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**Artículo:**

***Overseas chinese migration in Mercosur. The principal movements and projections for the 21<sup>st</sup> century***

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## **Introduction**

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is one of the world's leading exporters of population and workforces. If China lost control of migration and the pressures driving people to leave increased, migration could become a detonator of conflicts with regional and global implications. Nevertheless, the way the emigration process has unfolded has thus far given way to another reality. We observe that since the PRC's 'opening up' in 1978, the emigration of Chinese nationals from mainland China and Taiwan has expanded

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significantly both in terms of the number of migrants and the diversification of destinations they choose, taking in more than 150 countries around the world. This expansion was encouraged – among other things – by the easing of the PRC’s migration laws, the mentioned political opening up and the expansion of the country’s economy towards the outside world.

As a result, and in the context of the transformations in the migratory patterns and behaviour of Chinese migrants in the past three decades, a larger flow of overseas Chinese towards the Mercosur countries has resulted (with the exception of Paraguay, which has yet to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC, but which does have them with Taiwan). These groups are concentrated above all in large urban conglomerations, forming a system of ‘clan networks’, ‘family networks’ and ‘international networks’ that function as ‘spaces of support and containment’ for compatriots living abroad.

Clearly differentiated periods of Chinese immigration to each country have been identified, through which similar patterns of variation have been observed, although each has its own historical specificities. In this sense, and to guide our analysis, we ask the following questions: can migration be seen as a way to develop and strengthen China’s cooperative relations with South American countries? And based on this first question, we ask: is it possible to consider Chinese overseas migration as ‘directed’ migration in this sense? Finally, what role do migrant communities play in the cultural exchange of two regions that in recent years appear to have strengthened their relations?

In this chapter we approach migrations from an International Relations perspective, which allows us to recognize, principally, two issues. On one hand, for a number of years the evolution of communication and technology encouraged the international movement of people, with the perception that borders have blurred.<sup>1</sup> While on the other, when national interests overlap with those of migrants, states ensure national sovereignty prevails, which is expressed (among other ways) in the application of restrictive policies on the admission of migrants. In this sense, states behave ambiguously, as, for certain movements (commercial and financial) they open their borders while for others they close them, approving policies that are both contradictory and discriminatory. All of this was aggravated by the 2007–2008 global financial crisis which brought about a shift in the political, economic and social relations of migration processes between countries of origin and of destination.<sup>2</sup>

To complement the approach described, another of the issues examined is the difficulty faced when studying two phenomena that are complex by their very nature: that of migrations on the one hand and integration processes on the other. The first of these means dealing with issues relating to the integration of the migrant in the host society (cultural diversity, xenophobia, remittances and the protection of human rights). The second involves issues such as the free movement of people, integrated labour markets and border issues all of which take place in a landscape characterized by the coexistence of heterogeneous policies, regulations and national practices.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, there is the difficulty of simultaneously analysing the handling of intra-regional migration and at the same time considering how extra-regional migration is treated.

In the case of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), though the subject of mobility and the free movement of people was not included in the first regional agreements, over time advances have been made on these issues and governments have shown the political will to consolidate methods of cooperation that facilitate integration and mobility<sup>4</sup> and above all the protection of human rights. These strategies were at once complemented by joint regional policies in the framework of another regional process: that of the Union of South American Nations (2008), from where advances are being made not only on the consolidation of a regional political space, but also on the construction of regional citizenship.

When evaluating the current dynamic of migration flows, it is important to note the figures recently estimated by the United Nations, who say the stock of international migrants in 2013 was around 232 million, of whom 96 million lived in less developed countries, with 136 million in more developed countries. According to this data, around 40% of cross-border movements are made between developing states, dispelling the myth that the flows are only towards developed countries.<sup>5</sup>

Europe and Asia host 60% of international migrants: 72 and 71 million, respectively. North America has 53 million, Africa 19 million, Latin America and the Caribbean 9 million and Oceania 8 million.<sup>6</sup> Among the main countries of origin are: China, Mexico, India, the Philippines and Indonesia. While the main hosts are the United States (with 46 million migrants),<sup>7</sup> Germany, Canada, Great Britain, Australia and Saudi Arabia.<sup>8</sup>

Though it is true that there has been an increase in the growth rate of international migration over the past two decades, rising from 1.2% annually between 1990 and 2000, to 2.3% between 2000 and 2010, this figure has fallen recently due to the 2007–2008 international crisis,<sup>9</sup> which had a negative impact on migration movements and above all on the conditions in which they have taken place. Ultimately, the figures set out above indicate that there has not been a substantial quantitative increase in the stock of international migrants in recent years, but there has been a change in the criteria by which the host states address the issue of migration. In general, now, they see it as a ‘problem’, rather than an inherent feature of the social nature of humans, which has led governments to adopt measures that are not always consistent with the international legislation on the protection of human rights in general and migrants in particular.

## **The migration policies implemented by China and their current impact on the movement of people**

To begin the study of Chinese migration routes we are obliged to mention certain issues in the process of emigration from the PRC whose main and first destination was the Asia-Pacific (AP) region. This region is the most densely populated on the planet, concentrating around 50% of the world’s population and has the largest labour market in the world. It has also experienced ‘explosive’ rates of economic growth, above all since the 1980s in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand and China, a factor that has decisively influenced the movements of people and workforces from one country to another in the region. This situation led to an increase in the number of migrant workers,

with a figure reached that fluctuated between three and four million people a year in that period.

Because of these characteristics and the additional factor of shared cultural and traditional features, the AP region was always seen by Chinese citizens as a preferential option for emigration, and a constant historical flow of intra-region movements of people resulted. While on the other hand, differences in terms of growth between the region's more and less developed countries has been shown to be another of the causes of emigration. Examples of this are Japan and China and Malaysia and Singapore.

China's migration policy has gone through various historical stages that have varied from a policy of restricting emigration and one called 'forced retention', which meant developing border controls, and was brought in with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This migration policy applied by the government of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was a response, at first, to an underlying situation in the country but over time the same restrictive policy came to be considered a key tool in the development of a national project with an international dimension: opening up the economy.<sup>10</sup> In this way, we may consider that a migration policy with domestic characteristics was being transformed over the years into part of a complex reformulated foreign policy.

This situation was modified over time, beginning with the establishment of the economic, political and social reforms applied from 1978 onwards, which eased those restrictions. Traditionally, Chinese nationals who lived abroad were considered Chinese. The first law on nationality promulgated by the Qing government in 1909 stipulated that wherever a child of Chinese parents was born, they would be considered of Chinese nationality (even if the mother was Chinese and the father not). In practice, this situation has created problems, as in some host countries Chinese migrants held double nationality.

In the early years of the PRC government, this criterion on nationality was preserved. But it later underwent transformations, which were enshrined in a new Nationality Law (1980), under which people of Chinese nationality were not permitted to hold double nationality and any Chinese national living abroad who decided to choose another nationality for themselves automatically lost their nationality of origin. This law still applies today.

Some specialists in the study of Chinese migration consider that the Chinese government's inclination to allow the emigration of their nationals has in practice worked as an 'escape valve',<sup>11</sup> diminishing the effects of overpopulation, unemployment and rural-urban internal migration.<sup>12</sup> On this matter, we agree with the mentioned authors that international emigration may help decompress overpopulation and unemployment problems in certain regions. And, indeed, it has been shown that in overpopulated areas there is always a greater tendency to emigrate.

However, we do not understand there to be a direct relationship between the easing of the restrictions on international emigration and the reduction in rural-urban movements, as these have their own dynamic, which is the product of the economic reforms (in particular those of the state agricultural production system) and of the system of permanent residence registration that exists in China called *hukou*. *Hukou* was introduced in 1958, with the aim

of controlling the internal movement of the Chinese population and differentiating the services provided by the state according to each person's place of residence. It distinguishes between agricultural and non-agricultural *hukou*, which is passed down over time from generation to generation, as the registration of place of residence at birth is obligatory. Having a non-rural *hukou* has always given an automatic right to a better range of state services, such as the rights to work, education, health and a range of social benefits. By contrast, those with a rural *hukou* have always had the right only to a smaller number of services, though the rural worker has greater self-sufficiency, because the state provides them with a plot of land to work. This system of residence certification created social stratification in China and differentiation in access to education and health services, including family planning, giving rise to a situation of discrimination against Chinese citizens 'in movement' within their own national borders, especially from rural to urban areas. In this sense, there has been talk of 'invisible walls' and 'rural-urban apartheid' in China. This situation is currently under review by the Chinese authorities, because as we shall see below, the high rate of urban growth has revealed that the system of residence checking and registration is not proving very effective and, on the other, that it is resulting in complex legal situations of illegality and vulnerability.<sup>13</sup>

Continuing with the demographic and emigration processes in China, it is important to mention that the phenomenon of 'explosive urbanization' was highly important, as reflected in the following data statistics: during the 1975-1999 period China's urban population increased from 17.4% of the total population in 1975 to 31.6% in 1999 and in 2015 the figure reached 54.4% of the total of the population.<sup>14</sup>

Another issue to add to the analysis is the fall in the employment rate in the Chinese agricultural sector, from 60% of the total of the economically active population in 1990 to 35% in 2012. The opposite happened in the services sector, which rose from 18.5% in 1990 to 36% in 2012. This data reflects the internal mobility of the Chinese population and, above all, the social and labour transformations in the country.

In short, China's economic boom, social changes and the process of globalization that also reached the communist country, were some of the key factors in the change from a restrictive migration policy towards a more open one. In this respect, the official discourse on the issue of migration has contributed to the development of a programmatic policy, built up over years, that values the contributions made by migrant communities outside the country (called 'overseas Chinese'), whether in the form of remittances or investments. The migration policy has thus increasingly become an internal policy with an international dimension, and if we add the idea that the emigration of nationals may involve the development of a policy to influence the host countries, this begins to make more sense.

On the other hand, the (South-South) cooperation policy set out by China in recent years has also been part of a foreign policy aimed at strengthening ties with other developing countries, with issues of migration also forming part of the programmes of encouraging relations with the world.

## **The distribution of Chinese migrants around the world and the expansion process of transnational networks**

In the emigration processes of overseas Chinese it is important to look at how, in all the places where Chinese citizens have settled, they have set about organizing their own networks, in accordance with the needs of each community. The international networks of overseas Chinese have formed strong relational structures among themselves. Generally, they come together within the country of residence in groups based around the economic activity they engage in, the place they are from (town or city) and the religion they practise. Later on they generally add an international dimension.<sup>15</sup> These networks are open and all who want to become members can join. But they have one particular characteristic: generally their members act as absolutely efficient, decentralized parts of the global system, which allows the Chinese and their businesses to react quickly to changes, especially political changes.<sup>16</sup>

A snapshot of the distribution of Chinese overseas migrants shows that more than 65 million live outside China (continental China and Taiwan) and are spread across six continents. According to a specific report published by the UNDP on international migration in 2009, 64% of these migrants were concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, with an increase in migration towards non-Asian countries registered in recent years, 23.3% were located in the United States, 7.2% in Europe and 0.9% in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>17</sup>

Though Chinese migrants are found in approximately 150 countries around the world, there is a direct relationship between the locations of the most populous colonies of overseas Chinese and the largest countries geographically. The same correlation exists with regard to the richest countries. Likewise, Chinese migrants are concentrated in the urban areas of host countries, above all in the large cities. According to the same study made by the UNDP, 79.5% of Chinese migrants live in countries characterized as having 'Very High Human Development'.<sup>18</sup>

The development of the transnational networks has been possible, on one hand, because of the number of Chinese who live around the world (around 65 million), a figure that represents around 4.7% of the population of continental China and Taiwan. To this may be added the fact that they customarily provide help 'to their fellow countrymen', which has also contributed to the expansion of this global network. On the other hand, we should highlight the existence of 'clan networks' and on a smaller scale 'family networks', which work as a support system for the new migrants (helping with accommodation, language, finding work, contacts and psychological support, among other things).<sup>19</sup>

The development of this 'system of relations' between the members of the various Chinese communities abroad is one of the elements that has contributed to Chinese migrants' integration into host country societies. We could define it as 'integration with Chinese features', because the migrants integrate while preserving their culture, traditions, customs and language. An example of this is their clustering into neighbourhoods where on a small scale they reproduce part of the oriental country's culture. There they engage in all kinds of

activities: economic, religious, cultural and political and they celebrate traditional festivals. Which is to say that these places function as meeting points and spaces for handing down Asian cultural symbols. These practices have contributed to the interaction between cultures and individuals and are repeated on larger and smaller scales across Mercosur.

As a result, overseas Chinese establish highly specific relationships with both their country of origin and that which hosts them. Chinese businesspeople generally have business relationships with their counterparts in China, which allows a great deal of currency to return to their country of birth, as well as making donations to educational and religious institutions in the provinces they come from. The amount of remittances sent by emigrants to their relatives has also been an important component in the development of some regions of China.

In the following pages we will analyse how the pattern of emigration described and the particularities of the Chinese migrant communities have also been reproduced in Latin America and the Mercosur countries.

### **Precedents in Latin America: the first migrant flows and the current situation of Chinese communities**

Chinese immigration towards Latin America began in colonial times. The active trade of the centuries that followed linked Spanish traders with their American colonies. It was in this era that the first moves by the Chinese outside Asia are known to have taken place (towards America and Australia). The first groups of Chinese arrived in Cuba, Peru and Brazil and it is presumed that some of them dispersed towards the surrounding countries.

In Peru, in the last years of the 19th century, there was a shortage of peasant labour, which led to the first local initiative to ship in 75 Chinese, who arrived at the port of El Callao in 1849 as a result of agreements signed by the two countries. From that point on, Peruvian legislation was adapted to encourage cheap labour migration policies. The Chinese settled on the Peruvian farms, where their abilities to grow rice and sugar stood out, but they also took part in diverse commercial activities, developing a network of relations and assistance in the community.

According to official calculations, nowadays more than a million Chinese live in Peru, going as far back as five generations. In Lima alone it is estimated that there are 600,000 inhabitants of Chinese origin where they have formed what is known as 'Chinatown' in Lima (Barrios Altos).

The case of Cuba is also illustrative of the history of Chinese migration towards Latin America. The situation is similar to that of Peru. The Spanish authorities decided to hire Chinese labour (coolies<sup>20</sup>), to work on the sugar plantations. The first boat landed in Cuba in 1847, but because of the poor travel conditions, a large number of the Chinese died on the crossing. Despite this, the disembarkation of coolies on the island continued, and in 1853 and 1873, around 133,000 Chinese arrived in Cuba. In 1874 Chinese emigration under the system of 'forced labour contracts' ended and the Chinese acquired the status of

‘free man’ on the island. These days, the number of Chinese resident in Cuba does not reflect the precedents described, as the Chinese community did not continue growing and, on the contrary, there were instances of re-emigration towards other Latin American and North American destinations.<sup>21</sup>

In Brazil the situation was similar and goes back to 1810, an occasion on which King John VI of Portugal authorized the entry of 2,000 Chinese to work on the tea plantations in Rio de Janeiro with a similar number going to São Paulo in 1900. The first period of immigration was very short and resumed again towards the end of the Second World War (1945), when Brazil became an attractive potential destination thanks to the industrial boom beginning in the country at the time. The largest of the migrations went to São Paulo and was predominantly urban in nature, with the majority engaging in trade, setting up small bars, restaurants, bakeries or entering the liberal professions.<sup>22</sup> Currently, the Chinese community in the country is large, and is one of the longest-standing Asian settlements in Latin America.

The second half of the 20th century featured a second migratory flow of Chinese into the major Latin American cities, a situation that was later limited by the emigration restrictions imposed by the PRC government from 1949 onwards. Nevertheless, the national censuses of many countries in the region also reported on the existence of a Chinese-origin population. By way of example, in Venezuela, a large established community was recorded in the country’s main cities. In Mexico, they settled in the large cities, but with the particular feature that this country became a ‘transit country’ from 1990 onwards for migrants of all nationalities who aspired to emigrate towards the United States and Canada. In Chile, a stable Chinese community put down roots, and has grown in numbers in recent decades, a product of the growth in commercial relations between China and Chile, as well as the fact that Chile was the first country in South America to establish diplomatic relations with China in 1970.<sup>23</sup>

## **The current situation of Chinese communities in Mercosur countries and their impact on the deepening of cooperative relations**

The Mercosur countries have been characterized as states with traditions of migration.<sup>24</sup> Despite variations among them, their societies were formed to a greater or lesser degree from a foreign population that came principally from Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. European immigration (principally Spanish and Italian) was concentrated in Argentina, Uruguay and southern Brazil. For various reasons, this situation began to reverse and the migration patterns of those countries were transformed. Nowadays, cross-border migration and the new migrations are what stand out in the region. In Mercosur, the figures are the following: in Argentina the percentage of migrants of all nationalities as part of the total population is 4.5%; Paraguay 2.7%; Uruguay 2.2%; and in Brazil it is 0.3% of the total population.<sup>25</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Mercosur has made progress by approving the Agreement on Resident Status for Nationals of the Mercosur States Parties and Associated States (2002), which gave recognition to the current citizen and former foreigner from a country with



shared economic, cultural, scientific and political strategies,<sup>26</sup> leaving behind the conception of the ‘border as barrier’ to make a ‘border as meeting point’.<sup>27</sup> Notwithstanding these advances the bloc has not managed to implement an integrated policy on extra-regional migrants.

As we have said, in the countries of Mercosur as a whole there are currently settled Chinese communities. However, it is necessary to note the particular situation of Paraguay, which has not yet established diplomatic relations with the PRC and has recognized Taiwan as an independent country since 1958, making it the only country in South America in this situation. This has led to a Chinese community resident in Paraguay that is fundamentally Taiwanese in origin.

This continues to be an ‘insurmountable’ obstacle for the deepening of cooperative relations with the PRC, the effect of which has also extended to Mercosur as a bloc. For the Asian country, the recognition of the ‘one China, two systems’ policy has been the crux of its foreign policy and, therefore, its diplomatic and political relations with the rest of the world. This state of affairs has also affected the migration issue in Paraguay, leading to the formation of a small community.

In our analysis, Brazil has received large flows of migration throughout its modern history. In terms of Chinese migration it has gone through an increase in recent decades, so that today it is the second largest Asian community in the country behind the Japanese.<sup>28</sup> According to the IOM Migration Profile (2009), the number of work permits granted to citizens of Chinese origin grew in the following manner: in the 1993–1997 period there were 1103; 4051 were granted between 1998 and 2004; while between 2005 and 2008 a total of 6002 permits were issued. As such, the greatest increase in (temporary) job applications came from Asian countries with the Japanese, Chinese and Filipinos standing out. The same document reported that in the 1990–2000 period 44% of Asian immigration (excluding Japanese), was concentrated in the metropolitan region of São Paulo (the country’s main industrial hub).

In this way, the Chinese community has become a stable community concentrated in the large cities, which has continued growing over recent years. The country’s migration authorities also reported that there is a strong selectivity in migration, with an increase in the qualified workforce, above all in Asian migration.

It is worth mentioning that the deepening of commercial and political relations between Brazil and China that has taken place over years (strategic cooperation society: the highest category China grants to its international partners) has also led to an increase in the migration cooperation strategies, the objectives of which are also to improve cultural relations, encourage mutual learning and interlink qualified human resources.

In the case of Uruguay the first migrants of Chinese origin arrived at the port of Montevideo ‘in passing’, with the intention of continuing on to Buenos Aires. This first group of Chinese migrants was therefore small and stayed in the country on a transitional basis. For this reason the stable community has only recently begun to establish itself, beginning in the 1980s, when Uruguay established diplomatic relations with the PRC. This

is important because, from 1988 onwards, the processing of entry visas for Uruguay was activated and the integrated bilateral ties were advanced, which translated into high-level exchanges of official and business visits, the deepening of mutual knowledge, cultural-economic cooperation, increased bilateral trade and an increased flow of Chinese citizens into the country. In 1990 the entry of a contingent of 750 migrants of Chinese citizens was recorded.

Currently, the Chinese-origin population resident in Uruguay is calculated at around 1,500 people, located almost entirely in the city of Montevideo, with their principal characteristics being their origins in the PRC's coastal cities, dedication to commercial activities and situation of 'mobility'. The underlying reason for this 'mobility' lies in the small size of the Uruguayan labour market, meaning some of these migrants were unable to overcome the economic difficulties inherent in a market of these characteristics, although those who have put down permanent roots have integrated into society without difficulty.

Argentina received its first significant influx of Chinese migrants mainly from the island of Taiwan from 1985 onwards.<sup>29</sup> This is recognized as the second period of Chinese immigration, the first was recorded between the First World War and 1950. In that period, the number of Chinese arriving in the country was very limited and the main reason for migration was connected to political issues and persecution. For this reason, in this first stage, a stable Chinese community did not form.

The first major arrival of migrants was recorded in the 1980s, above all from Taiwan. The island's inhabitants feared a rumoured expansion of the Chinese communist system under the slogan 'one country, two systems', and this became one of the main motivating factors behind the decision to emigrate. Along with this was the need to improve the quality of life of the family unit, which threatened to deteriorate with the 'demographic explosion' taking place on the island in those years. Both affected the migration decisions of Taiwanese families, who generally chose countries where they had a relative or friend who had already settled, which brought them knowledge of the political and socioeconomic situation of the potential host country.<sup>30</sup>

In terms of the type of migration, this period was characterized by the emigration of family groups with their own capital, which was decisive for the economic development of the Chinese who reached Argentina. This situation had a positive influence on the integration of the migrants into the host society (above all in terms of employment) and on the formation of a stable Chinese group in the country. Similarly, there was a gradual drive to develop civil migrant associations which, at the same time, widened their connection with the regional and international networks of overseas Chinese.

The second important migration period began in the 1990s, and was the result of a set of varied but interrelated factors. The end of the Cultural Revolution in China (1989) led to further opening up, which – among other issues – accelerated the emigration process, especially among young people, who generally moved alone, without work contracts and with very little capital with which to establish themselves abroad. They emigrated to Argentina encouraged by the country's situation of economic growth until the end of the

next decade (1997–1998), as well as the presence of compatriots or ‘fellow countrymen’, from whom, in general, they received some kind of help or assistance in settling.

Up to the early 1990s, the number of Chinese arriving from Taiwan was higher than the number of continental Chinese but, beginning in 2000, this trend began to change and went into reverse.

Nevertheless, the serious economic and political crisis that affected Argentina from 2001 onwards resulted in a decline in Chinese immigration. As a consequence, there were cases of family groups re-emigrating to other countries on the continent: Chile, Mexico and Brazil (countries that at the time showed greater economic stability).

This downturn in immigration was maintained until 2005, a time when the situation of crisis began to reverse in Argentina. To this more favourable set of circumstances was added the approval of the new national law on migration in 2004 (Law No. 25.871), which modified part of the migration policy and, as a consequence, a programme of document normalization was approved which hugely improved the migration situation of foreigners (Decree 1169/2004). In this sense, and according to 2005 data from the National Direction of Migration, more than 10,000 migrants were received from Asia, the majority from the PRC.<sup>31</sup> Currently, the size of the Chinese community in Argentina is estimated at well over 120,000 people and we can already speak of the existence of growing ‘second and third generations’.

Looking at the sociocultural profile, the community is characterized by a high level of education (having completed secondary, tertiary and university-level education). This is seen most strongly among immigrants from Taiwan. In terms of Spanish, they generally learn it once they arrive in the country. They preserve activities and practices from their oriental culture, as shown by food habits, speaking Mandarin Chinese in almost all the homes in the community, celebrating traditional Chinese festivals, preserving the methods of Chinese medicine and, above all, inter-marriage within the community, as well as the practice, in the majority, of Buddhism. These characteristics are replicated in all the Chinese communities resident in the four Mercosur countries in the study.

In terms of location within the national territory, Chinese migrants tend to congregate in metropolitan areas, which fits with the hypothesis that characterizes the majority of Chinese communities in the world as located in the large cities. The main centres are: the autonomous city of Buenos Aires, the provinces of Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Córdoba, Santa Cruz, Río Negro, Corrientes, Mendoza, Entre Ríos and San Juan. They mainly work in commercial activity (gastronomy, supermarkets, tourism services, traditional Chinese medicine, garages, hairdressing and import-export, among others).

In terms of the construction of spaces of belonging, the community identifies itself with the formation of a kind of ‘Chinese enclave’, where they concentrate businesses of various sectors of activity, and where one of the three Buddhist temples in Buenos Aires is also found along with a Chinese school. The morphology of the Chinatown has changed progressively over the past decade (2005–2015), with an evident increase in the number of established businesses and greater visibility of oriental characters and cultural features. The

most significant is that the Chinese community has developed identity strategies of ethnic cohesion, which has consolidated it as a 'community that supports itself' with a propensity for integration into the majority society.

On the existence of networks of Chinese migrants, in Argentina there are 20 associations, arranged according to the regions of origin in the PRC and Taiwan, the religion they practise or the economic activity they engage in, but they are not organized into a central association which brings them all together, as happens in other countries, such as Peru, for example.

By way of synthesis, there has been growth in the phenomenon of Chinese-origin immigration over the past three decades and it is now considered to be the largest of the Asian communities. It still presents as a 'conservative' group that preserves its traditions and customs. The immigration process of Chinese migrants coming to Argentina is in full growth – according to extra-official sources Chinese arrivals to the country are verified every day. This situation, which has been confirmed through interviews made with representatives of the Chinese communities in Argentina, with private institutions of trade promotion (Chambers of Commerce), and in communication with heads of the 'Jornal Chinês para a América do Sul' of São Paulo (Brazil), shows that Brazil and Argentina have become the South American countries receiving the most Chinese immigrants in recent times.

## **Conclusions**

The People's Republic of China is one of the world's leading exporters of population and workforces. We note that since the 'opening-up' process of the PRC began in 1978, the emigration of Chinese nationals from mainland China and Taiwan has risen significantly in terms of the number of migrants as well as the diversification of destinations selected by them, taking in more than 150 countries around the world. This growth was encouraged – among other things – by the easing of the migration laws of the People's Republic of China, the above-mentioned opening up and the expansion of the country's economy into the wider world.

In the decades prior to the 1980s, Chinese migrants were concentrated, by preference, in neighbouring Asian countries (Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Japan, among others), with the economic expansion of Southeast Asia (1960–1980) a 'mobilizer' of Chinese migration towards those countries. This situation encouraged the economic development of overseas Chinese who, as well as participating in the growth processes of these Southeast Asian countries, managed to form an 'international network' with the characteristics and powers of international economic actors.

As a consequence, and in the context of the transformations of the migration patterns in the past three decades, a larger influx of Chinese migrants to South America has been seen. In the Mercosur countries, these groups are concentrated above all in large urban conglomerations, forming a system of 'clan networks', 'family networks' and 'international networks' that function as support spaces for compatriots living abroad. Likewise, the

expansion of the area of influence of overseas Chinese capital has been demonstrated. This process is still in its infancy in Latin America, although significant investments have already been made in South American countries such as Brazil (China's leading trading partner in South America), Chile, Argentina, Venezuela and Uruguay.

The migration flows of Chinese citizens have taken place peacefully, showing variation in the destinations chosen by the migrants, and giving rise to new generations of Chinese migrants. They stand out for their preference for settling in large cities and their continuity in developing and strengthening 'intra-community relational networks'. This is one of the outstanding characteristics of these communities, which has allowed them over time to gain privileged spaces in host societies.

As well as all these activities, providing their family with a livelihood, their children with access to education<sup>32</sup> and integration characteristics that identify the community of Chinese migrants established in the Mercosur region, we can also state that they are stable communities, who preserve their customs and traditions, who have achieved a high level of employment, above all engaging commercially with the society that hosts them. Similarly, this is a community that has not produced conflictive situations in the host countries and one that in general accepts the norms and rules of the country that hosts them.

We can also state that the cooperation strategies put in place by China in the region in recent times as part of its foreign policy have favoured the establishment of Chinese communities, motivated – along with the circumstances described – by visa agreements, bilateral document harmonization initiatives signed,<sup>33</sup> and exchanges of scientists, teachers and students. We must also consider the important role played by migrant communities in tightening the links between two cultures with such different characteristics.

In the years ahead, and notwithstanding the Chinese communities continuing their growth, owing to its recent economic growth, China will (possibly) begin to experience the 'return' effect of Chinese citizens with hopes of reintegrating in their country of birth. By the same token, it is likely that China will gradually become a receiver country of migrants from other countries who see the Asian country as having good development prospects in the near future.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sassone, S., 'Problemática geodemográfica en las fronteras interiores del Mercosur: una mirada desde el territorio argentino', *Anales GAEA Sociedad Argentina de Estudios Geográficos*, Tomo 21–22, Vol. II (1997–2001), pp. 213–246, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Sassone, S., and Yépez del Castillo I., 'Políticas migratorias y ciudadanía en tensión'. In: Sassone S. (coord.) *Migración y crisis global. Europa-América Latina: nuevas estrategias, nuevas desigualdades*, *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 106–107, Spain: CIDOB, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Novick, S. 'El proceso de integración Mercosur: de las políticas migratorias y de seguridad a las trayectorias de los inmigrantes', Working paper No. 46, Gino Germani

Research Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2005.

4 Martínez Pizarro, J. 'La migración internacional en los debates actuales'. *Revista Todavía: Pensamiento y cultura en América Latina*. Buenos Aires, No. 23, 2003.

5 UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), 'Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin', United Nations database. <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/TIMSO2013/migrantstocks2013.htm>.

6 UN DESA, 'Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin'.

7 IOM, *Informe sobre las Migraciones en el Mundo 2011. Comunicar eficazmente sobre las migraciones*, Geneva: IOM, 2011.

8 UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) 'Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin', United Nations database, <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/TIMSO2013/migrantstocks2013.htm>.

9 Sassone, S., and Yépez del Castillo I., 'Políticas migratorias y ciudadanía en tensión'. In: Sassone, S. (coord.) *Migración y crisis global. Europa-América Latina: nuevas estrategias, nuevas desigualdades*, Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals, 106–107, Spain: CIDOB, 2014.

10 Mármora, L., *Las políticas de migraciones internacionales*. Buenos Aires: IOM, Alianza, 1997.

11 Martínez Pizarro, J. 'La migración internacional en los debates actuales'. *Revista Todavía: Pensamiento y cultura en América Latina*. Buenos Aires, No. 23, 2003.

12 Smith, P., 'The strategic implications of Chinese emigration'. *Survival*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1994.

13 Staiano, M.F., 'La ley sobre la población y la planificación familiar de la RPC', in: Staiano F. (comp.), *El ordenamiento jurídico de la República Popular China en el marco del Derecho Internacional: planificación familiar, migraciones y cooperación*, Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales, UNLP, Argentina, 2014.

14 UNDP, 'Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano 2015. Trabajo al servicio del desarrollo humano', [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015\\_human\\_development\\_report\\_overview\\_-\\_es.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report_overview_-_es.pdf) (accessed on 20 January 2016), 2015.

15 An example of this is the World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention (WCEC). In 2015 the annual meeting was in Bali, Indonesia.

16 Naisbitt, J., *Megatrends Asia. The Eight Asian Megatrends that are Changing the World*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 1997.

17 UN DESA, 'Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin', 169.

18 UNDP, 'Informe Sobre Desarrollo Humano 2009. Superando barreras: movilidad y desarrollo humanos', <http://www.undp.org/spanish/> (accessed on 3 January 2016), 2009.

19 This has been shown by the successive interviews made of Chinese migrants resident in Argentina (Buenos Aires and La Plata) and other South American countries, such as Chile, Uruguay and Venezuela.

20 'Coolie' is a Hindu word meaning seasonal worker or day-labourer. It is used as a name for Chinese labourers, generally hired for work in the fields and the mines.

21 Mármora, L., *Las políticas de migraciones internacionales*, 46.

[22](#) De Freitas, S., 'Brasil, desde Hong Kong a São Paulo', in: Morimoto, Amelia, *Cuando Oriente llegó a América. Contribuciones de inmigrantes chinos, japoneses y coreanos*. Washington, DC: BID, 2003.

[23](#) After the Communist revolution (1949), Latin American countries established diplomatic relations with the authorities in Taiwan and did not recognize the PRC government. The first Latin American country to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC was Cuba in 1960, followed by: Chile (1970), Peru (1971), Mexico (1972), Argentina (1972), Guyana (1972), Trinidad and Tobago (1974), Venezuela (1974), Brazil (1974), Surinam (1976) and Barbados (1977). By the end of the 1980s the majority of countries in the region had initiated relations with China.

[24](#) For the purposes of this chapter, the migration situation of the four founding members of Mercosur will be analysed: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

[25](#) UN DESA, 'Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin', 173.

[26](#) Novick, S. *Migraciones y MERCOSUR: una relación inconclusa*. Universidad de Buenos Aires, Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, 2010.

[27](#) Sassone, S., 'Problemática geodemográfica en las fronteras interiores del Mercosur: una mirada desde el territorio argentino', *Anales GAEA Sociedad Argentina de Estudios Geográficos*, Tomo 21–22, Vol. II (1997–2001), pp. 213–246, 2002.

[28](#) Unofficial sources say the Chinese community resident in Brazil is over 300,000.

[29](#) Research in Argentina begun for the author's master's thesis and continued in a research project for the Centro de Estudios Chinos del Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales (IRI) at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata.

[30](#) Bogado Bordazar, L., *Migraciones Internacionales. Influencia de la migración china en Argentina y Uruguay*. Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina, 2003.

[31](#) Novick, S. 'El proceso de integración Mercosur: de las políticas migratorias y de seguridad a las trayectorias de los inmigrantes', Working Paper No. 46, Gino Germani Research Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2005.

[32](#) Cesarín, S., 'Ejes y estrategias del desarrollo económico chino: enfoques para América Latina y el Caribe', in: Cesarín S. (eds) *China y América Latina. Nuevos enfoques sobre cooperación y desarrollo. ¿Una segunda ruta de la Seda?*, Buenos Aires: BID-INTAL, 2005.

[33](#) It is necessary to mention the example of Ecuador, which is analysing the possibility of eliminating the need for Chinese-origin citizens to apply for visas, which would be a significant advance in mutual cooperative relations.

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