

1 Introduction: Latin American Sinographies

The early invention of the compass that allowed the Chinese to be adventurous navigators did not point north but south. Western imperialism has colonized not only territories across the globe. It has also occupied extensive terrains of our imaginaries about the *self* and the *other* to the point of reaching the very limits between the imaginable and the unimaginable in the world mappings of cultural representation. Thus, the north-pointing compass, later developed in Europe, has made us assume that all compasses have always pointed north, making seem almost inconceivable the idea that an earlier version of it could have signaled other trajectories and traced other connections beyond the limits of the Northern conventions.

Therefore, when it comes to elucidating the ties that have defined Latin America's historical contacts and cultural exchanges with the world, a clear example of such monopolized routes and destinations comes to mind: the transatlantic. It was through the Atlantic and the colonial relations with Europe that the insertion of the New World into the global cartographies acquired legitimacy and went from being an unimaginable geography to one imagined through the colonial eye that observed it. Since then, it has been the ocean that Latin Americans have navigated the most, seeking validation for their own governmental and economic models, as well as approval for their own ways of existing through their very own forms of culture, art, and memory.

In spite of that, drawn by the magnetism of other ideas and forms of inhabiting the realms of the poetic and the political, Latin Americans have also set sail for other horizons, aiming for inadvertent destinations. These pages are thereby dedicated to exploring the travel writing of their transit through one of these deviating routes from Latin America—the transpacific journey to China—while disregarding the direction marked by the needle of its colonial compass.

Yet the journey to China and its writing is also, not unsurprisingly, another very telling example of Western-dominated trajectories, both in its geographic and imaginary dimensions. The image of China exported to the world has been mainly produced and reproduced based on those shaped at the factory of Western imaginaries of the cultural *other*, a practice that Carles Prado-Fonts described in his book *Secondhand China: Spain, the East, and the Politics of Translation* as a form of “intellectual hegemony” (2022: 10). As a consequence, nearly every time that I discussed with others my interest in studying the Latin American production of travel accounts of China, I was questioned—between wary

and puzzled reactions—not only on the academic validity but even on the very existence of such uncharted trajectories. Moreover, my firm intention of doing this research without first addressing the travel narratives of Marco Polo and other renown voyagers from the developed West such as Pierre Loti, André Malraux, Henri Michaux, or even Edgar Snow made it seem a project both *pointless* and unfeasible.

Fortunately, the present pages and the extensive archive of primary sources gathered and studied here are proof of the achievability of this research journey. More than that, the south-pointing compass that has guided the direction of this study has taken its boat much further away than expected, witnessing through its course the vast and varied array of historical and cultural exchanges that remain submerged and unexplored in the depths of the Pacific. Nevertheless, just as each of the travelers that I will discuss embarked on their journeys led not only by maps and guides but also by their own readings of previous accounts, this study has also been steered by the invaluable work that a rather recent, yet fast-growing, scholarship has devoted to (re)explore from varied approaches Latin America's interoceanic connection with China.

Among these works, *Orientalismo en el modernismo hispanoamericano* (2003) by Araceli Tinajero, *Dragons in the Land of the Condor Writing Tusán in Peru* (2014) by Ignacio López-Calvo, *Trans-Pacific Encounters: Asia and the Hispanic World* (2016), edited by Koichi Hagimoto, *Orientaciones transpacificas la modernidad mexicana y el espectro de Asia* (2019) by Laura Torres-Rodríguez, and the even more recently published *Representations of China in Latin American Literature (1987–2016)* (2023) by María Montt Strabucchi and *Disoriented Disciplines: China, Latin America, and the Shape of World Literature* (2023) by Rosario Hubert, are all works that have underpinned this study's pages from various perspectives and extents throughout its different stages. This scholarship has also proven that a south-pointing compass can lead these two latitudes to shared destinations that can differ from being observed, interpreted, and written about only through the mediation of the Global North. Their ambition to map and systematize the courses of these counter-hegemonic trajectories have allowed the unearthing of a previously unimaginable archive of exchanges across the Pacific, an ambition to which the present study aspires to contribute.

It is with this in mind that the primary purpose of this book is to provide a panoramic revision of the history of the Latin American travel writing of the journey to China from the nineteenth century to the beginning of the Cultural

Revolution in 1966.¹ The following pages intend to propose a comparative analysis of the historical transformation of these writers' travel impressions, focusing on how travel writers² from Colombia, Chile and Peru belonging to different generations imagined, interpreted, and represented through their texts the different Chinas they witnessed. Furthermore, these pages aim to contextualize and identify the political, as well as the poetical effects that this encounter caused in the way they positioned China and China's relation with Latin America within world mappings. Thus, the main questions to be addressed are as follows: How are the travel impressions of China and their written representations renegotiated throughout this period? What are the main elements that drive their transformation? What can the ways of writing the encounter with China tell us about the traveler's world imaginaries? Are these imaginaries contested? What effects did the encounter with China, as an encounter with a cultural element beyond the colonial bond, have on the travelers' identity constructions?

As this is a study centered on travel impressions, cultural imaginaries, and their written representations, two clarifications are necessary. I will begin the first one by explaining the term "sinography," part of this book's title, which I borrowed from Eric Hayot's *Chinese Dreams* (2004) and *Sinographies: Writing China* (2008). Hayot explains that "Sinography would be to sinology (a debated discipline in its own right) as historiography is to history, a reflection on the conditions, assumptions, and logic of a set of disciplinary and cultural practices" (2008: vii). Following on from this, Hayot writes:

To read sinographically would be to abandon the attempt to force every reference to "China" into truth or falsehood, without at the same time abandoning the question of reference altogether—rather, the question of reference would have to be folded into the broader discussion of writing "China," a discussion [...] of the action of writing China as it actualizes itself within the world-text independently of the notion of authenticity (2004: 185).

1 I take the year 1966 just as a general referent to mark the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. I follow the temporal outline proposed in *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History (1962–1976)*, in which Frank Dikötter distinguishes the period 1962–1966 as "The Early Years" from 1966–1968, which he refers to as "The Red Years," starting from the summer of 1966 (2016: 66–67). Likewise, in *Cultural Revolution and Revolutionary Culture*, Alessandro Russo also differentiates the period 1966–1968, starting from the autumn (2020: 167–168), as "The Mass Phase".

2 Considering the complex transformations that both traveling and writing underwent during this extensive time scope, I only use the term "travel writer" as a general category to refer to a very broad and diversified profile of travelers whose particularities I discuss in detail in each of the following chapters.

Hence, a travel text is only one of the multiple shapes that a sinography can adopt, and therefore, studying the transformation of the Latin American writing on travel impressions of China implies proposing a historicization of a set of “Chinas” within the many other “Chinas” Latin America has produced. In standard Chinese, the word “impression” may be translated as *yinxiang*³ 印象. The first character, *yin* 印, is more concerned about expressing what remains after the encounter with that from which an impression has been created, since it means “print,” “mark,” or “stamp.” Perhaps more intriguing is the character *xiang* 象, as it is more focused on the construction process of that “print” and on how that precise “mark” is reached and preserved. In fact, *xiang* 象 means “elephant,” and this character, when accompanied by other radicals such as *ren* 人 “person,” as in *xiang* 像, describes a “likeness” or “resemblance” but also an “image.” Further, when combined with the radical *mu* 木 “tree” or “wood,” as in *xiang* 橡, which means “oak,” *xiang* 象 also refers to something that “seems like” something—in this case “a tree as big or strong as an elephant.”

Nonetheless, what I have found even more interesting is the origin of the relation of the figure of the elephant with the meaning of the word *yinxiang* 印象 “impression.” In an ancient Buddhist parable, a group of blind monks are given

3 Regarding the guidelines for the use of Chinese characters, I have mostly followed the recommendations of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, as I found it the most detailed and comprehensive. Here are some clarifications: For well-known proper names such as Confucius or Mao Zedong, I have omitted the use of Chinese characters. However, I decided to include them after the pinyin and followed by the English translation (if applicable) in the case of anthroponyms, toponyms, or names of historical events when I considered that their inclusion could either allow the reader to identify more accurately a given reference or when I found that it enabled me to add nuances or illustrate a point that I considered relevant. As for a few quotes from texts originally written in standard Chinese with no available English translation, I chose to preserve the original in the main text followed by my translations. In the case of words of Chinese origin, either from standard Chinese or from some of its variations or geolects, transcribed by the travel writers in their texts, I have maintained their spelling and have only resorted to footnotes for clarifications or corrections when I considered it strictly necessary. Finally, with respect to the authors cited whose names are of Chinese origin, I have followed the naming conventions according to which the family name appears before the given name, so that, in the case of the writer Gao Xingjian, the surname is Gao, and the given name is Xingjian. Hence, when the original text is in standard Chinese, I have chosen to include in the main text first the name in pinyin, followed by its Chinese characters when it was first mentioned. Thus, for example, in the case of Huang Lijuan 黄丽娟, this is listed in the bibliography as Huang Lijuan. On the other hand, in the case of citations from texts published in English, I did not include the name of their authors in Chinese characters despite preserving naming conventions. The only exception to that is when the authors have opted themselves to use names or pen names of non-Chinese origin, as in the case of authors such as Grace Yan, whose works are listed in the bibliography as Yan, Grace.

the task of describing an elephant using their sense of touch. The one who touched its trunk described it as a snake, the one who patted a leg said it was a tree trunk, the one who touched an ear said it was a fan, and the one who touched the tip of the tail described it as a brush. Thus, each monk described the elephant not only in accord with the part they happened to come in contact with but also in line with each of their own language confines, as well as within the particularity of their very own previous experience of the world. The parable has been used to refer to the impossibility of forming a finished, comprehensive, or reliable image of a given reality, as well as the dangers of one-sided truths or interpretations. Therefore, in relation to the shaping of a certain “China,” I am more concerned about how and why a given image of an elephant is formed by a certain monk, rather than exclusively asking whether an elephant actually exists, what it is, or how it actually looks. Just as in the parable, this book stems from the understanding that each of the representations, and even all the written representations studied here, present, both singly and jointly, a sufficient and insufficient, finished and unfinished image of China.

These pages will, therefore, be more oriented towards understanding how the encounter with China and the ways of representing it through travel writing triggered from the Latin American gaze alternative ways of tracing global trajectories, as well as ways to shape the travelers’ own cultural identities. Even though these trajectories are intercepted and, in varying degrees, mediated by the West, I will demonstrate how they also manage to establish direct South–South dialogues. Through them, aesthetic and cultural circulations, as well as social and political projects running counter-current to those proposed by the metropolitan model of Western modernity are made visible.

The mediation of the West brings me to the second clarification, also closely related to the foregoing. As geocultural coordinates, not only China but also Latin America, Europe, Asia, East, or West are to be understood here, following Prado-Fonts, as “geopolitical locations and discursive formations” (2022: 190). That ought not mean that they will remain unproblematic throughout these pages. Rather, it is to acknowledge that, just as “the meaning of ‘China’ remains in many instances very particularly *constructed*—and rarely in the same way twice” (Hayot 2004: xvi)—the same is true for the forementioned concepts, always mediated by the contexts of their discursiveness.

Understanding from Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) that the invention of *otherness* does necessarily entail the invention of a sense of *self*, it is, therefore in their specific coexistence with other geocultural coordinates that discussions about their particular forms of interaction can be held. In this sense, returning to the metaphor of the Buddhist parable, and following María Montt’s reapproach to

otherness in Latin America from Kuan-Hsing Chen's *Asia as Method* (2010), notions such as the West can be seen "as 'bits and fragments that intervene in local social formations in a systematic, but never totalizing, way' [...] which implies the possibility of shifting points of reference" (2023: 24) in order to discuss them through a more relational perspective.

The research and writing process of this study developed not only into a sinography in itself insofar as it is a producer of meanings of China; it also became an extensive and complex journey on its own. Therefore, before moving any further, I would like to introduce what decisions were made along the way and why certain routes and itineraries were preferred over others. To begin with, when I first came in contact with the inspiring scholarly work that several other researchers had previously developed on this subject, I noticed the absence of studies that offered a broader and more diversified temporal, geographical, and thematic picture of the question on the Latin American writing of the journey to China.

As I anticipated, it was evident that the immense contribution and the inestimable value of studies that made this project possible, lies, among many other things, in the particularity of their questions. Thus, just to name a few, such studies focus on the following: 1) the figure of a single traveler, such as Rosario Hubert's (2015) article on the Colombian Nicolás Tanco Armero, Pedro Iacobelli's (2020) study on the Chilean Pedro del Río Zañartu, or Koichi Hagimoto's (2018) article on the Argentinian Eduardo Wilde, which are some of the ones dedicated to nineteenth-century travel writing. Some of the various dedicated to the twentieth-century travel works include Daniela Spencer's (2010) study on the Mexican Vicente Lombardo Toledano or Wei Teng's (2018) article on Pablo Neruda; 2) a single travel text, as in Álvaro M. Navarro's (2014) reading of *Sensaciones de Japón y de la China* by the Salvadoran Arturo Ambrogi; 3) a comparative reading of a narrower corpus, as in Montt's (2016b) analysis on *600 Millones y uno* by Bernardo Kordon and *Diario de Oriente* by Luís Oyarzún, as well as José Chávarry's (2022) reading of *Los ojos de bambú* by Mercedes Valdivieso and *China 6 a.m.* by Manuel Zapata Olivella.

There is also some academic production devoted to 4) narrower time scopes, as in Hubert's (2017a) article, focused on the period 1952–1958 and Luís A. Barandica's (2013) book devoted to the years between 1949 and 1972. Finally, there is a substantial bibliography on studies dedicated to the analysis of 5) a single country during a specific period, as in Brenda Rugar's (2019, 2020) articles on Argentinian travelers during the 1950s as well as both Montt's (2016a) study and Mónica Ahumada Figueroa's (2020) publication dedicated to Chilean voyagers between the 1950s and 1960s. Jaime Ortega's (2020) analysis on Mexican travelers between the 1950s to 1980s can also be mentioned together with Carlos Manuel

Villalobos's (2020) research on the case of Costa Rican visitors during the period 1949–1982. Evidently, a number of these publications also revolve around the study of concrete thematic axes that can range between the presence of the coolie trade to the construction of China as a revolutionary utopia.

With this in mind, the main contribution that the present pages aim to offer resides in approaching the question of the Latin American travel writing of China from the perspective of a more extensive constellation of travelers and texts from which different and more complex interactions can be brought to light to form part of other academic discussions. This research has been methodologically intercepted mainly by literary criticism, since the text is its main priority and point of departure. Nonetheless, considering that I also examine the conditions that surrounded the transformation of the Latin American production of meanings of China, and that close attention was also paid to how “China” as a Latin American idea has changed through this period, this study could also be considered a contribution to the fields of intellectual history and the history of ideas.

Evidently, space and time constraints for the development of this study have imposed limits to its outreach, making it necessary to define practical delimitations of spatial, temporal, and textual order, which I will proceed to describe.

As the first pages of this introduction have anticipated, the Latin American Pacific coast has provided this study with essential coordinates for the definition of its scope. It goes without saying that the absence of a maritime border with the Pacific has not prevented countries such as Cuba, Brazil, and Argentina from sharing an extensive and varied history of contacts and exchanges of a diverse nature with China. The magnitude of their relevance responds to multiple circuits as the concurred colonial routes for the trafficking of Chinese coolies in Cuba and Brazil as the studies *Mandarin Brazil: Race, Representation, and Memory* (2018) by Ana Paulina Lee, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History* (2013) by Kathleen López and *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba* (2008) by Lisa Yun have demonstrated; to neuralgic nodes for the diffusion of Maoism in the region, as it was the Argentina of the second half of the twentieth century studied by Matthew Rothwell in his book *Transpacific revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America* (2013) and even more specifically addressed by Brenda Rupar in the recently published *Los “chinos”: La conformación del maoísmo en Argentina (1966–1974)* (2023).

Nevertheless, although preceded by several major studies, works such as *Orientaciones transpacificas la modernidad mexicana y el espectro de Asia* by Torres-Rodríguez or *Trans-Pacific Encounters: Asia and the Hispanic World* edited by Koichi Hagimoto, have been particular in articulating lines of academic discussion that prioritize the Pacific, based on the premise that this ocean “encarna la me-

moría material de una historia manifiesta, pero muda” [it embodies the material memory of a manifest, yet silent history]⁴ (Torres-Rodríguez 2019:16) and emphasizing how “the myriad encounters that constitute the basic contours of transpacific studies have often been overlooked by the traditional emphasis on transatlantic studies” (Hagimoto 2016: 2).

Thus, as this study seeks to continue the efforts to map the archive that rests in the Pacific as an axis of academic exploration, I have decided to bring into focus the travel writing produced by Colombian, Peruvian, and Chilean authors, since altogether they cover an important part of the Latin American Pacific coastline. Certainly, beyond the purely maritime reference, there are two aspects, one practical and one metaphorical, that make these countries a distinguishable point of departure to approach the Latin American travel writing of China. The practical one is related to the arduous archival work that this research required. Each of these countries offered a corpus of primary sources that was both broad and varied enough to give priority to the literary character of their texts, as well as being extensive enough to allow the best possible chronological continuity and distribution among travelers and travel writings all along the studied period.

The metaphorical aspect relates to a distinctive way the travelers from these countries have for constructing a Pacific imaginary and, even more, a unique form of reaching towards this shore in search of new ways to ideate themselves in their Latin Americanness or, even, to reinvent their national fictions from the alternative transits that the Pacific offers them. This attempt to re-explore their sense of *self* through an alternative archaeology of their own identity across this ocean is an imaginary that I have found to be a unifying thread, extending from the oldest to the most recent of the primary sources gathered here.

Among the various examples that one can find about this is, for instance, the second travel book dedicated to Japan and published in 1888 by the Colombian Nicolás Tanco Armero, in which he affirms that “los asiáticos de estas regiones fueron de los primeros que vinieron á América por el Estrecho de Behring” [The Asians from these regions were among the first to come to America via the Bering Strait] (72).⁵ Further, well into the twentieth century, the Peruvian diplomat Francisco A. Loayza published in 1926 *Manko Kapa (El fundador del imperio de los Incas fue japonés) (Manko Kapa «The Founder of the Inca Empire Was Japanese»)*,

4 N.B. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

5 I have decided to preserve—and here, I am mainly referring to the primary source—the original spelling used by the authors. Thus, for instance, “i” will be found, for the most part only in the travel narrative of the nineteenth century, instead of the modern usage of “y” or “colegio,” “hoi,” “esplicaciones” instead of “colegio,” “hoy,” and “explicaciones.”

in which he articulated in more than a hundred pages a transpacific foundational myth directly tied to the original peoples of Peru.

Not content with that, Loayza published in 1948 *Chinos llegaron antes que Colón*, a book very convincingly subtitled *Tesis arqueológica, transcendental, sustentada por 150 de los más famosos autores antiguos y modernos [...] como pruebas gráficas e irrefutables...* to whose main thesis Loayza assures is “far from new,” as this quote illustrates: “Que hubieron en épocas remotas migraciones humanas desde Asia y desde Oceanía a la América, anteriores a Colón, es una tesis que no solo ya nadie pone en duda, sino que está al presente consagrada por el criterio universal” [That there were human migrations from Asia and Oceania to America in remote times, prior to Columbus, is a thesis that not only no longer raises any doubts but is now universally accepted] (5). This is a text more explicitly aiming to be part of a categorical reassessment of the dominance of the transatlantic connection with Europe in the historization of Peru, as well as a radical recreation of a Peruvian identity.

As I will further describe in the last chapter, this Pacific imaginary did not only resonate even more strongly within the travel writing from the second half of the twentieth century; it also acquired new significances. Namely, it was rearticulated from the political left as a form of historical and cultural dissidence, and therefore, traversed by the decolonial discourse that steered the creation of Third World solidarity networks. That was the case with the Chilean writer and Communist militant, Francisco Coloane Cárdenas, in whose travel chronicles of China, *Papeles recortados* (2004), written during the late 1950s and early 1960s, he relinks this Pacific imaginary, in a gesture similar to Loayza’s, with the history of the exterminated Selk’nam (Ona) people originally from the Patagonian region as: “Como este mar, el Pacífico, creían que más allá estaba la esperanza de hallar alguna otra orilla. Por ello no cabría duda de que nuestro autóctono americano sería de origen asiático” [Like this sea, the Pacific, they believed that beyond it lay the hope of finding another shore. Hence, there could be no doubt that our indigenous American would be of Asian origin] (127). Although this imaginary does not vanish the colonial wound, it does alleviate it by an alternative narrative of the past that holds the promise of a more hopeful future.

Finally, in *Tambores de América para despertar al Viejo Mundo* (2020), a book published posthumously, with the Colombian Manuel Zapata Olivella chronicling his experiences touring with his sister Delia and her group of Colombian folkloric dancers across several European and Asian countries between 1956 and 1958, Zapata recounts their performances in China in this way:

Nuestro grupo folclórico, el primero en revelar a los millones de chinos la también milenaria cultura americana, suma de tradiciones orientales, europeas y africanas, recorrió

ante sus ojos el manto de lo misterioso y lo presentido [...] el asombro por lo extraño y lo propio. Marimbas de bambú, flautas traversas, tambores y tamboras, sandalias y sombreros tejidos con fibras vegetales les permitían reconocer algunos rasgos de su propia cultura y les decían que millones de años atrás el océano Pacífico nos separaba de nuestros comunes antepasados [Our folkloric group, the first to reveal to millions of Chinese the also millennia-old American culture, a blend of Eastern, European, and African traditions, unveiled before their eyes the veil of the mysterious and the foreseen (...) the astonishment at what was strange and familiar. Bamboo marimbas, transverse flutes, drums and tamboras, sandals and hats woven with plant fibers allowed them to recognize certain traits of their own culture and told them that millions of years ago the Pacific Ocean separated us from our common ancestors] (213–214).

This tension between *lo extraño* (the strange) and *lo propio* (the familiar) and the *presentida* (foreseen) familiarity in the face of something presumably unknown is the same historical and cultural transpacific friction that makes the China–Latin America bond a novel (re)encounter with antiquity. Following the recently published book by Chris Alden and Álvaro Méndez, *China and Latin America: Development, Agency and Geopolitics* (2023), I will briefly describe how this relation is defined by a constant tension between past and present. Despite being separated by nearly a century, Francisco A. Loayza’s words defining the history of the Latin America–China connection as “nothing new” have profound echoes in Alden and Méndez’s pages. They offer a retrospective view of present-day relations, providing important clues to, on the one hand, dimension how the commercial treaties and cooperation agreements that we are witnessing and mediatically perceiving today as new are far from being a recent phenomenon and, on the other hand, provide important hints to assess their implications in contemporary contexts and issues.

The Spanish expansion into the world formed an empire in which the sun never set. Their colonial ambition established not only a transatlantic link between Europe and the so-called New World but also a transpacific trade route between Mexico and the Philippines in 1571 (Hu-DeHart and López 2008: 10). This route established an intercontinental bond that set in motion during the same sixteenth century an affluent channel of circulation between Asia and Latin America through which, not only silks, teas, and porcelains circulated but also peoples, cultures, ideas, and beliefs.

From the early nineteenth century, the gradual fulfilment of the project of an independent Latin America coincided both with the standstill of the circulation of this colonial trade route but also with the beginning of a more direct link with China. Today, the ancient maritime and terrestrial routes of the Silk Road are under reconstruction, while new ties are being forged and ancient bonds are being revived. As a result, Third World initiatives such as the Shanghai Coopera-

tion Organisation (SCO), whose “eight members account for 80% of Eurasia’s landmass, 43% of the world’s population, and a quarter of the world’s GDP [make it] the largest regional organisation in the world” (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2018: vii). In addition, China’s extensive investments in its Belt and Road Initiative and its cooperation with the BRICS countries have leveraged new financial presence through an alternative economic bloc to that of the G7, as well as a fast-growing political and symbolic capital.

On the same line of revitalizing old connections or resuming truncated intentions to establish them, it is worth noting how, following the historian Carlos Marchal, Laura Torres-Rodríguez observes that during the almost two-and-a-half centuries that the Manila Galleon navigated across the Pacific, Mexican silver was the main trading currency between these two ocean shores. Thus, the following quote is telling: “durante el Porfiriato [México] buscó fomentar vínculos directos con el este asiático. [...] esta situación fue eclipsada cada vez más por un panorama internacional que comenzaba a favorecer definitivamente el patrón oro” [During the Porfiriato, (Mexico) sought to foster direct ties with East Asia. (...) This situation was increasingly overshadowed by an international landscape that was beginning to definitively favor the gold standard] (2019: 22). This was a standard imposed by the economic preponderance that the British Empire enjoyed during the nineteenth century. Interestingly, after holding their fifteenth summit in August 2023 in South Africa, BRICS announced their intention to counterbalance the longstanding dominance of the US dollar as the main currency of reference for global trade. Almost as a continuation of the attempt to (re)establish direct links to oppose monetary standards, always favorable to Western powers, they plan to create and share an autonomous monetary unit.

As for the chronological dimension of this study, I gave priority to offering the broadest possible view. Thus, the choice of 1843 as its starting date corresponds to the arrival year in China of the first traveler to document their journey: in this case, the Peruvian Juan Bustamante Dueñas. Therefore, considering that there were travelers who visited China on more than one occasion or that their travel impressions were not published until a few or many years after (some even posthumously), the date of the first trip was the criteria that defined the inclusion of each traveler in the proposed timeline. Although I will elaborate more on this in the last chapter, the reason for extending the present revision to the mid-1960s is because with the Sino-Soviet split and the onset of the Cultural Revolution, a substantial transformation in China’s foreign policy took place. These changes were translated into a sharper political profiling of the traveler, which marked a turning point in the history of Latin American travel writing of China. To this day, *Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America* (2013) by

Mathew Rothwell is the closest attempt to comprehensively map the flow of travelers and travel text during this period. Nonetheless, a separate study would be needed to properly delve into the complexities that this new phase brought, both for the construction of a new traveler subjectivity, as well as for the rearticulation of the travel text.

Presenting an analysis of a corpus both broad and diverse was a central guideline throughout the selection process. Hence, since emphasis was primarily placed on surfacing an archive that had not been previously examined, these texts constitute the great majority of the selected corpus. Nevertheless, travelers such as Nicolás Tanco Armero or Manuel Zapata Olivella, whose travel writings on China have been previously addressed, were also included in an effort to reposition these analyses within broader discussions, as well as to further develop research questions or interests that motivated them in the first place.

In addition, authors whose work has received certain attention, either because they are considered canonical, such as Francisco Coloane, or because they have been more recently vindicated by other disciplines from the social sciences as anthropology or political history (in the case of Juan Bustamante Dueñas) or by other lines of research focused on feminist or gender approaches (in the case of Teresa de la Parra). However, despite the recognition, their travel writing about China has remained largely unnoticed, for which their inclusion in the present corpus is aimed at rediscovering other connections that this unexplored dimension of their lives and literary works can trace within other and more complex literary and cultural ecosystems.

In addition to the above, there were other aspects that I considered important to ensure a diversified corpus. Firstly, even though preference was given to travelers whose bonds with the world of letters were tighter, the inclusion of other voices intercepted by fields such as journalism, as well as others not so proximate, such as those of diplomacy or politics, were relevant in order to allow other perspectives and to reflect from other angles on travel and travel writing in particular but also more generally on the China–Latin America encounters. Secondly, although in the following chapter, I will delve deeper into the discussion about travel writing as a genre, I would like to clarify some initial points regarding the limits of the travel narrative selected. On the one hand, in line with the previous point, I prioritized the inclusion of texts in which the literary elaboration had the greatest prominence, particularly for the chapters covering the twentieth century, given the progressive expansion of the corpus available.

Thus, despite the literary dimension being a major element, considering that the main purpose is to provide an analysis of the selected writers' travel impressions, along with the transformation of the ways in which China was represented

through them along this period, I decided to address texts such as travel diaries, travelogues, or travel chronicles, in which the personal accounts of travel experiences occupy a central and more direct place in the narration. The foregoing is not intended to disregard the fact that as Carl Thompson observes, “Even in a form with the apparent immediacy of a travel journal or diary, a writer necessarily picks out significant recent events, and organises those events, and his or her reflections on them, [...] this crafting process must inevitably introduce into the text, to a greater or lesser degree, a fictive dimension” (2011: 27–28).

Nonetheless, I have refrained from including travel writings such as novels, short stories, or poetry collections that, while traversed by the writers’ personal encounters with China, expose an even greater degree of fictionalization or poetical exploration of the travel experience, as in *Muerte en Shanghai* (1953) by Juan Marín, *Anillo de jade: poemas de China* (1959) by Ángel Cruchaga Santa María, or *Los ojos de bambú* (1964) by Mercedes Valdivieso. On the other hand, I have also resolved not to include texts that, despite also resulting from the authors’ encounters with China, the compliance with either their political commitments or their reporting /informative intentions chose to mostly discard any literary aspiration, as in the cases of *China: la revolución del arroz y de la rosa* (1959) by Jorge Falcón Gárfias or *Por los caminos de la paz: de Pekín a Viena* (1953) by Diego Montaña Cuellar.

Therefore, while these are the textual coordinates on which I have positioned the research interest of these pages, I am also aware that even though I use the labels “diary,” “chronicle,” or “travelogue,” which in this order would imply a presence from the most to the least evident of the traveler’s subjectivity, in fact, not even one of the selected works fits neatly into any label, since each of them embodies to varying and complex degrees elements of all of these sub-species, as Thompson points out: “different travelogues can strike a very different balance between informing and entertaining the reader. Some are much more literary in aspiration, or entertainment-oriented; others, meanwhile, lean more towards reportage and journalism” (2011: 19). Thus, since a detailed reflection on the terminological element would imply a study as extensive as the present one, I have chosen to use as a general guideline the categories that the same travelers have used to define their own travel writings, which allowed me to lay more emphasis on the examination of other elements more directly associated with the outlined objectives.

Of the following four chapters, the first one is entirely devoted to the theoretical elaboration and the terminological discussion on which the analysis developed along this book relies upon. Through it, I present an overview of the most recent and relevant literature on the question about China–Latin America as a field of study, as well as on their shared historical, cultural, and literary circulations and networks of exchange, prioritizing those that coincided more

closely with the scope and purposes of this study. Rather than providing precise definitions about travel writing and its place as a literary genre, I aimed at highlighting the problematic and debated questions that revolve around the construction of its definitions. Moreover, I considered it essential to further explore the implications of studying the Latin American travel narrative, as well as the distinctive features that delineate the Latin American as a traveler and travel writer, especially when viewed from the perspective of a journey to China. On the other hand, given that this study has been intercepted by postcolonial studies and decolonial theories, I also outline in this chapter some key concepts that have been instrumental for its development.

The remaining chapters are chronologically arranged and are mainly focused on the critical examination of the travel narrative written by a total of twelve travelers. Although I have focused on the analysis of one travel text for each traveler, I have occasionally included some other works of their authorship, such as autobiographies, personal letters, newspaper articles, and books on history or politics when I considered them a relevant complement to the development of my analysis. In total, these three remaining chapters trace a line that begin at the third one, dedicated to the nineteenth century, and extend up to the fifth and last chapter covering the second half of the twentieth century until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s. This chronological arrangement allowed me to illuminate various historical, political, and aesthetic transformations that offer clues to better examine the travel narratives belonging to each period. Thus, at the beginning of each of these chapters, I have included a brief introductory section that offers precise hints for delineating the distinctive features of each era. Additionally, in the case of chapters four and five, there is a section titled “Ruptures and continuities,” aimed at drawing the main parallels between the traveler and the travel writing of that period and the previous one(s), serving as an initial roadmap for the more detailed analysis developed through the rest of each chapter.

Regarding the internal structure of each chapter, the emphasis shifts from a chronological to a thematic division. Owing to the emergence of precise or prevailing historical, political, or aesthetic conditions in each period, I included in every chapter some movable thematic axes to explore the particularities of those contexts. I will thus introduce some of these axes, while also taking the opportunity to present the corpus selected for each of the studied periods. In the third chapter, dedicated to the period 1843–1899, I discuss the work of four travelers: *Viaje al antiguo mundo* (1845) by the Peruvian Juan Bustamante Dueñas; *Viaje de Nueva Granada a China y de China a Francia* (1861) by the Colombian Nicolás Tanco Armero; *Memoria que el ministro de estado en el despacho de Relaciones Exteriores presenta al Congreso Ordinario de 1874* (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores 1874)

including the official correspondence written by the Peruvian Aurelio García y García; and *Viaje en torno al mundo por un “chileno” Tomo II* (1884) by the Chilean Pedro del Río Zañartu. For this chapter, it was important to introduce a section dedicated to the role of Christianity and another one to the place of the coolie trade in the travel in question and its writing.

In the fourth chapter, dedicated to the first half of the twentieth century, I analyze the travel narratives of five voyagers: *Diario de una caraqueña por el Lejano Oriente* (1920) by Teresa de la Parra; the chronicles “Un viaje a la China”, “El templo de Confucio en Pei-Ping” and “La Ciudad Prohibida en la capital de la China” written by the Chilean Elvira Santa Cruz Ossa and published by the newspaper *El Mercurio* in 1931 between May and December, with the exception of the last chronicle, published in August 1937; and *Recuerdos entreabiertos* (1998), written by the Chilean Juan Guzmán Cruchaga when he resided in China between 1925 and 1927 (and published posthumously). Finally, I also included in this selection *Mujeres, paisajes y templos: Japón y China* (1931), written by the Chilean Eugenio Orrego Vicuña and *Mesa de Mah-Jong: una crónica de China* (1948) by Juan Marín. Considering the new paradigms that the turn of the century brought, it was worth including in this chapter a section on the place of technology, as well as the role played by the formation of a Latin American bourgeoisie in the travel narrative of this period.

Lastly, the fourth chapter, centered on the period 1950–1966, consists of the study of three works. *China 6 a.m.* (1954) written by the Colombian Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Papeles recortados* (2004) written by the Chilean Francisco Coloane during his first trip to China in 1958, as well as during the second time he traveled to live in Beijing between 1962 and 1964 (and was posthumously published). Finally, *La otra mitad del mundo II: China Comunista* (1959), written by the Peruvian Francisco Miró Quesada Cantuarias, was also included in the corpus. For this chapter, due to historical developments such as the triumph of the Chinese Communist revolution and the launching of popular diplomacy as a geopolitical strategy, I included a section focused on exploring the shifts in the notions of the individual and the collective in the writing of this period, as well as a section devoted to the new positions occupied by the translator as a figure and by translation as a practice.

Apart from these moving axes, in each of these chapters, despite positioning them from different perspectives, I revisit the question for rather fixed thematic axes, such as the interactions between travel and its writing with racial imaginaries or class constructions. I also revisit the mapping that the travelers and their works draw in relation to notions such as Orient/Occident and East/West, which most times is also related to the travel writers' way of positioning China and Latin America, both separately and in relation to each other, in the global

cartographies of history, politics, and culture. Finally, each chapter provides context and proposes answers in relation to the motivations and the purposes behind the journey to and the writing of China in every period.