

5 Following the Red Star (1950–1966)



Fig. 28: Near Beihai Lake, from left to right: Alipio Jaramillo, Diego Montaña Cuéllar, Jorge Zalamea, and Mr. Barragán during their visit to Beijing in 1952. Source: Personal archive, courtesy of Patricia Zalamea.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111622675-005>

Introduction

With Europe buried under the rubble of two world wars and an image of its civilizing hand drastically blurred as a moral and social referent in the Latin American map of the future, the need for new horizons gained strength. The glimmer of hope left in 1945 by the defeat of Nazism at the end of the Second World War, and the ground gained with the consolidation of left movements in the American subcontinent, aiming for a political and a social transformation, was a hope quickly extinguished by the imminent momentum that the Cold War had gained by 1948 (Joseph/Spenser 2008: 21). Since this war was not fought in the centers of metropolitan modernity, it was regarded in the Global North as “Cold”, but it was, in fact, experienced in most of the Global South in its full force. The partition of colonial India in 1947 and the institutionalization of the apartheid in South Africa in 1948 (Grandin 2011: 8) are just signals of the systemic outburst of totalitarian governments allied with new colonial interests and practices coming from the Western capitalist powers.

In Latin America, by 1947, the rise to power of the Radical Party under Gabriel González Videla in Chile¹ took an unexpected turn to align with Washington’s anti-communist agenda. It restrained the field of influence of the Chilean left, outlawing the Chilean Communist Party (Rothwell 2016: 49) and suppressing the demand for change coming mainly from the mining sector but also from other labor movements (Garay et al. 2016: 95). As for Peru and Colombia, 1948 was also pivotal in the squelching of any popular voices. In October of that year, Peru witnessed the establishment of an authoritarian regime following the military coup led by General Manuel Odría, suppressing all political dissent (Roitman 2013: 45). In Colombia, for its part, the assassination of the Colombian left-wing leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in April unleashed the *Bogotazo*—a massive outburst of protests plunging the country into a long period of acute violence and political instability. In order to restrain it, the conservative leader, and then president, Mariano Ospina Pérez created an anti-communist front.

1 Some of the photographs included in this chapter are part of the exhibition entitled in Chinese *Zhongguo jiyi—zhili huajia hesai wantuleili sheying xiuxie zhan* 中国记忆—智利画家何塞·万徒勒里摄影及速写展 and in Spanish: *Chile y China: la memoria de una amistad pionera desde la figura de José Venturelli*. It was inaugurated on October 14, 2023, at the National Art Museum of China and organized by the *Guo duiwai wenhua jiaoliu xiehui* 国对外文化交流协会 (China International Culture Association) (CICA), the National Art Museum of China, the Embassy of the Republic of Chile in China and the José Venturelli Foundation. To see other exhibited pieces, consult: <<https://www.namoc.org/zgmsg/xw2023/202310/13ccc88c545a4148aa42353913f2a28a.shtml#>>

With the turn of the decade, conditions for political dissidence on the continent did not improve. In the early 1950s, Laureano Gómez, Ospina's successor and fellow conservative, expressly forbade traveling to Communist China (Chávarry 2022: 432). In Chile, despite the rise in popularity that the forces of change gained, Salvador Allende lost the elections both in 1952 and 1958 to right-winged candidates Carlos Ibáñez del Campo and Jorge Alessandri, respectively (Vidal 2020: 166–167).

In other regions of the world, the war took on several shapes and forms. By 1950, the socialist bloc extended from the West in Berlin to the Far East in Canton, and the borders between blocs went through multiple transformations during this part of the century. To isolate and divide, walls, fortifications, military checkpoints, minefields, and watchtowers were erected. But, since it was a war “waged in fiercely doctrinal terms as an ‘invasion’ or delegitimization of the other’s social order, replete with a demonology of the other and a mythology of one’s own eternal virtues” (Joseph and Spenser 2008: 11), narratives were also fabricated. Thus, radio broadcasts, travel chronicles, letters, newspaper articles, and official communiqués circulated inside and between the two halves of this divided world.

Nonetheless, while much of the attention has been focused on the historicization of the division and the tension between the two blocs, with the United States and the Soviet Union as their main protagonists, the new territorial and imaginary layouts imposed by the geopolitics of the moment also misadjusted and redistributed the traditional cartographies between East and West and North and South. Thus, during these years, the world also witnessed the rise of independence movements that shared anti-colonial and anti-imperialist stances in the Global South. Among them are, for instance, Indonesia’s independence declaration from the Dutch empire in 1945 and the struggle for independence from France initiated by the Việt Minh in 1946, which resonated among their neighbors Laos and Cambodia, also French protectorates. Further, the Philippines gained its independence from the United States that same year, followed by Sri Lanka and Myanmar, who obtained recognition of their sovereignty from British colonial rule in early 1948. Finally, although the African Decolonization Movement against European rule gained further development during the 1950s and 1960s, it was during the second half of the 1940s that the movement took its first steps.

Evidently, while the ability to isolate and divide was fundamental on the geopolitical board of these years, the capacity to unite and make new allies through dissident trajectories to the hegemonic ones was a not inconsiderable virtue. This skill proved crucial when it came to gaining representation in the terrains of global influence. Thus, this second half of the century also inaugurated a new and very distinctive period in the circulation of Latin American travelers and their writing of China. By 1950, only eighteen countries had given official recognition to the PRC.

Most of the rest maintained diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (ROC), which retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after the defeat of the KMT. As a result, China's foreign policy experienced a decisive shift with the launching of what has been regarded as a period of *Renwen waijiao* 人文外交, translated as “cultural diplomacy”, “popular diplomacy”, or “people-to-people diplomacy”, which “by using foreigners as a tool to export Chinese culture, the Chinese sought to win friends and neutralize opponents” (Hubert 2017a: 337). Thus, this strategy devised by New China was aimed at obtaining international recognition and establishing alliances with other third-world nations to counterbalance the political influence, the economic blockade, and the international isolation imposed by the United States. These first encounters laid the foundations of the future establishment of official diplomatic relations (Hernández 2020: 277) and, as Jorge Locane argues, were therefore crucial since they set “los cimientos de las redes comerciales que hoy conocemos y que habrían relegado a Europa a una condición provincial y colocado a China en una posición rectora en el orden geopolítico mundial” [The foundations of the commercial networks we know today, which would have relegated Europe to a provincial condition and positioned China as a leading force in the global geopolitical order] (Locane 2022a: 142).

It is in this context, just a little over a month after the establishment of the PRC, the Mexican Vicente Lombardo Toledano and the Cuban Lázaro Peña were invited, as union leaders, to participate in the Asian and Australian Trade Union Conference celebrated in Beijing in 1949 (Ruilova 1977: 98). This gathering, together with the Asia and Pacific Rim Peace Conference also celebrated in the PRC's capital, sent a loud and clear message of peace and unity to the third world, still staggered by the war-mongering reach of the Western powers. Starting right the day after the celebration of the fourth anniversary of the triumph of the Chinese Communist Revolution, this conference was held in Beijing from 2nd to 12th October 1952, and “more than 150 representatives from 11 Latin American countries attended” (Teng 2018: 183).

Daniel Rojas affirms that the event involved the participation of four hundred international delegates and was held at a crucial moment since it “serve[d] as a peace conference to counterbalance the international power of the western belligerents of the Korean War [and] allowed a whole generation of Latin Americans and representatives of the entire world to unite around a pacifist movement, whose goal was to avoid the outbreak of a Third World War” (2020: 77). The participation of the Colombian delegates was particularly significant since Colombia and the PRC fought on opposing sides of the Korean War. The Colombian government, with Laureano Gómez at its head, was the only one in Latin America to participate in it with the dispatch in June 1951 of 5,100 soldiers in support of the coalition formed by the United States in its fight against communism (Rojas 2017: 60). Therefore, as Luís



Fig. 29: Wearing a hat Jorge Zalamea walks by the hand of a Chinese boy during a guided tour.
Source: Personal archive, courtesy of Patricia Zalamea.

Cantillo points out “mientras unos y otros se agredían en la región del paralelo 38 que terminó dividiendo a Corea en dos, hubo un grupo de intelectuales colombianos que viajaron expresamente a Pekín a contribuir con la paz” [While various factions clashed along the 38th parallel, ultimately dividing Korea into two, a group of Colombian intellectuals traveled specifically to Beijing to contribute to peace efforts] (2020: 18). Apart from Zapata, this group consisted of lawyer and politician Diego Montaña Cuellar, painter Alipio Jaramillo, and writers Jorge Zalamea and Jorge Gaitán Durán. Not surprisingly, it was also under the Gómez administration that Zapata Olivella was sent to prison right after his return from the PRC and the publication of *China 6 a.m.* (Mina 2016: 27). There were also other conferences and events that reaffirmed the need for this South-South connection: the Bandung Conference (1955), the Conference of Asian and African Writers (1956), the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference (1957) or the Tricontinental Conference (1966), followed by major festivals, such as the World Festival of Negro Arts (1966) or the World Festival of Youth and Students that since its first celebration in 1947 has kept unity, peace, and solidarity as its main motto.

Given that wars have been the ones traditionally serving as the articulating axes of metropolitan history, the place and the significance of peripheral encounters advocating for freedom, peace and solidarity from the Global South have been denied or undervalued. In Zapata’s descriptions of the event in his diary, the conference acted as a space for collective mourning “inolvidable día en que las madres y mujeres de la India abrazaron y besaron a las madres y mujeres de

Corea” [An unforgettable day when the mothers and women of India embraced and kissed the mothers and women of Korea] ([1954] 2020: 49) as well as a place to give perspective and open ways toward the resolution of conflicts that have colonial abuses as common roots and imperial interests as common instigators. This was also the case of India and Pakistan, which had an “instante de comprensión entre aquellos dos pueblos frente al torbellino entusiasta de los delegados de la Paz del Asia y Pacífico redujo a sus ridículas proporciones las hogueras que querían atizar los guerreristas entre estas dos naciones hermanas” [A moment of understanding between those two peoples, amidst the enthusiastic whirlwind of the Peace Delegates of Asia and the Pacific, reduced to ridiculous proportions the flames that the warmongers sought to stoke between these two sister nations] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 49). Nonetheless, as Rachel Leow has argued: “the WPC [World Peace Conference] itself has also largely vanished from histories of world peace movements, from whose Euro-American historiography the APC [Asian-Pacific Peace Conference] is also absent” (2019: 24).

In relation to the World Peace Movement, Locane has further proposed that the platforms and channels that these forms of nonofficial diplomacy extended were used by other parties to propel their own agendas and put their own cultural products in international circulation. Thus, they trace “dissident international circuits” (2022b: 297) able to bring forward “other canons, other preferences and other protagonists” (2022b: 298) to build networks, which “functioned as the most material support point for an early internationalisation of Latin American literature far beyond the centres of Western modernity and capitalism” (2022b: 301) projecting it “towards *the world*, a wider one, in fact, than that one represented by Western metropolises” (2022b: 303).

It is with this in mind that in this fourth and last chapter, I will focus my analysis on the travel writing corresponding to the period between 1950 to 1966. I approach these travel accounts from the premise that, even though they only represent a fraction among the many other political, artistic, cultural, and intellectual forms of exchange, they give account and contribute to the materiality of the history of South-South encounters. Altogether, they represent compelling evidence of how the reconstruction of the history of the travel narrative proposes, in particular, a more intimate and affective narration of the encounters between countries and cultures, their exchanges, and the circulation of their symbolic capitals. They configure an alternative and dissident tracing with respect to the perspective of the history of official diplomacy tensed by the forces of hegemonic geopolitics. Such differentiating perspective becomes even more relevant when placed in the context of the Cold War since, following Leow, it “encompassed a wider variety of agendas than [the ones] bloc politics recognized”. In this sense, it is essential to continue

asking, as Leow proposes, “how this era was actually experienced, remembered, enacted and *felt* by ordinary people” (2019: 26).

Thus, the Latin American travel writing of this period configures an alternative archival and broader narrative of the Cold War, as well as a dissident archaeology not only in relation to our own historical and cultural ground but in its interactions with *the world*. In this context, these travel accounts represent, in the words of Locane: “una insólita ampliación de la experiencia de mundo, por lo pronto, con un eje geopolítico que—visto en perspectiva latinoamericana—se va a desplazar del Océano Mediterráneo o el Atlántico al Pacífico como una alternativa para reorganizar las dinámicas intercontinentales y multilaterales” [An unprecedented expansion of world experience, marked by a geopolitical shift that—viewed from a Latin American perspective—moves from the Mediterranean or Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific as an alternative for reorganizing intercontinental and multilateral dynamics] (2020: 56–57). All in all, these new tracings brought new significance to the political, aesthetic, and intellectual encounters and exchanges between China and Latin America, outlining new and distinct motivations, not just to undertake the journey to the newly established PRC but also to write and to discover alternative ways to represent their traveling impressions.

Thus, in the absence of official diplomatic recognition, China turned initially to the formation or reinvigoration² of cultural ties with nations mostly belonging to the third world and with whom it shared similar historical experiences as colonial subjects. Besides that, the PRC “movilizó referentes y problemas distintos a los acumulados en el marxismo producido en el centro del capitalismo europeo” [It mobilized references and issues distinct from those accumulated within the Marxism produced at the center of European capitalism] (Ortega 2021: 2501). This also expanded Maoism³ to become an alternative path in the construction of a socialist world.

2 In the case of Latin America, this was a way to resume dialogues with countries such as Peru, Mexico, or Brazil, which, as I studied in the second chapter, sent their first diplomatic missions to China in the nineteenth century, or even countries such as Cuba, with whom China shared a long and very significant history of migration and trade ties.

3 Regarding the use of the term Maoism, its origin, and the connotations of its use, *Maoism: A Global History* has served as my main referent. Julia Lovell explains that the term “became popular in the 1950s to denote Anglo-American summaries of the system of political thought and practice instituted across the new People’s Republic of China. [...] Its Chinese translation, *Mao zhuyi*, has never been endorsed by CCP ideologues [...] Orthodox Chinese analysts use the more cerebral term ‘Mao Zedong Thought’” (2020: 25–26). In line with Lovell, I have decided to preserve the use of this term since “it has become the most commonly use term for a successful Chinese Communist programme from the 1930s to the present day. It has validity only on the understanding that the Maoist

During the 1950s, thousands of people visited the country, invited and sponsored by the PRC. William Ratliff estimates that over the course of the 1950s approximately 1,400 Latin Americans visited China (2012: 28). Only between 1959 and 1960, “when guided tourism was at its peak” (most probably also due to the tenth anniversary of its establishment), the PRC hosted 900–1,000 Latin Americans” (Ratliff 1972: 859). In exchange, the PRC “sent 400 Chinese delegations to participate in international sports meetings, drama and film festivals, musical contests and exhibitions” (Hubert 2017a: 337). Moreover, following to Wei Teng, it is also worth noting that “1959 is the peak year of translating and publishing Latin American works between the 1950s–1970s” (2018: 184). Most of the travelers belonged to the spheres of art and culture and gravitated ideologically toward the left. However, there was still a significant political diversity and a variety of backgrounds and interests represented since, at least initially, they intended to “cultivar relaciones con intelectuales latinoamericanos que no tenían ningún interés en someterse a la disciplina de un partido comunista” [to cultivate relationships with Latin American intellectuals who had no interest in submitting to the discipline of a communist party] (Rothwell 2013a: 44).

Compared to Asia and Africa, Latin America ranked the lowest in the PRC’s revolutionary agenda. However, with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the establishment of official relations with the island, China gained a new foothold in the region (Montt 2016b: 97). The foregoing, added to the internal tensions fueled by the Sino-Soviet split propelled a turn in its people-to-people diplomacy during the 1960s, focusing on drawing, more specifically, the attention of “a more limited audience of radical revolutionaries” (Ratliff 1972: 846). Nonetheless, as shown by Daniel E. Rojas, the concern about the political influence that the PRC could obtain in Latin America as a result of its cultural diplomacy and the flow of travelers to the PRC was a matter that did not take long to be addressed by both the United States and the representatives of the ROC led by the KMT party with Chiang Kai-shek at the head (2020: 71). Thus, in the case of Colombia, right after the ROC’s defeat in the Chinese Civil War, they tried to forge closer ties with the government from Taiwan. It was a very strategic alliance, considering that it:

Had coasts along both the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean, which allowed ROC diplomats assigned there to easily access the Andean and Caribbean countries alike. Additionally, Colombia had been the only Latin American country to participate in the US-led coalition in the

programme –despite possessing a solid symbolic core, in the shape of Mao himself– has taken various (and often contradictory) forms over decades and continents, according to context. It comes into formal existence in the early 1940s, though builds on antecedents from earlier in Mao’s life and thought” (2020: 26).

Korean War (1950–1953), which underscored its status as a reliable ally in the fight against communism [...] ROC diplomats had acted to prevent any kind of cultural or political cooperation between the Chinese Communists and their potential supporters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Rojas 2020: 72).

The cultivation of this form of diplomacy was extended well beyond the 1960s because, even though Cuba established formal diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1961, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that most of Latin America gave it their official recognition.⁴ However, the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 is, for this study, the event that represented the most substantial change in the way China directed its relationship not just with the world beyond their borders but also with its own past and tradition (Hubert 2020: 36), which translated into a very differentiated phase within the history of the Latin American journey to China.

Regarding the period covered by this chapter, it is essential to note that the large number of travelers, as well as the widespread enthusiasm for leaving written testimony of their passage through the almost miraculous revolutionary project that was being built in this novel and fast-changing China, are both circumstances that make the word “vast” fall short to describe the number of publications that came to light during these years. The countless number of pages were written, preserved,⁵ and published in the years to come.⁶ This circumstance presented this

4 From 1960 to 1990: Cuba (1960) Chile (1970) Mexico, Peru and Argentina (1972) Venezuela and Brasil (1974) Ecuador and Colombia (1980) Bolivia, Guatemala and Nicaragua (1985) Uruguay (1988) Paraguay (1989).

5 A very interesting case of an unpublished diary is the one written by Marianella Cabrera Cárdenas. Her story and that of her family is recounted in Juan Gabriel Vásquez's novel *Volver la vista atrás*, published in 2021. The Cabrera Cárdenas, both communist militants, arrived in Beijing in 1963 to live in the Friendship Hotel and work at the Institute of Foreign Languages. Their daughter Marianella was 11 years old, and their son Sergio was 13 (renowned filmmaker and current ambassador of Colombia to China, appointed in 2022). The siblings lived the rest of their teenage years and part of their adult life in Beijing, both joined the Red Army and for many years Marianella kept a diary in Chinese. A few passages of this diary were translated and included in the novel, together with some photographs of the original text.

6 Only with regard to the writing of Colombian, Peruvian and Chilean travelers who visited China between 1950 to 1966, we can find: *Pekín* (1952) by Fernando Sativán, *Diario de viaje* (1952) by Jorge Gaitán Durán, *Reunión en Pekín* (1952) by Jorge Zalamea, *Por los caminos de la paz: de Pekín a Viena* (1953) by Diego Montaña Cuellar, *Hablemos de China Nueva* (1953) by Olga Poblete, *Un viaje por esos mundos: crónicas* (1955) by Gustavo Mujica, *Aurora sobre el Yang-tse* (1956) by Alfonso González Dagnino, *Diario de un viaje al mundo novísimo China, Unión Soviética, Checoslovaquia: breve informe* (1967) by Manuel Beltroy, *El Perú ante la URSS y la China popular* (1958) and *Las comunas populares en la China*, (1960) by Ernesto More, *En la aldea de China* (1958) by Volodia Teitelboim, *Mi vuelta al mundo* (1958), Benjamín Ángel Maya (Hong Kong), *China: la revolución del arroz y de la rosa* (1959) by Jorge Falcón Gárfias, José Sotomayor Pérez visited China in July 1959 and wrote

chapter with a significant challenge in selecting the travelers and the works to be studied. I tried to select a corpus that included authors from each of the countries on which I have focused this study. Thus, together, they could build the broadest chronological view of these almost two decades. In line with Maria Montt, I also tried to select both the authors and the travel texts that contributed to contradicting historians such as Victor Alba who, referring to the publications of Latin Americans who travel to the PRC, affirmed in 1961 that “None of them is critical in tone, not even merely a dispassionate account” (qtd. in Montt 2016b: 99). Statements like this would make their extensive literary production not worthy of any other qualification than that of “propaganda”. Even though further into this chapter, I will provide several examples of how this propaganda machine operated, I second the idea that “si bien es cierto que estos viajes fueron en gran medida parte de una operación propagandística del gobierno chino, no sería acertado caracterizar el corpus surgido de ellos como uno homogéneo” [While it is true that these trips were largely part of a propaganda operation by the Chinese government, it would not be accurate to characterize the body of work that emerged from them as homogeneous] (Locane/Montt 2020: 1). This chapter will also show how this aspect was a common matter of reflection and how some travelers were vocal critics of it.

With this in mind, I have intended to put in dialogue a corpus that, first, could be able to give an account of pivotal events that shaped the writing of the relations and exchanges between Latin America and China during these years. It was also

Memorias de un comunista (2015) *Notas de viaje*. *Luces de Hong Kong* (1959) and *Desde China* (1959) by Luís Enrique Délano, *Un viaje muy particular: China 1959* (1959) by José Cademartori Invernizzi, *Si Mao Tse Tung callara* (1959), by Jaime Castillo Velasco *Viaje parlamentario a China en 1959* (2015) by Joaquín Franco Burgos, *Anillo de jade. Poemas de China* (1959) by Ángel Crucchaga Santa María, *Los fumadores de opio los enterró para siempre China* (1959) by Elena Caffarena *De Confucio a Mao Tse-Tung: del feudo a la comuna popular* (1960) by César Guardia Mayorga, *Entrevista con Mao Tse-Tung* (1960) by Jorge del Prado, *Viaje a Oriente* (1960) by Luís Oyarzún, *China el asombro: crónicas y reportajes* (2008) by Antonio Fernández Arce who moved to China in 1960; *Las comunas populares en China* (1960) by Ernesto More, *La luz viene de Oriente* (1960) by Ernesto Cáceres (Hong Kong), *Donde nace la aurora* (1961) by Carlos de la Riva, *Una vejez añosa* (2016) by Eliana Rojas Sanchez, wife of Francisco Coloane. *Medicina en China* (1962) by Osvaldo Quijada, *Memorias desde némesis, Canto de fuego a China Popular* (1963) by Pablo de Rokha, *De Chile a China* (1963) by Tito Mundt, *China rompe la historia* (1963) by Miguel Saidel, *Canto de fuego a China Popular* (1963) by Pablo de Rokha, *Cuadernillo de Oriente* (1963) by Sebastián Bondy, *Artesanías clásicas chinas* (1963) by Tomás Lago, *Los ojos de bambú* (1964) by Mercedes Valdivieso, *Viaje a China Popular* (1964) by Jorge Dulanto Pinillos (2014) by Abimael Guzmán Reinoso (and Elena Yparraquiere Revoredo. Guzmán visited the PRC for the first time in 1965. *Asia en la tormenta. China, Vietnam e Indonesia* (1965) by Luis Carrera V., *Los ojos de bambú* (1965) by Mercedes Valdivieso, *El viento de los reinos* (1967) by Efraín Barquero.

intended to provide a selection of works that could account for the political and social diversity that characterized the Latin American travelers of this period, the diversity of their impressions, and the wide array of textual representations of China and the Chinese that followed. I have, therefore, selected the following authors and works to represent the travel writing corresponding to these years, and these are the primary features that led to this selection: the first one is *China 6 a.m.* (1954), written by the Colombian Manuel Zapata Olivella. This book is a collection of twenty-nine short chronicles that tell not only Zapata Olivella's passage through China but also the New China of the early 1950s. Each chronicle retains its own autonomy and can be read independently of the rest. Moreover, this travel book has received the most academic attention among the travel accounts written by Colombian authors during this period. Within this group formed by Diego Montaña Cuelar, Jorge Zalamea, and Jorge Gaitán Durán, it is also the most extensive travel account and one which I find that best combines poetic and aesthetic ambition with testimony of their journey through China, besides their participation in the Peace Conference held in Beijing in 1952. In addition, Zapata's distinct interest in the Colombian Pacific culture, the close relation that this region has with the rest of his work, as and his relentless efforts to recognize Afro-Colombian history and cultures make Zapata's connection with China an interesting one.

The second work is *Papeles recortados* (2004) by the Chilean Francisco Coloane, who visited China in 1958 and returned almost four years later in May of 1962 to stay until 1964. This travel book is divided into three parts: the first one dedicated to his first visit and entitled "El viaje", and the second and third one, "Cuatro años después" and "China Reconstruye", are devoted to his second stay in the country. Compositionally, this is also the most daring and experimental travel book. Coloane wrote it using plenty of spare notes, diary entries, letters, and chronicles. He accompanied it with a collection of cuttings from magazines, newspapers, and official communiqués, which he kept as an archive of his own memories of China and his life there. His narrative can be considered somewhat fragmentary and disjointed. It does not always maintain a stable timeline but instead jumps back and forth between various reminiscences. These establish, at times, other connections associated with a particular experience, theme, historical event, or even a certain feeling.

A parallel study of both Zapata's and Coloane's travel narratives allows us to see the transformation that the experience of the journey to China underwent over the course of the 1950s. On the one hand, the enthusiasm and the quest toward a revolutionary utopia that marked the Latin American travel writing to China in the early 1950s to a great extent are clearly reflected in *China 6 a.m.* On the other hand, in the case of Coloane, despite sharing their communist militancy with Zapata, his first trip took place nearing the end of that decade. Furthermore, his second and

longest stay occurred in the 1960s, approaching the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, providing an interesting change of perspective. His pages reveal the noticeable deterioration of the idealized image of Communist China as an example of a fulfilled red dream suffered with the turn of the decade. Moreover, the transformation of his political convictions, permeated by the pervasiveness of censorship and self-censorship, led to his own questioning as a communist, and even as a revolutionary during his second stay in Beijing. These changes are all clearly reflected in *Papeles recortados*. In this sense, this travel book allows us to see varied crucible of positions, impressions, and forms of representation that coexist not only in the travel writing of this period but even in a single traveler or even in a single work. Finally, the fact that Coloane is such a prominent and canonical figure in Chilean literature, while *Papeles recortados* is a work that has not aroused almost any academic interest so far, is an additional reason to study it.

Finally, the third travel book that I have selected is *La otra mitad del mundo II: China Comunista* (1959), written by the Peruvian Francisco Miró Quesada Cantuarias, who visited China for a month in 1959. This book, preceded by the first part dedicated to his journey to the Soviet Union, is divided into twenty-one chapters, most of them articulated around specific thematic axes. Chapter XVI, for instance, comprises five subsections on education and culture, which explore the new place of traditional artistic manifestations in the context of the New China, as well as the reforms and new policies ruling the production of art and culture. Other chapters are devoted to themes, which include the new political organization of the PRC, the role played by other political parties, the freedom of worship, and the place occupied by capitalism in the country's new economy.

Thus, Miró Quesada is, within this corpus, a crucial figure providing the most complex and diversified image of the travel narrative of this period. His belonging to the intellectual elite of Peru, the traditional anti-communist agenda of his family, and his own militancy in the Christian Democratic Party are factors that give his travel writing a very contrasting departure point. The foregoing applies not only to debunk the idea that during these years the PRC only opened its doors to communist leaders and militants but also to disprove the notion that the non-Communists who visited it only did so aiming to demonize it and delegitimize its efforts and achievements through their writing. In fact, it is worth highlighting that *La otra mitad del mundo: II China Comunista* is a travel book that explores in greater depth at a theoretical level how Marxism-Leninism described the Communist China he visited and at a more practical one, how the new institutional composition of China determined more concretely the day-to-day functioning of the country and the life of its people. Finally, the control that the Miró Quesada family has wielded since the nineteenth century and continues to exert today with Juan Aurelio Arévalo Miró

Quesada at the direction since 2020 of *El Comercio*, the oldest and still most influential newspaper in the country, is a factor impossible to overlook.

Meeting the Travelers

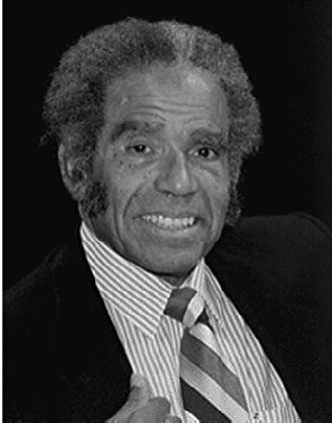


Fig. 30: Manuel Zapata Olivella. Source: Library of Congress.

<<https://www.loc.gov/item/n86845576/manuel-zapata-olivella-colombia-1920-2004/>>.

Originally from Santa Cruz de Lorica in the Colombian⁷ Caribbean region, **Manuel Zapata Olivella** (1920–2004) was one of the twelve children, of which only five

⁷ Another travel writer who visited China for the first time during this period is Enrique Posada Cano. Initially, I intended to include the memoirs of his life in China to be analyzed in this chapter, but space restrictions prevented me from doing so. Posada Cano moved to Beijing for the first time in February 1965 until 1969 to work together with his wife at the Institute of Foreign Languages. Nonetheless, he returned to Beijing in 1973 and stayed until 1979, years during which Posada worked on the translations of Mao's poetic work and other philosophical and military texts as well as on the *Selected Works* by Deng Xiaoping. In the 1980s, Posada returned once again, but this time to occupy a diplomatic post between 1983 and 1985. Finally, in the 1990s, in order to write his novel *En China dos veces la vida* (2002) whose writing took him four and a half years Posada went back to Beijing in 1991 and stayed until 1995. This novel was later translated and published first in Chinese in 2010 with the title *Youyi binguan de na xie shi* 《友谊宾馆的那些事》 (The Stories of the Beijing Friendship Hotel) by *Xin shijie chubanshe* 新世界出版社 (New World Press). This press was founded in 1966, and later in the 1980s, it became part of the *Zhongguo waiwen chuban faxing shiyeju* 中国外文出版发行事业局 (China International Communications Group) founded in 1949. This is one of the media organizations owned and run by the *Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang*

survived to be raised by Edelmira and Antonio. His father, an avid reader of Victor Hugo, Darwin, Voltaire, and Rousseau (Garcés 2020: 138), was a teacher of liberal ideas, often paid for his classes with chickens, rice sacks, and bunches of green plantain (Garcés 2020: 215). Having left to study medicine, Zapata became not only a doctor but mostly a versatile performer in the great theater of the world. He played many roles and lived many lives: one of the anthropologist and ethnographer but also those as journalist, novelist, poet, *teatrero*, boxer, communist militant, and connoisseur and diffuser of Colombian folklore. However, none of them encompasses all the better than something that he also was: a great wanderer.



Fig. 31: In Beijing Zapata Olivella poses with Leonor González Mina and his sister Delia, together with Chinese officials at Tiananmen Square. Source: *Tambores de América para despertar al viejo mundo* [Drums of America to Awaken the Ancient World] Julio Rentería personal archive (Zapata: 2020: 214).

As William Mina points out, not only because Zapata traveled on foot through Central America up to the United States between 1943 and 1947 (2016: 26) or not even because his militancy and his commitment to peace, Zapata traveled across the globe to participate in the Asian-Pacific Peace Conference. In fact, his way of *journeying* went far beyond its geographical dimension—it was more defined by being *between* roads, than by being *on* the road. He was, above all, a voyager who opened

weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu 中国共产党中央委员会宣传部 (Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China), also known as Central Propaganda Department. Two years later, the book was also translated and published in English with the title *China, a Life Twice Lived*. This novel is the first belonging to the trilogy dedicated to his life in China, including also *Testigo de China* (2014) his book of chronicles, and the novel *Adiós a Pekín* (2017).

new paths between the different regions of Colombia, new roads between different countries in the continent, and new solidarity ties among continents. He was a traveler who, from the perspective of his practice as an anthropologist, his sensibility as a writer, and his political stances, explored the historical, cultural, and political connections not only with Africa but also with Asia through their people, their ideas, and their arts. That autumn in Beijing was not, however, the last time that Zapata visited China. At the end of the 1950s, he returned, this time as “coordinador del grupo de danzas folclóricas de su hermana Delia, [con quien] recorrió Manuel varios países de Europa y de Asia desde España hasta China, pasando por Francia, Alemania, Mongolia y la Unión Soviética” [Coordinator of his sister Delia’s folk dance group, [with whom] Manuel traveled through several countries in Europe and Asia, from Spain to China, passing through France, Germany, Mongolia, and the Soviet Union] (Díaz-Granados 2003: 29). During his stay in Paris, Zapata met Gabriel García Márquez and Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, an occasion that he used to ask them to join in the performance at the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students, an event celebrated in Moscow in the summer of 1957. There, they needed to replace “un saxofonista y a un acordeonero que se habían quedado en el camino. Gabo no tocó el acordeón, pero tocó la caja, y cantó [...] Fueron cuatro días de viaje en el que atravesaron Berlín, Praga, Bratislava, Kiev y Moscú” [A saxophonist and an accordionist had been left behind along the way. Gabo didn’t play the accordion, but he did play the drum and sang (...)] It was a four-day journey during which they passed through Berlin, Prague, Bratislava, Kyiv, and Moscow] (Oliveros 2020).

His travel experiences across the American continent largely defined his chronicles and journalistic reports published during the 1940s in the cultural magazine *Sábado* (Palacios 2016: 565), later part of *Pasión vagabunda* (1949), his second published book after his first novel *Tierra mojada* (1947). Similarly, *He visto la noche* (1953) gathers mostly his experiences in the United States and, finally, *China 6 a.m.* (1954) is the written testimony of his first passage through the PRC. Among his later and most renowned works are the novels: *Los pasos del indio* (1958), *Detrás del rostro* (1963), *Chambacú, corral de negros* (1963) and *Changó, el gran putas* (1983), and among his sociological studies *Tradición oral y conducta en Córdoba* (1972) and *El hombre colombiano* (1974) deserve a mention.

From the very first pages of his book of recollections *Los pasos del hombre*, there is a confessed affection of **Francisco Coloane Cárdenas** (1910–2002) for the *South*, and even more, perhaps, for his *Far South*. He describes his memoirs as the ones belonging to “a muchacho que partió en busca de algo más, hacia el extremo sur y no hacia el norte” [A young man who set off in search of something more, heading southward rather than north] (2000: 15). His travel chronicles are not the

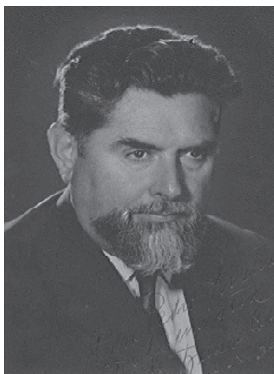


Fig. 32: Photograph of Francisco Coloane. Source: Archivo del escritor. Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Chile. <<https://www.bibliotecanacionaldigital.gob.cl/bnd/623/w3-article-623573.html>>.

only books within his extensive literary work in which traveling occupies a significant place. Most of his textual creation is, in fact, permeated by it, and in most of his lines echoes of the Coloane voyager resound.

Born in Quemchi, Chile, surrounded by huge cargo ships on its coasts and a whaler father who taught him to sail from a very young age, most likely grew in Coloane as a deep love for the sea and its adventures. Following this interest, Coloane joined the crew that was in charge of the First Chilean Antarctic Expedition in 1947. This tight connection with the sea not only left an indelible mark on his life but also on his literary work, present in *El último grumete de la Baquedano* (1941), *Los conquistadores de la Antártica* (1945) or *Velero anclado* (1995). Besides, many of his titles contain words that denote movement like his recollections *Los pasos del hombre* (2000), *El camino de la ballena* (1962), or *Rastros del guanaco blanco* (1980); while others have geographical locations as their main protagonists; for instance: *Cabo de hornos* (1941), *Golfo de penas* (1945), and *Tierra del Fuego* (1956). Most likely, it was the same impulse to search for that *algo más* that led him to another *Far* of the world, not once, but quite a few times along his life. It took him not to China and India, but to the Soviet Union, Mozambique, and Lebanon too. The first time that Coloane visited China was in 1958—a journey that in fact started four years before, when on the 50th birthday of Pablo Neruda celebrated in Chile, Coloane met the Chinese poet, translator, and first biographer of Mao Zedong: Xiao San 萧三, known by the pen name Emi Siao. Later on, it was at the first Afro-Asian Writers Conference, celebrated in the city of Tashkent in October 1958—that García Márquez also attended (Coloane 2000: 231)—when Xiao and Coloane met once again. There, Xiao



Fig. 33: Photograph included in the exhibition *Chile y China: la memoria de una amistad pionera desde la figura de José Venturelli* with the label *Hesai wantuleili yu shiren ai qing, xiao san, huajia qi baishi zai gongzuoshi* 何塞·万徒勒里与诗人艾青、萧三，画家齐白石在工作室 (José Venturelli with the poets Ai Qing and Xiao San, and the painter Qi Baishi in his studio).

invited him to visit his country, offering his help with the handling of the visa from the city of Moscow. About a month later, Coloane arrived in the soon-wintery capital of the PRC. However, it seems that his short stay in Beijing left him with an even greater desire to return. It added to the great enthusiasm that his wife Eliana Rojas always had for China and its literature, which she had already started to cultivate from Chile when she joined the Chinese-Chilean Cultural Institute (Coloane 2020: 238–239) founded among others by the painter Jose Venturelli,⁸ the then-senator Salvador Allende, and the poet Pablo Neruda⁹ in 1952. Thus, Coloane flew back to the PRC in May 1962, accompanied by his wife and his youngest son, Juan Francisco.

The couple had been offered to work at the magazine *China Reconstruye*, and their stay was extended until January 1964. Despite the fact that there were numerous books that Coloane published after his years living in China, his impressions of this country, later comprised under the title of *Papeles recortados* were not published

⁸ To learn more about Venturelli as a pioneering and articulating figure for the Latin American left through the formation of diplomatic and artistic exchanges with the PRC and the internationalization of Maoism, see (Rothwell 2016; Ahumada 2020).

⁹ See (Teng 2018), to learn more about the three times that Neruda visited China, his role as a political and artistic articulator of the Latin American exchanges with the PRC, his literary production related to China, and an account of the translations of his work into Chinese.

until 2004,¹⁰ two years after his death. It was a period of almost four decades during which Coloane resisted the idea of getting rid of these notes but also preferred to keep them in his “drawer of unfinished books”. A very different fate met his book *Crónicas de India* (1983), which comprises his memoirs of this country, published only two years after Coloane left New Delhi, where he lived from 1979 to 1981.

10 Several references claim that Coloane published a book titled *Viaje al Este*. However, there is no consensus among them on either the publication date or on the book, including impressions of China and the Soviet Union or only the Soviet Union. Besides, neither of these references provides any further information on the place of publication or the publishing house. In *La Tribuna*, Wellington Rojas wrote that it was published in 1954, a date that rules out the possibility of it including his first stay in China. This hypothesis is reinforced by two other articles; the first one was written by Luis Alberto Mancilla in the magazine *Punto Final*. In it, despite not mentioning the publication date, Mancilla affirms that it is a book exclusively dedicated to his visit to the USSR (2000: 5); the same idea is present in the article titled “Rescatan cuentos y crónicas inéditas de Francisco Coloane” and published in *La Tercera* by Roberto Careaga (2006: 87). However, Camilo Marks affirms it was “una obra de pura propaganda” [A work of pure propaganda] published in 1960 and that it includes both China and the Soviet Union (2011: 65). On a similar note, Hugo Montes and Julio Orlandi, in their *Historia de la literatura chilena* also claim that it includes both countries but that it was actually published in 1958 (1982: 199). Finally, in the introduction to Coloane’s *Última carta*, Ricardo Ferrada states that it was published in 1959 (2005: 7). Unfortunately, despite extensive efforts to locate the book, I have been unable to access it. Nonetheless, I would like to present two arguments why, after reading *Papeles recortados*, I am inclined to think that if such a book, in fact, exists, it does not contain his impressions of China. The first one is that in one of the prologues of *Papeles recortados* written by Juan Francisco Coloane Rojas, son of the author who, as I mentioned, moved to China with his parents on their second time in the country, wrote: “—mi padre—dejó este escrito de China medio armado y medio disperso en cuadernos y libretas de apuntes como era su forma de trabajar. Por algún tiempo permaneció indiferente a la idea de publicarlas porque se consideraba un escritor más bien de la medianía y poco merecedor de los elogios que a veces pensó algo desmedidos. Tenía la impresión de que abordar China en un relato, como fuera su formato, sería un zapato demasiado grande para su horma de escritor” [—My father—left this manuscript from China half-finished and scattered in notebooks and notepads, as was his way of working. For some time, he remained indifferent to the idea of publishing it because he considered himself a writer of mediocrity and not particularly deserving of the praise that sometimes seemed, to him, somewhat exaggerated. He had the impression that tackling China in a narrative, in whatever format, would be a shoe too large for his writing mold] (Coloane 2004: 9). This reaffirms the idea that, in fact, Francisco Coloane did not publish his travel memories of China before the publication of *Papeles recortados* since he had a difficult relation with those writings, which explains his resistance to see them published. My second argument is that part of his hesitancy about the idea of publishing them could also respond to the fact that the chronicles he wrote while living in Beijing and that, according to his own account, when he sent them to his party, the Communist Party of Chile, they were not well received given the fact that once he sent them, the texts: “habían quedado en suspenso y no tuve una explicación, ni siquiera una crítica al respecto” [Had been left in suspense and I had no explanation, not even a critique about it] (2004: 55).

Francisco Miró Quesada Cantuarias (1918–2019) was born in Lima into a family with an extensive journalistic and intellectual tradition. The Miró Quesada had owned for generations the diary *El Comercio*, “for many decades the country’s most influential newspaper. Their control of this potent political instrument, substantial wealth, and a firmly established position in elite society all placed them among the oligarchs” (Gilbert 2017: 213). In 1867, his grandfather José Antonio Miró Quesada started working as a correspondent in the newspaper, whose codirection he assumed nine years later, before becoming its main director in 1898 (Gilbert 2017: 214).



Fig. 34: Francisco Miró Quesada Cantuarias. Source: *El Comercio* – Archivo

Later on, Francisco Miró Quesada’s father, Oscar Miró Quesada de la Guerra, and his uncles Antonio and Luís started to participate in the production of the newspaper from an early age. The economic security and social influence that the newspaper represented for these brothers opened the gates to the most selected intellectual circles, the most influential positions in the conservative force led by the Civil Party, as well as a strong international network within the world of diplomacy and foreign relations.

Despite the conservatism that defined their political stances in the years to come, it should be noted that during the first decade of the twentieth century, they expressed through the diary their support to the working class, openly demanding an improvement of their conditions. Nonetheless, with the strengthening of the left movements in Peru during the 1930s, they not only received with enthusiasm Hitler’s rise to power, since it represented an anti-Communist force, but they also showed their support to the presidency of Luís Miguel Sánchez Cerro, leader and founder of the Peruvian fascist party Unión Revolucionaria,

expressing with it a clear “anti-APRA,¹¹ anti-union, and generally anti-civil libertarian positions” (Gilbert 2017: 217).

Subsequently, the political isolation and the loss of popularity in which the diary entered tried to be remedied by the inclusion of younger members of the family like Francisco Miró Quesada Cantaurias, who had mostly devoted himself to the study and teaching of philosophy. He visited the Soviet Union and China in 1959 together with a group of Peruvian parliamentarians and journalists of varied political leanings ranging from communists to Christian democrats. A journey whose experiences and impressions were consigned in two volumes under the title of *La otra mitad del mundo* and published that same year after staying in China for about a month. For its publication, the author suggested printing no more than five thousand copies, but its popularity led the book to a total of twenty thousand copies distributed into three editions. Miró Quesada explains this popularity in the prologue to the third edition of his travel book by saying that there was a high expectation in the reading public to know the impressions of the communist world written by a member of a conservative family “y con un puesto directivo en el diario el El Comercio, se atreviera, primero a ir, y luego a escribir, sobre la realidad comunista” [and with a managerial position at the newspaper El Comercio, he dared, first to go, and then to write about the communist reality] (1959, I: i).

Furthermore, he adds that there is a generalized interest in knowing more about the industrial and technological development achieved in the socialist world. He argues that most of the people that wanted to know about it were, in fact, non-communist, but people who understood the need to know and learn from it and from the grounds and the methods of their accomplishments. In this regard, Miró Quesada C. also accused mainly the Peruvian but also the Latin American dominant classes of silencing the voices who talked about it, assuming that it would hasten the entry of Communism in Latin America (1959, I: ii).

During the 1960s, after his return from “the other half of the world”, he promoted comprehensive reforms which gave an ideological twist to the newspaper. An example of this ideological redirection is, on the one hand, the support shown by *El Comercio* of the candidacy of Fernando Belaúnde from the liberal party Acción Popular in the presidential elections of 1963. Miró Quesada C. briefly served in Belaúnde’s cabinet as Minister of Education before the “APRA used its position in Congress to force [his] censure and removal” (Gilbert 2017: 228). The diary also expressed its support to the left-leaning military regime established by General Velasco Alvarado after the coup d’état that took place in 1968 (Gilbert 2017: 231) while Francisco Miró Quesada was serving as ambassador to France, a position

11 Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana.

he held for two years until 1969. Despite Velasco's "third-way" approach and his clear anti-communist stance, he decided to "open diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and its allies [...] to reduce the United States influence" (Brands 2010: 476) in the country. In the early 1970s, Francisco Miró Quesada had to pay, however, a very high price for his manifested sympathies for more progressive governments. He was branded a "left-wing extremist" by many of his family members, who also accused him of treason arguing that he was using his ties to the country's left to conspire against his family in order to obtain the direction of the newspaper (Gilbert 2017: 234). An idea that would be difficult to support considering that Miró Quesada did not take over the management of *El Comercio* until 2003, which he held until 2008.

Between Chinas: The New and the Millenary



Fig. 35: Photo included in Miró Quesada's travel book with the caption "Una reliquia de la vieja China, que vivió en tiempos del último Manchú, pasea lentamente por los jardines del Palacio de Verano" [A relic of ancient China, who lived during the time of the last Manchu, strolls slowly through the gardens of the Summer Palace] (1959, II: 42).

As I argued in the first chapter, for the Creole voyager traveling to Europe, in particular to Paris, represented a journey toward their ambitions for the future, whereas the journey to China was perceived as a return to their own colonial past. In the second chapter, I discussed how these aspirations started to displace Europe as the one and only center and how China had gradually acquired a new position in the writing of the first half of the twentieth century. To return to this question now becomes even more essential since works such as *China de hoy... América Latina de mañana* by Amado Canelas or phrases such: "el pasado de China es el presente de América Latina y el presente de China es el futuro de América Latina" [The past of China is the present of Latin America, and the present of China is the

future of Latin America] (1962: 161) written by Raúl González Tuñón in *Todos los hombres son hermanos* (1954) became, in fact, a common occurrence during these decades.

Evidently, “For Latin Americans, travelling to China supposed witnessing the embodiment of a theory of government that could be transplanted into their geographies. [...] the Chinese Revolution offered a new system of beliefs and ethical principles of modernity for peripheral capitalism” (Hubert 2017a: 338). Nonetheless, although the PRC was then the personification of many of the revolutionary utopias of the Latin American left (Villalobos 2020: 72), China’s economic and social transformation was also observed by many non-leftists, if not as a model, as a source of inspiration.¹²

From the travel narratives of the nineteenth century, the impressions of the travel writers of the relation of China with its own dynastic and millennial tradition had been, so far, dominated by the portrayal of a stagnant former empire, described as dilapidated and devoid of its foregoing splendor. In the travel writing of this period, China, in fact, New China, is oftentimes exalted by these travelers for its dynamism, fast-paced transformative power, inexhaustible strength, and discipline toward progression. Further to this, it is also a China commonly depicted as reunited and reconciled with its past and whose present is in permanent dialogue with its history and tradition.

This is a critical aspect since, as discussed in the previous chapters, the tension between tradition and modernization has been a major crossroad for the Latin American debate since the nineteenth century. Therefore, the alternative model of modernization forwarded by the PRC, besides representing the possibility of building a revolution in a mainly rural and non-industrialized context, could have also been seen as a path toward reconciliation with their own past, without surrendering their ambitions for the future. In the words of Silvia Saítta, “la armonía que los viajeros descubren en China difiere sustancialmente de la de otras sociedades revolucionarias porque se trata de una revolución que no arrasa con el pasado sino que concilia ese pasado milenario con un presente revolucionario” [The harmony that travelers discover in China differs significantly from that of other revolutionary societies because it is a revolution that does not erase the past but instead reconciles that ancient past with a revolutionary present] (2007: 11).

The vertiginous transformative leap toward a socialist material and immaterial modernization is an aspect that all the travel writers underlined in their pages and which ranges from the educational aspect of it with initiatives, such as the “nuevo

¹² In this corpus, Miró Quesada represents this group of travelers. For an analysis of a similar case in the Mexican context see (Ortega 2020), which analyses the writing of Emilio Portes Gil.

método de enseñanza que les permite en cuarenta horas dar el salto del analfabetismo a la luz de los ideogramas chinos” [A new teaching method that allows them, in forty hours, to make the leap from illiteracy to the light of Chinese ideograms] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 42), to the fast-moving construction of all sorts of infrastructure projects. The celerity of this change leaves the readers with the impression that in the course of only a couple of years, China became radically different. In this sense, Zapata’s depiction of this New China is by far the most telling, to the point of leaving the impression that it went to sleep plunged into horror, misery, suffering, and despair to wake up the next day in the joys of inextinguishable happiness.

Nonetheless, as other authors (Vidal 2020: 172) have also observed, despite the predominant interest in the present of this New China and its material and social achievements, historical references to its millennial past are still a very common occurrence (Coloane 2004: 19, 22, 23). At a more particular level, despite the early 1960s being still a climatic time in the Maoist Era, there is no doubt for a communist militant like Coloane that: “no se encuentra otra personalidad, en la historia de China, que haya ejercido una influencia tan decisiva y permanente en la vida y pensamiento de su pueblo como Confucio” [There is no other personality in the history of China who has had such a decisive and lasting influence on the life and thought of its people as Confucius] (2004: 52). A statement seconded by Miró Quesada C.: “Los dos mil quinientos años de confucianismo han plasmado su carácter de manera demasiado profunda para que diez años de comunismo hayan podido cambiarlo” [The two thousand five hundred years of Confucianism have shaped its character too deeply for ten years of communism to have changed it] (1959, II: 36).

As a result, both the millenarian and the new are realities that coexist in these traveling accounts. Nevertheless, this was a very specific circumstance within the varying relationship that modern China established with its own past because, as Rosario Hubert highlights:

Mientras que en los primeros diecisiete años de la República Popular se mostró cierta apertura a conservar el patrimonio cultural y a adaptar formas literarias tradicionales (ópera de Pekín, poesía clásica, folclore, etc.), con la radicalización de la Gran Revolución Cultural Proletaria (1966–1976) se condenaron los “cuatro antiguos” (costumbres, cultura, hábitos, ideas) y la producción cultural quedó reducida a las traducciones de Mao y a las ocho estilizadas “óperas modelo”. [While in the first seventeen years of the People’s Republic there was some openness to preserving cultural heritage and adapting traditional literary forms (Peking opera, classical poetry, folklore, etc.), with the radicalization of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the “four olds” (customs, culture, habits, ideas) were condemned, and cultural production was reduced to translations of Mao and the eight stylized “model operas”] (2020: 36).

This is worth emphasizing mainly because the Forbidden City, among other imperial buildings, was saved from the Red Guards by Zhou Enlai during the Cultural Revolution (Bregolat 2015: 155) and was a construction to which Miró Quesada referred to specifically describe how, after the communist triumph in the War of Liberation, the Chinese had physical access to parts of their past and their heritage, previously restricted to officials and members of the imperial court (Guo 2008: 82). “Allí el emperador y su corte, en un mundo artificial y secreto, vivían lejanos, como figuras de marfil insensibles a la erosión del sufrimiento y la miseria. Hoy día, el pueblo de Pekín deambula boquiabierto por los salones y jardines de esa ciudad de ensueño” [There, the emperor and his court, in an artificial and secret world, lived distant, like ivory figures insensible to the erosion of suffering and misery. Today, the people of Beijing wander open-mouthed through the halls and gardens of that dream city] (Miró Quesada 1959, II: 23–24). This was also something that he noted in connection with the opera: “Gracias a los esfuerzos del gobierno, la ópera llega a todos los lugares del país. A través de su luminoso mensaje el pueblo chino entra en contacto con sus tradiciones milenarias, de las cuales antes jamás disfrutó” [Thanks to the government’s efforts, opera reaches all corners of the country. Through its luminous message, the Chinese people come into contact with their ancient traditions, which they had never before enjoyed] (1959, II: 116).

Similarly, in his visit to the Ming dynasty tombs, Coloane pointed out that “El estado hizo un refinado trabajo para la recuperación de toda la vestimenta y pulimento de la joyería y artículos que allí había” [The state carried out a refined effort to restore all the clothing, jewelry, and items that were present there] (2004: 26).¹³ Furthermore, there are descriptions like: “veíamos la juventud del pueblo más viejo del mundo” [We saw the youth of the oldest people in the world] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 46) and depictions such as the one of the celebration of the fourth anniversary of

13 The article “Instrumentos tradicionales y música moderna” providing another example of this ten-dency present in the musical field. The article was included in the first issue of the magazine *China Reconstruye* published on January 1, 1960. Its autor, the musicologist Li Yuanqing explains that: “el estancamiento de la sociedad feudal impidió el desarrollo de la música china en su conjunto. [...] Sólo después que el pueblo llegó al poder y que el desarrollo de nuestra cultura se convirtió en una preocupación del Estado y la sociedad, pudo darse la debida atención a la estandarización y perfeccionamiento de los instrumentos tradicionales como parte del proceso de heredar y construir sobre la herencia de la música china a través de las épocas” [The stagnation of feudal society hindered the development of Chinese music as a whole. (...) Only after the people came to power, and the development of our culture became a concern of the State and society, could the proper attention be given to the standardization and improvement of traditional instruments as part of the process of inheriting and building upon the heritage of Chinese music through the ages] (Li 1960: 26–27).



Fig. 36: Photo included in Miró Quesada's travel book with the caption: "Grupo de peruanos rodeado de los más famosos actores de la Opera de Pekín..." [A group of Peruvians surrounded by the most famous actors of the Peking Opera...] (1959, II: 119).

the triumph of the Chinese Revolution on October 1st, 1952 at Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, during which: "Gigantescos faroles de papel rojo y cadenetas de variados colores adornaban la vieja arquitectura del palacio de los antiguos emperadores [...] Cuando el presidente Mao Tse Tung y su gabinete aparecieron en el Presídium, el clamor de los niños estremeció la clara mañana" [Gigantic red paper lanterns and chains of various colors adorned the ancient architecture of the palace of the old emperors (...) When President Mao Tse Tung and his cabinet appeared in the Presidium, the clamour of the children shook the clear morning] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 43). The red lanterns, the ancient architecture, and the mention of the emperors contrast with the presence of Mao as the founder of this New China as well as the children as a recurrent symbol of the future of this new society.¹⁴

Finally, these travel writers not only witnessed a China that was growing and building at great speed and scale but that was also capable of renegotiating and repurposing its cultural products, ancient knowledge, and even some more modern constructions. On the literary level, it was manifested, on the one hand, through the "fomento de un proceso de escritura más veloz, a través de composiciones de menor extensión. [...] con un lenguaje más sencillo, [y que] comunicaran de forma más concreta la aspiración revolucionaria" [The promotion of a faster writing process, through shorter compositions (...) with simpler language, (that) communicated more concretely the revolutionary aspiration] (Vidal 2020: 177). But, on the other hand, it was evident in the adaptation of some ancient proverbs and sayings (Coloane 2004:

¹⁴ References to the presence of children in Zapata's *China 6 a.m.* can be found on pages 37, 43, 45, 48, 50, 56, 62, 64, 75, 78, 88, 89, 95, 109, 112, 114, and 141.

126) as well as in the reinterpretation of some of the great Chinese classics to the circumstances and interests of the Red China. That was the case of *Xiyouji* 《西游记》 (Journey to the West): “que posteriormente sirvió de base a la ópera *Revolución en el reino de los cielos* [...] los comunistas descubrieron en ellas una simbología que las hizo positivas. Por ejemplo, en algunos de estos textos los ladrones no son más que héroes populares que se rebelaban contra el orden social” [This later served as the basis for the opera *Revolution in the Kingdom of Heaven* (...) the communists discovered in them a symbolism that made them positive. For example, in some of these texts, the thieves are nothing more than popular heroes who rebelled against the social order] (Coloane 2004: 94).

In regard to the way in which their millenary knowledge and practices were put into place in the construction of China’s socialist modernity, these are pointed out by Zapata during his description of a traditional technique used in the building of the Fusi-Ling dam: “este milenario método adquiría toda su eficacia entre estos modernos obreros” [This millennial method gained its full effectiveness among these modern workers] ([1954] 2020: 105). The same applies to the ancient method used for the cultivation of rice on terraces that contributed, in turn, to the plans of agricultural modernization drawn up for the country: “logrando así que el agua derivada de los sistemas de irrigación del Huai se empozara en ellas permitiendo la humedad necesaria a los cultivos de arroz. Con este ingenioso y antiquísimo procedimiento lograban no solo detener el agua, sino evitar la erosión del terreno” [Thus, they succeeded in making the water derived from the Huai irrigation systems pool in them, providing the necessary moisture for rice cultivation. With this ingenious and ancient method, they not only managed to stop the water but also prevent soil erosion] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 97).

Finally, Coloane also found remarkable how constructions left by the colonial era, especially in a city like Shanghai, “la ciudad más corrompida del Oriente” [The most corrupted city in the East] (Miró Quesada 1959, II: 27), were repurposed and put at the service of the construction of Socialism, old casinos, cabarets, and race-courses transformed into cultural centers and public parks (Coloane 2004: 39). Similarly, Zapata also found remarkable how “la urgencia por crear su propia economía obligaba a los chinos a convertir” [The urgency to create their own economy forced the Chinese to turn] ([1954] 2020: 59) an American plane shot down in combat and a Japanese battleship captured during the War of Liberation “máquinas de guerra del enemigo [en máquinas] al servicio del estudio y de la construcción pacífica” [The enemy’s war machines [were transformed] into machines for study and peaceful construction] ([1954] 2020: 59).

Ruptures and Continuities: From the Lettered Creole to the Formation of a Red Tourist

This section will examine both the differences and commonalities the travelers of this generation have with the nineteenth-century Creole traveler and the bourgeois voyager studied in the previous chapter. Hence, reading the travel books belonging to this period, it was inevitable to notice the resemblance that these diaries have with nineteenth-century travel writing. Some of the elements that define this resemblance are, on the one hand, a significant return to historical references and to a certain encyclopedic enthusiasm for dates and names (Coloane 2004: 19, 22, 23, 96) that, at least for the present corpus, was a practice for the most part extinct among the travel writers from the first half of the twentieth century. There is, on the other hand, a renewed interest in learning as much as possible and retaining the most information regarding geography (Zapata [1954] 2020: 89), systems, practices, models (Coloane 2004: 27–28), institutions (Zapata [1954] 2020: 105), machineries (64, 87), techniques, and infrastructure projects (91, 93) in order to replicate them or to adapt them to the realities of their own countries.

This tracing of similarities between China and Latin America¹⁵ is a bridge over common social and economic issues such as feudalism, land tenure, and the agrarian reform as a neuralgic axis for social transformation (Zapata [1954] 2020: 23, 52, 97, 123). Similarly, literacy programs (Zapata [1954] 2020: 42, 119, 122; Miró Quesada 1959, II: 117–118) and access to education in regions of the world such as these, both territorially vast, populous, and with a largely rural and illiterate composition, despite their ample linguistic and ethnic diversity. Likewise, in his capacity as a doctor, Zapata expressed, for instance, a very similar interest to the one Eduardo Wilde showed back at the end of the nineteenth century to learn about medical and hospital practices that they see could be of benefit both in Colombia and Argentina (Zapata [1954] 2020: 61). Similarly, Coloane, drawing from his experience with livestock farming, found intimate connections between his Chilean pampas and the Mongolian steppe (2004: 108).

In the same vein, phrases like: “recorrer caminos que alejan definitivamente a la humanidad de las tinieblas de la prehistoria” [To travel paths that definitively distance humanity from the darkness of prehistory] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 63) reflect a renewed importance that material progression and faith in science had for these travelers, even if this interest has distanced itself from the metropolitan Western models of modernity with which the lettered Creole was much more aligned.

¹⁵ The presence of comparisons and parallelisms has also been noted by several authors through their readings of other travel texts from Chile (Montt 2016b: 113–114) Argentina (Rupar 2019: 173–174).

Conversely, despite the affinity that words such as the ones pronounced by Mao during the meeting he had with Miró Quesada C. and the other Peruvian journalists and commissioners: “Ahora ha comenzado la gran etapa de la lucha contra la naturaleza¹⁶ para aprovecharla al máximo a favor de nuestros hombres” [Now the great stage of the struggle against nature has begun, to harness it to the fullest in favor of our people] (1959, II: 49) might have with their first predecessor, it is nonetheless important to note that such interest has moved closer to alter-modernization models. As asserted, “The PRC represented an alternative modernization model to those of the USSR and western industrial democracies” (Rojas 2020: 74). Thus, although the faith in progress acquired a new dynamism, it is anchored on a relationship with nature and on class structures clearly differentiated from those of the lettered Creole.



Fig. 37: Photograph included in the article “Pronósticos del tiempo con métodos caseros” published in the first issue of *China Reconstruye* and labelled “El viejo agricultor Juan Kuojung enseña la meteorología tradicional a Tuan Tso-chun, uno de los dos jóvenes operadores de la estación meteorológica de la comuna popular Changjou, en la provincia de Junán” [The old farmer Juan Kuojung teaches traditional meteorology to Tuan Tso-chun, one of the two young operators of the weather station in the Changjou popular commune, in the province of Junán] (Li y Ju 1960: 34).

There is, as a result, both a re-approximation of the peasantry as a class as well as a romanticization of the rural world and the work of the land. Therefore, the

¹⁶ In his article on the Costa Rican narrative of the journey to China in this period, Carlos Manuel Villalobos highlights this same aspect by quoting Joaquín Gutiérrez Mangel’s travel book in which he states that the socialist countries are heading “hacia una sociedad en la cual no existirá más la explotación del hombre por el hombre, un mundo en el cual la naturaleza será la esclava dócil de la humanidad” [Towards a society in which there will no longer be the exploitation of man by man, a world in which nature will be the obedient slave of humanity] (2020: 74).

traditional wisdom of the peasant and the worker is commonly praised, sometimes even over the one cultivated through more intellectual disciplines. Thus, during a visit to a people's commune, an Italian journalist questioned one of its members about the effectiveness of collectivized crops, a conversation that Zapata recalled saying that: "aquel interrogatorio parecía un duelo entre el hombre de la ciudad y el campo. Por más está decir que todos estábamos del lado del campesino que nos había ganado con su medida y precisión exacta al responder" [That interrogation seemed like a duel between the man of the city and the countryside. It goes without saying that we were all on the side of the farmer, who had won us over with his measured and precise responses] ([1954] 2020: 73). In the same way, although Zapata points out on multiple occasions the heroism of the worker, it is the peasant who keeps a special place in his writing. This is likely because the triumph of the communist revolution was mainly an accomplishment of their struggle, but also because, for him, it is their daily work of the land the clearest example of peace-building (Zapata [1954] 2020: 100).

The new class dynamic that permeated the traveler's encounter with China also derived into a poeticization of the figure of the peasant and an intended exaltation of the countryside and the rural life. This almost bucolic twist, which contrasts sharply with the impression left by the travel writing of the previous period, marked by a much more commodified journey, is also evident in Coloane's writing and present in the description of his visit to Wuhan, where he visited tea fields: "contemplar los bellísimos contornos de la colina, y escuchar el canto de un pájaro llamado *pucu*, nombre onomatopéyico y que, en chino, quiere decir 'siembra arroz'. Es el canto que acompaña al campesino en su trabajo. Una oropéndola cruza como un rayo de sol desprendido del follaje y nos da la despedida" [To contemplate the beautiful contours of the hill and listen to the song of a bird called "*pucu*," an onomatopoeic name that, in Chinese, means "rice planting." It is the song that accompanies the farmer in his work. A oriole crosses like a ray of sunlight breaking through the foliage and bids us farewell] (2004: 48).

On the other hand, both of these generations of Latin American travelers to China were evidently motivated by the role they believed they played in the process of large-scale social construction, from which the bourgeois traveler had withdrawn from almost entirely:

Quiero mirar y aprender lo que más pueda [...] Conocer, mirar, abarcar todo cuanto sea capaz mi naturaleza para incorporarme y empaparme de ese mundo bullente, polifacético, que está causando tanto interés en el mundo. [...] además, que siendo escritor y periodista comprendo que el proceso que se desarrolla en China haya calado tan hondo en sectores incluso más allá de lo propiamente político. [I want to look and learn as much as I can... To know, to look, to encompass everything my nature can handle in order to immerse myself in that vibrant, multifaceted world that is causing so much interest worldwide. Moreover, as a writer and

journalist, I understand that the process unfolding in China has made such a deep impact on sectors even beyond the purely political] (Coloane 2004: 16).

In the case of the lettered Creole, it was at the level of their domestic borders a national-building project but also, as I explained in the second chapter, a global and borderless enterprise founded upon the expansion of Christianity as a “nation of faith.” In the case of the travelers of this last period, it varied between the construction of a socialist society either at a national, continental, or global level, which even reached the interest of some non-communist travelers in certain socialist, progressive ideas or methods which had shown evident social transformations. Communism as a fiery globalizer was also spread as a borderless world endeavor, which against its scientific certainties, also called for a high degree of devotion tightly rooted in strong ritualistic practices. Texts such as Mao’s *Little Red Book* acquired a nearly sacred character.¹⁷ Likewise, practices such as internal purges ensured the constant self-revision and self-criticism exercises as the main method to keep the temptations of bourgeois deviations at bay through the performance of confession, punishment, and recommitment. As a devoted parishioner, Miró Quesada was the only traveler to establish a similar parallel when describing the encounter of his communist travel companions with Mao Zedong:

Para ellos, la sensación era muy similar a la que puede experimentar un católico al hablar con el Papa. Es muy curioso observar esta coincidencia de actitud. Aunque los comunistas reniegan de la religión y afirman que el marxismo no es sino una filosofía científica que repudia la metafísica, su actitud frente a los dogmas del marxismo y la personalidad de los jefes máximos, es muy parecida a la de los que creen en alguna religión revelada. Para ellos la última y eterna verdad es la del marxismo. Y para ellos, cuando algunos de los grandes jefes del marxismo habla, no puede equivocarse [For them, the feeling was very similar to what a Catholic might experience when speaking with the Pope. It is quite curious to observe this coincidence of attitude. Although communists reject religion and assert that Marxism is nothing but a scientific philosophy that repudiates metaphysics, their attitude towards the dogmas of Marxism and the personalities of the highest-ranking leaders is very similar to that of those who believe in a revealed religion. For them, the ultimate and eternal truth is that of Marxism. And for them, when some of the great leaders of Marxism speak, they cannot be mistaken] (1959, II: 48).

¹⁷ In Tanzania at the end of the 1960s, ruled by Julius Nyerere profoundly influenced by the Maoist revolutionary model, Julia Lovell mentions that as part of the Chinese medical missions sent to Tanzania: “If these medics studied a local language, the first sentence they would master was: ‘Chairman Mao sent me here.’ Opticians tested eyesight using passages from the Little Red Book. When a doctor had cured a Zanzibari man’s cerebral embolism, the Chinese medics told him that his recovery was due to Chairman Mao” (2020: 203).

The reinvigorated commitment and the renewed sense of responsibility as a witness of reality otherwise unseen made the “search for truth” another significant connection between the Creole traveler and the traveler of this last period. Thereby, as Maria Montt argues, the travelogues of this period “invite the reader to trust their authority as a kind of truth” (2016b: 95), and the traveler’s role as witness and writer is a much more important calling than those stemming from their personal interests or desires. As Coloane admitted: “Las cifras me cansan [...] Confieso que es más satisfactorio ver los campos tupidos [...] que estar anotando cantidades” [The numbers tire me... I confess that it is more satisfying to see the lush fields... than to be jotting down figures] (2004: 28). Nonetheless, this is a position to which Coloane later dedicated a few lines to further reflect on the decisions he had made as a writer for the conception and elaboration of this work: “me interesa dejar algo testimonial mío, fiel a estos sucesos, y de mí mismo, aunque en mi condición de hombre y de comunista salga mal parado [...] Si se tratara de una novela o cuento crearía estos personajes, les atribuiría sus cualidades y defectos como los estoy observando: Aquí no me surge esto” [I am interested in leaving something of my own testimony, true to these events, and to myself, even though, as a man and a communist, I may come out badly... If this were a novel or story, I would create these characters, assigning them their qualities and flaws as I observe them: But here, this doesn’t arise for me] (2004: 58).

In addition, despite coming from a very differing political stance, this same duty to preserve the objectivity all along his traveling account, even above the political convenience of what should be disclosed or kept hidden, is also manifested by Miró Quesada: “Para mí existe sólo una conveniencia y una inconveniencia. Lo que conviene es, únicamente, decir la verdad. Lo que no conviene es ocultarla, por miedo o por interés [...] algunas personas, tanto de izquierda como de derecha se van a sentir ofendidas por lo que digo” [For me, there is only one convenience and one inconvenience. What is convenient is, solely, telling the truth. What is inconvenient is hiding it, out of fear or self-interest... some people, both from the left and the right, will feel offended by what I say] (1959, II: 11).

Thus, in the writing of this new traveler are revealed spaces of interesting co-existence between the encyclopedist lettered Creole, who relinquishes poetic elaboration in order to give priority to the objectivity of their testimony and the modern bourgeois traveler, who sees with apathy the idea of carrying the burdensome responsibility of building a nation and prefers to make their travel writing and their literary elaboration a deliberately subjective space. In this sense, even in the case of Coloane, who, as I have just presented, is one of the travelers who have openly declared his renunciation of poetic elaboration in exchange for offering an objective testimony to his readers, has, nonetheless, passages in his text in which this

determination wavers and his literary sensibility seems to besiege the grounds of his writing.

For instance, when he is hospitalized, he fantasizes about the possibility of writing a poem: “Después la noche, de nuevo la noche que se repite, y la suave vibración de una gota de agua que cae en un tubo transparente... Me gustaría poder escribir, al mirar el tubo grueso panzudo, algo que se llamara ‘la fornicación de una gota’” [Then the night, again the night that repeats, and the soft vibration of a drop of water falling into a transparent tube... I would like to be able to write, while looking at the thick, bulging tube, something called ‘the fornication of a drop’] (2004: 68). However, that poetic spark is quickly extinguished with a copious irrigation of political reflections. Coloane transforms and interweaves the painful experience of the illness of his body with the agonizing feeling of seeing the socialist world fractured as a consequence of the Sino-Soviet split: “El cuerpo del socialismo era uno solo, esplendoroso [...] Jamás he sufrido tanta angustia y desesperanza [...] Creo que me mejoraría si entraran en este cuarto Jruschov y Mao para decirme: mire, en vista de su enfermedad y para que se sane, hemos decidido poner fin a nuestras divergencias” [The body of socialism was one, splendid... I have never suffered so much anguish and despair... I believe I would feel better if Khrushchev and Mao came into this room and said to me: look, in light of your illness and for your healing, we have decided to put an end to our divergences] (2004: 70).

Thus, although inspired, as he himself points out, by the traditional Chinese art of papercutting (2004: 90–91), Coloane refers to his own exercise of writing this text as an edge in which his weakness for writing from his own subjectivity and his responsibility to write from the objective space converge. As I mentioned, *Papeles recortados* was, before being assembled in the form of a more cohesive work, a mixture of press clippings, official communiqués, letters, personal notes, and diary passages. Once published, it manifests to its readers as a collage in which some memories will be announced or outlined but only developed many pages later, such as the visits of Hortensia Bussi de Allende to the Friendship Hotel (2004: 71, 100) or Coloane’s trip to Inner Mongolia (2004: 87, 103). This is a collage of the objectivity of the journalist, the commitment of the communist, the pain of the human, the sensitivity of the poet, the frustration of the socialist, and the confusion of the Chilean. All of them traverse Coloane as a prism from which texts of multiple tonalities emerge in different directions. These various forms of textuality in the writing of Coloane are unexhausted but differentiated versions of the same experience. They do not limit the representations of his impressions to the domain of a single voice but reconcile the multiple voices and perspectives that merge in him both as a writer and as a traveler.

“El Pueblo ante el Espejo”: Class and Other Comparative Perspectives

Previously, I have underlined the important role that class has played in the history of the Latin American travel writing of China. From the nineteenth-century lettered Creole to the cosmopolitan bourgeois of the first half of the twentieth century, the journey to China has been an experience mostly dominated by the highest social spheres. Thus, even though the popular diplomacy program initiated in the 1950s by the PRC was still mainly oriented to “ganarse la buena voluntad de las elites intelectuales alrededor del mundo” [to win the goodwill of intellectual elites around the world] (Ruilova 1977: 93), it is, nevertheless, significant that the large number of travelers, invited in the context of this people-to-people diplomacy, experienced a significant turn in terms of their social composition. Evidently, this was also translated into a notable diversification of the political leanings and social interests represented by the travel writers of this new period.

At least with regard to the travel writers that are part of this corpus, it is evident that with the exception of Miró Quesada, all the other travelers were born and educated in places other than the capital cities of their home countries, raised in more rural¹⁸ or marginal regions by working-class parents, and educated to a lesser degree in Western metropolises. Evidently, without intending to reduce their work to the limits of such circumstances, it is a variable not to be discarded as part of the complex equation of their political and poetical projects since they are part of the diversified perspective of their encounter with China and their writing of it.

Just as class structures and their historically changing dynamics in Latin America and China have been an articulating thread of the history of these journeys throughout the previous chapters, new perspectives will be present in the travel writing of this last period. For instance, one of the peculiarities that captured great attention and surprise in these travelers during their visit to New China was experiencing a society that, despite having a dynastic past only a few decades behind from their present, had social hierarchies and power roles seemingly entirely flattened in several spheres. This made “muy difícil identificar a simple vista la jerarquía de un alto empleado chino, pues su modestia los hace confundir con el común de la gente” [It is very difficult to identify at first glance the hierarchy of a high-ranking Chinese employee, as their modesty makes them blend in with the common people] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 58).

¹⁸ In his article on Pablo de Rokha, José Vidal K. also observes that the affinity that the Chilean writer developed with the Chinese revolutionary experience also had to do with “su familiaridad con y el apego hacia el mundo campesino” [His familiarity with and attachment to the rural world] (2020: 167).

There could not be a better example to illustrate this point than the passage in which Coloane recalls the day when in a meeting of union leaders he met China's last emperor: "el intérprete me dice que nos va a presentar al último emperador Pu Yi, situación que en un comienzo no la entendimos sino hasta mucho después. Pu Yi estaba allí como representante del gremio de jardineros [...] Él era representante de la clase trabajadora china como tantos otros que participaban allí" [The interpreter tells me that we are going to be introduced to the last emperor Pu Yi, a situation that we initially did not understand until much later. Pu Yi was there as a representative of the gardeners' guild... He was a representative of the Chinese working class, like many others who were participating there] (2004: 115). As Saïtta also underlined, "el mayor impacto que estas comunidades reconciliadas producen en la mirada de escritores y periodistas es la inexistencia del abismo que suele separar a los intelectuales del pueblo" [The greatest impact that these reconciled communities have on the perspective of writers and journalists is the absence of the divide that often separates intellectuals from the people] (2007: 11–12). Thus, while highly vertical Confucian structures such as the imperial examination system had been abolished just a few decades ago, during his visit to a university in Tianjin, Zapata asks with surprise: "¿Qué clase de universidad es esta en donde los estudiantes y profesores parecen simples obreros? [...] No se equivoca usted al considerarnos simples obreros, en realidad lo somos: profesores y alumnos estamos construyendo nuestra propia universidad" [What kind of university is this where students and professors seem like mere workers? [...] You are not wrong in considering us simple workers; in fact, we are: both professors and students are building our own university] ([1954] 2020: 56).

To better understand this change, I would like to return to the figure of the windows that I used in the previous chapter to illustrate certain forms of interaction that had the class factor as their main mobilizing axis. One of the titles that Zapata gave to one of his travel chronicles of China "El pueblo ante el espejo" provides us with the figure of the mirror, which, instead of the window, is the one that best encompasses the transformation that the class factor underwent along this period. Thus, although it is an element that will vary from traveler to traveler, it is safe to say that when they encounter China and its realities, they do not do so by observing it from the other side of a glass but by seeing it while observing themselves. While seeing their struggles, they see their own struggles; while looking into China's past, they read into their own past. It is standing in front of this mirror, contemplating the reflection of their common historical and social realities, how these travelers not only encounter that *other* but encounter their own selves.

The pledge of a non-classist art is another dimension in which this horizontalization was also perceived: "cuando asistimos a la ópera, nos sorprendió cómo los

actores en escena apenas si se distinguían del hombre de la calle que nos rodeaba. Después de estas representaciones nos parecía ver al guerrillero Wang Kuei, principal protagonista de la ópera *Wang Kuei y Li Hsiang-hsiang*, apostado en una esquina o dirigiendo el tránsito con uniforme blanco” [When we attended the opera, we were surprised at how the actors on stage barely seemed distinguishable from the common man around us. After these performances, it seemed as though we could see the guerrilla Wang Kuei, the main character of the opera Wang Kuei and Li Hsiang-hsiang, standing at a corner or directing traffic in his white uniform] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 46). Thus, while in the previous chapter, particular emphasis was placed on the distance that separated the world of the outside from the world of the inside, for travelers like Zapata, the separation between these two dimensions seems to have fallen apart. The *self* and the *other* are here portrayed as one. Similarly, as I will elaborate later on, the divisions between the individual and the collective, the private and the public, and the artistic and the popular are also structures that are renegotiated. Thereby, in the theater of this new society, the stage and the audience have become one as well as the actor and the spectator. “La obra presentada fue una alegoría a los trabajos realizados por el pueblo en las construcciones del río Huai” [The presented work was an allegory of the labor carried out by the people in the constructions of the Huai River] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 107). In this sense, the worker is also an artist, and his manual work serves as the basis of an artistic work that they themselves observe, reflect on, and narrate but also direct and perform. This narrative approach is based on a breakage of the limits imposed by the written word and by the divisions drawn by the lettered city.

Nevertheless, there are other instances in which the class element and their condition as travelers intersect in different ways in the travel narrative of this period. Echoes of both the lettered Creole and the modern bourgeois resonate in the subjectivity of the travel writer to *China Nueva*. To begin with, from the nineteenth century to the present period, the journey to the Orient gave all these travelers the right and the almost immediate social recognition of not being labeled as tourists. However, both the nineteenth-century traveler and the traveler from this new period can be distinguished by the vehemence with which they tried to distance themselves from this figure. In the case of the first one, it is mostly based on the fact that the journey to Asia was the pilgrimage to an almost unexplored geography for the Latin American experience of travel with respect to the already commodified trip to Europe. In the case of the latter, they were guided, on the one hand, by the need to take political distance from the bourgeois tourist, hedonist, and collector of exotisms and common places.

On the other hand, they were also driven by a form of pilgrimage, prompted by curiosity or conviction. This pilgrimage was no longer toward an unexplored land

but to a land that had become almost mythical due to the project of a new society that was under construction there. Thus, even in the case of Miró Quesada, whose travel group was comprised of Peruvians with very diverse political inclinations, and despite admitting that tourism was their greatest temptation:

Todos y cada uno de los que formábamos el grupo peruanos [...] teníamos un orgullo: estábamos convencidos de que no éramos turistas. [...] Cualquiera de nosotros habría considerado como un insulto imperdonable tamaño apelativo [...] aunque el hecho de hacer el extraordinario viaje que estábamos haciendo nos elevaba al límite del entusiasmo, ello no se debía al puro hecho de viajar, sino a la definida circunstancia de viajar al mundo socialista, de tener conocimiento directo [...] de un país como China, en el que se está produciendo uno de los experimentos más discutidos de los últimos tiempos. Ya pensáramos a favor o en contra de estos experimentos [Each and every one of us in the group of Peruvians [...] had one pride: we were convinced that we were not tourists. [...] Any of us would have considered such a label an unforgivable insult [...] While the extraordinary journey we were undertaking filled us with the utmost enthusiasm, it was not simply because of the act of traveling, but because of the specific circumstance of traveling to the socialist world, of gaining direct knowledge [...] of a country like China, where one of the most discussed experiments of recent times is taking place. Whether we supported or opposed these experiments] (1959, II: 22).

Nonetheless, this experience will also change in the case of Coloane, among the many Latin Americans who did not only visit China for periods of a few weeks or a couple of months, as it was in the case of Miró Quesada or Zapata, but who shared the Friendship Hotel as their new home together with other thousands of “foreign experts.” Later, I will delve deeper into the implications that both the tangible and the intangible borders imposed by the Friendship Hotel had in the relationship established between these travel writers and the Chinese society they met. However, I would like to highlight at this point how paradoxical is the fact that these walls are the ones that will bring this new travel writer closer together to its most immediate predecessor, the modern bourgeois traveler. The privilege, comfort, and physical and social isolation that these frontiers represented can be interpreted as a distant but still arguable inheritor of the borders that, in the last chapter, we saw drawn by party halls, voguish receptions, and exclusive restaurants. A legacy glaringly captured in Coloane’s description of:

El banquete más fabuloso que he saboreado en mi larga vida. Nos presentaron trece platos, sin contar las dos sopas que, por lo general, se sirven entremedio. El primero de ellos venía acompañado, en un cedazo de fino mimbre, sobre una porcelana. [...] Después fueron apareciendo delicados champiñones y brotes de bambú, envueltos en la típica salsa de soya roja preparada con azúcar y vino; las aletas de tiburón cocidas a fuego lento; un pescado al vapor, otro en salsa de vinagre y algo que mi mujer no olvida por su bella presentación: pollo envuelto en hojas de loto y cocinado en una fuente de arcilla. Pero nos están faltando las ostras y camarones saltadas con almendras, y la infaltable soya. Preguntamos por los nidos de

pájaros y, cosa extraña, sería una de las dos sopas gelatinosas que nos servimos sin poner mayor atención [The most fabulous banquet I have ever tasted in my long life. We were served thirteen dishes, not counting the two soups that are generally served in between courses. The first dish came accompanied by a fine wicker sieve placed atop porcelain. [...] Then came delicate mushrooms and bamboo shoots, wrapped in the typical red soy sauce made with sugar and wine; slow-cooked shark fins; one fish steamed, another in vinegar sauce, and something my wife won't forget for its beautiful presentation: chicken wrapped in lotus leaves and cooked in a clay dish. But we mustn't forget the oysters and shrimp sautéed with almonds, and the ever-present soy. We asked about the bird's nests, and, strangely enough, they turned out to be one of the two gelatinous soups we sipped without paying much attention] (2004: 36).

Although such a banquet was far from being a daily occurrence, as it was the case most probably for the travelers from the first half of the century, it is very telling that right after such a description, Coloane asked himself: “¿Quién podría ser tan ciego y obcecado para no darse cuenta que uno estaba palpando una sociedad distinta a la que habíamos leído en novelas y diarios sobre China, donde la mortandad por hambre era una pesadilla permanente?” [Who could be so blind and obstinate as not to realize that we were witnessing a society entirely different from the one we had read about in novels and newspapers, where death by starvation was a constant nightmare?] (2004: 37). Using his own words, this comment could be read as “blind” and “stubborn” even without expecting Coloane to be aware of the at least forty-five million Chinese that died during the Great Famine (Yang 2013: vi; Dikötter 2010: xii). It started in 1958, when Coloane first visited the country, and reached an end by 1962, right on his return. Nonetheless, it was also clear that even though living conditions experienced a significant improvement after the communist triumph in the War of Liberation (Yang 2021: 97), life on collectivized farms and, in general, was still hard for most Chinese. It was, in fact, a common occurrence to hear, in many of the tours that the travelers joined during their stay in China, that: “El Gobierno Popular comenzó por alimentarnos, todos teníamos hambre y estábamos al borde de la muerte” [The People's Government started by feeding us; we were all hungry and on the brink of death] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 85). This was something that Coloane himself also acknowledged a few pages later: “necesidad del ahorro, en una sociedad que atraviesa por graves dificultades económicas y que debe cuidar el uso de determinados elementos del diario vivir, para abastecer en lo posible, a todos” [The need for frugality in a society facing severe economic hardships, where careful use of certain daily essentials is crucial to provide for everyone as much as possible] (2004: 50).

Therefore, although the limits of the privilege appear to coincide with the limits that isolated these travelers from their outside realities while in China, it is also the presence of this limit the one that triggered new interrogations. Thus, further into his stay in Beijing, Coloane did question his own role as a communist, fearing that

he had become a bureaucrat instead of a true revolutionary (2004: 62). He also experienced a woeful mistrust in his own work at *China Reconstruye* since, according to him, the documents he worked with were full of a *palabrería* only read and understood by few (2004: 125). Besides, he questioned the limits of the privileges of foreigners like himself in the Friendship Hotel who had, according to his Chinese colleagues at the magazine, not only salaries higher than theirs and even higher than the ones that Mao or Zhou Enlai had (2004: 190) but, as he acknowledged, also privileges, such as

Un salón [...] donde había bebidas, golosinas y finos cigarrillos [...] Las habitaciones tenían buena calefacción en invierno, con dobles cristales gruesos [...] servicios médicos oportunos con galenos en el hotel. Además, derecho a lavandería y una entrega de bonos mensuales para la compra de géneros de algodón. Como extranjeros gozábamos de una cuota superior, que nosotros no utilizábamos [A lounge [...] offering beverages, sweets, and fine cigarettes [...] The rooms were well-heated during winter, equipped with thick double-pane windows [...] timely medical services with doctors available at the hotel. Additionally, there was access to laundry services and the allocation of monthly vouchers for the purchase of cotton goods. As foreigners, we were granted a higher quota, which we did not use] (2004: 50–51).

Then again, it was the experience of his class position in China that also provoked the reflection on his own class positioning back in Chile, as it particularly happened during his visit to a popular commune:

Todo lo que vi en este campo fue interesante y novedoso, comparado al trabajo en mis tierras en Chiloé, donde mi madre tenía un poco más de 360 hectáreas, algunas vacas, ovejas y caballos, además de un bote pesquero. El predio de doña Humiliana equivaldría a unos 5.400 mus, según los cálculos de mi intérprete, es decir, más tierras que las que tiene la comuna que visito y que corresponden a 3.566 mus. A medida que conocí algo del campo chino, me preocupé por la tenencia de la tierra, ya que se descalificaba a la comuna y, por otra parte, se defendía el atrasado sistema feudal [Everything I saw in this field was fascinating and novel, compared to the work on my family's land in Chiloé, where my mother owned just over 360 hectares, along with a few cows, sheep, horses, and a fishing boat. According to my interpreter's calculations, Doña Humiliana's property would amount to about 5,400 *mus*, which is more land than the commune I visited, with its 3,566 *mus*. As I learned more about the Chinese countryside, I grew concerned about land tenure, as the commune was criticized while, on the other hand, the outdated feudal system was being defended] (2004: 29).

Orientalist Legacies

Revisiting the category of *orientalismo periférico*, introduced by Hernán Taboada in the late 1990s, Jaime Ortega proposed the term *orientalismo rojo* to address a selected corpus of Mexican travel writing of China from the 1960s to the 1970s. Ortega argues,



Fig. 38: Photograph included in the exhibition *Chile y China: la memoria de una amistad pionera desde la figura de José Venturelli* taken by Delia Baraona between 1952 and 1958, labelled *Zhongguo huapingdian menkou de haizi* 中国花瓶店门口的孩子 (Children at the entrance of a Chinese vases store).

on the one hand, that it “responde a un conjunto de categorías que los viajeros expresan en sus relatos; por ejemplo, el constante señalamiento de la ‘historia milenaria’ de China” [It corresponds to a set of categories that travelers articulate in their accounts; for example, the frequent emphasis on China’s ‘millennial history’] (2020: 566). On the other hand, this form of orientalism “proyecta una concordancia entre los objetivos, las orientaciones y sus formas de cristalización de una revolución, a partir de lo cual se puede entender la ausencia de crítica [...] El orientalismo rojo habita los relatos de viaje en la medida en que se adhieren a la concepción de que en la sociedad no hay conflictos” [It projects a concordance between the objectives, orientations, and manifestations of a revolution, which helps to explain the absence of criticism [...] Red Orientalism permeates travel narratives insofar as they adhere to the notion that society is devoid of conflict] (2020: 567). Ortega’s effort to return to the question of the place that orientalism occupies in the Latin American travel narrative of China in this period is fundamental, mainly because, as he recognizes, it is strongly permeated by an anti-colonial discourse. Nonetheless, I would argue that, even though there are in fact orientalist gestures that are still reproduced in the writing of this period, the new historical position in which China is located as well as the new forms of encounters and exchanges that its people-to-people diplomacy established among Third World countries give a whole new perspective to the orientalist narrative.

In the first place, I do not agree with the interpretation of the frequent allusion to ancient Chinese history in these texts as an orientalist gesture. In fact, one of the aspects in which it differs the most from the previous ones is precisely the fact that it is able to see and represent China through eyes other than those of the European

“imperial eye.” This “imperial eye” is governed by distributions of power that self-legitimize metropolitan imaginaries of superiority, endorsing with it racist practices of oppression and subjugation of an *other* for the benefit of their own particular interests. Evidently, this is not to suggest that the “imperial eye” is overcome as an intermediary for the interpretation of the journey to China and its writing in this period. Nonetheless, it does distinguish itself from the previous ones by recognizing China as a historical subject in its own right and not just as an object whose incursion into history is justified by its colonial connection to Europe. Moreover, the fact that as Latin Americans, these travelers saw in Chinese history reflections. They interpreted China, for the most part, as “an equal.” This factor disrupts the orientalist apparatus, whose vision of that *other* is always mediated by an understanding of itself as superior and the other as inferior. On the other hand, there is, in the travel writing of this period, an evident effort to both serve as a means for China to historicize itself and represent China “in their own words,” instead of exclusively resorting to European sources to legitimize their own writing as Latin Americans. This is, therefore, an element that provincializes the European metropolitan centers from the South-South relationship and exchanges (re)established between these two latitudes under their own power dynamics.

Second, Ortega’s definition of *orientalismo rojo* is also understood as a result of, on the one hand, the PRC’s performance of the experience of socialism as an imaginary that did not coincide with a reality permeated by “intentos de control, manipulación, violencia descarnada” [Attempts at control, manipulation, and unrestrained violence] (2020: 567) and, on the other hand, the subsequent absence of criticism from the travelers regarding the Chinese revolutionary process. In this respect, it is possible to note that if confronted with a corpus that included broader perspectives, this category would prove itself as inoperative. Over and above that, the historical weight and the political implications that the concept of “orientalism” carries make it impossible to disregard the relations of power and subjugation that govern its very definition. Thus, although, the PRC had its own agendas and interests in launching its program of cultural diplomacy and promoting its model of socialism, the very fact that the PRC is the artifice of imaginaries about itself as exportable realities for the rest of the world is a fact that challenges the use of this category within the specificity of this context.

I agree with other scholars analyzing the Latin American travel writing of this period that there is a manifest interest, also evident in the present corpus and even applicable in the case of Miró Quesada, to avoid orientalism. There is an evident attempt to “abandonar totalizaciones culturales, binarismos y nociones de alteridad” [To abandon cultural totalizations, binaries, and notions of otherness] (Montt 2016a: 3029), just as “an explicit intent of taking distance from

an essentialist approach” (Montt: 2016b: 106) in order to “superar alteridades fijas” [To overcome fixed otherness] (Vidal 2020: 187). In this sense, it is worth noting that Zapata recognizes not only how deeply the roots of the orientalist discourse are associated with Marco Polo’s writing, penetrated in the terrains of the imagination, but also how mediated they are by a race and class privileges: “la literatura de exportación confeccionada para agradar al extranjero nos pintaban las hermosísimas princesas de pies pequeños, arrebujadas en sedas y colores, mostrando sus ojitos seductores al europeo, mientras algún miserable tiraba de la *rickshaw* por las estrechas callejuelas” [The export literature crafted to please foreigners depicted the beautiful princesses with small feet, wrapped in silks and colors, showing their seductive little eyes to the European, while some miserable man pulled the rickshaw through the narrow alleys] ([1954] 2020: 39). Furthermore, there is, in his writing, a clear recognition of how these images shaped their traveling expectations and with it their impressions and experiences:

Inútilmente algunos delegados buscaban los tipos chinos que habían visto en las películas y literatura occidental. Por ninguna parte encontraban a las mujeres con sus trajes de seda bajo sombrillas de papel; ni las turbas de mendigos acosando al extranjero tan propio de la China de Chiang Kai-shek; ni hallaban, como era la obsesión de alguien, cantinas o prostíbulos. Estábamos frente a una nación nueva. [...] El pueblo chino había dejado de tejer las sedas que le habían hecho producir por muchos siglos sus opresores, para construir fábricas, universidades y su nuevo arte [Some delegates fruitlessly searched for the Chinese types they had seen in Western films and literature. Nowhere could they find women in silk garments under paper umbrellas, nor the crowds of beggars harassing foreigners so typical of Chiang Kai-shek’s China; nor did they find, as someone had obsessively imagined, taverns or brothels. We were faced with a new nation. [...] The Chinese people had stopped weaving the silks that their oppressors had made them produce for centuries, in order to build factories, universities, and their new art] ([1954] 2020: 46).

Therefore, in the acknowledgment of this New China, Zapata underlines how it has managed to free itself from its own self-orientalization, no longer a creation of the Western imagination. It has ceased to be the factory of its own colonial exoticisms to become the creator of new and alternative social, cultural, and political realities, not only for itself but for the rest of the world. There are, however, other instances in which the orientalist gesture survives. It was through Miró Quesada’s writing that the exoticizing exercise of disguising oneself as *that other* was preserved. In the nineteenth century, we saw the portraits of both Carlos Ribeiro “O meu traje chinez” (My Chinese suit) posing with a *changpao* 长袍¹⁹ oneself as that other the Qing dynasty,

¹⁹ Also written *changshan* 長衫 is a traditional Chinese garment. Typically worn by men (scholars, officials, and members of the upper class), a *changpao* is a long, loose-fitting robe with wide

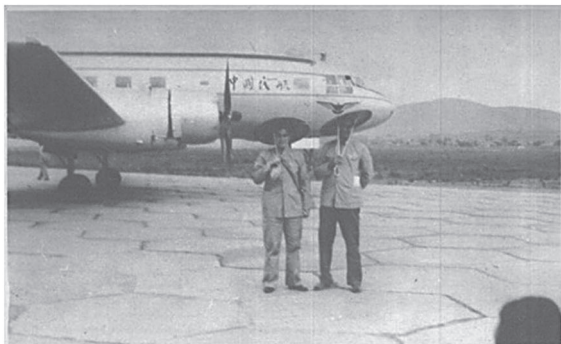


Fig. 39: Miró Quesada posing together with another Peruvian delegate wearing a ‘Mao suit’. Photograph included in his travel book. (1959, II: 98).

as well as Tanco Armero, who, standing in front of a camera, flaunts a rice paper umbrella and a pair of typical Manchu official boots. By the first half of the twentieth century, we noticed how this practice reached new levels and how it was integrated into the commodification of the experience of the journey to East Asia, becoming a common form of entertainment at parties and banquets. Many of them were described by de la Parra, where the travelers paraded bursting into laughter in the costumes of geishas, rice growers, and feudal lords. In this last period, Miró Quesada poses in the company of another Peruvian representative, both dressed in the legendary *zhongshan zhuang* 中山装, popularly known as the blue “Mao suit,” in a gesture that he himself accepted as being “una ligera concesión al espíritu del turismo” [a slight concession to the spirit of tourism] (1959: II: 96).

In this sense, it is not surprising that it is through Miró Quesada’s travel writing preserves this and other exoticizing orientalist traits coming from previous periods. The echoes of the bourgeois traveler resonate most strongly in the construction of his subjectivity as a journeyer. Thus, when on his visit to an antique store in Shanghai and tempted to turn his suitcase into a small museum of chinoiserie, Miró Quesada cannot but admit that:

Allí todos los peruanos abjuramos vilmente de nuestra condición de estudiosos del mundo socialista para precipitarnos como turistas hambrientos sobre los tesoros que descubríamos. Nos transformamos en vulgares imperialistas y saqueamos las tiendas de los anticuarios. Cuando llegábamos al hotel, cargados de tantos paquetes que se nos caían de las manos, nos mirábamos los unos a los otros con incomodidad inconfesada y tratábamos de pasar

sleeves. It has been worn in China for centuries and has variations in style and design depending on the region and time period.

desapercibidos ante nuestro anfitriones chinos que nos contemplaban con comprensiva sonrisa. Estaban seguramente acostumbrados a la metamorfosis. Después de todo, no hacíamos sino contribuir al progreso del socialismo [Here, all of us Peruvians vilified our condition as scholars of the socialist world to rush like hungry tourists towards the treasures we discovered. We transformed into vulgar imperialists and looted the antique stores. When we returned to the hotel, loaded with so many packages that they almost slipped from our hands, we looked at each other with unspoken discomfort, trying to go unnoticed by our Chinese hosts, who observed us with a knowing smile. They were surely accustomed to such metamorphoses. After all, we were only contributing to the progress of socialism] (1959, II: 27–28).

The Collective and the Individual

Travelers like Tanco and de la Parra had previously emphasized the “massive” and “collectivized” character of the Chinese, mostly to describe them as “monotonous” and “unvarying.” In this new period, however, such characteristics acquired new significance. Thus, in contrast to de la Parra’s description of the Chinese as “pululaban a millares aquellas cabezas uniformes, de un parecido desesperante” ([1920] 2011: 78), for Zapata, this uniformity is understood as a commitment of the individual with its collectivity:²⁰

Casi la totalidad de la población vestía un traje azul²¹ de dril que no solo mostraba la sencillez del ciudadano chino, sino su solidaridad con los esfuerzos que hacía toda la nación de emplear el mínimo de gasto superfluo para destinar el máximo de la industria a la lucha contra el bloqueo económico” [Almost the entire population wore a blue drill suit, which not only reflected the simplicity of the Chinese citizen but also their solidarity with the nation’s efforts to minimize unnecessary spending and allocate the maximum amount of industry towards the fight against the economic blockade] ([1954] 2020: 46).

Therefore, although this “collectivization” was in other aspects also problematized by Coloane and Miró Quesada, the perception of it will be predominantly based on a deep admiration for the social and economic achievements that with astounding self-discipline such feature managed to leverage: “El orden de aquel río humano, a pesar de su convulsiva agitación, maravillaba al no desbordarse un solo paso más allá de los límites trazados con franjas blancas en el suelo. No se hacían necesarios cordones de policías para ordenar a este pueblo consciente de sus pasos” [The order of that human river, despite its convulsive agitation, amazed as not a single step extended

²⁰ Similar interpretations are underlined by José M. Vidal in his reading of Pablo de Rokha’s writings; see (Vidal 2020: 178–179).

²¹ In her reading of Kordon’s and Oyarzun’s diaries, María Montt also referred to this same aspect (2016b: 104).

beyond the limits marked by white stripes on the ground. No police cordons were necessary to organize this people, conscious of their steps] (Zapata ([1954] 2020: 44). This admiration for the Chinese masses is in the words of Coloane even turned into a poetic motif: “Admiro el bosque de ruedas que giran con suave velocidad y armonía” [I admire the forest of wheels spinning with gentle speed and harmony] (Coloane 2004: 15), and the contemplation of the collective work becomes almost a *must-see* tourist attraction: “Probablemente no volveremos a contemplar un conglomerado humano tan inmenso dedicado al trabajo con tanta energía [...] Miles y miles de hombres y mujeres trabajan día y noche” [Probably we will never again witness such a vast human conglomerate devoted to work with such energy... Thousands and thousands of men and women work day and night] (Miró Quesada 1959, II: 21).

However, as other authors have pointed out (Montt 2016b: 105), this gesture also leads to the construction of homogenizing depictions of China and its people, which translate into descriptions of Beijing as a “ciudad inundada de miles de hombres” [City flooded with thousands of men] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 39). Similarly, images of Tiananmen Square, which by 1959 was under expansion, following Mao’s ambition to turn it into the largest square in the world (Bregolat 155) was also described by Miró Quesada as a “especie de hormiguero gigante [...] Como un gigantesco enjambre de termitas, los trabajadores chinos avasallan todo lo que se les pone al paso. Pero en lugar de devorar, construyen” [A kind of giant anthill... Like a massive swarm of termites, the Chinese workers overwhelm everything in their path. But instead of devouring, they build] (Miró Quesada 1959, II: 21).

This animalization of China and the Chinese, which we had already seen in the narrative of the previous period, specifically in the words of Orrego Vicuña, for Miró Quesada is initially a way of celebrating their ability to cooperate and build together. Nonetheless, as his narrative progresses, and his criticisms of communism become more searing, the animalization as a descriptive resource becomes the pretext for suggesting that far from this being a conscious and socially committed exercise, it was in fact a display of their “voiceless” irrationality and their inability to verbalize their criticisms to their own regime: “En la Plaza de la Revolución vimos un hormiguero en marcha. Pero no pudimos conversar con las hormigas. Cuando una hormiga habla en chino es difícil entender lo que dice [...] Como no hay libertad de expresión en los países totalitarios, nadie puede demostrar las falacias de la propaganda estatal” [In the Revolution Square, we saw an ant hill in motion. But we couldn’t talk to the ants. When an ant speaks in Chinese, it’s hard to understand what it’s saying... Since there is no freedom of speech in totalitarian countries, no one can demonstrate the falsehoods of state propaganda] (1959, II: 90).

Interestingly, in this new period the individual has gained the greatest prominence. It presents the reader with a more local experience of Chinese history and

reality, often described from a singularized perspective. Therefore, this travel writing is defined by a permanent overlapping between the individual and the collective. In it, the individual is frequently collectivized or described from a *zoom-out* perspective, and the collective is also constantly singled out or *zoomed in*, creating a testimony in which the local and the global appear as interwoven: “miramos el rostro y escuchamos las canciones del pueblo chino” [We looked at the face and listened to the songs of the Chinese people] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 37). Thus, it refers to the vastness of the Chinese people, but through the image of a single “pueblo” with a single face of a single China.

There are, on the other hand, mainly two narrative mechanisms that Zapata uses to individualize and provide a *zoomed-in* perspective of both China’s past and present. The first one is to see through a characteristic of an individual the reflection of a collective experience of history, as in the description of an old man, whose “cuerpo curvado por los años y el esfuerzo; era como una estatua de carbón que llevara en sus músculos estampados todos los sufrimientos de los obreros chinos bajo la explotación minera del invasor” [a body bent by years and effort; it was like a statue of coal, its muscles imprinted with all the suffering of the Chinese workers under the mining exploitation of the invader] ([1954] 2020: 70), given that “el dolor de uno cualquiera de sus hijos era el dolor de toda la patria” [the pain of any of its children was the pain of the entire homeland] ([1954] 2020: 91). The second mechanism, which I will return to in the next section, is introducing to the readers many of the Chinese that he met along his journey through the PRC. Therefore, his writing became the channel through which he allowed them to narrate their own stories and the stories of their own families, villages, or communities using “their own words” on their own personal names. In this sense, the literary narrative puts a face to the generalized accounts of the traditional historiographical exercise.

Finally, although, as readers, we are clear on which side of history Zapata’s narration is located, it is also worth noting that in this exercise of historical interweaving, there are instances in which the plurality of the perspectives of that story are brought to the forefront in a decolonizing gesture of the traveler’s gaze. Through this, Zapata steps down from his position as an *observer*, situating himself and his writing not only from the perspective of one being *observed* but from the multiplicity of sides. The various angles highlight the different actors that piece together a single story, adding narrative layers in a way that only art can do. This approach attests to the historical density of a single event, which might be otherwise lost among official annals, as shown by the following lines:

¡Cómo debieron temblar las manos de los verdugos que dispararon las armas! ¡Cómo resonarían en los oídos del pueblo las canciones con que sembró el camino hacia el cadalso! ¡Qué sentiría el fotógrafo que supo recoger cada uno de los segundos que precedieron al sacrificio!

¡Dónde esconderían su miedo los criminales que pretendieron con su muerte borrar su presencia imborrable! ¡Cuál sería el llanto de ese padre y esa esposa cuando los amigos llegaron a contarles cómo había sabido entregarse Wang Shao Ho al sacrificio [How must the hands of the executioners have trembled as they fired the guns! How the songs that paved the way to the scaffold must have echoed in the ears of the people! What would the photographer, who captured every second before the sacrifice, have felt? Where would the criminals who tried to erase his indelible presence hide their fear? What would be the cry of that father and wife when friends came to tell them how Wang Shao Ho had bravely surrendered to the sacrifice?] (1954) 2020: 117).

Another gesture that exemplifies this exercise of decolonization of the traveler's gaze in *China 6 a.m.* stems from its open intention to configure itself as an alternative narrative:

Yo no conozco la historia, ni los nombres, ni las fechas, ni los lugares donde fueron asesinados estos héroes. Yo solo he visitado en el Palacio de los Trabajadores de Shanghai la exposición de fotografías y prendas personales que llevaban en el momento de ser sacrificados estos mártires de la revolución. Me ha bastado mirar esas caras de los profesores, de los líderes obreros, de los periodistas, de las mujeres dirigentes, de los niños, de los anónimos, de las madres, de los estudiantes, en las fotografías desteñidas, tomadas con disimulo, en las cuales el fotógrafo expone su propia vida, reproducidas en los periódicos, carcomidas por el fuego, manchadas por la sangre de las víctimas. Me ha bastado, repito, con mirar esas fotos, como las que reproducen los últimos momentos de Wang Shao Ho, para comprender y sentir que el pueblo de Shanghai, que su clase trabajadora y sus dirigentes han sabido fundirse en el heroísmo de sus hombres en la lucha abierta, soterrada y valiente contra los reaccionarios de la patria y contra los opresores extranjeros. He visto la foto de Chen Iwen [...] he visto un facsímil de esta carta [...] He visto los rincones en donde se reunían los comunistas [...] he visto a los comunistas vendados los ojos, las manos amarradas a la espalda, de rodillas en la calle [I do not know the history, the names, the dates, or the places where these heroes were killed. I have only visited the Workers' Palace in Shanghai, where I saw an exhibition of photographs and personal belongings carried by these martyrs of the revolution at the moment they were sacrificed. It was enough for me to look at the faces of the teachers, the worker leaders, the journalists, the female leaders, the children, the anonymous ones, the mothers, the students, in the faded photographs, taken secretly, in which the photographer risked his own life, reproduced in the newspapers, eaten by fire, stained with the blood of the victims. It was enough, I repeat, just to look at these photos, like the ones that reproduce the final moments of Wang Shao Ho, to understand and feel that the people of Shanghai, that their working class and leaders have known how to merge into the heroism of their men in the open, underground, and courageous struggle against the reactionaries of the homeland and the foreign oppressors. I have seen the photo of Chen Iwen... I have seen a facsimile of this letter... I have seen the corners where the communists gathered... I have seen the communists blindfolded, their hands tied behind their backs, kneeling in the street] (1954) 2020: 118–119).

Zapata openly declares himself a non-historian but not for that reason, incapable of seeing through a living archive the alternative account of an experience of history. This open defiance to the motivations, the limits, and the methods of

construction of the traditional historical narrative that favors facts over individuals and objectivity over sensitivity is, in a broader sense, a contravention of the limits of a memory colonized by the scientific approach to the narration of the human experience inherited from the centers of Western modernity. Ultimately, *China 6 a.m.* joins an archive that, while being historiographically imprecise or scientifically objectionable, is a testimony of the experience of a war that could only be called “cold” because of the colossal scope of its crudeness.

(Un)Translatability: Between Language, Culture, and Politics

In previous chapters, I have referred extensively to the role that the traveler has played as a cultural translator for the Latin American reader, not only of their traveling experiences but of China and the Chinese as a cultural entity. Further, I have referred to the implications that translation and the absence of it, as well as communication or the lack of it, have had in their experience and in their written representations of China. However, the cultural diplomacy initiated in this period articulated the encounter between these two latitudes more consistently, prompting with it an increase both in the number and in the manifestations of these encounters. As a result, the levels at which translation as a linguistic but also as a cultural and political exercise grew in complexity. Thus, for instance, while it could be easily assumed that the PRC’s primary interest in this period was, above all, the “translatability” of its revolutionary process to the rest of the world, the fact that, as Julia Lovell has shown: “through the 1950s the Chinese government often showed an inclination to refuse visas to people with a background in Chinese studies or Chinese language skills, indicating a preference for visitors without prior or independent knowledge of China” (2015: 144) demonstrates that also the absence of communication and rather the control over what is translated and what is not was also essential.

For this reason, I have decided to dedicate the present section to the analysis of the different shapes that translation took in the writing of this period. Evidently, not only Chinese interpreters took on a more involved role, but it was also in this period that some travelers were “recipients” of translations and put themselves at the service of the PRC as translators, editors, or proofreaders of translations of official texts as well as of journalistic and literary ones. As Rodolfo Hernández explains, in 1941, Radio Pekín became the first means of dissemination of the Chinese revolution to the world and had its first program broadcast in Spanish in September 1956 (2020: 280).



Fig. 40: Cover of the first issue of the magazine *China Reconstruye*. January 1960, featuring a colour woodcut by Li Pingfan 李平凡 titled *Da gezi* 《大鸽子》 (*Big Dove*) (1955).

Yet, during the 1950s, the PRC's main written channel of communication to make visible its social and economic achievements, as well as to export its model of revolution to Latin America, was the extensive written accounts of the travelers who visited New China during this decade. Later on, "En enero de 1959 se publica en español la revista y, para 1960, circulaban en nuestro continente las siguientes revistas: *Ciencia China*, *Mujer China* y *China Revista Ilustrada*. Las Obras escogidas de Mao en español aparecieron en 1960 y la revista *Pekín Informa*, en español, el 6 de marzo de 1963" [In January 1959, the magazine was published in Spanish, and by 1960, the following magazines were circulating in our continent: *Ciencia China*, *Mujer China*, and *China Revista Ilustrada*. The Selected Works of Mao in Spanish were published in 1960, and the magazine *Pekín Informa*, in Spanish, was released on March 6, 1963] (Hernández 2020: 280). It is not coincidental that the urge to gain visibility through periodical publications in the region increased concurrently with the escalation of the Sino-Soviet tensions during the 1960 and the subsequent pro-Maoist and pro-Soviet divisions that emerged in the Latin American communist parties. It is in this context that *Pekín Informa* positioned itself as the main channel for the dissemination of the Chinese Communist Party guidelines to the Spanish-

speaking world²², offering content sometimes even tailored to the specific interests of a given readership (Rojas 2020: 83). This same tailoring process was replicated in the other direction, since, as Wei Teng argues:

Only the left-wing writers of the Pro-China community could be introduced into mainland China; the others would be kept out of Chinese readers' sight. [...] Due to manipulation of literature and translation, the Chinese translation of Latin American literature from the 1950–1970s was synchronized with national politics. More particularly, the country made a clear distinction between 'translatable' and 'untranslatable' writers and works of foreign literature. Thus, only revolutionary and left-wing literary works could be introduced into mainland China (2018: 184–185).

Unsurprisingly, reflections on the practice of translation and its role as a cultural bridge, but also as a bridge for them to understand China and the geopolitical situation they were witnessing, become a common occurrence. As Coloane reveals through a description of one of his days working at *China reconstruye*:

Viene a mi escritorio el camarada M. para hacerme una consulta sobre las palabras 'paz eterna'. Se refiere al libro de Mao Tun *Sobre la guerra prolongada*. [...] Le digo que 'paz eterna' se asocia, en general, a la tranquilidad o pasividad que sustentan algunas iglesias y que, en algunos casos, se lograría en la muerte. Después le converso con respecto a lo que se comenta de China acerca de sus planes belicistas, a propósito de la bomba atómica [...] luego, la 'paz eterna' puede ser un arma, como decimos nosotros, de 'doble filo'. La 'paz eterna', ¿no podría ser la muerte de China y de la humanidad? [The comrade M. comes to my desk to ask me about the words "eternal peace." He refers to Mao Tun's book *On Protracted War*. [...] I tell him that "eternal peace" is generally associated with the tranquility or passivity upheld by some churches, which in some cases could be achieved through death. Then, I discuss what is said about China in relation to its militaristic plans, specifically regarding the atomic bomb [...] later, the "eternal peace" can be a weapon, as we say, of "double-edged" nature. Could the "eternal peace" not be the death of China and humanity?] (2004: 98)

Working at this magazine, in mid-1963, Coloane met a New Yorker named Stanley Bender, son of a Russian mother and a member of the Communist Party of the United States. Owing to the persecution of left-wingers imposed by the rise of McCarthyism, which started by the end of 1940, Bender escaped in 1953 to British Guyana without a passport. From there, he left in 1961 to work in Cuba as a philosophy professor at the University of Havana. Once in China, he was entrusted with the revision of the Russian and English versions of the translation of Mao's

22 For an analysis of two magazines published in Argentina, *Cultura China* and *Capricornio*, which, without losing sight of the Chinese revolutionary process, kept culture as their central axis, see (Locane and Montt 2021).

complete works. With him, Coloane not only shared a role as proofreader but also his emotional distress derived from the political tensions of the moment:

Con frecuencia, por la tardes, después de la cena, llegaba a nuestro departamento apremiado e inquieto. [...] “¡Mire, querido Francisco, estoy en la página 28 de las obras de Mao, pero es tan tremendo el culto a la personalidad que me cuesta seguir leyendo, ya que voy anotando la palabra Mao y ya la he contado 14 veces! ¿No le parece exagerado?” [...] Francisco, todo lo que estamos viviendo me hace temblar [Frequently, in the evenings, after dinner, he would arrive at our apartment troubled and restless. [...] “Look, dear Francisco, I’m on page 28 of Mao’s works, but the personality cult is so overwhelming that it’s hard for me to keep reading. I keep noting the word ‘Mao,’ and I’ve counted it 14 times already! Don’t you think that’s excessive?” [...] Francisco, everything we are experiencing makes me tremble] (2004: 145).

It is clear that translation does not always necessarily act as a bridge, but as a barrier. Nonetheless, the translatability of the experience of the journey to China can also be compromised by elements that exceed the limitations of the purely idiomatic, and that between the political and the cultural are erected as solid but invisible walls. This limit of the untranslatable, bordering on the limits of the incommunicable and the incomprehensible, will be a frontier that all the travelers in this corpus, with the exception of Zapata, will encounter.

In the case of Miró Quesada, this frontier is expressed not even through the untranslatability of what is said but by the barrier imposed by what is not spoken: “El chino es, por lo general, muy poco discutidor. Con nuestros anfitriones chinos hablamos poco de comunismo, de política, de imperialismo. No hubo con ellos discusiones ni polémicas” [The Chinese, as a rule, are not very argumentative. With our Chinese hosts, we spoke little about communism, politics, or imperialism. There were no discussions or debates with them] (1959, II: 35–36). In a conversation with his guide and translator Sin Yunhao, who asked him about his impressions of New

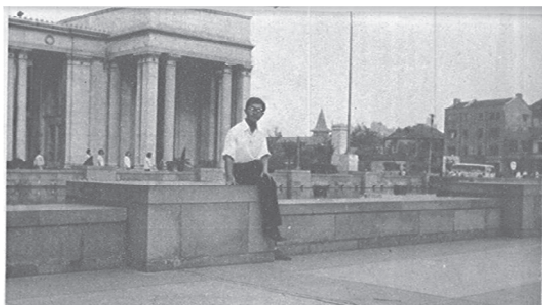


Fig. 41: Photo taken by Miró Quesada of his interpreter Sin Yunhao. Included in his travel book (1959, II: 41)

China, to which, after mentioning a few positive aspects, Miró Quesada decided to “insistí especialmente sobre el aspecto negativo de la censura cultural, de la falta de libertad de expresión, sobre la dictadura política, sobre la regimentación del pensamiento. A todo lo que decía, Sin respondía con una ligera y cortes venia de cabeza” [I particularly insisted on the negative aspect of cultural censorship, the lack of freedom of expression, the political dictatorship, and the regimentation of thought. To everything I said, Sin responded with a slight and polite nod of the head] (1959, II: 39).

On the other hand, in the case of Coloane, there are some doubts over the true origin of such frontier: “He dedicado muchas horas de lectura para empaparme de todo lo que sucede a mi alrededor, y así, tratar de comprender mejor a todos los que me rodean, especialmente a mis compañeros de trabajo que, queriéndolos tanto, a veces me irritan porque no logro comprenderlos, ¿es mía la falta de comprensión por desconocer su idioma?” [I have dedicated many hours of reading to immerse myself in everything that happens around me, and thus, try to better understand everyone around me, especially my colleagues, whom I care for deeply, yet sometimes irritate me because I can’t comprehend them. Is the lack of understanding mine for not knowing their language?] (2004: 97). Nonetheless, on other occasions, the nature of such estrangement will be very clear to him, sometimes in the form of a political frontier imposed by officiality: “Al leer tanto documento sobre las divergencias, a veces uno presume que está conociendo el carácter o el ser mismo que está dentro de esas cuartillas de papel. Eliana me recuerda que solo estamos leyendo documentos que producen una dirigencia, pero que allí no está la expresión del pueblo” [By reading so many documents about the divergences, sometimes one assumes they are getting to know the character or the essence within those sheets of paper. Eliana reminds me that we are only reading documents produced by leadership, but that there is no expression of the people there] (2004: 88). And, other times, it is expressed as a border erected beyond the limits of the language barrier, which imposes itself between Coloane and Chinese society: “cuando vinimos pensábamos que aunque nos faltara el idioma, podríamos trabar relaciones, aprender unos de los otros; todo es muy difícil aquí... nuestros sueños abarcaban demasiado” [When we came, we thought that even though we lacked the language, we could build relationships and learn from each other; everything is very difficult here... our dreams were too grand] (2004: 88).

Translating the Experience of Socialism: Writing Red China in Cold War Times

The complexity of translation in the travel narrative accounts of this period can be mainly explained by the three reasons. First, even though from the nineteenth century onward, global communication channels, such as the telegraph or the telephone, had also proven to be effective and powerful channels of censorship, surveillance, and therefore intervention in the “what” and the “how” of what is communicated or translated, the Cold War, nonetheless, took this to a whole new level. This war over the control of information is one of the reasons why these travelers felt, without exception, an even greater responsibility not only to serve as writers of that encounter with China but to be translators of their experience in the Socialist bloc, giving a whole new significance to what was said or unsaid, hidden, omitted, or uncovered. Thus, in relation to the need to be heard through the thick iron curtain of disinformation, Miró Quesada notes that:

En muchas revistas occidentales de gran seriedad se ha atacado al régimen comunista chino por la brutalidad con que obliga al pueblo a someterse a la nueva organización. [...] Se dice que, además de haber asesinado a millones de terratenientes, los comunistas han asesinado a millones de campesinos que se oponen a la socialización de la tierra [...] No se tiene en ningún momento la impresión de que el orden y el entusiasmo laboral se debe a las bayonetas [In many serious Western magazines, the Chinese communist regime has been criticized for the brutality with which it forces the people to submit to the new organization. [...] It is said that, in addition to having killed millions of landowners, the communists have also killed millions of peasants who oppose the socialization of the land [...] At no point does one get the impression that the order and work enthusiasm are due to bayonets] (1959, II: 91).

On the same note, it was also acknowledged how part of this media strategy also consisted of delegitimizing any effort outside the circles of official narrative to give an account of life on the other side of the curtain, including travel accounts and journalistic chronicles to which, according to Francisco Coloane:

No se daba credibilidad a esas opiniones porque, según los críticos o comentaristas, lo que cuenten y relaten, estará en concordancia con lo que transfiere el intérprete o la prensa oficial. En resumen, no se creía ni se aceptaba otros pensamientos o posiciones, porque se presumía manipulación, falta de criterio y, lo más grave, se desconfiaba de la capacidad de la persona para comprender los fenómenos sociales que se estaban llevando a cabo frente a sus narices [Such opinions were not believed because, according to critics or commentators, whatever was recounted or reported would align with what was conveyed by the interpreter or the official press. In summary, no other thoughts or positions were believed or accepted because manipulation was assumed, a lack of judgment was presumed, and, most seriously, there was a distrust of the person's ability to understand the social phenomena unfolding right before their eyes] (2004: 12–13).

Second, the launching of cultural diplomacy as a mechanism for China to translate Maoism to the world. As I suggested earlier, there is a manifested intention to learn from Red China, whether from the perspective of the traveler who saw their socialist militancy as a global project to be expanded and replicated, but also from the viewpoint of the one that intended to learn from its social and economic achievements regardless of the ideologies, added to the need to translate.

Thus, although Mao could not speak any foreign language (Łuszczkiewicz and Brose 2022: 231) and always kept a strong Hunan accent (Lu 2017: 69), he was a great translator. A translator of Marxist theories for the construction of a rather pragmatic doctrine that opened China's path toward its own form of socialism and later on as a translator of Maoism as an exportable model to the world. The fact that, at least initially, the visits of Latin American representatives to the PRC to witness “las profundas transformaciones que se estaban viviendo [se hacían] no desde un lenguaje teórico, sino desde la propia experiencia personal” (Ahumada 2020: 12). On the other hand, the fact that the radio was the first vehicle the PRC had to tell the world about their revolutionary process and the social and economic victories of the New China was certainly a means to overcome the limits between the written and the oral. This limit was also a frontier Mao intended to tear down for his own people, actively combating *benben zhuyi* 本本主义 or “bookism” throughout his entire career (Guha 2014: 102) and bridging, as Miró Quesada noted, the Chinese people with their own past and language through the simplification of the Chinese characters (1959, II: 117). An enterprise that took place during the 1950s and 1960s following the interrupted impulse brought by the New Culture Movement, which sprouted at the turn of the century. A translating capacity very much commented on and admired by Miró Quesada: “consiste más bien en adaptar la teoría a la realidad que la realidad a la teoría. El marxismo sostiene que el capitalismo debe desaparecer. En consecuencia, los rusos lo hicieron desaparecer. Los chinos, en cambio, lo han conservado mediante una serie de concesiones a la situación social y de sutiles interpretaciones de los textos marxistas” [It rather consists of adapting theory to reality rather than reality to theory. Marxism holds that capitalism must disappear. Consequently, the Russians made it disappear. The Chinese, on the other hand, have preserved it through a series of concessions to the social situation and subtle interpretations of Marxist texts] (1959, II: 38).

Regarding the role of the traveler in this period as a translator of the experience of socialism there is, as I suggested, a notable shift in the willingness both to understand and to be understood through translation. Thus, contrary to Teresa de la Parra's diary, in which, as I argued, untranslatability was not only chosen but also actively pursued, in this new period, the active search for understanding is a common trait in the corpus. This “willingness” becomes even more interesting

when we note two things. On the one hand, when compared with the travel writers from the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, highly versed in foreign languages and who, like Tanco or de la Parra, frequently resorted to expressions, mainly in French, but also in English, to account for their experiences in China, a writer like Zapata, by contrast, refers to his English as a language that “apenas balbuceo” [barely stutter] ([1954] 2020: 55). Zapata was seconded by Coloane, who flatly recognized himself as completely foreign in other linguistic lands (2004: 87). On the other hand, not only did the presence of these two imperial languages decrease in the travel writing of the present period, but it is also evident that the use of words in Romanized Russian and Chinese gained a new space of influence (Coloane 2004: 13, 21, 23, 26, 33).

This willingness reaches a point where translation is even dispensed with, given that there is an understanding of the reality experienced that relies on a deeper historical and social relatability and is even able to transcend words. I join José Chávarry in his interpretation of the role of translation in *China 6 a.m.*, according to which “for Zapata, the interpretation scene is a nearly miraculous encounter, where the successful relay of meaning captures the revolutionary joy of the PRC victory and, by extension, of the global liberation movement” (2022: 427), whereby “Language, then, does not contain this revolutionary joy, which overflows verbal comprehension” (Chávarry 2022: 439). Examples include the day when Zapata visited the labor union of the rickshaw drivers, who, for the most part illiterate, were using their offices to learn to read and write: “algunos de ellos se acercaron a mí con muestras de simpatías, haciendo toda clase de esfuerzo y mímicas por demostrarme su alegría por mi inesperada visita. Pero no se hacía necesario ningún intérprete para comprender sus palabras y lo que mis propios ojos observaban” [Some of them approached me with signs of affection, making all sorts of efforts and gestures to show their joy at my unexpected visit. But no interpreter was needed to understand their words and what my own eyes were witnessing] ([1954] 2020: 42).

Similarly, when comparing the experiences of two Colombians who, separated by almost a century, attended an opera in China, we see how while in the case of Tanco ([1861] 2013: 326–327) the absence of translation is a hindrance that jeopardizes the entire experience, in the case of Zapata: “nos bastaba ver la representación de aquella ópera popular con efectos escénicos de tal realismo que poco nos importaban las dificultades idiomáticas para compenetrarnos con su espíritu” [It was enough for us to see the performance of that popular opera, with its stage effects so realistic that the language barriers mattered little in our immersion in its spirit] ([1954] 2020: 47). Therefore, the translatability between the written and the oral is an element of special relevance in the travel writing of this new period.



Fig. 42: International delegates shaking hands at the 1952 Asia-Pacific Peace Conference in Beijing. Pictured are Colombian delegates Sr. Carrasquilla, José Domingo Vélez, Manuel Zapata Olivella, Alipio Jaramillo, and Jorge Zalamea. Source: Personal archive, courtesy of Patricia Zalamea.

Together with other corporal manifestations, such as dancing, singing served as a powerful and effective form of translation of the socialist project to the Chinese people, in the first place, and later on, of the Chinese people to the visiting traveler. Songs are commonly heard in factories, schools, fields, and universities and sung by children, workers, students, and peasants to the point of becoming a shared soundtrack of the traveling accounts and written memories of these travelers²³. Thus, these mechanisms configure a dissident form of expression that objects to the social boundaries imposed by the lettered elites, either discarding or using them in their alternative oral form. The powerful force of this mechanism was quickly recognized by Zapata “como un himno que no conocía tregua, se escuchaba el canto de los trabajadores durante toda la noche como una fuerza que por sí sola era capaz de movilizar la montaña” [Like a hymn that knew no respite, the song of the workers could be heard throughout the night, a force capable of moving the mountain on its own] ([1954] 2020: 107) and even when the signing of the students and workers that took to the streets to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the triumph of the Chinese Revolution went silent every now and then “entonces el rumor de los pasos se elevaba como otro himno de firmeza y aliento de la nueva China” [Then the sound of footsteps rose like another hymn of strength and encouragement for the

²³ Most likely due to Zapata’s musical and performative background, his travel book is within this corpus the text that establishes the closest relationship between singing and dancing. Episodes in which singing is present can be found on pages 36, 43, 45, 47, 50, 61, 70, 71, 75, 89, 96, 102, 105, 106, 107, 111, 112, 117, and 124.

new China] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 43). As I mentioned, dancing and other performative popular arts also served as a translating bridge:

Más allá de donde alcanzaba la vista, el pueblo, entrelazadas manos y almas, danzaba a los acordes de sus músicas populares [...] Los delegados a la Conferencia de Paz no pudimos contemplar a la distancia aquel espectáculo y entrelazados en una cadena que cantaba canciones en muchos idiomas, nos introdujimos en el corazón de la multitud. Con el regocijo de siempre, los jóvenes chinos batieron sus manos y se arrojaron a nuestros brazos. Al calor de sus canciones y de sus danzas fuimos trenzando nuestros propios bailes. Después las muchachas nos enseñaron sus ritmos y, siguiendo sus movimientos y canciones, pudimos ligarnos a los bailes que expresaban el sentimiento del pueblo liberado [Beyond where the eye could see, the people, with their hands and souls intertwined, danced to the rhythms of their folk music. The delegates to the Peace Conference were unable to observe this spectacle from a distance, and so, hand in hand, we entered the heart of the crowd. With the usual joy, the young Chinese clapped their hands and threw themselves into our arms. In the warmth of their songs and dances, we began to weave our own steps. Then the young women taught us their rhythms, and following their movements and songs, we joined in the dances that expressed the feelings of the liberated people] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 45).



Fig. 43: During their visit to China in 1957, Zapata Olivella poses with his sister Delia and other members of her folkloric dance group. Source: (Zapata 2020: 188). Julio Rentería personal archive

I join Luís Cantillo in his characterization of the role that dancing plays in Zapata's account of China as an "arte del movimiento que logra vencer la barrera del idioma" [The art of movement that transcends the barrier of language] (2020: 23). An alternative space of interaction and mutual understanding in which, taking up the metaphor of the mirror that I proposed earlier, the other becomes that that image in one's own reflection is seen: "nos sacaron a bailar y danzaron nuestros bailes con gran desenvoltura como si hubieran vivido toda su vida en nuestros países" [They took

us dancing and performed our dances with great ease, as if they had spent their entire lives in our countries] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 125).

Translators, Guides, and Interpreters: Translating New China to the World

It is clear that traveling and its writing have been possible with the help of an extensive network of facilitators and “mediators,” including interpreters, guides, drivers, butlers and bellhops, whose experiences have all intervened, in one way or another, in the traveling impressions. Most times, from the other side of the page, the role of these stagehands goes unnoticed by us as readers. In the particular case of the Latin American journey to China, only on a few occasions, we have seen them mentioned so far or we have had the impression of their presence either in the backstage or as part of a voiceless scenography whose primary role is to enhance the performance of the traveler-actor. The fact that the journey to China and, in particular, this form of “red tourism” was articulated by the PRC as a propaganda device, was something that gave translation and to the figure of the interpreter a significance it had not had before. Therefore, I coincide with José Chávarry in the fact in spite of the scholarly interest that the textual production derived from these exchanges with the PRC has gained in recent years, “the act of translation itself, specifically the role of the language interpreter, is somewhat overlooked” (2022: 426).

Following Maria Montt (2016b: 111), Chávarry explains this tendency by saying that “this may be because many of these travelers, when writing their accounts, tended to partially silence or gloss over the role of their language interpreters to strengthen their own authorial voice and personal testimony” (2022: 426). However, when the travel writing of this period is addressed from a broader corpus with a rather long timespan, there is, as I have just argued, a noticeable turn in the prominence that the interpreters acquire in this last period. With this in mind, I will illustrate how the set in motion of the cultural diplomacy by the PRC implied that the mediation in the travel experience and the intervention of this network of stagehands in the impressions of the travel writers became much more visible and influential.

To begin with, the place of the interpreter now goes far beyond being merely linguistic or even cultural; it is fundamentally a translator of the Chinese experience of socialism. Thus, there is a recurrent mention of the interpreters who Zapata regarded not only as “soldados del idioma” [Soldiers of language] (Zapata ([1954] 2020: 129) but as his personal friends, such as his interpreter Ho Chi Ling and other Chinese in this network (Zapata ([1954] 2020: 130). Similarly, Coloane also introduces his interpreter Liu by his name and recognizes that whatever he was going to learn about China on

this trip will largely depend on Liu and other hosts (2004: 16, 26). As Chávarry points out, “for Zapata, these interpreters embody in their own life stories the miracle of the Revolution” (437). Therefore, on many occasions, this interpreter goes from being a stagehand to becoming a performer, an interlocutor, as Zapata recognizes when he attended an opera and referring to its protagonist, he says: “como él, que supo enfrentarse al señor feudal, resistiendo los peores suplicios sin doblegar su firme voluntad de lucha, era el muchacho traductor que nos acompañaba o el médico que nos atendía [...] El público congregado en el teatro: obreros, estudiantes, intelectuales y campesinos miraban su propia hazaña” [Like him, who knew how to confront the feudal lord, enduring the worst torments without yielding his firm will to fight, it was the young translator who accompanied us or the doctor who attended to us [...] The audience gathered in the theater—workers, students, intellectuals, and peasants—witnessed their own feat] ([1954] 2020: 46–47).

In this context, I would like to highlight how, despite Zapata’s travel narrative being, above all, the account of his personal impressions, he transforms his writing into a more collective space of narration. The fact that he constantly gives up his voice so that the Chinese he meets along his path can tell their own story makes this a narration whose authorship seems to be rather part of a more collective endeavor since Zapata cedes the center of the narrative representation. This way, he contributes simultaneously to building of his personal memory and constructing the individual and collective memory of the Chinese he met during his journey. As an example of such narrative mechanism, I can refer to the passage in which on the train on their way to Shanghai, right after introducing us to comrade Tsui, who served as commander of a battalion part of the Liberation Army, Zapata cedes his voice to him and allows Tsui to tell us his story: “—Hoy llegamos a Shanghai, mi ciudad natal. Hace diez años que me incorporé a las guerrillas. Eran unos tiempos...” [—Today we arrive in Shanghai, my hometown. It has been ten years since I joined the guerrillas. Those were times...] ([1954] 2020: 109). The same is true for Huang Wen-Shan, a factory worker, Tian Kuan-Ying, a female locomotive driver, Chen Iwen, a female union leader, Ho Chi Ling, his interpreter, Mon Fu, his guide, or Wang Shao Ho. Wang was a young soldier whose father was murdered shortly before the triumph of the Red Army, after showing to the traveler a letter that his son left him; Zapata transcribed and included a passage of in his travel book ([1954] 2020: 116–117).

This newly influential role was acquired by the interpreter as a translator of the experience of socialism as well as the way in which they did not only perform as linguistic and cultural facilitators but also acted as gatekeepers of defined narratives. In the words of Julia Lovell, “every aspect of the ‘performance’ was minuted by ‘interpreters’ (in reality, politically reliable cadres)” (2015: 142–143). This can be illustrated with the description of Zapata’s visit to a school where he communicated

with one of the students through a translator. However, later on, a teacher tells Zapata that that student is perfectly fluent in English and French, to which Zapata asks confused: “¿por qué necesitó de un intérprete para hablar conmigo?” [Why did he need an interpreter to speak with me?] ([1954] 2020: 99), a question to which the teacher answered by saying that it is “porque conoce sus deberes y no quiso interrumpir la labor de traducción que se le ha señalado a los intérpretes que acompañan a ustedes” [Because he knows his duties and did not want to interrupt the translation work assigned to the interpreters accompanying you] ([1954] 2020: 99). Evidently, it is clear that beyond translating, the interpreter also performs a selecting and filtering task of the information to be translated in order to prevent the travel experience from straying from the limits of the narrative demarcated by a perfectly choreographed “script.”

Thus, when Zapata questioned the need for this mediation, the aforementioned teacher, who also served as a guide during the visit to this school and, therefore, as another intermediary, directed with his answer the path toward the right interpretation of this experience, which makes Zapata to describe the gesture of this student as an act of modesty²⁴. Thus, it is obvious to the reader that even the most trivial questions are always accompanied by the most edifying answers. For instance, while in a garden in Shanghai, Zapata sees a large group of people doing gymnastics, and since “varias mujeres gordas se afanaban igualmente en practicar[la]” [Several overweight women were also eagerly practicing it] ([1954] 2020: 112) Zapata asked about it to his guide, who replied saying that: “Antiguamente solo venían aquí los adinerados a practicar la gimnasia china. Pero ahora veo que se ha convertido en un parque popular” [In the past, only the wealthy came here to practice Chinese gymnastics. But now I see that it has become a popular park] ([1954] 2020: 112). This confirms not only the performative role played by the interpreters and guides but also their plausible talent for improvisation.

Continuing with the performative function of the interpreter in the travel text, it is worth noting that on many occasions, the travel writer is the one serving as a mediator, often quoting and transcribing word for word so it is the interpreter or guide the one who addresses directly to the reader “yo escuchaba de mi intérprete la extraordinaria historia de aquellas *rickshaws*: —Cuando Pekín fue ocupado...” [I

24 From his reading of *Los ojos de bambú* (1964) by Mercedes Valdivieso, José Chávarry refers to a similar episode in which, “in a conversation with Fanny, Clara discovers that the deputy speaks English (a language they have in common) but had chosen to utilize the interpreter to talk to her” but in contrast with Zapata “Her feelings when she learns this further capture her realization of the theatrical nature of her visit [thus] far from serving as a conduit to a revolutionary experience, the act of interpretation here is a channel of state control” (2022: 444).

heard from my interpreter the extraordinary story of those rickshaws: “When Beijing was occupied...” (Zapata [1954] 2020: 41), sometimes even excusing themselves as writers for the literary quality of the transcribed texts. As Coloane does after quoting the translation made by his interpreter of a comment made by a university language professor about the transformation of the university as an institution in the context of the New China: “La versión es de mi intérprete y se nota en la transcripción” [The version is from my interpreter, and it is noticeable in the transcription] (2004: 48). With it, Coloane differentiates his own voice from the one of the professor and from the version of the translator. Similarly, the exercise of political, linguistic, and cultural translation that converge in the travel narration. This narration, in turn and in itself, is a translation of the traveling impressions and experiences. It is also acknowledged by Miró Quesada through the realization not just of the multilayered nature of his text, but the diversity of voices interpreted, uninterpreted, and misinterpreted that conform it. On a footnote in one of the pages dedicated to the description of his meeting with Mao Zedong he warns his readers as follows: “En todo lo que sigue, el texto de mis notas es vago. Tengo la impresión de que ello se debió a la vaguedad del mismo Mao, o a fallas del traductor. Puede, naturalmente, deberse a que yo interpreté mal lo que escuché” [In everything that follows, the text of my notes is vague. I have the impression that this is due to the vagueness of Mao himself, or to flaws in the translator. It may, of course, be due to my misinterpretation of what I heard] (1959: II: 51).

Between the Borderlines of Perception

Now that I have referred to translation not only as a bridge but also as a boundary, I will devote this section to exploring the presence of different borderlines found in travel writing of this period. From the beginning of this study, borders have served as another articulating axis that, from physical, cultural, linguistic, to political, have so far served to better understand the dynamics that each of these travelers established with the China of their time and with writing as their means to represent it. In the previous chapters, I have referred to how geographical borders limited the physical transit of travelers through Chinese territory in the nineteenth century but also how they intended to control the field of influence of the foreign in the cultural and social territory of the Chinese. Both borders also influenced the traveling experiences and impressions of the journeyer. However, although by the 1950s, the geographical borders were, for the most part, erased from the travel cartographies, the desire to segregate and control the field of influence of the foreign remained. Therefore, the writing of this new period still displays the presence of other borders, some more tangible than others but still equally influential.

As far as the tangible borders are concerned, the most influential is the one surrounding the PRC in itself since “An independent trip to the PRC was almost impossible, due to the strict control over visits exerted by the Government” (Montt 2016b: 102). Thereby, the border that divides Hong Kong from the PRC has had a very particular trajectory along the history of the Latin American travel writing of China. From the nineteenth-century travel accounts, we saw how travelers like Tanco arrived in China through Hong Kong and later how during the first half of the twentieth century, Guzmán Cruchaga even served as consul there in the 1920s. Since 1945²⁵, the flow of refugees from mainland China to Hong Kong increased due to the Chinese Civil War (Mark 2007: 1146). After the triumph of the Communists, the outbreak of the Korean War, and the escalation of tensions brought on by the Cold War, passage across this border became restricted by both Hong Kong and the PRC. As a result, Hong Kong falls completely off the map of the Latin American voyagers visiting the region during this period. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how contrasting could be the perspective of the travelers who visited Hong Kong but not the PRC. That was the case of the Colombian José María Córdoba who in a round-the-world trip visited the city in the early 1960s and included his impressions of it in his travel book *Mi viaje al rededor del mundo*. He mentioned that: “Allí también, como en Macao, se preparan misioneros para que penetren luego al interior chino. Está el barrio denominado de refugiados, o sea, de los que se escapan de la China roja, que se encuentra a pocos kilómetros” [There too, as in Macao, missionaries are prepared to later penetrate into the interior of China. There is the area known as the refugee district, that is, for those who escape from Red China, located just a few kilometers away] (1962: 114).

The second most influential physical boundary is, arguably, the one surrounding the Beijing Friendship Hotel. A place so extensively described in so many of the Latin American diaries of this period, that it is transformed into a character on its own, rather than a common setting. Coloane referred to it as “the fishbowl” (2004: 53), and his wife Elena also reminded him every now and then how it controlled the exchanges between its inside and its outside: “¿No te das cuenta que estamos en un hotel para extranjeros? Estamos limitados por un cerco, una ciudad cerrada. Los mismos chinos no entran aquí, salvo raras excepciones. Los laborantes, que hacen todas las tareas de limpieza, los del restaurante, tienen un contacto escaso con nosotros, el ‘ni-hau’ y el ‘she-she’ y basta” [Don’t you realize that we are in a hotel for foreigners? We are confined within an enclosure, a closed city. The Chinese themselves do not enter

25 As I mentioned in the second chapter, during World War II, Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese between 1941 and 1945. However, once the war ended, the city was reoccupied by the British forces, who regained control of the border.



Fig. 44: Photo of the Beijing Friendship Hotel included in Coloane's travel book. (2004: 34)

here, except for rare exceptions. The workers, who handle all the cleaning tasks, those in the restaurant, have minimal contact with us—a simple ‘ni-hau’ and ‘she-she,’ and that’s it] (2004: 58). Also mentioned in relation to the Chinese that lived and studied abroad and who had some *foreignness* within themselves, reason why they were also put into a different dynamic with the rest of the Chinese once they returned: “Lo primero que llama la atención es su vestimenta de blue jeans, chaquetas amplias, cabellos largos, por lo general, fumadores. Aquí se les construyó una casa especial para su llegada” [The first thing that stands out is their attire: blue jeans, loose jackets, long hair, and generally smoking. Here, a special house was built to accommodate their arrival] (Coloane 2004: 50).

On the other hand, it is clear that the force that demolishes, edifies, transforms or reaffirms the existence of these physical borders also pushes the transformation of tangible borders into intangible ones. In the previous chapter, based on my reading of Eugenio Orrego's description of the foreign legations in Beijing, I proposed that the layout of these boundaries had not only changed with respect to how they were arranged in the nineteenth century, but how in some cases these frontiers had even been inverted. In the earlier period (1900–1950), we had a stretch of the Great Wall, originally intended to keep foreign barbarians out of the territory, as a limit now appropriated for their own enjoyment by the US legation in Beijing. In contrast, in this new period (1950–1966), we have a sort of Forbidden City, to which formerly no foreigners were allowed in and in which only Chinese belonging to the court or serfs could dwell. Now, under the name of the Friendship Hotel, located in the outskirts of the capital of the empire, it serves as an exclusive residence for foreigners and to which the Chinese, except for the serfs, also had very limited access.

Regarding the presence of intangible borders in this period, it is possible to say, following Montt, that there is an “intención de presentar a China como cercana” [The intention to present China as approachable or relatable] (2016a: 3033). Clearly, the limit imposed by cultural difference that the abysmal strangeness between

China and Latin America, permeating so strongly most of the Latin American travel narrative of the nineteenth century, appears in the writing of this new period as a clearly narrowed frontier. Interestingly, in the case of Zapata, I would argue that such a frontier seems to have almost completely disappeared due to the political sympathy he had for the PRC. In the case of Coloane, the fissures caused by the ideological divergences between China and the Soviet Union imposed barriers that, among the political and the cultural made this limit an unbridgeable border in the territory of Coloane's relationship with China, notwithstanding his communist militancy. In this same regard, it is interesting to note how, in the case of Miró Quesada, the absence of such political sympathy, in particular for the Communist party, meant that the cultural strangeness was, in fact, reaffirmed in his writing and that the acknowledgment of difference had a much more significant place in his impressions of the country. For instance, in spite of recognizing the important social and cultural place of China and the Chinese in Peru, for Miró Quesada: "Nada puede hacer que la mente deje de pensar que está en un país exótico" [Nothing can prevent the mind from perceiving itself as being in an exotic country] (1959, II: 19) and that "Por más que hicimos nunca pudimos acostumbrarnos a 'sentirnos' en China" [Despite our efforts, we could never manage to truly 'feel' like we were in China] (1959, II: 20).

However, the border built by the "performance" of the socialist experience is, despite not being physical, the most predominant one. This standardization of red tourism, inherited from the Soviet Union, as Saïta observed, "inaugura un nueva forma de viajar porque a través del viaje se 'inaugura un modelo'" [It inaugurates a new way of traveling because, through the journey, 'a model is established'] (2007: 15). This carefully tailored staging of the revolution aimed to mediate and intervene in the travel experience of the invited delegates and other foreign personalities, this border had as a purpose to promote the PRC as the builder of an alternative path toward Socialism. In this connection, it is worth noting how tangible frontiers converge with intangible ones. As referred to by Lovell, it is through the crossing of the border separating Hong Kong from mainland China that the testimony of the Shanghainese Robert Loh came to light.

Loh escaped from the PRC in 1957 and published his memoirs *Escape from Red China* in 1962. Lovell brings up Loh's testimony in order to illustrate how this "performance" of the Chinese socialist experience was devised as "a machine of perfect control, judged to play to the individual weaknesses of particular visitors, and rehearsed to ensure flawless performances by Chinese hosts [...] His role was to play the part of a gently reformed capitalist to foreign visitors to Shanghai in the 1950s" (2017: 142). As other authors have pointed out (Montt 2016a: 3030), it is not necessary to delve deep into an extensive corpus to notice how there are multiple coincidences in the travel

narrations from this period. Reading just a few of them allows us to see how different travelers visiting China in different years are taken to the same cities, the same universities, the same museums, the same factories, the same hospitals, and the same people's communes. They are introduced to the same achievements based on the statistics to give the same answers to questions that arise during the tours and which seem to be all part of the same script.

However, this boundary is so transparent that travelers like Zapata not only do not seem to see it but in his description, “China emerges as a site of utopian unity” (Chávarry 2022: 433) where “Zapata witnesses a productive collaboration between urban and rural sector, industrial workers and peasants, capitalists and socialists, young and old” (Chávarry 2022: 439). This collaboration is brimming in *China 6 a.m.* through joyful and smiling crowds ([1954] 2020: 37), children (38, 45, 49, 50, 88, 110), students (39, 55, 56, 98, 102), parents (62), peasants (106), soldiers (117–118), teachers (123), old people (82), and workers (52, 64, 84, 86). Despite their atrocious past, they do not cease to declare that “ahora somos felices” [Now we are happy] ([1954] 2020: 38), in a state that seems so imperturbable that “estaban tan asombrados como nosotros de su propia felicidad” [They were as astonished as we were by their own happiness] ([1954] 2020: 45). A travel narrative that gives, in sum, the impression of being an extended version of a revolutionary opera in which the reality and the performance of that reality meet on the same stage. Other travelers, however, will at least express their concern over its possible existence or will manifest through their writing certain signs of doubt over the idea that everything they are seeing is true or that what they are witnessing is perhaps only a fraction of a more vast and complex reality that they are not accessing.

As I suggested earlier, in the travel narrative of this period, as readers, we witness a theater in which the boundary between the stage and the auditorium has disappeared. In it, the travel writers are surprised to see in the audience the same workers and peasants whose stories are being presented and the same actors, actresses, screenwriters, and directors who are, in turn, workers and protagonists of the same memories. This performance unfolded between the revolutionary opera and the day-to-day, merged into one extensive act infiltrated into the everyday without pauses or interludes. A double interpretation in which the actor observes and is observed, a split reality to which Coloane referred to in a conversation with his friend Liu: “dice que al ir a un espectáculo de orquesta, baile, danzas de los soviéticos, todo está muy bien calculado, aplausos, silencios, y una que otra voz disidente. ¿Cómo se siente usted después de estos sucesos? ‘cansado espiritualmente’ y se lleva la mano a la cabeza. Yo le agregué: Yo también” [He says that when going to a performance of orchestra, dance, and Soviet dances, everything is very well calculated—the applause, the silences, and an occasional dissenting voice. ‘How do

you feel after these events?’ ‘Spiritually exhausted,’ and he places his hand on his head. I added: ‘I feel the same] (2004: 150). This instrumentalization of art, its motivations, and purposes are a subject that also disturbed Miró Quesada, who, after reading, quoting, and discussing in his travel book a speech delivered by Lu Dingyi, then propaganda director of the CCP, in relation to the role of art and culture, concludes that:

¿No es realmente extraordinario que se pueda perder de manera tan completa el sentido de la libertad intelectual y de la dignidad de la cultura? [...] Lu-Ding-yi sostiene, con un candor sobrenatural, que en la China actual hay libertad frente al arte y la literatura. El arte y la literatura son tan libres que no solo pueden alabar las nuevas formas de vida, es decir las comunistas, sino que además, ¡oh maravilla!, pueden criticar las viejas formas (es decir las feudales y burguesas) [Isn’t it truly extraordinary that one can so completely lose the sense of intellectual freedom and the dignity of culture? [...] Lu-Ding-yi asserts, with a supernatural candor, that in present-day China there is freedom in art and literature. Art and literature are so free that not only can they praise the new ways of life, that is, the communist ones, but also, oh wonder! they can criticize the old ways (that is, the feudal and bourgeois)] (1959, II: 69).

There were, nonetheless, other interactions between these split realities described and represented in different ways in other travel accounts belonging to this period, some cautious and others more speculative. Thus, when Coloane visited Beijing for the first time in 1958, his descriptions, despite showing clear enthusiasm and admiration for what he was seeing, took some narrative distance from it. “*Se ve prolijidad y esfuerzo, también hay sacrificio*” [It is seen neatness and effort, there is also sacrifice] (2004: 28; emphasis added) and “*Se sentía que esos comuneros estaban conformes con el cambio*” [It was felt that those communards were content with the change] (2004: 30; emphasis added)—these comments in relation to his visit to a popular commune serve as an example of forms of impersonalization in his ways of representations. In a similar exercise of taking distance from what is observed or doubting the veracity of what is seen, Miró Quesada also warned his readers: “No pudimos darnos cuenta naturalmente si este entusiasmo era aparente, si era producido por la amenaza, por el hambre o por la fe. Captar las causas últimas era, en las circunstancias de nuestro viaje, imposible. Pero las apariencias estaban por la autenticidad. El pueblo da la impresión de trabajar con entusiasmo y con fe” [We couldn’t naturally discern whether this enthusiasm was apparent, whether it was produced by threat, hunger, or faith. Understanding the ultimate causes was, under the circumstances of our journey, impossible. But the appearances leaned toward authenticity. The people give the impression of working with enthusiasm and faith] (1959, II: 82–83). Nevertheless, this suspicion of being part of a performance without being aware of it was a thought that never really left Miró Quesada, “Todo el tiempo tenía la sensación de que era algo arreglado, algo expresamente

hecho para suavizar nuestras corruptas mentes occidentales” [All the time, I had the feeling that it was something arranged, something specifically made to soften our corrupt Western minds] (1959, II: 98), but also conflicted with the idea that “No creo que el Gobierno comunista de la China actual pierda lamentablemente su tiempo organizando farsas para sus invitados” [I don’t believe that the current communist government of China unfortunately wastes its time organizing farces for its guests] (1959, II: 98). In a conversation with Liu, a university professor and friend of Coloane, the writer asked him, determined to unveil the presence of that limit: “Hay una China para los Chinos y una China para los extranjeros, ¿cuál se conoce?” [There is one China for the Chinese and one China for the foreigners, which one is known?] (2004: 150), only to obtain a vague answer.

The Hundred Flowers Campaign was a topic of special interest for Miró Quesada since its open and conciliatory approach “inauguraba una nueva época, superando de manera espectacular el dogmatismo comunista” [It inaugurated a new era, spectacularly overcoming communist dogmatism] (1959, II: 65). Through this campaign, Mao “pide a todos los comunistas que discutan con absoluta libertad todos los problemas culturales y políticos, cualquiera que sea su contenido” [He asks all communists to discuss with absolute freedom all cultural and political issues, whatever their content may be] (1959, II: 65) which, according to Miró Quesada “habría demostrado que el comunismo puede implantarse en un país dentro de un clima de libertad espiritual” [It would have demonstrated that communism can be established in a country within an atmosphere of spiritual freedom] (1959, II: 65). However, after reading *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Amongst the People*, a text published in 1957, where Mao explores in detail the rationale that gave form to the campaign, it is clear for Miró Quesada that even though “en principio pueden aceptarse ideas no marxistas” [In principle, non-Marxist ideas can be accepted] (1959, II: 67) they should not come from counterrevolutionaries who, citing Mao’s text: “los privamos de su derecho de hablar” [We deprived them of their right to speak] (1959, II: 67). Then, after asking among his guides and hosts if there were people who were indeed expressing themselves in contradiction to Marxist, Communist, or even against Mao’s philosophical principles:

La respuesta fue siempre negativa. La respuesta de los comunistas en estos casos, cuando son muy presionados, es ya de todos conocida: esto es, en principio posible, pero no hay nadie que quiera hacerlo porque todo el pueblo chino está contento con el comunismo [...] Pero la respuesta de los intelectuales libres es: no hay nadie que se atreva a hacerlo porque es inmediatamente silenciado [The response was always negative. The response of the communists in these cases, when under heavy pressure, is well known to all: this is, in principle, possible, but no one wants to do it because the entire Chinese population is happy with communism [...] But the response of free intellectuals is: there is no one who dares to do it because they are immediately silenced] (1959, II: 67).

It is clear that this was a period marked by solidarity both between China and Latin America and between the different communist parties, globally and continentally. Nonetheless, through the reading of these travel diaries, we can also catch a glimpse of a history of these relations and exchanges from a more intimate and less official perspective, thus revealing frictions, bickering, and other imperceptible fissures in the authorized discourse. On the one hand, despite the revolutionary vigor, the admiration for the triumph of communism in China, and the fascination for contributing to the construction of socialism, there were some like Coloane. Their stay in China was more dominated by its shadows than by its lights, to the point of expressing very early his desire to leave the country. However:

Yerko me había traído una respuesta negativa a mi consulta de “querer volver a Chile”. Y él me la transmitió con palabras que le fueron dichas en Santiago: “Consideran pésimo tu regreso. No debieras hacerlo porque estás faltando a un compromiso que tú contrajiste y no corresponde a tu conducta” [...] Allá no comprendieron o no quisieron entender lo que yo estaba sintiendo aquí y a lo mejor pensaron en el escándalo que podría confundir a muchos. Además, mis crónicas chinas habían quedado en suspenso y no tuve una explicación, ni siquiera una crítica al respecto [Yerko had brought me a negative response to my inquiry about “wanting to return to Chile.” He relayed it to me with words that were spoken to him in Santiago: “They think your return is a bad idea. You shouldn’t do it because you’re breaking a commitment you made, and it doesn’t align with your behavior.” [...] Over there, they didn’t understand or didn’t want to understand what I was feeling here, and perhaps they thought about the scandal that might confuse many. Additionally, my Chinese chronicles had been put on hold, and I didn’t receive any explanation, not even a criticism regarding them] (Coloane 2004: 55).

It is this refusal element that gradually fills Coloane’s pages with the agony that unfolds in *Papeles recortados*, making the sum of his frustrations a reduced cell in the midst of the immensity of China: “Mi trabajo de revisión del castellano fue una tarea, podría decir, sencilla; pero el malestar que me produjo fue peligroso” [My work of reviewing the Spanish language was a task, I could say, simple; but the discomfort it caused me was dangerous] (2004: 149).

Aquí en China nosotros no somos comunistas, ni podríamos serlo. No se permite el ingreso de ningún extranjero a sus filas. En cambio nosotros en Chile somos diferentes. Ha habido dirigentes peruanos, militantes españoles, costarricenses, panameños. Incluso hemos recibido a norteamericanos que tienen interés social por el país [...] Decidido a venir a China, conversé con el partido. Varios miembros directivos me aclararon muy bien mi rol. “Allá tú vas a colaborar con el pueblo chino pero no vas a hacer política” [Here in China, we are not communists, nor could we be. No foreigner is allowed to join their ranks. In contrast, we in Chile are different. There have been Peruvian leaders, Spanish militants, Costa Ricans, Panamanians. We have even received North Americans who have a social interest in the country [...] Decided to come to China, I spoke with the party. Several executive members clearly explained my role.

“There, you will collaborate with the Chinese people, but you will not engage in politics] (Coloane 2004: 56–57).

Coloane further emphasizes the labyrinth of transparent walls with which he feels he is permanently colliding and which, in the form of CCP guidelines, limit his transit through the experience of the New China:

Han pasado alrededor de catorce meses en este país, y me he preguntado muchas veces el por qué aún es difícil tener una mayor comunicación con su gente. Esta nueva sociedad [...] no logra o permite esa relación que es necesaria y se espera. Uno comprende a un pueblo y a un régimen que debe ser vigilante y cauteloso, sin embargo, siento, o me ha parecido, que la disciplina o las normas para una buena convivencia con el extraño, por no decir extranjero, son de suma rigurosidad [Around fourteen months have passed in this country, and I have often wondered why it is still difficult to establish greater communication with its people. This new society [...] does not achieve or allow the kind of relationship that is necessary and expected. One understands a people and a regime that must be vigilant and cautious; however, I feel, or it has seemed to me, that the discipline or the norms for good coexistence with the stranger, not to say foreigner, are of utmost rigor] (2004: 95)

The Sino-Soviet Divergences and the Cuban Revolution

The evident advantage that the Soviet Union had in terms of a larger proletariat and a more developed industry made some travelers regard the Maoist project, at least in those spheres, as a more viable path toward socialism for Latin America since it was an example “of how a Third World country could break out of the dependence economic development paradigm” (Montt 2016b: 99). Although it is not directly expressed by Zapata, the conditions that are equated between China and Latin America are not only social, but they are also economical and reflected in the resources available for the construction of a Socialist Revolution. Examples of this are the descriptions of the construction of the Fusi-Ling dam, mostly carried out by peasants with rudimentary techniques and in an almost absolute absence of any machinery (Zapata [1954] 2020: 104–105). This was a circumstance that Miró Quesada also highlighted during a visit to a shipyard in Dalian—“Hacen con sus manos lo que deberían hacer con máquinas” [They do with their hands what they should be doing with machines] (1959, II: 82)—or the work carried out by former prostitutes now dedicated to the textile industry with—“un inmenso telar de ruecas a manos y de tejido mecánico muy primitivo, daba trabajo a la mayor parte de las recluidas” [A vast loom of hand spindles and very primitive mechanical weaving provided work for most of the imprisoned] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 116).

In addition, it is also worth highlighting the fact that various social sectors, traditionally excluded from the Soviet model, seemed to have a place within the Maoist

one. This characteristic will take on special relevance in later writings as the Sino-Soviet split becomes more and more apparent and the Soviet model is more outwardly branded by China as revisionist (Bernstein 2014: 123; Li 2022: 13). Nonetheless, by 1952 when Zapata Olivella visited China, he found with surprise that prostitutes ([1954] 2020: 113), pimps ([1954] 2020: 116), capitalists, feudal lords, ([1954] 2020: 65) or “vagos, rateros y maleantes” [Lazy, thieves, and delinquents] ([1954] 2020: 119) also had a place within the Maoist alternative. Thus, the realization of the idea that “la liberación alumbra para todos”²⁶ [Liberation shines for all] ([1954] 2020: 124) was one that he described as a “sabia enseñanza” [Wise teaching] ([1954] 2020: 119). Such apparently receptive and conciliatory spirit was even remarked on by a non-communist such as Miró Quesada regarding his meeting with Mao Zedong in 1959. The Chinese leader stressed how both the Soviet Union and the United States were their “dos grandes maestros” [Two great teachers] (1959, II: 49) in the race toward progression and emphasized the importance of preserving cultural ties even with a country “poco amistoso” [Not very friendly] (1959, II: 47), such as Japan, as well as to cooperate as a government with capitalists and members of democratic parties in China (1959, II: 51).

As outlined in the introduction, both the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the deepening of the Sino-Soviet divergencies also produced changes in the PRC’s strategy aiming to forge closer ties with Latin America. “As tensions between Beijing and Moscow mounted in the early 1960s, the Soviets began to leave the PRC and the number of specialists from other nationalities (including Latin Americans) increased” (Rojas 2020: 78). Besides, with the outbreak of the Sino-Indian War in 1962, “the PRC found itself isolated from other Asian countries” (Rojas 2020: 73). Therefore, as described by Coloane, the Friendship Hotel “Fue construida especialmente para los miles de técnicos soviéticos que la habitaron hasta 1960, año en que se retiran, por orden del su gobierno, a raíz del inicio de la crisis entre ambos gobiernos” [It was specially built for the thousands of Soviet technicians who lived there until 1960, the year they were withdrawn by order of their government following the onset of the crisis between both governments] (Coloane 2004: 173–147) so that, by 1962 “habitaba un conglomerado heterogéneo, cuya misión era colaborar, generosamente, en la primera etapa del nuevo gobierno de la República Popular China” [It housed a heterogeneous conglomerate, whose mission was to generously collaborate in the first stage of the new government of the People’s Republic of China] (Coloane 2004: 33).

²⁶ Evidently, this was not always the case because, as it is well known: “the landlords were amongst the first groups to be purged after the communist take-over, many of them being executed” (Cook and Murray 2001: 99).

However, as I have suggested, there is, within this corpus, a noticeable gradual fading of the revolutionary enthusiasm that marked the travel writing of the early 1950s and which, as in the case of *China 6 a.m.*, projected an idealized image of a pacifist China²⁷. For Zapata, the Chinese were “los guardianes de la paz en el oriente. Sus armas no se habían manchado con el ataque a los pueblos vecinos” [The guardians of peace in the East. Their weapons had not been stained with the attack on neighboring towns] ([1954] 2020: 44). By the end of the 1950s, peace was still a central topic of discussion in Mao Zedong’s meetings with Latin American commissioners. For instance, during the meeting that he had with Miró Quesada and the other Peruvian delegates and journalists, Mao began affirming that “el problema más importante para el mundo, en estos momentos, comenzó, es la paz. La paz y solo la paz pueden salvar al mundo. Los pueblos que luchan por la paz son los grandes pueblos” [The most important problem for the world at this moment, the one that has begun, is peace. Peace, and only peace, can save the world. The peoples who fight for peace are the great peoples] (1959, II: 44) and went on to recount the consequences of the two world wars as well as the many more that a third one could bring. He explained this as follows: “Creo por eso que el Movimiento de la Paz, que ha nacido en los países socialistas, pero que se extiende a todo el mundo, es muy valioso” [I believe, therefore, that the Peace Movement, which has arisen in socialist countries but extends to the entire world, is very valuable] (1959, II: 45). However, the escalation of the tensions between China and the Soviet Union clearly impacted

27 In his travel book, Diego Montaña Cuellar also referred to China as a historically pacifist nation: “Lo que refieren los mitos y la historia china no son guerras de conquista, sino la evolución pacífica del cultivo de la tierra y de la formación de las costumbres morales. Los chinos no eran un pueblo guerrero y cuando han luchado lo han hecho bajo la coacción de las necesidades defensivas. Empresas de ataque más allá de las fronteras han sido excepcionales y se han producido tan solo en alguna época de florecimiento de dinastías extranjeras. Ha sido, de esta manera la más firme tradición china, La Paz” [What the myths and history of China refer to are not wars of conquest, but the peaceful evolution of land cultivation and the formation of moral customs. The Chinese were not a warlike people, and when they have fought, they did so under the compulsion of defensive needs. Offensive campaigns beyond their borders have been exceptional and occurred only during periods of flourishing foreign dynasties. Thus, the strongest Chinese tradition has been Peace] (1953: 21). Similarly, Jorge Zalamea Borda describes China as a nation endowed with a particular virtue which makes it ideal for the promotion of peace: “La peculiar sabiduría que ha adquirido el pueblo chino por su permanente adhesión a la realidad y su aguda comprensión de la esencia de las cosas, - aconsejó al Comité Nacional de la Paz de China promover y realizar la reunión en Pekín de la Conferencia de los Pueblos de Asia y del Pacífico” [The unique wisdom that the Chinese people have acquired through their constant adherence to reality and their keen understanding of the essence of things—advised the National Peace Committee of China to promote and hold the meeting in Beijing for the Conference of the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific] (1952: 95).

by the USSR's reluctance to assist the PRC in the development of a Chinese nuclear bomb (Zhang 1999: 207). Thus, Mao Zedong's realization that "in today's world, if we don't want to be bullied by others, we should have atomic weapons by all means" (Zhang 1995: 205) turned around the pacifist perception of China.

Therefore, the Sino-Soviet split will not come to life in the travel narrative of this corpus until Coloane's travel memoirs corresponding to his second stay in China from 1962 to 1964. His comments about it include the economic impact that the split brought to the continuation of the Maoist project: "El complejo metalúrgico, construido con la ayuda de la Unión Soviética, ya no era el mismo de dos o tres años atrás. Afloraban los primeros síntomas de las divergencias" [The metallurgical complex, built with the help of the Soviet Union, was no longer the same as it had been two or three years ago. The first signs of divergences were beginning to emerge] (2004: 46) not only because of the absence of experts but also because of the great losses in unfinished projects, the lack of spare parts for machinery maintenance, and the general drop in production that this caused (2004: 47). At this point it was already evident for Coloane that "Se trata de si hacemos la revolución con bomba atómica o sin bomba atómica" [It is a matter of whether we make the revolution with atomic bombs or without atomic bombs] (2004: 59), "se comenta de China acerca de sus planes belicistas, a propósito de la bomba atómica [...] luego, la 'paz eterna' puede ser un arma, como decimos nosotros, de 'doble filo'. La 'paz eterna', ¿no podría ser la muerte de China y de la humanidad?" [There is talk about China regarding its war plans, with respect to the atomic bomb... Then, 'eternal peace' could be a weapon, as we say, of 'double-edged.' Could 'eternal peace' not be the death of China and of humanity?] (2004: 98).

As expected, the Sino-Soviet split derived into rapid pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet divisions among the Communist parties in Latin America, "The Brazilian party was the first to split, in 1962 [...] the Peruvian Maoist created their own new party in January 1964 [...] By the end of the 1960s, most Latin American countries had at least one Maoist party [...] However, only in Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Bolivia and Paraguay did the new-born pro-Chinese parties rival the pro-Soviet parties in size and influence at the time of their founding" (Rothwell 2013b: 23–24). Evidently, the impacting that this split had in the political fabric on the Latin American communists²⁸, both at home and in China, was a phenomenon to which Coloane extensively referred. For instance, even though the Communist Party of Chile was expressly forbidding its members to travel to China, there were some Chileans who, like Jorge Palacios, decided to travel despite not having authorization (2004: 83). Furthermore, Coloane

²⁸ Examples of this can be seen in the case of Chile with the criticisms of Pablo De Rokha, pro-Chinese, and poet Pablo Neruda, pro-Soviet in his text *Neruda y yo* published in 1955 (Vidal 2020: 168).

referred in his diary to the divergences that the split caused on a microscale in the Friendship Hotel, as revealed in a conversation that he had with a young Chilean, the son of a Pampino worker, who had recently arrived in Beijing:

De un momento a otro quiere saber mi opinión sobre las divergencias de estos dos grandes, porque él está seguro de que China tiene la razón y que la URSS se desvía de su cauce. Critica, más adelante, que los rusos usen pieles finas mientras haya todavía tantos pobres. Según él, busca la libertad. Me digo para mí mismo, son ideas de jóvenes encandilados que aún no encuentran la verdad que pretenden. Estos eran los primeros indicios de cómo las divergencias de dos grandes afectaban las relaciones de aquellos que habíamos venido a colaborar porque sustentábamos ciertos ideales [At any moment, he wants to know my opinion on the divergences of these two giants, because he is sure that China is right and that the USSR is straying from its path. Later, he criticizes the Russians for wearing fine furs while there are still so many poor people. According to him, he is seeking freedom. I tell myself, these are the ideas of young people dazzled by illusions who have not yet found the truth they seek. These were the first signs of how the divergences between the two giants affected the relationships of those of us who had come to collaborate because we held certain ideals] (2004: 56).



Fig. 45: Photograph included in the exhibition *Chile y China: la memoria de una amistad pionera desde la figura de José Venturelli* and labelled *Nuobeier wenxue jiang dezhu, zhili zuojia baboluo nieluda yu zhongguo qingnian zai yiqi* 诺贝尔文学奖得主，智利作家巴勃罗·聂鲁达与中国青年在一起 (The Nobel laureate in literature, Chilean writer Pablo Neruda with Chinese youths).

These types of divergences, hardly explored or contemplated in official narratives, became, in the course of the late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, more profound and frequent to the point that: “Uno ya se está sintiendo como un traidor de una causa o de una u otra persona aquí” [One is already beginning to feel like a traitor

to a cause or to one person or another here] (Coloane 2004: 58), inevitably creating new disagreements and tensions as in “El caso de L.E. Delano y varios españoles que se retiraron porque no quisieron leer por Radio Pekín un comunicado contra la URSS” [The case of L.E. Delano and several Spaniards who withdrew because they refused to read a statement against the USSR on Radio Beijing] (2004: 76).

As Ernst Halperin pointed out, by 1960, the largest communist party in the region, the Communist Party of Chile, was aware of the Sino-Soviet frictions, but it had preferred to keep the discussion on an internal level. However, with the introduction of *Pekín Informa* in major Latin American cities, mid-1963, the party decided to make public its differences with the PRC, and in September, Pablo Neruda gave a speech in Santiago attacking the Beijing government (1967: 134). This was immediately reflected in the drastic change that the figure of Neruda had in the PRC as well as in the translation and circulation of his work there: “from 1964, neither Pablo Neruda nor his works appeared in China’s media, [...] Once the most important Latin-American poet, had disappeared in the view of China” (Teng 2018: 184–185).

For the Latin Americans in China, these divergences even created important disagreements in favor of or against their own parties back home. In the hotel²⁹, in the middle of a conversation between Coloane and the Chilean poet Fernando González Urizar a topic arises in which “Le manifesté que nuestro país, y nuestro partido, aunque pequeños, merecían respeto, y que así como no me había sumado al coro antichino en Chile, en China por dignidad no podía sumarme al coro anti-soviético o antichileno” [I expressed to him that our country, and our party, though small, deserved respect, and that just as I had not joined the anti-Chinese chorus in Chile, in China, out of dignity, I could not join the anti-Soviet or anti-Chinese chorus] (2004: 141).

Furthermore, although the divergence between the Soviet Union and China is one of the major personal and political frustrations that Coloane experienced during his time there, he conferred a place in his writing to highlight how the subsequent adherence to one or the other of these factions was not based on purely ideological frameworks. Additionally, he emphasizes how these choices were influenced by certain privileges and comforts that could be defined as “class” in the case of foreigners living in China during this time, as he does in relation to a conversation he had with an old lady: “Le confieso, —me dice—que mis simpatías están

²⁹ Apart from the divisions that the Sino-Soviet split caused within each of the Latin American parties, regarding Argentina, Brenda Rupar also describes how, in the Friendship Hotel, different delegations from different political fractions cohabited without having had previous contact with each other. Carlos “Pancho” Gaitán described, for instance, how there was some tension inside the hotel due to the presence of a delegation of the Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo (2020: 222).

con los camaradas chinos. [...] Tengo 72 años, a mi edad no tendría en qué trabajar. Vea usted aquí: trabajo medio día en la oficina y el otro en mi casa” [I confess to you,” he tells me, “that my sympathies lie with the Chinese comrades. [...] I am 72 years old; at my age, I wouldn’t have any work to do. Look here: I work half the day in the office and the other half at home] (2004: 72). This is an issue to which Coloane will return later in his diary, acknowledging that “Ahora estoy recibiendo un sueldo de un país socialista en divergencia con otro país también socialista. [...] me sentía preocupado al pensar cuanto oportunismo podía haber en mi opinión. Era un drama volverse oportunista en el campo socialista” [Now I am receiving a salary from a socialist country in disagreement with another socialist country. [...] I felt worried thinking about how much opportunism could exist in my opinion. It was a drama to become an opportunist in the socialist camp] (2004: 142). However, he was also very distressed about the “suposiciones de que unos son pro-imperialistas porque están disciplinadamente con su partido y otros oportunistas porque se ganan la vida en China” [Assumptions that some are pro-imperialist because they are dutifully aligned with their party, while others are opportunists because they earn their living in China] (2004: 142).

Furthermore, regarding the place that Cuba came to occupy within such tensions, it is worth noting that Coloane referred to a Chilean friend, a university professor and member of the Communist Party, who: “se fue a Cuba a trabajar de maestro en la Universidad de la Habana. Nos cuenta que la Revolución Cubana le abrió mucho los ojos, como un deslumbramiento, y encontró que allí se había producido una síntesis de todo lo teorizado” [He went to Cuba to work as a professor at the University of Havana. He tells us that the Cuban Revolution opened his eyes significantly, like a revelation, and he found that it had achieved a synthesis of everything that had been theorized] (2004: 78). Thus, despite the initial enthusiasm that arose in the region due to the emergence of a successful model for a socialist revolution developed in the cultural, linguistic, and geographic proximity of the Caribbean, Cuba will come to add to the already tense relations. This model had surfaced as an even more viable and replicable alternative than of the Soviet or even the Chinese model.

Therefore, while it is true that, from the perspective of the Chinese Communist Party, the triumph of Cuba was a confirmation of the “validity of armed struggle as a path for revolution in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and was utilised as an ideological cudgel against the Soviet Union’s advocacy of the peaceful transition to socialism” (Rothwell 2016: 53), it also meant that “sooner or later the Chinese experience would lose its appeal. [...] the triumph of the Cuban Revolution prompted the PRC to co-opt Latin Americans and to start a campaign to demonstrate that the

Chinese Revolution, not the Cuban alternative, was the true path that the countries of Latin America and Africa should follow” (Rojas 2020: 74–75).

Evidently, this added a further degree of complexity to the divergences between China and the Soviet Union and to the divisions within the Friendship Hotel as a result. There, Russian comrades explained to Coloane their “doble preocupación: salvar la revolución cubana, es decir su felicidad socialista en el mundo, y al mismo tiempo, evitar un conflicto mundial [...] Kennedy había recordado a los rusos que los EE.UU. no intervinieron en Hungría, lo que era una manera de exigir la no intervención rusa en la invasión proyectada” [A dual concern: saving the Cuban Revolution, that is, its socialist happiness in the world, while simultaneously avoiding a global conflict [...] Kennedy had reminded the Russians that the U.S. did not intervene in Hungary, which was a way of demanding Russian non-intervention in the planned invasion] (2004: 128), strategic moves from which new disagreements arose as it happened when an official communication from the island addressed to the Latin Americans in Beijing:

En dicho llamado se atacaba a los pueblos latinoamericanos “porque se habían guardado la lengua en el bolsillo” [...] Que Cuba resistía gracias al apoyo de Asia y África. Franco reaccionó muy alterado y se negó a firmar ese documento. [alegando que:] en los meses que llevo aquí he cambiado de opinión. Vine pro y ahora no lo soy. El último documento chino me parece una infamia contra la URSS [In that statement, the Latin American peoples were criticized ‘for having kept their tongues in their pockets’ [...] It was claimed that Cuba resisted thanks to the support of Asia and Africa. Franco reacted very upset and refused to sign the document, [arguing that:] in the months I have been here, I have changed my mind. I came in favor, and now I am not. The latest Chinese document seems to me an outrage against the USSR] (Coloane 2004: 89).

Another perspective is offered by Venturelli, who in the 1950s was a very vocal advocate of the Chinese revolutionary process in Latin America and a crucial articulating figure for the political and cultural exchanges between these two regions. Right after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, he moved to Havana but still “advancing China’s efforts at informal diplomacy (Rothwell 2016: 52). With the Sino-Soviet split and the Cuban pro-Soviet swing in 1964, the “Cuban government requested that China stop all propaganda activities in Cuba” (Rothwell 2016: 54). As a consequence, “Venturelli’s work to advance China’s cause internationally brought him into a close political relationship with Zhou Enlai and led to his expulsion from Cuba and denunciation by Castro during the Sino-Soviet split” (Rothwell 2016: 46).

Remapping East and West

As other authors have noted (Montt 2016b: 106–107), “West” and “Western” continue to be a historical, discursive, and cultural reference defining their own identities as travelers and as Latin Americans and still acting as intermediaries in the experiences of their journey to China. For instance, the imagination of China, colonized for centuries by Marco Polo, is not an abandoned reference among the travel writers of this period. As traveling readers, they shared the reading of Marco Polo with the previous generations of travelers. Thus, in the case of Zapata, it works as a form of personal retracing of his previous encounters with China through his childhood readings ([1954] 2020: 36), while for Coloane, it is a more geographical *revisiting*, a *reandar* of Marco Polo’s steps (2004: 26–27) as a way to subscribe himself as a travel writer into the mythical history of the journey to China. Besides, lines such as the following ones, written by Miró Quesada right the day before the end of his trip to “the other half of the world,” it preserved a clear division between “here” and “there”: “Al día siguiente, en un avión de la Air France, debo reincorporarme al mundo Occidental. ¡París!, pienso en medio de la multitud ¡París! ... ¿qué será lo primero que haga al llegar al mundo democrático, a mi mundo, a mi ‘habitat’...?” [The next day, aboard an Air France plane, I must return to the Western world. Paris! I think amidst the crowd, Paris! ... What will be the first thing I do upon arriving in the democratic world, in my world, in my ‘habitat’...?] (1959, II: 129). Nonetheless, I would argue that as a consequence of such repositioning of China in the cartographical layout of the Latin American traveler of this period, the force that kept the needle of the Latin American compass pointing to Europe as its north is clearly weakened.

In this sense, the conceptual limits between Eastern and Western, as well as the tracings that divide them historically, politically, and culturally in the imaginary cartography drawn by each of them, are largely reshaped. The relationships established between each of these travelers and the Western world, both as a geographical and a symbolic space, are clearly problematized. Therefore, just a couple of pages after his mention of Marco Polo, Coloane continues by saying that after his return to Europe, the famous adventurer “causó todo tipo de comentarios algunos no dignos de crédito, otros solo fantasía de un hombre ignorante” [It sparked all kinds of remarks—some not credible, others merely the fantasies of an ignorant man] (2004: 30). Similarly, although in the case of Miró Quesada, it is “nuestra sensibilidad occidental” [our Western sensibility] (1959, II: 114) the one that, attending a Chinese opera, and even though “pusimos a funcionar todos nuestros recursos culturales [...] a Toynbee, a Spengler, a Cassirer. Todo fue inútil” [we brought all our cultural resources into play [...] Toynbee, Spengler, Cassirer. It was all in vain] (1959, II: 114) because from the

music “solo pudimos captar maullidos de gato” [we could only catch cat meows] (1959, II: 114). For others, like Zapata, this cultural anchorage is also recognized as a barrier that can be overcome: “influidos por nuestra mentalidad occidental [...] pero no tardamos en comprender que...” ([1954] 2020: 129).

On the other hand, the geographical frontiers that came to determine the geopolitical scenario of the Cold War and which initially divided the Western from the Eastern bloc, were frontiers that gradually stretched during the 1950s and 1960s to even contest the very delimitations between East and West. The most immediate antecedent was the division of the Korean Peninsula, but, as a response to the increased political fissures that surfaced with the Sino-Soviet split, there were also new and conflicting border tensions within the very core of the socialist bloc, manifested through the militarization of the border between China and the Soviet Union (Zhang 2016: 419–420). Thus, the division traced not only between the socialist and the capitalist bloc but at the interior of the Eastern one, deformed, uniformed, and reformed parts of the epistemological delimitations between “Eastern” and “Western” or between “Orient” or “Occident.”

These tensions altered the delimitation of imagined cartographies and ideological adhesions, which gained enough strength to break down cultural and national borders that would seem otherwise immovable. That does not necessarily imply that in the travel writing of this period, they acquired a single new layout, but given that every edified frontier is arbitrary, these new cartographies subjected various concepts and imaginaries to molds that were sometimes too large and other times too narrow. Compelling examples of this are the problematic placement of categories like “Soviet culture” both in its territorial and cultural dimension, within the limits of “Europe” or the “Western civilization.” Thus, Zapata includes both “Latin American” and “Soviet” within the same borderlines of the “cultura occidental” [Western culture] ([1954] 2020: 125–126) and somehow grouped together in opposition to Chinese culture. On a similar note, as I mentioned earlier, Miró Quesada spent his last night in Moscow at the end of his journey and excludes the Soviet Union from the geographical frontiers of “the West” when he referred to his return as going back to the “Occident” (1959, II: 129). However, contradicting his own distribution, Miró Quesada also referred, in another passage of his book, to the personality cult surrounding the figure of Mao in China, affirming that it was even more alarming than the one developed in the Soviet Union with Stalin, with which he explains that:

Esto es lo que debe comprender el occidental cuando juzga las reacciones y las valoraciones comunistas, especialmente las chinas. Y el oriental debe comprender la posición del occidental para entender a fondo sus críticas y sus opiniones sobre la realidad comunista. Porque para el occidental ningún hombre es infalible, ningún hombre es intangible. El occidental está

acostumbrado, desde hace siglos, a criticar con el mayor desenfado a cualquier semejante, ocupe la situación que ocupe [This is what the Westerner must understand when judging communist reactions and evaluations, especially the Chinese ones. And the Eastern person must understand the Westerner's position to fully grasp their criticisms and opinions about the communist reality. Because, for the Westerner, no man is infallible, no man is untouchable. The Westerner has been accustomed, for centuries, to criticize any fellow human with complete frankness, regardless of their position] (1959, II: 56).

In other sections of his book, Miró Quesada, like Zapata, places the Soviet Union under the umbrella of “Western.” Nonetheless, it is its communist condition that “orientalizes” it, otherizes it, and together with China, derationalizes it, and therefore, “dehumanizes” it by tracing its critical and analytical incapacity as a common pattern. Oddly enough, this is applicable to Stalin and Mao but apparently inappropriate to interpret the figures of Mussolini or Hitler, erected “on the Western side” of his distribution.



Fig. 46: Photograph of Miró Quesada shaking hands with Mao Zedong, included in his travel book. (1959, II: 13)

Such distribution becomes even more problematic when, a few pages later, Miró Quesada judges Mao's philosophical writings as “simplista, elemental. Carece de rigor, de profundidad” [simplistic, superficial. It lacks rigor, depth] (1959, II: 61) mainly because Mao ignores or does not make use of “los grandes movimientos de la filosofía occidental” [the great movements of Western philosophy] (1959, II: 61). This is a category within which, contradicting his own distribution of Eastern-Western and communist-capitalist, he locates Marx, Lenin, Lukács, Hegel, and Kant, despite Germany's geographical division into “Eastern” and “Western” sides. Nonetheless, Germany's “East” is not “orientalized” and, therefore,

“derationalized” under the same criteria as, for instance, China, despite both belonging to the same socialist bloc.

South-South Networks

Despite the evident unfolding of divergences, tensions, and divisions that surfaced in the travel writing of this last period, these almost two decades also witnessed the emergence of new political, historical, and cultural bridges between China and Latin America to which I will dedicate this last section of the present chapter.



Fig. 47: Coloane posing with other delegates at the Afro-Asian Writers Conference with Nikita Sergueivitch Khrushchov at the centre. Source: Lúcio Lara Archive.
<<https://www.tchiweka.org/fotografia/1007002018>>

A significant part of this peripheral solidarity was sustained by intellectual networks and circles of artists who set in circulation an interesting flow of ideas and debates through various cultural products that, between literary works, journalistic chronicles, travel diaries, and translations, became a source of understanding and exchange both on the international and on the regional level.

On the one hand, there are the international networks laid with other artists or intellectuals from other regions of the Global South—there is a perceptible tendency in this generation to congregate at events and to unite through organizations and associations. These channels served to bring to the fore the most contemporary issues, debates, and ideas as in the case of Coloane in the Afro-Asian Writers Conference in 1958, “a la que he sido invitado sin ser africano y asiático, porque ya se impone en las relaciones internacionales la fórmula Asia, África y América Latina,

que vincula y en alguna forma encubre realidades en extremo diferentes” [to which I have been invited without being African or Asian, because the formula Asia, Africa, and Latin America is already imposed in international relations, which links and in some way conceals extremely different realities] (2000: 229). There:

Estuvimos allí doscientos cuarenta escritores de veintisiete países. Entre ellos el colombiano Gabriel García Márquez y el africano Wole Soyinka. [...] el norteamericano Norman Mailer, el uruguayo Eduardo Galeano, el argentino Osvaldo Soriano, el peruano Mario Vargas Llosa, el senegales Sambene Ousmane, el egipcio Mahmed Yala y muchos otros, de Birmania, Camboya, India, China, Nepal, Rusia, observadores de Estados Unidos y Alemania occidental [We were there two hundred and forty writers from twenty-seven countries. Among them were the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez and the African Wole Soyinka. [...] the American Norman Mailer, the Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano, the Argentine Osvaldo Soriano, the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, the Senegalese Sambene Ousmane, the Egyptian Mahmed Yala, and many others from Burma, Cambodia, India, China, Nepal, Russia, as well as observers from the United States and West Germany] (Coloane 2000: 231).

They were also a force interested in denouncing imperialism and destabilizing the apparatuses built by canons as well as in rereading the traditions to unfold new social and literary trajectories, such as the “Organización de la Resistencia de Trabajadores del Arte y Literatura” [Organization of the Resistance of Workers in Art and Literature] (Coloane 2004: 31) founded by Emi Siao, Mao Tun, Guo Morou, and others aiming to “introducir literatura con clásicos de otros países” [introduce literature with classics from other countries] (2004: 31). In the particular case of the PRC and its resolution to strengthen relations and gain strategic allies through its cultural diplomacy, the creation of the *Zhongguo renmin waijiao xuehui* 中国人民外交学会 (Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs) in 1949 played a crucial role since “it consists of many high-level (former) diplomats and officials and it was responsible for maintaining contacts with prominent (former) statesmen, ministers, political leaders, diplomats, entrepreneurs, public figures and scholars who are considered friends or are otherwise important to China” (Hooghe 2015: 155). In line with this reference, the *Zhongguo renmin dui wai youhao xiehui* 中国人民对外友好协会 (Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries) founded in 1954 “currently cooperates with nearly 500 NGOs and institutions in 157 countries” (Hooghe 2015: 156).

It began to weave a very important network of organizations and associations which were for the most part founded by the Latin Americans that visited the PRC. “La primera de estas asociaciones fue la chilena, creada en 1952; luego la brasileña, en 1954; la mexicana, en 1957; la uruguaya, en 1959; la colombiana, en 1959; y la argentina, en 1961” [The first of these associations was the Chilean one, created in 1952; followed by the Brazilian one in 1954; the Mexican one in 1957; the Uruguayan



Fig. 48: From left to right: W. E. B. Du Bois, Shirley Graham Du Bois, Senegalese writer and activist, Majhemout Diop, literary critic and deputy director of the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Central Committee, Zhao Yang and leader of the Chinese delegation and deputy head of the Chinese Cultural Ministry, Mao Dun at the Afro-Asian Writers Conference. Source: [W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 1803-1999] Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Research Center, UMass Amherst Libraries <<https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-i0649>>

one in 1959; the Colombian one in 1959; and the Argentine one in 1961] (Hernández 2020: 278). In the case of Colombia, it has been suggested that the first Friendship Association (CCFA) was founded in 1977 (Asociación de la Amistad Colombo-China 2015: 78). There were, as Guillermo Puyana asserts, previous attempts to “crear asociaciones, fundaciones o centros culturales con el objetivo de promover el conocimiento sobre China” [To create associations, foundations, or cultural centers with the goal of promoting knowledge about China] (2010: 23).

Among them are, for instance, the one above listed by Hernández, which was “created unofficially during a visit by a Colombian parliamentary delegation to Beijing in the final weeks of June 1959” (Rojas 2020: 76). The delegation led by Joaquín Franco Burgos whose own written account of this encounter mentions that it was a trip initially suggested in 1952 as a visit to Korea “para informarse sobre nuestra delegación militar en oriente” [To inform themselves about our military delegation in the East] (2015: 59). This idea was promptly discouraged by the then-conservative

president Laureano Gómez Castro. However, after the abdication of Rojas Pinilla in 1957, whose regime began in 1953 with a military coup, Franco renegotiated with Gómez Castro at the end of 1958 the long-awaited trip to Asia. This was a crucial year since it marked the beginning of the National Front³⁰, which lasted until 1974. Once Franco obtained a permission, he traveled at the end of April 1959 together with his delegation. They attended the May 1st demonstration in Prague, from where they left for Moscow, before arriving in China in June. A “largo periplo por los países orientales de Europa y China,” an experience from which he highlighted “lo fastidiosa que fue la compañía de ciertos parlamentarios izquierdistas, en lo que ellos llamaban ‘paraíso’” [A long journey through the Eastern European countries and China,” an experience from which he highlighted “how annoying the company of certain leftist parliamentarians was, in what they called a ‘paradise’] (Franco 2015: 60).

Marco Ramírez Rojas affirmed that León de Greiff “sale por primera vez del país en 1945, como enviado consular con destino a México. [...] Luego, a finales de 1950 realiza un viaje de mayor duración que lo lleva a Europa, Rusia, China” (2020: 16; 2023: 129). However, Germán Espinosa recounts in his book *La verdad sea dicha: mis memorias* that in 1958, the Colombian Communist Party appointed de Greiff as representative to the Peace Congress held in Stockholm in July that same year³¹. Once in Sweden, he was invited to visit the Soviet Union (2003: 146), but there is no mention in his writing about a visit to China. The only relation that Espinosa recalls between de Greiff and the PRC is that with the taking office of the liberal president Alberto Lleras Camargo in August, de Greiff was appointed next year as first secretary of the Colombian embassy in Sweden, but not cultural attaché as Ramírez argued³² (2023: 29). Once there, the poet had numerous frictions with the ambassador: “Una de ellas, la de asistir a las recepciones ofrecidas por la Embajada de China

³⁰ The Frente Nacional was a power-sharing agreement established in 1958 between the country's two major political forces: the Liberal and the Conservative Party. Under this agreement, the presidency alternated between them every four years. Although it aimed at promoting stability and it brought to some extent peace, and reconciliation after years of acute political and social unrest, it excluded non-dominant and therefore non-adhering voices from the political debate, deepening the differences even further.

³¹ Francisco Miró Quesada C. also attended this congress, and his memoirs of this gathering are consigned in chapter XII in the first volume of his travel book *La otra mitad del mundo I: Unión Soviética* (1959: 61–63).

³² In the decree 1154 dated April 22, 1959, dictated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia in the first article: “Nómbrese al señor LEON DE GREIFF, Secretario de la embajada de Colombia en Suecia, en reemplazo del señor Fernando Arbeláez Garcés” [Appoint Mr. LEÓN DE GREIFF as Secretary of the Colombian Embassy in Sweden, replacing Mr. Fernando Arbeláez Garcés].

Comunista. ‘Colombia—le dijo—no sostiene relaciones con Pekín.’ De Greiff repuso: ‘Puede que Colombia no sostenga relaciones con Pekín, pero don León de Greiff sí las sostiene y seguirá asistiendo a esas recepciones’” [One such occasion was attending the receptions hosted by the Embassy of Communist China. ‘Colombia,—he was told—does not maintain relations with Beijing.’ To this, De Greiff replied: “Colombia may not maintain relations with Beijing, but Don León de Greiff does, and he will continue attending those receptions] (Espinosa 2003: 146–147).

Nonetheless, this bond between the Colombian poet and China had, however, a longer life. In the archives of the Daily Report of the Foreign Radio Broadcast, there are records of another earlier version of the CCFA. It was established in Bogota on October 15th, 1965, with Álvaro Pérez Vivez among one of its members, who “said at the inaugural meeting that the Chinese people ‘know exactly what they are doing and why’ [...] ‘...they [the Chinese leaders] say there can be no peace in the world as long as imperialism exists.’” Now that the Chinese people have destroyed imperialism on their own territory, they are helping others to defeat it. This version of the CCFA was formed by the honorary presidents “Leon de Greiff and Camilo Torres. Arturo Valencia Zea is the president” (United States. Foreign Broadcast Information Service 1965: FFFF1). Given that by the mid-1960s, the Sino-Soviet split was already showing its effects on the Latin American political dynamics, the founding of this Friendship Association coincides exactly with the fact that by 1965, the Chinese press recorded the support of the PRC “a las luchas de liberación nacional, realizadas por fuerzas diferentes a los Partidos comunistas [...] Lo anterior se puede ejemplificar con el caso colombiano, donde los chinos también expresaban apoyo al Ejército de Liberación Nacional y al Frente Unido del Pueblo dirigido por el cura Camilo Torres” [To the national liberation struggles carried out by forces other than the Communist Parties [...] This can be exemplified by the Colombian case, where the Chinese also expressed support for the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the United People’s Front led by Father Camilo Torres] (Hernández 2016: 109).

On the other hand, there are also, as a result, new networks laid among the Latin Americans. Thus, among artists and intellectuals, there is a network of analogous aesthetic or political positions that, in the sublevel that interests us, also constituted a network that had the journey to China as an additional common point. This also became a source of exchange and discussion of their own experiences, impressions, and representations of China, both through the circulation of their personal writings and readings as well as through an extensive epistolary archive. As Montt pointed out, “en muchos de los textos de viaje a China de este periodo, los viajeros se leían entre ellos, citaban y en muchas ocasiones viajaban juntos” [In

many travel texts about China from this period, travelers would read each other's works, cite one another, and often travel together] (2016a: 3030).

It can be, therefore, argued that this new generation of travel writers is the generation that shows us the most signs of having shared the experience of the reconstruction of an image of China. This accounts for, among other things, that this is also the generation that, without ceasing to have European references—among them being the novel *La Condition Humaine* by the French writer André Malraux, one of the most recurring ones—it is also the generation for which the literary production of writers and artists from the Global South served as its main imagined referent for the writing of China. Moreover, fellow Latin American travel writers played a significant role in shaping their perceptions.



Fig. 49: “Juan Marín junto a Francisco Coloane, Roque Esteban Scarpa y periodistas de Punta Arenas”. Source: Fotógrafo: Esteban Scarpa Covacevich. Legado Roque Esteban Scarpa. Colección Archivo del Escritor - Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

<<http://www.bibliotecanacionaldigital.gob.cl/bnd/623/w3-article-600538.html>>

This reorientation of textual trajectories opens a crack in the traditional scaffolding of circulation that prioritized the reading and the imagined reconstruction of China devised by the Global North as the main referent, displacing and provincializing its field of influence in the Latin American writing of the journey to China and opening with it new representational horizons less aligned with the metropolitan tracings. Among the many examples that could be pointed out from the scope of the present corpus is the relation between Juan Marín and Francisco Coloane. Despite knowing each other personally, they did not have the opportunity to comment on their experiences in China, since Marín died during Coloane's stay in Beijing (2004: 12).

Nonetheless Coloane recognizes that Marín: “nos dejó, entre otros, un libro que valoré muchísimo desde que lo tuve en mis manos, y más luego de mis dos años de permanencia en ese país. Hasta hoy siento su resonancia y su latir como si fuera el corazón mismo de la tierra” [He left us, among other works, a book that I greatly valued from the moment it came into my hands, and even more so after my two years of living in that country. To this day, I feel its resonance and heartbeat as if it were the very heart of the earth] (2004: 11).

In addition, as expressed by Coloane, the Beijing Friendship Hotel also served as a place of convergence and exchange between this Latin American intelligentsia: “Había una solidaridad y espíritu de ayuda fraterna entre los que nos conocíamos desde Chile, y con otras personas muy afectas a los que llamábamos ‘amigos de principios’. Entre ellos estaban Eraclio Zepeda y su mujer Elva. [...] Los cuentos de Eraclio nos hacían reír [...] Poseedor de un gran anecdotario nos embarcaba en noches de fantasía” [There was a sense of solidarity and fraternal support among those of us who had known each other from Chile, as well as with others deeply loyal to what we called “friends of principles.” Among them were Eraclio Zepeda and his wife, Elva. [...] Eraclio’s stories made us laugh [...] A master of anecdotes, he would sweep us away into nights of fantasy] (2004: 54). Moreover, it also became into a space for constructing a Latin Americanness outside of Latin America. It endowed them with a new perspective that allowed them, from the particularity of their time and their historical space, learning from, rediscovering, or even to re-drawing the limits of their national identities. They reversed the direction of their cultural compasses in order to point it and set out on the road to themselves. As Coloane states in the middle of a conversation with fellow Latin Americans at the Friendship Hotel: “—Yo vine a conocer a los chinos y resulta que me iré solamente conociendo a los chilenos, pues si algo aprendí es que la gente no es como la ve en su país, sino en China” [I came to get to know the Chinese, and it turns out I’ll leave only having gotten to know the Chileans. If I learned anything, it’s that people aren’t as you see them in their own country, but as they are in China] (2004: 76).

The hotel was the space where common experiences were woven together. Despite travel accounts being written and published mostly as an individual narration, for those who shared the halls and rooms of the Friendship Hotel, their memories there also became a collective place. This was evident when Coloane and his wife Eliana held a short story contest at the Friendship Hotel, juried by Sergio Pitol³³ and Eugenio Matus Romo. The contest prize was a Chinese painting (Coloane 2004: 85).

33 On the three trips Pitol made to China, his travel writings and his memoirs working at *China Reconstruye*, see (Corral 2016: 305–337).

Besides, it served as a communal atelier in which they discussed what, how, why, and even if to write about their experiences in this country (Coloane 2004: 63–64).

Clearly, this exercise of collective construction included the political aspect: “en China estoy aprendiendo y adquiero una nueva visión del mundo y de los entretelones de los partidos y sus políticas” [In China, I am learning and gaining a new perspective on the world and the inner workings of parties and their politics] (Coloane 2004: 80) but also the personal one, taking current news on the global, the continental, the national, and the personal sphere from and to the hotel. It stimulated a shared interpretation of the reality both in China and back home:

La vuelta de Yerko despertó varias inquietudes, porque nos traía el ‘clima’ político que se vivía en Chile. Había tres candidatos a la presidencia, entre ellos estaba el doctor Salvador Allende, apoyado por el Partido Comunista. [...] Con preguntas que van y otras que vienen nos pusimos a dar opiniones sobre los candidatos y sus perspectivas pensadas o improvisadas a la distancia [Yerko’s return sparked several concerns because he brought with him the political ‘climate’ of Chile. There were three presidential candidates, one of whom was Dr. Salvador Allende, supported by the Communist Party. [...] With questions coming and going, we began to offer opinions about the candidates and their perspectives, whether planned or improvised from a distance] (Coloane 2004: 54).



Fig. 50: Photograph included in the exhibition *Chile y China: la memoria de una amistad pionera desde la figura de José Venturelli* and labelled: *Diliya balaona he xuesheng zai dangshi de beijing waiguoyu xueyuan* 迪莉娅·巴劳纳和学生在当时的北京外国语学院 (Delia Baraona and her students at the then Beijing Institute of Foreign Languages).

On a more personal scale, these networks were also alternative spaces for the circulation of knowledge, as in the case of Delia Baraona, who had among her many Chinese students of Spanish, writers like Emi Siao or Lu Wei Su (Coloane 2004: 14).

These networks are also facilitators that helped navigating the practicalities of the traveling experience or exchange, as it was, for instance, the already mentioned assistance that Xiao gave to Coloane in the handling of his visa, the case of “Lui Siao Pei—un joven profesor de castellano que años más tarde vivió con otros dos compañeros en mi casa, cuando vinieron al Instituto Pedagógico a perfeccionar su castellano” [Lui Siao Pei—a young Spanish teacher who, years later, lived with two other companions in my house when they came to the Pedagogical Institute to improve their Spanish] (2004: 16) or with the trip of Coloane and his wife Eliana to Beijing in 1962 “Yerko Moretic y su mujer, Virginia. Ambos pasaron a ser nuestros guías en esta etapa de vida en China” [Yerko Moretic and his wife, Virginia. Both became our guides during this stage of life in China] (Coloane 2004: 33).

Peripheral Solidarities: China-Latin America

Thus, “inconscientemente extendíamos las miradas hacia el sur” [Inconsciously, we extended our gaze toward the south] ([1954] 2020: 35) are, for instance, the words with which, on his way to Beijing, flying over the border between the Soviet Union and Mongolia, Zapata Olivella opened the written accounts of his journey.

This *sur* is no longer just geographical; it is a *sur* that, despite not being his South—the American one—was a South and a home to his political ideas and struggles. It is another part of that South of fading borderlines that, despite visiting for the first time, made him arrive in China invaded by the nostalgia of those who return home. In his writing, China was a home in which he was not born but in which he felt he belonged. It was like to return to “al país con el cual había soñado desde mi infancia” [To the country I had dreamed of since my childhood] ([1954] 2020: 36), to get back to another South that he had not inhabited, but one which had inhabited him since long. This is the same familiarity he experienced when, at the celebration of the anniversary of the establishment of the PRC on October 1st in Tiananmen Square, the Chinese raised on their shoulders not only the portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Zhu De but also “de todos aquellos destacados luchadores del internacionalismo proletario: Dolores Ibárruri, y Pablo Neruda, Ho Chi Minh, Joliot Curie” [Of all those prominent fighters of proletarian internationalism: Dolores Ibárruri, Pablo Neruda, Ho Chi Minh, Joliot Curie] ([1954] 2020: 44), expanding the limits of that South beyond the national, cultural, or linguistic frontier.

This unifying force stems from colonialism as a common experience and from the struggle for freedom and autonomy as shared objectives. In consequence, these links end up remapping not only the geographies but also the concepts that have traditionally labeled Latin America as a “Far West” and China as a “Far East,” giving

the impression of being inexorably opposed and unrelatable geographies. In this sense, it is clear that the leftist movements, and more concretely, the members of the communist parties of the world were the ones who mobilized these networks most consistently among third-world nations. Nonetheless, also non-communists such as Miró Quesada, a militant of the Christian Democratic Party, referred to the lack of a common historical vision among all the “underdeveloped” countries in a chapter of his travel book entitled “Convergencia”:

Una de las causas más importantes es su condición de ex-colonia. La colonia es una realidad apendicular, dependiente. Acostumbrada a mirar a la metrópoli como la realidad suprema, no mira hacia su propia realidad [...] Pero tampoco mira al mundo, tampoco dirige su mirada hacia los países considerados como miembros de una comunidad. Solo mira a la metrópoli. Por eso mira a la historia, y no comprende lo que de verdad sucede en el mundo [One of the most important causes is its condition as a former colony. The colony is an appendicular, dependent reality. Used to looking at the metropolis as the supreme reality, it does not look towards its own reality [...] But it also does not look at the world, nor does it direct its gaze towards the countries considered as members of a community. It only looks at the metropolis. That is why it looks at history, and does not understand what truly happens in the world] (1959, II: 123).

Thus, these common struggles are mostly recognized at the level of countries or regions of the Global South and are part, albeit to varying degrees, of all the diaries studied in this chapter. However, a more personal and intimate acknowledgment of them predominates in Zapata’s writing. Therefore, as soon as he lands in Beijing, a joyful little girl greets him and asks him: “¿cómo son y cómo viven los niños de su país?” [How are the children of your country and how do they live?]; although hesitant at first, Zapata resolves to answer by saying: “Los niños de mi patria sufren tanto, tienen tal amargura en su risa, que al mirar tu carita alegre y sin pena, me parece que nunca había visto sonreír a un niño.” [The children of my homeland suffer so much, their laughter carries such bitterness, that when I look at your happy and carefree face, it seems to me that I have never seen a child smile.] Still smiling, the girl replies: “Nosotros también hemos sufrido mucho con la guerra, pero ahora somos felices. Cuando usted regrese a su país, dígales a los niños que estamos luchando por la paz para que ellos también lo sean” [We too have suffered a lot because of the war, but now we are happy. When you return to your country, tell the children that we are fighting for peace, so that they can be happy too] ([1954] 2020: 38). Not only is it interesting that the first conversation that Zapata had on Chinese soil about world peace was with a little girl but this first vision that Zapata gives us of this common suffering and of peace as a shared project with China is not built from an official perspective. In contrast, it is presented from the viewpoint of a portion of society diametrically opposed to one of the decision-makers and treaty signatories, a perspective that

attains an even greater significance when placed in the context of the exercise of this people-to-people diplomacy.

Similarly, when Zapata visited a small village in Mukden, a Chinese miner told him how he and his wife had planned to end their lives and that of their daughters in order to free themselves from the Japanese regime: “poniéndome la mano sobre la rodilla como un hermano que contara a otro las penas pasadas en su ausencia” [Putting his hand on my knee like a brother telling another about the pains endured in his absence] ([1954] 2020: 79). Thus, despite not having a common language, culture, or territory, Zapata turns his travel book into a narrative geography of collective and shared memory both for Chinese and Latin Americans. In this textual territory, Zapata interweaves a common historical account that while compiling testimonies of modern Chinese history; he also writes for a Latin American reading public a culturally distant yet historically related version of their own past and present, bringing a whole new dimension to their historical experiences.

Continuing with the implications of the reconfiguring of the territoriality of this South, it is worth noting that not only is the geographical plundering recognized, but also the looting by the Northern powers of cultural and historical memory as a shared experience of colonial violence. Hereby, Coloane refers to the looting of both Chinese and Chilean patrimony: “los moai de la Isla de Pascua en otros lugares. Y tanta joya china llevada fraudulentamente a otros países... Y recordar también que los restos del hombre de Pekín habrían sido llevados a Norte América” [the moai of Easter Island in other places. And so many Chinese treasures taken fraudulently to other countries... And also remember that the remains of the Peking man might have been taken to North America] (2004: 186). Thus, on a temporal dimension of it, there is a more diachronic dialogue between these latitudes, since the struggle for the repossession of memory and its reconstruction as a common aim is part of the political and class struggles, engaging past, present, and futures together.

Repositioning New China in World Cartographies

Previously, I have highlighted how the place that these travelers gave to China in the world went through a transformation. As I suggested, China received greater recognition within the mappings of World Culture. The acknowledgment of its contributions to science, history, art, and world thought coincided with a distancing from the West as a model for the Latin American voyager. Thus, in the almost two decades that followed (1950–1966), besides increasing, it was also expressed not only through a form of “awareness,” but also some aspects of China and its culture were appreciated not as foreign to them but even as realities that they

also inhabited. For instance, the numerous and significant presence of the Chinese diaspora and their descendants in Peru, and in the formation of Peruvian culture is mentioned for the first time: “se han mezclado con los peruanos, que son queridos entre nosotros, y que estamos acostumbrados no solo a su presencia cotidiana sino incluso a algunas de sus costumbres y hasta a su comida” [they have mixed with the Peruvians, who are well-liked among us, and we are accustomed not only to their daily presence but also to some of their customs and even their food] (1959, II: 19).

It is also noticeable how there are more and more spaces in which the familiarity of the Latin American coexists with the novelty of the Chinese to account for an experience that is both known and unknown, past and present. Therefore, “The difficulties the authors meet to explain what they perceive as ‘different’ is overcome by the use of images which reflect their overlapping identities which suggest a defiance of fixed notions of alterity” (Montt 2016b: 96). In fact, images of Latin America sprout almost as finding islets of it along the course of their journey through China: “Tenemos una tarde de plácido sol y me parece que caminamos por una ladera del San Cristóbal” [We have an afternoon of pleasant sunshine, and it seems to me that we are walking along a slope of San Cristóbal] (Coloane 2004: 40). Furthermore, both for Zapata and Coloane, this bond with aspects of Chinese culture is even tied to their childhood and to their most intimate memories and experiences of the world: “En la Nochebuena, cuando en los juegos de niño cantábamos bajo la lluvia de luces de bengala, admiré a los artífices chinos que supieron crear la pólvora para maravillar la inocencia” [On Christmas Eve, when in the children’s games we sang under the rain of sparklers, I admired the Chinese craftsmen who knew how to create gunpowder to amaze innocence] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 36–37). Similarly, Coloane situates the mythological figure of the dragon within his earliest reminiscences: “del Dragón recuerdo las canciones, las danzas, los barcos y tanto juguete de niño” [Of the Dragon, I remember the songs, the dances, the boats, and so many childhood toys] (Coloane 2004: 22). Through this exercise, there is a (re)discovering of intimate and old ties with China and its culture, both from the cultural bond shared with China as Latin American countries and from the connection established between China and them as individuals.

Thus, the encounter with China is an encounter that resizes, relocates, and brings perspective on different levels. On the global dimensions of space, it is interesting to see how other points of reference are introduced to their descriptions of the country: “Recorrí, pausadamente, la Gran Muralla. [...] cubre un tramo entre Londres y San Petersburgo o entre París y Bucarest, y para los chilenos, según Juan Marín, el trayecto directo entre Arica y Magallanes” [I walked slowly along the Great Wall. [...] It covers a stretch between London and St. Petersburg or between

Paris and Bucharest, and for the Chileans, according to Juan Marín, the direct route between Arica and Magallanes] (Coloane 2004: 18), adding vantage points on global and on the more local level. The same shall apply to the resizing of the dimensions of time and culture: “la nueva generación de China que resueltamente se lanza al asalto de la cultura occidental, plenamente segura de su propia civilización milenaria” [The new generation of China that resolutely launches itself to assault Western culture, fully confident in its own millennia-old civilization] (Zapata [1954] 2020: 126), leaving the impression in these lines that “Western culture” is synonymous with something newer, more recent.



Fig. 51: Photo included in Miró Quesada's diary with the caption: “Admirando un astrolabio construido por astrónomos chinos hace más de dos mil años...” (1959, II: 75).

This realization of the West as a more recent source of knowledge in comparison to China, or even other cultures, is a clear form relocating the map of cultural and symbolic influence exerted by the West in the compass of the Latin American travel writers. For instance, in a conversation between Coloane and Efraín Baquero, the latter commented that “Estoy leyendo un libro de un francés que se refiere a los cuatro elementos esenciales de la poesía: la tierra, el agua, el aire y el fuego. El autor es un físico atómico” [I’m reading a book by a French author who refers to the four essential elements of poetry: earth, water, air, and fire. The author is an atomic physicist] (2004: 64) to which Coloane replies arguing that: “—Sí, pero ese francés debe estar imbuido de los principios orientales, porque ellos son los que ven en esos elementos toda la creación. ¿No lo ves así tú? También todos los pueblos primitivos” [—Yes, but that Frenchman must be imbued with Eastern principles, because they are the ones who see in those elements the entirety of creation. Don’t you see it that way? Also, all primitive peoples...] (64). This extends also to passages in which Coloane referred to Daoist medical practices that are not recognized by Western

medicine (2004: 157), or when he resorted to Zhuangzi's teachings to reflect on the Sino-Soviet split, since: "Aquellos que adelantan o anticipan puntos de vista fracasan en la comprensión de que todos están parcialmente correctos y parcialmente equivocados" [Those who advance or anticipate points of view fail to understand that all are partially correct and partially wrong] (2004: 170).

With regard to China's art and other cultural products, they acquired an entirely new position in the traveling impressions of this period. For instance, when admired by the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace, Miró Quesada concluded his visit saying that: "Los creadores renacentistas de la perspectiva no son sino unos aprendices" [The Renaissance creators of perspective are nothing but apprentices] (1959, II: 27) and admitting, as he also did when referring to the gardens in Hangzhou, that they were the most beautiful in the world (1959, II: 29): "Ni los jardines de Versalles, ni los de Schönbrunn, ni siquiera las ariscas rosaledas de Villa Carlota en el lago di Como pueden compararse" [Neither the gardens of Versailles, nor those of Schönbrunn, nor even the rugged rose gardens of Villa Carlota on Lake Como can compare] (1959, II: 30). The same happened when he attended an opera:

La Ópera China nació antes que la tragedia griega. Cuando Occidente balbuceaba apenas su cultura, ya China había llegado a las más claras nociones en cuestiones de arte, literatura y teatro. Cuando la Polis comenzaba a diferenciarse del caserío y del villorrio, los emperadores, en el fausto inigualado de su corte, experimentaban todas las posibilidades de la emoción estética [Chinese opera was born before Greek tragedy. When the West was just beginning to stutter its culture, China had already reached the clearest notions in matters of art, literature, and theater. When the Polis was beginning to differentiate itself from the hamlet and the village, the emperors, in the unequaled splendor of their court, were experimenting with all the possibilities of aesthetic emotion] (1959, II: 112)

This reconsideration of Chinese art, especially with respect to ancient Greece, is critical since, as discussed in the first chapter following Enrique Dussel, re-signifying the limits and referents of "the ancient" beyond the reach of the Hellenocentric is, therefore, a way of re-signifying the field of influence of Europe as a center. On the other hand, in terms of the place of the critic and the exhibition of art, it is also worth noting how Western referents have been displaced as the only possible and valid ones as well as the exclusive measure for the legitimization or delegitimization of the artistic value of works or practices.

For instance, when Coloane comments on his experiences visiting museums and art galleries in China and refers specifically to the practice of keeping the walls almost empty while the paintings are kept rolled in drawers and only individually displayed when someone asks to see them, Coloane admits that: "cuesta entender sus sensibilidades frente al arte pictórico" [It is hard to understand their sensitivities towards pictorial art] (2004: 138). However, he does not fail to express the

satisfaction he experienced while being able to “entender que ellos lo preservan como un verdadero tesoro, que solo debe ser visto por unos ojos capaces de contemplarlo. De allí que a ellos no les quede claro entrar a una casa donde nosotros tenemos una verdadera exposición en los muros. Sencillamente lo consideran una profanación” [To understand that they preserve it as a true treasure, one that should only be seen by eyes capable of contemplating it. Hence, it is unclear to them to enter a house where we have a true exhibition on the walls. They simply consider it a desecration] (138). In a similar vein, and in spite of the weight that concepts such as “authorship” and “originality” have in the history of Western art, Coloane expresses his interest and fascination in the fact that “La copia es un arte en la pintura china” [The copy is an art in Chinese painting] (2004: 139) as well as the little concern they expressed in a conversation he had during his visit about the impossibility of recognizing the authorship of a work.

Reaching toward the Other Shore: Repositioning China and Latin America in History

At the end of the previous chapter, I pointed out how, in comparison with the nineteenth-century sojourners, more driven by national bonds, travelers like Orrego manifested an idea of Latin America as a unity and as an enclave of his own historical and cultural identity. Evidently, not only has this vision of Latin America as a unit become generalized and turned into the main point of enunciation among travelers to New China, but also their image of Latin America is portrayed from a much more complex and diverse perspective. As a result, part of this epistemological re-mapping of Latin American and its position in the face of a new way of understanding the West is also a consequence of the repositioning of the indigenous and the black traditions in the very definition of Latin America, its culture, its history, and its memory, not only in relation to itself but also with other cultures and regions of the world beyond the limits of the Western civilization.

In this new period, we find, for instance, a travel writer like Zapata, for whom the class struggle was never separated from the struggle against racism. He was fully committed to the dissemination of the traditionally marginalized Afro-Colombian culture and knowledge, which therefore implied a redefinition of Colombianity. This commitment sent him to jail for the first time in the 1940s when he “gritó en las calles de la capital de la república ¡Vivan los negros! ¡Abajo el racismo! arengas de compromiso político de las que nacerían el día del afro y el movimiento afro en Colombia” [He shouted in the streets of the capital, ‘Long live the blacks! Down with racism!’ Political slogans from which the Day of Afro and the Afro movement in Colombia would be born] (Mina 2016: 27). Furthermore, in works such as *He visto*

la noche, Zapata focuses his narrative on the culture but also the hardships of the Afro-American communities in their day-to-day lives. This work, initially published in the United States in 1953, and then reissued in Cuba in 1962, outlines common trajectories among the African diaspora in the Americas, not only among Souths within the South, but also with a South within the North.

On a similar note, regarding the new space that the indigenous communities acquired in the discursivity of the travel writers of this period, it is worth mentioning that the recovery of this space also goes hand in hand with the reframing of the territory of cultural and symbolic influence claimed by the Western metropolis. Therefore, following Enrique Dussel, the tight bond between Hellenocentrism and Eurocentrism is something that for Coloane is manifested not barely as a historical reality but also as a racial and class imposition: “El burgué se cree hijo del pensamiento helénico, de la cultura occidental y cristiana. Pero eso es solo una pátina; debajo está nuestro ancestro, que un día se levantará con su maravillosa cultura autóctona y todas sus artes naturales” [The bourgeois believes he is the offspring of Hellenic thought, of Western and Christian culture. But that is just a veneer; beneath it lies our ancestor, who one day will rise with his marvelous indigenous culture and all his natural arts] (2004: 184–185). Therefore, in addition to setting other referents to stretch bonds with their own antiquity, this connection not only expanded into a resignification of the past but proposed new tracings to rethink the limits of the Latin American, to project them into alternative outlines for other political, social, and cultural futures for the continent.

Revisiting the historical and cultural bonds with the indigenous peoples³⁴ also represented for Coloane a channel to retrace historical connections between Latin America and China. He claimed points of convergence were located further beyond their connection with Europe. Thus, in a conversation with his Chinese colleague Shao Yi, a young Chinese-Peruvian, enthusiast of the history of Peru and the Inca people, Coloane tells her that in Chile: “Todos tenemos algo de autóctono, aunque muchos no lo reconozcan. Yo mismo tengo sangre huilliche, que puede haber llegado desde China u Oceanía hacia Chiloé que es mi tierra” [All of us have something indigenous in us, although many do not recognize it. I myself have Huilliche blood, which may have come from China or Oceania to Chiloé, which is my homeland] (2004: 184).

When working as a proofreader at *China Reconstruye*, Coloane also imparted classes of Chilean history among his Chinese colleagues, and this was a topic to which he commonly referred to, in relation to the Onas: “Como este mar, el Pacífico,

34 This was also pointed out by Brenda Rugar in her reading of Bernardo Kordon's travel writing (2019: 174).

creían que más allá estaba la esperanza de hallar alguna otra orilla. Por ello no cabría duda de que nuestro autóctono americano sería de origen asiático” [Like this sea, the Pacific, they believed that beyond it lay the hope of finding another shore. Therefore, there could be no doubt that our indigenous American would be of Asian origin] (2004: 127). This other shore of the Pacific, which was, in turn, an ancient bridge that redefined the historical and cultural ties of the American subcontinent with the world, was also a connection to rethink the legitimacy of the bond with the Atlantic, and its relationship with Europe, as the only possible one, and the European colonial subjugation as the only threshold between Latin America and the world.

Similarly, when Coloane refers to the origins and principles of Buddhism, despite making parallels with the Christian tradition, he extends his comparisons to pre-Hispanic times to find ties with the original peoples of the Southern Cone: “cuando pienso en mis antepasados Onas, me siento identificado con ellos, cuando creían que habían descendido de la bóveda de arriba por medio de una cuerda trenzada hecha de piel de foca” [When I think of my Ona ancestors, I feel identified with them, when they believed that they had descended from the vault above by means of a braided rope made of seal skin] (2004: 43). He draws this same parallel when, during his visit to Inner Mongolia, Coloane uses the word *trutruca* to name a Mongolian musical instrument very similar to that of the Mapuche tradition (2004: 109). Miró Quesada also did this when he found similarities in the architecture of the Winter Palace in the Forbidden City with the Maya and the Aztec ones.

On the other hand, as I argued in relation to the nineteenth-century travel writing in the first chapter, the expansion of Europe and especially of Christianity in China was observed by the travel writers with approving eyes, with the exception of Bustamante. Conversely, in this new period, there is a widespread recognition of the imperialist coercion exerted by Europe and the United States resizing and resetting with it the historical position of the West and Western culture with respect to China and Latin America. This acknowledgment was so generalized that even from the perspective of a Christian democrat like Miró Quesada, also a fervent admirer of the old continent, it was, nonetheless, clear that:

El desprecio de los explotadores europeos por los chinos llegaba a extremos tan atroces que se hace difícil creerlo. Pero esto es cierto. [...] pueblos que se llaman cristianos han esclavizado a millones de hombres, simplemente porque eran de nacionalidad diferente [...] cómo ha sido posible que esto no solo haya sucedido sino que haya sido visto con naturalidad por los hombres más cultos y cristianos del mundo [The contempt of European exploiters for the Chinese reached such atrocious extremes that it is hard to believe. But this is true. [...] Peoples that call themselves Christian have enslaved millions of men, simply because they were of a different nationality [...] how has it been possible for this not only to happen but also to be seen as natural by the most cultured and Christian men of the world?] (1959, II: 83–84)

Similarly, during another of his history classes at the magazine, Coloane also referred to “Pizarro y Almagro y sus codicias por el oro” [Pizarro and Almagro and their greed for gold] (2004: 126), putting greater emphasis on the cosmogony of the Araucanian peoples (126–127) and resorting to his own experiences with and writings about the Selk’nam (Ona) people. He criticizes the fact that “Los historiadores en Chile no nos han señalado ni han hecho un buen estudio del porqué de la extinción de varios grupos autóctonos” [The historians in Chile have not pointed out nor have they done a good study of the reasons behind the extinction of several indigenous groups] (2004: 131), and, after labeling it as an extermination, he further explains that: “fueron víctimas de una sociedad que los relegó a una condición subhumana donde se privilegiaban los intereses de unos cuantos ganaderos, despojando a estos autóctonos de sus medio de vida” [They were victims of a society that relegated them to a subhuman condition, where the interests of a few landowners were privileged, depriving these indigenous people of their means of livelihood] (2004: 131).

Just as with the manifestations of Souths in the North, we see here the emergence of Souths within the South—other levels of peripherality within the periphery. As part of the celebration of the third anniversary of the triumph of the communist revolution on October 1st, Zapata Olivella describes with enthusiasm how there were present: “Toda la variada gama de danzas folklóricas desde los pueblos nórdicos de China hasta los bailes tibetanos” [All the varied range of folk dances, from the Nordic peoples of China to the Tibetan dances] ([1954] 2020: 45). Thus, in this staging of socialism, the face of the PRC that celebrates its ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity is the one that is enacted. Nonetheless, in the class I have just referred to, Coloane’s colleagues also commented on China’s ethnic and linguistic diversity and on how, throughout history, depending on the government, better or worse conditions were created for their minorities: “se producía una extremada y cruel opresión, negandoles sus derechos [...] me citan los Hui, Tibetans, Uighurs, Miao y varios otros” [se producía una extremada y cruel opresión, negandoles sus derechos [...] me citan los Hui, Tibetans, Uighurs, Miao y varios otros] (2004: 132), whose varied customs “la revolución no ha podido uniformar” [The revolution has not been able to standardize] (132).

In the same vein, in the midst of the tensions caused by the Sino-Soviet split, Coloane traveled to Inner Mongolia to cover a story. There, he encountered a setback of the staging of multiculturalism in revolutionary China, when: “un grupo de mongoles, varones vestidos muy a la usanza de abrigos de cuero y botas. Se tiraron con los brazos abiertos diciéndome: *toravich, toravich* (escribo el término como lo escuché); yo traté de retribuir el cariño, sin darme cuenta de que mis guías se

interponen entre ellos y yo” [A group of Mongols, men dressed in the fashion of leather coats and boots. They threw themselves at me with open arms, saying: *toravich*, *toravich* (I write the term as I heard it); I tried to return the affection, not realizing that my guides were interposing themselves between them and me] (2004: 168). Confused and upset with his guides and interpreters, Coloane only obtained a: “Podían hacerle daño” [They could harm him] (168) as an explanation. However, he realized later that: “yo no sabía que en Mongolia había 10 *han* por cada mongol, y que los han, habían sido llevados allí a raíz de problemas no resueltos con la otra Mongolia, que tenía todo el apoyo ruso [...] Son casos y cosas, ojos y oídos que me han hecho pensar que el nudo de las divergencias tiene algo de estas suspicacias” [I didn’t know that in Mongolia there were 10 *Han* for every Mongol, and that the Han had been brought there due to unresolved issues with the other Mongolia, which had the full support of Russia [...] These are cases and things, eyes and ears that have made me think that the crux of the divergences has something to do with these suspicions] (168).

To conclude this last chapter, I would like to underline how travel narratives provide alternative testimonies and visibilize the existence of counter-hegemonic historical and cultural connections both with respect to the official diplomatic narrative, as well as to the account of historical phenomena such as the Cold War. Addressing the Latin American narrative of the trip to China in this period gave an account of other political and ideological trajectories as well as other artistic and cultural exchanges between these two regions of the Global South. Throughout these almost two decades, there was an evident transformation in the place that China came to occupy not only in travel impressions but also in the Latin American imaginary of the future for both leftist and non-leftist militants. Their vision of China as an alternative model of progress and economic modernity, as well as a disruptive proponent of social construction, repositioned China in the Latin American compass, significantly displacing the influence and predominance of Western powers. This weakened their mediating power and allowed for more direct dialogues, exchanges, and alliances between these two regions.