotiations.

Remarkably, the final well publicized public dispute between China and Mexico was not about economics, but about politics. Right after the China-Mexico strategic partnership was established, in September and October 2004, the Dalai Lama was welcomed to Mexico City, which was holding a Tibetan Cultural Week. The Mayor of Mexico City met the Dalai Lama, who among his other activities also addressed the Federal House of Representatives. As has become the norm, in his speech the Dalai Lama was critical of the PRC, described it as a totalitarian state, and accused it of stifling Tibetan culture. The Dalai Lama also met President Fox's wife (though not the President himself) and a senior member of the Cabinet (Melgar, 2004). The PRC Ambassador to Mexico called a press conference, and announced that those who had met with the Dalai Lama were 'opportunistic and ignorant on the Tibet issue.' Mexico's Foreign Minister, Ernesto Derbez, demanded an apology, and said publicly that the Ambassador had 'lost self-restraint and got his knickers in a twist' ('perdió los estribos, metió la pata') (Reforma, 2004). The PRC Ambassador to Mexico apologized in writing (Renmin Ribao, 2004).

The strategic partnership between Mexico and the PRC is best understood in terms of multilateral relationships and particularly the processes of globalisation which both shape the cooperation and conflict that characterises their interaction. China has clearly approached its relationship with Mexico in terms of a multilateral rather than a simple bilateral perspective. Firstly, relationships with and within Latin America are not insubstantial. The PRC's concerns at maintaining Mexico's support may be heightened given its concern over the concentration of states in Central America that still recognize Taiwan as the 'only China' and given Mexico's assumed influence with those states. By 2018, only 17 governments were left that had full diplomatic

recognition and relations with the Taiwan-based regime. Of these 9 are in Latin America and the Caribbean (down from 12 in 2012), with four located on the Central American isthmus to the south of Mexico: Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.

Yet, of more importance is the wider interaction between both countries and the USA. Politically, both China and Mexico have had a sometimes ambiguous relationship with the USA but rather than this shared commonality Mexico presents opportunities for the PRC to be involved in North America, to have an alternative route to approach the USA if necessary, and also as an entry point to the USA economy. As already noted, Mexico is close to China when voting in the United Nations General Assembly, often to the chagrin of the USA. And in that context Mexico and China worked closely together in their opposition to the USA-led invasion of Iraq.

At the same time, care is needed in interpreting behaviour at the United Nations, both because of the complexities involved in international relations and the way in which the UN operates. On the one hand, an analysis of voting behaviour in the UN General Assembly does indeed demonstrate that Mexico voted with China more than any state other than Cuba between 1990 and 2003 (Domínguez, 2006). On the other hand, it is also clear that Mexico votes closely, as might be expected, with the USA. Table 2 summarizes voting behaviour in the United Nations General Assembly from 2000-2017, in coincidence with the USA on 'important votes and consensus actions' which 'directly affected United States interests and on which the United States lobbies extensively' (US Department of State, 2018). The UN General Assembly members vote on a large number of issues over a broad range of topics. The mere quantity, as well as the fact that not all countries are equally active in the United Nations, make it hard for the voting pattern to reflect a nation's core interests and stance in international affairs. Moreover, focussing on the voting behaviour of China and Mexico in isolation may lose sight of the wider context.

Table 2
UN Voting relative to USA, 2001-2011
(USA=100%)

	<i>China</i>	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>Russia</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Cuba</i>
2017	21%	59%	26%	44%	16%
2016	15.4%	70%	25%	58.3%	16.7%
2015	33.3%	63.6%	28.6%	58.3%	11.1%
2014	11.1%	66.7%	28.6%	50%	18.2%
2013	30%	66.7%	20%	50%	0%
2012	0%	42.9%	30%	28.6%	0%
2011	0%	62.5%	25%	33.3%	0%
2010	18.2%	54.5%	30%	33.3%	10%
2009	18.2%	63.6%	33.3%	37.5%	10%
2008	7.7%	40%	0%	12.5%	0%
2007	7.7%	50%	11.1%	30%	0%
2006	0%	33.3%	0%	20%	0%
2005	11.1%	44.4%	33%	22.2%	0%
2004	11.1%	44.4%	28.6%	25%	11.1%
2003	0%	42.9%	45.5%	38.5%	0%
2002	20%	38.5%	22.2%	38.5%	20%
2001	0%	18.2%	11.1%	22.2%	0%
2000	14.3%	40%	25%	50%	22.2%

Sources: US Department of State, 2018 available at <http://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/>

The voting behaviour of Brazil and Russia in the UN General Assembly during 2001-2010 has also been included in Table 2 for comparison, as two of China's most important strategic partners within and outside Latin America. Cuba is also included in Table 2, as a non-strategic partner that nonetheless has a close relationship with China. Unsurprisingly, China and Cuba have the most similar voting patterns relative to the USA and its interests and activities in the UN as defined by the US State Department. Perhaps also not so surprisingly, both Brazil and Russia's voting behavior as reflected in Table 2 are not very different from China either, although they do seem to tend to coincide with the USA slightly more. However, Mexico's voting pattern clearly stands out among the five countries for being the most similar to the position of the USA, especially over the last three years. As Table 2 indicates, China's strategic

partnership with Mexico and the establishment of the Intergovernmental Standing Committee obviously have not made Mexico more of a China ally.

Final observations

Despite the establishment of a strategic political partnership Mexico is not a high profile country for the PRC Government. As a result, more often than not Mexico is neglected by Chinese journalists and academics. Occasionally Mexico does attain newsworthiness, but usually only because of the more sensational topics, such as drug trafficking and its consequences. This though is hardly the basis for the development of a sustained public opinion assessment of Mexico in China.

The People's Daily has done little to change an approach to understanding Mexico that seems to have more in common with the pre-Reform period style of public information than with the more open era. Leaving aside obvious questions about *The People's Daily's* management of the representation of China's international relations, there is some possibility of change in the salience of Mexico in the PRC consciousness. While Mexico sees China almost only in terms of a bilateral relationship, China sees Mexico from a more multilateral perspective. Despite all the various tensions, Mexico's relationship with and influence on other Latin American countries, especially those in Central America, are attractive to China not least because of China's limited influence in the region. More importantly, to have the USA's next door neighbour as its strategic partner is an important factor for China in balancing the USA's power in the world, and for the possibility of gaining access to the USA market, even in the age of a Trump Presidency.

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