From the President

by **Aldo I. Panfichi Huamán**
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú / apanfic@pucp.pe

The dynamism that Latin American studies has shown in different regions of the world can be explained by the strengths that this area of study has developed along its trajectory of over five decades. During this time, the study of Latin America has become characterized by mature and experienced teaching and research, generating insights that contribute to understanding numerous problems in different parts of the globe.

From its origins in the mid-twentieth century, Latin American studies postulated the need to have a profound knowledge of the history, economics, and social structures of the countries in this region. History and structuralism, be they from functionalist or Marxist perspectives, were present in the first analyses of the possibilities and limitations of development in Central and South America.

As Latin American studies has developed, it has incorporated the premises, perspectives, and methodologies of diverse fields in the humanities and social sciences, actively promoting collaboration between colleagues from a diversity of disciplines. In this sense, the field of Latin American studies is an early example of the strength of interdisciplinary work, an example followed by other academic societies around the world.

Another strength of Latin American studies is the existence of a tradition of critical thinking, in which scholars are suspicious of absolute truths and ideological biases. For the most part, our field has not become trapped by the political and economic agendas of powerful states, instead successfully revindicating academic autonomy. This has not been an easy enterprise, especially in the context of the dictatorships of the seventies or the subsequent

authoritarianisms where various colleagues have suffered, in the flesh, the harshness with which independence and autonomy were punished.

Latin American studies also turn out to be an important asset in the knowledge accumulated on national and regional issues, which today constitute global problems. Among these issues we find economic migrations, but also those produced by political reasons, such as migrations of those displaced by wars and internal conflicts; the different shapes that authoritarianism takes, from classical military dictatorships to contemporary forms such as those that develop inside initially democratic political systems, concentrating power in few hands; the revolutionary efforts of social change and social movements; the innovative forms of citizen participation; the practices of corruption by political authorities at the national and subnational level that today corrode social coexistence and the legitimacy of political systems; the informal sector of the economy and work; structural inequality; violence and lack of public safety. All these problems, well known in Latin

America, are today global ones, and those of us in Latin American studies can contribute to their understanding worldwide.

Additionally, an important criterion in the capacity of Latin American studies to reinvent itself, and remain relevant as the years go by, is its calling to respond to the challenges and needs of local and national environments in which it has developed. It is a production of knowledge with great social and political usefulness, not a mere academic exercise free of commitment nor a field which serves those currently in power.

To sum up, Latin American studies constitute a dynamic, mature, autonomous, and interdisciplinary area of teaching and research. It is a privileged laboratory to analyze a wide range of social, political, and cultural phenomena, as well as a space of learning for societies in other regions of the planet, and an arena of exchange between distinct nuclei of academics not only in and on the Americas, but around the world. On this last point, there is a lot still to do and to learn. The time has come to think of more ambitious and innovative forms of collaboration between our academic communities. //