

3 Creole Travel Memories from Nineteenth-Century China (1843–1899)

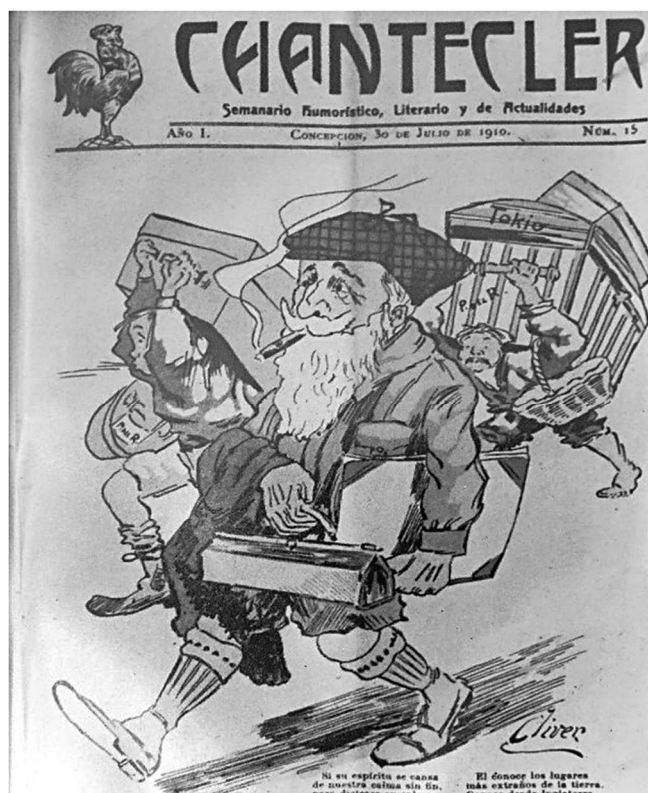


Fig. 1: Pedro del Río Zañartu on the frontpage of the Chilean newspaper *Chantecler* (Concepción 1910–1913) año 1, No. 15. Julio 30, 1910. Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

<http://descubre.bibliotecanacional.gob.cl/permalink/f/1lmsdj/bnc_aleph000009118>.

Introduction

The beginning of the connection between China and Latin America can be set long before the nineteenth century. The Spanish expansion into the world set not only the new transatlantic link between Europe and the New World but also established the transpacific Acapulco-Manila trade route that connected Latin America with Asia during the same sixteenth century.¹ A transoceanic link, which is, in consequence, equally old and therefore, equally relevant for study and consideration.

Not even two centuries after its establishment, the empire in which the sun never set started to experience the first symptoms of decay during the eighteenth century, marking the beginning of a phase of European imperialism that would ultimately become undeniably visible by its end. Tropical disease and indigenous and slave rebellions caused a decline in the profitability of slavery, which allowed independence and abolitionist movements to gain a new and irrepressible force (Pratt 1997: 97). These set of circumstances at the regional level changed the global panorama and its geopolitical tensions. Entering the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Latin American quests for independence were the primary events that put pressure on the transformation of the connections between Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The resentment of the Creoles—Spanish descent born in the colonies—was the result of several forms of exclusion from the peninsular Spaniards. Creoles were perceived as inferior² and disregarded in the political spheres,

1 Besides the versions that support the arrival of several navigators in Latin America before Christopher Columbus, such as the Vikings and the Celts, in the book *1421: the year China discovered America*, Gavin Menzies argues that between 1421 and 1423, the Chinese Muslim explorer Zheng He sailed along Latin American coasts, which was part of a more extensive exploration project that started in 1405 and which included the Seven Seas. According to Menzies, Zheng He preceded by four centuries the European exploration of the Antarctic and the Arctic and by three centuries the arrival of the British explorer James Cook in Australia. Moreover, a century before the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan, Zheng allegedly crossed through the Magellan Strait and the Pacific Ocean. Menzies also argues that Zheng arrived at the first territories in the Caribbean Sea seventy years before Columbus and even sixty years before Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope. See also (Vargas 2010: 14; Dussel 2004: 7–9; Chang-Rodríguez 2006: 131–134). Despite the disputes and extensive criticism of this alternative version of the arrival of explorers in Latin American territory, I would like to highlight that Menzies managed to raise doubts and new concerns about the traditional Eurocentric view of these events even despite that he refers to these arrivals with the very much disagreeable term of “discovery”. However, the project of the decentralization of this view is a task to which these pages also hope to contribute to.

2 The origin of this perception could be, among others, the result of the scientific discourse coming from the Renaissance period, which considered inferior pretty much everything coming from the New World. Moreover, Ruth Pike argues that “throughout the colonial period, prisoners were an important source of cheap labor both in Spain and Spanish America [...] prisoners (*presidarios*) were regularly

charged with high taxation, and had their participation in trade and industry limited (Forero 1946: 5–8; Núñez 2018: 56).

These circumstances served as a trigger for the Spanish American Creoles to ignore the peninsular government and declare independence from the Spanish Crown, an event that consolidated them as the new intellectual elite and ruling class. Consequently, the declarations across the American subcontinent contributed to the end of the Acapulco-Manila galleon trade route in 1815. Furthermore, opened the experience of traveling as a new practice in the newly independent republics³ and with it, new channels and means for this South-South connection. Thus, considering that it was necessary to be independent in order to travel, it is clear that traveling and emancipation are two elements which have maintained a tight relationship of interdependence, as Beatriz Colombi affirms, “el hispanoamericano recién nace como viajero con los preparativos de la independencia, cuando se traslada para instruirse, observar de cerca modelos de organización política, o pedir ayuda para el proyecto de la emancipación” (2010: 11). While the voyage of Europeans to America was the event that marked the beginning of the history of the colonization of the continent, traveling was also a central instrument to the achievement of independence. Therefore, becoming independent as an inner struggle required the parallel struggle of becoming a traveler within but also beyond the national borders.

Thus, traveling represents not only the formation of an independent Latin America but also the construction of a national narrative consolidated through the emergence of a dominant class. In this sense, while a great deal has been said and written about the concept of *lettered city* initially proposed by Ángel Rama, it is still essential today for an understanding of the Creole subjectivity and the intricate relation between power, writing, knowledge, and traveling which will be all key

distributed among the Peninsula presidios [...] and the overseas presidios in North Africa, Spanish America and the Philippines [...] Faced with a severe shortage of labor because of the decline in Indian population from the middle of the sixteenth century, the colonial courts sentenced men to terms of service at hard labor and then turned them over to private employers who used them in mines, factories and mills. The growth of the population in the eighteenth century reduced the need for such labor in the private sphere, but the demand in the public sector continued to increase in response to the requirements of imperial defense” (Pike 1978: 21–23). The fact that this flow of presidio labor coming from the peninsula to the colonies was so consistent and widely practiced could have also caused that impression of inferiority, savagery, or viciousness of the people settled or born in the New World.

3 A comment on this is in one of the diaries that I will explore later in this chapter. “I en realidad, solo cuando los brazos titánicos de la independencia quebraron el yugo peninsular i lo arrojaron lejos al mar, franqueose este a los chilenos, que, a la manera de las aves que rompen tímidas la cáscara de su huevo, comenzaron así, poco a poco, a asomarse en todas direcciones por el dilatado mundo” (Del Río 1883: VI–VII).

concepts throughout this and the following chapters. The new tracing of the historical, cultural, and literary bondages between China and Latin America has opened new horizons for the definitions and the understanding of the Latin American nineteenth century in general and its lettered elites in particular. These bondages unclothe dissident perspectives and chronologies of the intellectual and literary endeavors within the Latin American context that resignify and enrich, as a consequence, the initial definitions and delimitations of Rama's *lettered city*.

For Rama, the *lettered city* was a "grupo social especializado" [specialized social group] which acted, aware of their agency, as an "anillo protector de poder" [protective ring of power] ([1984] 1998: 33) and also as an executor prompt to order "el universo de los signos" [the universe of signs] ([1984] 1998: 31). A group to which he also referred to as intellectual *producers*, ([1984] 1998: 36) who have as their main function to prolong and reproduce "el estado de cosas" [The state of things] ([1984] 1998: 98). Thus, the *lettered city* works as a symbolic representation of the history of the intelligentsia in Latin America and the formation of its graphocentric literary establishment. Rama traces its evolution from its birth in the colonial period to its far-reaching influence in the postindependence Creole elites up until the 1960s, with the sight always set on the relation between the *lettered city*, the center of power, the control of the economy, and its influence on the state apparatus.

Its birth in the colonial period can be traced back to the sixteenth century when colonizers and missionaries played a prominent role in the shaping of the educational, economic, and moral systems. The Jesuits, for instance, combined the religious and the scientific enterprise studying the ethnic, linguistic, geographic, and botanic composition of the territories, for which travel was an essential channel. Hence, they had a very significant influence in the formation of the nationalist thinking of the Latin American lettered creoles whose faith in science, progress and Christianity gave a new life to the chimeras of the Enlightenment. There are still vigorous debates regarding the setting of the beginning of modernity with the Renaissance era. Nonetheless, I second Enrique Dussel, who argues that it is possible to

Anticipar la Modernidad hasta finales del siglo XV, articulando y situando cuatro fenómenos que se originan simultáneamente: 1) la Modernidad; 2) los imperios europeos; 3) el colonialismo; y 4) el sistema capitalista. La Modernidad (fenómeno cultural, histórico, filosófico, literario y científico) comienza, según mi tesis, y se desarrolla, cuando Europa deja atrás el Mediterráneo renacentista y se "abre" al Atlántico; entra al "ancho mundo." [To anticipate Modernity until the late 15th century, articulating and situating four phenomena that originate simultaneously: 1) Modernity; 2) European empires; 3) colonialism; and 4) the capitalist system. Modernity (a cultural, historical, philosophical, literary, and scientific phenomenon)

begins, according to my thesis, and develops when Europe leaves behind the Renaissance Mediterranean and “opens” to the Atlantic; it enters the “wide world”] (2004: 7).

As a result, these elites held both colonizers and missionaries in high regard and followed their example in order to form their Creole subjectivity and consciousness as travelers. Thereby, both national and international traveling became an essential means for the construction of the newly independent Latin American nations. Traveling within the national borders allowed the categorization of all sorts of life. The systematization of natural species and human ethnicities permitted their subsequent capitalization and exploitation under the auspices of religion. This enabled the progress machine of expansionism, assembled during colonial times, to run as never before.

It is with this in mind that the primary motivation when writing this chapter is to explore the travel writing produced during the nineteenth century by lettered Creoles all along their journey toward and across the China of their time. To this end, I will read through the lenses of the geopolitical implications that these rather unique transpacific encounters entailed both in the context of the falling Chinese dynastic system in contrast with an emerging intellectual elite and the ruling class in Latin America. Considering that these encounters are part of a complex network of South-South connections whose exceptionality lies in the fact that they deviate from the traditional periphery-metropolis transits, I also intend to examine how colonial patterns of cultural representation are reproduced in the travel writing of the lettered Creoles. I will also analyze how the periphery-periphery interaction shed light on new focal points that might potentially open the way to new forms of identification, positioning and representation contributing it to new trajectories to the mapping of the Global South memory.

Meeting the Travelers

Juan Bustamante Dueñas⁴ popularly known in Quechua as *mundo purikuj* (world traveler), lived convinced that he had been, if not the first South American, at least the first Peruvian to visit China by 1843.

⁴ For this study, Bustamante was a very unexpected finding that took place after the writing of the present chapter. I have included this brief biographical note to provide some context, but I have decided not to include him in the main development of the chapter. The reason behind that is that not only his work but himself as a traveler represent a dissident representation of the nineteenth-century Latin Americaness, which breaks most of the conventions and stands out among the dominant Creole narrative of the century. Therefore, taking into consideration that it makes him also



Fig. 2: Juan Bustamante Dueñas. Illustration included in his second travel book published in Paris, *Apuntes y observaciones civiles, políticas y religiosas con las noticias adquiridas en este segundo viaje a la Europa* (*Notes and Observations on Civil, Political, and Religious Matters with the Information Acquired on This Second Journey to Europe*) (1849: vii).

While it is difficult to claim that he was indeed the first, within the literature currently available, he is, in fact, the first to have documented and published his travel impressions. Besides that, he stands out from other fellow travelers not only because he was not a Creole, but a mestizo born to a Creole father from Arequipa and an indigenous mother, allegedly a descendant of Tupac Amaru I (Jacobsen and Domínguez 2011: 40). Furthermore, he did not belong to the lettered elite. Differing from the well-extended practice among the Creole elites to educate themselves mainly in Europe, Bustamante received scant tutoring from a parish priest who instructed him in basic arithmetic and taught him to read and write (Jacobsen and Domínguez 2011: 41). More importantly, Bustamante never ceased to be a vocal advocate of the indigenous and the agrarian cause. He was the creator of the first pro-indigenous organization in Peru called *Sociedad Amiga de los Indios* (Ossio 1992: 219). He was also the leader of the peasant rebellions of 1866–1868 in Huanacán and Azángaro until he was tortured and finally decapitated in Pusi together with seventy-one indigenous leaders (Jacobsen 1989: 100). Bustamante visited China in July 1843 and is the author of *Viaje al antiguo mundo*. This travelogue was published for the first time in 1845, although the author expanded,

one of the most noteworthy highlights of the present study as well as an incredibly valuable opportunity to enrich and diversify the categories of analysis related to travel writing between Latin America and China. For a detailed account and analysis of his figure and travel accounts of China, see (Ramírez Gómez 2024).

made corrections to the original version, and published its second edition that same year.

To be an heir to cattle haciendas on his mother's side allowed Bustamante to amass a considerable fortune, and in spite of lack of any formal education, his success as a producer and merchant of wool and textiles opened his way to the world of politics. His involvement with the political centers started when he was appointed deputy to the National Congress for his native province of Lampa in 1839. This experience brought him profound disappointment due to the exceedingly conservative administration of Agustín Gamarra. His mandate was defined by the supremacy of the colonial aristocracy and a clear tendency toward authoritarianism that Bustamante tried to counteract with his reformist ideas, an attempt that almost sent him to jail (Bustamante 1945: 7).

Given these circumstances, he decided to embark on a journey of almost four years around the world, from 1841 to 1844. Once he returned to Peru, the first ascent to power of the liberal and progressive administration of Ramón Castilla brought him new hope in politics and compelled him to participate in congress again in 1845, even though none of his proposals, such as the establishment of free schools (Jacobsen 87), were ever accepted or executed. Thus, his inexhaustible passion for traveling impelled him to begin another adventure in 1848—this time of a one-year journey through Europe and Scandinavia. This experience inspired him to write a second travel book that was published in Paris in 1849 under the title *Apuntes y observaciones civiles y políticas y religiosas con las noticias adquiridas en este segundo viaje a la Europa*. (*Notes and Observations on Civil, Political, and Religious Matters with the Information Acquired on This Second Journey to Europe*).

Ordered by date of publication, the first travel book that conforms to the corpus of the present chapter is *Viaje de Nueva Granada a China y de China a Francia*.⁵ It was published for the first time in Paris in 1861 and written by the Colombian **Nicolás Tanco Armero** after a stay of over three years in China from June 1855 to July 1858.⁶

5 From now on *Viaje*.

6 Within the corpus selected for this chapter, Tanco Armero is the traveler who not only stayed in China the longest but also wrote most extensively about his impressions and experiences there. Therefore, I devote most of my attention in this chapter to his diary. By way of comparison, in the first edition of *Viaje* published by Imprenta de Simón Raçon y Comp. with 568 pages, Tanco devoted 200 pages to his stay in China. In contrast, Pedro del Río only spent a couple of weeks in there after leaving Japan on February 3rd, 1881, and his stay in China finished on the 21st when he set sail for Singapore. Thus, in his travel diary, published in two volumes that comprise a total of 988 pages, only 33 of them are devoted to China.



Fig. 3: Photograph of Nicolás Tanco A. Source: Colección de Elvira Cuervo de Jaramillo (AEJC) Biblioteca Virtual Banco de la República <<https://www.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/biografias/nicolas-tanco>>.

As the son of the last Minister of Finance belonging to the presidential cabinet of Simón Bolívar back in the years of the Gran Colombia,⁷ Tanco grew up in a family of the conservative Colombian Creole elite. After living in France as a student, Tanco joined the conservative party on his return to Bogotá in 1847. However, his criticisms of the government of José Hilario López, who was the first liberal president of the republic, forced him in 1851 to go into exile in Cuba (Hincapié 2010: 28). Once on the island, he started working for a Spanish company importing Chinese coolie labor from the port of Xiamen to work mainly in the sugar and tobacco plantations in Cuba and in the production of guano and saltpeter in Peru. His diary is an extensive account of his impressions living overseas. The narration begins in the city of Bogota and continues through Saint Thomas, Jamaica, Cuba,

⁷ Established between 1819 and 1821. It included the territories of present-day Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador, and Colombia, and even some northern areas that are now part of Brazil and Peru. It was later dissolved in 1831 after gaining independence and consolidation of Ecuador and Venezuela as republics. Since then, Colombia and Panama became the República de Nueva Granada. With a new constitution of 1858, the Nueva Granada was dissolved, and from then until 1863, it became the Confederación Granadina de los Estados Unidos de Colombia until 1886. Finally, after a war against the liberals, the conservatives were victorious and drafted a new constitution with which they declared the founding of the Republic of Colombia.

the United States, Great Britain, France, Malta, Egypt, and Sri Lanka, before reaching the port of Hong Kong.

After his stay in China, Tanco set off on his journey back to Nueva Granada, but this time visiting Palestine. In “Los Viajes”, a text published by *El Repertorio Colombiano* in 1880, Tanco announced that soon his next travel diary *Mis últimos viajes: India Oriental, China, Japón, Java, Islas Filipinas, California y visita a los Menonitas 1865–1869–1871–1874* would be published. According to him, the reason for this upcoming publication was the favorable response that his first travel diary had received from his readers, nonetheless, eight years had passed before its publication became reality. Without much explanation, Tanco affirmed in the introduction of the resulting book *Recuerdos de mis últimos viajes: Japón* (1888) that he was unable to publish the entire volume but for the time being, he presented to his readers the part corresponding to his stay in Japan. Tanco added that in the future, he would publish the rest of his diary, which contained his impressions of his second time visiting China and his first encounters with Java, India, and the Philippines —travel accounts that, apparently, were never printed.



Fig. 4: Aurelio García y García. Source: Biblioteca Nacional del Perú – Digital. Archivo Courret. <<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14428/15765>>.

In 1872, the then president of Peru Manuel Prado appointed **Aurelio García y García** to lead the first Peruvian diplomatic mission to Chinese territories. The reports written in the form of official letters during the course of his mission serve as the second traveling account of this chapter and a testimony of this transpacific encounter.



Fig. 5: Portrait of Pedro del Río Zañartu included in the first volume of his travel book *Viaje en torno al mundo por un “chileno”* (1883: ii).

The full correspondence between García y García and the then Minister of Foreign Affairs José de la Riva Agüero was compiled with all the annexes as *Memoria que el ministro de estado en el despacho de Relaciones Exteriores presenta al Congreso Ordinario de 1874*. The last travel book is part of a round-the-world travel diary written by the Chilean **Pedro del Río Zañartu**, born in Concepción in 1840. His diary was divided into two volumes that comprise records of del Río’s journey through several countries in America, Asia, Europe, and Africa, and they were published in 1883 and 1884 under the title of *Viaje en torno al mundo por un “chileno”*. He wrote his impressions of China as part of the second volume when he visited it for less than a month in February 1881.

From the Revolution of 1851, liberalism started growing as an important force in Chile but also in other countries within the region. Even though del Río held public office since he was twenty-five, when he was appointed as subdelegate of Talcahuano, he was first and foremost a businessman. Throughout his life, he ventured his capital into several industries, including agriculture, cattle farming, shipping, whale hunting, mining, sugar refinery, wine production, fish trade, as well as the export of saltpeter (Cartes 1997: 92–93, 104). Despite being raised in a liberal and pro-independence family, the catholic teaching was not absent during his upbringing (Cartes 1997: 119). Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that the *Club de Concepción*, of which del Río was founder and president, was integrated by liberals, among whom the ideas about secular societies were widely accepted and promoted.

Following the tragic death of his first wife Ana Rosa Serrano and their two children (Cartes 1997: 62, 91), del Río decided to embark on his first journey around the world in 1880. His travel impressions were initially written in the form of family letters, and from July of that same year, they were published as a periodical publication in *La Revista del Sur* under the title of “Cartas Familiares.” Additionally, del Río wrote a third volume which is a collection of travel impressions of his second journey around the world. From February 1904 to December 1905, he traveled to other places in Europe as well as South and North America, visiting the Middle East for the first time⁸, which resulted in the publication in 1912 of *Tercer viaje entornò al mundo*.



Fig. 6: On the left, book cover of the first edition of *A China e os Chins* (*China and the Chinese*), 1888. Next to it, the portrait of Henrique Carlos Ribeiro Lisboa included in that book with the caption “O meo traje chinez” (My Chinese suit) (1888: 239).

Among other Latin American travelers who wrote records of their journeys to China during this century are the Mexican Francisco Bulnes, the Brazilian Carlos Ribeiro, and the Argentinian Eduardo Wilde. Bulnes was a civil engineer who was part of the renowned group known as “the scientists” during the years of the

⁸ Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Jamaica, Antilles, Mexico, United States, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Greece, Smyrna, Rhodes Island, Cyprus, Messina, Alexandretta, Tripoli, Beirut, Balbeck, Damascus, Caiffa, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Egypt, Sicily, Italy, Monaco, France, England, Portugal, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Falkland Islands, Magellan, Tierra de Fuego.

Porfiriato. He served as a “calculator” and chronicler of a scientific expedition to Japan carried out by the Mexican Astronomical Commission. As a result of that journey *Sobre el hemisferio norte once mil leguas Impresiones de viaje a Cuba, Estados Unidos, Japón, China, Conchinchina, Egipto e Europa* was published in 1875 (Gasquet 2018: 137–138).

Eduardo Callado and Arthur Silveira da Motta commanded the first Brazilian mission to China between 1879 and 1883. Carlos Ribeiro Lisboa served as Secretary for this mission and published his travel memoirs in the city of Montevideo in 1888 under the title *A China e os chins: recordações de viagem (China and the Chinese: Travel Memories)*. Later, in 1894, Ribeiro published *Os Chins do Tetartos (The Chinese of the “Tetarto”)*, a work intended to be read as a continuation of his first travel memoirs⁹. Finally, yet importantly, the Argentinian writer, diplomat, doctor, and politician Eduardo Faustino Wilde published in 1899 his travel diary: *Por Mares i por Tierras*. This diary includes his impressions of several countries in Europe and Asia. Wilde began his journey to Asia in the city of London in July 1896 and arrived in Hong Kong in February 1897. In March of the same year, Wilde left China en route to Yokohama, Japan.

Traveling within the National Borders: Building a National Project

As outlined in the introduction, national traveling redefined the meaning of traveling as a practice since it became a pilgrimage toward oneself, an exercise of self-discovery and self-understanding. Thus, the lettered Creoles tried to better comprehend their nations and themselves through an exhaustive journey across the rivers, the mountains, and the valleys of their territories to lay the foundations of their envisioned republics, as Mary L. Pratt defines it: “As Christianity had set in motion a global labor of religious conversion that asserted itself at every point of contact with other societies, so natural history set in motion a secular, global labor that, among other things, made contact zones a site of intellectual as well as manual labor, and installed there the distinction between the two” (1997: 27).

There is probably no other lettered Creole who, as a thinker, poet, pedagogue, legislator, and even as a traveler, had assumed more rigorously the task of transforming this new Latin American subjectivity through both law and poetry as

9 The full official correspondence in relation to this mission was published in *Cuadernos do CHDD* by the Centro de História e Documentação Diplomática (History and Diplomatic Documentation Center) (2012).

Andrés Bello. Much can be understood about the lettered Creoles in general and the prominence of national traveling in particular through his life and poetic work. As just an eighteen-year-old Bello met the German naturalist Alexander Von Humboldt—an encounter that one of Bello's biographers, Ivan Jakšić, describes as an “intellectual revelation” since Bello accompanied Humboldt in his “ascent to Mount Avila, the impressive mountain overlooking Caracas [...] other excursions and appears also to have met him on social occasions [...] More importantly, Bello's contact with Humboldt inspired him to develop a strong interest in natural science, which became a main theme for his later writings” (2001: 9).

As I will explore in what follows, the formation of the identity of an independent Latin America, and its relationship with the always complex and problematic tie with Europe was a recurring theme over the course of the history of the Latin American writing of the journey to China, a theme that was already evident in Bello's *Alocución a la Poesía*. In it, Bello exhorts Divina Poesía saying that “tiempo es que dejes ya la culta Europa [...] y dirijas el vuelo a donde te abre / el mundo de Colón su grande escena” [It is time to forsake cultured Europe (...) and turn your flight to where the world of Columbus unfolds its majestic stage] because in Latin America “el bosque enmarañado, el sesgo río, / colores mil a tus pinceles brindan” [The tangled forest, the winding river, / a thousand hues offer themselves to your brush] ([1823] 1985: 20). Later, in the poem, Bello refers to Latin America as “América, del Sol joven esposa, / del antiguo Océano hija postrera, en su seno feraz cría y esmera” [America, youthful bride of the Sun, / last-born daughter of the ancient Ocean, / nurtures and tends within her fertile embrace] and about Europe Bello expects that “No te detenga, oh diosa, / esta región de luz y de miseria” [Let not this realm of light and wretchedness, / O goddess, hold you back] ([1823] 1985: 21).

Although the idea of Europe, no longer as ancient and cultured but as old and decadent, will take greater force in the poetry of the *Modernistas* some decades later. By the time of this poem, Bello already had an idea of Europe both as representing “light” and “wretchedness.” Thereafter, the vision of Europe as a stagnated and decadent geography in which the sun sets shed a new light over the “Orient” as the place where the sun rises and as a refreshing alternative in which new beginnings could sprout. For Bello, Latin America was that perfect “Orient” in which Europe had a second opportunity to rewrite its project for humanity.

Nonetheless, Latin America only represents a great *would-be* because, even though Bello appeals to leave Europe behind and praises the figures of indigenous deities or leaders such as Huitaca ([1823] 1985: 23) or Guaicaipuro ([1823] 1985: 36), Latin America was for him a tabula rasa in which everything was to be written, everything was still to be done. Further, this land was still “the world of Columbus” and Europe continued to be, nonetheless, the “cultured” and “light” carrier of the

world. Thus, under the gaze of Bello, the most ambitious project for Latin America was to preserve that “light” of progress and civilization brought by Europe but to extirpate the “wretchedness” of colonialism and slavery that came along with it.

In the poem *La agricultura de la zona tórrida*, Bello presents “agriculture” in the broadest sense of the word, as a project for the Latin American republics “desde el llano / que tiene por lindero el horizonte, / hasta el erguido monte, / de inaccesible nieve siempre cano” [From the plains / where the horizon forms the bound, / to the towering mount, / ever cloaked in inaccessible, ancient snow] ([1823] 1985: 40). Agriculture embodies the domestication and the rationalization of that savage nature. A task that could only be achieved through a positivist and exploitative vision since it is the only possible path for its transformation and integration into the capitalization of human and natural resources. Initially, these were key for European project of the colonialist expansion into the world and then essential for the ruling Creole elites to earn a place in the modern world and to give continuity to their historical, cultural, and commercial ties with Asia as independent nations.

“Travel to Learn, Learn to Teach”: Traveling and Writing as the Market of an Elite

Although the strength and popularity of writing as an industry and a market will become much more noticeable in the twentieth century, as I will address in greater depth in the next chapter, the beginning of the professionalization of writing takes place during the nineteenth century. Rama mentions that in 1816, Fernández de Lizardi had already warned about the collapse of patronage, so “la única vía moderna y efectiva, consistió en vender la capacidad de escribir en un nuevo mercado del trabajo que se abrió entonces, el *mercado de la escritura*” [The only modern and effective pathway lay in selling the skill of writing within a newly emerging labor market: the market of writing] ([1984] 1998: 94). This emerging industry will be key for the development of travel, journalism and, consequently, of travel writing if we consider that later on writers will not write because of traveling, but they will travel because of writing.

With the exception of Enrique Gómez Carrillo, who also visited Asia and made a living by writing, none of the nineteenth-century travel writers whom I study lived by the pen. They all had other businesses and were engaged in other industries, while writing was a secondary thing—something that gradually changed throughout the twentieth century. The travel writers were the ones who actually had to invest some capital in order to see their writing printed. Furthermore, as mentioned, their travel writing started at least, according to Tanco ([1861] 2013: 13)

and del Río, as letters addressed to friends and family members. It was only the growing popularity of their diaries that compelled them to publish them.

More than living by the pen, travel writing had other purposes. In this context, it was much more associated with a pedagogic duty than with a literary expression or aesthetic manifestation. In this sense, there is an evident influence of Humboldt's writing of in the traveling accounts of the lettered Creoles. For instance, Pratt cites Humboldt's *Monuments of the Indigenous People of America* to highlight the view of a narrative that he defined as: "the esthetic mode of treating subjects of natural history" (1997: 121). His writing was then an "attempt to correct what he saw as the failings of travel writing in his time ... «the merely personal» and on the other hand, an accumulation of scientific detail that was spiritually and aesthetically deadening" (Pratt 1997: 121). To a greater or lesser extent, the travel writing of the lettered Creoles to China is signed by Humboldt's influence and presence of subjective writing as they all imagined, interpreted, and wrote China in different ways but always preserving a scientific and educational duty.

This is warned both by the travelers and by the critics. Pedro María Moure said regarding Tanco's *Viaje*: "En este viaje el estilo no solamente es el hombre" [In this journey, style is not merely the man himself] ([1861] 2013: 12) to point out that the diary was far from being stylistically perfect and to make it clear that as a literary piece, it left much to be desired. Nonetheless, according to Moure, it is much more appreciable that Tanco "copia con la fidelidad del fotógrafo" [he narrates with the fidelity of a photographer] ([1861] 2013: 12) the physiognomy of the cultures, customs, and ways of living of all the places and peoples that he described during his journey. Therefore, the ethnographic endeavor of the traveler is much more highly regarded for being faithful to reality than for their literary brilliance or the genius of his pen.

In the same vein, Tanco underlines on several occasions that he is not a writer and refers to his pages as "desaliñadas" [Disheveled] (1888: 5), reminding his readers that: "sale este libro, como mis *viajes a China*, sin poderlo revisar ni darle la última mano al imprimirse [...] Si la frase, por consiguiente, no fuese muy correcta, si el estilo no es tan castizo y atildado como sería de desear, suplico a mis lectores lo disimulen" [This book is published, much like my travels to China, without being able to review it or give it the final touches upon printing (...) Therefore, if the phrasing is not entirely correct, if the style is not as refined and polished as one might wish, I ask my readers to overlook it] (1888: 6). All the other travelers accompany Tanco in this position and declare themselves as non-writers. For instance, del Río also makes the same point while saying that none of the education and experience that he had accumulated as a businessman could allow him to "presentarme en la liza de las letras como un autor literario, ni siquiera como un simple

escritor” [To present myself in the arena of letters as a literary author, or even as a mere writer] (1883: xx). There is then an apparent contradiction between the fact that they all declared themselves as non-writers, but they still not just wrote but also published and expected to be read. Be that as it may, this can be better understood if we take into account that they all considered their works to serve other purposes beyond literature and literary writing.

This is connected to what Tanco considers his actual ambition and also his duty as a traveler: “consignar mis impresiones del modo más sencillo, dando a conocer a mis compatriotas los lejanos y curiosos países que he visitado” [To record my impressions in the simplest manner, sharing with my fellow countrymen the distant and fascinating lands I have visited] (1888: 6). This responsibility, which seems to be more sociological than artistic for him, makes that the more “true” and “untouched” by subjectivity these impressions are, the more “reliable” they become in terms of their educative role. For Tanco, when the traveler sets sail on a journey to the novelty and the unknown, they leave with a “pensamiento feliz que anuncia cuanto corrige la razón ilustrada del viajero que todo lo examina y reflexiona” [A fortunate thought that heralds everything corrected by the enlightened reason of the traveler who examines and reflects on everything] (1880: 448). To travel is then the experience through which all of what they have imagined is subjected to a rigorous process of ascertaining facts and verifying the accuracy of their sources.

In words of Tanco, the passion for traveling is not a matter of vanity but “una necesidad imperiosa de relaciones, una ley poderosa y fecunda [motivada] por el progreso, que nos impele a buscar los adelantamientos de las ciencias, de la industria y del comercio, y a mejorar la condición moral y material de los pueblos” [An imperative need for connections, a powerful and fruitful law (motivated) by progress, which drives us to seek advancements in sciences, industry, and commerce, and to improve the moral and material condition of nations] (1880: 447). Likewise, the idea of traveling as a duty to the motherland is also defended in the diary of the Chilean Pedro del Río and openly stated in the introduction written by Benjamín V. Mackenna. Mackenna says that, while it is true that del Río was not the first Chilean to travel around the world, there is something undeniable that distinguishes him from the rest, and it is that “de seguro nadie le ha precedido en el patriótico afán de transmitir sus impresiones, para el bien común” [Surely, no one has preceded him in the patriotic zeal of conveying his impressions for the common good] (1883: xvii).

Depending on their professions, they tended to be more interested, and to write more extensively, on topics that were closer to their disciplines. Given that the writers of the diaries and travelogues that I analyze in this chapter were all

businessmen and/or politicians, their writing is also more focused on economic and financial matters. Nonetheless, they were also committed to writing about everything that they found valuable, useful, and educational. For that reason, besides their evident interest in industries, the sciences, arts, and crafts of other countries also drew their attention, and it is clearly reflected in all the diaries. Tanco dedicated a good amount of his descriptions of Cuba to detailed accounts of machineries, factories, and techniques as he does, for instance, in the Santa Helena sugar mill ([1861] 2013: 75–79). He repeats these observations several times over the course of the diary, as he does in Sri Lanka to describe the production of cinnamon ([1861] 2013: 282–283) or the manufacturing of silk and tea in China ([1861] 2013: 449–453).

Traveling was, in this context, tightly related to progression and a way to look forward to a prosperous and harmonious future. In consequence, isolation was in this century, and for these Creole elites, a synonym for savagery. These elites operated on the premise that the pre-Hispanic era was dominated by isolated indigenous communities, whose barbarism was finally mitigated by the civilization and progress brought by the Spanish colonization, which served as a constant reminder for these Creole travelers of the brutal ravages of isolation. Hence, the societies that do not travel are condemned to be left behind in the race for progression.¹⁰

Thus, after living in China for several years and visiting it again more than a decade later, Tanco reassures his idea about isolation: “un estado violento que impide el desarrollo del hombre; es el estado de las tribus salvajes que no viajan [...] Tal es la suerte de China [...] [un imperio] relegado en un rincón del orbe y sustraído voluntariamente a todo roce con las naciones cultas, a quienes en su orgullosa ignorancia califica de salvajes” [A violent state that hinders the development of man; it is the

10 There are many examples in nineteenth-century Latin American literature that could be cited to account for this mentality. Among them, one of the most telling is *Facundo* written by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and published in 1845. From its first pages, the close relationship between isolation and barbarism is evident. Sarmiento begins by pointing out the little vocation for navigation shown by Argentines and regrets the little benefit that is obtained from its water resources as a means for progress and civilization. “Pudiera señalarse, como un rasgo notable de la fisonomía de este país, la aglomeración de ríos navegables [...] Pero estos inmensos canales excavados por la solícita mano de la naturaleza, no introducen cambio ninguno en las costumbres nacionales. El hijo de los aventureros españoles que colonizaron el país, detesta la navegación [...] ríos que debieran llevar la civilización, el poder y la riqueza, hasta las profundidades más recónditas del continente” [It could be pointed out, as a remarkable feature of this country’s physiognomy, the gathering of navigable rivers (...) But these immense canals, excavated by nature’s diligent hand, bring no change to the national customs. The son of the Spanish adventurers who colonized the land despises navigation (...) rivers that should carry civilization, power, and wealth to the deepest corners of the continent] ([1845] 1997: 24–25).

state of the savage tribes that do not travel (...) Such is the fate of China (...) (an empire) relegated to a corner of the world and voluntarily withdrawn from all contact with cultured nations, whom, in its proud ignorance, it deems savage] (1880: 448). These disjunctive relationships between city and countryside, civilization and barbarism were, among many others, dilemmas that occupied a very important place in the debates around the narratives that served as the basis for the process of construction of an independent nation. Following Rama, the city as a synonym for civilization reiterates the classic Greek conception of the civilized *polis* in opposition to the barbarism of the non-urbanized ([1984] 1998: 25). By contrast, the urge to travel to learn is clearly reflected in both Tanco's and del Río's efforts. They strive to cover as many areas as possible, from history to commerce to traditions, costumes, geography, religion, politics, law, economy, language, education, family, mathematics, chemistry, botany, music, medicine, literature, astronomy, and even climate.

The above was assumed as the "ought to be" of traveling and was understood, consequently, as the duty the Creole had as part of a social class. Therefore, despite the popularization of traveling, it is evident that its exercise was a privilege of the lettered elite. Besides education, there is a broader agenda for Latin American travelers in general, but even more specifically for the ones who traveled to Asia. Traveling must contribute to the construction of the nation on all possible fronts, always coinciding with the fact that the members of the Creole elite are the ones who are the fittest to travel since, in the interest of the nation, they would make more out of their journeys. As Pedro Moure suggested in the introduction to Tanco's travel book, traveling and educating are tightly bound together during this century: "¡Viaja para aprender, y aprende para enseñar!" [Travel to learn, and learn to teach!] ([1861] 2013: 15) Only the one capable of learning and teaching is the one that should be able to travel because, right as Pedro Moure suggests, Tanco was traveling with "tres pasaportes: su nombre, su inteligencia y su instrucción" [Three passports: his name, his intelligence, and his education] ([1861] 2013: 26).

To travel must be then conceived as something that only the creole lettered elite was capable of doing, not just financially able to afford it, but intellectually capable of learning from what will be seen and experienced. "Dejad, pues, viajar al sabio que busca la ciencia en remotos climas [...] al mercader, perseguidor del oro y de la plata, que lleva y trae los productos de la industria" [Let the wise man, who seeks knowledge in distant climates, travel (...) and the merchant, pursuer of gold and silver, who brings and takes the products of industry] ([1861] 2013: 17). This idea was also echoed by Tanco: "El humilde habitante del lejano pueblo aprenderá más leyendo tranquilamente en su rincón que dando la vuelta al mundo: los libros irán a buscarle; los grandes pensadores, los poetas, los literatos todos le hablarán, pero con más claridad, erudición, gracia y ciencia que la que encontrarían ellos" [The

humble inhabitant of the distant village will learn more by reading quietly in his corner than by traveling around the world: books will seek him out; the great thinkers, poets, and writers will all speak to him, but with more clarity, erudition, grace, and knowledge than they themselves would have found] ([1861] 2013: 17). For the humble “inhabitant,” it is more fruitful to remain within the borders of the nation and wait for the writings of the journeys around the world of the lettered elite since they would learn more from their interpretations than from the actual practice of traveling.

All the encyclopedic wisdom lends continuity to the predominance and the supremacy of written knowledge in relation to oral one or to mere practical experience. For Ángel Rama, the formation of the *lettered city* derives from what he calls “sueño de un orden” which is closely related to the supremacy of the written word originated in the colonial times: “La escritura poseía rigidez y permanencia, un modo autónomo que remedaba la eternidad. Estaba libre de las vicisitudes y metamorfosis de la historia pero, sobre todo, consolidaba el orden por su capacidad para expresarlo rigurosamente en el nivel cultural” [Writing possessed rigidity and permanence, an autonomous mode that mimicked eternity. It was free from the vicissitudes and metamorphoses of history but, above all, it consolidated order through its capacity to express it rigorously at the cultural level] ([1984] 1998: 22). In this context, travel writing is not exempt from the relation between the written word and the “sueño de un orden.” Actually, it serves, at least initially, as a hybrid extension between the traveler-ethnographer and the traveler-botanist or the traveler-encyclopedist with the literary endeavor. The written word behaves both as a mechanism to distinguish the lettered Creole from the “humble inhabitant,” and as a way to exert control and reaffirm their role as a ruling class.

As a consequence of the expansive dynamics of capitalism promoting and directing the writing of the Napoleonic code, which, according to Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot represented “la cima de la racionalización del derecho y consecuentemente el polo opuesto de la visión teocrática del mundo feudal” [The pinnacle of the rationalization of law and, consequently, the polar opposite of the theocratic worldview of the feudal era] ([1988] 2004: 46). It was a new sociohistorical reality that imposed the rationalist and capitalist principles, which were later perpetuated through the code’s “adaptación para la República de Chile por Andrés Bello en 1854, [...] [y] aceptada luego por las demás repúblicas latinoamericanas” [Adaptation for the Republic of Chile by Andrés Bello in 1854, (...) (and) subsequently accepted by the other Latin American republics] ([1988] 2004: 47). This is very much in line with the fact that it is through the written word that knowledge is legitimized and practiced, as in the case of contracts, law edicts, constitutions, or scientific and philosophical treaties. For Rama, treatises and encyclopedias are examples of what

he calls “orden de los signos,” and it is the strategy through which the Creoles articulated their relationship with power and preserved its hierarchical distributions to legitimize themselves as a ruling elite.

In the same way, the lettered traveler imposes and endorses itself as superior in relation to the unlettered traveler because the *lettered city* “inspiró la distancia respecto al común de la sociedad. Fue la distancia entre la letra rígida y la fluida palabra hablada, que hizo de la ciudad letrada una ciudad escrituraria, reservada a una estricta minoría” [It inspired a distance from the general society. It was the gap between the rigid written word and the fluid spoken language, which transformed the literate city into a written city, reserved for a strict minority] (Rama [1984] 1998: 43). Thus, the connection between traveling and the written word, as well as the written word and the imperialist metropolis, are both undeniable. Travel writing becomes, in this context, a way for these Creole travelers to exercise their power through writing because the meaning-making about other cultures entails the process of the legitimation of “the truth” as it is first and foremost a written product, almost exclusively devised and controlled by the lettered elite.

This meaning-making is inherited by the Creoles as an imperial mechanism of the colonial regime. It was through it that the Europeans constructed an imaginary for themselves and for the rest of the world. In the same way, the lettered Creoles had an imaginary construction of the Latin American nations. Thus, in the context of the Creoles traveling to China, the act of traveling and their travel writing were used by them as a tool of legitimization of themselves as the only ones capable of understanding while traveling and the only ones capable of producing knowledge from that experience, capturing it through ink and paper.

Traveling beyond the National Borders: The First Encounters with China

During the nineteenth century, traveling as a social practice expanded its horizons and made way for the idea of tourism and the pleasure of traveling as we conceive it today. The development of global-scale technologies, such as the invention of the telegraph and the popularization of steam navigation, made not only possible but also more accessible to Latin Americans, at least for its ruling elites, to travel beyond the national borders. The first one eased and hastened communications, and the second one made distances shorter and the perception of the world as smaller and more reachable. This led to the diversification of the means of transportation and dissemination that had been, up until that time, exclusively controlled by the imperial metropolis. Before that, the colonial dominance over these means and channels had prevented, in a very effective way, the broadening and the decentralization of the

circulating narratives across China and Latin America as global peripheries and as subjects of the Western expansionist project.

This gave rise to the particularities attached to the reality of the Latin American republics of the time, which shaped the ideas around traveling and the traveler in a very distinctive way. For the lettered Creoles, the possibility to travel internationally also played an essential role in the formation of their subjectivity due to the profound need to hammer out answers to questions about how to think, rule, and historicize their present, which existed in parallel to the eagerness to see and explore the world. There was not only an immense curiosity about life beyond their borders and seas but also an acknowledged responsibility to put the knowledge acquired overseas at the service of the construction of national narratives. Therefore, traveling abroad was a way to see and understand themselves better as well as to perceive the formation of their newly independent identities from a broader and comparative angle.

The opportunity for Latin Americans to travel overseas also represented the beginning of an entirely new way to conceive traveling as it ended up broadening its limits and redefining its centers. It opened new ways for peripheral subjects to narrate other versions of what had been seen, to trace alternative paths for what had been traversed, and to tell from new perspectives what had been narrated from the European viewpoint. In the Latin American context, this transformation of traveling as a social practice was particularly relevant. It represented the possibility of seeing with the Latin American travelers' own eyes what had only been possible to imagine through the reading of European writing. It also implied a transformation of their presence in the world cartographies of traveling, considering that before this, they had only been known for occupying the role of the "object of study," the one observed, silenced, and only able to be narrated and understood through the European positivist vision consigned in the records of colonizers, missionaries, botanist, geographers, and ethnographers during their encounter with the New World.

Thus, from the early 1850s and with Paris as their epicenter (Fombona 2005: 69), the visits of the new ruling Latin American elites to the Old Continent started to gather momentum. They extensively recorded their journeys in the form of diaries, travel memoirs, and notes¹¹. There was, nevertheless, a group of travelers for whom Europe

¹¹ Some examples among this extensive literary production are: *Viajes de un colombiano en Europa* (1862) by José María Samper, *Viajes en Europa, África i los Estados Unidos* (1849) by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Páginas de Mi Diario Durante Tres Años de Viaje. 1853–1854–1855* (1856) by Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Mis Impresiones y Vicisitudes en Mi Viaje a Europa* (1879) by Maipina de la Barra, *Viaje a España* (1889) Rafael Sanhueza, *En viaje (1870–1871)* (1884) by Miguel Cané, *Un paseo por Europa* (1891) by Aurelia Castillo de González, *Sensaciones de viaje* (1896) and *De mis romerías* (1898) by Manuel Díaz Rodríguez, *Sensaciones de París y de Madrid* (1899) by Enrique Gómez Carrillo, *Diario de*

was just a stopover before reaching their actual destination: China. The first travel diaries written by the pioneer Latin American voyagers during their passage through Chinese territory are a testament to these journeys.

Locating the Journey to China within the Creole Cartographies of World Traveling

The dispute over the prime meridian has served as a metaphor for the dispute over geopolitical control throughout history. Besides the cartographical point of reference, Paris was for a long time the epicenter, not just of the traveling aspirations for these lettered Creoles, but it also meant to travel to what they aspired and expected for the future of their home nations. Traveling to Paris meant to travel to another space but mostly to travel to a future time in which all dreams and hopes of what they aspired for their nations to be in the years to come. Traveling to China and, even more generally, to “the Orient” represented, in contrast, a journey to the past.¹²

This idea is clearly illustrated by Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna: “Chile era entonces, respecto del Viejo Mundo, padre i distribuidor supremo de toda civilización, algo semejante a lo que es hoy día con relación a nosotros, el reino de Otahiti” [Chile

viaje a Europa (1853–1854) by Rómulo José Yegros, *Mis confesiones de viajero* (1898) by Roberto Huneus, *A Toledo desde el Cuzco* (1893) by Gavino Pacheco Zegarra, *Recuerdos de España* (1899) Ricardo Palma, *Hojas de un diario* (1878) by José Antonio de Lavalle, *Memorias de un viajero peruano Apuntes y Recuerdos de Europa y Oriente (1859–1863)* by Juan de Arona, *Memorias e impresiones de un viaje a Inglaterra y Escocia* (1853) Manuel Payno, *Viajes por Europa (1896–1898)* (1899) by Enrique Rocuant Figueroa, *Recuerdo del pasado (1814 – 1860)* (1886) Vicente Pérez Rosales, *Viaje de América a Jerusalén tocando en París, Londres, Loreto, Roma i Egipto* (1869) by Andrés Posada Arango, *Recuerdos de un viaje a Europa* (1873) by Nicolás Pardo, *Recuerdos de un viaje a Oriente* (1875) by Federico Cornelio Aguilar, *De América a Europa : recuerdos de viaje* (1875) by Luciano Rivera Garrido, *Diarios de viaje* (1824) Domingo José de Toro y Guzmán, *Recuerdos de viaje* (1881) Lucio Vicente López, *Miscelánea: impresiones y recuerdos* (1845) by Calixto Bernal, “Diario de su vida en Europa (1845–1847)” en *Obras Completas Tomo I* (1866) by Francisco Bilbao Barquín, *Veinte días en Génova* (1845) by Juan Bautista Alberdi, *El catolicismo en presencia de sus disidentes Tomo I* (1855) by José Ignacio Víctor Eyzaguirre, *Informe sobre los asuntos de Bolivia en Europa* (1877) José Avelino Aramayo, *Viaje a Oriente* (1882) by Luis Malanco, *Curiosidades de la vida americana en París* (1893) by Ángel Cuervo Urisarri, *Impresiones* (1884) by Martín García Mérou, *Recuerdos de viajes en América, Europa, Asia y África en los años de 1865 a 1867* (1869) by Filomeno Borrero.

¹² During the International Meridian Conference of 1884, it was decided to adopt the Greenwich meridian as the prime meridian over the one of Paris, which had been, until then, the dominant reference (Bartky 2007: 41). France did not comply with this measure until 1911, when the signals emitted by the Eiffel Tower transmitter were finally changed to follow Greenwich (Bartky 2007: 42).

was then, with respect to the Old World, the father and supreme distributor of all civilization, something akin to what Tahiti is to us today] (Del Río 1883: vi). Unlike Latin America, to which Europe had already expanded its modernizing project more than three centuries earlier, the most evident intervention of Europe in China had been a much more recent event that was perceived at the time as a work in progress.

In spite of this, traveling to Asia had for these travelers, as well as for their readers and critics, very special implications compared to the journey to Europe. Thus, even though, according to most of these travelers, their first intention was not to write a book, their writing started to serve other purposes. In addition to the purposes already mentioned, it was also intended to be used as a reference for future travelers in view of the absence of travel guides to Asia. Besides that, as Taboada (1998: 299) and Martínez (1996: 105) suggest, they also served as a means to strengthen the religious convictions of their fellow compatriots.

Distance, both geographical and cultural, played an important role in the differentiation between these two journeys. Thus, according to Tanco, traveling within the borders of your own nation should not be regarded as traveling: “Visitar las varias comarcas de un reino, o las villas y aldeas situadas en el corto radio del suelo natal, no se hace por simple distracción y pasatiempo, pues no es lo que realmente se llama viajar” [To visit the various regions of a kingdom, or the villages and hamlets situated within the small radius of one’s native land, is not done out of mere distraction or pastime, for this is not truly what is called traveling] (1880: 449). Traveling to Europe was perceived by these travelers as an already commoditized experience that resulted from the rapid emergence that tourism had as a leading industry and a very profitable business during the nineteenth century (Lickorish 2011: 16). The standardization of the experience of traveling started in this century to demarcate a defining line between the tourist and the traveler (Sloterdijk 2010: 58). Thus, although Paris was very much admired and claimed as the capital of the world,¹³ the sense of novelty found in its illuminated streets and boulevards started to fade, at least for the Creole travelers to Asia. “The Orient” offered a renewed sense of adventure and discovery that the already rather conventionalized journey to Europe no longer did. This

13 “Paris, esta meca de la moderna civilización, esta capital del mundo, este foco de donde parte la luz para toda la tierra, este centro donde acuden todos los extranjeros notables del universo, todas las capacidades, todos los talentos a perfeccionarse, a refinarse en las ciencias y en las artes” [Paris, this mecca of modern civilization, this capital of the world, this beacon from which light radiates to all corners of the earth, this center where all the notable foreigners of the universe converge, all the abilities, all the talents, to be perfected, to be refined in the sciences and the arts] (Tanco [1861] 2013: 152).

differentiation between traveler and tourist is directly addressed by Tanco when he says that:

Entre el mero turista, como es denominado en Europa, y el viajero, hay una esencial diferencia, una distancia enorme. Viajes como los de algunos sur-americanos en Europa. [...] tales viajes a pesar de su pomposa fachada, de nada sirven ni en nada aumentan la suma de los conocimientos civilizadores. Mas los viajes a lejanas y desconocidas regiones, donde habitan pueblos en todo distintos de los nuestros, de raza, ideas y civilización diversa, ofrecen un vasto campo de observación y estudio, en que la comparación con lo que hemos visto y conocemos derrama luz en abundancia y extiende los límites de la ciencia social. [Between the mere tourist, as they are called in Europe, and the true traveler, there exists a fundamental difference, a vast distance. Journeys like those of some South Americans in Europe (...) despite their pompous façade, serve no purpose and do not increase the sum of civilizing knowledge. But travels to distant and unknown regions, where peoples with entirely different races, ideas, and civilizations dwell, offer a vast field for observation and study. In these places, the comparison with what we have seen and know sheds abundant light and expands the boundaries of social science] (1880: 449)

In this sense, it would seem logical to assume that geographic and cultural distance behave as interdependent variables, whereby the larger the geographic distance is, the larger the cultural distance experienced. However, for the Creole travelers, that is not always the case. For Tanco, Christianity and modernity are reference points to define cultural proximity independently of geographic distance.

For instance, at the very beginning of his journey, Tanco leaves Bogota and arrives in Cartagena through the Magdalena River. There, even though he is within the borders of his home nation, there is a vast cultural distance between this city and himself, and there does not seem to be anything worth of being written: “Inútil me parece detenerme mucho en las impresiones que he experimentado en todo el tránsito hasta llegar a Calamar. Miseria, desnudez, atraso, ignorancia por un lado; árboles gigantescos, vegetación prodigiosa, un río caudaloso” [It seems pointless to dwell much on the impressions I experienced throughout the journey until I arrived at Calamar. On one side, misery, nakedness, backwardness, ignorance; on the other, gigantic trees, prodigious vegetation, a mighty river] ([1861] 2013: 53). His descriptions of Cartagena, Mompo, and Camalar are all brief and depict their people and traditions with open mockery and disdain, describing their dances as “piruetas, brincos y contorsiones” [Somersaults, leaps, and contortions] ([1861] 2013: 55). Therefore, Cartagena does not inspire anything besides “pena y tristeza por la excesiva cantidad de negros [...] por cada blanco hay nueve o diez negros es una cosa horrible y desconsoladora” [Grief and sorrow due to the excessive number of blacks... for every white person, there are nine or ten blacks; it is a dreadful and heart-rending thing] ([1861] 2013: 55). These lands covered in both human and vegetal savagery are so culturally distant to Tanco and are located so far away from

being morally or materially progressive to the point that “la única impresión que sentí fue la de ver surcar en uno de nuestros primeros ríos algunos cuantos buques de vapor” [The only impression I felt was that of seeing a few steamships navigate one of our first rivers] ([1861] 2013: 53).

In contrast, the notable presence of Europeans and the evident modernization of Hong Kong by the time of his arrival in the city, as well as the imposing influx that Catholicism and the Portuguese empire put in the reshaping of the architecture of Macao, left a much more favorable impression in the eyes of Tanco:

El aspecto de la ciudad trae a la memoria las poblaciones de Europa o América, y las hermosas cúpulas y torres de las iglesias que se divisan por encima de todos los edificios recuerdan al viajero que es cristiano [...] el símbolo de la cruz que se ostenta majestuoso sobre los templos en cualquier parte del mundo, es igualmente el signo del cristianismo y el de la moderna civilización. [The appearance of the city brings to mind the populations of Europe or America, and the beautiful domes and towers of the churches visible above all the buildings remind the traveler that they are in a Christian land (...) The symbol of the cross, displayed majestically above temples everywhere, is both the sign of Christianity and that of modern civilization ([1861] 2013: 377).

Despite being thousands of leagues away from his country, the material and moral progression brought by Portuguese Catholicism and colonial imposition makes Macao perceived by Tanco as a much more familiar city than Cartagena. For him, the geographic distance is shortened by the cultural and religious familiarity that Macao evokes in him. It is a colony with which his young home republic shared a very similar experience of empire in their histories.

In April of 1855, Tanco arrived in France and stayed for almost a month before heading to Egypt from Marsella. Once in Paris, Tanco takes ownership of the city and feels at home. In Paris, he acts neither as a traveler nor a tourist but just as another Parisian. Thus, when referring to the people who are temporarily in the city, he addresses them as “foreigners” and even classifies and characterizes them, making fun particularly of the South Americans who had recently arrived in the capital ([1861] 2013: 177). Tanco writes about Paris with the fluidity characteristic of someone whose sense of belonging is more than evident, a fluidity that, paradoxically, is not at all perceived in the narration of his own nation. In short, while being in Paris, despite the geographical distance, the cultural distance experienced here is rather imperceptible.

The familiarity that the lettered Creoles had with Paris reached a point in which this city is located more as a home than as a place of discovery. In the case of the creoles that traveled to China, the familiarity with Paris almost borders with boredom, as Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna suggested:

I es así como París ha comenzado a ser para los chilenos una especie de lámpara maravillosa, un nido de delicias, un viaje cotidiano, una especie de segunda capital de la República [...] hoy día - 'ir a París' ha convertido en cosa tan liviana i trivial casi como el pan de cada día [...] no acontece lo mismo respecto de los viajes de circunvalación que siguiendo el derrotero de Magallanes i de Sebastian de Elcano, emprenden solo los que tienen ávida curiosidad de contemplar en sus diversas fases el orbe inmenso [...] de las Californias al Japón, del Indostán a la Palestina [And thus Paris has begun to be for the Chileans a kind of magic lamp, a nest of delights, a daily journey, a sort of second capital of the Republic (...) today - 'going to Paris' has become something as light and trivial as the daily bread (...) this is not the case with circumnavigation journeys, which, following the route of Magellan and Sebastián de Elcano, are undertaken only by those with an avid curiosity to contemplate in its various phases the immense globe (...) from California to Japan, from India to Palestine] (Del Río 1883: viii–ix).

There is therefore a blast of superiority that makes the Creole traveler to Asia a distinguished passenger. The real traveler travels to learn, to inquire, to examine with the eyes of science—travelers are educated, cultured, and read. Tourists, in contrast, are depicted as trivial people who need to disguise their ignorance under the commonplaces of their tourist guides. (1880: 449). This distinction is reinforced by Vicuña Mackenna when referring to del Río as a “infatigable explorador” [tireless explorer] (Del Río 1883: xvii) who “en vez de ir a hacer regalado paseo a los boulevares de París o a los aromáticos casinos de Italia, se lanzó por el derrotero que le ha conducido a visitar i conocer las cinco partes del mundo, todas juntas” [Instead of taking a leisurely stroll along the boulevards of Paris or to the aromatic casinos of Italy, he embarked on the path that led him to visit and explore the five parts of the world, all at once] (Del Río 1883: xviii). Then, the tourist prefers traveling for pleasure, surrounded by the comfort of the well-known sightseeing, while the traveler craves for places off the beaten path as it is, in this context, a journey to Asia.

Moral and Material Progress: Slavery Abolition and Chinese Coolie Labor

Although the transits of these first Latin American travelers to China might spark enthusiasm for versions of a history written with subalternity as their perspective, it is necessary to keep in mind that despite the independencies and the uniqueness of these encounters, the Creole elites inherited the colonialist vision against which they had fought to achieve their sovereignty. They were also the ones who devised the foundational narratives that, to a great extent, still support the weight of these

republics today¹⁴. This is possible due to the survival of colonizing models and patterns in the minds and imaginations of those who, ultimately, laid the foundations of the newly independent Latin American republics.

The distinctiveness of the transpacific encounter between Latin America and China is better explained if we return to the concept of “contact zone” since it reflects “The social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths” (Pratt 1997: 4). We can therefore argue that the contact zone is also defined as a space of colonial encounter and that its existence is conceivable even if there is not a direct participation or involvement of a colonial power in that interaction. Thus, the continuation of colonial setups is, according to Pratt, a phenomenon of the contact zone referred to as “transculturation” which is focused on describing “how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture [and] how are metropolitan modes of representation received and appropriated on the periphery” (1997: 6).

Pratt is interested in the tensions and dynamics that define transculturation from the perspective of the periphery to the metropolis. However, it would be interesting to rerail that question for the purposes of the present study and to put it in the context of the lettered Creoles writing China. This is with the aim of analyzing how, and even if, these modes of representation obtained from the metropolis operate or if they are dislocated when Latin Americans as peripheral subjects visit and write China as another world periphery. Pratt traces a “distinction between the «European» and the «Europeanizing» [which] encapsulates the transatlantic appropriation through which elite liberal creoles first sought esthetic and ideological grounding as white Americans” (1997: 175). The Eurocentric nature of these foundational narratives ended up serving as a continuation of the colonial rule, but now adapted to renewed colonial institutions, a process that Rama describes as:

Primero «evangelizar» y después «educar». Aunque el primer verbo fue conjugado por el espíritu religioso y el segundo por el laico y agnóstico, se trataba del mismo esfuerzo de transculturación a partir de la lección europea. Para esos fines, las ciudades fueron asiento de Virreyes, Gobernadores, Audiencias, Arzobispados, Universidades y aun Tribunales inquisitoriales, antes que lo fueran, tras la Independencia, de Presidentes, Congresos, siempre Universidades y siempre Tribunales [First “to evangelize” and then “to educate.” Although the first verb was used by religious figures and the second by secular and agnostic ones, both represented the same effort at transculturation based on the European model. For these

14 For a broader understanding of the Creole subjectivity in relation to the nineteenth-century Latin American literature and foundational narratives, see (Sommer 1993)

purposes, the cities served as the seats of Viceroy, Governors, Audiences, Archbishops, Universities, and even Inquisitorial Courts, long before they became, after Independence, the seats of Presidents, Congresses, still Universities, and still Courts] ([1984] 1998: 27).

Thus, born in the context of the colonial regime, the lettered city inhabited by Creole elites was transformed and professionalized in order to upgrade it to their new independent reality. That is how, following Aníbal Quijano, several colonial structures have survived to the present day as they have “origen y carácter colonial, pero ha probado ser más duradero y estable que el colonialismo en cuya matriz fue establecido” [Though it has a colonial origin and character, it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in which it was established] (2003: 260). Therefore, although the expansion of traveling entailed the flow of peripheral subjects to other peripheries, most of these Creole elites also traveled accompanied by the same imperial and racist complexes, which, to a great extent, marked their impressions and representations of China.

Most of the nineteenth-century travel writing produced by Latin American Creole elites in their passage through this country give account of this phenomenon. For them, this transatlantic dependency on the imperial centers is still their main measuring point to define, position, and represent themselves and others. A clear example of the preservation of colonial structures in postindependence Latin America is that, in parallel and after the struggles for independence, the processes of slavery abolition were also taking place and served as another pivotal event for the transformation of the relation between China, Europe, and Latin America. The dramatically decimation of indigenous population resulted in an enormous increase in the demand for labor. It contrasted with a desperate desire to pick up the pace of the economic development and industrial progression in the entire American subcontinent in order to open itself and adapt its local economy to the demands of the world markets. These changes pressured not just the Northern metropolis but also the Creole elites ruling over the newly independent Latin American republics to rethink their strategies and redirect their focus to Asia in search of an alternative source of workforce. This caused an enormous upsurge, not only in the population and commercial flows but also in the cultural exchanges among them.

Before delving into the relationship between the Creole travelers to China and the coolie trade, it is important to make clear that this trade, which brought hundreds of thousands of indentured Chinese workers to Latin America during the nineteenth century, served as a continuation of the triangular trade because: “it was a system of labor, which in practice differed little from slavery [...] indentured workers were not better off than the slaves they replaced” (Meagher 2008: 21). Thus, for some of these Creole travelers, the trade of Chinese workers was the very purpose of their journey and the very reason that made them set sail for China—a

circumstance that serves as a clear illustration of their inherited colonialist vision and practice.

In Latin America, the Chinese diaspora, far from being a homogeneous group, has multiple stories of life and migration that converge in the nineteenth century as a common point of origin. The high demand for laborers in the growing agricultural and mining sectors in Colombia, Brazil, and Ecuador, the guano production in Chile and Peru, and the plantations of tobacco and sugar cane in Cuba made these elites redirect their vision to China, as its population proved to be the most affordable and abundant source of labor. As noted, this transpacific encounter is far from being recent. According to Walton Look Lai, during the nineteenth century, the cultural flows between China and Latin America were not perceived as a new introduction if we consider that “up to as late as 1860, there were actually more Chinese in the Latin America/Caribbean region than there were in North America” (1998: 6). Therefore, the very old connection between the Middle Kingdom and the New World makes the Chinese not just a mere presence but a vital component in the cultural and historical formations of the Latin American societies.

Due to the aforementioned accumulation of developments and circumstances as it advanced, this century certainly represented a turning point in the history of the encounters between these two latitudes. Owing to the mass migrations of Chinese to the Americas from the 1850s to the 1880s¹⁵, these transits and bonds reached a much larger scale, which coincided with several political uprisings and social issues within the Chinese territories. Among the expressions of such political unrest are the two Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1864), the bloody struggles among internal migrants for land tenure as well as the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864) that left China with a costly number of twenty to thirty million deaths (Unschuld 2013: 51) as well as other set of internal turmoil and conflict such as the Nian Rebellion (1851–1868) in the south, a Muslim uprising in the southwest, the Panthay Rebellion (1856–1873), and in the north, the Dungan Rebellion (1862–1877). All of these events

15 Elliott Young reckoned that “Over half a million Chinese had come to the Americas by 1882, half of these to Latin America as coolies and the other half to Anglo North America, mainly the United States” (2014: 32). Arnold J. Meagher estimated that “the total number of Chinese imported to Cuba from 1847 to 1874 range from 114,232 to 250,000” (2008: 206) and “109,146 arriving in Peru” (2008: 222) during those same years. Regarding Chile, “if we are to believe the Chilean general census, there were less than 1,000 Chinese in all Chile in 1885” (2008: 244). Finally, although Meagher’s study does not include figures on Colombia, considering that during this period, Panama was still part of today’s Colombian territory, he pointed out that: “A thousand Chinese were brought to Panama in 1854 to help build the Panama railway” (2008: 272). For more studies dedicated to the Chinese diaspora in Colombia, see (Fleischer 2012; Camargo 2021).

brought only grief, devastation, and even more poverty to an already very much impoverished population.

On top of that, the European colonialist powers demanded reparations in the form of taxes in order to compensate for the losses they suffered in wars that they themselves initiated. As a consequence, many peasants suffered the expropriation of their lands, and several industries were weakened by the forced introduction of international products that did not pay any tribute to the falling Qing Empire. Droughts and floods aggravated the already widespread famine and poverty, while trade came to an almost standstill (Takaki 1989). Although the ravages of war were felt until the Northern capital of Beijing, the southeastern provinces were the most affected, as the interests of the colonial powers were mostly focused on the port regions. For this reason, most of the first Chinese immigrants in Latin America were originally from provinces such as Fujian and Guangdong (Cesarín 2010: 105).

Besides working the land and developing the coal and gold mining industry, the Chinese also participated in the construction of the Panama Railway, a project which started in 1854, almost half a century before Panama won independence from Colombia. As most of the immigration of coolies took place after the abolition of slavery was declared in most of the Latin American countries, their history has tried to be differentiated from the history of slavery in the continent, addressing the Chinese coolies as free or indentured workers. However, as the epigraph that opens this section demonstrates, despite the apparent crusade against slavery of which the Western powers claimed to be the standard bearer, this idea is very far from the actual practice. Only in the case of Cuba, according to Lisa Yun, there is evidence of mortality rates among the transport of Chinese coolies higher than the one of African slaves:

Rebellions, crew assassinations, suicides, thirst, suffocation, and sickness occurred upon the 'devil ships', as the Chinese called them [...] Resistance and rebellion occurred on ships because methods of procuring coolies primarily involved kidnapping by force and deceiving individuals to board ships—then entrapping them. An overwhelming majority of Chinese coolies declared that 'Spanish vessels come to China, and suborning the vicious of our countrymen, by their aid carry away full cargoes of men.' Other candidates for coolie procurement included gullible young men who went to 'recruitment agents' only later to discover that 'we were not to be engaged as labourers but to be sold as slaves' (2008: 18–21).

As noted earlier, all the Creole travel diaries written during this century are unavoidably related to Chinese labor. Either because they are coolie traders, as in the case of Tanco, or because, as in the case of Pedro del Río, they bumped into them on board a vessel or interacted with them on the streets. These were experiences that left an indelible impression on him. However, the diary that is most directly related is the one written by the Peruvian Aurelio García y García.

García y García served as captain of the frigate *Independencia* (García y García 1866: 1) and, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, he was appointed by the then president, Manuel Pardo, to command the first diplomatic mission of Peru to China in 1874. The primary purpose of his mission was to sign a treaty with the Chinese government to regulate the import of Chinese coolie labor to Peru. Due to the high demand for labor force required for agricultural work, especially for guano production (Hollett 2008: 120), García y García intended to agree on the opening of free immigration ports. On this, the Peruvian José de la Riva Agüero, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated in 1872:

Es indudable que sobre bases tan opuestas al espíritu, al verdadero interés y a la aspiración primordial de las emigraciones modernas, no era posible se cimentase entre nosotros la de las razas europeas, y, por regla general, las de los Estados cristianos, únicas convenientes al perfeccionamiento moral de nuestros pueblos [...] los diversos y costosísimos ensayos de inmigraciones europeas realizadas en el país, han demostrado ser estas completamente inadecuadas [...] La emigración asiática ha sido, por sensible y extraño que parezca, la única compatible con las peculiares exigencias de nuestra agricultura [...] En los últimos veinte años, particularmente desde 1855, en que los esclavos fueron emancipados en el Perú, puede decirse que a despecho de la fecundidad asombrosa de nuestro suelo y de los esfuerzos de la capital, la agricultura habría muerto infaliblemente sin la cooperación que vino a prestarle el trabajo de los culíes. [...] Las ventajas que bajo el punto de vista económico ofrecían los emigrantes asiáticos como elementos baratos y permanentes [It is undoubted that on foundations so opposed to the spirit, the true interest, and the primary aspiration of modern emigrations, it was not possible for the European races, and generally the Christian states, the only ones suitable for the moral improvement of our peoples, to take root among us. (...) The various and costly attempts at European immigration carried out in the country have proven to be completely inadequate (...) The Asian emigration has been, as strange and surprising as it may seem, the only one compatible with the particular demands of our agriculture (...) In the last twenty years, particularly since 1855, when the slaves were emancipated in Peru, it can be said that despite the astonishing fertility of our soil and the efforts of the capital, agriculture would have inevitably died without the cooperation provided by the work of the coolies. (...) The advantages that, from an economic standpoint, the Asian emigrants offered as cheap and permanent elements] (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores 1874: 76–77).

Thus, even though the very much Eurocentric Creole elites that were ruling these recently founded republics recognized, as we will see, how ideal it would be for a massive migratory introduction of Europeans for the moral and racial development of their countries. They were also very much aware of the expensive and largely unsuccessful results that such projects had shown from the second decade of the nineteenth century. In one of the earliest systematic studies of the history of the coolie trade, Arnold J. Meagher argues that “the history of their [Chinese coolies] introduction to Peru falls into two separate periods: from 1849 to 1856, the year the Peruvian government intervened to stop the trade, and from 1861, when the ban

was lifted, to 1874. During a quarter of a century, Peru received approximately 110,000 Chinese laborers” (2008: 222). Most of the Chinese workers were settled along the coast in the plantations of cotton and sugar but many also worked on the Chincha Islands, one of the three main guano islands. “Merchant vessels of many nations, but principally British and American, flocked to the Peruvian coast to partake of the carrying trade” (Meagher 2008: 222) of the guano to Asia, North America, and Europe.



Fig. 7: Photograph included with the caption “Li Hung Chang with Lord Salisbury and Lord Curzon” in *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang* (1913) edited by William F. Mannix. Source: Library of Congress. <<https://ccn.loc.gov/13022226>>.

In 1854, some British shipmasters, through the British Privy Council of Trade, requested the British Government to intervene as they had repeatedly witnessed the precariousness and the cruelty in the treatment and living conditions of the Chinese coolies in Peru (Meagher 2008: 223). Consequently, it became one of the countries that drew more attention in the Peking court in relation to the inhuman and degrading treatment that fellow Chinese nationals were receiving in foreign territories, as it was denounced by the then Viceroy of Zhili, Li Hong Zhang on multiple occasions to García y García during his stay in China.

One of them is consigned in the following letter from November 1873: “los chinos del Perú redactaron peticiones públicas en que declaraban que se les castigaba, fatigaba e insultaban; se les hacía sufrir tormento, se les ponía fierros y no se les daba el suficiente vestido y alimento [...] También se les cortó las trenzas, los azotaban y golpeaban, y los tenían privados de toda libertad” [The Chinese in Peru wrote public petitions in which they declared that they were punished, overworked, and insulted; they were made to suffer torment, were shackled, and were not provided with sufficient clothing or food (...) Their braids were also cut, they were whipped and beaten, and were deprived of all freedom] (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores 1974: 217).

As a result, the toughening of the Chinese laws in this regard soon followed and made it impossible for Peru to secure coolie labor into the country (Stewart 1951: 160). As a response to the latest lopsided treaties signed by China with France, Great Britain, the United States, among other nations, it was made clear by de la Riva Agüero that García y García had to insist on “exigir é conceder como excepción, las mismas ventajas, las mismas prácticas y las mismas reservas que se hayan convenido con la nación más favorecida” [To demand and grant, as an exception, the same advantages, the same practices, and the same reservations that have been agreed upon with the most favored nation] (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores 1874: 79). In short, the whole purpose of the mission was to demand the same benefits that the British and others, considered back then as world powers, had obtained as a result of the Opium Wars. Nonetheless, as García y García expressed the following in a letter addressed in response to his Minister of Foreign Affairs:

En aquella fecha dije a usted que la disposición de este gobierno era adversa a los objetivos que me traían al Celeste Imperio pues la contestación escrita del príncipe Kung fecha 9 de julio abiertamente se negaba a entrar en relaciones con el Ministro del Perú [...] mientras no se regresen a su propio suelo todos los culíes extraídos y no se celebre el compromiso de no contratar otros nuevos [On that date, I told you that this government's disposition was unfavorable to the objectives that brought me to the Celestial Empire, as the written response from Prince Kung, dated July 9th, openly refused to engage in relations with the Minister of Peru (...) until all the coolies taken are returned to their own land and the agreement to not hire any more is honored] (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores 1874: 206).

As it was through the diplomatic aid and intervention of the ministers of the United States and Great Britain in China, Frederick Low and Thomas Francis Wade, respectively, that García y García was trying to obtain an audience in the court of Peking, and he asked them to “tratasen de obtener una modificación en las primeras ideas, demasiado violentamente formadas” [Try to obtain a modification of the initial ideas, which were formed too violently] (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores 1874: 206).

This mission was granted, as a result, the diplomatic stay in China of Juan Federico Elmore, who served as secretary to this mission and was later appointed in 1875 to stay in the city of Beijing and serve as Plenipotentiary Minister of Peru to China (Irick 1982: 354). His father, Federico Elmore Percy, was a British officer who participated in the Independence of Peru (Ortíz and Castañeda 2007: 93). Years after Juan Federico Elmore came back from China, he was appointed minister of foreign affairs in August 1891 (Basadre 2014: 159).



Fig. 8: Juan Federico Elmore, taken around 1879 by the renowned photographer Lai Fong and included in *Album of photographs of Peking and its environs*. <<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924126237340>>.

The accelerated material and infrastructural leap brought by the nineteenth century echoed immensely in these travelers and was reflected in their profound faith in progress. All of them, without exception, had great faith in modernization and material progression. For instance, bridging masses of land was not a synonym of imperialism or colonial imposition but a promise of universalization and fraternity for humankind in the case of Tanco.

For him, works such as the construction of the Suez and the Panama Canal were described in his text “Los Viajes” as hopes for the “fraternidad universal [through which] los pueblos se darán las manos, [y] se abrazarán las naciones” [Universal fraternity, (through which) the peoples will extend their hands to one another, (and) the nations will embrace] (1880: 448). For Pratt, this logic was part of something that might be perceived as contradictory in the thought and subjectivity of the lettered Creoles. A contradiction that Pratt exemplifies with the figure of Andrés Bello, who spent more than fifteen years abroad, wrote and published “one of the founding texts of Spanish American literature in England” (1997: 173). This same contradiction can

be perceived in Tanco's travel writing as it carries the "contradictions involved in trying to legitimize hierarchical societies through egalitarian ideologies" (Pratt 1997: 182). As I have already pointed out, although most of the independence movements in Latin America took place during the first half of the nineteenth century, from the second half emerged an alternative path for the global hegemony of the Northern empires. This is better described by Pratt through the concept of *anti-conquest*, which differs from the enslavement and appropriation of territories and is achieved through a more abstract appropriation. That gave the European expansionist project a more benign approach sheltered by the promise of progression, modernization, and humanism (Pratt 1997: 38–39). Therefore, the development and refining of transport and communication technologies were not simply part of a disinterested advancement. They became facilitators that contributed to the development of traveling and tourism, hand in hand with playing an essential role in empire-building and colonization (Carr 2002: 70).

As I have suggested, the transit traced by Pratt is located between the metropolis and the periphery. However, there is, at least for the Latin American travelers to China during the nineteenth century, an imperial eye that the lettered Creole inherited from their colonial past and which is the eye through which, for the most part, they see, experience, and understand the reality around them. Thus, as a coolie trader Nicolás Tanco is the Creole traveler who has the most direct connection with this alternative or renewed form of European expansionism from the perspective of the anti-conquest because "The anti-conquest «underwrite» colonial appropriation, even as it rejects the rhetoric, and probably the practice, of conquest and subjugation" (Pratt 1997: 53).

For instance, even though he is not just a witness but a facilitator of that imperialist expansion, the apparent absence of violence or the indirect form of subjugation that Tanco exerts allows him to evade any feeling of guilt derived from his role as coolie "trader." Thus, in the introduction to *Viaje*, Pedro María Moure, who was a fellow conservative and a close friend, referred to Tanco's role in China as a "migration agent" and as part of an attempt to "reemplazar el trabajo africano por medio de la inmigración asiática" [To replace African labor through the means of Asian immigration] (Tanco [1861] 2013: 28), describing it as a delicate task and a humanitarian effort. Likewise, Moure refers to Tanco's decision to take on that role as a selfless and altruistic choice because "sin temer comprometer sus intereses, fijándose solamente en que la inmigración iba a destruir la esclavitud: tenía delante una cuestión humanitaria" [Without fearing the compromise of their interests, focusing solely on the fact that immigration would abolish slavery: they faced a humanitarian issue] (Tanco [1861] 2013: 28).



Fig. 9: Juan Federico Elmore posing together with the foreign ministers of Belgium, United States, Great Britain, Austria, Japan, Spain, Germany, Russia, and France. Included in *Album of photographs of Peking and its environs* taken by Lai Fong around 1879. <<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924126237340>>.

As Rosario Hubert argues, in his diary of over five hundred pages of extension, Tanco does not dedicate more than a couple of lines to the description of his job or the particularities of his duties: “he does not refer to any humanitarian affair and instead acknowledges it as a high-risk and high-revenue transaction” (Hubert 2015: 46). Additionally, as a manifestation of the *anti-conquest* nature of his perspective, he disguises his involvement in this very much inhumane business under the facade of a “liberator,” “to conceal his participation in what was already an infamous human trade, he re-fashions his traveling persona from that of a ‘chinero’ (coolie trader) to that of a Christian pilgrim” (Hubert 2015: 46).

In the same way as the ideals of *liberty*, *equality*, and *fraternity* were not conceived by the French bourgeoisie to be applicable to the enslaved people in their colonies, the ideals of emancipation of the secessionist Creoles were not intended to be relevant to the black, indigenous, or Chinese. Therefore, there was no interest in decolonizing structures related to the legitimization of the Creole rule and dominance, such as racialized hierarchical structures of abuse and exploitation, which were even intensified after the independence declarations (Pratt 1997: 188). A clear expression of this phenomenon is the fact that the Peruvian mission to China led by García y García intended to replicate the same oppressive demands that the Western powers claimed to the very hand-tied Qing empire. In Hong Kong, Tanco is staying at a luxurious Club House from which balcony he sees

Asomado a la espaciosa baranda o balcón que da a la calle principal, Queen’s Road, pasé algunas horas muy divertido [...] las aceras se hallan cubiertas de peones o cargadores conocidos

con el nombre de culíes, con sus enormes sombreros de paja, de ala anchísima y la copa rematando en punta; los tales culíes arman un alboroto extraordinario. [...] se la pasan sentados en los escalones al frente de las casas, con sus largas varas o palos para cargar al lado, aguardando el momento que venga un extranjero y los llame para emplearlos [...] hasta que viene algún malayo, de los que componen el cuerpo policial, y empieza a dispersarlos a fuerza de latigazos. En todo país inglés, en la más miserable colonia, existe siempre una admirable policía que inspira confianza a todo extranjero [Leaning over the spacious railing or balcony that overlooks the main street, Queen's Road, I spent several hours quite entertained. The sidewalks were covered with laborers or porters known as coolies, wearing their enormous straw hats with wide brims and pointed tops. These coolies caused an extraordinary commotion. They spent their time seated on the steps in front of the houses, their long poles or rods by their sides, waiting for the moment when a foreigner would come by and call on them for work. Then, a Malay policeman, part of the local force, would arrive and begin scattering them with a lash of his whip. In every English-speaking country, even in the most miserable of colonies, there is always a remarkable police force that inspires confidence in every foreigner] ([1861] 2013: 308).

Despite being directly involved in the coolie trade, Tanco defines himself first and foremost as a traveler and never ceases to see and describe the coolies with the eyes of a traveler. He almost sees them with the enjoyment and leisure of a tourist, which serves as a masquerade of his true purposes in China.

Christianity and Western Civilization as a Borderless “Nation of Faith”

When proposing a reading of Tanco's diary, it is unavoidable to address the issue of his religious agenda. Right upon his arrival at the port of Hong Kong on June 25th, 1855, Tanco dedicates more pages to the history of the Spanish and Portuguese religious missions in China than to his historical review of the country or even to the very narration of his first impressions of this city. Thus, for more than a year of living in the port city of Xiamen, back then called Amoy by the foreign settlers, Tanco had established a close friendship with the Spaniard Dominican missionaries. They were in charge of the Catholic mission in Fujian, a province located in Southeastern China. With great pride, Tanco wrote in his diary that “¡Un solo padre español ha hecho más conversiones que todos los protestantes juntos! Esto habla, sin necesidad de comentarios muy elocuentemente a favor de nuestras misiones [...] ¿Habrá vínculos que unan más a los hombres que el idioma, la religión y el nacionalismo o paisanaje?” [One single Spanish father has made more conversions than all the Protestants put together! This speaks, without the need for very eloquent commentary, most powerfully in favor of our missions... Are there any bonds that unite men more than language, religion, and nationalism or the ties of one's homeland?] ([1861] 2013: 356). It is clear that, in contrast to the previously quoted

passage, in the context of the Christian faith, Tanco disregards all borders and encompasses all in an *us*, which is only feasible as long as that *us* remains Christian.

Thus, it is possible to say that the “nation of faith” is a strategic mechanism that Tanco uses to inscribe himself as a marginal Granadino in the midst of the centralities of the European metropolis. Therefore, on this occasion, the Spanish missions in China are not, for him, the missions of “*them* the Europeans” but of “*us* the Christians.” In this case, from Tanco’s perspective, what makes this nation of faith so powerful is its capacity not only to break down the territorial borders between Europe and New Granada but its strength to also lift the boundaries between the imperial center and the subaltern periphery. That is how the ties bound by the devotion to the Catholic faith can be stretched to the very confines of nationalism.

There are several other occasions in which this nation of faith is manifested. One of them takes place in Hong Kong when Tanco visited the convent of the Sisters of Saint Paul of Chartres. There, the cultural and religious closeness experienced by Tanco makes “French” and “Catholic” synonyms in their familiarity. This nation of faith is an oasis that contrasts with the sea of strangeness that surrounds him while in China: “‘Asile de la Sainte-Enfance’. ¡Cuánto gusto me dio ver, en medio de multitud de casuchas chinas, este establecimiento! Ramificación de la respetable institución que lleva este nombre en Francia” [‘Asile de la Sainte-Enfance’ How much pleasure it gave me to see, amidst a multitude of Chinese hovels, this establishment! A branch of the respectable institution that bears this name in France ([1861] 2013: 310). It seems like a return to the homeland, to the homeland of his faith, which can be French, Spanish, or Granadina, as long as it is Catholic.

Throughout his narration, concepts such as Catholicism, “Christian Civilization,” and “Western Civilization” are closely connected and are terms that Tanco uses interchangeably. This connection lays the foundation for the imagined “nation of the Catholic faith,” a nation whose territories extend over continents and is consistently widening its borders.

This imaginary built around the idea of a transcontinental Christian nation and its ties with the desires for expansion, which were a top priority in the Western agenda, are already evident in the introduction of *Viaje* written by Moure. As a writer and an adventurous traveler himself, Moure openly expressed his sympathies for the bondage between material advancement through modernization and moral progression through Christian instruction: “Con el cristianismo entrará en China la civilización, su inseparable compañera; la muchedumbre se convertirá en nación, el chino en hombre y el fiel en Cristiano” [With Christianity, civilization will enter China, its inseparable companion; the multitude will become a nation, the Chinese man will become a human being, and the faithful will become Christians] ([1861] 2013: 11).

In relation to the concept of the “West,” something interesting becomes apparent from these lines. Despite having the European metropolis as a traditional geographical reference, this “nation of faith” is, in fact, considerably flexible in terms of what or who can be regarded as “Western.” As a quality, it can be extended as far as the Far East, as long as it is Christianized. This is why, according to Moure, only through its Christianization could China go from being a crowd to being a nation and become part of this extended stronghold of the Western world.

Similarly, civilization as a concept also has multiple edges throughout Tanco’s travel diary. The existence of several civilizations is recognized as synonymous with the existence of several cultures. However, when used as an adjective, it is greatly simplified since it is evident that, although there are many civilizations, there is only one civilized civilization: the Western one. Hence, although Tanco has previously recognized China as a civilization, shortly after stepping on Chinese soil, he wrote that it was a country that had been deprived of “the light of civilization” ([1861] 2013: 292). In this case, such formulation is exclusively referring to the Western/Christian civilization, a concept that is directly linked to material progression and modernization, an advantage that other civilizations lack.

Such predominance reaches a point in which everything that seems to make China a civilization is only recognized in terms of its proximity to Christian values or its equivalents to Western principles. Hence, for instance, Tanco refers to Confucius, of whom he declares himself an admirer, not without first saying that he is the Herodotus of China and that he was sent by God to enlighten the Chinese. One clear example is that without further argument, Tanco assures that the founding fathers of Chinese thought and society Yao, Chun, and Yu¹⁶ “no cabe la menor duda” [There is not the slightest doubt] ([1861] 2013: 294), “si bien se examina se verá que son tales los puntos de semejanza que tienen entre sí que no podrían menos que ser las mismas personas. El llamado Fo-Hi¹⁷ ¿quién otro podría ser sino Noe?” [If one examines carefully, it will be seen that the points of similarity between them are such that they could only be the same individuals. The so-called Fo-Hi—who else could he be but Noah?] ([1861] 2013: 294). As might be expected, the argument to defend this

16 Most likely referring to Yao 尧, *Dishun* 帝舜, *Dayu* 大禹.

17 The origin of this comparison between *Houji* 后稷 and Noah from Christian mythology is that by the time Yao became an emperor (2333–2234 BCE), there was an urge to engineer a system to control the tremendous floods of the event known as the Great Flood. Dayu’s father failed to achieve that task after several attempts, but Dayu continued the project and was able to succeed, presumably thanks to the help provided by Houji, who depending on the version was a god or a demigod mostly related to agriculture. That is the reason why Dayu is actually known as *Dayu zhishui* 大禹治水 (Dayu who controls the waters).

hypothesis is never inverted. There are so many coincidences that it can almost be assured that Fo-Hi was, in fact, Noah, but never that Noah was actually Fo-Hi.

As it has been shown, the Catholic faith is an element that, to a greater or lesser extent, is present in all the travel writing of the Latin Americans that visited China during this century. Such is its impact that its presence is evident even regardless of the different political affiliations of the travel writers. Some, like Tanco, leaned toward the conservative forces; and others, like the Chilean Pedro del Río, claimed to be liberals and, in his case, a “católico poco practicante” [a Catholic of little practice] (1912: 172). Despite that, while he was on a ship on his way to Singapore from Canton, he heard the first official of the ship talking to other officials and saying, “pestes de los españoles, i como aún no me diese por aludido, siguió insultando a los católicos” [They spoke ill of the Spaniards, and since I still did not take it personally, he continued insulting the Catholics] (1884: 331). As a Catholic, del Río felt offended by those comments and addressed the official, saying that “no permitiré que usted siga espresandose de esa manera” [I will not allow you to continue expressing yourself in that manner] (1884: 331). His filiation with Spain as a nation is not strong enough to intervene, but Catholicism works on this occasion as a wider “nation” that surpasses geographical boundaries and stretches its limits far enough for del Río to feel identified and to think that the conversation refers to him.

The Creole Journeys in the Context of Nineteenth-Century China

As global peripheries, not only Latin America but also China are undergoing a re-signifying phase of their national narratives during this time. It is important to point out that for around two centuries, the foreign minority of the Manchu had ruled over China. They played a significant role in the fall of the Ming dynasty and in the later establishment of the Qing empire in the seventeenth century. A dynasty that, despite being new, set the beginning of the end of the millenary dynastic reign and made the way for China’s Republican era. In the nineteenth century, among the many consequences of the first Opium Wars, the British forced the Chinese to engage in an economic liberalization and imposed cultural openness.

On the other hand, there is also a noteworthy historical juncture in the context of the Nueva Granada that gave the journeys of Colombian travelers to the Orient particular importance. The recent arrival of the liberals to power and the great number of reforms that arrived with them had shaken the social ladder and threatened the permanence of the conservative lettered elite in the highest echelon. One of the most important liberal reforms that forcefully questioned the social and political legitimacy of the Creole elite in power was the project of a secularized education and the weakening of the participation of the church in state decisions. An

ambition whose ultimate goal was “la destrucción de las instituciones coloniales y el acceso a la modernidad republicana y democrática” [the dismantling of colonial institutions and the transition to republican and democratic modernity] (Martínez 1996: 108). Even though Frederic Martínez analyzes this juncture in the context of the travel diaries of conservative Colombians along their passage through the Middle East, especially the Christian holy land, we will see how the main points of his arguments are also applicable to the journeys to China.

As Martínez points out, it is by no means fortuitous that the great majority of the Colombian travelers to the Orient were members of the conservative party. These travel writings served the Creole elite as a strategy to distort the liberal project of secularization. As Martínez explains, “el relato de viaje a Oriente se impone en primer lugar, como un instrumento de pedagogía cristiana” [The travel narrative to the East first and foremost imposes itself as a tool of Christian pedagogy] (1996: 105). This is only possible if we consider that “Oriente ofrece entonces un álbum de imágenes edificantes: la piedad ejemplar de los misioneros de tierra santa, la resistencia de los religiosos perseguidos por los poderes impíos de Europa, la obra civilizadora del cristianismo y los progresos de la modernidad católica” [The East then offers an album of edifying images: the exemplary piety of the missionaries in the Holy Land, the resistance of the religious persecuted by the godless powers of Europe, the civilizing work of Christianity, and the progress of Catholic modernity] (Martínez 1996: 109).

Therefore, the Orient acts as a mirror in which this conservative lettered elite saw their own reflection. As members of these elites, the lettered Creoles devoted most of their efforts to the legitimation of the new ruling class they represented. With this, they tried to ratify their position as the fittest to govern, availing themselves of their racial and educational closeness to the Northern colonial empires. They could see themselves reflected in their role as the only ones capable of governing the barbaric Latin American societies of the time, as their European homologues had exemplarily done in the distant lands of the equally barbaric Orient.

There can be no better example of this legitimation of the Creole social and political climbing than Tanco. Over the course of *Viaje*, Tanco presents a very much inimitable intertwining of tensions and contradictions. First, he is a colonized subject coming from a land that recently became independent, who is now on a journey to a contrastingly millenary civilization such as China. Moreover, at the time of his visit, China was being ravaged by the same yoke of European colonialism from which his home nation had recently set itself free. Finally, as a coolie trader, Tanco represents a subject that takes, in fact, an active role as part of the imperial colonizing advance over China.

He widely and recurrently acclaims this alliance between Catholic evangelization for moral progress and Western modernization for industrial development. That is the reason why he sets France as the central axis and as the capital of the world:

La nación francesa, a pesar de la escuadra considerable que sostiene en el mar de China, no ha ocupado siempre el lugar que le corresponde, y el pueblo chino no sabe todavía todo lo que vale esta nación, ni la respeta como debiera. Francia, foco de la civilización europea, o mejor dicho occidental, debe serlo con el tiempo de la oriental: en el mar de la India, en la China, en Corea, en Japón, por todos estos países tiene intereses y debe conservar y sostener su influencia, protegiendo las misiones católicas, únicas fuentes de donde debe correr la futura civilización de estas comarcas. Solo la conversión de estas puede traer su completa apertura al comercio del mundo y al engrandecimiento moral [The French nation, despite the considerable fleet it maintains in the Chinese seas, has not always occupied the place it deserves, and the Chinese people still do not fully understand the value of this nation, nor do they respect it as they should. France, the focal point of European, or rather Western, civilization, must, with time, become the focal point of Eastern civilization: in the Indian Ocean, in China, in Korea, in Japan, throughout these countries, it has interests and must preserve and sustain its influence, protecting the Catholic missions, the sole sources from which the future civilization of these regions must flow. Only the conversion of these peoples can bring their full opening to the world's commerce and to moral greatness] ([1861] 2013: 385).

Unlike the concept of “colonial frontier,” the term “contact zone” is not only delimited with respect to Europe, but it embraces, as in this South-South transit, the “co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt 1997: 7). This intersection requires an improvisational dimension, in view of the unprecedented nature of this contact, which for the Latin Americans in China implies the creation of new patterns and models to observe, experience, write, and represent that other world margin. Thus, despite the reproduction of colonialist visions of the world in most Latin American travelers, the eyes with which even the lettered Creoles observed and wrote China were eyes that, since the seventeenth century, had already been laying the groundwork of independent thinking and being (Benítez-Rojo 1993: 185). Consequently, this zone of interaction between Latin America and China proposes new focal points that, at times, manages to provincialize Europe¹⁸ from this alternative transpacific cartography.

¹⁸ I borrow that term from *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* by Dipesh Chakrabarty. The Europe that is intended to be provincialized is not attached to a geographic delimitation but an imagined space. The main purpose, but also the main challenge, is to mobilize categories of the European rationalization of the world to differentiate the development of capitalism and modernity in “non-European life- worlds.” Chakrabarty sets apart two types of

Therefore, even though these diaries do not transcend the margin that divides this binary logic and might not always or entirely stand as dissident voices of the Western modernizing project, their encounter with China displaces and dislocates them from their traditional foundational narratives and national rhetoric. In this sense, travel writing possesses a unique character since it serves as the written testimony of the detachment experienced by the traveler from everything they regard as known and familiar. With this in mind, I would argue that these transpacific encounters fractured established frameworks and gave rise to alternative perspectives. In their distinctiveness, they managed to raise questions about the apparent normalization of colonial structures and the geopolitical configurations of imperial authority. Their encounter with China compelled them to refocus their vision and their enunciation points, not just in terms of how to represent and position themselves in relation to China but also in relation to themselves and their home nations. On their pages, there is an already manifested desire to get hold of their own universality and stand for an initial articulation toward the right to their own counter-hegemonic form of cosmopolitanism.

These diaries traced, for the first time, a written transit between these two world peripheries, which shared, despite their cultural and geographic distance, the indelible condition of colonial subjects. In the same way, they also represent not just an exceptional opportunity as a peripheral subject to write from the perspective of one periphery about another but also the chance for Latin Americans to record themselves as writing and traveling subjects. This also contributed to contend against the limits of geographical and conceptual borders between centers and margins along the course of their journeys.

In this sense, for Tanco, the conquest of the centrality is a lost battle in Europe because for him and for the elite to which he belongs, their provincial nature is an indelible burden. Tanco recognizes, nonetheless, that the national labels that are a subproduct of the colonization of America and of the hierarchies and distributions resulting from the discourses around *mestizaje* and the construction of *mestizo* nations are erased in China: “Para el chino no hay más mundo ni país que el suyo, y es lo único que les importa conocer” [For the Chinese, there is no other world or country but their own, and it is the only one they care to know] ([1861] 2013: 401). “En el Celeste Imperio, donde lo mismo es ser inglés que francés, español, ruso,

history. The first one is focused on the social relations that replicate and are conditioned by capital, The second one submerges capital in a very intricate fabric of human interactions, which trap and obstruct the capital from moving onward and make way to “affective narratives” that refuse to be historicized under the standardization of capital in terms of belonging, truth, and memory.

turco o americano, donde todos son *fanguais*¹⁹, demonios de Occidente, en épocas de conmociones políticas el viajero corre todo género de peligros” [In the Celestial Empire, where it is the same to be English, French, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, or American, where all are ‘fanguais,’ demons of the West, in times of political upheaval, the traveler faces all kinds of dangers] ([1861] 2013: 423).

Therefore, resulting from this array of tensions, throughout his diary, Tanco detaches himself, sometimes even strategically, from his own labels as a peripheral subject. The purpose of that is to imagine and represent himself from an illusory belonging to a center, from which, some other times, he also withdraws his own presence. Therefore, due to the continuous relocation of Tanco’s position between the center and periphery borders, his diary represents a vision that manages to confront the very nature of these limits as they become malleable. Despite the usually contradictory and indefinite nature of Tanco’s positioning, the idea of the European mission to the Orient as an exemplary quest for Christian modernization and expansion is a project with which Tanco fully agrees and is quite consistent all along his narration. In his own words: “La sociedad en China yace como un pozo estancado en el fondo del cual germina toda especie de elementos de corrupción. Es menester que venga la civilización cristiana y que con sus torrentes disipe toda impureza para que el habitante del Imperio Celeste tenga paz y libertad, dicha y ventura” [Society in China lies like a stagnant pool, at the bottom of which all kinds of corrupting elements germinate. It is necessary for Christian civilization to come and, with its torrents, dissipate all impurity so that the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire may have peace and freedom, happiness and prosperity] ([1861] 2013: 354).

This suggests that the displacements in his ways of positioning and representation strategies are not carried out in this diary exclusively through the reversal of these roles, that is to say, through the achievement of a central position over a peripheral one, but they are chosen depending on the intended effect and place of enunciation. Consequently, his displacement through a journey which is geographical, also becomes a displacement of the limits, not only semantic or symbolic of centers and peripheries, but also a redefinition of the distribution of these categories through the ways of inhabiting them.

Therefore, as I have suggested, traveling implies a displacement that ends up putting out of order and decentering the distribution of those categories. As a result, what was perceived back home as a dual dichotomy becomes more and more complex, and multiple edges start to appear along the journey. For instance, Tanco also finds multiple centers and margins that differ from the limits of the one that dominated back home in order to expand them. In Havana, he felt “exotic” when, from

19 *Fangui* 番鬼

his perspective as a Creole, visited a neighborhood inhabited predominantly by peninsular Spaniards ([1861] 2013: 69). Moreover, in his pass-through France, he recognizes that there are centers and margins not just within the country as when he says that: “resultará que en Francia no habrá más que una sola ciudad, o, si se quiere, que toda Francia se convertirá en París. A fuerza de centralizar, desaparecen las cuestiones de descentralización” [It will result that in France there will be only one city, or, if you will, that all of France will become Paris. By centralizing, the issues of decentralization disappear] ([1861] 2013: 155). However, even within the city of Paris, something similar occurs when he traces a very complex socioeconomic map of the city in which he delineates the existence of several centers and peripheries inside Paris all along chapters VII and VIII ([1861] 2013: 180–212). Even more interesting is the fact that while living in China, Tanco not only recognizes his place as a *fanguí* 番鬼 (foreign demon) but also acknowledges alternative formations of despairing centers and peripheries within China itself:

El *li-yan-yuen* o junta colonial tiene a su cargo la vigilancia e inspección de todas las tributas en la Mongolia, Cobdo, Yli y Kokonor, llamadas *wai-fan*²⁰ o extranjeros externos para distinguirlos de las tribus tributarias en Sz'cheuan²¹ y Formosa²², a las que se les da el nombre de *nui-fan*²³ o extranjeros internos. Hay también *nui-i* y *wai-i*²⁴, o bárbaros internos y externos, bajo cuya denominación se comprende a los salvajes montañeses de Kwei Chan y a los habitantes de todo país extranjero [The *li-yan-yuen* or colonial board is responsible for the surveillance and inspection of all the tributes in Mongolia, Cobdo, Yli, and Kokonor, known as *wai-fan* or external foreigners to distinguish them from the tributary tribes in Sz'cheuan and Formosa, which are called *nui-fan* or internal foreigners. There are also *nui-i* and *wai-i*, or internal and external barbarians, under which term the wild mountain people of Kwei Chan and the inhabitants of all foreign countries are included] ([1861] 2013: 340).

Therefore, in China, Tanco can represent himself as European because the points of reference for representing centrality within the Chinese territory vary substantially from the ones established in Europe and Nueva Granada. This is by no means to suggest that centrality and peripherality do not exist in this context. By contrast, they operate independently from the metropolitan distributions, and they are set

20 *Wai-fan* 外番.

21 Sichuan 四川.

22 Formosa was the name that from the sixteenth century, the Portuguese started to use when referring to Taiwan, but as Amoy (Xiamen), the name became popular among foreign Westerners even until the twentieth century. Later in 1895, Formosa was the name that the island of Taiwan received as a republic when it was ceded to the Empire of Japan by the Qing dynasty.

23 *Nei-fan* 内番.

24 *Neiyi* 内夷 and *waiyi* 外夷, correspondingly.

according to their own criteria. Fang Weigui explains that the term *dongyi* 东夷 was initially used in reference to the Eastern barbarians, but later:

The character 夷 *yi* gained greater universality and came to signify, in addition to the eastern inhabitants, “barbarians” of the periphery in general—in contrast to the peoples of 夏 *xia* 华 *hua* or 夏华 *huaxia* (i.e., the inhabitants of what was to be called the Middle Kingdom later on). The term *yi* which thus referred to “barbarian” peoples of the periphery living on “Chinese” soil or that of vassal states, was used since the late Ming and early Qing dynasty not only for additional groups of people surrounding the Middle Kingdom, but also for Europeans and Americans, so as to underline the inferiority of other human beings and cultures (Fang 2001: 96).

The invalidation of the traditional distribution of the limits of these power dynamics and roles of the “West” when in China is evident in *Viaje* on various occasions. One of them takes place when Tanco is walking along the narrow streets of Xiamen, with which he was probably quite familiar due to his already prolonged stay in the city. He notices that women and children flee as he approaches. In this particular occasion, Tanco enunciates himself as European: “¿de dónde procede este temor que les inspiraba? He aquí lo que causa una grande impresión: estos pobres salvajes nunca han visto un europeo y naturalmente todo les sorprende, figura, traje, aspecto, etc., todo es diferente a lo de ellos y les llama la atención” [Where does this fear that they inspired come from? Here is what causes a great impression: these poor savages have never seen a European and naturally everything surprises them—figure, clothing, appearance, etc.—everything is different from their own, and it catches their attention] ([1861] 2013: 315). This passage is quite compelling since he intends to marginalize the Chinese, calling them “savages” and placing himself in a dominant or centric position when he identifies as European. Even so, seeing this scene from another perspective, he is also being marginalized not because he is Granadino but rather because he is a *non-huaxia* 华夏, or in more modern terms, non-Chinese.

Even though there are multiple occasions in which this circumstance allows him to enunciate himself as European, Spaniard, or Westerner throughout his narration, there are specific situations in which Tanco prefers or would prefer to be distinguished as a Granadino and not to be seen or addressed just as another European. I will refer to two of these occasions as I find them the most illustrative. The first one takes place on a day in which Tanco is invited to a banquet offered by a Mandarin official. His thoughts and impressions of that day are particularly interesting. The scientific vision had been, to this point, an essential feature of *Viaje* since it had as its main focus the exterior/objective rather than the interior/subjective of the traveling experience. Nonetheless, in this passage, Tanco decides to put himself in the center of the narration:

¡Un granadino en el fondo de la China, obsequiado por una de las principales autoridades del imperio, asistiendo a un banquete de mandarín en el Imperio Celeste a seis mil leguas de su patria! ¿Qué papel hacía yo allí rodeado de más de trescientas personas todas de una raza distinta a la mía? estas impresiones eran para mí la principal, pues de la comida, como ya he dicho, nada gusté y de la función dramática solo la parte mímica pude comprender [A Granadian in the heart of China, honored by one of the main authorities of the empire, attending a banquet of a Mandarin in the Celestial Empire, six thousand leagues away from his homeland! What was I doing there, surrounded by more than three hundred people, all of a race different from mine? These impressions were the most important to me, for as I have already mentioned, I tasted nothing from the meal, and from the dramatic performance, I could only understand the mimed part] ([1861] 2013: 326–327).

From this perspective, as he observes, the most impressive thing is not the reality that he witnesses but it is to see himself surrounded by that reality. To that effect, it is then even favorable to identify himself as Granadino, given that, in this case, if he had identified as European, then that would not be impressive any longer. It is worth noting that, on this occasion in which he enunciates himself as Granadino, it is only meaningful as it allows him at the same time to distinguish and make himself exceptional from the rest of the Granadinos at large. Not just because of the reduced number of them who managed to set foot on Chinese soil during this century but also the even more reduced number that could have been invited and entertained by this distinguished Mandarin feast. That is how Tanco intends to position his narration from a discursive geography that is neither the metropolitan European nor the provincial Granadino.

The second occasion took place in December 1857 when, on his return to Hong Kong, Tanco found that due to the breakout of the Second Opium War one year before, all commercial transactions had been brought to a halt, and England and France had planned on attacking the city of Canton on the 28th of that month:

En el seno de una sociedad semejante se vive sin garantías, sin seguridad, sin el goce de aquellas inmunidades que conceden ciertas leyes prescritas por la humanidad, y sancionadas por la costumbre en todo pueblo culto. En cualquier punto de Europa, así como en cualquiera de América, el viajero que no toma cartas en las escenas políticas siempre goza de garantías y es respetado [In the heart of such a society, one lives without guarantees, without security, without the enjoyment of those immunities granted by certain laws prescribed by humanity and sanctioned by custom in every civilized people. In any part of Europe, as well as in any part of America, the traveler who does not engage in political scenes always enjoys guarantees and is respected] ([1861] 2013: 422–423).

Tanco's claim is based on a position that, if stated by him would be: "*Me*, originally from New Granada, a territory devoid of conflicts with China, should be exempted from the outrages of this war caused by *them*, the Europeans." However, if seen from another angle, we could also say that Tanco actually blames China for the

current circumstances, despite the fact that it is the Chinese nation that was invaded and under attack. This means that, even though he wants to be set apart from Europe, his trust in the project of the Western expansion over China, the liberalization of its economy, and the Christianization of its beliefs makes him a supporter and advocate of that enterprise.

In this sense, the term “autoethnography,” proposed by Mary L. Pratt, is a very useful lens through which to analyze these forms of identification and representation of Tanco’s subjectivity; Pratt defines it as the “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” (1997: 77).

Therefore, by self-identifying as “European,” Tanco not simply engages with the colonizer, but he appropriates the term just because the context allows him to do it. However, I would also argue that he distances himself from it too. The ethnographic representation encompasses a rather clear and demarcated definition of others in order to continue operating as a mechanism of subjugation. Nonetheless, the ways of Tanco’s “autoethnography” are rather unsettled and are changing from page to page, not in accordance with a specified set of rules but subject to the circumstances.

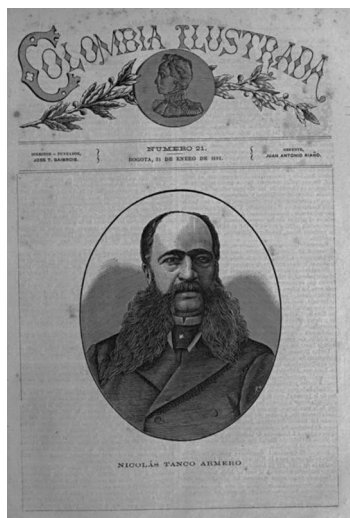


Fig. 10: Nicolás Tanco Armero. Portrait published in the newspaper *Colombia Ilustrada*, no. 21 January 31st, 1891. Source: Banco de la República. Hemeroteca Digital. <<https://babel.banrepcultural.org/digital/collection/p17054coll26/id/7742>>.

As I proposed earlier in this chapter, it is evident that in regard to Tanco's identity, the plasticity that representation and auto-representation have in *Viaje* is exclusive of his encounter with China. Accordingly, this reaffirms, in fact, that the South-South connection that this transit entails is exceptional as it exceeds the traditional periphery-metropolis layout. It engages in a rather periphery-periphery transit, which opens new ways for the forms of representation and identification since they rely on more ductile dynamics. This is yet another evidence of the fact that the displacement that this geographical travel implies occurs simultaneously with a displacement of the limits between centers and peripheries. Once in contact with a different reality that is driven by an alternative distribution of these forces, then global tensions take on new meanings and interpretations. As I suggested earlier, they vary depending on their place of construction and enunciation.

The Orient: Images and Objects

En ti están sus grandezas abreviadas:
 tu las basteces de oro y plata fina
 y ella a ti de cosas más preciadas;
 en ti se junta España con la China,
 Italia con Japón, y finalmente,
 un mundo entero en trato y disciplina
 en ti de los tesoros del poniente
 se goza lo mejor; en ti, la nata
 de cuanto entre su luz cría el oriente.²⁵

La Grandeza Mexicana, Bernardo de Balbuena, 1604

This closing section is ideal for the present chapter since it serves as a perfect hinge between the nineteenth and the twentieth century because, even though the fascination for the aesthetic of objects and images coming from Asia was much more evident and had a much larger presence in the art and literature of the Latin American *modernistas* about whom I will elaborate more in the next chapter, its origins are much older:

²⁵ Excerpt from the book *La Grandeza Mexicana (Mexico's Grandeur)* by Bernardo de Balbuena, 1604: In you, their greatness is condensed: / you supply them with gold and finest silver, / and they enrich you with treasures far more prized. / In you, Spain and China are entwined, / Italy meets Japan, and ultimately, / a whole world converges in trade and discipline. / In you, the West's most precious wealth is savored; / in you, the very essence / of all that the Orient nurtures in its light.

Chinoiserie, or the European interpretation of Asian decorative arts, was a trend that took shape in the seventeenth century thanks to the modern commercial links that escalated the circulation of “exotic” consumer goods in the West. [...] quickly appropriated by artists and tastemakers all over the West and still suited *Modernismo*’s relationship to the imaginary geographical construct of “the Orient” up to the late nineteenth century (Hubert 2022: 135–136).

As argued before, this extensive material flow of porcelains, silks, fans, folding screens, teapots, vases, etc. had its beginning with the Manila galleon as they were “traded for Mexican and Peruvian silver; [and] sold in Mexico City, with the Spanish-bound items leaving from Veracruz and crossing the Atlantic to Lisbon” (Lowe 2016: 417). Thus, the commercial opening of China, as well as the rapid modernization process undergone during the nineteenth century, made the access to these goods and commodities easier. For centuries, the consolidation of an aesthetic of *Chineseness* was nonetheless an imagined and fantasized idea of China and the Chinese in the European mind molded through the reading of Marco Polo. This European invention of the dreamed, mysterious, and remote China gave way to the aesthetic of the *chinoiserie* and brought to life the works of European artists such as Giuseppe Venanzio or François Boucher.

Despite that, it is interesting to note that the aesthetic of the *chinoiserie* has been mostly explored from a transatlantic perspective, and its artistic expressions have been almost exclusively studied with Europe at the center. This approach has disregarded the indispensable transpacific transit of such commodities from Asia to the New World in the first place. However, even more important is the fact that in the nineteenth century, “it was imported Chinese labor that facilitated the large-scale extraction of commodities Latin America exchanged for *chinoiserie* goods [...] the fantasies of *chinoiserie* commodities are inextricably linked to the terror of Chinese labor” (Hubert 2022: 136).

Thus, just as the transit of Chinese people to the American continent shaped multiple spheres of Latin American history and its social and cultural life, the transit of objects also had a very interesting influence on the multiple Latin American ways of thinking and creating aesthetic and cultural manifestations that account for these cross-cultural encounters. On this, Lisa Lowe wrote a very compelling article in relation to the exhibition *Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia*, curated by Dennis Carr for the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 2015.

Lowe describes several of the exhibited objects, such as a desk with a tall bookcase. It was made in Puebla, Mexico, in the mid-eighteenth century by mestizo artisans with indigenous materials and painted in an *achinado* style.

It is fashioned after a traditional Anglo-Dutch style bureau [...] with wood embellishments that allude to Dutch ripple moldings and German engraving techniques [However] the interior is painted in a striking red and gold chinoiserie style and on its two cabinet doors [there] is a representation of a map of Veracruz plantation, adorned with symbols [...] identified as Nahuatl hieroglyphs. (2016: 413)

Further into the text, Lowe also describes a “Peruvian weaving featuring traditional Chinese motifs such as peony flowers, phoenixes, and the *qilin*²⁶ (a mythical creature found in Chinese textiles), along with indigenous plants and fauna, blending imported silk with local cotton, wool, and ‘camelid’ (llama or alpaca)” (2016: 421). This very prolific cultural and artistic affluence of materials, techniques, styles, and motifs gives us a broader vision of this material flow and so much to reflect on in relation to the cultural and historical ties between China and Latin America, beyond the mere transport and exchange of merchandise.

As Lowe very well argues, “while *achinado* designs and techniques may echo Asian ones, they are distinctly Latin American” as they “evoke the complex histories of colonialism, slavery, indenture and transhemispheric trades” (2016: 413), which open the door to “remap former understandings of artistic ‘centers’ and ‘peripheries’” (2016: 420). Therefore, it is evident that this material flow plays a fundamental role in the tracing of these South-South ties, and they also prove to be tightly connected with the history of traveling in Latin America. Our multiple travel impressions and encounters with China have influenced the ways in which we have seen and interpreted the world as well as the way in which we have imagined ourselves. For this reason, I have decided to dedicate a section of this chapter to an inquiry of the presence and the role of this material flow of commodities and the aesthetic of the *achinado* (also known as *Zhongguo feng* 中国风) in the Creole travel diaries of this time. All of this with the purpose of understanding the possible impact that they had in the formation of a creole subjectivity or in their forms of identification and positioning.

After the independencies, the arrival and commercialization of commodities coming from China was only accessible to the Creole elites since they were considered luxury goods. A good example of this is the considerably extensive Asian collection that belonged to Pedro del Río and which is exhibited today in the Park Museum Pedro del Río Zañartu located in the city of Hualpen, in the province of Concepción. Most of this collection comprises luxury objects, such as a carved brush holder in marble, porcelain vases, as well as plates and paintings on silk. Nonetheless, it is also interesting to note that a restaurant menu, a newspaper, and an opera program are also part of it as a form of a personal memory, an affective archive

26 *Qilin* 麒麟

that represents the testimony of a journey on the most personal level, carrying through these objects memories and experiences that give account of the particularities of his voyage.

Conversely, luxury is an essential term for understanding of *chinoiserie*. This chapter has suggested that there is a vision that is sometimes detached from the center-periphery distributions. Nonetheless, we can see that the imaginary that surrounds what Tanco calls the Oriental/Asian “luxury” or “splendor,” which fascinates him so much, is actually a fascination for the European construction of the Orient. In other words, the Orient that he appreciates is, in fact, a product of the European imagination in relation to the Orient rather than an admiration for being Asian or Oriental in itself. Therefore, the descriptions of the Oriental or Asian “luxury” or “splendor” appear along this diary with more frequency and vigor during his short stays in metropolitan cities rather than during his long stay in Asia. Sometimes, as we will see in the following example, this reference is not directly associated with a certain style or aesthetic that could be defined as Asian or Oriental per se but as a way of being ostentatious or sumptuous.

For instance, during his stay in the United States, Tanco describes the steamboat that will take him from Richmond to Baltimore as having: “salones [que] están amoblados con sumo lujo: sedas, terciopelos, caobas, embutidos de nácar preciosos, dorados, espejos, pinturas, los caprichos de la arquitectura, hasta el mármol, todo se ostenta de un modo asiático” [The salons, furnished with the utmost luxury: silks, velvets, mahoganies, precious inlays of mother-of-pearl, gilded accents, mirrors, paintings, the whims of architecture, even marble—all displayed in a distinctly Asian manner] ([1861] 2013: 101). Once in New York, Tanco describes his room in the St. Nicholas Hotel as having “un lujo artístico, difícil de describir: es una cosa oriental, una mansión del placer” [An artistic luxury, difficult to describe: it is something oriental, a mansion of pleasure] ([1861] 2013: 105). Thus, even though there are silks from China and other fabrics from India, his descriptions include several other materials of diverse origin, which are not strictly Asian. Thus, his idea of what represents the “Asian” or “Oriental” is much more associated with a way of being “luxurious” rather than being attached to a geographical, cultural, or stylistic delimitation of Asia or the Orient.

This idea of geographical detachment for this concept is reaffirmed when Tanco uses it even during his stay in Asia. Leaving Sri Lanka and on board the *Ganges* vessel, there is no mention of any object or aesthetic reference that could be described as typically Asian or Oriental in his description. In contrast, it is the impressive variety of wines and the limitless consumption allowed to the passengers that he describes as “una magnífica mejora” [a magnificent improvement] comparing it with other transatlantic vessels and which according to him “revela cierta

generosidad, cierto «orientalismo» que agrada” [Reveals a certain generosity, a certain ‘Orientalism’ that is pleasing] ([1861] 2013: 285). Finally, once he arrived in Hong Kong, Tanco stayed in a club house that he defined as “aristocratic” and which was founded and visited by “toda la parte respetable del comercio extranjero en China” [All the respectable part of foreign trade in China]. Its parlors are “amueblados con un lujo asiático” [Furnished with an Asian luxury] which is, in this specific context, a recreation of the metropolitan vision of Asia which is aligned with the presence of “cuartos hermosísimos”, [Exquisite rooms] “baños magníficos” [Magnificent bathrooms] ([1861] 2013: 307). This imaginary metropolitan construction around what is, or represents, Asia or the Orient seems to be the point of reference that serves him as his criteria for judging the Oriental character of the Orient.

Regarding his consumption of this type of European-made images through literature he even admitted during his stay in Cairo that his references are “fantastic visions”: “la realidad no está lejos de las pinturas y fantásticas visiones de los escritores” [The reality is not far from the paintings and fantastical visions of the writers] ([1861] 2013: 241). Thus, once he experiences that reality himself, his reference to define the actual nature of what is Asian or Oriental is still very much anchored to the visions of the European writers that he had previously read and admired, even more tightly than the reality presented right before his eyes. In other words, it is not the text the one that seems to be contrasted to determine its legitimacy, but it is rather the reality that he experiences the one that he intends to confirm in his diary.

The parallel that Rama draws between *ciudad letrada* and *ciudad real* according to which “*La ciudad letrada* quiere ser fija e intemporal como los signos, en oposición constante a la ciudad real que solo existe en la historia y se pliega a las transformaciones de la sociedad” [The lettered city seeks to be fixed and timeless like signs, in constant opposition to the real city, which only exists in history and adapts to the transformations of society] ([1984] 1998: 52) helps to illustrate and to better understand the existent margin in Tanco’s diary between his journey as a reader through the written metropolitan text about the Orient as well as the encyclopedias, history, and philosophy books about China and his journey as a traveler through the physical cities and living societies. As a Creole, his colonial dependency on the metropolis makes his traveling experience highly mediated by the written, text so his commitment to the *ciudad letrada* is evidently more important than his commitment to the *ciudad real*.

This explains why the “Oriental splendor” and the “Asiatic luxury” are attributed mainly to his descriptions of vessels and hotels. Unsurprisingly, these are places frequented mostly by foreigners staying there only temporarily, but these are also adjectives that are never used to describe places beyond this comfort zone.

In contrast, the reality beyond those walls, which is the reality inhabited by the local people, seems to actually contradict all the luxury, ostentation, and splendor of the descriptions that he recalls from his readings, and which are a fundamental part of what he depicts as “Oriental” or “Asiatic.”

The reality to which Tanco is exposed beyond this perimeter denies the Orientalist construction of the European imaginary around the Orient. For instance, even though Tanco had the opportunity to thoroughly stroll and experience the streets of Xiamen, for him, nothing about it seemed to be special: “Jamás se ve un edificio notable por su construcción [...] nunca en ningún ramo se encuentran establecimientos lujosos ni nada que llame la atención o pueda compararse con lo que tenemos en los pueblos de Europa o América” [One never sees a building noteworthy for its construction [...] never, in any field, are there luxurious establishments or anything that draws attention or could be compared with what we have in the towns of Europe or America] ([1861] 2013: 314). The European imaginary about the Orient has colonized not just his imagination and his expectations, but also his experience with the *ciudad real*.

Despite the fact that in the nineteenth century, the narratives around the national identities are barely in a process of self-recognition, and most of these discourses privilege the view of these new republics as a project for the future. Thus, this exploration of the travel writing of the Latin American lettered Creoles to China gave us an opportunity to see certain boundaries set around national identities called into question. It was also clear that, contrary to what was expected, the subjectivity of the lettered Creoles became more multifaceted and complex as a result of their encounter with China because they were forced to interact with their realities under very different distributions and delimitations.

In the next chapter, I will explore the changes that traveling as a social practice and travel writing experienced at the turn of the century. We will see how the consolidation of *Modernismo* in the first decades of the twentieth century gave a new political and aesthetic force to the journeys across China.