Mining: Lithium Leads

During the first two decades of the 21st century, booming Chinese demand for minerals and Latin America's role as an exporter of these raw materials saw many countries in the region become intensely intertwined with the Asian nation. Whether or not Chinese companies built or financed mining assets, this demand growth fueled to a large extent the price rallies in copper, iron ore and other metals that led to mine development, and in turn to greater dependence on China as a trade partner.

Now, in line with the shift towards innovation, Chinese investments in mining in the region are being rapidly expanded to include lithium. This mineral, essential for the manufacture of electric car batteries and for battery-based energy storage systems, has become a key resource sought by China in Latin America, the part of the world with the largest reserves. Argentina, Chile and Bolivia make up the so-called "Lithium Triangle," an area that concentrates more than half of the proven reserves globally, and an even larger portion if only considering lithium in brine deposits, the largest and most profitable form of extraction. In addition, there is lithium in smaller quantities in Brazil, Mexico and Peru.