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Argentina and China: an Analysis of the Actors in the Soybean Trade and the Migratory Flow

Eduardo Daniel Oviedo¹

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Abstract This article explains who the actors are and how they interact in the two main issues concerning Argentinian–Chinese relations: the soybean trade and Chinese migration to Argentina. Each of the trade policies of the two states guides the soybean business and the Argentinian migration policy seeks to control the flow of Chinese immigration. However, the growing influence of the Chinese state on Argentina through Chinese state-owned companies and Chinese migrants has infiltrated the role played by the Argentinian state in Argentinian–Chinese relations. But the dominant role played by the Argentinian government in the alliance between the Argentinian government and the big export companies in the soybean trade, and the capacity of Argentina state to control the Chinese immigration flow in the face of non-state actors, both legal and clandestine, show that the government is still able to exert a significant restraining influence on these Chinese non-state actors.

Keywords Trade Policy · Soybean · International Actors · Argentinian Foreign Policy · Chinese Migration

Introduction

China has been an economic great power since the end of the last century.¹ The country has expanded its relations with the international community, influencing not only regions in Asia, but also regions outside its area of direct influence, such as Latin America and Caribbean.

¹China became an economic great power in 1998 and eliminated the colonialism of the great powers in 1999 when China restored its sovereignty over Macau [30: 17].

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This expansion of China's ties has motivated numerous academic studies worldwide, mainly from a state-centered perspective.² However, when analyzing a specific issue in a particular state, a close relationship between state and non-state actors can be observed,³ as in the two cases which are examined in this article—the Argentina–China soybean trade and Chinese migration to Argentina. This paper addresses the question of who the involved actors are and how they interact in these two principal areas of Argentina–China relations. By comparing the two very different cases of the bilateral soybean trade on the one hand and bilateral migration on the other, this paper aims to identify the specific roles played by individual actors and actor groups in each aspect of the Sino–Argentinian relationship.

In Sino–Argentinian relations, the soybean trade and migration are the area in which China exerts the greatest influence on Argentina. In each of these two cases, the numbers and autonomy of non-state actors and their interactions have increased, but the state is still the main unit in bilateral relations and prevails over transnational or national non-state actors, which have only the function of lobbying or interest groups and cannot replace the crucial role played by the state.

This particular role of the state—in China as well as in Argentina—is clearly visible in the soybean trade. On the one hand, the Chinese state, as this research will show, has started to exert increasing influence on Argentina through China's state-owned companies. The Argentinian government, on the other hand, also plays a dominant role in its well-established alliance with the big multi-national export companies in the soybean trade, although this interaction may appear to take the form of non-state and private linkages to external observers. As a matter of fact, the soybean trade has been one of the main sources of government finance in Argentina since 2002 and, to some extent, also ensures food security in China. At the same time, Argentinian state control over the Chinese immigration flow has been eroded by non-state actors, both legal and clandestine. As a result, non-state actors (Chinese private and state-owned⁴ companies, the Chinese community in Argentina and criminal organizations engaged in human trafficking) have been playing a stronger role in bilateral relations in recent years, but, as in the case of the soybean trade, the state is still able to exert a significant restraining influence on these Chinese non-state actors.

² Recent studies on the relations between China and Latin America have focused on new actors in the linkage, see, for example, Ellis [9] on the “expanding physical presence by Chinese companies” in the region. However, as Nacht [21] observed: “In most of the research on Argentinian–Chinese linkages, the researchers rarely discuss the actors involved, how they articulate their interests, or how they are supported and legitimized by consensual and coercive aspects.” From this perspective, only very few researchers, for example, Oviedo [30], Bouzas [3] and Laufer [18], have attempted to look beyond the state-centered vision. This article seeks to enrich this vision of international relations.

³ There are two basic types of actors: sovereign states and non-state actors. The state plays a political role, that is, the “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” [42: 10]. Non-state actors do not play this kind of role. This is the functional difference between the different actors. Non-state actors include: a) intergovernmental international organizations (United Nations); b) non-governmental international organizations (international parties, international churches, terrorist organizations); and c) transnational corporations. In addition, there are several domestic actors, such as non-governmental organizations and private entrepreneurs that also have an impact on international issues. However, ultimately, the state seems to have a significant constraining influence on non-state actors [45: 47].

⁴ Chinese state-owned companies can be considered as non-state actors, although in a strict sense they are part of the organizational structure of the Chinese state.

For these reasons, this article is divided into two main parts: the first analyzes the actors in the soybean trade, the second focuses on the actors in the Chinese migration flow to Argentina. The first part describes the current situation of the soybean trade in Argentina, the roles of the two states and their policies in this sector, as well as the roles played by non-state actors, such as transnational corporations and other international or national actors (producers, collectors, boards of trade etc.). The second part introduces the current situation of Chinese migrants in Argentina, the role of the two states in the migration process and the “private sector” of migration. This part takes into account the fact that the Argentinian state monopolizes the migration policy, but in contrast to the soybean trade, this policy has been infiltrated by non-governmental actors, such as the associations which receive the migrants when they arrive in Argentina and the “brokers” or “snakeheads” who make their living by human trafficking.

Actors in the Soybean Trade

Soybean is the main crop in Argentina. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in the 2012–2013 marketing year, the area harvested was 19.4 million hectares and production reached 49.3 million tons (see Table 1). This represented 55.4 % of the total area harvested and about 50 % of the total grains production of Argentina. Argentina is ranked third in soybean production worldwide, after US and Brazil, with production amounting to 18 % of the total production of soybean worldwide. Argentina is also the leading exporter of soy oil and soy-meal, and the third largest exporter of unprocessed soybeans, after the United States and Brazil.

In 2012, sales in the soybean sector (including soybean, soy-meal, biodiesel, crude and refined soy oil) represented 24.4 % of Argentina’s exports (see Table 2). A similar percentage (24.5 %) was seen in 2013.

The soybean is also the main commodity in Argentinian–Chinese trade relations. In 2012, the export of soybeans and soy oil represented 69.2 % of the total exports to China in US dollars (see Table 4). Also in 2012, China bought 84.9 % of the unprocessed soybeans exported by Argentina, which represented only 13.3 % of the national soybean production. The remaining 86.7 % was crushed in the Argentinian industrial sector and its byproducts were exported world-wide (see Table 1). For example, in 2013 Argentina exported soy oil to India, Iran and China; soy-meal and pellets to Indonesia, Vietnam, Netherlands, Thailand and other countries; and biodiesel to US, Spain and Peru.

The Increasing Role Played by Both States in the Soybean Trade

To ensure food security and protect its crushing industry, it is in the interests of the Chinese government to buy as large quantities of Argentinian soybeans as possible to crush in China. However, from 2008, when Argentinian exports to China reached US\$ 6397 million, all soybean sales to China were stopped (see Table 3), due to the fact that the Argentinian industry processed the major part of the soybean crop locally and other

Table 1 Soybean and soybean byproducts in Argentina (Metric tons)

Product	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14 ^a
Area harvested (mhs)	18,300	17,577	19,400	19,800
Soybean				
Production	49,000,000	40,100,000	49,300,000	54,000,000
Exports	9,205,000	7,368,000	7,738,000	8,500,000
Exports to China ^b	8,324,653	5,987,142	6,570,262	Nr
% of production	16.9	14.9	13.3	
% of exports	90.4	81.2	84.9	
Chinese imports	52,399,000	59,231,000	59,865,000	69,000,000
Crush	37,614,000	35,886,000	33,611,000	37,225,000
Soy oil				
Production	7,181,000	6,839,000	6,364,000	7,030,000
Exports	4,561,000	3,794,000	4,244,000	4,420,000
Export to China ^b	410,000	750,859	628,000	Nr
% of production	5.7	10.9	9.9	
% of exports	9.0	19.7	14.8	
Chinese imports	1,319,000	1,502,000	1,409,000	1,250,000
Soymeal				
Production	29,312,000	27,945,000	26,089,000	28,825,000
Exports	27,615,000	26,043,000	23,667,000	27,000,000
Exports to China ^{b,c}	0	0	0	Nr
Chinese imports	294,000	113,000	16,000	20,000

Source: USDA

^a USDA estimation

^b National Institute of Statistics and Census of Argentina (INDEC)

^c China's trade policy was to not import soy-meal, since China has become self-sufficient in this product through the importing of soybeans (from US, Brazil and Argentina) and soybeans processing in China. For this reason, Argentina and other producer countries do not export soy-meal to China

important Argentinian byproducts were not allowed access to the Chinese market.⁵ This incident was the main cause of Argentina's bilateral trade deficit (US\$ 24,164 million between 2007 and 2014), which was directly connected with the industrialization policies of Argentina and China: while the Argentinian policy stimulated the soybean crushing industry by imposing high taxes on primary goods (35 % on soybean and 32 % on soy oil); the Chinese side only wanted to buy unprocessed soybeans to supply

⁵ The volume of Argentinian soybeans exported to China between 2008 and 2014 differed from that between 1995 and 2005 (see [19: 5]), when it increased from US\$ 57.4 million in 1995 to US \$ 2435.6 million in 2005. The volume of Argentinian soybeans exported to China remained stagnant or declined between 2008 and 2014, due to the fact that Argentina sold about 15 % of the unprocessed soybeans, and also that China did not purchase soy-meal and purchased less soybean oil.

Table 2 Soybean sector in Argentina—total exports

	(US\$ million)	
	2012	Percentage
Total exports	80,927	100.0
Soybean	3157	3.9
Crude soy oil	4203	5.2
Refined soy oil	96	0.1
Soy meal	10,548	13.0
Biodiesel	1774	2.2
Soybean sector	19,778	24.4
Others	61,149	75.6

Source: INDEC [28]

its own crushing industry. China is self-sufficient in soy meal, and bought only 14.8 % of the crude soy oil exported by Argentina in 2012.

China is one of main trading partners in Argentina’s soybean production chain. However, in contrast to what might be expected, not all Argentinian soybeans are sold to this market: in 2012, sales amounted to only about 13.3 % of the total soybean production and 9.9 % of the soy oil output. In the same year, India was the largest importer of Argentinian soy oil, followed by China, Iran, Peru, and European countries. China is the world’s fourth largest producer and the largest importer of unprocessed soybeans, but is self-sufficient in soy-meal production and China’s annual production of soy oil is increasing. Other export destinations such as the European Union, India, Indonesia and Iran are also important partners in Argentina’s soybean complex. That is, although China is one of Argentina’s main customers, she would be even more important if Argentina exported more soybeans, as in the case of United State and Brazil, but taxes on soybean exports have led multinational companies to add value by soybean crushing. According to the USDA, in 2012 China imported 70 million tons of soybean and Brazil exported 46.3 million tons, the United States 44.6 million tons and Argentina only 7.8 million tons in total. Quite clearly,

Table 3 Argentinian–Chinese trade (2007–2014)

	(US\$ millions)							
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Exports	5166	6397	3668	5799	6173	5165	5762	5006
Imports	5092	7104	4823	7649	10,573	9952	11,312	10,795
Total trade	10,258	13,501	8491	13,448	16,746	15,117	17,074	15,801
Balance	+74	−707	−1155	−1850	−4400	−4787	−5550	−5789
Total deficit								24,164

Source: INDEC [26]

Excluded: Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan

the Argentinian government has played an important role in guiding the soybean trade in bilateral relations by imposing taxes on exports of oilseeds and grains (Table 4).

The two states are now playing more important roles in the soybean trade because both governments determine the trade policy. Up to now, Argentina has executed a static policy while China's policy tends to be dynamic. In Argentina, in 2002, the government of Eduardo Duhalde imposed high taxes on soybean exports and the Kirchner administration increased this amount twice. At present, unprocessed soybean exports are taxed at 35 %, but soy oil, soy-meal and biodiesel are taxed at 32 %. This policy directly harms soybean producers without affecting the big corporations, namely, the industrial intermediaries or exporters who have passed these federal taxes on to the producers. In this way, the large corporations have made an informal alliance with the government at the expense of the soybean producers who are naturally opposed to this government policy. Without doubt, this policy has been maintained in times of economic growth in China, and due to the growing demands of other emerging countries, it has led to global increases in soybean prices since the beginning of the 21st century.

In the case of China, growing domestic demand and high prices forced the Chinese government to increase oilseed production and importation. Since the beginning of the century, Chinese policy has favored the purchase of genetically modified soybeans, and large investments have extended the domestic industrial capacity to crush soybeans. At the same time, although the Chinese discourse opposes the use of food to produce biofuel, China also has the capacity to process huge amounts of ethanol and biodiesel. China's trade policy is aimed at decreasing market pressure and restrains its high dependence on soybean prices by increasing Chinese companies influence and control on both levels. In 2014, "*China's go out policy*" has encouraged the COFCO (China National Cereals, Oils and Foodstuffs Corporation) to play a more important role in the oilseed and grain trades. The Chinese government wants to reduce dependence on four large commodity traders, known as the ABCD companies (Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus) which control as much as 90 % of the world grains trade [20: 5]. This decision shows that China's government is considering increasing imports of soybean or corn, sorghum and barley, and, in particular, importing oilseed for domestic processing.

Table 4 Soybean in Argentinian-Chinese trade

	(US\$ millions)			
	2012	Percentage	2013	Percentage
Total exports to China	5160	100.0	5762	100.0
Total soybean sector	3573	69.2	3959	68.7
Soybean	2722	52.7	3360	58.3
Crude soy-oil	851	16.5	599	10.4

Source: INDEC [28]

Transnational Corporations

Given the Chinese trade policy, another “C” can be added to the ABCD group of transnational corporations in the agri-business: COFCO, China’s largest food commodity company.

In 2014, COFCO expanded its influence in the grain and oilseed trade when it bought 51 % of Nidera, a Dutch company with interests in Argentina. In addition, COFCO controls 51 % of Noble Agriculture, a company belonging to the Noble Grain Group in which COFCO wants to hold a major share. This represents the most significant change in transnational actors in the food supply chain in recent years, and grants COFCO a position as an additional “C”. The description of the big companies in the global agribusiness should be changed to “AB, double C and D”.

The entry of COFCO as a new player in the grains and oilseeds market will increase Chinese influence on the grains supply and on price determinations. It will allow China to exert more control over costs, particularly in the context of China’s increasing demand. As COFCO’s chairman Ning Gaoning remarked: “Through Nidera and Noble Agriculture’s spread the management capacity and trade network of the world’s major grain producing areas, COFCO will combine a channel between the upper reaches of the grain supply capacity with COFCO’s domestic port, processing, logistics and brand, and can open up the passage from global grain origin to Chinese consumers” [36]. In addition, with the exception of ADM, the rest of these transnational companies have interests in Argentina. Thus, bilateral trade is restricted to “B, double C and D”. But the “A” could be replaced by Aceitera General Deheza (AGD), Argentina’s largest company. Molinos Río de la Plata and Vicentin are the other two important companies. In China, in addition to “AB, double C and D”, other important enterprises are Wilmar (a Singapore company), Jiusan Group and Chinatex (two other Chinese companies) (Table 5).

COFCO is one of China’s state-owned food processing holding companies, but the soybean crushing and export sectors in Argentina are controlled by private companies. The main difference in the trade interaction, therefore, is that the Chinese companies depend on Chinese government policies. That is, while private companies tend to root their investments abroad and define their interests in the interests of the company, state-owned enterprises (such as COFCO) take into account the interests of the company itself and, at the same time, serve the national interest as expressed in Chinese policy towards the sector. This implies greater stability in the first case and dependence on government decisions in the second. Conversely, if the state is strong, the company is probably strong; and if the state is weak, the company will have critical problems. This is different to the private sector, because strong companies can appear within weak states. In fact, the Chinese state-owned companies have more additional power than the private companies because, here, as in the case of COFCO, they have official support through political and diplomatic channels. China’s ban on imports of Argentinian crude soy oil in 2010 is a good example of a rapid reaction in China’s foreign economic decision-making that, demonstrates greater autonomy in power relations and can cause abrupt

Table 5 Crushing plants in Argentina and the PRC

Main crushing plants in Argentina	Aceitera General Deheza Cargill Bunge Molino Río de la Plata Vicentín Louis Dreyfus Nidera Noble Grain Oleaginosa Moreno Buyatti
Main crushing plants in PRC	Cofco (中国粮油食品集团有限公司) Jiusan Group (九三集团) Chinatex (中国中纺集团公司) Cargill (嘉吉公司) Noble Grain (米宝集团) Bunge (邦吉公司) Louis Dreyfus (路易达孚) Sinograin (中国储备粮管理总公司) Wilmar (益海嘉里集团)

Prepared by the author

disruption or instability in Argentina's exports to China and, therefore, better Chinese control over bilateral trade interdependence [32: 365].⁶

The increased influence of Chinese-funded companies in Argentina can be seen in the production capacity of soybean. Table 6 shows that the daily production capacity of Nidera and Noblegrain together amounts to 20,500 t, which equal the capacity of Louis Dreyfus. This is clear evidence that "A, B, double C and D" has already begun in Argentina. However, although China has a share of the grains and oilseeds industrial sector in Argentina, she does not control it and probably never will, since it is highly fragmented and COFCO only has 6.7 % of the annual production of Argentina.

⁶ On April 1, 2010, the Ministry of Commerce of China made the decision to ban imports of crude soy oil from Argentina. The Chinese government based its decision on national technical factors, but the transnational companies in Argentina produce crude soy oil according to Codex Alimentarius requirements. In fact, the ban was a retaliatory measure against the anti-dumping and non-automatic licenses, introduced by the government of Cristina Fernandez, for goods manufactured in China. One further reason for the ban was Beijing's decision to strengthen the development of its own crushing industry in the production of soy meal and oil and to avoid foreign competition by importing more beans and fewer value-added products. The main political reason was to apply an economic sanction in response to the judicial order issued by an Argentinian judge, who has requested an international warrant for the arrest of former President Jiang Zemin on charges related to the crimes of torture and genocide committed against Falun Gong practitioners in China. Finally, the dispute can be seen as a test case that shows how tensions emerge in relations with China when the Argentinian government seeks the de-primarization of its economy, by adding value and developing the soybean crushing industry [32: 337–376].

Table 6 Ranking of vegetable oil companies according to the crushing capacity in Argentina

(Metric tons)

Rank	Company	PC 24 h	APC
1	Aceitera Gral. Deheza	31,000	10.2
2	Cargill	26,200	8.6
3	Bunge Argentina	24,200	8.0
4	Molinos Río de la Plata	21,500	7.1
5	Vicentín	20,500	6.8
6	Louis Dreyfus	20,000	6.6
7	Nidera	11,000	3.6
8	Noble	9500	3.1
9	Oleaginosa Moreno S.A. (Glencore)	5750	1.9
10	Buyatti	4800	1.6
	Others	11,950	3.9
	Total	186,400	

Source: Rosario Board of Trade [33]

^a Production capacity in 24 hours (tons)

^b Annual production capacity

Actors' Interaction in World Soybean Pricing

On the international market, the price of soybean and soybean by-products is set by the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT). Brazil and Argentina are ranked second and third, respectively, as world producers, and the prices of the Bolsa de Valores, Mercadorias & Futuros de São Paulo (acronym in Portuguese: BM&FBovespa) and Rosario Board of Trade (BCR, in Spanish) are also reference prices for domestic and regional markets. The Dalian Commodity Exchange (DCE) plays a similar role in China's soybean market.⁷

Several times, due to the volume of crop harvested, weather and other special conditions in Argentina and Brazil, the Chicago Board of Trade prices have not reflected South America's real prices; they are influenced by the US domestic market. Taking into consideration the fact that, in 2013, soybean production in the United States reached 89 million tons and Argentina and Brazil's total production exceeded 141 million tons, the reference prices should be set by the two South American boards of trade, but up to now Chicago hegemony has remained decisive in determining the world price of soybean.

This situation has generated common interests between Brazil and Argentina with regard to modifying the role played by South America in the prices subsystem of the world soybean trade and developing an alternative to the Chicago hegemony. Since it is on the buying side in this scenario, the Dalian Commodity Exchange also plays an important role because it has to pay attention to South American pricing when performing trade operations.

⁷ Several factors influence the price of soybeans: 1) seasonal variations in soybean supplies; 2) soybean supply and demand conditions; 3) international market price of soybeans; 4) trade policies (producer-country policies; the policies of main consumer countries); 5) price of relative products [6: 4].

In conclusion, the soy-bean price is determined by the Chicago Board of Trade. Sao Paulo and Rosario can exert a minor influence, but if these two South American institutions came to an agreement on strategic collaboration they would probably be in a position to take over or at least share the current role played by CBOT. The announcement of the largest US crop in terms of the total production of soybean, estimated to be around 108 million tons in 2014, conspires against this alternative.

Other Actors in Soybean Production and Export Chains

In Argentina, the soybean production and export chain started with the decision of Argentina's farmers to produce soybeans. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature Switzerland Report (2002: IV) [39], soybean farmers are often highly dependent on trading companies for seed, credit and other inputs. Also, the export tax on soybean and soybean byproducts is borne by the farmers. It can be seen that these actors are the weakest links in the soybean production chain. Nevertheless, due to the natural conditions of the crop areas in Argentina (comparative advantage) and the high technical standards of agricultural production, this sector has become the most dynamic in the Argentinian economy.

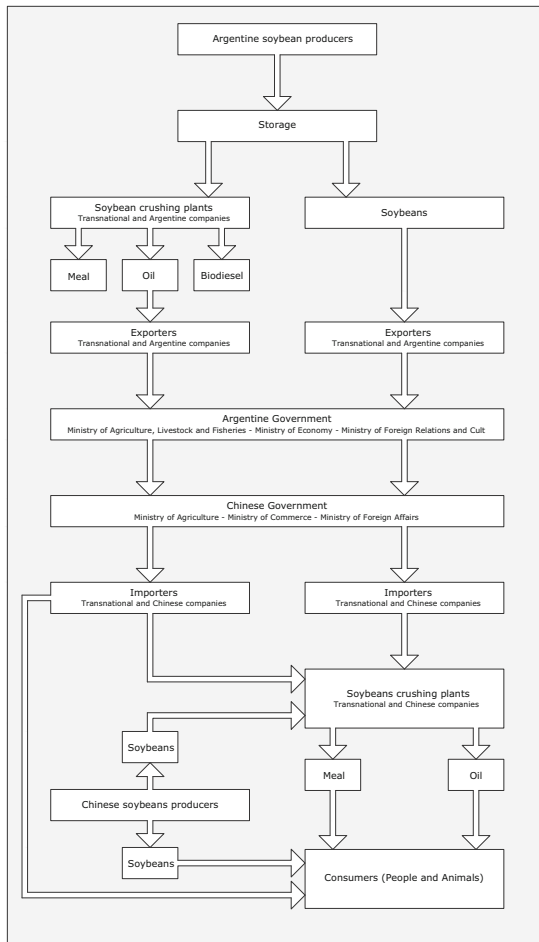
After the harvest, the next step is to transport the soybean crop to the grain storage plant. Farmers and storage plants are two actors in the first sub-national level of the production chain. Then, middlemen connect the first level with the second level: exporter and crushing plants. The exporters sell unprocessed soybean directly to Chinese importers or, indirectly, crushing plants export soybean-oil to Chinese importers.

Several government departments are involved in the production and export of soybean and soybean byproducts from Argentina to China. The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries in Argentina and the Ministry of Agriculture in the PRC define the policies for this sector. Their technical agencies are the National Agrifood Health and Quality Service (SENASA) in Argentina and the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) in China. Another institution is the Certification and Accreditation Administration of China (CNCA), which authorizes Argentinian industrial plants that want to export to China. The two Foreign Ministries are also involved in this process. In times of crisis (for example, the soy-oil bilateral crisis in 2010), high-ranking representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Relations of both countries immediately set up meetings to discuss the problems. The Argentinian Deputy Secretary of International Relations, the Ministry of Agriculture, the officials at the SENASA, the Argentinian Embassy in China, the Argentinian Agricultural Office in Beijing and the private sector together worked to solve the crisis.

Finally, there are other public or private institutions in which several soybean chain interests are grouped. In the private sector, one key institution is the Soybean Chain Association (ACSOJA), which has the main mission of improving the competitiveness

of the sector, encouraging actor participation, and stimulating production, industry and trade through the development of science and technology [37]. Other important institutions are the Argentinian Oil Industry Chamber (CIARA), PROSOJA, Argentinian Chamber of Agricultural Health and Fertilizers (CASAFE), Argentinian Fats and Oils Association (ASAGA), the Chamber of Exporters of Argentina (CERA) and several other organizations relate to production and trade in the soy bean industry. In the public sector, the National Agricultural Technology Institute (INTA), the National Institute of Seeds (INASE) and the Faculties of Agronomy at the National Universities are the most important.

Argentina's Soybean Production Chain and Exports to China



Actors in the Migration Flow

Chinese Migrants in Argentina

According to Argentina's National Census, 11,804 Chinese immigrants were living in Argentina in 2010 (see Table 7), of whom 75.6 % originated from the People's Republic of China and the remaining 24.4 %, from Taiwan. Together, they amounted to 0.61 % of the foreign-born population living in Argentina.

Under the Argentinian Migration Act of 2004, foreigners are allowed to enter and stay in the country as "permanent residents", "temporary residents" or "transitory residents". Foreigners who wish to settle permanently in Argentina are admitted in the capacity of "permanent residents" by the National Directorate of Migration (Article 22), which functions as the Argentinian government agency for migration issues. According to the reports of this agency, between 2004 and 2013, 17,505 Chinese citizens were granted permanent residence, which represented 2.26 % of all the approved applications for permanent residence (see Tables 8 and 9).

During the same period, 13,088 applications for temporary residence were also approved. The 2004 Act does not define temporary residents, but lists fifteen subcategories that include migrant workers, pensioners, investors, scientists, asylum seekers, refugees, persons in special situations and persons applying for humanitarian reasons, etcetera. It should be noted that 9174 applications for temporary residence were resolved in 2005 and 10,433 applications for permanent residence were resolved between 2009 and 2011. Between 2009 and 2013, 229 Chinese nationals were expelled as a consequence of criminal offenses or irregularities related to residency (see Tables 8 and 9).

According to the statistics provided by the National Directorate of Migration, between January and July of 2014, 48.8 % of the infractions of all immigrants were committed by Chinese applicants (see Table 10).

Apart from these irregularities related to residence, Chinese citizens have low involvement in crime. According to the report made by the Head of the Cabinet of Ministers to the National Senate of Argentina, out of a total of 2259 foreigners serving prison sentences, only 19 were Chinese [14]. However, most of the crimes committed against Chinese residents (and related to the "Chinese mafia") remain unsolved, to the point that the Argentinian government has submitted requests for collaboration to China's Ministry of Public Security in order to solve the repeated cases of extortion

Table 7 Chinese immigration in Argentina's National Census—2010

Origen	Male	Female	Total	Percentage	Percentage ^a
China	4897	4032	8929	75.6 %	0.49 %
Taiwan	1435	1440	2875	24.4 %	0.12 %
Total	6332	5472	11,804	100.0 %	0.61 %

Source: INDEC. Censo Nacional de Población, Hogares y Viviendas [27]

^a Percentage of the total of the foreign-born population

Table 8 Application and approval for temporary residence and permanent residence; the expulsion of Chinese immigrants from Argentina—Annual statistics 2004–2013

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Applications	8441	1168	673	1614	1833	3906	2365	2117	1902	2218
Temporary residence	20	9174	280	419	497	338	420	812	653	475
Permanent residence	263	242	357	2944	982	7103	1611	1719	1084	1200
Expulsions art. 29 c ^a						4	8	3	1	3
Expulsions art. 61 ^b						23	60	43	62	22

Source: Argentina’s National Directorate of Migration [23-25]

^a For criminal offenses that involving deprivation of liberty for 3 years or more

^b For issues related to irregular residency in the country

and threats involving Chinese supermarket owners. In December 2011, China’s government sent the first police delegation to Argentina, which resulted in the disbanding of a gang of Chinese citizens [44]. Nonetheless, homicides involving members of the Chinese community continued after the police delegation returned to China [40]. To solve these and other crimes (such as drug trafficking, human trafficking and contraband) the security ministries of both countries decided to renew and extend the cooperation agreement signed in 1997 [17: article 2.9].

In contrast to the official statistics, several non-official reports and newspaper articles have estimated that the number of Chinese residents in Argentina is around 120,000 [22, 35]. This figure includes people from Mainland China and Taiwan. In addition, at the official level, the Chinese Cultural Counselor in Argentina, Han Mengtang, remarked that “In Argentina there are more than 120,000 Chinese who are participating in with the social and economic development of this country...” [13: 17]. However, notwithstanding the statement made by the Chinese Counselor, this figure of 120,000 is only an unofficial estimate and therefore lacks academic precision.

In fact, according to the report made by the Employees Federation of Trade and Services of Argentina, in 2010 there were 4684 supermarkets belonging to Chinese owners in Argentina [10: 17]. In addition, the Chamber of Supermarkets and Self-Service Restaurants Owned by Chinese Residents in Argentina (acronym in Spanish:

Table 9 Started and resolved applications for temporary and permanent residence; the expulsion of Chinese immigrants from Argentina—2004–2013

	2004–2013	Percentage
Applications	26,237	1.34 %
Temporary residence	13,088	1.45 %
Permanent residence	17,505	2.26 %
Expulsions	229	2.78 %

Source: Argentina’s [23-25]

Table 10 Detection of irregular situations (2009–July 2014)

Nationality	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 ^a
Bolivia	33.8 %	28.5 %	27.2 %	33.9 %	29.2 %	17.0 %
China	16.1 %	24.3 %	19.7 %	24.3 %	28.4 %	48.8 %
Paraguay	16.5 %	22.6 %	27.2 %	17.3 %	16.7 %	10.6 %
Peru	19.0 %	14.9 %	19.4 %	16.0 %	11.8 %	17.0 %
Others	14.6 %	9.7 %	6.5 %	8.5 %	13.9 %	6.6 %

Source: Report of the Head of the Cabinet of Ministers to the Honorable Senate of the Nation [15]

^a January–July 2014

CASRECH) estimated that the supermarkets belonging to Chinese owners in Argentina surpassed ten thousand units in 2011 [4, 12, 34]. If one considers that these types of businesses are usually family economic units composed of at least three persons of Chinese origin, the figures for this sector alone would already well exceed the figures provided by the National Census.

If this figure is correct, one possible explanation for the discrepancy in numbers could be the large number of immigrants who are living in irregular circumstances after entering Argentina illegally. In order to resolve this problem, in 2004 the Argentinian government promulgated Decree No. 1169 to regulate the migratory situation of residents from non-Mercosur countries. In total, 12,062 immigrants lodged applications to regularize their positions and 75 % of these came from China [2: 50]. This is usually described as an amnesty (*dàshè* 大赦) by the Chinese in Argentina.

The figures related to the numbers of immigrants in the migration processes are important because they can help to identify the existence of an irregular flow channel. Due to the illegal nature of a proportion of the Chinese migratory flow towards Argentina, undertaking research on this issue is naturally far more difficult than studying the soybean trade. The problem is the lack of reliable statistical data on the irregular status of a significant proportion of the Chinese residents in Argentina. In order to obtain comprehensive statistical data, a complete study of the Chinese migration flow to Argentina has to include all the channels of the Chinese migration flow, both regular and irregular, although it is impossible to determine the number of irregular immigrants. In addition, the irregular channels are controlled by non-state actors, who take over the role and actions of the state, and make their living by human trafficking in collusion with public officials.

For this reason, the following two sections of this paper analyze the roles played by governmental and non-governmental actors in the Chinese migration flow to Argentina.

The Role of the Governments in the Migration Process

In principle, the governments of both countries control the migration flow and regulate the interaction through laws and bureaucratic decisions. In Argentina, the migratory policy is determined in accordance with the 1853 Constitution.

The preamble to the 1853 Constitution and Article 25 stipulate that Argentina is an immigrant-receiving country and state the guiding principles for the migration policy. In the second half of the 19th century, this political project promoted European immigration, with the aim of attracting immigration from the United Kingdom [1: 77]. However, at the beginning of the 20th century the immigrants to Argentina mainly came from Southern Europe, especially from Italy and Spain. The above-mentioned clauses continued in use even after the last constitutional reform in 1994. Although the Constitution provides that the “Federal Government shall foster European immigration”, since the restoration of democracy in 1983, the largest share of immigrants has come from neighboring countries (Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru) and the East Asian region (Korea, Taiwan and Mainland China).

Since 1853, the Argentinian Congress has passed several acts related to migration. The most recent was promulgated in January 2004. It is a modern law, focused on the protection of the human rights of immigrants. The National Directorate of Migration has the authority to implement this law. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (through the Direction of Consular Affairs, the Consular Section of the Argentinian Embassy in China and the Consulates in Shanghai and Guangzhou) is the other relevant state agency that is involved in the Chinese migratory process. The Consulate in Guangzhou was opened in 2009 and has jurisdiction over southern China, including Fujian province, which is: the place of origin of most of the Chinese immigrants in Argentina. In addition to these Consulates, the Consulate General in Hong Kong and the Trade and Cultural Office in Taiwan must be mentioned, which have a different status in the hierarchy of Argentinian diplomatic missions abroad, but also participate in the process of the Chinese migration flow towards Argentina. And finally, the Federal Tribunals, which issue the letters of citizenship, are also important actors in Argentina’s bureaucracy.

Although the official policy towards Chinese immigrants does not place restrictions on their numbers, the numbers of entry permits issued annually by the National Directorate of Migration is limited, although it has been constantly increasing, especially since the new Migration Act was passed. In fact, according to non-official statistics, from 2010 onwards, the Chinese community has been positioned as the fourth biggest foreign community in Argentina, after the Bolivian, Paraguayan and Peruvian communities [35]. Although the migration flow comprises few people (only 120,000 immigrants), this small percentage of the population formed one of the main minority groups in Argentina. One explanation for this situation is that some of the members of other communities who have been living in Argentina for a long time have re-migrated to other countries or have returned to their various countries of origin, for example, the Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese communities. After the 2001 crisis, this trend was also observed in the Chinese community as well.

While Argentina is a receiving country, China is a high-emigration country. The Annual Report on Chinese International Migration [41: 7] estimates that around 50 million “overseas Chinese” and “foreign citizens of Chinese origin” live outside China. The figure of 50 million Chinese living abroad represents only 3.7 % of China’s population. Compared with other countries, this percentage is low, but the number is not small in absolute terms: it represents 25 % more than the total population of

Argentina. In this respect, emigration is both an advantage and a problem for the Chinese government. The advantage consists in the greater influence that China can wield in other countries; the problem is that issues related to emigration require China's government to negotiate with other countries. Due to the large number of Chinese immigrants, the Argentinian government is concerned about the regulation of this migration flow and sets a limit on the number of Chinese immigrants who are allowed to enter Argentina each year. The Chinese government places an emphasis on their forming an important interest group that increases China's influence on Argentina while protecting Chinese citizens and their interests in this country.

The Chinese authorities started to put the protection of the rights of Chinese citizens on the bilateral agenda after the 2001 crisis, when widespread looting occurred in supermarkets under Chinese ownership. This issue did not seem relevant to the Chinese government before the crisis, but new emphasis on protecting Chinese nationals overseas is related to the rise of China's power and its new global role [8: 40–56]. The Chinese government also wants to keep some good cards in hand in order to be able to play the Sino-Argentinian diplomatic game, with regard to balancing the issue of the irregular flow of Chinese immigration.

In the 2014–2018 Joint Action Plan, which was signed during the visit of President Xi Jinping to Argentina in 2014, Argentina and China agreed to "... promote mutual assistance in order to fight illicit immigrant trafficking and prevent irregular migration as well as to protect the security and rights of the citizens of one Party in the territory of the other" [17: article 2.7.]. The first part of this clause is clearly an Argentinian proposal; the second part, linked to the protection of the safety and rights of immigrants, is part of the Chinese government's complaints about the acts of violence that have been perpetrated against the Chinese community in Argentina. This clause is highly significant because Argentina and the PRC have never signed a specific bilateral agreement on the immigration issue.

The planned or unplanned nature of the immigrant flows is the most important characteristic for describing the roles played by the two states in their bilateral relations. It can be seen that the two states both place an emphasis on controlling and planning the migration flow. In the early years of modernization, the Chinese community abroad was considered to be a "bridge" between foreign countries and China. The Chinese community in Argentina can be seen as forming part of the bridge that China has built with all other countries worldwide and it has favored the policy of modernization and the opening of China.

Argentina maintains control over the number of Chinese citizens who are allowed to enter the country annually, but the irregular channel, of course, continues to function without any limits. In addition, there is high interdependence between the regular and irregular channels. When entry permits or visa issuance is restricted in the regular channel, the demand in the irregular channel increases immediately, but the two channels continue to work simultaneously. For example, after the National Congress of Argentina passed the Migration Act in 2004, the amnesty for extra-Mercosur citizens facilitated the

regularization of irregular Chinese citizens but, at the same time, a large number of Chinese citizens arrived in Argentina through the irregular channel. Apart from this, the irregular migration of Chinese citizens does not only increase when macroeconomic and political conditions are favorable, as was the case in the 1990s, but also increases during times of political weakness or power transition, when criminal organizations exploit the political and economic situations to conceal the arrival of new Chinese immigrants.

The irregular entry of Chinese citizens to Argentina has resulted in the strict and rigorous enforcement of regulations, which again causes delays in the issuing of visas and obstructs commercial and cultural exchanges. This situation has been fiercely criticized by Argentinian entrepreneurs and academics, who are obliged to fulfill numerous requirements in order to be able to issue invitations to Chinese delegations, while Chinese citizens who want to enter Argentina legally also have to fulfill various requirements. For example, the letters of invitation have to be signed by the highest authority in an institution or company in the presence of a notary public.

The “Private Sector” of Migration

The “private sector” of migration includes migrants, the associations that receive them in the target state, and the “brokers” or “snakeheads” (*shétóu*)—who make their living by human trafficking.

The main actor is the immigrant. In the last decade, the migration of Mainland Chinese citizens to Argentina has often been motivated by the prospects of family reunification and economic factors. Chinese immigrants have sought a new life in Argentina in order to improve their economic position and, recently, to avoid the problems arising from unfavorable environmental conditions or the lack of food security in China. Political motives for migration were important drivers after the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, when hundreds of Mainland Chinese tried to emigrate to Argentina as businessmen or entrepreneurs.

With the increase in trade and financial interactions, the number of temporary residents and people with other forms of provisional residence has grown in recent years, particularly in the case of those who work for Chinese companies in Argentina (ICBC, Petrochina, CNOOC). It should be noted that in the contracts for projects in Argentina, for example for the Belgrano Cargas railway, the Chinese government usually includes a clause stating that a number of Chinese technicians is going to be sent to live temporarily in Argentina until the contracts expire. This kind of clause has aroused wide criticism in Argentina, especially since the signing of several agreements during the visit of President Fernandez de Kirchner to China in February 2015. In recent years, emigration for the purpose of education has emerged as a new way of emigrating to Argentina: Chinese scholars and students emigrate temporarily to Argentina to study the Spanish language and other fields of knowledge.

The second actor is the *shétóu* (蛇头), a term that is generally used to refer to people who manage and control illegal immigration. Their organizations are called *rénshé*

jítuán (人蛇集团) in Chinese. For the purpose of academic research, they are “invisible actors”, because they work illegally and apart from rumors, no data is available on them. Their clandestine actions affect the role played by a state mainly through the venality of public officials. An interesting article written by a Chinese citizen on a social network asks why the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Argentina does not employ Argentinian lawyers or does not create a Legal Office to advise Chinese immigrants and thus eliminate the inhuman channel controlled by gangs [11]. In other words, the suggestion is that the government should take action “to nationalize” the “private activity” or “service” provided by the brokers. The reason that this does not happen is clear: human trafficking signifies huge amounts of money, widespread government corruption and a network of interests supported by criminal organizations worldwide. On the other side, from the 1980s, the Argentinian press has published several reports and articles about the sale of visas to Chinese citizens by Argentinian diplomats [7, 29, 43].

The third actor is the organizations created by Chinese immigrants in Argentina. In the last decade, the influence of the Chinese community in Argentina’s society and government has expanded quickly through the creation of civilian organizations and the opening of representative offices by Chinese companies. More than 50 Chinese community organizations have been established in Argentina, including chambers of commerce, social entities, media, educational institutions (for example, Confucius Institutes and the Buenos Aires city bilingual school) or Chinese corporations recently arrived in Argentina (for example, ICBC, Petrochina, CNOOC) which provide support for several Argentinian journals and scholars. In this way, the Chinese government has been able to form a monolithic block of overseas Chinese with a pro-Beijing position, although opposition groups (such as human rights organizations and Falun Gong activists) continue to show strong resistance to the Chinese regime which was visible, for instance, in the city streets of Buenos Aires during the presidential visits of Hu Jintao in 2004 and Xi Jinping in 2014. Despite these sporadic clashes, the *détente* in the Taiwan Strait has ensured the peaceful coexistence of the members of the Taiwanese and mainland China communities in Argentina since 2008.

These Chinese organizations in Argentina play an important role by facilitating transnational networks. As the World Migration Report [16: 34] maintains: “The emergence of organized migrant communities in destination countries constitutes a social and cultural ‘pull factor’. A network of family members abroad can further promote migration as it facilitates the migration process for others, and such movements account for the bulk of the legal migration flows in many industrialized countries.” Simultaneously, the *rénshé jítuán* is also a transnational network that promotes migration between China and Argentina, albeit in this case illegally, especially from Fujian province. For this and other reasons, in 2009 the Argentinian government opened the Consulate in Guangzhou, close to Fujian province [31, 484], in order to closely observe the situation in the region and the irregular channel.

An unexpected player in the life of the Chinese community in Argentina has been Carrefour, a French company and leader in the supermarket sector. Indeed,

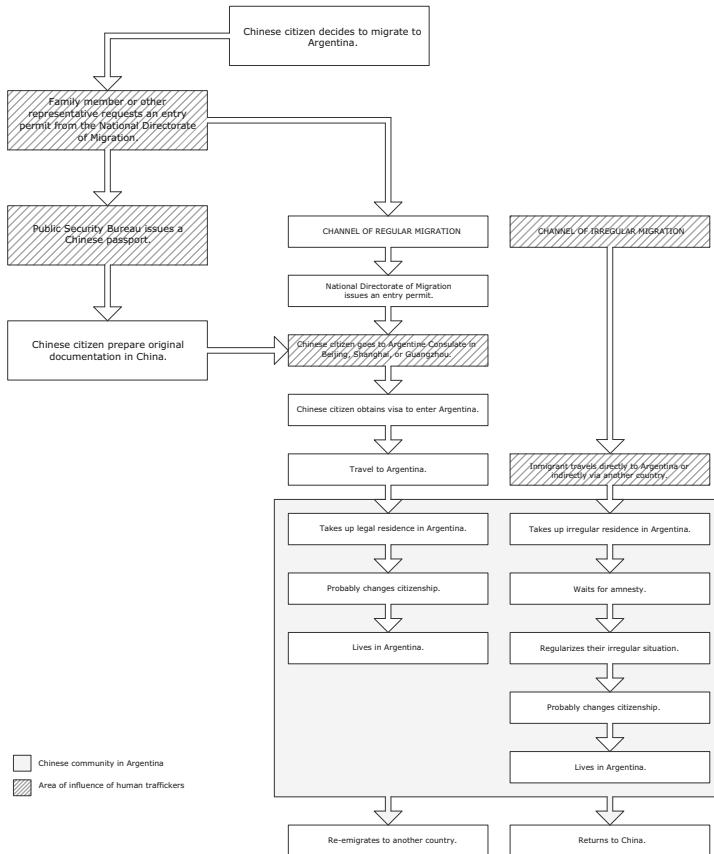
the golden age of Chinese supermarkets in Argentina in the 1990s when 20 or 30 supermarkets used to open each month, seems to have become history. The French company has changed its strategy, from the opening of large-scale supermarkets to the opening of small branches, strategically located close to small Chinese-owned supermarkets. The competition through the French company's "Carrefour Express" and "Carrefour Market" is eroding the supremacy of Chinese-owned supermarkets in retail market activity in Argentina. As a result, most of the Chinese supermarkets have had to close their doors, have been sold to compatriots at a low price, converted into Chinese Rotisseries, or have moved to other places where they do not have to compete with Carrefour. In addition, the fall in consumer demand among Argentinian citizens due to recent economic crises has also weakened the sales of Chinese-owned supermarkets in Argentina. As a result, a new social problem has emerged among the Chinese community in Argentina and many Chinese are considering re-migrating to other countries or returning to China.

Complaints from customers, employees, suppliers and neighbors about the lack of hygiene and other irregularities in Chinese-owned supermarkets or restaurants are widely documented. Many shops have been closed down by the local health authorities in several cities. Another suspicion that has emerged about the Chinese in Argentina is that the "private investments" in supermarkets from China correspond to money laundering.⁸ Several supermarkets and restaurants also have been accused of violating local laws, favoring the illegal migration process by providing job opportunities for Chinese migrants who are living in irregular circumstances, and of exploiting their own compatriots and members of other communities, for example, Peruvian or Bolivian immigrants. Chinese entrepreneurs in Argentina are not enthusiastic about employing local workers, arguing that they need to "avoid labor lawsuits" or Argentinian employees are "lazy". Employing an Argentinian inside a Chinese-owned supermarket would in their eyes mean having a person "with power" in their shops who would denounce any irregularities directly to the authorities. Of course, these irregularities are not reflected in the studies of Chinese scholars, which also avoid mentioning the attempts to monopolize the supermarket sector and "increase" the control over the food supply chains [38].

The private sector of Chinese migration in Argentina plays roles that are usually assigned to the state. In fact, the Chinese community seems to form two sub-national states within Argentina. One involves the Chinese criminal organizations engaged in human trafficking, contraband and threats or extortion of money from other members of the Chinese community in Argentina. The other comes into existence when Chinese entrepreneurs in Argentina organize their own "special police group" of about 100 persons to protect Chinese-owned supermarkets from potential looting [5]. In fact, these developments show that the Chinese community in Argentina now enjoys much more autonomy than in previous decades.

⁸ One measure that has been undertaken against this problem is the Memorandum of Understanding on the prevention of money laundering activities and the financing of terrorism that was signed by the People's Bank of China and the Central Bank of Argentina in May 2014.

Chinese Migration Flow to Argentina



Conclusion

The analysis of the two issues in this article provides a description of the actors and how they interact in the relations between Argentina and China. While the two cases are very different, the comparison highlights the increase in the interactions and the numbers of individual actors and actor groups, as well as their greater political presence in Argentina. Non-state actors, such as Chinese companies and Chinese organizations in Argentina and groups dedicated to human trafficking increase China's influence in these two main areas of Argentinian-Chinese relations. Of course, they have not replaced the role played by the state, but significant changes are observed in both areas.

In the area of migration, clandestine groups have broken the Argentinian state's monopolistic hold on immigration by operating an irregular migration channel; this differs from the area of the soybean trade which is ruled effectively by means of

established legal regulations. As a result, statistics on how many tons of unprocessed soybeans are exported to China are available, but no official figures are available with regard to the number of Chinese immigrants living in Argentina. In the soybean trade, a new important actor (COFCO) has recently appeared in the production and export of Argentinian soybeans to China, while in the migration flow, traditional actors have remained unchanged, albeit becoming more influential in Argentina, particularly Chinese residents' organizations.

Both the Argentinian and the Chinese governments guide and control the soybean trade, and their trade policies impose constraints on non-state actors. Among these actors, transnational companies play a principal role in both countries. They exert influence on governments, pricing and other non-state actors, such as producers, but cannot control the trade policies of states. They are highly dependent on the governments' trade policies. Therefore, the governments and transnational companies work in tandem in the soybean trade between Argentina and China.

In recent years, COFCO has strengthened its transnational position in order to obtain a greater share of the soybean market and to safeguard the supply channel to China. This is one of the most important changes that has been observed in recent years and places COFCO among transnational companies as the new "C". A proposal has therefore been made that ABCD companies should now be known as "AB, double C and D". In addition, the fact that COFCO is a state-owned enterprise can be seen as a signal that the political factor is most important in the Argentinian-Chinese soybean business. This can promote instability in trade relations, because the decisions made by the Chinese companies tend to be dependent on government decisions and are not always in the best interests of the companies themselves. In the other side, transnational companies in Argentina have formed an informal alliance with the Argentinian government at the expense of the soybean producers. While the government collects the revenues in the form of the high taxes that are imposed on exports of soybeans and other commodities, the transnational companies pass the tax burden on to the producers, who are the weakest actors in the soybean production chain in Argentina.

The Chicago Board of Trade plays a leading role in determining the price of soybeans on the world market. BCR, Bovespa and DCE are secondary and regional actors. Given the role played by Argentina (BCR) and Brazil (BOVESPA) in the production and export of soybeans worldwide, if the two countries established a strategic partnership, they would also be able to play a greater role in the setting of prices and would perhaps be able to displace the COBT in its central position.

The Chinese migration flow to Argentina differs in several aspects from the soybean trade: 1) the statistical data on Chinese residents in Argentina is essential for the development of a migration policy, but these statistics are not as accurate as those available for the soybean trade; 2) the official state policies are directed towards controlling the migration flow, but these policies are not fully effective due to the existence of irregular immigration activities, the venality of public officials and human trafficking organizations; 3) for the above-mentioned reasons, instead of only one single migration channel, there are two: a regular and an irregular migration channel; 4) non-state actors in the migration flow include legal and clandestine actors.

The state plays a monopoly role in the control of migration. However, this role has been eroded by non-state actors. The non-state actors include migrants, the associations

that receive them in Argentina (receiving state), and the “brokers” or snakeheads (shétóu) in the irregular migration channel. In comparison with earlier phases of Chinese immigration to Argentina, the Chinese community is now more involved and better organized, and also has the ability to exert an influence on the Argentinian government by adopting roles that are usually incumbent upon the state, for example, organizing a police force to defend the Chinese-owned supermarkets. Simultaneously, the “golden age” of Chinese-owned supermarkets is over, since the competition of other transnational and local companies, especially Carrefour, has eroded their predominance in the retail sector. This has given rise to societal changes and a new flow of migration, with Chinese residents moving to other countries or returning to China.

Transnational networks also play an important role. In fact, Chinese residents in Argentina form the most important network, because family reunification is the main motivation for emigrating to Argentina. But due to the fact that there are two migration flow channels, illegal migration organizations, such as the *rénshè jítuán*, play the role of “brokers” between the two states in the irregular flow channel (and also in the regular channel through corruption). As a final point, although the proposal to “nationalize” this “private activity” or “service” provided by “brokers” seems, in principle, to present itself as a means of eliminating the illegal migration channel, any such plan is bound to be less than effective because human trafficking involves huge amounts of money as well as government corruption and is supported by the interest networks of mafia organizations all over the world.

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