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DISORIENTED DISCIPLINES

ROSARIO
HUBERT

CHINA, LATIN AMERICA, AND THE SHAPE OF WORLD LITERATURE



Disoriented Disciplines



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A complete list of titles begins on page 325.

Disoriented Disciplines

*China, Latin America, and
the Shape of World Literature*

Rosario Hubert



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Para Joan, Joancito y Rosie, mes copains d'abord

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A Note on Romanization

Per scholarly convention in the United States, I use the pinyin romanization system of standard Chinese and only employ other transcriptions when quoting a source or when they are of common usage, for example, in names.

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A very early version of chapter 1, published as “Chinoiserie” in *Latin American Literature in Transition 1870–1930* (2022): 135–47, is reprinted here with permission of Cambridge University Press. As are a few pages from chapter 2, which came out as a stand-alone article in *Variaciones Borges* 39 (2015): 81–101. Some ideas developed in chapter 5 were originally conceived in Spanish in the exploratory essay “Pañales rojos (o el archivo afectivo de una infancia revolucionaria),” published in *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 9, no. 3 (2020): 34–55.

In the years it took me to complete this book, my two children were born, and my writing also experienced the physical transformations that come with labor. This has made me think a lot about the working conditions of women in academia and, inspired by Severo Sarduy, of writing as a bodily practice. None of the efforts put into this project would have been worthwhile without the support of loved ones across the many geographies that my family calls home. In Buenos Aires: Cota, Tani, and Tino along with my lifelong friends, as well as aunts and cousins (and their ever-open office space for me in Maldón). In Seattle: Tito and Sharbani have convinced me that there is another place in the US that feels like home. In Barcelona: queridas Tata y Yaya, always ready to give us that much needed helping hand. Thank you Rebeca Medrano for being there for my kids and my family in our daily lives. My children Joan Marcel and Rosie are not only my loves but also my constant reminder of the transformative power of language and storytelling. Finally, Joan, thank you for your loving complicity, your relentless drive, and your precious care. This book is for you.

Disoriented Disciplines

“Indiscipline”

China, more than any other imaginary construction of the Orient, has occupied a crucial role in Latin American literary modernity. *Modernistas* were obsessed with the chinoiserie imports that ornamented their luxurious interiors and precious language, and that stressed their embrace of the exotic in lieu of the mimetic. The Chinese script—or rather, the European fantasies of the ideograph—was a critical object of inquiry for avant-garde artists such as José Juan Tablada, who used it as a precursor of haiku poetry in Spanish; for the Brazilian *concretistas*, who made the ideogram the *ars poetica* of their movement; or for poet-translators debating logocentrism, who manipulated Asian glyphs in the most unexpected ways. Jorge Luis Borges’s fiction teems with Chinese characters: spies, professors, pirates, diplomats, fugitives, bookkeepers, encyclopedias, as well as a good number of English and German sinologists. Since the Cold War, both socialist realism and the enormous Maoist propaganda apparatus consisting of revolutionary novels, poems, films, plays, and operas have had a decisive impact in Latin American intellectual and aesthetic debates on culture and politics. With recent migration waves, international cooperation initiatives, and the general renewed interest in this ancient culture that is today at the forefront of global capitalism, China comes up time and again in fiction and criticism in Spanish and Portuguese.

Truth be told, very few of these writings of China advances much specialized knowledge about Chinese culture itself. It is unlikely that

sinologists will expand their understanding of Du Fu or Wang Wei by reading Haroldo de Campos's translations of poetry from the Tang dynasty (618–907), and linguists might be rather perplexed at Severo Sarduy's wholly invented Asian signs and words. These writers barely had any background on the Chinese literary traditions, seldom spoke its languages, or had access to relevant bibliography in their cultural fields. In the foreword to *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1940; *The Book of Fantasy*), Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and Silvina Ocampo openly acknowledge the challenges of writing from Argentina about a faraway culture like China: “El admirable *Sueño del Aposento Rojo* y hasta novelas eróticas y realistas, como *Kin P'ing Mei* y *Sui Hu Chuan*, y hasta los libros de filosofía, son ricos en fantasmas y sueños. Pero no sabemos cómo estos libros representan la literatura china; ignorantes, no podemos conocerla directamente, debemos alegrarnos con lo que la suerte (profesores muy sabios, comités de acercamiento cultural, la señora Perla S. Buck), nos depara” (The admirable *Dream of the Red Chamber* and even erotic and realist novels, like the *Kin P'ing Mei* and *Sui Hu Chuan*, and even philosophical works, are rich in ghosts and dreams. But we do not know how these books represent Chinese literature; we are ignorant of it, and cannot access it directly. Instead, we must content ourselves with what luck [very sage professors, cultural cooperation committees and Ms. Pearl Buck] has in store for us).¹ Read literally, this quote establishes that peripheral intellectuals are destined to remedy their ignorance of faraway cultures only by “contenting themselves” with derivative forms of knowledge, that is, through the fortunate mediation of metropolitan experts. But the ironic tone in which the Argentine writers caricature these specialists reveals that, rather than lamenting their own subaltern position in the cartography of comparative literature, they are actually questioning the nature of the so-called authorities: “*very wise* professors” (erudite scholars), “cultural cooperation committees” (like the cultural diplomacy initiatives that their group *Sur* designed with US foreign officials at the time of the Good Neighbor Policy), and “Ms. Pearl Buck” (a best-selling novelist based in China, whom they designate merely as a middle-class woman). To the Latin Americans, neither philology, foreign policy, nor immigration seem valid mechanisms for producing knowledge about foreign cultures. Borges, Bioy, and Ocampo eventually include numerous excerpts of—undecipherable—Chinese fantastic literature in their anthology, and in the following years Borges goes on to translate, review, and compare Chinese novels that he has not even read, because Borges, like many

other artists and intellectuals studied in this book, is less concerned with the mimetic representation of China than with the ways in which Chinese culture helps rethink the larger networks of world literature and with establishing an unstable topos to adopt in a global conversation on cultural exchange. While these disorienting writings of China do not say much new about China itself, they do say a lot about Chinese culture in its transnational, diasporic, and global dimension. Chinoiserie trade goods, the ideograph, Maoist propaganda, and the Chinese diaspora are after all different inflections of this distant and ancient Eastern culture, and they all emerge through the displacement of peoples, texts, and artifacts since early modernity. “What can furnish the West with a better reservoir of dreams, fantasies, and utopias?” posits Zhang Longxi in reference to the longstanding misconceptions of Chinese culture in the West.² Tracking the circulation of Chinese culture in Latin America further complicates such prevalent tropes and demands a reconsideration of context. Although chinoiserie goods had been circulating in global markets since the seventeenth century, these products were imported to Latin America at the turn of the century thanks to the transplanted Chinese indentured laborers who facilitated the export of commodities, thus making modernist exoticism in Latin America inseparable from demographics. Also, avant-garde artists from Latin America did indeed embrace the fertile misconceptions about the ideograph promoted by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century and revived by Anglo-American modernism. But in doing this they defined a new approach to these misconceptions, through the prism of the concerns of folklore, archaeology, and antiquity regarding Mesoamerican hieroglyphs and Andean nonverbal languages. The Maoist fever of the New Left in Latin America was evidently influenced by French theory and its romanticization of the Cultural Revolution. Yet, Maoist aesthetics in Latin America were debated in the context of societies in the grip of state terrorism and the guerrilla warfare spreading throughout the Third World. A reading effect of the itineraries and afterlives of Chinese culture, these disorienting writings of China open a far-reaching interrogation of both the scholarly archive on Orientalism and the effects of cultural epistemologies in general.

Disoriented Disciplines: China, Latin America, and the Shape of World Literature is a study of the archival formations, theoretical debates, and geopolitical frameworks that facilitate the flow and exchange of books, bodies, and things between China and Latin America from the nineteenth century to the present. In the following pages I make two distinct but connected claims. First, the writing of China in Latin America is a material

act of translation, a form of writing that involves the physical dislocation of agents and artifacts across cultural boundaries. In this light, translation is more than a textual exercise; it is also the displacement of the human, visual, and haptic qualities of a literary work. My second claim is that the writing of China in Latin America unfolds as an undisciplined critical praxis that bypasses conventional academic methods, thus producing new modes of reading and archives. World literary discourses about China in Latin America taken shape in contingent critical infrastructures given the absence of specialized programs and scholars of Chinese ethnography, philology, international relations, and history.

* * *

I pursue three goals in this book. The first is to provide an in-depth study of the circulation of Chinese culture in Latin America. The book compiles a unique archive on China in Spanish and Portuguese that revisits the work of canonical artists and intellectuals who had a long-standing fascination with Asia such as José Juan Tablada, Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, Haroldo de Campos, and Severo Sarduy; yet this book also unveils an overlooked corpus of primary sources that is scattered across “coolie” trade documents, Maoist print culture, and the plastic arts. Lesser-known authors such as the Argentine Fina Warschaver and Bernardo Kordon prove to have been invaluable brokers of Chinese humanist culture through Communist networks during the Cold War. What’s more, recent works by renowned filmmakers like João Moreira Salles and Sergio Cabrera reveal intimate family memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution that further complicate current debates on postmemory and art. The fiction of the Sino-Peruvian Siu Kam Wen and the recent translation of testimonies of Chinese indentured laborers in Cuba adds not only to a growing corpus of Asian American voices in Latin America but also to silenced accounts of slavery. This is a humanist, yet fragmentary and scattered body of works that sheds light on Chinese culture in translation and poses the very question of how to read cultures from afar.

The second goal is historical in nature. I revisit Latin American literary modernity in light of its critical infrastructures, what I refer to as the conjunction of trends in literary criticism and the networks of travel that facilitate the translation of Chinese cultural artifacts at different moments in time. Overall, the book provides a sweeping revision of Latin America’s literary history considering the rhetorical mediations that make sense of a culture that is virtually unreadable and undeci-

pherable with the conventional tools of literary criticism. Therefore, it proposes an alternative genealogy of comparative literature as practiced in a cultural field where the university is not the axis of cultural criticism. Throughout the book I provide ample evidence of how the most substantial theoretical and critical debates on foreign cultures in Latin America happen eminently outside of academia.

The final goal is methodological and refers to my own intervention as a scholar of Latin America in the global conversation on cultural exchanges happening for the most part in US academia. Because of my emphasis on the circulation of cultural artifacts; my understanding of literature as a material, sensorial, and affective phenomenon; and my attention to the historical processes that enable such acts of translation, I participate in the ongoing studies on world literature in Latin America in light of material evidence of the region’s global engagements, such as “concrete and finite set of global trajectories traveled by writers and books,” “material institutions of world literature,” and “institutional interventions within the war and the market.”³

My book also contributes to the growing scholarship on East-West comparison through the lens of sinography, “the particular forms of writing that produce and convey (within China as well as without it) the meanings of China; they try to understand those writings analytically, symptomatically, and historically, in relation to multiple determinants.”⁴ Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven Yao postulate in a foundational volume titled *Sinographies: Writing China* (2007) that rather than seeking to advance philological or historical “truth” about China, sinography is concerned with the boundless aesthetic potential of the cultural constructions of China as an object of knowledge: “sinography would be to sinology (a debated discipline in its own right) as historiography is to history, a reflection on the conditions, assumptions, and logic of a set of disciplinary and cultural practices.”⁵ In dialogue with the rise of China globally and the opening of the humanities beyond the university, *Disoriented Disciplines* scrutinizes the writings of China in Latin America to pose a crucial question for the present: What does it mean to be a specialist in a foreign culture?

WORLD LITERATURE AND LATIN AMERICA

The complex nature of specialized knowledge of foreign cultures is the perennial question of comparative literature. In *Comparing the Litera-*

tures: *Literary Studies in a Global Age* (2020), David Damrosch looks back on the life and work of comparatists who have struggled to define and redefine the terms of literary analysis over the past two centuries, and in doing so, he reflects on his own role in the heated debates on world literature from the last two decades. From the start, Damrosch phrases this initial question as “how can we *best* address the many disparate literatures now at play in literary studies, and what do we *really* mean by comparing them” (my emphasis).⁶ The first clause of the sentence signals the geographical widening of *Weltliteratur*, which, unlike in its Eurocentric origins, now engages with multiple and disparate literary traditions from around the world. The second part of the phrase, and its adverbial emphasis “what do we *really* mean” (and “how can we *best* address”), points to a misreading: throughout the chapters of this panoramic book, Damrosch corrects, revises, and amends many of the premises and misunderstandings of his own watershed contribution *What Is World Literature?* (2003), which garnered a plethora of devoted followers across the globe, as well as harsh critics within the fields.⁷

By broadly defining world literature as a mode of circulation, Damrosch turned the taboo of philology into the totem of comparativism: contrary to the rigorous linguistic training of the past, it now seemed possible to engage with literary works as ancient as the Epic of Gilgamesh without experiencing Sumerian, to delight in Dante in English, or even to attempt to venture into Chinese literature in Spanish or Portuguese. Scholars and students of comparative literature were suddenly encouraged to make comparisons between arcane traditions and remote epochs thanks the alchemy of translation. New syllabi teemed, anthologies of world literature were published by various presses, and specialized publications, symposia, and even an Institute for World Literature consolidated the structure of what is now, according to Damrosch, “a very crowded field.”⁸ In terms of Emily Apter’s distinction between “world literature” as the descriptive catch-all term referring to the sum of all forms of literary expression in all the world’s languages, and “World Literature” as “the disciplinary construct that has secured its foothold in both the university institution and mainstream publishing,” Damrosch’s scheme has become World Literature with capital letters.⁹

As a scholar of Latin America interested in China, I found the critiques of World Literature astoundingly illuminating as well as perplexing. Latin American cultures could now be read in connection to unexplored traditions and across multiple time periods, thus revisiting

fossilized notions such as indigeneity, exoticism, or modernism, as well as overcoming the dominant postcolonial lens that insisted on reading Orientalism as a problem concerning subaltern identities of the Global South. Yet, as somebody also interested in the material history of literary forms, the attacks on World Literature as “undisciplined” and “overtly reliant on translation” did not quite resonate with my object of study, since in Latin America comparative criticism is essentially about indiscipline and translatability. *Disoriented Disciplines* sits on the cracks in World Literature. By studying the writings of China in Latin America, in this book I follow World Literature’s boldest wager that everything is comparable, even antipodal and remote traditions that have barely been in touch or do not have an extant archive in which to trace their overlooked encounter. Yet, I also embrace the pitfalls of World Literature, by acknowledging its lack of discipline and its assumption of translatability as a point of departure. In view of the lack of an institutional framework and the opacity of the Chinese language in Latin America, this book reconstructs the critical infrastructures that facilitate the flow of literary artifacts across borders and produce new modes of reading and archives. Furthermore, World Literature’s capacious theory of translation as “the introduction of a text into a literary system beyond that of its original culture” is precisely what enables the term’s conceptual plasticity in the comparison of seemingly untranslatable traditions.¹⁰ *Disoriented Disciplines* understands translation in its most essential sense of displacement; after all, etymologically speaking, the Latin *translatio* is an inflection of *transferre* “to bring over, carry over.” I argue in this book that the writings of China in Latin America are a product of linguistic and nonlinguistic forms of translation, such as human migration, intellectual adaptation, media adjustment, and transfer of affect.

If the debates on world literature strive to reconcile the long-standing disciplinary models for the study of foreign cultures within the increasingly diverse US university, this book moves this discussion forward by asking how distance is a factor in the foundations of this expansive move. How can we rethink translation in a cultural context like Latin America where comparative criticism is not entirely defined by the learned philological tradition of comparative literature, the strategic social-science approach of area studies, or the identitarian paradigm of ethnic studies? To what extent does the global circulation of new archives pave the way for a reformulation of the concepts and methods that define Euro-American modernism but are typically forced into other latitudes as derivative paradigms? Theories of world literature need to be

translated, because, after all, comparative literature—the cosmopolitan and ever-changing enfant terrible of the literary disciplines—is just one of the many iterations of émigré philology.

INDISCIPLINE

The exile of European Romance philologists to the Americas during the interwar period was a pivotal event in the consolidation of the programs of study of comparative literature.¹¹ In Latin America, even before the intellectual migrations produced by the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), there had already been significant scholarly exchanges between Spain and its former colonies in the Americas. By focusing on the trajectory of the literary scholar Amado Alonso (1896–1952), Miranda Lida traces the global history of the Instituto de Filología (1927–46; Institute of Philology) in Buenos Aires, and examines its decisive role in the study of languages and in the publishing industry, as well as in the configuration of a Hispanist diaspora throughout the Americas.¹² The Instituto in Argentina was part of a larger hemispheric effort centered in Madrid that had begun with the establishment of a Spanish program at Columbia University in New York and a Spanish department at Universidad de Puerto Rico in Río Piedras in the 1920s. The Colegio de México, chaired by Alfonso Reyes (1889–1959) in the capital of that country, also started out as an institute of higher education designed to host the exiled Spanish intellectuals in the 1940s, and soon became the headquarters for Spanish philology, as well as a mandatory stopover for those scholars who, like the Argentine Lida siblings, Raimundo (1908–79) and María Rosa (1910–62), eventually settled in the United States to work as specialists of Hispanism and of the emerging field of Latin Americanism. As Fernando Degiovanni demonstrates in *Vernacular Latin Americanisms: War, the Market, and the Making of a Discipline* (2018), the wartime trajectories of these peripatetic scholars provide the key to understanding the disciplinary origins of Latin Americanism not as a spiritual discourse of continental solidarity but as “a group of intellectual and institutional interventions that reject both state nationalism and global internationalism to think regional community ties.”¹³

But what about the contribution of these exiled scholars to the study of foreign literatures in Latin America? Latin American (public) universities saw their linguistic expertise as a crucial tool in their own pedagogical efforts to standardize a vernacular Spanish—somewhat mestizo

and in constant flux due to immigration—and to conduct research on regional dialects, Indigenous languages, and other variants of speech across their national territories (an effort of *translatio imperii* famously lampooned in Jorge Luis Borges’s polemic with Américo Castro [1885–1972] as “We do not suffer from dialects, although we do indeed suffer from dialectological institutes”; see chap. 2). But these figures had a more decisive impact in a flexible institutional configuration located beyond academia. Philologists like Amado Alonso or the Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña (1884–1946) joined the staff of the publishing house Losada in Buenos Aires to design grammar textbooks and, from that editorial position, became active curators of series offering translations of works in linguistics, philosophy of language, and literary criticism at large.¹⁴ Through these series in Losada and other publishing houses established in Argentina and Mexico after the Spanish Civil War, the Latin American general public had early access to the scholarship of German thinkers like Karl Vossler, Helmut Hatzfeld, and even Leo Spitzer (1887–1960), with whom Hispanists had corresponded during their formative years in Europe. Also, through these erudite collections catapulted by a booming publishing industry, Greco-Roman classics were introduced to the mass market in refined versions by these rare polyglots.¹⁵ The divulgation of their research also extended beyond the walls of academia, since they were active contributors to literary magazines, private institutes of higher education (e.g., Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores in Argentina, Ateneo de la Juventud in Mexico, or Escuela Libre in Havana), and some, like Alfonso Reyes, even held diplomatic posts. Because of their common language, connected histories, and cultural prestige, Hispanists in Latin America had a far more vibrant public life than their counterparts in the United States, largely cloistered at research universities and Ivy Leagues.¹⁶

This initial dispersion of literary criticism across the publishing industry, literary market, and cultural journalism soon became a trend for comparative criticism in Latin America. This was particularly so in the turbulent second half of the twentieth century, when the intermittent military governments across the region forced the closure of universities and pushed intellectual reflection to informal underground seminars as well as into exile abroad (note the contrast with the United States: while since the 1960s the university has been an enduring stronghold of liberal and democratic values—and thus an enduring target of right-wing attacks—in Latin America the public university was systematically intervened during right-wing governments, forcing the displacement of

liberal and democratic debate to other venues). In an article that seeks to rethink the cartography of comparative literature, “Asymmetry: Specters of Comparativism in the Circulation of Theory” (2017), Nora Catelli reads these informal, individual, and material networks of magazines and study groups scattered throughout Latin America and Spain during the 1960s and 1970s not as supplements to (nonexistent) disciplinary programs, but rather as new centers of production of critical thought and theory: “travels, translations, exogenous readings deriving from unexpected terrains, such as those of anthropology, psychoanalysis, or linguistics.”¹⁷ By tracking early translations into Spanish of French structuralist and poststructuralist theory, Catelli reveals how Latin America became a “spectral” center of translation during that time, thus elevating theory as a fundamental sphere of comparative literature, in contrast with the field’s tendency to emphasize original primary texts. The key to Catelli’s argument lies in the central role of translation in Latin America at large. By signaling translation as a universal practice that is significantly more common among peripheral cultures—perhaps due to necessity, an inferiority complex, an encyclopedist drive, or an urge to translate from central languages as a necessary step to participate in modernity—Catelli revisits the US genealogy of World Literature and advocates for the “implicit comparativism” happening in other latitudes.¹⁸ I unpack this hypothesis by showing how the high points of translation of China in Latin America occur almost entirely outside academia, namely through the book industry, diplomacy, and the arts. This brings me to my first understanding of indiscipline as a form of criticism that unfolds on the margins of institutional fields of knowledge, in a porous space where literary studies meets translation and creative practice, and addresses a larger, educated—yet not exclusively professional—readership. When Enrique Gómez Carrillo depicts the Chinese merchant class from Singapore for the broadsheet *La Nación*; when Jorge Luis Borges reviews the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry for a women’s magazine; or when Bernardo Kordon prefaces his own self-published and self-translated versions of Tang dynasty tales, they are practicing comparative criticism in its own right and in its own place. In assuming that comparative criticism is an extramural and deterritorialized practice in Latin America, this book reads genres such as travel narratives, book reviews, periodicals, publishing series, short stories, documentaries, or memoirs not as mere primary sources from Latin America that illustrate theories of world literature, but as spaces of critical intervention of World Literature in Spanish and Portuguese.

My second understanding of indiscipline refers to the lack of specialized frameworks for the study of Chinese culture in Latin America. In Europe, sinology arose as an academic discipline thanks to a vast archive of sources exchanged through travel. Starting with the Jesuit letters in the seventeenth century and later with the discursive apparatus of imperial expansion, scrolls and manuscripts dating from Chinese antiquity found their way into European libraries and universities, where erudite scholars versed in Asian scripts interpreted and explicated them using the tools of comparative philology (and where art aficionados like Ernest Fenollosa or Arthur Waley translated them poetically, igniting the distinctive fascination with China of Anglo-American modernism). In the United States, Chinese studies followed the Cold War area studies model that combined aspects of sociology, history, and cultural anthropology to focus on political and economic phenomena in traditional and contemporary Asian societies; as well as the ethnic studies model that focused on the experience of migrant communities of Asian descent in the Americas. None of these models took shape in Latin America as such. Sinology had historically been a minor field in Spain. Thanks to the enduring domains of the Spanish Crown stretching from the West Indies to the Philippines since early modernity, the “Spanish Pacific” was indeed a vibrant space of exchange of language, material culture, and representations.¹⁹ But the Spanish did not produce a substantial school of research or body of translations of Chinese humanistic culture as did their European counterparts in the nineteenth century. As Carles Pradó-Fonts argues in *Secondhand China: Spain, the East, and the Politics of Translation* (2022), most knowledge about China reached Spanish readers indirectly, as discourses on China arrived into European national contexts mostly via pivotal centers such as Britain, France, or Germany: “About 25 percent of the books related to China that were published in Spain between 1890 and 1940 (including poetry, fiction, and nonfiction) were acknowledged translations of English or French originals; the rest relied heavily on foreign sources as well, even if they were not always acknowledged.”²⁰ As a result, Chinese classical works translated into Spanish were rare, and the larger philological exile transplanted to the Americas at the beginning of the century barely covered this region in their literary maps. Martín Bergel notes that the pioneers in Asian studies in Latin America were, in fact, amateur critics of comparative religions who started publishing loosely about Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam along the lines of theosophy, spiritism, and other prominent nineteenth-century pseudosciences that thrived in these latitudes.²¹ For-

mal centers for the study of Asia did emerge in Latin America during the Cold War, although these were not a part of national geopolitical strategies connected to higher education as in the US area studies model. Instead, they were a byproduct of UNESCO East-West Major Project for Intercultural Dialogue (1957–66) that saw several universities in Argentina, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Costa Rica (as well as of other countries from the so-called Third World) create seminars, courses, and even graduate programs in Oriental Studies.²² The most noteworthy of these are the Centro de Estudios de Asia y África (1964) at Colegio de México and the Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Comparadas Oriente y Occidente (1961) at Universidad del Salvador, Argentina, both active to this day.²³ To some extent, Asian immigrants in Latin America also secured their own disciplinary fields of ethnic studies, yet this was mainly the case for the very cohesive Japanese diaspora in Brazil and to some extent in Argentina,²⁴ but not so much for the overseas Chinese, who—with the exception of the Peruvian *tusán* (“locally born Chinese”)—have historically been a very dispersed community in the region.²⁵ For the most part polyglots and globe-trotters, the protagonists of this book consume Chinese literature in translation and read it in light of their broad repertoires of world literature. They are self-taught sinophiles who absorb China through the lens of literary theory and thus engage with it beyond the zeal of exoticist infatuation. It is precisely their amateur—erudite, yet not dilettante—grasp of China that makes these professional critics singular interpreters of World Literature.

I argue in this book that, because of the undisciplined nature of comparative criticism and the absence of a specialized epistemological framework for the study of China, the intellectual discussion of China in Latin America unfolds in the critical infrastructures that combine the trends of literary criticism with the repertoire of artifacts transported by global networks of travel at any given time. Drawing from the work of anthropologist Brian Larkin, I think of infrastructures as the material forms that allow for the possibility of exchange across space: “They are the physical networks through which goods, ideas, waste, power, people, and finance are trafficked. As physical forms they shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movement, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown. They comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergirding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life.”²⁶ Larkin studies actual infrastructure projects from urbanism, like bridges and roads,

exemplifying how, although these are essentially intended to transport vehicles, in their uses they end up defining social patterns of mobility and human behavior. This architectural model of circulation is useful to consider the material undergirding that channels images, narratives, and texts as well as writers, readers, and translators around the world in the absence of conventional structures enabling literary exchange. Ignacio Sánchez Prado is adamant as to the relevance of global material networks in the study of world literature and accordingly qualifies the publishing industry and the literary market as “institutions of world literature”: “what defines world literature as such is not just the transnational circulation of works, but the material networks and practices that construct its archives and repertoire and determine the condition of possibility of world literature as a practice.”²⁷ Critical infrastructures comprise institutions like the literary market and the publishing industry, as well as other networks that do not purposely seek to foster literary exchange, but end up becoming its condition of possibility, particularly so between cultures that are distant or minimally connected. In this book such infrastructures are maritime trade routes, commercial navigation, and human trafficking, as well as global circuits of cultural diplomacy and political militancy, which overlap to different degrees throughout the chapters and contribute an unforeseen collection of sources and references on China to the broader conversation underway in literary criticism. One of the most vivid images of my study is that Chinese literature travels to Latin America not through foreign policy or curriculum design, but mainly in the luggage of key cultural agents who later circulate it to local audiences, filtered through their distinctive personal lens. The writings of China in Latin America are the product of individual aesthetic interventions that resist systematization because they engage with global circuits of exchange in back and forth movements that go in different directions: they unfold in luxurious ocean liners as well as in cramped coolie clippers; in Maoist Friendship Associations and in international liberal organizations; and in English, French, and German editions, as well as in hieroglyphic scripts, pottery inscriptions, and acrylic painting.

In this sense, rather than examining “China” as an epistemological formation or “Chinese literature” as a corpus of literary texts and conventions (in whichever denomination, be it premodern, contemporary, sinophone, etc.), I track “literary artifacts” that flow between China and Latin America. Archaeologists understand artifacts as any item that has been made or modified by past human cultures. For me, literary artifacts

are not merely texts, but different articulations of the literary work that can be apprehended in their full material, sensorial, and affective dimensions. With this approach, I stress the physical transformations of world literature as it moves through mediations that are material, such as literary agencies, publishers, and distributors; sensorial, such as paper, ink, scrolls, parchment, film, and screens; and affective, since they arouse emotions and demand a bodily disposition. This approach highlights the phenomenological dimension of literature, or as Martin Puchner reminds us in the basic premise of *The Written World* (2018), that world literature unfolds at the intersection of storytelling and the evolution of creative technologies.²⁸ In my book literature is read and written, as well as seen, touched, felt, and recalled. Paratexts and textures become privileged spaces of critical authority in view of the opacity of the text. Typography, ethnography, and choreography, in this view, are indeed forms of writing China.

TRANSLATION MATTERS

Thinking of literary artifacts instead of literatures also helps overcome the dead ends encountered by translation theory in comparing disconnected cultural fields. However optimistic polysystems approach may be as to the active role of translated literature within particular literary systems, channeling this frame for the study of peripheral and semi-peripheral languages like Chinese and Spanish would yield disheartening results given the lack of a relevant corpus: the number of titles and the quality of the extant Spanish translations of Chinese literature lag far behind the diversity and complexity of that of nearer literary systems, such as the Portuguese, or central ones such as, to mention the most obvious example, the French. In “Mediated and Marginalised: Translations of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature in Spain, 1949–2010” (2018), Maialen Marín-Lacarta exposes the paradoxical demographics of world-system models: even if Spanish and Mandarin are the two most spoken native languages in the world (combined, they boast more than one billion speakers, roughly 20 percent of the world’s population), texts translated from Spanish represent as little as 1–3 percent of the world market of translated literature, and translations from Chinese have a share of less than 1 percent in that same market.²⁹ In her comprehensive analysis of nearly one hundred translations of Chinese literary works published since 1917 in Spain’s official languages

(Spanish, Catalan, Galician, and Basque), Marín-Lacarta observes that these works are either marginalized within the cultural field (stripped of their aesthetic value and presented as mere descriptions of history in their paratexts) or mediated by the Anglophone and Francophone literary systems (translated indirectly from these central languages).³⁰ I complement—and complicate—Marín-Lacarta’s findings by revealing the unexpectedly diverse and disperse catalogue of Spanish translations of different periods and genres of Chinese literature (ancient poetry, Tang dynasty lyrical poetry, “Four Classic Chinese Novels,” modern literature, contemporary literature, “Red Classics,” model opera librettos, “scar literature,” etc.) published in Latin America throughout the twentieth century, which will hopefully inspire scholars working in Chinese studies to include Latin America in the larger linguistic cluster of the Spanish literary system. But instead of engaging in close readings of the textual strategies and linguistic turns of individual translations, I read them as Chinese literary artifacts that circulate in larger bodies of works on travel writing, philology, Communist culture, visual poetry, and memorial literature. This effort to highlight the local end of circulation echoes Andrea Bachner’s notion of “world-literary hospitality,” which summons us to think of reception “beyond (yet with) the agency of a text as a crucial (if not the most crucial) motor of world literature and to leverage it for a global redistribution of world-literary power by revaluing reception- and translation-intensive cultural contexts, literary systems, and historical moments as the core of world literature.”³¹ Marín-Lacarta’s “mediation” and “marginalization” are thus positive marks in my argument: Borges’s ignorance of the Chinese language and the difficulty of accessing actual volumes of Chinese novels spurs him to pen a manifesto of indirect translation that challenges the tenets of philology upheld by his rival Spanish Hispanists exiled in Buenos Aires in the late 1930s. To counter the Maoist revolutionary literature translated by Chinese Friendship Associations, liberal presses begin to print older French and English translations of Tang dynasty poetry, thus circulating classical Chinese literature in Spanish for the first time in Latin America. With a limited grasp of the Chinese language, but a zealous eye for design, Haroldo de Campos manipulates the ideogram and turns it into the poetic form of concretism, elevating translation from a subsidiary linguistic practice to literary act of “transcreation.” Let me emphasize this idea: by revealing a massive and massively overlooked archive of Chinese translations in Latin America, I do not intend to overemphasize the influence of China in the tropes, themes, or language of Latin Amer-

ican literary traditions, which, as I discuss in chapter 4, I find superficial. I entirely agree with Octavio Paz, the exemplary poet-translator forever dazzled by the Asian feel of Anglo-American modernism, that “the translations of Chinese and Japanese poetry into English have been so great and so diverse that they themselves form a chapter in the modern poetry of the language. . . . It’s a pity. In Spanish this lack has impoverished us.”³² My key point in this book is that such untranslatability is impoverishing in terms of textual analysis, but fruitful for a material, sensorial, and affective approach to world literature. When considering the larger historical and institutional constructs that frame the circulation of literary artifacts between distant cultures, the opacity of the script and the ignorance of the literary tradition are exceptional points of departure for a material study of translation. An example from chapter 4 captures this point vividly: in his collection of ideographic poetry *Li-Po y otros poemas* (1920; Li-Po and other poems), José Juan Tablada includes a Chinese character copied from an ornamental hanging scroll and stenciled onto the page of the book using the Mexican and Chinese folkloric techniques of punched paper (*papel picado* and *jianzhi*, respectively). Tablada, unable to read the Chinese character, uses an ideographic method not “influenced” by Chinese poetics or Anglo-American modernism, but rather, crafted with a Chinese decorative item bearing a text of good auspices, and using the artisanal technique of cutting out words from paper with a blade, both of which made it to Tablada’s studio in Mexico through transpacific trade routes. Tablada’s avant-garde primitivism consists in deconstructing the materiality of Western writing by illuminating the prehistory of paper: by using paper to carve Chinese signs manually, Tablada rewinds the history of literary modernity and defers its course toward the Pacific, where paper no longer signifies the medium of (Latin) text but the instrument of (Asian) words and (mestizo) motifs.

DISORIENTATIONS

“Asia and Latin America” is a comingling of disciplines, corpora, and histories that in the last decade or so that has yielded an enormous amount of scholarship that reconsiders conventional cartographies of comparison between these increasingly entangled cultural traditions. Within Latin American Studies, Araceli Tinajero’s pioneering *Orientalismo en el modernismo hispanoamericano* (2004) set the tone for

the analysis of cultural exchanges between Latin America and Asia within an unequal planetary order through the book’s close reading of representations of Asian subjects and objects.³³ Influenced by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Tinajero’s book provides a thorough review of *modernismo* in light of a postcolonial framework that locates Asia, Africa, and Latin America in a continuum of marginal resistance to cultural formations coming from the North. Later developments of postcolonial theory across various area studies gave rise to concepts such as the “Sinophone” or the “Hispanophone,” which broke with the metropolis-colony bipolarity of European Orientalism by identifying disparate centers and peripheries in the Chinese-speaking communities scattered throughout the globe.³⁴ In a comprehensive study spanning many monographs and edited volumes, Ignacio López Calvo has revised the wholly overlooked contribution of Chinese and Japanese diasporas to the cultural production of Cuba, Peru, Mexico, and Brazil. Race has and continues to be a critical lens to organize alternative cartographies for Asia and Latin America. Following the decades-long work of Evelyn Hu-Dehart on Chinese indentured workers in Mexico and Cuba, the work of ethnic studies scholars like Kathleen López, Lisa Yun, or Jason Chang, to name a few, reconstruct the memories of the Chinese communities in Latin America through novel primary sources in Chinese, providing oral histories that operate as a counterpart to *testimonio* and, as I will discuss fully in chapter 1, to the *crónica modernista*.³⁵

The drive to decenter is at the core of the transpacific studies, an interdisciplinary effort coming from US American universities to counter the hegemonic narrative of the Pacific Rim’s central place in the global economy and instead frame it as a contact zone “with a history defined not only by conquest, colonialism, and conflict, but also by alternate narratives of translocalism, oppositional localism and oppositional regionalism between subjugated, minoritized, and marginalized peoples.”³⁶ The notion of the transpacific has nevertheless met with criticism. Junyoung Verónica Kim denounces how the epistemic violence of both area and ethnic studies is at work in the transpacific framework: “Despite its careful attention to difference and multiplicity in relation to the experiences of peoples of color in the United States, ethnic studies largely examines migration as a movement from one non-Western area to the West, in most cases privileging the United States as the destination for immigration.”³⁷ Kim postulates “Asia–Latin America” as a method for investigating the experiences of those living at or through this underdetermined transpacific site, which is fraught with openings,

gaps, cacophonies, and jagged encounters that cannot easily dislocate the West. The task of the “Asia–Latin America” scholar, she concludes, is to articulate a precarious position that calls attention to the workings of knowledge that naturalizes itself and forgets the material conditions of its own making.

To stress such material conditions of knowledge production, I follow Diana Sorensen’s suggestion to envision a new geographical consciousness that no longer assumes fixed epistemic locations (North–South, Orient–Occident, center–metropolis, Global South, Third World, etc.) but rather examines “alternative vectors of movement that imply transit, transmission, and exchange, often detecting conversations that have gone unnoticed. It requires attentiveness to the singularity and uniqueness of each encounter and then, in a concomitant move, an attempt to draw appropriate generalizations.”³⁸ I thus view geographical constructs such as “Latin America,” “China,” or “the West” as profoundly unstable positions that require serious nuance of the critical lineages and the individual actors that chart them. With my material, sensorial, and affective approach to world literature, I join Laura Torres-Rodríguez’s effort to rethink Latin American and Asian exchanges in terms of the experiential and embodied “orientations” of the region. Drawing from the work of Sara Ahmed, Torres-Rodríguez in *Orientaciones transpácificas: La modernidad mexicana y el espectro de Asia* (2019) identifies alternative directionalities of bodies and objects from the Mexican intellectual and artistic tradition beyond those of putative discursive geographies like the Orient, which lies to the east only when observed from Europe.³⁹ Whereas Torres-Rodríguez focuses on the specific transpacific orientations of Mexican culture inherited from colonial and nineteenth-century coordinates, I stress the decentering emphasis of the prefix “dis” by identifying vectors of mobility between geographies such as traffic, edge, twist, surface, and motion, all of which challenge Latin America’s sense of direction toward China.

Each of these forms of disorientation organizes the five chapters of this book, which discuss the agents, structures, and modes of writing China in Latin America. Moving chronologically from the nineteenth century to the present, the odd chapters base their arguments on Chinese global moments (the coolie trade [1847–74], Maoist diplomacy [1949–76], and the current Beijing Consensus, while the two even chapters contest specific tenets of philology and translation. Each chapter begins by identifying a Chinese literary artifact, the interpretation of which demands an account of the critical infrastructures that enable its translation.

Chapter 1 examines *modernismo*'s taste for chinoiserie as a political critique of Chinese labor. José Martí, Enrique Gómez Carrillo, and José Juan Tablada's fascination with travel infrastructure illuminates both the material and human traffic networks connecting China and the Americas. I reread their *crónicas* about Oriental tourism and steamship navigation in relation to what I name the “coolie passage archive,” to refer to the horrific accounts of mutinies of Chinese migrants onboard ships sailing through the Pacific, which were ubiquitous in the English-language press and adventure fiction at the turn of the century.

Chapter 2 argues that Jorge Luis Borges's writings of China put on the edge the humanistic discipline that conceives China through the explication and interpretation of its classical texts. In the noticeably numerous reviews of English and German translations of Chinese works published in literary magazines during his most prolific years, Borges anticipates his theories of (mis)translation, the fantastic, and literary tradition. In this move, he enacts the creole form of criticism that he advocates for Latin America in lieu of Romance philology, which confronts him heatedly with the exiled Spanish intelligentsia seeking to reproduce Castilian Hispanism in the Americas.

If the first two chapters acknowledge the role of European translations in satisfying a readership with a taste for foreign cultures, chapter 3 explores the fascinating trajectories of leftist intellectuals who gravitated between the networks of Maoist diplomacy and the booming Spanish book industry in Latin America. Basing itself on extraordinary archival evidence of publishing series, Communist periodicals, and front organizations, the chapter demonstrates that these agents of the cultural Cold War in Latin America used cultural diplomacy to nurture their singular aesthetic projects rather than to simply rubber stamp Maoism. Supported by travel and advocacy, but also informed by French theory and English poetry, as well as intelligence agencies, these writers curate a unique catalog of Chinese literature in Spanish that is eventually submerged, scattered, and silenced by their own cultural fields.

The starting point of chapter 4 is the glaring contrast among Spanish-language editions of Tang dynasty poetry, a genre that has become the epitome of Chinese literature in the West. In dialogue with the China craze of Anglo-American modernism and the ideogrammatic experiments of the avant-gardes, I suggest that in Latin America it was not lyrical but visual poets and plastic artists who innovated poetically in engaging with the surface of the Chinese script. If the Chinese language has been conceived as the paradigmatic counterexample of phonetic

writing from early modernity to poststructuralism, Latin American poets were eager to dislocate the boundary between word and image, translating them beyond the linguistic: Haroldo de Campos recreates the architecture of classical quartets in concrete grids and mimics the cinematic experience of handscrolls in modernist design; José Juan Tablada crafts pictographic glyphs with silk, pottery, and other transpacific imports of the Manila Galleon; and Severo Sarduy tattoos ideograms and pierces acupuncture needles as body writing.

At a juncture when the academic study of history is in the midst of a subjective turn that incorporates emotions as modes of knowledge production, and when art criticism is illuminating the workings and transmissions of archival memory, chapter 5 asks how the personal archives of Latin American families who experienced the Cultural Revolution first-hand resurface five decades later in artistic form. Rather than focusing on the documentary value of these materials in reconstructing the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as a historical event, the chapter analyzes how these “moving” memoirs, novels, and documentaries capture the embodied memories of performing arts. The retrospective gaze of the Maoist militants’ offspring educated in China, who are now bicultural citizens living for the most part outside Latin America, trigger new questions about cultural heritage, political commitment, and, above all, the relationship between art and politics in the present.

* * *

Let me finish with an exercise on the reading effects of this introduction. In order of appearance, and turned into adjectives for the sake of euphony, the keywords that convey the writings of China in Latin America in these pages are as follows: disoriented, undisciplined, assumed, translatable, lacking, opaque, ignorant, mediated, marginalized, scattered, slippery, overlooked, unstable, mobile, trafficked, clandestine, edgy, twisted, superficial, moving, illegible, displaced. This book grows from the flaws of a paradigm of world literature and posits the fortuity of Latin America’s critical infrastructures of comparison—these ideas are tricky ones to propose in times of post-truth, fake news, and systemic racism. With this book, I do not suggest that the notion of truth or the scientific method should be questioned. Rather, I seek to stress the speculative nature of the humanities, overlooked in an academic context that steadily forces humanistic disciplines to adapt to the protocols of science. I echo Eric Hayot’s call to emphasize the humanist reason of our scholarship: a way of thinking that uses a variety of epis-

temological and evidentiary practices to study the lifeworld of beings with minds and their engagement with the social construct they inhabit or that they imagine, through models that make truth claims that are reasonable and realistic, and that far precede the epistemological disciplines institutionalized with the preeminence of scientific reason in the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ My work operates with the firm conviction that literature travels through material infrastructures and in the context of social, historical, and aesthetic frameworks that must be accounted for empirically, but the question of how books and bodies navigate those networks is always matter of chance, timing, and desire in individual artistic projects that resist systematization. I hope that this book serves as an invitation to consider that indiscipline in the writing of culture can be a profound political intervention to expose the mechanisms of representation and the geopolitics of knowledge at large. In this sense, I embrace Erin Graff-Zivin’s “anarchaeological drive” to expose the university by revealing the points of untranslatability that provide the basis for and that unsettle disciplinary thinking: “I invite the reader to imagine an undisciplined or interdisciplinary university, in which literary studies, moribund, would find, in anarchaeological readings, an afterlife through its exposure to other practices and discourses, such as philosophical discourse, and philosophy, moribund, would find an afterlife through its exposure to aesthetic discourse.”⁴¹ Literary criticism is far from agonizing, but, as can be seen in this book, it is displaced to an extramural market, to the unraveling technologies of communication, and to the culture wars happening on the streets. I am hopeful that this book about the powerful disorienting quality of Latin American comparative criticism might help envision future forms of engagement of the humanities at this critical juncture.

Trade, Tourism, and Traffic

The Labor Routes of Modernismo

Modernistas loved china: porcelain, ceramics, and lacquerware furnish the verses of Rubén Darío (1867–1916), Julián del Casal (1863–93), and José Juan Tablada (1871–1945), as well as those of poets less associated with cosmopolitan imaginaries, such as José Martí (1853–95). From the outset of the movement, Rubén Darío reveals his obsession with the glossy sheen of Asian artifacts. In the short story “La muerte de la emperatriz de la China” (1890; “The Death of the Empress of China”), published in the inaugural collection *Azul*, the protagonist Recaredo is a sculptor who has a particular taste for “japonerías y chinerías”:

había leído buenos exotistas, adoraba a Loti y a Judith Gautier, y hacía sacrificios por adquirir trabajos legítimos, de Yokohama, de Nagasaki, de Kioto o de Nankín o Pekín: los cuchillos, las pipas, las máscaras feas y misteriosas como las caras de los sueños hípnicos, los mandarinitos enanos con panzas de curbitáceos y ojos circunflejos, los monstruos de grandes bocas de batracio, abiertas y dentadas, y diminutos soldados de Tartaria, con faces foscas.

he had read all the good exotistes, he adored Loti and Judith Gautier, and he made sacrifices in order to purchase good

things from Yokohama, Nagasaki, Kyoto, Nankin and Peking; knives, pipes, masks as hideous and mysterious as the faces in his hypnotic dreams, tiny Mandarins with cucurbitacean bellies and circumflex eyes, monsters with the open, toothless mouths of batrachians, and tiny soldiers from Tartaria, with wild countenances.¹

Recaredo's thirst is an intellectual one, fueled by the French readings of exoticist authors like Judith Gautier (1845–1917), and Pierre Loti (1850–1923). But it is also a material craving for foreign products that are crafted in actual Japanese and Chinese cities and that typify Orientalist characters, such as hypnotic masks, tiny Mandarins, and animalesque Tartar soldiers. Chinoiserie, or the European interpretation of Asian decorative arts, was a trend that emerged in the seventeenth century thanks to the modern commercial links that escalated the circulation of exotic consumer goods in the West. This trade network defined the matrix for cultural fantasies of a whimsical and inventive China that echoed passionately among a vast consumerist audience.² Although that fashion peaked in the rococo period in European courtly circles, it was quickly appropriated by artists and tastemakers all over the West and continued to inform *modernismo's* relationship to the imaginary geographical construct of the “Orient” until the late nineteenth century. As scholars have observed in reference to *modernismo's* Orientalism, the inclusion of a chinoiserie repertoire adds a cross-cultural dimension to its exploration of ornamentation and precious language; the fictional imagination of faraway cultures also signals the movement's embrace of the mythical in lieu of mimetic representation.³

Yet Darío's take on the China trade is not solely driven by escapism. Just like the statuette of the Chinese empress given to Recaredo as a wedding gift from his friend Robert, in this short story chinoiseries are not simply floating in the background to infuse the dramatic action with an Oriental feel, they are introduced as consumer goods originating from an actual commercial network. In a letter signed in Hong Kong, Robert writes to Recaredo: “Di un salto y caí en la China. He venido como agente de una casa californiana, importadora de sedas, lacas, marfiles y demás chinerías. Junto con esta carta debes recibir un regalo mío que, dada tu afición por las cosas de este país amarillo, te llegará de perlas” (“I leapt the pond and landed in China. I'm here as the agent for a California firm, an importer of silks, lacquers, ivories, and other such Chinese wonders. With this letter I am sending you a small

gift—which, given your love of things of the Yellow Kingdom, should make you jump with glee”).⁴ The emergence of the figure of the broker that supplies Chinese goods to the South American market through a Californian trading firm illuminates the larger network of exchange in which South America participated in the nineteenth century eminently as an importer of manufactured goods and exporter of raw materials. The Chinese artifacts now appear in light of what Ericka Beckman names the “modernist import catalog,” that is, a rhetoric about the consumption of imported goods that eclipsed the obsession with commodity production during the Export Age. In reference to Julián del Casal’s lists of material objects (e.g., bronzes, crystals, and tapestries), Beckman observes that none of Casal’s objects of desire could have been produced in Cuba at the end of the nineteenth century. Instead, they would have been purchased from Europe in exchange for the island’s main export crop, sugar: “while Casal was himself the son of a ruined sugar planter, sugar *never* appears in his poems; nor do the people of sugar culture—(former) slaves, plantation owners, and the like—ever appear. Instead, inspiration and desire emerge from a distinct but no less legitimately ‘Cuban’ experience of modernity: the restricted and private consumption of imported luxury goods” (emphasis in original).⁵

The erasure of the universe of the local export commodities that enable the import (and in this materialist reading, the literary representation) of luxury goods is all the more striking when considering the China trade in Latin America. It was, after all, imported Chinese labor that had facilitated the large-scale extraction of sugar, guano, and tobacco in the region after the abolition of African slavery. The paradox is that hundreds of thousands of Chinese “coolies” were trafficked across the Pacific in order to meet the global market’s booming demand for cash crops, which enabled the bourgeois consumption of things Chinese depicted in *modernista* prose and poetry. Yet the introduction of Chinese indentured workers produced far less gleaming accounts than did the *modernista* chinoiserie fantasies; in parallel to the sinophilia that developed around imported luxury goods, a loud sinophobic backlash sought to expose Chinese migrants as perilous interlopers. Whereas in Europe the debates on the China trade referred to an issue unfolding in colonial areas faraway from metropolitan centers, in the Americas these conflicting discourses of exoticism and immigration were voiced on the exact same shores that received cargos of both Chinese goods and peoples.

This chapter reexamines characterizations of *modernismo*’s Asian imaginaries as a mere aesthetics of evasion, reading them instead as a

political discussion of Chinese labor. While I acknowledge the prominence of the cultural politics of Orientalism in the movement's transcultural imaginaries of chinoiserie, I argue that the portrayal of the China trade offers more than a reflection on the exchange of exotic luxury artifacts: it opens a discussion on the global division of labor, the modes of displacement of peoples across latitudes, and the visual representation of foreign bodies. These novel aspects of the China trade shed light on the material networks connecting fin de siècle Latin America to the rest of the world, particularly Asia.

The first part of the chapter is an attempt to read the *crónica modernista*'s lighthearted consumption against the grain of discourses of labor. Although José Martí, José Juan Tablada, and Enrique Gómez Carrillo do not intervene directly in national debates on the "Yellow Question" in their respective countries, they are eloquent about it overseas. In their travels across the United States, Japan, and East Asia, they reconstruct earlier transpacific migrations enabled by the trade routes of the Spanish empire and advocate for legislation affecting the industrious immigrant group that both thrives in and seems to threaten Western ports around the world. These writers track the circulation of actual historical subjects within an international labor market that was critical to Latin American state-building projects and thus do more than provide a mere sociological critique, since a complex theory of translation takes shape in the traffic of tropes and themes of their peripatetic prose. By broadening the scope of translation from linguistic transfer to physical displacement, in this chapter I understand translation as the traffic of peoples and things, embodied in the overlapping practices of trade and tourism, both of which were booming at the turn of the century with the explosion of labor migrations, consumer culture, and the bourgeois taste for the exotic.

In addition to its sharp commentary on imported Chinese labor, I hold that the *crónica modernista* is strongly concerned with the infrastructure for the physical displacement of those bodies, provided by the technological advances of navigation. The second part of the chapter takes as a point of departure Enrique Gómez Carrillo's *crónica* "Paisajes y emociones" (1906; Landscapes and emotions), which portrays a Chinese passenger who is a scholar returning from a research trip in Mexico and Italy. I argue that this singular trope of the seaborne Chinese helps unfold the overlooked "coolie passage archive," the corpus of sources on the less alluring accounts of mutinies onboard coolie ships sailing from China to Cuba and Peru, which were frequent in the

English-language press and travel literature, although less common in Spanish and Portuguese. An analysis of the maritime infrastructures of the China trade in Latin America helps unveil both the global itineraries of modernism and *modernismo*'s take on immigration.

THE COOLIE TRADE

Along with manufactured Chinese-style products, many Chinese people also disembarked in Latin American ports during the nineteenth century. Between 1847 and 1874, an estimated quarter million Chinese men were transported to the Caribbean and to tropical South America on vessels from twenty Western nations.⁶ Criollo landowners started to search for a low-paid labor force in other regions of the globe, due to the reduction in the enslavement of Africans, as well as their dismissal of native populations for these tasks and their acknowledgement of the futility of their efforts to attract European colonists for plantation. Following what was becoming an established human-trafficking network in the British colonies, Spanish Americans also began recruiting Asian indentured laborers for their plantation economies. Known by the derogative term “coolie,” which was not a legal term but rather an ideologically charged descriptor of cheap and easily exploitable labor almost inextricably linked to Asians, this large-scale human trade scheme facilitated a contract system that would eventually pave the way for free wage labor but for many decades worked as a legal guise for slavery.

China offered a robust labor reserve in the second part of the nineteenth century. Famine, unrest, and a demographic crisis contributed to an exodus of poor peasants overseas. A politically imploding empire, weakened by defeat at the hands of the Western nations in the Opium Wars (1839–60), China was forced to open its coastal ports to foreign trade, among which human trafficking became one of the most profitable businesses. An estimated one million Cantonese left South China between 1840 and 1875, the majority coming from the Pearl River Delta. For the most part, they departed as free contract workers to toil in the mines of California, Canada, or Australia, and to the French, Dutch, and English plantations of Southeast Asia. Some Cantonese were recruited to Suriname and other Dutch possessions and to the English and French islands in the Caribbean.⁷ This migratory wave represents the peak of the global Chinese diaspora. The main destinations for coolies in Spanish America were Cuba, Peru, and Mexico, where the de-

mand for manpower increased owing to commodity bonanzas. Because of the British embargo on the slave trade and the international pressures to abolish slavery, Spanish Caribbean planters experienced a critical shortage of labor as the demand for sugar was rising unabated.⁸ Slavery was still legal in the Spanish colony of Cuba when thousands of *colonos asiáticos* (Asian settlers) joined the labor force, and even though the Chinese had signed contracts before setting sail, the treatment they received differed little from that of their African counterparts. Although Peru had put an end to both the trade and practice of slavery in 1854, the labor regime for guano extraction underway there until 1870 was equally oppressive. The migrants shipped across the Pacific collected strict daily quotas of this bird excrement that was used as fertilizer, working in conditions that were particularly inhuman in the Chincha islands, a small archipelago off the southwest coast of the country where this product abounded. Well into the twentieth century, in Mexico every month hundreds of poor Chinese coming from Asia and North America became contract laborers in plantations, railroads, and mining operations encouraged by the national colonization policies implemented by President Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915).⁹ The lucrative so-called *trata amarilla* (yellow trade) ended in the mid-1870s when opprobrium escalated globally. The humanitarian cries of abolitionists, coupled with the economic interests of colonial powers, and the pressures of the Anglo-American press, prompted a series of diplomatic negotiations between the Qing empire and the Spanish Crown over the situation of the coolies in colonial Cuba. A mediation carried out by England, Russia, France, Germany, and the US arbitered in favor of China and appointed a delegation in 1874 to investigate the accusations of mistreatment. Its final report described the appalling working conditions of the Chinese laborers in the Spanish possessions. As the *Cuba Commission Report* (1876) was being made public, resistance to the trade grew in Southern China, and the Spanish government was forced to end the traffic between China and its colonies before both governments had even signed a final written agreement banning it.¹⁰

In each context Chinese laborers were not imported as permanent settlers, but rather as temporary workers who were expected to leave after the termination of their contracts, which usually lasted eight years. For these Asian men in their twenties and thirties who were unprotected by their homeland—which prohibited legal emigration—there was no path to citizenship or naturalization in the young republics. Even if, from the perspective of the positivist scientific parameters of the time,

they ranked higher than Africans, the national identity projects, aspiring to whiten the population, barely saved a space for them in their imagined communities. Fears of “mongolization” of the population and stereotypes of the Chinese as degenerate opium addicts materialized in loud expressions of sinophobia, known globally as the “Yellow Peril.” Needless to say, in literature the Chinese were rarely characters, let alone protagonists, of foundational fictions. This erasure of the Chinese from the grand narratives of national identity also has a historiographical counterpart. As Jason Chang observes, “for the most part, Asians have been relegated to the footnotes of discussions of mestizaje in Latin American Studies, if mentioned at all.”¹¹ After 1874 tens of thousands of Chinese who survived indenture remained in the region and began enjoying physical, occupational, and even social mobility. They joined free agricultural laborers, peddled goods, worked as artisans in urban centers, and even became merchants. Since this was an eminently male migration, for the most part they married out of their communities and gradually blended into the local populations. Like many of their Chinese counterparts dispersed around the world, freed coolies represent the late nineteenth-century’s bumpy transition from slavery to wage labor, as well as the ambivalent space of the “yellow” race in Latin America’s civilizing mission.

ILLEGAL ALIENS

Scholars of sinophone cultures in Latin America make a valid point when they express puzzlement at the Cuban patriot and national poet José Martí’s silence to the figure of the Chinese Cuban. That the intellectual architect of Pan-American identity, carefully mindful of the extant and vanished heritages of the mestizo inhabitants of “Nuestra América” (“Our America”), barely mentions this minority that was particularly noticeable in his native Cuba is a matter of speculation. Ignacio López Calvo argues that references in passing to a “yellow doctor” in the poems of *Versos sencillos* (1891; *Simple Verses*), to a Chinese prisoner in the pamphlet “El presidio político en Cuba” (1871; Political prison in Cuba), or to a generic Chinaman in the *crónica* “Los indios en los Estados Unidos” (1885; The Indians in the United States) do not amount to a substantial engagement with the Sino-Cuban community, but instead evidence Martí’s deliberate effort to exclude them from the official discourse and historical records.¹² Kathleen López nuances what she

calls the “full-blown Orientalist erasure” hypothesis, but still acknowledges Martí’s uncanny omission in the context of his anti-imperialist discourse: “José Martí imagined the souls of whites and black who died together on the battlefield rising to forge a transracial Cuban union. His writings on race in Cuba focus on blacks and mulattos, with scant mention to the Chinese coolie past.”¹³

That Martí lived most of his adult life in exile partly explains that he only begins to pay attention to Chinese people once he is outside the island. At the age of eighteen he moved to Spain and later resided in Mexico, Guatemala, and Venezuela, before settling in 1882 in the United States, where he stayed until his ill-fated return to the Caribbean in the mid-1890s. In fact, Martí memorable vignettes of New York’s Chinatown turned some of his Chinese-themed *crónicas*, such as “Un funeral chino” (1888; “A Chinese Funeral”), into stand-alone literary pieces in his prolific journalistic career. In “Un funeral chino,” as well as in the fragments on “Teatro chino” (1899; Chinese theater), and “Una boda china” (1888; A Chinese wedding), Martí gracefully strolls the streets, observes the rituals, and tries to interpret the enigmatic gestures of Manhattan’s Chinese community for his avid audience of the Argentine newspaper *La Nación*, reading him from the opposite edge of the continent.¹⁴

The characterization of the Chinese as addicted to narcotics is a recurrent trope in Martí and could well be understood as a byproduct of the anti-Asian rhetoric of the Yellow Peril, pervasive at that time and informed by the Western victory in the Opium Wars. In “El puente de Brooklyn” (1883; “The Brooklyn Bridge”), Martí writes: “El chino es el hijo infeliz del mundo antiguo: así estruja a los hombres el despotismo: como gusanos en Cuba, se revuelcan sus siervos entre los vicios. Estatuas talladas en fango parecen los hijos de sociedades despóticas. No son sus vidas pebeteros de incienso: sino infecto humo de opio” (“The Chinaman is the unfortunate son of the ancient world: thus does despotism wring men dry. Like worms in a trough its slaves writhe among vices. The sons of despotic societies are like statues carved out of mud. Their lives are not censers of incense, but are rank with the smoke of opium”).¹⁵ This passage indeed reinforces Martí’s Orientalist association of the Chinese with despotism, vice, and animalization. But a zoom out of this scene alleviates the stereotypical rendering of this particular community, because, after all, Martí seems to apply epithets to each of the many immigrant groups he encounters in the United States:

este puente colgante de Brooklyn, entre cuyas paredes altísimas de cuerdas de alambre . . . se apiñan hoy como entre tajos vecinos del tope a lo hondo en el corazón de una montaña, hebreos de perfil agudo y ojos ávidos, irlandeses joviales, alemanes carnosos y recios, escoceses sonrosados y fornidos, húngaros bellos, negros lujosos, rusos, de ojos que queman, noruegos de pelo rojo, japoneses elegantes, enjutos e indiferentes chinos. El chino es el hijo infeliz del mundo antiguo: así estruja a los hombres el despotismo.

Between the bridge's high walls of steel wire . . . there now crowd together, as if into a row of gashes cut deep into the heart of a mountain, avid-eyed Hebrews with sharp profiles, jovial Irishmen, fleshy, robust Germans, ruddy, muscular Scotsmen, handsome Hungarians, resplendent Negroes, Russians with burning eyes, redheaded Norwegians, elegant Japanese, and lean and listless Chinamen. The Chinaman is the unfortunate son of the ancient world: thus does despotism wring men dry.¹⁶

With the new Brooklyn Bridge as a frame of the scene and as a metaphor of transit, Martí portrays the mixed mass of foreign-born citizens crowded together in awe of the majestic infrastructure project that signals the material prosperity of their adopted nation. Visibly dissimilar from each other, these peoples are all identified by the most salient features of their race according to the pseudoscientist standards of the late nineteenth century: Northern Europeans are sturdy, hirsute, and muscular; “Negroes” are shiny—and thus sensual; and the Japanese are refined.

Rather than studying Martí's representation of the Chinese within their own distinct community, whether the Sino-Cuban or the migrant New York settlement, a comparative analysis of labor migrations to the Americas illuminates Martí's less manifest views on Chinese culture. I hold that Martí's arguments take shape in relation to the discrepant immigration legislations implemented in the Latin American countries that published or reprinted his *crónicas*, and in the elaborate rhetorical strategies by which the *modernista* writer fashions his voice in terms of—and against—the editorial demands of the media outlets that had hired him as a foreign correspondent. As Graciela Montaldo argues, *modernistas'* “modernity” lies beyond the original treatment of the sub-

ject matter of their texts and takes shape in their unique intervention in an ever-changing craft: “La literatura de la época ya era claramente la transacción entre diferentes escrituras y el pasaje entre esas diferencias constituye lo nuevo: una colocación entre la autonomía y la profesionalización, entre la estetización y la divulgación. Quien sobrevivía a las diferencias, colonizándolas y territorializándolas, era moderno” (The literature of the time was already a transaction between different forms of writing, and it is precisely in the passage between those differences where the experience of the new happens: a place located between autonomy and professionalization, between aesthetics and divulgation. Whomever was able to survive those differences, by colonizing and territorializing them, was modern).¹⁷

A letter by Martí published on March 31, 1882, in the Venezuelan newspaper *La Opinión Nacional* presents one of his most intricate discussions of Chinese immigration to the Americas. Among the many events happening in the United States during those weeks, Martí reports on the public debates over a ban on travelers from China that would go into effect in May of that year. The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) was the first law implemented in the West to prevent members of a specific ethnic or national group from immigrating to a nation-state. This project, which was intended to last for ten years but became permanent from 1902 until its repeal in 1934, sought to mitigate the free entry of Chinese sojourners that had flocked to California and the Pacific Northwest to build railroads and canals. In Martí’s words: “Ya no podrán venir, como venían, a modo de rebaño, y a millaradas, los hombrecillos de ojos almendrados, rostro huesudo y lampiño, y larga trenza. Ya no podrá el hombre de China, a no ser viajero, o mercader, o maestro, o enviado diplomático, o estudiante, o trabajador que hubiese estado en Norteamérica hasta noviembre de 1880,—los cuales han de traer muy minucioso pasaporte,—pisar, en busca de trabajo, tierra norteamericana” (It will no longer be possible for the small almond-eyed, bony, braided, and hairless men to come as they did, in herds of thousands. It will no longer be possible for the Chinaman to touch in [US] American soil to seek work, unless he is a traveler, tradesman, teacher, diplomatic envoy, student, or resident alien—carrying proper and precise documentation—having lived here until November 1880).¹⁸

Tighter legislation over immigration was not uncommon in progress-oriented Latin America. To some extent, this was the result of the contrast between the composition of the spontaneous migration underway since the midcentury and the demographics that the modernizing na-

tions sought to engineer. The laws varied widely across the continent, particularly regarding Chinese immigration. Countries that still relied on a large workforce for their plantation economy and infrastructure projects signed diplomatic treaties of peace, friendship, trade, and navigation with the Qing empire soon after the termination of the coolie trade to secure the “free and voluntary” emigration of cheap wage laborers: Peru signed one in 1875, Brazil in 1888, and Mexico in 1899. In the temperate Southern Cone, the written law did not restrict the immigration of Chinese citizens but was forcefully in favor of European immigration. To mention just an example, Argentina’s 1876 Law of Immigration and Colonization stipulated the sponsorship of transportation costs, land, and provisions for Northern European families willing to settle in the country. States closer to the ethnically mixed Caribbean, like Colombia and Venezuela, had both promotional and restrictive immigration policies. While these two countries also aspired to “whiten” their populations with European settlers, their laws specifically curtailed the entry of Asians. In Venezuela, for example, article 3 of the Immigration and Colonization Law of 1891 established that “no individual of Asian nationality, nor arriving from the English and Dutch Antilles will be accepted or hired as an immigrant.”¹⁹

Interestingly, Martí’s 1882 *crónica* on the Chinese Exclusion Act written for the Venezuelan *La Opinión Nacional* had as its audience this same liberal constituency. In her classic study *La invención de la crónica* (1992; *The American Chronicles of José Martí*), Susana Rotker observes that the Caracas-based broadsheet had a focus on education, industry, and commerce in the rational mindset of Europe and North America, because this newspaper “was still the newspaper of the illustrious, the medium for the ruling, liberal class to promote its ideas.”²⁰ Martí, who condemns the Chinese travel ban, articulates his arguments in such a way that they expose the contradictions of its “liberal” legislation. In an anaphora that emphasizes the futility of the Congressional debates—“in vain . . . in vain . . .”—Martí unpacks the arguments against the travel ban precisely based on individual rights, free market, capitalism, democracy, and freedom of speech, all of which his Venezuelan audience would most certainly have agreed with but, like the majority of the US representatives, probably ended up voting against:

En vano dijo un senador que la nación que hacía gala de llamar a todos los hombres a su seno, no podía, sin que causase asombro, cerrar sus puertas y negar sus campos a toda una

raza respetuosa, útil y pacífica. En vano dijo un economista que el Congreso de una nación, hecho a amparar los derechos de los nacionales, no podía privarles del derecho de comprar barato, y en mercado libre, el trabajo que necesitan para sus industrias. En vano imponentes grupos en la alta y baja Cámara decían que prohibir la entrada de hombre alguno, y de un pueblo entero de hombres, a esta tierra, era como rasgar con daga la Constitución generosa de este pueblo, que permite a todos los hombres el ejercicio libre y libre empleo de sí. En vano toda la prensa del Este tenía a mal que en provecho de los inmigrantes de Europa, ambiciosos y voraces, se compeliere a emplear trabajo caro a los fabricantes del Oeste, y se cerrase la entrada del país a los inmigrantes de Asia.

In vain a senator said that the nation that prided itself on taking in all men could not, without repercussions, close its doors and banish an entire respectful, useful, and peaceful race. In vain an economist said that the Congress of a nation, meant to protect the rights of its nationals, could not deprive them of the right to buy the labor required for their industries at a low cost and in the free market. In vain important groups of the Upper and Lower Chambers said that banning the entry into this territory of any man, and more so of an entire group of men, was like stabbing the generous Constitution of this people, that grants all men the right to freely practice labor. In vain all the Eastern Press has criticized that for the benefit of ambitious and voracious European immigrants, businessmen from the West should be forced to employ expensive labor, and deny entry to immigrants from Asia.²¹

The last sentence of this passage opens a *mise en abyme* of immigration, by postulating the Chinese migrant not as an antagonist of US citizens but of all the “ambitious and voracious” Europeans immigrants in the United States. The paragraphs of this *crónica* dedicated to the Chinese Exclusion Act close with a dictum that proves once again that Martí rarely provides substantial racial arguments in favor or against a specific cultural group, but reads these groups chiefly in terms of their status in the new social structure of the immigrant nation: “Y no es, no, la civilización europea amenazada la que levanta como valla a los chinos la espuma de sus playas: es la ira de una ciudad de menstrales que han

menester de altos salarios contra un pueblo de trabajadores que les vencen, porque pueden trabajar a sueldos bajos” (No, this is not triggered by a threatened European civilization using the foam of its beaches to build a wall: but rather by an enraged city of artisans fighting for higher salaries against a nation of workers that will defeat them, since they accept lower wages).²²

Herein lies the key. To the extent that the Chinese are victims, Martí postulates, they do not need to be made so at the hands of a self-proclaimed superior white race but of the Calibanesque United States; of its voracious capitalist system and the miserable social inequality that comes with it. Like in “El puente de Brooklyn,” a zoom out of the section about Chinese immigration in the *crónica* sheds light on Martí’s broader discussion of nineteenth-century labor migrations, since the text carefully navigates the geography of the rapidly developing country, depicting the struggles of workers in each region. The report on the strikes across the thriving industrial Northeast and agrarian Midwest are straightforward about the social struggle that pits Gilded Age robber barons against unfortunate immigrants like Chinese coolies and also against low-wage miners, millers, train workers, embankers, spinners, soldiers, unemployed blacksmiths, women disguised as men so that they can work, and prostitutes: “Vese aquí cómo los ricos se van agrupando y espaldando, y buscando gobierno para sí, que les ponga a cubierto de las demandas de los pobres. Y vese cómo los doloridos de otras tierras, enardecidos por la dificultad que a su progreso opone el visible concierto de los ricos, azuzan las iras y avivan la mente de los pobres desasosegados” (Just observe how the rich gather and isolate, self-ruling and shielding themselves from the demands of the poor. And see how the wretched that come from other lands, enraged by the challenges the blatantly rich impose on their prospects of progress, kindle the wrath and unsettle the minds of the troubled poor).²³ This confrontation of the American rich versus the immigrant poor, however, becomes less palpable in Martí’s description of California, a region populated by internal migrants; after all, the “californianos avarientos, que tienen celos de los chinos sobrios” (greedy Californians jealous of the sober Chinese) were for the most part Northeastern entrepreneurs and teeming masses of pioneers of both US American and foreign origin.²⁴ “Era el duelo mortal de una ciudad contra una raza. Por mantener la esclavitud de los negros hizo una guerra el Sur. Pues por lograr la expulsión de los chinos hubiera hecho una guerra el Oeste” (It was a lethal duel between a city and a race. To perpetuate Black slavery, the South waged a war. To expel

the Chinese, the West was eager to go to war too).²⁵ What the travel ban reveals is not an underlying cultural crusade opposing the East and the West, but the aporia of an economic model that both relies on and is threatened by foreign labor.

In sum, Martí condemns the Chinese Exclusion Act for its contradiction of the principles of US liberalism and yet falls prey to such inconsistent rhetoric in his own representation of foreign cultures. After all, the Cuban émigré in the United States, who according to Koichi Hagimoto finds himself in a terrain of contradiction and ambivalence, repeatedly acknowledges the conflicting points of view over an issue that he calls a “extraña lucha” (strange struggle), a “problema arduo” (arduous problem), and an “acuerdo loco” (crazy agreement).²⁶ Martí’s originality lies in his keen journalistic intuition in featuring what would become the first federal law to proscribe entry of an ethnic working group on the grounds of the threat it poses to the good order of a locality, an argument that became a model of hemispheric jurisprudence and also a precedent for the numerous attempts at regulating national entry quotas, such as the 1924 Immigration Act targeting Japanese and Southern Europeans, or the more recent 2017 executive orders against citizens of predominantly Muslim countries. Still, Martí’s actual innovation lies in articulating with astonishing clarity in 1882 something that has become a commonplace today: the political uses of xenophobic rhetoric or, to put it bluntly, what better democratic tool to criminalize a foreign group that menaces the local economy than fueling injurious racial discourse through public opinion? On June 20, 1883, in *La Nación* Martí recognizes his own use of such derogatory tropes by noting that the stereotype of the Chinese as opium addicts might well be a deliberate distortion perpetuated by their competitors on the job market: “Se corre el riesgo que irlandeses y otras castas, movidos de odio al chino sobrio que en el mercado de trabajo les saca codos y puede dejarlos sin labor, de puro abaratarla, exageren el mal que el vicio del opio hace en las clases bajas” (One runs the risk that Irishmen and other castes, mobilized by their hatred toward the sober Chinese—who is better positioned in the job market and might take their jobs—and to diminish him, they exaggerate the hazards of opium on the lower classes).²⁷ In a subsequent letter on the Chinese Exclusion Act for *La Opinión Nacional* dated on April 15, 1882, Martí envisions the proselytist efficacy of racial slurs to capture the votes of naturalized immigrants in the upcoming elections, celebrating that the incumbent president and Republican candidate Chester Allan Arthur (1829–86) did not initially support this:

“Y para terminar: el Presidente Arthur sensatísimo, niega su firma al acuerdo loco, por el que los representantes cierran esta nación, cuya gloria y poder viene de ser casa de todos los hombres, a los hombres chinos, por no perder en las elecciones próximas los votos de los celosos irlandeses, cuyo trabajo burdo y caro no les da modo de competir con el trabajo chino, barato y perfecto” (To conclude: President Arthur most sensibly refuses to sign the crazy agreement by which the representatives of this nation—that prides itself and thrives in being the home of all men—close their doors to the Chinaman so as not to lose the vote of the jealous Irishmen, whose crude and expensive labor cannot compete with the cheap and perfect Chinese labor).²⁸

JAPONIST ARTISANS

If Martí offers an ambivalent portrayal of the Chinese migrant communities in the United States, Mexican José Juan Tablada is unequivocally disparaging of the Chinese workers he encounters in Japan. Deploying the full arsenal of *modernista* style, his Japanese *crónicas*, published in the Mexican magazine *Revista Moderna* between 1900 and 1901, and later compiled in the book *En el país del sol* (1919; In the land of the sun), showcase a repertoire of blatant clichés of China. As an example, just a short passage of the piece “Bacanal china” (Chinese bacchanalia), about a festival at Yokohama’s Chinatown, provides countless explicit racialized fantasies of backward and animalesque peoples:

Salen los chinos de sus “bungalows” y de sus sótanos y van al campo, a sus famélicos ágapes, a macular con la grasa de sus viandas el florido tapiz que tiende Otoño en las praderas japonesas . . . Allá en los oscuros desvanes, en los hediondos tapancos, quedó la pipa atascada de opio y la asquerosa hembra china que cuando se levanta de su tálamo vacila, intenta clavar en la estera las púas de sus pies atrofiados, pies de cabra o de faunesa, y cae, por fin, si una mano de beluario piadoso no se tiende para detenerla y volverla otra vez a su cubil. Pero el tropel simiesco se solaza celebrando la fiesta invisible y misterioso monarca.

The Chinese vacate their “bungalows” and basements and head to the fields for their famished meals, tarnishing the

flowery tapestry of the Japanese prairie in autumn with their greasy food . . . They leave behind in the dark attics and fetid garrets their opium-clogged pipes and their disgusting females who hesitate to rise from bed and who, when they try to pierce the mat with the spikes of their atrophied feet—goat or faun’s hoofs—they inevitably fall to the ground unless a merciful tamer holds them to prevent their fall and places them back on their dens. The oblivious apelike hordes, however, relax and celebrate the invisible feast and its mysterious monarch.²⁹

Portrayed as famished, addicted, and misogynistic and set in a dark and fetid ambiance, the Chinese in the quotation display apparently idiosyncratic customs such as opium smoking, oily cuisine, or foot binding. To the Mexican poet forever captivated by Japanese culture, the world of the migrant Chinese workers in Meiji Japan (1868–1912) is a constant object of scorn.

For this second-generation *modernista*, usually considered the most Orientalist of his peers, there is no such imaginary construct as the “Orient” or the “Far East” but a clearly delimited East Asian geography made up of crumbling or expanding empires. For Tablada, China and Japan are disparate universes that only overlap in his own transpacific imperial fabulations. “Bacanal china,” was, in fact, written in the context of the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), an antiforeign uprising that exposed China’s discontent with Western intervention into its sovereignty through unequal treaties and unrestricted missionary activity, a discontent that Tablada interprets as human carnage: “Hordas más salvajes que los ‘tai-ping’ y más funestas que los ‘Babellones Negros,’ hacen el ‘scalp’ de todas las cabelleras rubias! Las patriarcales barbas de los misioneros sacrificados, los grumos de sus barbas blancas se enredan en las zarzas, confundiéndose con las greñas de algodón que reinventan en las cápsulas maduras!” (Hordes, wilder than the “tai-ping” and more lethal than the “Black Flag Army,” “scalp” all the blond manes! The patriarchal beards of sacrificed missionaries, the clumps of their white beards, tangle in brambles and mingle with the cotton strands that burst like ripe capsules!).³⁰ China’s clash with the West, conveyed here in black-and-white imagery, is evoked as a combat involving atavistic rites against benevolent clerics, not entirely alien to agriculture and trade interests (“cotton”). In the heat of conflict in August 1900, Tablada projects the events of the Chinese siege

of the International Legations in Tianjin onto what he describes as his asphyxiating Japanese residence, fatefully fortified by the Chinese quarters of the port city: “Mi casa, por un excéntrico capricho, sale del barrio europeo donde debía ser confinada, sale de su quietud nocturna y de su puritanismo burgués, y por quién sabe qué veleidades de curiosa indiscreta se empuja sobre los barrios chinos, sobre la pululante, hedionda y tumultosa ‘China Town’” (The eccentric whims of fate have dictated that my house stretches beyond the European neighborhood where it should have been confined to its nightly calm and its bourgeois puritanism, and, due to who knows what curious indiscretion, is closer to the Chinese quarters; to the swarming, stinky, and tumultuous Chinatown).³¹

Japan’s entry into the concert of nations was a much calculated process than China’s. Aware of China’s forced opening after the Opium Wars, which followed the hegemony of the British East India Company (1600–1874) and the bulldozing advance of European colonies in South Asia, the Meiji rulers resolved in 1868 to establish homologous relations with the great powers by modernizing their country. What is known historiographically as a restoration was indeed a comprehensive transformation of the economic, military, and social structures that better equipped the Asian nation for diplomacy. As it was modeled on nineteenth-century European empires, the new state also absorbed their expansionist drive: colonialism and the racist ideology that accompanied it were already too entrenched in the West to allow an upstart, nonwhite nation to enter the race for natural resources and markets as an equal. Early on, the historically isolated archipelago conducted an aggressive territorial expansion (occupying Taiwan in 1895, Korea in 1910, and Manchuria in 1931, as well as several territories along the Pacific Rim) that would abruptly end in World War II. From Tokyo, writing for *La Nación*, Enrique Gómez Carrillo captures the belligerent stamina of the victorious Japanese in his coverage of the aftermath of the Russian-Japanese War (1904–5): “Pero los japoneses, puestos a soñar ensueños de grandezas, no se detienen fácilmente. El jurista Nakamura Shingo propone que con los millones de rusos se alquile en el centro de Europa un terreno vastísimo, en el cual se establecería una verdadera ciudad japonesa, para hacer ver al mundo ‘lo que es esta raza privilegiada’ y para ‘comenzar a ejercer alguna influencia en el Occidente’” (In their dreams of glory, the Japanese will not easily stop here. The jurist Nakamura Shingo proposes that the million Russians rent a vast space in the center of Europe, and set up a real Japanese city, to

show to the world “what this privileged race is all about” and “to begin to exert some influence in the West”).³²

Japanese culture indeed exerted “some influence” in the West at the turn of the century. An art critic and collector, Tablada celebrates the generalized taste of contemporary artists for things Japanese, such as Edmund (1822–96) and Jules de Goncourt (1830–70), Toulouse Lautrec (1864–1901), William Morris (1834–96), or Edouard Manet (1832–93) in the *crónica* “El Japón en Occidente”: “la gloria de los ilustres estetas que fueron los de Goncourt, es hoy universalmente reconocida y el arte japonés que su videncia suprema les hizo presentir, se impone hoy en el arte de Occidente, trastorna los antiguos cánones, modifica totalmente el arte de la decoración, cambia los puntos de vista del paisaje, llegando a influir en la figura humana, aún en el retrato” (The glory of the illustrious aesthetes, the de Goncourts, is today universally acknowledged, and Japanese art, which their supreme eye anticipated, dominates Western art, recasting old canons, modifying the decorative arts, changing the landscape’s perspectives, and impacting the human figure, and still within the portrait).³³ As a foreign correspondent, he defines for himself the mission of disseminating the Japonist creed in Latin America himself: “en México poca idea tenemos de las innumerables y apasionadoras bellezas que ese arte encierra y conceptuamos tarea digna de quien de arte se ocupe de revelar y propagar esas bellezas lamentablemente ignoradas por una gran mayoría” (In Mexico we have a very vague notion of the countless and passionate beauties of this art; the task of the arts’ connoisseur is to reveal and propagate such unfortunately overlooked beauties).³⁴ Tablada is well known for his introduction of haiku poetry in the Hispanic American lyric tradition, and for his essays on Japanese visual arts. His own residence, built in the style of a Japanese pavilion in the municipality of Coyoacán, as well as his personal collection of Japanese prints, recently exhibited at the Palace of Fine Arts of Mexico City, speak of his critical role in the circulation of Asian literary artifacts in the Americas.³⁵

Japonisme, or the Western exoticizing and somewhat trivial interpretation of Japanese art, was also a carefully orchestrated cultural diplomacy strategy that leveraged the symbolic capital of Japanese aesthetics. In a telling anecdote, Christopher Bush observes how the Asians profited from the fin de siècle enthusiasm for how those whom they considered minor pop artists such as Katsushika Hiroshige (1797–1858) and Utagawa Hokusai (1760–1849) might fit in their larger imperial scheme: “the low esteem in which *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints were held

at the time in their native country is apparent in the perhaps apocryphal story of how they were first discovered in France: as packing material for ceramics imported from Japan.”³⁶ Along with ceramics and prints of the “floating world” of geishas, kabuki theater, and the red-light districts of Tokyo, Japanese craftsmen also flooded the streets of Paris to instruct the West in their artisanal techniques. In the 1904 *crónica* “Japoneses de París” (Parisian Japanese), Rubén Darío registers the presence of these performers, students, landscapers, editors, journalists, painters, and artists: “se les ve por todas partes, en el Barrio Latino, en los jardines, en los teatros y music halls, en el bosque” (you see them all around, in the Quartier Latin, in the gardens, in theaters and music halls, in the park).³⁷ Charmed by their refinement, Darío dedicates several lines to Hata, the talented gardener of the symbolist poet Robert de Montesquiou (1855–1921), who, it seems, was also a florist, painter of watercolors, and artist of lights. The description of his physical appearance evokes the imaginaries of Darío’s *arielismo*: “Y su silueta, regordeta . . . como la de un Calibán complicado de Ariel, de un Puck robusto, alado y gesticulador” (And his plump silhouette . . . like that of a Caliban complicated by Ariel, that of a robust, winged, and expressive Puck).³⁸ In Darío’s view, this accomplished immigrant embodies the Japanese empire in his unique combination of the traits of a pragmatic and utilitarian Caliban, a refined and spiritual Ariel, with a touch of the whimsical and ethereal Puck. For Darío and many other *modernistas*, Japan dislocates the imaginaries of imperialism from the Americas to the world at large.

Emigration was a controversial issue of Japanese imperial foreign policy, and Latin America played a key role in this debate. While the rulers unanimously supported exchanges involving their best and brightest scholars—who were often from the former samurai class—they were torn about the fate of the lower classes. On the one hand, poor and landless farmers (more numerous with the recent agricultural reforms), less-skilled laborers, and the historic so-called Burakumin outcasts, were perceived as undesirable for the nation and thus best suited for emigration. By the same token, others argued, the relocation of such commoners abroad could reinforce the Western image of Japan as an uncivilized nation, and besides it was a risky humanitarian undertaking, a lesson the Japanese had learned from the infamous Chinese coolie trade.³⁹ Because of critical pressures from overpopulation, the conservative faction reluctantly agreed to sign bilateral treaties of free immigration with Western countries through a policy of *ishokumin* (migration

and colonization) by which the Japanese state purchased foreign land for farmers to engage in agricultural and extractive production in enclosed ethnic colonies.⁴⁰ The cross-equatorial flow of *dekasegi* (migrant workers) to South America boomed after the Tokyo earthquake of 1923 aggravated the housing crisis, and the 1924 Immigration Act banned the entry of Japanese nationals to the United States. This fortuitous swerve would initiate intense human traffic during the twentieth century that enabled Brazil to become the home of the largest Nikkei community in the world, which it is today, and Peru, to house a very substantial one.

As Mexico had just signed diplomatic agreements with Japan (1897) and China (1899) when Tablada visited the country for the first time in 1900, the issue of immigration was not a priority in the political agenda of Tablada's *crónicas*. I do not think that, in *El país del sol*, Tablada advocates for any kind of Asian migration—be it skilled or unskilled, Japanese or Chinese—but rather for the importing of Asian techniques for local manufacture. I follow here Laura Torres-Rodríguez's hypothesis that Tablada's *japonisme* was chiefly a commercial venture. In *Orientaciones transpacíficas* Torres-Rodríguez argues that since the trip for *Revista Moderna* was partly sponsored by Porfirio Díaz's government, Tablada also participated in this administration's Pacific-oriented economic modernization: "La comisión requería que se inscribiera en el proyecto político y económico del régimen. El autor no sólo debía escribir textos literarios, sino también reportar sus observaciones acerca de las prestigiosas artes aplicadas japonesas" (The commission required [that this trip] fit within the regime's political and economic project. The author was not just expected to write literary texts, but also, to report his observations on Japan's prestigious applied arts).⁴¹ I will return to Torres-Rodríguez's arguments more in detail in chapter 4 in reference to Tablada's avant-garde experimentation with Chinese handcraft techniques and ideogrammatic poetry. Regarding the question of Asian labor, I provisionally accept Torres-Rodríguez's hypothesis that Tablada is more concerned with imitating Japanese modes of production than with importing Japanese products or peoples, because Asian artisan techniques would play a crucial part for both the future of Mexican modernity and for the history of Mexico's folk art. Tablada's recurrent fabulations of the Pacific trade route of the Spanish empire between 1565 and 1815, "la feérica y prodigiosa nao de la China" (the fairy and fabulous Manila Galleon), are best summarized in the introduction to Adolfo Best Maugard's *Método de dibujo: Tradición, resurgimiento*

y evolución del arte mexicano (Manual of drawing: Tradition, renaissance, and evolution of Mexican art), the massive institutional project on art education with which Tablada collaborated in 1923.⁴² Autochthonous art is defined here as a combination of pre-Columbian, colonial, and contemporary art forms, the latter being a product of Spanish and Asian influences:

Más tarde, las Naos de China nos trajeron nuevos elementos de riqueza artística: el arte chino que especialmente en sus productos de porcelana, invadió a nuestro país por la circunstancia de su comercio con Europa, pasando por México. En un principio, el indio trató de imitar también esos productos, y se hizo de porcelana en Puebla, imitación de la china, etc.; pero poco a poco, el indio se asimiló esos elementos de belleza y, lo que en un principio fuera, como en casi todos los pueblos primitivos, simplemente imitación, acabó por convertirse en características del arte mexicano, hasta el punto de ser hoy la expresión genuina de nuestro arte popular.

Later, the Manila Galleon brought us new artistic elements: Chinese art, famous for its porcelain, invaded our country by way of the commercial routes to Europe which crossed through Mexico. At first, the Indian tried to imitate those products too and came up with Puebloan style of porcelain as an imitation of the Chinese, etc. But gradually, the Indian incorporated those beautiful elements, and, what was at first simply imitation, as in all primitive societies, became a typical trait of Mexican art, to the point that nowadays it represents the genuine expression of our popular art.⁴³

This *achinado* (Chinese-like) tradition by which indigenous craftsmen “imitated” and “assimilated” Chinese and Japanese styles of furniture, china, silver, and textiles that had been imported from Manila to Acapulco, flourished without any form of apprenticeship from migrant craftsmen. For example, local artisans from Lima fashioned unique weavings featuring traditional Chinese motifs such as peony flowers, phoenixes, and the *qilin* (a mythical creature found in Chinese textiles), along with indigenous plants and fauna, blending imported silk with local cotton, wool, and camelid (llama or alpaca).⁴⁴ The very few Asian migrants that settled in New Spain and in the Viceroyalty of Peru during

the rule of the Spanish empire were either enslaved or occupied in urban trades but did not form an independent artisan class.⁴⁵

In sum, Tablada's observations on the importing of Japanese applied art techniques resignifies his relationship to Chinese labor in two crucial ways. Despite his disparaging notes about the Chinese migrant workers of Yokohama in *El país del sol*, the *modernista* in fact values Chinese skilled labor and envisions it through the remote universe of transpacific imperial networks where China had a much more advantageous geopolitical standing than in the more recent coolie trade. Furthermore, Tablada's inscription of Mexico in the contemporary Japonist and in the early modern chinoiserie global aesthetics forges a larger narrative detailing the transpacific nature of Mexican culture and an artistic legacy transmitted not through the physical displacement of its peoples or products, but through the performance and reinterpretation of its artisanal techniques. Thinking about the broader question of the writing of China in Latin America, the *modernista* artifacts of the transpacific trade do not constitute a fixed *archive* to be traced and reestablished in written sources or museum collections; rather, they introduce a *repertoire* of embodied memory, of acts usually thought as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge such as gestures, orality, and movement. I will elaborate on the idea of repertoires as embodied archives in chapter 5.

MIGHTY MERCHANTS

If Martí and Tablada cast their gazes on the Chinese unskilled migrant workers in imperialist United States and Japan, Enrique Gómez Carrillo (1873–1927) only has eyes for the prosperous Chinese merchants throughout colonial Asia. By observing the social division of labor caused by the mechanization of manufacture and the globalization of trade at the turn of the century, Gómez Carrillo examines the outcomes of centuries of Euro-Chinese exchanges in colonial ports throughout Asia. His gaze emancipates the Chinese from their stereotyping as mere manual workforce and instead foresees the leading role they would play in global capitalism.

I will not be the first to claim that the Guatemalan writer, translator, and diplomat Enrique Gómez Carrillo is perhaps the most fascinating of all the *modernistas*. A prolific author of narrative and criticism, honored by the Académie Française and a darling of the Ibero-American press, Gómez Carrillo epitomizes the bohemian fin de siècle spirit, his

life laden with turbulent affairs—including a short-lived marriage with the future wife of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944); accusations of espionage surrounding the Mata Hari scandal in 1917; and his premature death in Paris following years of excess. His tireless globe-trotting and trained taste for cultural diversity, recorded in his two dozen published travelogues, earned him the nickname “Príncipe de los cronistas” (prince of the chroniclers). Gómez Carrillo is the *modernista* who traveled the most and the farthest.⁴⁶

In *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* (2014), Mariano Siskind revisits Gómez Carrillo’s oddly numerous eastbound trips and argues that the Guatemalan’s Orientalist representations are grounded in a knowledge of the nineteenth-century French Orientalist archive far superior to that of his *modernista* peers. This Orientalist posture, Siskind notes, “is constantly interrupted—indeed, disrupted—by his ability to analyze the material underpinnings of the experience of colonialism, denaturalize his exoticizing expectations, and insert counterpoints and dissenting voices that make for a complex portrayal of the process of colonial modernization.”⁴⁷ To demonstrate this point, Siskind shows how in Gómez Carrillo’s travelogues, codified images of, say, sensual dancers are juxtaposed with militant anticolonial voices; how his sympathy for the Jews disrupts *modernista*’s conventional constructions of Otherness; and how he deliberately bypasses a crucial trope of Orientalist travel literature, that is, the shock of exoticism upon arrival at a new destination: “the absence of an exoticizing gaze in Gómez Carrillo’s first impressions of Saigon and Shanghai, in contradiction to the Orientalist vein of his traveling subjectivity, can be understood in relation to the development of a cosmopolitan point of view that is able to produce an unlikely even, smooth, and homogeneous global territory, a cosmopolitan continuity between Paris, Saigon, and Shanghai,” to which Siskind later adds Buenos Aires.⁴⁸ This new, flat mappemonde emerges not as a product of the cultural mixture of global migrations, but of the looming Parisian phantasmagorias that modeled each corner of the planet on the aesthetic capital of modernity, and whose spatial distribution traces the contours of a unified modernist world that follows the shape of *modernista* cosmopolitan desire. Siskind concludes that what makes it possible to produce universal spaces out of Yokohama, Saigon, and Shanghai is that “they cease to be Japanese, Vietnamese, or Chinese—that is, Oriental and therefore exotic—to instead become instances of the global totality of cultural modernism/capitalism.”⁴⁹ While I entirely agree with Siskind’s idea about the es-

sentially French mappings of Enrique Gómez Carrillo's cosmopolitan desires, I hold that his analysis of the material underpinnings of colonialism in Asia shifts to China. In *De Marsella a Tokio. Sensaciones de Egipto, la India, la China y el Japón* (1906; From Marseille to Tokyo: Sensations of Egypt, India, China, and Japan) Gómez Carrillo is overwhelmed by the Chinese merchant class. In the *crónicas* "Singapur: El paraíso de los chinos" (Singapore: The Chinese paradise) and "Shanghai: Los chinos que trabajan" (Shanghai: The working Chinese), the *modernista* sees beyond the cultural ubiquity of French modernity and instead postulates China as the new powerhouse of global capitalism, which marks its print through its diasporic merchant population. "Las guías nos dicen que éste es el París del Extremo Oriente. Pero, en realidad, los dos nombres chocan. ¿París? No. Ni Oriente tampoco. Es una gran metrópoli de trabajo que se describe mejor con cifras estadísticas que con frases. Es el mercado de la seda, del algodón y del hierro de la China. Sus manufacturas son infinitas y formidables" (In travel guides we read that this is the Paris of the Far East. But in fact, both names are jarring. Paris? No. Nor the Orient. This is eminently a workers' metropolis best described in statistics than in phrases. This is the Chinese market for silk, cotton, and iron. Its manufactures are infinite and formidable).⁵⁰ If this landscape that the *modernista* captures from the ship taking him to the port of Shanghai resembles any place in the world, it is not the City of Lights but the historic merchant towns of the Hanseatic League: "Sí, sin duda, este espectáculo no es nuevo. ¿Es Hamburgo o es Amberes? Una por una, las altas columnas humeantes se alzan. Son las avanzadas del industrialismo" (Indeed, this spectacle is not at all new. Is it Hamburg or Antwerp? The smoky chimneys rise high one by one. They are the vanguard of industrialism).⁵¹ The tall chimneys along the river's margin obstruct the views of the picturesque backgrounds of rice paddies and seamlessly blend into the geometrical architecture of the Bund conveying the familiar urban scenery of Northern Europe. Prussia is, after all, for Gómez Carrillo, the constant reference point of Chinese capitalist progress: materialization of Wilhelm II's (1859–1941) heavy industry ambitions ("Aquí en efecto, el fantasma que Guillermo II vio en sueños, se convierte en realidad" [The ghost that Wilhelm II saw in dreams, here becomes reality]); Chinese imitation of Krupp cannons; and rapid replacement of German imports with local production ("Los billares, los mostradores de bar, los tiros al blanco, todo lo visible decía 'Made in Germany' y presentaba los caracteres de la manufactura tedesca" [Billiards, bar counters, darts, all the visible things used to say

“Made in Germany” and displayed the character of Saxon manufacture]).⁵² To the extent that there is a Yellow Peril, Gómez Carrillo retorts rhetorically, this threat is neither racial nor military—like that posed by the triumphant Japanese empire he documents in the subsequent chapters of his book—but rather of an economic sort: “El peligro es pacífico: no amenaza los puertos de Guerra sino los puertos comerciales. Sus naves, en vez de cañones, llevan fardos de sedas, de lacas, de porcelanas, de esencias: y pronto llevarán también cargamentos de lanas y algodones, de carbón y de hierro, de drogas y cristales, de joyas y adornos, granos y bebidas, de todo lo que la tierra y la industria producen” (This is a pacific peril: it poses a threat not to military bases but to commercial ports. Instead of canons, its vessels carry silk, lacquers, porcelain, spices; and soon they will also carry wool and cotton, coal and iron, drugs and crystals, jewels and ornaments, crops and drinks; anything produced by the soil and industry).⁵³ We read that the Chinese economy is expanding at the turn of the century because of its rapid industrialization and the recasting of China’s trade network. In the quote above, Gómez Carrillo predicts that the Asians will compete as producers and exporters of not only the chinoiserie so dear to the West (silk, lacquers, porcelain, and spices) but also the commodities (wool, cotton, coal, and iron) and elaborate manufactured goods (drugs, jewels, and ornaments). China is depicted as no longer bound to foreign masters, but rather as a full-fledged owner of the fruits of its soil, labor, and capital; in other words, a free actor in the global market.

Of all places in Asia, Singapore is where Gómez Carrillo sees the expansion of Chinese capitalism: “Mejor que en Pekin, los que estudian el peligro amarillo, podrían, en esta isla ecuatorial, darse cuenta relativamente exacta de lo que la raza china, una vez educada en los métodos occidentales, logrará hacer” (Much better than in Beijing, those who study the Yellow Peril will immediately notice in this equatorial island what the Western-educated Chinese race is capable of achieving).⁵⁴ Like the treaty ports mentioned in this quote, Singapore was a culturally mixed city at the turn of the century. A possession of the British Empire since 1819, Singapore became the capital of the Straits Settlement in 1836 thanks to its privileged location connecting the busy shipping routes of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. While numerous trading firms were set up by Europeans, Chinese, Arabs, US Americans, and Indians, Chinese middlemen handled most of the trade between the Europeans and Asians.⁵⁵ Although Gómez Carrillo’s layover in Singapore is brief, he is quick to grasp the complex demographics of its

vibrant Chinese population. Without calling them by their name, the Guatemalan grounds his hypothesis on the assimilation skills of the “great Chinese businessmen” in the Peranakans, a subethnic group that descends from the first waves of Chinese settlers in the Malay Peninsula between the fifteenth and seventeenth century (“Ni necesidad hay, para comprender lo que en Singapur representa la raza amarilla de una larga estancia y de un profundo estudio” [One does not need a lengthy stay or an in-depth study to understand what the yellow race represents in Singapore]),⁵⁶ adding that they culturally differentiated themselves from the more recent immigrants coming from South China: “Viendo a los celestes mostrarse superiores a todos los que habitan en Singapur” (Seeing the celestials display their superiority toward all the inhabitants of Singapore).⁵⁷

The prophetic portrayal of the China trade is based on Gómez Carrillo’s far superior knowledge of the infrastructure of the colonial world through which he trekked, visiting British, French, German, and Russian imperial possessions, as well as Japanese and Chinese territories. The trip that takes him from Marseille to Tokyo in 1906 adds to his previous experience in European-dominated regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa, and exposes him to the intricate cultural diversity of South and East Asian colonies in the sphere of influence of China and Japan. Regarding the Chinese, Gómez Carrillo differentiates internal migrants from native inhabitants and historic waves of settlers within the same cultural group. Chinese might, Gómez Carrillo concludes, is not defined within the confines of the imploding Qing rule, but rather in the booming “ungrounded empire” of diasporic Chinese merchants, middlemen, and brokers.⁵⁸

If Martí’s discussion of immigration laws in the United States and Tablada’s observations of Asian artisanship engage in local debates about Chinese labor, Gómez Carrillo’s notes on the flourishing Chinese merchant diaspora speculate about the positive long-term effects of Chinese labor migrations to the Americas. Thus, *modernistas* did participate in national debates on the transition of labor in Latin America, not by addressing the political issue directly, but in the traffic of tropes and themes across their traveling texts. As discussed above, typical turn-of-the-century topics such as global labor migrations, imperialism, or the rapid expansion of capitalism, offer, when read in the light of the “Chinese Question,” a fresh perspective on the unresolved issue of foreign labor in *modernista* prose.

STRANDS OF MODERNITY

Along with themes that capture the experience of modernity, traveling *modernistas* also document processes of modernization. Privileged witnesses of what David Harvey describes as the “time-space compression” of the globe that came with the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the regularization of transcontinental rail passenger service in 1867, these writers’ fascination with the infrastructure of Oriental tourism illuminates a much larger circuit of vessels crisscrossing the oceans and transporting peoples in quite a different fashion than the “lujo asiático” (Oriental luxury) that they experience as foreign correspondents in Asia.

Let us return to Gómez Carrillo. The second chapter of *De Marsella a Tokio* titled “Paisajes y emociones” (Landscapes and emotions) chronicles the segment of the route from the Mediterranean Sea into the Indian Ocean. Although the book later returns to the stopover in Egypt, the crossing of the Suez Canal signals the expansion of Oriental tourism: “estaban orgullosas de embarcarse en un buque de los que van más lejos, en un buque de la carrera de la China y del Japón, en un buque acostumbrado a escapar a la *mousson* del Océano Índico y a los tifones del mar amarillo!” (they were proud to board a ship that travels further, a steamboat going to China and Japan, a ship used to escaping the monsoon of the Indian Ocean and the typhons of the Yellow Sea!).⁵⁹ Unmoved by the smooth waters and well-trodden coastlines of the Middle East, the pages about the initial days of the journey turn indoors to capture the lifestyle inside the emblematic vessel that, since the mid-nineteenth century, shuffled leisure travelers and colonial troops eastward and westward. We visualize the halls, smoking parlors and promenade decks of the *Sydney*, a steamer of the French company Messageries Maritimes, built as a mailing ship and later converted into a passenger cruise. We experience the motion sickness familiar to passengers of railroad dining cars: “se mueve esto menos que un ferrocarril, ¿no es cierto?” (This should feel more stable than a train, shouldn’t it?).⁶⁰ We become intrigued by the audacious European women heading to faraway places; the romantic sailors from the Mediterranean enamored of Homeric poetry; and the resilient colonial officers serving overseas. As Gómez Carrillo summarizes the global spirit of the seafaring microcosm in the favorite *modernista* topos of the cosmopolis, he points to a Chinese passenger who stands out from the crowd:

En esta cosmópolis flotante, entre los egipcios de perfiles de ave de presa y los indios de grandes ojos ojerosos, entre los japoneses cortos de talla y los anamitas femeniles, un personaje singular, suntuoso, grave y enigmático, interesa especialmente. . . . Es un chino. Pero no es un chino vulgar, un mercader, un banquero, no, ni siquiera un diplomático, sino un sabio chino, un chino doctoral, un chino que si no fuera imponente, sería caricaturesco.

Among the Egyptians with their aquiline profiles and the baggy- and wide-eyed Indians, the short Japanese, and effeminate Annamites of this floating cosmopolis, a unique, sumptuous, grave, and enigmatic character catches one's attention. . . . He is Chinese. But not an ordinary Chinese, a merchant, banker, nor a diplomat, even; but rather a wise-man, a doctoral Chinese, a Chinese whom, were it not for his magnificence, would be a caricature.⁶¹

The use of exotic epithets to describe the Asian passengers resembles Martí's stereotypical depiction of the immigrant physiognomies staring at the Brooklyn Bridge. But this seaborne Chinese is unlike the "ordinary" types of New York, or the bankers, merchants, and diplomats seen in San Francisco, Yokohama, and Singapore by Tablada and Gómez Carrillo himself. Onboard, this "doctor" diligently keeps up with the research routine that took him to Italy and to Mexico for over twenty years to study early Chinese migrations to the Americas. Interestingly, what initially appears as a caricature of an Asian humanist wearing a tunic and a braid, speaking in aphorisms, and assisted by an entourage of servants carrying parchment scrolls (a parody Jorge Luis Borges will exploit in his chinoiserie fiction, discussed in chapter 2) is a global historian connected to the emerging milieu of social sciences in the United States. Gómez Carrillo reports his words: "Los sabios americanos me han ayudado mucho. Además de Masters, Lobscheid es partidario de la América china. El gran Bancroft probó que por las venas de los aztecas circula sangre mongólica. Yo, por mi parte, he notado que el calendario mejicano y el chino son idénticos" (The American wisemen have helped me a lot. Besides Masters, Lobscheid is a proponent of Chinese America. The great Bancroft has demonstrated that Mongolian blood runs through the veins of the Aztecs. I, myself, have observed that the Mexican and Chinese calendars are identical).⁶² To the astonished

ears of the Guatemalan traveler, the modern Chinese scholar explains in fluent Spanish the works of protoethnologists who in the last quarter of the nineteenth century developed theories about pre-Columbian transoceanic contact based on their studies of Indigenous cultures of the American West, such as Hubert Howe Bancroft's *The Native Races of the Pacific States* (1886) and William Lobscheid's *Evidence of the Affinity of the Polynesians and American Indians with the Chinese and Other Nations of Asia: Derived from the Language, Legends and History of Those Races* (1872). This Chinese scholar at the door to the Far East is in fact pointing toward the Far West, to the transpacific routes that hypothetically established the first human contact between Asia and America long before the years of the Manila Galleon and of the coolie trade, in the prehistory of oceanic migrations.

I propose that Gómez Carrillo's politics of Oriental tourism in the Suez Canal should be read as a point of entry to a corpus of migration literature in the Pacific. I follow here Harris Feinsod's observation about the disorienting imaginaries of the sea in modernism. In "Canal Zone Modernism" (2019), Feinsod suggests that the extraordinary oceanic expansion of symbolic and material culture, well captured by modernist artists, refers to a world literature and art at once connected by intensifying flows and fortified by proliferating blockages: "literary works situated in the micropolitical environments of ships, or at their various ports of call . . . express a version of Aamir Mufti's claim that world literature, far from being a seamless and traversable space, has in fact been from the beginning a regime of enforced mobility and therefore of immobility as well."⁶³ I propose here to evoke a particular stance of Chinese untranslatability: the travel bans, disposed cargo, and silenced testimonies of oppressed Chinese migrant workers on their way to Latin America. This is not a comparative exercise of reference or citation since I do not think that Gómez Carrillo is explicitly referring to the nineteenth-century coolie trade in the crossing of the Suez Canal. The trope of the seaborne Chinese, however, gains novel and varied connotations in the itinerant afterlife of the *crónica* when reprinted in the well-oiled network of newspapers and magazines across Latin America and Spain that indeed reported on Asian migrations. The image of the Chinese scholar onboard a French steamboat in the Mediterranean might convey a taste of exoticism in the Argentine *La Nación* or the Spanish *El Liberal* where it originally came out, but less so in the magazine *Prisma* of Lima or the Cuban *Diario de la Marina* where it would appear alongside news of sugar, guano, and the plantation universe that

still relied on the migrant Chinese workforce in those areas. More precisely, the figure of the Chinese scholar that theorizes early transpacific migrations becomes heavily political when published next to news of coolie auctions at docks, mutinies onboard Pacific clippers, and insurance claims for human cargo thrown overboard. Rather than suggest a fluid East-West translatability, this *modernista* maritime trope signals a genealogy of forced displacement that does not flow as a solid corpus in the Latin American literary tradition, but is, rather, diluted across the United States, Peru, Cuba, and China. I echo Elliott Young's observation that "there is a growing literature on the 'many middle passages' of forced labor around the world, but for the most part the story of the thousands of Chinese who struggled and died on the open seas has simply dissolved into the vast oceans between national histories."⁶⁴ The following pages are an attempt to rescue such an archive in the Latin American tradition.

THE COOLIE PASSAGE ARCHIVE

It is in travel and maritime literature, two of the most popular literary genres of the early nineteenth century, that the narrative of the unwritten coolie experience emerges from the margins.⁶⁵ The coolie passage archive names, for me, the dispersed corpus of sources depicting the transportation of indentured laborers from China to Peru and the Caribbean in the second part of the nineteenth century. Although the ignoble business linked to slavery during the heyday of abolitionism—occurring for the most part in the international waters of the Pacific Ocean and overseen by the conflicting sovereignties of its crews, carriers, and cargoes—is well documented, the terrifying experience of such East-West journey has gone largely unnoticed in Latin American literary histories.

Stories of Asian maritime trade were common in the US press, and the most memorable account onboard a coolie ship is Edgard Holden's "A Chapter in the Coolie Trade," published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in June 1864. An open attack of bondage, the text, written toward the end of the American Civil War (1861–65), provides a rare first-hand account of a mutiny on the *Norway* clipper sailing from Macao to Havana in 1859 that bears striking similarities to the infamous crossing of slave vessels through the Atlantic Middle Passage. In the piece we read of the disparate headcount of sixty crew members and passengers versus a thousand half-naked "sullen or desponding" Chi-

nese men confined in cluttered shelves in the lower deck. We visualize through the text and its illustrations (see, e.g., fig. 1) how the barricades and iron gratings placed on the hatchways of the recast freight carrier break apart when swarming bodies crawl toward the upper deck. In the heat of the riot, we sense the silent authority of the translators, half-Portuguese half-Chinese middlemen versed in several Chinese dialects who were “nowise friendly to the mass of coolies on board” but were nevertheless the sole interpreters of their demands to the captain.⁶⁶ In

A CHAPTER ON THE COOLIE TRADE.

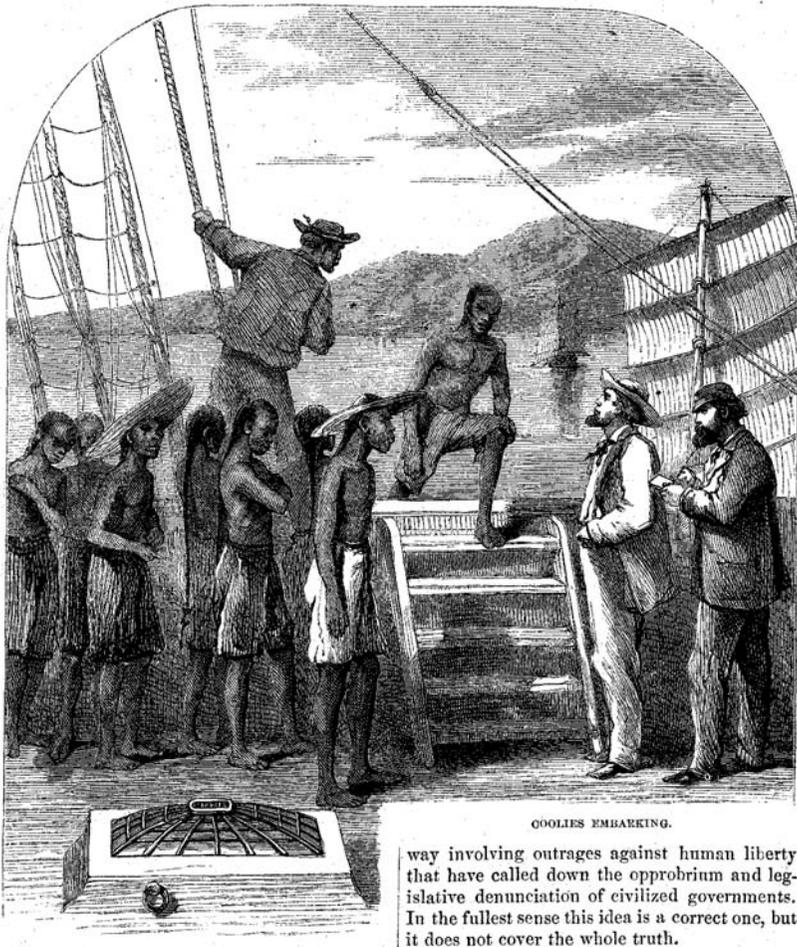


Fig. 1. Edgar Holden, “Coolies embarking,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 1864, 1. Courtesy of Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.

the aftermath of the failed uprising, the appeased coolies roaming on the deck echo the eerie characters of mutiny novels such as Edgar Allan Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) or Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855). Like the character Amasa Delano of Massachusetts, disoriented at the uncanny docility of the rebel slaves on Captain Benito Cereno's ship adrift off the coast of Chile, the narrator of the *Harper's* article also brings the readers onboard to the Pacific for them to judge the abuses of a new form of slavery.⁶⁷

Mutinies on board coolie ships were frequent, and the mortality rate was even higher than in African vessels because the journey across the Pacific was longer and the ships heading to Cuba still had to circumnavigate the continent through the Cape of Good Hope all the way up the Atlantic, adding yet more mileage (approximately three months total). The Chinese died of dysentery, scurvy, and pneumonia, as well as all kinds of illnesses produced by the inclement weather and the fetid hygiene conditions of the overcrowded vessels, which were regulated on paper but rarely enforced in the lawless high seas. In his comprehensive study of the coolie trade in Peru, Watt Stewart registers the exorbitant death rates in ships arriving to the Andean country, around 10 percent in the 1860s and between 14 and 31 percent in the 1870s.⁶⁸ Albeit inexact, the causes of these casualties were common knowledge since local newspapers such as *El Comercio* or *La Patria* published on the coolie trade and other popular ventures. The *South Pacific Times* was one of the loudest voices denouncing the trade. Printed during the 1870s in the coastal city of Callao, this English-language periodical was an active news outlet reporting on mercantile affairs as well as a promoter of British public interest among the Peruvian-Anglophone public. For example, in a dramatic editorial from May 24, 1873, the narrator condemns the harsh effects of the coolie passage with a vivid image of corpse-like bodies disembarking at the port of Callao: "Thin and wan enough they look—even the stoutest of them are, sometimes, mere bags of bones."⁶⁹

The international press was a crucial organ in the struggle for abolitionism as well as in the termination of the coolie trade. Along with criticism in English-language media, the full blow to the trade came with the translation of the *Cuba Commission Report*. Published in 1876, this text is the product of a multinational delegation sent by the Chinese government to Cuba in 1874 to investigate the accusations of abuse toward Chinese laborers. The commission was chaired by a French and a British customs officers stationed in China as well as by several Chinese officials who at that time were residing in Hartford, Connecticut,

as part of the Chinese Educational Mission (1872–81).⁷⁰ Although no Chinese commissioner held full diplomatic credentials or gubernatorial or ministerial office in China, their overseas residence in the United States counted as political expertise, allowing them to function as official representatives of the Qing government.⁷¹ Originally written in Chinese and soon translated into English for immediate dissemination in the press, the *Cuba Commission Report* represents an early example of modern East-West diplomacy. The text seeks to construct a testimonial narrative of the indenture of thousands of Chinese plantations workers across Cuba organized in the form of a questionnaire. Focused on the legal puzzles of each aspect of the trade, question four of the report sheds ample light on the coolie passage archive: “Do the laws provide adequately for the well-being of the coolies on the voyage?” The workers’ replies, which verify general ill health as causes of death on board the ships, emphasize abuse:

The deposition of Ch’en Hsio-Chou (陳學周) and 1 other state that more than 30 men were shot during the voyage. Chang A-chin (張阿金) deposes, “the surgeon was a foreigner, and many died through his treatment; many died from confinement in the hold, and others, decoyed unwilling to go abroad, killed themselves.” Li A-ch’iang (李阿烺) deposes, “two men were suspected by the deposes master of mutinous intentions, and were hanged by his orders.” Liang A-yu (梁阿有) “two insane men were struck to death by the carpenter.” Lin Chin (林金) deposes “30 men committed suicide.”⁷²

Note how the repetition of ideas delivered in direct speech conveys a common experience of the horrific passage. The statements were recorded in the various dialects that were spoken by the emigrants and were intelligible to the Chinese officials and European commissioners touring the Cuban plantations. Interestingly, the English translation of the report retains the transcription of the logograms of the Chinese names of the interviewees—most likely assigned at the time of the interview—somewhat restoring the identity of the anonymous human cargo, now turned into subjective migrant voices.

The desperation that led to mass suicide onboard is also voiced through the testimonies of the Peru Commission, also conducted in 1874. But unlike the much-publicized Cuban Commission, the Peruvian one was a covert enterprise, chaired by the Chinese American Yung

Wing (1828–1912) and partially funded by intellectuals and religious men associated with abolitionist circles of New England. Although the actual manuscripts of the three-months' trip from Connecticut to Lima in 1874 are scattered in records held at the National Library of China, Foreign Ministry Archives in Lima, and Yale University's Beinecke Library,⁷³ Yung Wing's memoirs from 1909 summarize part of the investigations. In his meeting at the Qing's foreign affairs office immediately after the trip, he underlines the shocking suicide sprees: "Then I told him something about the horrors of the middle passage between Macao and Cuba or Peru; how whole cargoes of them revolted in mid-ocean, and either committed wholesale suicide by jumping into the ocean, or else overpowered the captain and the crew, killed them and threw them overboard, and then took their chances in the drifting of the vessel."⁷⁴

The most poignant account of the coolie passage is, in my view, the short story "En alta mar" (1985; On the high seas) by the Sino-Peruvian author Siu Kam Wen (1951–). Juxtaposing a storyline about two sick men onboard a coolie ship with another about a junk packed with refugees somewhere in the South China Sea, the narrator probes the minds of the feverish emigrants. The character onboard the *Luisa Canevaro*, an actual steamer of Peruvian registry infamous in British diplomatic reports, lies unconscious as he wishes for his own death: "El hombre que deliraba esperaba morir a tiempo, antes que el barco atracase" (The delirious man hoped to die on time, before the ship docked at port).⁷⁵ In the fragmentary last paragraph of the story, the narrator leaves it to the reader to determine if the character finally died or not:

El *Luisa Canevaro* llegó al Callao finalmente y el junco tocó también puerto seguro.

Uno de los dos hombres enfermos murió y el otro sobrevivió.

Dejo a criterio del lector decidir cuál de los dos, el culí o el refugiado, fue el feliz sobreviviente.

The *Luisa Canevaro* finally made it to Callao and the junk also docked safely at port.

One of the two sick men died and the other one survived.

I leave it up to the reader to decide which of them, the coolie or the refugee, was the happy survivor.⁷⁶

The dilemma posed to the readers about the possible "happy survival" of a Peruvian coolie opens a broader interrogation about the archive of

Chinese migrations to the Americas. In a direct interpellation of contemporary Spanish-speaking readers, the narrator of the story interrogates their affective preference for the survival of a fictional Peruvian immigrant over that of a remote Southeast Asian. Furthermore, does the allusion to the happy survival signal the fictional escape from death at sea or the enduring prosperity of migrants in their new homelands? To what extent is this ending (or this story, oeuvre, or sinophone writing in general), crafted by a Chinese-born writer who now lives in Hawaii, but whose entire work is written in Spanish and revolves around his years in Peru, a statement of the fluid cultural memory of overseas Chinese experience, which does not stream between fixed ports of departure and arrival, but is diverted by the languages it navigates? Siu Kam Wen's diasporic fictions, Yung Wing's multinational diplomacy, and the Cuban laborers' testimonies that voice the memories of Asian American passages, take shape through textual constellations that have gone unnoticed in master narratives of national identity in Latin America because they are essentially hemispheric and transpacific, or, as Ana Paulina Lee posits, "circumoceanic," and thus slip through the artificial boundaries of nation states.⁷⁷

Now what about the perspective of Latin American intellectuals who, in the spirit of nation building, went to China as diplomats, merchants, or simple tourists in the second part of the nineteenth century? How does the much publicized question of Chinese forced migrations unfold in their Eastbound narratives during the heyday of Oriental tourism? In other words, what is the contribution of Spanish and Lusophone travel texts to the coolie passage archive?

As the pressure on the coolie trade grew internationally, Latin American diplomats were asked to account for it abroad. Amid negotiations with Chinese authorities for a treaty of commerce and navigation between China and Peru, the experienced captain Guillermo García y García (1847–79) responded in London with a report titled "Informe que contiene importantes detalles sobre la conducta con los emigrantes chinos y otros datos relativos a esta inmigración" (1873; Report dealing with important details about the conduct of Chinese emigrants and other issues related to this migration).⁷⁸ An unapologetic defense of the coolie passage, the document does not deny any of the accusations of mistreatment, instead contextualizing them as a problem of sovereignty, for which Peru is exempt from any blame. García y García acknowledges the high death rates onboard, but is quick to add that such figures are prevalent in foreign vessels consigned by Peruvian firms rather than

in state-owned fleets, and are even higher when the carriers are slow clippers rather than modern steamboats “construidos especialmente para el transporte de grandes masas de pasajeros, con todos los últimos adelantos que tanto la ciencia como la experiencia sugieren para llenar todas las exigencias de higiene, seguridad y comodidad” (built especially for the transport of large masses of passengers, and furnished with all the innovations that both science and experience recommend to fulfil all the requirements of the hygienic, security, and comfort needs).⁷⁹ The questionable amenities of the vessels such as food, lodging, or entertainment, García y García observes, surpass any possible scenario ever experienced by the famished emigrants, who diligently comply with the military discipline of the ship. To the accusations that the ship resembled a prison, the Peruvian seaman enumerates the clearance points through which the ships must pass in the jurisdictions of Hong Kong and Macao, which vested the British and Portuguese officials with the ultimate authority over the supervision of the vessels. Besides, the coolies at the Macao barracoons ready to board a ship headed to South America, he affirms, were by no means abducted by his people; rather, they were sold by Chinese brokers in a free-market operation.⁸⁰

While García y García fashions the coolie passage as a lawful national enterprise, the Brazilian diplomat Henrique Carlos Ribeiro Lisboa (1847–1920) presents a hypothetical maritime scheme with no legal loopholes. In his travelogue *A China e os chins: Recordações de viagem* (1888; *China and the Chinese: Travel memories*), the Brazilian imperial envoy to China had been very critical of the Hispanic coolie trade, with the aim of persuading local legislators that his proposed project for bringing Chinese labor to Brazil would not be a perpetuation of slavery but rather a temporary migration.⁸¹ In the second part of his report, published in 1894 as *Os chins dos Tetartos* (*The Chinese onboard Tetartos*), Lisboa discloses his plan for the logistics of the transfer of the workers and argues for the use of Chinese shipping companies as the definite advantage over any previous attempt to transport Chinese workers:

Para evitar os conhecidos abusos do transporte, seria preciso aplicar severamente rigorosos regulamentos que a pratica tem demonstrado serem de difícil e, por vezes, de impossível execução. Effectuado o transporte em navios chineses, desaparecem quase completamente esses inconvenientes. Prevenidos como costumam estar contra os *Diabos Estrangeiros* e

especialmente os *Cabellos Vermelhos*, os emigrantes do interior pisam com mais satisfação e confiança o convez dos navios cobertos pela sua bandeira e onde encontram quem fale a sua língua, esteja ao par dos seus hábitos e mostre-lhes carinho ou *sympathia*. Pelo seu lado os armadores chineses já conhecem os pontos fracos do caráter dos seus compatriotas e não estranham, favorecem, ao contrario, certas exigências de pouco custo que a falta desse conhecimento faz parecerem exorbitantes ou descabidas aos olhos de armadores e capitães europeus.

To avoid the infamous abuses of transport, it would be necessary to severely apply rigorous regulations that in practice have shown to be difficult and, at times, impossible to execute. If transported in Chinese ships, these inconveniences are almost completely eliminated. Being dubious of *Foreign Devils* and especially the *Red Heads*, as they usually are, the emigrants from the provinces will confidently board ships bearing their flags, where they will find others who speak their language, share their habits, and show affection or sympathy. For their part, as the Chinese seamen are familiar with the weaknesses of their compatriots' character, they are not surprised and they favor rather, certain inexpensive demands that, due to lack of knowledge, European shipowners and captains may find exorbitant or unreasonable.⁸²

The political move is evident: after half a century of fighting illegal human trafficking conducted in treaty ports, the reluctant Chinese authorities needed a very attractive deal to approve an official immigration plan to South America. Lisboa's suggestion of using the carriers of the recently created China Merchants Steam Navigation Company would secure new trade routes for the Chinese. The purpose of China Merchants, established in 1872, was to capture part of the international trade that had been virtually monopolized by foreign corporations based in treaty ports. But Lisboa's naive assumption of the solidarity between elite navy men and dispossessed peasants based on their common national provenance reveals the Brazilian's limited understanding of the hierarchical Chinese class system, as well as his Western bias toward the idea of national identity. That an "emigrant from the provinces" and an educated civil official of the late Qing empire would connect affectively

through symbols such as a flag or language is a cultural misunderstanding as large as that between Western crews and apparently “exorbitant” demands of the coolies Lisboa mentions in the passage. The Qing flag did not signal an imagined community, and the common language used by the imperial administration was virtually unintelligible to the illiterate populations of the Pearl River Delta, where various regional dialects are spoken. Furthermore, the premise of a triumphant national solidarity collapses in the awareness that illegal emigration had been facilitated largely thanks to Chinese brokers, who kidnapped and sold their fellow countrymen to the European agents at the treaty ports.

Finally, the travel journal of the Colombian coolie broker Nicolás Tanco Armero (1830–90) deliberately omits any reference to the coolie passage. Arguably the most notorious labor agent in Spanish America, from 1855 to 1873 Tanco Armero oversaw the buying, selling, and exporting of over a hundred thousand Chinese coolies. Exiled to Cuba in 1851, where he was hired by a Spanish trading company that dispatched coolie ships from the treaty port of Amoy (Xiamen) to the Caribbean, Tanco Armero left for China in 1855 and stayed there for three years. His sojourn is recorded in a travelogue titled *Viaje de Nueva Granada a China y de China a Francia* (A Trip from New Granada to China, and from China to France) published in Paris in 1860 shortly after his return.⁸³ As the title indicates, the book is divided into three parts: the departure from Bogota to Europe, his impressions of China, and finally, the return to Paris through Palestine. Organized chronologically, the text combines a rich narrative of the voyage with a very opinionated description of the Chinese people and their customs. A son of the Colombian oligarchy, Tanco Armero’s sojourn in China is the extended leg of the educated young man’s grand tour through Europe. Yet, as an employee of a coolie firm, he also writes as a mercantile agent globetrotting for profit.

In the book’s foreword, we learn that Tanco Armero goes to China to conduct business vaguely related to Asian immigration. The preface celebrates the young man’s universalistic drive in the decision to travel to the Far East, “without contemplating pecuniary estimations, nor compromising his own interest,” since the Spanish company that hired him apparently intended to replace the African slave force with Asian cheap labor: “El señor Tanco no pensó como nosotros y aceptó inmediatamente tan delicada comisión, sin detenerse en cálculos pecuniarios, sin temer comprometer sus intereses, fijándose solamente en que la inmigración iba a destruir la esclavitud: tenía delante una cuestión

humanitaria” (Unlike us, Mr. Tanco accepted this delicate enterprise on the spot, without delving into financial calculations and fearless of compromising his own interest; his mind was fixed solely on the idea that immigration would destroy slavery: he was facing a humanitarian issue).⁸⁴ Yet his six hundred pages barely mention his involvement in the trade, using vague phrases such as “asuntos de la emigración” (emigration matters) or “los asuntos que me trajeron a China” (the issues that brought me to China).⁸⁵ Only once does the author explicitly state having performed the duties of a coolie agent: “tan pronto como hube despachado dos buques con colonos asiáticos para la isla de Cuba” (as soon as I had dispatched two vessels with Asian settlers to the island of Cuba).⁸⁶ But that is it. The silence regarding his involvement in the traffic of Chinese to the Americas is so loud that toward the end of the book he refers to “los llamados coolies” (the so-called coolies), distancing himself from the affair as if his point of view were yet another mere ethnographic observation from his travels in Asia.⁸⁷

Tanco Armero’s book tells the story of a circumnavigation, of an itinerary that begins with an exile from Bogotá to Cuba, continues in Europe, and then ventures into Hong Kong. After that, dozens of ships set sail across the Pacific circling the globe back to the Caribbean. But, instead of orbiting the globe to track the coolie passage, the narrative returns to the Mediterranean via the same routes of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company transited in the outbound trip. On the inverse itinerary through the Indian Ocean, Tanco Armero reports once more on the thriving life on board the “floating cosmopolis” that gathers colonial officials, adventurous women, and exotic characters from all parts of Asia. In the last stretch of the journey, precisely in the crossing of the Suez Canal where Gómez Carrillo surrenders to the Oriental luxury of steam navigation, Tanco Armero gives in to the spleen of tourism:

Las mismas comodidades que brindan estos palacios flotantes llegan a cansar, y los pocos días la vida se hace inaguantable: se cansa uno de ver cielo y agua, de leer, de dormir, de comer constantemente, de beber a horas, de ver siempre las mismas caras, y hasta se fastidia uno de sí mismo. Todo se hace a bordo por necesidad, nada por gusto ni placer: es que el hombre necesita respirar cierta atmósfera intelectual, alimentar el espíritu con ideas e impresiones nuevos, y nada de esto se consigue navegando.

The amenities of these floating palaces get to be tiresome, and after a few days life on board becomes unbearable: one grows tired of staring at the sky and sea, of reading, of sleeping, of eating constantly, of drinking here and there, of always seeing the same faces, and even of oneself. Onboard, everything has a purpose, and is not done willingly or for the sake of pleasure: men need to breathe some kind of intellectual atmosphere, to nurture their spirit with ideas and new impressions, all of which are impossible during navigation.⁸⁸

Tanco Armero is fatigued at the end of the return trip from China but, unlike the exhausted coolies after the crossing of the Pacific, what saturates Tanco is the pleasure of travel. He now longs for the intellectual and spiritual stimulation of the Biblical tourist points that he cannot wait to visit in Palestine. This takes us back to Feinsod's "canal zone" as a choke point of maritime globalization. Like Gómez Carrillo's disorienting threshold to the universe of forced migrations in the Pacific, the Suez Canal in Tanco Armero's narrative signals a revolving door that opens onto the Far East, but immediately circles back to the cradle of Christian civilization. It is as much a gateway to China as it is a layover fraught with adventures that enhance the toil of his ultimate pilgrimage to the Holy Land. When at the beginning of the trip Tanco Armero acknowledges profit and curiosity as the motives of a trip he retrospectively deems "pitiful," he is by no means metaphorical in his way of referring to religious travel: "No teniendo en mira hasta aquí más que los conocimientos que pudiese adquirir y las utilidades que reportarían las grandes especulaciones que me llevaban a esas tierras, jamás me había detenido a contemplar los riesgos de mi penosa peregrinación" (Without keeping anything in sight but the knowledge that I might acquire and the earnings that might accrue from the major speculations that took me to those lands, I had never stopped to consider the risks of my pitiful pilgrimage).⁸⁹ If *Viaje de la Nueva Granada a China y de China a Francia* is the first travelogue ever published by a Latin American in China, conceived at the peak of the coolie trade, and a rare Spanish-language chronicle of the Opium Wars, it is at heart just another narrative of a Christian journey that Colombian elites overtly encouraged as an instrument of resistance to the liberal government's secularization project.⁹⁰ The urge for transcendence expressed as travel fatigue—a fatigue that grows during the overland route to Port Said since in 1860 the construction of the Suez Canal had only begun—becomes more

relevant if we consider that Tanco Armero would later participate in Ferdinand de Lesseps's attempt to construct the Panama Canal in the 1880s. Like his efforts in the infrastructure project that failed to open the waterway connecting Pacific and Atlantic oceans, Tanco Armero's travelogue epitomizes the scuttling of the Chinese migrants' archive in the Latin American literary tradition.

The rapid expansion of fin de siècle travel infrastructure captured in the *crónica modernista* would abruptly end with the start of World War I when ocean liners were converted into troopships to ferry soldiers back and forth between militarized ports. The global traffic of tourists, but also of goods, mail, and migrant laborers, suddenly faced new restrictions imposed by belligerent states, which lasted well until the early years of the Cold War and its renewed global networks of peaceful co-existence. Chapter 2 frames the itineraries of Chinese artifacts to Latin America during these convoluted decades of nationalism and war, when knowledge about foreign cultures became a form of warfare played out in the colleges and libraries of crumbling empires worldwide. I am interested in how the idea of world literature unfolds against this backdrop in arguably the most cosmopolitan of Latin American authors, Jorge Luis Borges, since his fiction and essays of this period abound with Chinese philosophers, European sinologists, and chinoiserie goods. With limited books or Chinese specialists to consult in Argentina, Borges deliberately misreads, misquotes, and fabricates Chinese literature. I hold that such practice of comparative literature as a discipline forever mediated by the geopolitics of Western centers of knowledge is a statement on the potential of the edge as a site of translation of world literature.

Sinology on the Edge

Borges's Fictional Epistemology of China

The book that established Michel Foucault's reputation as an intellectual giant begins with an image of a made-up Chinese encyclopedia by Jorge Luis Borges. In the preface to *The Order of Things* (1966), the French philosopher claims that his archeology of the human sciences was triggered by his bewilderment at the Argentine writer's fictional Chinese artifact: "a laughter that shattered all the familiar landmarks of thought, breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things."¹ Anticipating crucial issues of poststructuralist thought, particularly Foucault's massive revision of the empirical disciplines that precede the modern human sciences, Borges's "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins" (1941; hereafter "El idioma analítico"; "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins") comes up with a curious Chinese text that questions the very notion of classification. In this narrative essay Borges observes the "ambiguities, redundancies, and deficiencies" of the English scholar and bishop of Chester John Wilkins's (1614–72) hyperrational project for establishing a universal language.² In doing so, he suddenly recalls an attempt "attributed by Dr. Franz Kuhn to a certain Chinese encyclopedia called *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*," equally perplexing in its classification because of the latter's apparent arbitrariness. In the book animals are categorized as

(a) pertenecientes al Emperador, (b) embalsamados, (c) amaestrados, (d) lechones, sirenas, (f) fabulosos, (g) perros sueltos, (h) incluidos en esta clasificación, (i) que se agitan como locos, (j) innumerables, (k) dibujados con un pincel finísimo de pelo de camello, (l) etcétera, (m) que acaban de romper el jarrón, (n) que de lejos parecen moscas.

(a) those that belong to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel-hair brush, (l) etcetera, (m) having just broken the flower vase, (n) those that at a distance resemble flies.³

The juxtaposition of creatures in such a hallucinatory order respects no logical principle of exclusion and inclusion or rational formation of groups, and, oddly, includes itself in the classification. Reflecting on Borges's whimsical series, Foucault claims that this strange taxonomy stems not so much from the terrain of utopia as from that of heterotopia, the inconceivable space that undermines the very possibility for language to describe it. Beatriz Sarlo agrees with Foucault that Borges's hilarious take is a critique not of some exotic cosmovision, but rather, of any attempt to systematize the universe. In her influential *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge* (1993), Sarlo argues that "in its hyperbolic form, the fake Chinese encyclopedia mimics other more rational efforts that Western philosophers and linguists have made to explore the mechanism through which we apprehend reality and the ways in which we divide up the experiential continuum of time and space. All these modes, says Borges under the cover of the Encyclopedia, are conventions, because there exists no classification of the universe that is not inconsistent and hypothetical. The reason is very simple: we don't know what is the Universe."⁴

Despite the universalistic nature of Borges's philosophical fiction, the readers of "El idioma analítico" are still left to wonder about the specific choice of China as the site of the heteroclitic encyclopedia, and why this option produces such a strong rhetorical effect, best described in Foucault's laughter. An insatiable reader of both Western and Eastern traditions, major and minor literatures, and philosophies and histories from around the globe, Borges could easily have chosen to situate the

unsettling encyclopedia in any other remote setting within his colossal bibliographical repertoire. Foucault thinks of China as a poetic region whose name alone constitutes for the West a vast reservoir of utopias: the Chinese encyclopedia from which Borges quotes and its proposed taxonomy bring about a kind of thought without space: “in our dreamworld, is not China precisely this privileged site of space? In our traditional imagery, the Chinese culture is the most meticulous, the most rigidly ordered, the one most deaf to temporal events, most attached to the pure delineation of space . . . there would appear to be, at the other extremity of the earth, a culture entirely devoted to the ordering of space, but one that does not distribute the multiplicity of existing things into any of the categories that make it possible for us to name, speak, and think.”⁵ A first answer to “why China?” then would be that a “Chinese epistemology” operates as the perfect antipode of Western epistemology. If, as Foucault argues in *The Order of Things*, the forms of representation in the West are sensitive to the epistemes of the classical and modern eras, in China they are oblivious to any cultural paradigm. In this line, when Borges displaces the encyclopedia—the paramount epistemic artifact of modernity—to China, the tenets that regulate the universe are symmetrically inverted, thus resulting in a heteroclite classification.

But Borges’s disorienting textual construction of the reference to the encyclopedia complicates the East-West dichotomy that Foucault takes for granted. When the narrator of “El idioma analítico” claims to have registered all the arbitrariness of the “desconocido o apócrifo enciclopedista chino” (“unknown or apocryphal Chinese encyclopedist”),⁶ we ought to wonder: unknown to whom? To the narrator of the essay in Buenos Aires or to Dr. Franz Kuhn, the sinologist whom Borges indicates as the informant? The reference to Kuhn is vague: there is no title for the scholarly work that mentions this Chinese encyclopedia and, besides, the modifier “certain Chinese encyclopedia” further blurs the work’s identity. Although Borges uses the name of an actual sinologist from the University of Leipzig who lived between 1884 and 1961, and who was one of the most prolific German translators of Chinese literature of the twentieth century, the *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* is nonexistent except in Borges’s own invention. This type of false attribution combining erudition with imagination is recurrent in Borges’s work. Yet it is precisely in this disorienting double textual construction of the reference—an imaginary Chinese text mentioned by an actual German sinologist quoted in an Argentine fictional essay—that

fiction confronts the literary fact. By casting light on the mediation of knowledge about China, the epistemological problem that preoccupies the essay shifts from object to subject. In other words, the question is no longer that of Chinese epistemology (albeit a timeless and mythical one in the eyes of the West) but rather of an epistemology of China, that is, a way of categorizing and systematizing knowledge about China. Borges's famous Chinese encyclopedia, I argue, opens a discussion on world literature, humanism, and geopolitics of literary criticism at large.

My point here is that Borges's writings of China are all about sinology. A closer look at the numerous ways in which China comes up throughout his work proves that Borges cares little about representations of China, the Chinese, or Chinese culture in general but is concerned about the ways in which China becomes a humanistic object of study within a disciplinary framework. Just like the eccentric encyclopedia, the Chinese protagonists of Borges's fiction are textual constructs. To name a few: a British sinologist and a Chinese professor of English ("El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" [1941; "The Garden of Forking Paths"]); the books saved from the Tartar invasions ("La muralla y los libros" [1950; "The Wall and the Books"]) and "El guardián de los libros" [1969; "The Keeper of Books"]); a lettered pirate ("La viuda Ching, pirata" [1936; "The Widow Ching—Pirate"]); an unapologetically exoticist French traveler in China (*Un bárbaro en Asia* [1969; *A Barbarian in Asia*]); as well as a long list of actual Chinese philosophers, writers, and scholars.

In this chapter I explore the writing of China in Latin America to claim that Borges puts sinology on the edge. I argue that Borges insistently implies that China, as we know it, is an artifice of an ongoing humanistic enterprise to systematize and translate the vast archive of China into Western terms: that is, it is an invention of philology. In the same way that he scrutinizes any system designed to categorize the universe (the encyclopedia, language, the library, etc.), Borges places at the center of his writings of China the dynamics, politics and, most specifically, flaws of a humanistic discipline that has insisted on making sense of China and has inevitably fallen prey to its own misreadings. And it is precisely in those interstices, gaps, and paradoxes that his fiction emerges. The first part of the chapter explores the dramatic implications of putting sinology "on the edge," that is, putting it in a precarious position. Borges strips sinology of its hermeneutical principles of explication and interpretation of classical culture and, in turn, portrays its methods of superficial analysis of nontextual objects. In what is arguably his most famous short

story, “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” (“The Garden of Forking Paths”), an English sinologist misreads a text and ends up murdered by a Chinese spy; in a lesser-known story published a year later, “La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An” (1942; “Tai An’s Long Search”), an imprisoned detective—described as a sinologist—solves an enigma related to a Chinese jewel. A comparative reading of these two intriguingly parallel stories illuminates the larger framework for the traffic of knowledge between institutional centers of Western humanism and far off areas of the globe where the reading of foreign cultures is carried out through limited archives, specialists, or established hermeneutical traditions.

I also understand “edge” in the geographical sense of the term. I borrow the English translation of Beatriz Sarlo’s ideologem *orilla* to describe the cosmopolitan margin of the world that Borges creates as a privileged point of enunciation. For Borges, South America is indeed a peripheral region, yet it is by no means a subaltern one: “Placed on the limits between cultures, between literary genres, between languages, Borges creates himself as the writer of the *orillas*, a marginal in the center, a cosmopolitan on the edge. He entrusts literary processes and formal procedures with the power to explore the never-ending philosophical and moral questions. He constructs his originality through quotations, copies, the rewritings of other texts, because, from the outset, he conceives of writing as reading, and he distrusts, from the outset, any possibility of any literary representation of reality.”⁷ Along these lines, I explore the writing of China from Latin America through the rhetorical maneuvers by which Borges practices comparative criticism in a cultural field seemingly ignorant of the study of China. The surprisingly numerous reviews of contemporary German and English translations of Chinese classics that Borges wrote and published in the literary magazines *El Hogar*, *Sur*, and *La Nación* in the late 1930s and early 1940s account for the edification of a Chinese catalog made of scattered titles and indirect translations. Given Borges’s ignorance of Chinese language and the lack of an institutional setting to produce scholarship and translation of Chinese literature in Latin America, Borges invents a critical infrastructure to practice comparative literature, and thus anticipates his theories of translation and the fantastic. With this move, he not only redefines the hermeneutical principles of comparative philology but also enacts, specifically, the criollo style of criticism that he advocates for in Latin America in lieu of Romance philology, which leads to a heated confrontation with the Hispanist intelligentsia exiled in Buenos Aires since the Spanish Civil War.

ASSASSINATION OF THE SINOLOGIST

“El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” dramatizes a fatal conversation between a Chinese character and an English sinologist. Set in England during World War I, the story unfolds as a testimony that revisits the bellicose events of July 1916 as described in *History of World War I* (1930) by the English historian B. H. Liddell Hart. We read that Yu Tsun, a Chinese professor of English working as a spy for the Germans, must communicate the secret location of a new artillery park before being captured by the Irish Captain Richard Madden. He finds in the telephone book “el nombre de la única persona capaz de transmitir la noticia” (“the name of the only person capable of transmitting the message”) and sets out to find him in a suburb of Fenton, in Staffordshire.⁸ He arrives at the house of Stephen Albert, a modest man who confuses him with the Chinese consul and welcomes him in without hesitation. Albert happens to be a sinologist and, coincidentally, is an expert on the work of Yu Tsun’s ancestor, Ts’ui Pên, a famous civil servant who renounced his post as governor of Yunnan Province to undertake two tasks: to write a vast and intricate novel and to construct an equally vast and intricate labyrinth. Albert has deciphered the enigma that Ts’ui Pên’s labyrinth and novel are a single entity and keeps Ts’ui Pên’s original manuscripts in his house. After an exchange about the fate of these papers that traveled from China to Oxford, Yu Tsun shoots and kills Albert. We finally learn that Yu Tsun has succeeded in conveying his message: through the press coverage of the sinologist’s assassination, Yu Tsun’s German superiors learn that the name of the artillery park is in the town of Albert, in the Somme, and thereby attack it. Yu Tsun is eventually arrested by Madden and sentenced to death; this testimony reveals his last words.

How ironic is it that an erudite philologist, refined translator, and interpreter of complex texts is murdered as the result of ill-fated linguistic correspondence between his name and a topographical reference? Even more ironic is that he is murdered by a Chinese person, who, in addition, happens to be related by kin to his most distinguished object of study. Sylvia Molloy understands Albert’s death in light of Borges’s characters who are doomed by bad readings, that is, readings that have usually been carried out reductively and inefficiently: Stephen Albert is so confident of his successful reading of Ts’ui Pên’s labyrinth that he disregards the exact moment and nature of the act of reading: “a confrontation, forever in the present, with a mobile text based on other

mobile texts, never congealing.”⁹ Turning his back to Yu Tsun, Albert reduces his careful deciphering of Ts’ui Pên’s labyrinth to only one of its many possible situations, which he unwittingly provokes and then fixes with his own death. According to Molloy, “death, in Borges, is a form of irony. Cutting reductive readings short by putting an end, effectively, to the reader, Borges criticizes the latter’s excessive respect for texts wrongly considered quiescent. Death highlights a misguided fidelity that is, after all, a form of readerly inattention.”¹⁰ The image of Albert collapsing with his back turned to Yu Tsun and with Ts’ui Pên’s letter in hand illustrates the hermeneutical preference for the reading object rather than the reading action or, in Molloy’s words, the sinologist’s “disregard for the exact moment and nature of the act of reading.”¹¹ Just as the protagonist of “La busca de Averroes” (1949; Averroes’s search) is unable to translate the word “theater” as he watches from his window a group of children enacting a play, Stephen Albert fails to read that the Chinese stranger in front of him is also writing something: his own name. Yu Tsun is after all a Chinese writer, displaced from his homeland and using a foreign language to produce a nonverbal text. Albert’s fascination with the protocols of his discipline prevents him from seeing this and dooms him.

Fascination is at the core of the West’s relation to China. The initial European images of China reflect the enthrallment and fear of a competing universalistic paradigm. D. E. Mungello calls “proto-sinologists” the first generation of European savants who were overwhelmed by the seventeenth-century Jesuit reports from Cathay, a mythical land that they located in an alternative temporality and spatiality, while striving to fit it into their universal scheme of the world.¹² As I will discuss in depth in chapter 4, language was a crucial object of fascination. Following the rise of vernaculars in Europe and the parallel eager search for an enduring lingua franca that would replace Latin, many philosophers perceived Chinese as a model language whose ideographic principles transcended regional and dialectical variations. This perception made Chinese a much-discussed candidate in the search for a universal language capable of recapturing the simplicity and clarity thought to have been lost with the Biblical primitive language. Early European sinology was concerned with classical texts, approaching them through explication and translation: any of the Chinese literati would have insisted that the classics contained the fundamental principles on which the Chinese system had always rested and operated. This philosophical argument suited, by a different token, the Orientalist categorization of non-

European cultures in the nineteenth century. In this view, rather than partaking of the teleology of progress, China was thought to have a hierarchical organization, immune from change and exempt from history. But, unlike the expanding nineteenth-century European Orientalism, which began to study the ancient scriptures of Mediterranean traditions now in the orbit of European empires, sinology remained largely outside colonial interference and thus skirted its discursive authority. As Edward Said claims about the strategic uses of philology for colonial purposes, “to reconstruct a dead or lost Oriental language meant ultimately to reconstruct a dead or neglected Orient; it also meant that reconstructive precision, science, even imagination could prepare the way for what armies, administrations, and bureaucracies would later do with the Orient.”¹³ Thanks to China’s semicolonial status and the limited European interference in its local governments, sinology further strengthened the notion of China as a conceptual object isolated in time and space, mediated by remote textual fragments and coded in an opaque language.¹⁴

If Albert is a bad reader, it is because he fails to interpret Yu Tsun not only as a writer but also as an individual with historical agency. Throughout their conversation, Albert assumes he is talking to the Chinese consul Hsi P’êng and not to Yu Tsun, let alone to a German spy. Wartime rivalries unfold in the academic arena: Albert, a British sinologist, and Yu Tsun, a former Chinese professor of English at the *Hochschule* at Qingdao, enact a confrontation where knowledge about a foreign culture becomes a strategic asset in a global conflict. Apart from scholarly study, Albert discloses his connection to China through imperial networks: “Algo de sacerdote había en él y también de marino; después me refirió que había sido misionero en Tientsin antes de aspirar a sinólogo” (“There was something of a priest in him, and also of a sailor. He told me later that he had been a missionary in Tientsin before aspiring to become a sinologist”).¹⁵ Yu Tsun also leverages the European colonial experience in China by putting his knowledge of Britain to the service of the Germans during World War I. In *Out of Context: Historical Reference and the Representation of Reality in Borges* (1993), Daniel Balderston suggests that it is reasonable to think that Yu Tsun was willing to be sent on a new assignment—as a spy in England—out of loyalty to the colonial masters who had trained and employed him before the German possessions in Qingdao were seized by the Japanese (who in World War I were allied with the British and French).¹⁶ The opposite also can be argued since Yu Tsun is well aware

of the psychodynamics of colonialism: “No lo hice por Alemania, no. Nada me importa un país bárbaro, que me ha obligado a la abyección de ser un espía . . . Lo hice, porque yo sentía que el Jefe tenía en poco a los de mi raza—a los innumerables antepasados que confluyen en mí. Yo quería probarle que un amarillo podía salvar a sus ejércitos” (“I did not do it for Germany, no. That barbarous country, which has forced me into the abject position of being a spy, matters nothing to me. . . . I did it because I felt that the chief looked down on those of my race—on the innumerable ancestors who converge in me. I wanted to prove to him that a yellow man could save his armies”).¹⁷ Calling Germany a “barbarous” country does not necessarily suggest a postcolonial inversion of power where the formerly colonized sees himself as the civilized and gazes on the Other as the savage. Instead, this label expresses a long-dated sinocentric assumption of China’s supremacy that distinguished “civilized” Chinese from foreign “barbarians.” According to Frank Dikötter, the outpouring of patriotic agitation after China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 yielded to reformist ideas about the survival of China as a racial unit and sovereign state in the face of foreign aggression. This marked a transfer of China’s sense of identity stemming from a unity based on culture, traditionally opposed to various barbarians that could eventually be annihilated through the process of absorption, to a unity based on race, faced with aggressive alien races in an international context of the struggle for survival.¹⁸ Albert, an erudite in Chinese history, acknowledges this perception, and the ensuing denomination, when talking with Yu Tsun: “A mí, bárbaro inglés, me ha sido deparado revelar ese misterio diáfano” (“To me, a barbarous Englishman, has been entrusted the revelation of this diaphanous mystery”).¹⁹ Yet, with such denomination, Borges goes well beyond the Chinese genealogy of the term “barbarous” and incorporates modernism’s take on exoticism, which he draws from Henri Michaux’s *Un barbare en Asie* (1933; *A Barbarian in Asia*), a travel journal that he translated while he was writing “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” and which came out in *Editorial Sur* in 1941. Michaux’s provocative title inverts the Orientalist dichotomy of the European traveler in Asia, in line with Victor Segalen’s (1878–1919) *Essai sur l’exotisme. Une esthétique du divers* (*Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetic of Diversity*) and the avant-garde fascination with primitivism. By claiming a “barbarian” place of enunciation, Michaux not only questions the superiority of the West but also acknowledges that observation becomes unusual, if not inexplicable, through such a lens. *Un barbare en Asie* shifts repeatedly from the

banal to the epic and jumps to sweeping conclusions, as in the following note about the Japanese: “A people, in fact, devoid of wisdom, simplicity and depth, over-serious, though fond of toys and novelties, not easily amused, ambitious, superficial, and obviously doomed by our evils and civilization.”²⁰ Michaux’s exoticism is a deliberate exercise of modernist formalism that shows little concern for, and even less knowledge about, the cultures from which it extracts aesthetic resources.²¹

THE CHINOISERIE DETECTIVE

Seis problemas para Don Isidro Parodi (1942; *Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi*), one of the collections of detective fiction that Borges wrote in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares (1914–99) under the heteronym Honorio Bustos Domecq, includes a short story that also dramatizes a conversation between a Chinese character and a specialist in Chinese cultures. The expert in “La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An” is identified as a sinologist: “un sinólogo como usted, un europeo entre teteras” (“a sinologist, which you are; a European surrounded by the tinkle of teacups”), although the parodic epithet designates him as a Western consumer of porcelain.²² The creation of a chinoiserie philologist responds to Borges’s use of parody as a local and negative form of writing, an elusive strategy that uses grandiloquent and baroque registers to tackle the immediately referential. Through the exoticist treatment of China, Borges lays bare the representative aesthetics of nationalism by making use of its own literary procedures: local color, dialogism, and realism.

The story begins with the visit of Shu T’ung, the cultural attaché at the Chinese embassy, to the cell of Isidro Parodi, a former barber now a jailbird detective. Fully relying on Parodi’s fame as a crime investigator, Shu T’ung contacts him to solve the mystery of “the talisman of the goddess,” which had disappeared in Yunnan Province twenty years earlier and is said to have resurfaced in Buenos Aires. We learn through his flamboyant words and those of Parodi’s colleague Gervasio Montenegro that the magician Tai An was sent from China to rescue the jewel; that Tai An partnered with the Jewish cabinetmaker Nemirovsky and then established a relationship with Madame Hsin; and that the three hosted another Chinese man called Fang She, whom Tai An suspects to be the thief of the jewel. An incident of arson sparks their enmity and the eventual murder of Tai An. The second part of the story introduces

the testimony of Fang She, who visits Parodi in his cell, where together they disclose the actual events surrounding the enigma. It turns out that Fang She is the actual emissary sent in search of the jewel and that he has successfully returned it to China hidden in Tai An's corpse.

Characters shift positions in the story: the alleged detective becomes the victim and the assumed criminal happens to be the actual detective. As Gervasio Montenegro states in the pompous foreword to the collection, "La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An" presents "a new and original treatment of the classic problem of the hidden object [that] Poe inaugurates with 'The Purloined Letter.'"²³ Following in the tracks of Montenegro's statement, in *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (1994), John Irwin studies Borges's detective stories that employ this stratagem of shifting the characters' positions. Irwin points out a particular moment in "La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An" that complicates the object of Borges's parody. The scene where Tai An, Madame Hsin, Nemirovsky, and Fang She disperse into various locations that form "an interesting shape on the map of Buenos Aires, not unlike that of a triangle" evidently evokes the three to four oscillations governing the locations of the murders in Borges's famous story "La muerte y la brújula" (1944; "Death and the Compass"). Irwin suggests that Borges and Bioy do not parody Poe's original hidden-object problem but rather duplicate the structure of "The Purloined Letter" in their own story, thereby parodying the notion that it is possible to produce an original treatment of this classic problem.²⁴ I would like to consider Irwin's hypothesis on the shifting positions of characters in "La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An" as Borges's own parody of "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan". I seek not to underline the question of originality but rather to explore the epistemological shifts that occur when the dramatic action changes locales. I suggest that Borges parodies the investigative protocols of philology and detective fiction by shifting characters between these two stories. "La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An" is, in fact, one of the infinite forkings of "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan":

En todas las ficciones, cada vez que un hombre se enfrenta con diversas alternativas, opta por una y elimina las otras; en la del casi inextricable Ts'ui Pên, opta—simultáneamente—por todas. *Crea*, así, diversos porvenires, diversos tiempos, que también, proliferan y se bifurcan. De ahí las contradicciones de la novela. *Fang, digamos, tiene un secreto; un*

desconocido llama a su puerta; Fang resuelve matarlo. Naturalmente, hay varios desenlaces posibles: Fang puede matar al intruso, el intruso puede matar a Fang, ambos pueden salvarse, ambos pueden morir, etcétera. En la obra de Ts'ui Pên, todos los desenlaces ocurren; cada uno es el punto de partida de otras bifurcaciones. Alguna vez, los senderos de ese laberinto convergen; por ejemplo, usted llega a esta casa, pero en uno de los pasados posibles usted es mi enemigo, en otro mi amigo.

In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them. He creates, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork. Here, then, is the explanation of the novel's contradictions. *Fang, let us say, has a secret; a stranger calls at his door; Fang resolves to kill him. Naturally, there are several possible outcomes: Fang can kill the intruder, the intruder can kill Fang, they both can escape, they both can die, and so forth.* In the work of Ts'ui Pên, all possible outcomes occur; each one is the point of departure for other forkings. Sometimes, the paths of this labyrinth converge: for example, you arrive at this house, but in one of the possible pasts you are my enemy, in another, my friend. (my emphasis)²⁵

To illustrate Ts'ui Pên's mazelike novel, in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" Albert makes up an impromptu story, which surprisingly turns out to describe the exact same characters and subplot of "La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An": "Fang [Fang She] has a secret [he is the real emissary sent for the jewel]; a stranger [Tai An] calls at his door [to steal the jewel]; Fang resolves to kill him." The reappearance of characters in *Seis problemas para Don Isidro Parodi* is a distinctive feature of this collection. But since a minor character from Borges's most important short story becomes the protagonist of a parodic piece written almost simultaneously warrants analysis. "Who is the intruder?" "Who kills whom?" "Who escapes?" wonder both Albert in his metanarrative and Parodi throughout the investigation of the crime. In Ts'ui Pên's novel all these possible situations occur at the same time, yet in Parodi's story the apparent simultaneity of these actions is disruptive and re-

quires a detective to reconstruct the linear action and single resolution. In *Seis problemas para Don Isidro Parodi*, Borges parodies his own philosophical inquiry about the Leibnizian ordering of the world previously explored in “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” by subjecting it to the teleological narrative of detective fiction.

In addition to the possible fictional convergences of the labyrinth put forward by Albert in the above excerpt, Borges comes up with yet another potential chronotope for Albert and Yu Tsun: he displaces their conversation eleven years later to a city in Latin America. This second forking of “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” unfolds through different actors from separate contexts enacting a strikingly similar plot. Both stories have at the center of the narrative a Western sinologist (Albert/Parodi) who assists a Chinese consul (Yu T’sun/Shu T’ung) in solving an enigma from Yunnan Province, which involves a third—savant—Chinese character (Ts’ui P’ên/Tai An). While the former encounter takes place in England in 1916, the latter is set in Buenos Aires in 1927. Also, the cosmopolitan humanist/scholar mutates into an imprisoned amateur detective, and the Chinese consul no longer represents the classical literary culture of his lineage but rather the shiny materiality of Chinese goods. On the edge, the sinologist becomes an expert on Chinese export artifacts.²⁶

Chapter 1 of this book discussed chinoiserie as a transformative trend in the arts that not only shuffled exotic artifacts across geographies but also elevated commodities to the status of art. David Porter understands chinoiserie as an epistemological reaction to the traditional European gaze on China. In *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (2001), Porter claims that the idea of China changed in the eyes of the Europeans in the early seventeenth century because of various factors: modern commercial dynamics that escalated the circulation of “exotic” consumer goods in Europe, a new rationalistic paradigm, and an enlightened sense of self-assurance that defined the matrix of cultural fantasies and desires of a vast and materialistic audience.²⁷ It was no longer a small clerical elite who sought to understand China with philosophical angst, but instead sizable numbers of fashion-conscious collectors who began to approach the Chinese with light-hearted pleasure. Also the second wave of interest in things Chinese reversed the tropes and assumptions that had largely defined European ideas of China in the preceding century. Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) had gazed on China as a cultural terrain to be mapped out and mastered through heroic hermeneutics, but the seventeenth-century collectors gaily surrendered

to illegibility: chinoiserie was a glamorization of the unknown and the unknowable for its own sake. The second wave of interest's focus also differed: Jesuits had carried out the archaeological task of excavating the classical Chinese canon in search of primitive origins and the structure of Confucianism, while the consumers of the second wave of chinoiserie celebrated the superficial, glossy sheen of the porcelain vase. Porter concludes that chinoiserie emerged as a bold celebration of disorder and meaninglessness, artifice and profusion; an exuberant surrender to all that remained unassimilated by rational science and classical symmetries. Thus chinoiserie defied the very preconditions of legitimate representation.

The circulation of exotic consumer goods from China is abundant in “La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An.” Apart from the missing talisman of the goddess, the several narrators of the story mention a myriad of imported artifacts such as teacups, tea leaves, wardrobes, screens, exotic dragons, thousand-year-old lacquers, infinite bamboo lamps, an apocryphal Song dynasty vase, shelves of classical books, a straw hat, an umbrella, marble, jade, silk, sandalwood, ivory, and porcelain. In addition, the rhetoric of chinoiserie is embedded in the characters' own language. Shu T'ung exaggerates the courteous Chinese literary convention of using aphorisms and metaphors in what appear to be literal translations of Chinese proverbs, with an exaggerated amount of irrelevant information concealed by the verisimilar effect of transliteration. Two examples illustrate this hilarious speech:

Esperar que la elocuencia y la información hablen por mi boca es como esperar que la oruga hable con la medida del dromedario, o siquiera con la variedad de una jaula de grillos labrada en cartón y exornada con los doce matices razonables.

To expect eloquence and information from my mouth is to expect the caterpillar to speak with the composure of the dromedary or even with the rage of crickets in a cage wrought of cardboard and painted in the twelve prescribed colors.²⁸

En verdad, si para calcular el valor de un incalculable gabán de piel de nutria con ribetes de morsa, el juez más reputado se atiende al número de polillas que lo recorren, así también

la solidez de un hombre se estima por el exacto número de pordioseros que lo devoran.

In fact, if to assess the value of a priceless mink coat trimmed with sealskin the greatest expert takes into account the number of moths that dwell therein, so too a man's loneliness is assessed by the exact number of beggars who feed him.²⁹

Just like the heteroclitc Chinese encyclopedia, the unexpected juxtaposition of Chinese elements in Shu T'ung's speech makes the reader laugh. Gervasio Montenegro is aware of the seductive flamboyance of such style: "Apuesto que el doctor ha condimentado su narración con todo ese misterio de Oriente, que es la marca de fuego de sus interesantes monosílabos y hasta de su color y aspecto. Lejos de mí la sombra de una censura al lenguaje bíblico, grávido de sermones y de parábolas: me atrevo, sin embargo, a sospechar que usted preferirá mi *compte rendu*—todo nervio, músculo y osatura—a las adiposas metáforas de mi cliente" ("I'll wager that the doctor has spiced up his story with Oriental mystery, which is the hallmark both of his interesting monosyllables and his color and appearance. Far be it from me to censure him with biblical language, full of sermons and parables. I suspect, however, that you would rather listen to my *compte rendu*—all nerve, muscle, and bone—that to my client's ponderous metaphors").³⁰ Borges openly borrows the parodical Chinese orality from the humorous English writer Ernest Bramah (1868–1942), to whom the story is dedicated.³¹ In a short biography published in the magazine *El Hogar* in 1938, Borges reflects on Bramah's humorous English translations and tries them out in Spanish himself: "Los libros de Bramah son de naturaleza paródica: fingen ser traducciones del chino, y su desaforada perfección logró en 1922 un elogio incondicional de Hilaire Belloc. Traduzco un par de apotegmas: 'El que aspira a cenar con el vampiro, debe aportar su carne'; 'Una frugal fuente de olivas sazonadas con miel es preferible al más aparatoso pastel de lenguas de cachorro traído en cofres milenarios de laca y servido a otras personas'" ("Bramah's books are parodic in nature: they pass themselves off as translations from Chinese, and their boundless perfection achieved the unconditional praise of Hilaire Belloc in 1922. Here are two of his apothegms: 'He who aspires to dine with the vampire, must bring his own meat'; 'A frugal dish of olives seasoned with honey is preferable to the most resplendent pie of puppy tongues presented on thousand-year-old lacquered trays served to other people'").³²

Montenegro understands Shu T'ung's speech in classic Orientalist terms: it is mysterious, seductive, and colorful. His attention is focused on the sonic effect of the language rather than on its meaning. His own fantasies of Chinese discourse determine his perception: he refers to Shu T'ung's "interesting monosyllables" as if his interlocutor were speaking in Chinese and not in Spanish, which is the shared language of the characters in the story. Montenegro claims that he will also employ a similarly material approach to language—"my *compte rendu*—all nerve, muscle, and bone"—and avoid the philosophical discourse of the Chinese, which he translates in Christian terms: "Biblical language, full of sermons and parables." Language, understood as a cultural system to be analyzed by the sinologist-detective, is defined by its sheer exteriority and its visible particularity. In this respect China is constructed through a polyphonic narration that simultaneously combines a parodic saturation of particular traits of the culture (Shu T'ung) and a light-hearted Orientalist approach that blurs any specific Chinese particularity and transforms China into a generic Oriental culture (Montenegro). Even if they differ in the product, both approaches exploit local color in their portrayal of cultural difference. Vehement critics of such particularistic aesthetic, Borges and Bioy project in these characters the literary vices of their Argentine nationalist contemporaries. Gonzalo Aguilar underlines the relevance of the local and negative elements in the collection:

Local, porque en obras tan preocupadas por construirse en la órbita de una literatura cosmopolita y de espacios imaginarios, con Bustos Domecq crean al autor provinciano que exhibe todos los vicios del escritor nacional kitsch, que vive de un sueldo del Estado y lo celebra con un estilo vehemente y exaltado: Bustos Domecq, ser imaginario, es un juguete de las determinaciones de contexto a las que Borges y Bioy, como escritores de ficciones, intentan escapar. Y negativa, porque aquellos valores que invocan en sus textos firmados aparecen aquí invertidos, desplazados y como mirados en uno de los espejos de ferias que deforman los cuerpos de los visitantes. Si ya a principios de los años cuarenta, Borges y Bioy se habían inclinado por una escritura tersa y sobria, Bustos Domecq practica con desenfado los bucles de la ornamentación y la proliferación barroca.

Local, because in texts so concerned with defining themselves within the orbit of a cosmopolitan literature and imaginary spaces, manage to produce in the figure of Bustos Domecq the provincial author who exhibits all the vices of the kitsch nationalist writer, who lives off of the state and celebrates it blatantly: Bustos Domecq, an imaginary being, is a puppet of the contextual determinations that Borges and Bioy, as fiction writers, seek to escape. And negative, because those values invoked in their authored texts are here inverted, displaced, and seen as through those mirrors that distort the images of the visitors. If at the beginning of the 1940s, Borges and Bioy had opted for a smooth and sober style, Bustos Domecq unleashes the twists of ornamentation and baroque proliferation.³³

Secluded in prison, the discourse of those who visit Parodi in jail becomes the sole resource for Parodi's Chinese investigation. Unlike Stephen Albert's minute—yet fatal—exegesis of literary texts, Parodi successfully reconstructs the Chinese enigma by listening attentively to the polyphonic exoticist oral versions that give shape to his object of study.

BORGES AND WORLD LITERATURE

Both Albert and Parodi are bad readers of foreign texts. Now what is it that, for Borges, makes one a good reader of a foreign text? Right from his first collection of fiction, *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935; *Universal History of Infamy*), Borges provides a formula on how to relate to foreign literatures. He comes up with six short versions that rewrite existing European versions of Oriental fictions, biographies of US American bandits and gunmen, almost insignificant episodes concerning Chinese pirates, false Persian prophets, and Japanese warlords. Beatriz Sarlo notes that within Western culture and its versions of the Orient, Borges goes in search of marginal stories, alien to the great literary tradition and which, in some cases, reveal his taste for the detective genre or his devotion to adventure novels: "his sources are minor or little-known books (except *Life on the Mississippi* by Mark Twain) which he reworks with the freedom of a marginal who knows he is writ-

ing in the margins.”³⁴ For Borges, there is no such thing as local literatures or world literatures, but just literature, a universal category that crosses the boundaries of nationalist ideologies. He hints to this idea in his “Kafka y sus precursores” (1951; “Kafka and His Precursors”) by stating that a writer does not automatically assume previous authors from his national lineage as precursors, but instead creates his own. To illustrate this point he claims to recognize Franz Kafka’s (1883–1924) voice, habits, and gestures in texts from different geographies and epochs such as those by Aristotle (384–322 BCE), Han Yu (768–824), and Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55). If Borges can do this, it is not because Kafka deliberately ignored his Czech literary predecessors, but rather because Borges is oblivious of them and can only interpret Kafka in light of his own references.

In “El escritor argentino y la tradición” (1951; “The Argentine Writer and Tradition”), written as a lecture in 1951 and published in 1953, Borges takes this idea further when he suggests that the Argentine writer has additional advantages in their way of relating to foreign literary traditions. Similarly to Jews or the Irish, Argentines operate simultaneously in and out of their culture without feeling any special devotion to it. This, for Borges, is the only possible way to innovate within Western culture:

Creo que los argentinos, los sudamericanos en general, estamos en una situación análoga; podemos manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene consecuencias afortunadas . . . Por eso repito que no debemos temer y que debemos pensar que nuestro patrimonio es el universo; ensayar todos los temas, y no podemos concretarnos a lo argentino para ser argentinos: porque o ser argentino es una fatalidad, y en ese caso lo seremos de cualquier modo, o ser argentino es una mera afectación, una máscara.

I believe Argentines, and South Americans in general, are in an analogous situation; we can take on all the European subjects, take them [on] without superstition and with an irreverence that can have, and already has had, fortunate consequences. . . . Therefore I repeat that we must not be afraid: we must believe that the universe is our birthright and try out every subject; we cannot confine ourselves to

what is Argentine in order to be Argentine, in which case we will be Argentine whatever we do, or being Argentine is a mere affectation, a mask.³⁵

In this light, a peripheral writer relates to foreign traditions with a rhetorically productive irreverence. Beatriz Sarlo's ideologem "edge" describes this locality that operates as a central premise of Borges's literature: "a tension which runs through Borges's work and defines it: a game on the edge of various cultures, which touches on the borders, in a space that Borges would call *las orillas*. In this way a writer emerges who has two sides, who is, at once, both cosmopolitan and national."³⁶ The edge decenters the locality of the Argentine writer, and by extension the South American writer too. In a similar metonymic gesture, Borges's claim about a writer's patrimony equates the European tradition (European themes) with the West (Western culture) and the universe as a whole:

¿Cuál es la tradición argentina? Creo que nuestra tradición es toda la cultura occidental, y creo también que tenemos derecho a esta tradición, mayor que el que pueden tener los habitantes de una u otra nación occidental.

What is our Argentine tradition? I believe we can answer this question easily and that there is no problem here. I believe our tradition is all of Western culture, and I also believe we have a right to this tradition, greater than that which the inhabitants of one or another Western nation might have.³⁷

If the West is tantamount to the universe, we are left to wonder then, what does this seminal essay on the ontological privilege of the edge as the locality from which to write a cosmopolitan literature have to say about the relation of the edge to non-Western traditions? Does the irreverence suggested in Borges's essay also apply to any cultural tradition beyond the West? How does the edge operate as a locality from which to read other edges, or, in the case of China, from which to read other non-Western centers?

The surprisingly numerous reviews of Chinese literature published in the literary magazines *El Hogar* and *Sur* as well as in the newspaper *La Nación* between 1937 and 1942 account for the singular canon of sinology that Borges assembles on the edge. Borges delimits a contingent

corpus of Chinese literature, translates these works without the originals, and capitalizes on the constraints of the literary market to circulate them. If we understand world literature in dynamic terms, “not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike,” then I argue that Borges’s sinology is a metaliterary exercise of World Literature, which postulates indiscipline and translatability as a method.³⁸ His reviews of Chinese literature explore and fictionalize the actual and potential forms of circulation of literature between distant traditions. Given Borges’s ignorance of the Chinese language and the lack of an institutional framework to produce scholarship and translation of Chinese literature in Argentina, Borges is a distant reader who relies on the work of foreign sinologists. Also, because of the central place that he occupies in the Argentine cultural field in the 1940s and the privilege that his own locality grants him in reading foreign literatures, he circulates Chinese literature through fictional mediations.

Borges reviewed foreign literatures for various publications throughout his life, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s. The most important venue for these was *Sur*, the literary magazine founded by the Argentine writer and patron of the arts Victoria Ocampo (1890–1979), printed regularly between 1931 and 1970, and irregularly thereafter “as an elegant fusion of fiction, poetry, philosophy, plastic arts, history and social commentary.”³⁹ Arguably the most important Latin American literary publication of the twentieth century, its pages were the Spanish-language center of cultural debates for the Latin American, North American, and European intellectuals who collaborated consistently in it. Borges joined the editorial board of *Sur* at its inception and there published the first versions of his most celebrated pieces of fiction, hundreds of reviews, and his contributions to crucial literary debates. From 1936 to 1939, Borges also served as director of the section “Foreign Books and Authors” for the women’s magazine *El Hogar*, where he published essays, reviews of literary and theoretical works, and the later renowned “synthetic biographies,” short intellectual genealogies of writers from around the world. Despite its generally light consumption, *El Hogar* attained strong literary quality over the years and included as collaborators central figures of the Argentine intellectual field, such as Roberto Arlt (1900–1942), Ezequiel Martínez Estrada (1895–1964), and Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888–1963). These reviews are an invaluable source to reflect on Borges’s own exer-

cises in literary criticism and his formulation of the precursors that will inform his mature work.

A PERSONAL ANTHOLOGY

Among the many foreign texts that Borges reviewed for *La Nación*, *Sur*, and *El Hogar*, during the period from 1937 to 1942 he penned eight reviews of recent translations of Chinese classical works (table 1). The reviews cover various genres and time periods and sample canonical works of Chinese ancient and premodern literature translated into German and English. There is an evident preference for narrative in the choice to review three of the “Four Great Classical Novels” (*Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Water Margin*, and *Journey to the West/Monkey*) and the erotic narrative *The Plum in the Golden Vase*.⁴⁰ Regarding poetry, he includes the oldest collection of poetry (*Book of Songs*) and two anthologies of popular songs and fables (*The Dragon Book* and *Chinese Folk Tales and Fairy Tales*). Lastly, there is a comment on a collection of extracts of the philosophers Zhuangzi, Mengzi, and Han Feizi (*Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*).

At first glance, eight reviews on Chinese literature may appear a rather meager figure since, in total, Borges wrote around one thousand critical texts on literature from all latitudes and time periods. Yet, considering the almost invisible presence of Chinese literature in Argentina in the 1930s, this number becomes relevant in significant ways. At that time, no infrastructure existed for the study of Chinese culture in Argentina. The pioneers in Asian Studies were amateur critics of comparative religions who started publishing about Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam in the late 1920s. But in the 1960s specialized Chinese Studies programs took shape with the establishment of the Escuela de Estudios Orientales and the Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Comparadas Oriente y Occidente.⁴¹ Furthermore, at the time when Borges was writing his reviews, Chinese translations into Spanish were scant since, with the rare exceptions of individual figures like Marcela de Juan (1905–81) who could translate directly from Chinese sources, sinology as an academic discipline had not developed in Spain as it had in the rest of Europe in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴² Because of this, the practice field for translating Chinese literature into Spanish (mainly from prior translations) developed insufficiently in the larger Spanish-American market. The limited circulation of Chinese literature in Argentina is noteworthy

Table 1. Jorge Luis Borges's reviews of translations of Chinese literature, 1937-42

Borges's review	European translation reviewed	Original Chinese source
" <i>El sueño del aposento rojo</i> , de Tsao Hsue Kin," <i>El Hogar</i> 1466, November 19, 1937	Franz Kuhn, <i>Der Traum der rotten Kammer</i> (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1932)*	Cao Xueqin, <i>Dream of the Red Chamber (Hongloumeng)</i> , eighteenth century
" <i>Chinese Fairy Tales and Folk Tales</i> , traducidos por Wolfram Eberhard," <i>El Hogar</i> 1477, February 4, 1938	Wolfram Eberhard, <i>Chinese Fairy Tales and Folk Tales</i> (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Library Editions, 1937)*	Various Chinese fairy tales and folk tales
" <i>Die Raueber vom Liang Schan Moor</i> , de Shi Nai An," <i>El Hogar</i> 1503, August 5, 1938	Franz Kuhn, <i>Die Räuber: Einer alten Chinesischen Ausgabe</i> (Leipzig: Im Insel Verlag, 1934)*	Shi Nai'an, <i>Water Margin (Shuibuzhuan)</i> , fourteenth century
"Una versión de los cantares más antiguos del mundo," <i>El Hogar</i> 1515, October 28, 1938	Arthur Waley, <i>The Book of Songs</i> (London: Allen & Unwin, 1937)*	<i>The Book of Songs (Shijing)</i> , tenth to seventh centuries BCE
"Un museo de literatura oriental," <i>El Hogar</i> 1544, May 19, 1939	Dora E. Edwards, <i>The Dragon Book</i> (London: W. Hodge, 1938)*	Excerpts of prose and poetry from different periods of Chinese literature
"Clement Egerton, <i>The Golden Lotus</i> , Routledge," <i>Sur</i> 60, September 1939	Clement Egerton, <i>The Golden Lotus; A Translation from the Chinese Original of the Novel, Chin p'ing mei</i> (London: G. Routledge, 1939) Franz Kuhn, <i>Kin ping meh oder die abenteuerliche Geschichte von Hsi Men und seinen sechs Frauen</i> (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1931)	Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng, <i>The Golden Lotus / The Plum in the Golden Vase (Jinpingmei)</i> , seventeenth century
"Arthur Waley: <i>Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China</i> , Allen and Unwin," <i>Sur</i> 71, August 1940	Arthur Waley, <i>Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China</i> (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1939)	Fragments of Zhuangzi, Mengzi, and Han Feizi, third to fourth century BCE
"Sobre una alegoría china," <i>La Nación</i> , October 25, 1942	Arthur Waley, <i>Monkey</i> (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1942)*	Wu Cheng'en, <i>Monkey/Journey to the West (Xiyouji)</i> , sixteenth century

*Citations reconstructed by author, not provided in the review.

for other reasons, which have to do with the loosely articulated Chinese immigrant population of the time. The trajectory of the Chinese in Argentina challenges the thesis by which the formation and circulation of ideas about a foreign culture in a community is strongly shaped by the transnational links of this culture's corresponding immigrant group.⁴³ Because the first Chinese immigrants who arrived in 1910 were few and because they rapidly married and mixed with the local population, little evidence remains of the formation or existence of institutions or associations that promoted any literary material in Chinese or on Chinese matters in the late 1930s and 1940s.

The criteria for Borges's choice of titles to review, and his actual access to such books, are matters for speculation. It is widely known that he was familiar with the work of the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (365–290 BCE) since he learned about them during his teenage years from Herbert Allen Giles's *Chuang Tzŭ: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer* (1889), which he had acquired in Geneva and refers to as his introduction to Oriental literatures.⁴⁴ The original copy of this book is available at the Fundación Internacional Jorge Luis Borges in Buenos Aires, which gathers many of the volumes that Borges collected throughout his life. This collection, however, does not include any of the eight editions of the volumes reviewed for *El Hogar, Sur*, or *La Nación* mentioned in the middle column of table 1. Among the two dozen Chinese titles at the Fundación, there are later editions of these texts: a 1984 version of Arthur Waley's *Monkey*, as well as several German and French editions of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* that are all from the 1970s and 1980s. The Chinese titles catalogued in the Borges Collection at Argentina's National Library (Biblioteca Nacional), which comprises the personal books that Borges donated to the institution when his tenure as director concluded (1955–73), do not correspond to any of these editions either, as those are books on Chinese philosophy and Buddhism, a topic on which Borges wrote extensively in his later years.⁴⁵ Borges might have gotten rid of the editions that he reviewed in 1937–42 at some point, since, as has been extensively demonstrated, he periodically cleared his library, replacing old editions with newer and more refined ones.

Reference books on China might have provided Borges with a general understanding of Chinese literature. Herbert Allen Giles's *History of Chinese Literature* (1901) and Marcel Granet's *La pensée chinoise* (1934) are the two most frequently referenced texts in his fictional essays from the 1950s (see "Kafka y sus precusores" ["Kafka and His Precursors"]; "Avatares de la tortuga" ["Avatars of the Tortoise"]; "La

muralla y los libros” [“The Wall and the Books”]; and “Sobre los clásicos” [“On the Classics”]). Of special relevance is the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a favorite of Borges. He ironizes about his generalist’s approach to China through such nonspecialized sources in “Palabrería para versos” (1926; Talk on verse): “Mis autoridades para este rato de sinología son F. Graebner (*El mundo del hombre primitivo*, cuarto capítulo) y Douglas en la *Enciclopedia Britannica*” (My authoritative sources for this moment of sinology are F. Graebner [*The World View of the Primitives*, chapter 4] and Douglas, in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*).⁴⁶

The personal libraries of his cosmopolitan circle of friends could also have been an additional source of Chinese readings. There is ample evidence that Adolfo Bioy Casares was interested in Chinese literature; his conversations with Borges on the subject recorded in the journal book *Borges* (2009), their inclusion of Zhuangzi in their collaborative project *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1940; *The Book of Fantasy*) discussed in the introduction, and Bioy’s own reviews on Chinese Literature in *Sur*, such as “V. W. W. S. Purcel: *The Spirit of Chinese Poetry*” (1941). Such was also the case of the Argentine surrealist artist Xul Solar (1887–1963), who in 1924 interpreted the sixty-four hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* (*I-Ching*) into visions, and later published it in an invented neocriollo language under the title of *Relatos de los mundos superiores* (Tales of the superior worlds).⁴⁷

Yet these local factors do not amount to clues about the sources of these book reviews. The dates of publication of the eight translations reviewed for *El Hogar*, *Sur*, and *La Nación* suggest an immediate access to recent publications. To some extent, it was common for publishers to send recent titles directly to literary magazines like *Sur* or *El Hogar*.⁴⁸ This could explain the preeminence of Arthur Waley, the most popular Chinese translator of the period, in Borges’s own selection of Chinese texts. Even considering that Borges had a particular sympathy for Waley’s nonacademic credentials and poetic sensibility (“Waley es uno de los pocos sinólogos que es también un hombre de letras”; “one of the very few Sinologists who happens to be a lettered person”),⁴⁹ Waley’s translations not only expanded the readership of Chinese poetry to a larger audience beyond academic circles in Britain but also established a fruitful dialogue with the ideogrammatic experiments of Anglo-American modernists (e.g., Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa), as I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 4. The generalized interest in Chinese literature prompted by the modernist sinophilia also accounts

for the decision of larger publishing houses like the British George Allen & Unwin or Routledge to release new translations of Chinese classics, since British sinology was in full swing in the interwar period.

It should be noted that in the 1930s a significant market existed for books in French, English, and German language in Argentina because the lettered elites were still educated in foreign languages and the local publishing industry privileged European titles in its catalogs. As will be discussed in chapter 3, after the so-called golden age of the publishing industry in Argentina (1935–55) that brought about the institutionalization of translation into Spanish, the consumption of literature in foreign languages diminished, and the nature of the reading public changed significantly.⁵⁰ In *Borges, libros y lecturas: Catálogo de la colección Jorge Luis Borges en la Biblioteca Nacional* (2010), Laura Rosato and Germán Álvarez reconstruct the circuit of the specialized bookstores that Borges visited regularly in Buenos Aires, among which are the English Mackern's and Mitchell's, the German Pygmalion, the Goethe Institut's Bookstore, and Librería Sarmiento.⁵¹ As the titles from the collection held in Argentina's National Library bear the seals of the bookstores where they were acquired, their provenance can easily be traced. Since most of the Chinese titles from the period cataloged at the National Library were purchased in the mentioned bookstores, it is possible that several of the Chinese translations reviewed for *El Hogar*, *Sur*, and *La Nación* were also purchased there. These bookstores were run by learned booksellers who imported specialized material on demand. Such personalized dynamics of the literary market is a central point in understanding the mechanisms by which Borges could have tailored such a diverse array of sources. Rosato and Alvarez underline the centrality of foreign languages in the construction of Borges's personal library:

fue el dominio del inglés, y también del alemán, lo que le permitió acceder a temas y fuentes bibliográficas absolutamente desconocidas e inaccesibles para el público de habla hispana. Textos y autores que, aun en Europa eran considerados oscuros, o menores para el canon literario. La lectura de estos autores periféricos le proporcionó una inagotable fuente de temas, citas y referencias plenas de originalidad.

Borges's mastery of English, and also German, was the key that gave him access to topics and bibliographical sources ab-

solutely unknown and inaccessible to the Spanish-speaking public. Texts and authors that, even in Europe, were still considered obscure or minor to the literary canon. The reading of these peripheral authors provided him with an inexhaustible source of topics, quotations and references fraught with originality.⁵²

In sum, Borges's Chinese catalog, comprising German and English translations, is not a reflection of the disciplinary frameworks or literary trends of a peripheral market, but rather a deliberate construction made by a cosmopolitan writer on the edge. Borges leverages two cosmopolitan assets—a rich literary market and his multilingual education—to establish a fictional sinology. In this sense, these reviews are an invaluable document of literary criticism and experimentation. They evidence the personal Chinese catalog that would nourish Borges's own literature in the form of themes, quotes, and original references from a tradition that is seemingly alien to the Argentine cultural field but central in Borges's literary cartography. In these eight reviews of Chinese literature, Borges sketches an *ars critica* that attacks the hermeneutic method of philology. First, his claims that translations are superior to originals question the mandate that the philologist master source languages. Additionally, his preference for the fantastic over realism contests the principle of mimesis, a hallmark of hermeneutical philology.

OPAQUE TRANSLATIONS

In what I consider one of his boldest reviews, Borges capitalizes on the constraints imposed by the war on the literary market and proposes a novel model of world literature without books. The first lines of the piece “Clement Egerton, *The Golden Lotus*, Routledge” reads

Quince tenaces años ha dedicado el sociólogo Clement Egerton a traducir del chino esta novela erótica y trágica. 4 nobles volúmenes abarca la traducción y vale—inaccesiblemente—4 guineas. Por esta razón y por otra (que es la segunda guerra europea de nuestro siglo) no la tengo a mano para redactar esta página. Conozco, sin embargo, la obra: hace un par de años he leído sin tedio (y con algún horror agradable) la versión alemana de Franz Kuhn: *Kin Ping Meh*, Leipzig,

1929. Ese volúmen está asesorándome ahora. Egerton suele recurrir al remoto latín para velar las precisiones físicas del autor; el doctor Kuhn no excluye la obscenidad.

The sociologist Clement Egerton has dedicated fifteen tenacious years to translating this erotic and tragic novel from the Chinese. The translation consists of 4 noble volumes and its—inaccessible—price is 4 guineas. For this and another reason (the second European war of our century) I don't have it with me to draft these pages. I am, however, familiar with the work: a few years ago I read—without boredom and with some pleasant horror—Franz Kuhn's German version: *Kin Ping Meh*, Leipzig, 1929. I'm using this volume as a reference right now. Egerton uses the remote Latin to conceal the author's physical traits; Dr. Kuhn does not hide impropriety.⁵³

Right from the opening paragraph of the review of the recent translation of the Ming dynasty novel *Jinpingmei* (c. 1610), Borges acknowledges that he does not have the book on hand to write the commentary. Because the recent title is too expensive and, anyway, the war obstructs its shipping, he will base his notes on a previous German version by sinologist Franz Kuhn (1884–1961) discussed above. This gesture could initially be read as a lament, specifically that of the philologist detached from his books, a model of the exiled intellectual like the haunting figure of Erich Auerbach (1892–1957) bookless in Turkey. Yet it can also be read in a positive light: even if the review is a genre that takes recently published material as its object, Borges is not discouraged to carry on without the source in hand. A few notes about Egerton's years working on the translation obtained from secondary sources, brief references to the time and place of publication, and a close reading of the title (the remark on the choice of Latin to conceal indecorous passages) account for Borges's review of the English version. We might presume he had read a review of the book, since, looking at the two extant versions, the information he provides is accurate. Yet, as Sylvia Molloy asserts of Borges's vague erudition:

Poco importa que Borges hable de obras que ha leído o que aproveche los textos de quienes han leído las obras de las que quiere hablar. Basta comprobar con qué ligereza se des-

entiende del tradicional prestigio de la erudición. Ya lo señalaba Etienne, hace varios años, que Borges se refería al *Hong Leou Mong*, pero de tal modo que habría que ser muy astuto para saber si lo ha leído (en una época en que pocos lectores de extremo occidente habrían podido citar los títulos exactos de *dos* novelas chinas.”

It does not matter much whether Borges speaks about works he has read, or if he uses other texts that refer to the works that he wants to discuss. He flippantly bypasses the traditional prestige of erudition. Etienne noted several years ago that Borges would quote the *Hong Leou Mong* in such a way that it would take a great deal of wit to tell if he had actually read it [at a time when only few readers in the Far West would have been able to quote the exact titles of *two* Chinese novels].⁵⁴

What is the object of this review then? Borges claims to be familiar with “la obra” but points to another version: “Franz Kuhn: *Kin Ping Meh*, Leipzig, 1929.” The comparison of different translations is a recurrent approach to Chinese literature in these reviews:

1.

He confesado que me aburren los cuentos de hadas; ahora confieso que he leído con interés los que integran la primera mitad de este libro. Lo mismo me pasó, hace diez años, con los *Chinesisch Volksmaerchen* de Wilhelm.

I have confessed that I find fairy tales boring; let me now confess that I have eagerly read those in the first half of this book. The same thing happened to me ten years ago, with Wilhelm’s *Chinesisch Volksmaerchen*.⁵⁵

2.

De la novela traducida por Waley conozco una versión anterior, de Timothy Richard, curiosamente titulada *A Mission to Heaven* (Shanghai, 1940). También he recorrido las ex-

certas que incluye Giles en su *History of Chinese Literature* (1901) y Sung-Nien Hsu en la *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise* (1933).

I have read an earlier version to Waley's translation of the novel, one by Timothy Richard, curiously titled *A Mission to Heaven* (Shanghai, 1940). I have also skimmed the excerpts Giles includes in his *History of Chinese Literature* (1901) and Sung-Nien Hsu in the *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise*.⁵⁶

Borges follows the same methodology employed in his essays “Los traductores de las 1001 noches” (1936; “The Translators of The Thousands and One Nights”) and “Las versiones homéricas” (1932; “The Homeric Versions”), in which he analyzes different versions of *Arabian Nights* and *The Iliad*, respectively, to reconstruct the original texts, which he cannot access due to his ignorance of Arabic and Greek. But going against what Borges calls the “superstition” regarding infidel translations (best summarized in the oft-cited Italian sentence “traduttore traditore”), his comparative method acknowledges the authority of the translation but not that of the source text. Borges affirms the essential fluidity of the original, which is nothing but a retrospective illusion that emerges only after being contrasted with its subsequent versions: “presuponer que toda recombinación de elementos es obligatoriamente inferior a su original, es presuponer que el borrador es obligatoriamente inferior al borrador H—ya que no puede haber sino borradores. El concepto de texto definitivo no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio” (“To assume that every recombination of elements is necessarily inferior to its original form is to assume that draft 9 is necessarily inferior to draft H—for there can be only drafts. The concept of the definitive text corresponds only to religion and exhaustion”).⁵⁷ If nineteenth-century philologists sought to reconstruct national traditions by tracing the historical development of manuscripts and diachronic analysis of language, Borges employs a similar methodology but with the exact opposite aim: to emphasize the literary value of those versions and translations that are farthest from “original” texts and have thus been further transformed in the several instances of reading and have “gained in translation.” In this view of translation, ignorance of the source language is by no means detrimental to a legiti-

mate reading of foreign literatures, but rather a condition of possibility of world literature.

Versions may vary in time and space, and even within the same language, since there are different ways of translating. Borges further develops this idea in these two essays on translation. He claims that Antoine Galland (1646–1715), Edward William Lane (1801–76), Richard Francis Burton (1821–90), Jean-Charles Mardrus (1868–1949), and the other translators of *The Thousand and One Nights*, bring to a text a set of cultural assumptions, historical backgrounds, and social conditionings, in such a way that, even within the same nation and language, any word from the original might have contradictory translations in the target language. In the early essay “Las dos maneras de traducir” (1926; “The Two Types of Translation”), Borges presents the two most frequent methods of translation and associates them with a literary ideology. Classicists prefer to paraphrase because they prize the work over the artist; they seek smoothness in translation at the cost of “los localismos, las rarezas, las contingencias” (localisms, quirks, contingencies) and are willing to leave behind what is associated with the artist: the specific elements of the poetic voice, the artist’s words, syntax, and metaphors (which, Borges reminds us in this essay, correspond to choices of the language, not the artist).⁵⁸ Romantics, on the other hand, revere the poetic subject at the expense of the work of art, thus honoring the literality of the author’s word choices. Even if Borges acknowledges that both forms operate in tension with one another, he indicates a preference for the paraphrase over the literal method.

Chinese literature—or any literature whose original language is inaccessible to him—seems to further complicate this translation framework, since the opacity produced by the source language obscures the reader’s awareness of the styles of translation in play. In a review of Arthur Waley’s 1937 translation of *Book of Songs*, Borges complains about having to read “opaque” translations:

Al recorrer con entusiasmo y credulidad la versión inglesa de cierto filósofo chino di con un memorable pasaje: “*A un condenado a muerte no le importa bordear un precipicio, porque ha renunciado a la vida.*” En ese punto el traductor colocó un asterisco y me advirtió que su interpretación era preferible a la de otro sinólogo rival que traducía de esta manera: “*Los sirvientes destruyen las obras de arte,*

para no tener que juzgar sus bellezas y sus defectos.” Entonces como Paolo y Francesca, dejé de leer. Un misterioso escepticismo se había deslizado en mi alma. Cada vez que el destino me sitúa frente a la “versión literal” de alguna obra maestra de la literatura china o arábiga, recuerdo este penoso incidente.

As I read the English version of a Chinese philosopher with enthusiasm and gullibility, I came across a memorable passage: *A one-legged man discards ornament, his exterior not being open to commendation.* In a footnote the translator explained that his own interpretation was far better than that of a rival sinologist who had translated the phrase this way: *Servants will tear up a portrait, not liking to be confronted with its beauties and its defects.* Thus, like Paolo and Francesca, I stopped reading. A mysterious skepticism took over my soul. Every time destiny puts a “literal” version of a masterpiece of Chinese or Arabic literature in front of me, I recall this painful episode.⁵⁹

Putting himself in the shoes of the superstitious reader of translations, disappointed at the impossibility of accessing the original, Borges describes as “painful” the incapacity to decode the original line in a language that he cannot access, in this case Chinese. Because, even when translating word for word from such languages, there are still various possible translations into English, with no hints whatsoever as to which one is the most “faithful.” Yet Borges plays the devil’s advocate in this review, since he too is translating indirectly from the English versions of the Chinese philosopher mentioned by the translator. The dispute between the two sinologists in the quote happens to be real, and it is found in the introduction to Borges’s favorite book *Chuang Tzū: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer* by Giles:

Only one previous attempt has been made to place Chuang Tzu in the hands of English readers (Frederic Henry Balfour, *The Divine Classic of Nan-hua*. F.R.G.S., Shanghai and London, 1881). In that case, the knowledge of the Chinese language possessed by the translator was altogether too elementary to justify such an attempt.*

*One example will suffice. In ch. xxiii (see p. 309) there occurs a short sentence which means, “A *one-legged man discards ornament, his exterior not being open to commendation.*” Mr. Balfour translated this as follows: “*Servants will tear up a portrait, not liking to be confronted with its beauties and its defects.*”⁶⁰

Now let us compare the two rival passages quoted in Giles’s preface with Borges’s own translations of them into Spanish in the review of Waley’s *Book of Songs*:

(Giles) A one-legged man discards ornament, his exterior not being open to commendation.

(Borges) *A un condenado a muerte no le importa bordear un precipicio, porque ha renunciado a la vida.*

(Balfour) Servants will tear up a portrait, not liking to be confronted with its beauties and its defects.

(Borges) *Los sirvientes destruyen las obras de arte, para no tener que juzgar sus bellezas y sus defectos.*

While Borges’s translation of Giles’s line evidences how he opted to paraphrase, the translation of Balfour’s phrase imitates the original word for word. Borges honors Balfour’s content and semantic fields (servants, beauty, defects). Yet, in translating Giles’s, Borges retains the general idea but changes the depiction of the circumstances. Giles describes a man who does not care about ornamentation, since his amputated leg already undermines his beauty. Borges paraphrases this idea with the metaphor of suicide: a man who does not mind falling off a cliff, since he is already sentenced to death. That is, even if the aim of the example is to illustrate Giles’s distress and transliterate the two different English translations from the book on Zhuangzi, Borges engages in the chain of translating. This adds yet another layer to the complex framework of translation. Indirect translation evidences the simultaneous or multiple choices for literality or paraphrase since it puts different layers into play. Yet again, this simultaneity is not a constraint to access an alleged original, but rather an affirmation of the superiority of the translation over the source text.

MIMESIS

In a thorough study of the literary nature of Borges's criticism, Sergio Pastormerlo suggests that Borges should be read as a "writer critic," an advocate of a form of criticism defined in strictly negative terms vis-à-vis conventional disciplinary rules:

Es difícil describir la crítica borgeana sin confrontarla con las modalidades más académicas de la crítica universitaria. Decir que no disimula las huellas de la subjetividad, que está escrita en una primera persona de la autobiografía, que expone las valoraciones de una manera bien directa, que se desentien- de de los aparatos conceptuales de época y los circuitos de lecturas obligatorias, que sus argumentaciones avanzan rá- pidamente, que está regida por el arte de la brevedad y la simplificación, que es entretenida, no equivale a decir, reitera- damente, que es un negativo de la crítica académica?

It is difficult to describe Borgesian criticism without confronting it with the most scholarly modalities of academic criticism. Stating that it does not hide the traces of subjectivity, that it is written in the first person of the autobiographi- cal style, that it exhibits judgments in a rather direct fashion, that it pays little attention to the conceptual frameworks and the obligatory literary circuits of the time, that its argumen- tations move quickly, that it is directed by the art of brevity and simplification, that it is entertaining, does not actually amount to saying, once again, that it is the negative of aca- demic criticism?⁶¹

Borges's slippery use of literary criticism justifies its transversal nature: it crosses genres, traditions, and trends without giving notice. It steps away from the canon to follow a personal rather than consensual line of argumentation.

In her analysis of Borges's reading of Cao Xueqin's *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the highest achievement of the classical narrative produced during the Qing dynasty, Haiqin Sun claims that Borges's review in *El Hogar* is determined by the illusion of scale: it does not provide much analysis to further understand the Chinese classic, since its central point is to show the amazement of a Western writer at a novel containing

more than one hundred chapters and more than three hundred characters: “different from most of the *Hong Lou Meng*’s scholars, Borges’s focus is not on certain specific aspects of the novel, such as its characters, plots, narrative strategies, or historical contexts, but on the general fact that a novel can have so vast a textual construction.”⁶² Borges is indeed overwhelmed by this accumulation of characters that eventually keeps him from following the plot: “la novela prosigue de una manera un tanto irresponsable o insípida; los personajes secundarios *pululan* y no sabemos bien cuál es cuál” (the novel progresses insipidly and irresponsibly: secondary characters swarm so much that we lose track of them).⁶³ What might appear to be an impressionistic reading of Chinese narrative is actually a bold critique of realism. In the review Borges is overwhelmed only if we assume that he follows the mimetic principle of the nineteenth-century novel by which characters represent social types and interact organically in the plot, a principle that Georg Lukács (1885–1971) referred to as the “biographical form” of the novel: “On the one hand, the scope of the world is limited by the scope of the hero’s possible experiences and its mass is organized by the orientation of his development towards finding the meaning of life in self-recognition; on the other hand, the discretely heterogeneous mass of isolated persons, non-sensuous structures and meaningless events receives a unified articulation by the relating of each separate element to the central character and the problem symbolized by the story of his life.”⁶⁴ According to Borges, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* is free of dramatic biographism, since the mass of secondary characters takes over the narration without articulating its action in relation to the hero, but instead “swarming” to the extent that they blur the plot. Suspicious of realism, Borges further mocks this representative device from the theory of the novel. In reference to the aforementioned *Jinpingmei* he argues that Chinese novels have countless characters, because, along this rationale, the larger the population of a nation, the larger the stock of characters: “Es fama que las novelas chinas están abarrotadas de gente, como el Imperio Chino. En el *King Ping Meh*, la pululación de Volk ohne Raum no es indescifrable, como en otros libros asiáticos” (It is well known that Chinese novels are packed with people, just like the Chinese Empire. Unlike other Asian books, in the *King Ping Meh*, the swarming of Volk ohne Raum is not indecipherable).⁶⁵ Even if the *Jinpingmei* reflects Chinese demography, Borges notes that this particular novel is an exception to the rule of the overpopulation of Asian books, since the usual “swarming” of characters can in fact be deciphered. The reason for this is clear:

the characters of this novel are “people without space,” as suggested by the German words “Volk ohne Raum,” and thus have no bonds to a specific country. Emancipated from any terrain, the characters are not tied to a referential space and are thus free of any social—mimetic—function. The use of this German expression to describe the emancipation of characters from actual demographics has three distinct but crucial implications for Borges’s notion of mimesis; namely, the oblique treatment of reality, his theory of the fantastic, and the critique of philological hermeneutics.

First, Borges does read Chinese novels in allegorical terms, yet this allegorical reading does not link the novels to their context of production, but to the context of consumption. The allusion to Nazism is evident in the quote of the German slogan “Volk ohne Raum” used in 1939 to justify the military expansion to recuperate the “living space” (*lebensraum*) of German populations locked out of German borders after the Treaty of Versailles (1919). Fascism is a constant anxiety in Borges’s texts from this period, yet this preoccupation takes shape obliquely. Just like “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” is set in 1916 but actually reveals anxieties of World War II, Borges’s literature discusses contemporary reality through a form of writing inherently defined by literary autonomy. Numerous texts from this period point to cultural problems that arose during the years of fascism without dealing with them explicitly or referring to them politically or historically. As Annick Louis observes in *Borges ante el fascismo* (2007): “Borges parece haber propuesto en su ficción—a sus contemporáneos (argentinos)—una fórmula ilegible, intentó una estética donde lo que llamamos ‘realidad’ se vincula de un modo relativamente inédito o, al menos, inesperado con lo literario: un modo oblicuo, lateral” (In his fiction Borges seems to have proposed—to his (Argentine) contemporaries—an unreadable formula. He develops an aesthetic where what we call “reality” is connected in a relatively new, or, at least, unexpected way to the literary: an oblique, lateral way).⁶⁶ By using the expression “Volk ohne Raum” to talk about Chinese fiction, Borges engages in a vehement critique of authoritarianism, yet in an elusive way that privileges literary autonomy over mimetic representation.

Second, it could be argued that by reading a Chinese novel to actually talk about German politics, Borges anticipates the postcolonial critique of the imperative of national allegory in Third World. In the oft-quoted article “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (1986), Fredric Jameson suggests that fiction produced in

Africa, South America, and Southern Asia could be represented as having a single cultural logic, one inescapably linked to the representation of the national: “Third-World texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.”⁶⁷ Borges indeed resists reading literature produced in China solely as a national allegory of China, yet his geopolitical agenda is much more ambitious than the critique of underdevelopment: not because China—or Argentina—are allegedly part of the Third World and thus prone to adopting allegorical forms of representation, but because allegory as such is a futile premise of the realist novel. For Borges any representation of reality is an illusion, more so if this reality is of a “national” nature. In other reviews, Borges will go further by claiming that any realist reading of Chinese novels is futile, since Chinese literature is essentially fantastic. One example is: “Los chinos, en verdad, carecen de literatura fantástica porque todos sus libros, en algún momento lo son” (The Chinese, actually, do not have any fantastic literature because all their books, to some extent, are fantastic.)⁶⁸ Another example is: “La literatura china no sabe de “novelas fantásticas,” porque todas, en algún momento, lo son” (Chinese literature is alien to “fantastic novels” because all of them are, to some extent, fantastic.)⁶⁹

Like the critique of national allegory, these two statements are less concerned with particularistic aesthetics than with Borges’s own distrust toward the mimetic premise of the novel. By reviewing in total four translations of Chinese novels (the novel being a secondary genre for Borges), Borges further develops his theory of the fantastic outlined in “El arte narrativo y la magia” (1932; “Narrative Art and Magic”), an essay in which he deliberately chooses figures that are marginal to the great tradition of the novel to illustrate the deficiencies of realism, as well as its potential for the fantastic. The Chinese novel is also a relatively marginal genre within the Asian tradition, Borges tells us in the voice of the sinologist Stephen Albert in “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan”: “En su país, la novela es un género subalterno; en aquel tiempo era un género despreciable. Ts’ui Pên fue un novelista genial, pero también fue un hombre de letras que sin duda no se consideró un mero novelista” (“In your country, the novel is a subsidiary form of literature; in Ts’ui Pên’s time it was a despicable form. Ts’ui Pên was a brilliant novelist, but he was also a man of letters who doubtless did not

consider himself a mere novelist”).⁷⁰ Emir Rodríguez Monegal observes that by studying realist marginalia, Borges prepares his readers for the fiction that he will start publishing in the late 1930s: “En vez de fundar una ‘poética de la narración,’ funda (echa las bases) de una ‘poética’ de su futura ficción” (Instead of founding a “poetic of narration,” he founds [sets the foundations for] a “poetic” of future fiction).⁷¹ After all, the apparently impressionistic note on the infinite “swarming” of characters in Chinese novels turns out to be the narrative core of the fantastic labyrinthine structure of Borges’s most idiosyncratic fiction; in “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan,” Ts’ui Pên unfolds the idea verbatim: “Volví a sentir esa pululación de que hablé. Me pareció que el húmedo jardín que rodeaba la casa estaba saturado hasta lo infinito de invisibles personas. Esas personas eran Albert y yo, secretos, atareados y multiformes en otras dimensiones de tiempo” (“Once again I felt the swarming sensation of which I have spoken. It seemed to me that the humid garden that surrounded the house was infinitely saturated with invisible persons. These persons were Albert and I, secret, busy and multiform in other dimensions of time”).⁷² In this light, Borges’s sinology on the edge is not only a fictional epistemology of China but also a pretext of fiction.

Last, reading a novel in terms of the context of the reader, as Borges does, rather than that of the producer of the text, attacks the very principle of philological interpretation: the philologist’s aspiration to identify with the author, which Edward Said describes as follows: “in order to be able to understand a humanistic text, one must try to do so as if one is the author of that text, living the author’s reality, undergoing the kind of life experiences intrinsic to his or her life, and so forth, all by that combination of erudition and sympathy that is the hallmark of philological hermeneutics.”⁷³ In the introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition of Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis* (originally published in 1953), Said reminds us of the formidable training of Romance philologists, who, apart from having insatiable erudition and proficiency in classical and Latin-based languages, received formal training in various humanistic disciplines so as to immerse themselves in “all the available written documents in one or several Romance languages, from numismatics to epigraphy, from stylistics to archival research, from rhetoric and law to an all-embracing working idea of literature that included chronicles, epics, sermons, drama, stories, and essays.”⁷⁴ As has been discussed throughout this chapter, Borges’s erudition has nothing to do with the scholarly expertise described above: albeit remarkable, it

is contingent, asystematic, and alien in unique ways to the consensual procedures of a learned community. What is at stake in Borges's reformulation of philology is a critique of its nationalistic discourse of origin, the ability "to re-establish that which appears to have been lost in the dense proliferation of the past: the author's scrupulous intent, the text's original form, and the nation's immaculate and distant origins."⁷⁵ After all, during the highly productive Chinese years—when he wrote fiction about sinologists and Chinese encyclopedias, and reviews of Chinese literature—Borges was particularly concerned about the development of philology as a modern scientific discipline in Latin America, a concern best summarized in his famous 1941 essay "Las alarmas del doctor Américo Castro" ("The Alarms of Doctor Américo Castro").⁷⁶ In this exceptionally playful review of the Spanish philologist Américo Castro's *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense y su sentido histórico* (The linguistic peculiarities of the River Plate region and their historical explanation), Borges dismantles Castro's claim that Castilian Spanish has become corrupted in the River Plate region. Borges retorts to Castro that local popular speeches, such as *lunfardo* or the *gauchesca* speech, indeed diverge from the classical norms of Castilian, but so too do regional forms and varieties of popular registers in other regions of Spain like Catalonia, Andalusia, or Alicante. Borges's attack is specifically on the protocols that legitimize knowledge about the Spanish language in diverse Hispanophone areas and that imply imperial notions of tradition:

Salvo el lunfardo (módico esbozo carcelario que nadie sueña en parangonar con el exuberante caló de los españoles), no hay jergas en este país. No adolecemos de dialectos, aunque sí de institutos dialectológicos. Esas corporaciones viven de reprobando las sucesivas jerigonzas que inventan. Han improvisado el *gauchesco*, a base de Hernández; el *cocoliche*, a base de un payaso que trabajó con los Podestá; el *vesre*, a base de los alumnos de cuarto grado. En esos detritus se apoyan; esas riquezas les debemos y deberemos.

Except for Argentine slang (a modest dialect that no one dreams of comparing to the exuberant *caló* of the Spaniards), there are no jargons in this country. We do not suffer from dialects, although we do indeed suffer from dialectological institutes. Those organizations thrive on condemn-

ing each successive slang they invent. They have improvised *gauchesco*, based on Hernández; *cocoliche*, derived from a clown who worked with the Podestá brothers; *vesre*, taken from fourth-grade students. They are dependent of such rubbish; we owe and shall continue to owe those dubious riches to them.⁷⁷

As Fernando Degiovanni and Guillermo Toscano y García have argued about this polemic, Borges associates the arbitrary nature of a discipline to the ideological tenets of contemporary European totalitarianism. After all, the quote's evoking of "dialectological institutes" is a direct reference to the Instituto de Filología of Universidad de Buenos Aires chaired by Amado Alonso, founded in 1923 as a branch of the Centro de Estudios Históricos de Madrid, and which became the center of Hispanist philology with the exile of Spanish intellectuals during the Spanish Civil War. By engaging in a linguistic polemic with Spanish scholars of languages and literatures, Borges questions the Hispanists' uses of antiquity in their own imperial articulations of culture in South America (as well as in North America, where Castro conducted an institutional refashioning of the discipline). At the heart of his original interpretation and explication of remote literary Chinese texts, Borges suppresses the imperial aspirations of a decadent cultural universe striving to perpetuate its cultural capital in a Hispanophone region that was no longer its colony but a new edge for world literature.

The exile of Spanish intellectuals, educational institutions, and different sectors of the publishing industry (imprints, translators, distributors, etc.) in the midcentury was a watershed in the cultural life of Buenos Aires, as it was in many other major cities of Latin America. Transferring the axis of the larger Hispanic cultural industry to South America enabled the creation of new critical infrastructures, social relations, and reading publics that paved the way for the "golden years" of the publishing industry in the region. Such expansion of series featuring works of world literature became significantly relevant in terms the cartography of the Cold War, particularly so with respect to the establishment of Communist China in 1949 and its global translation initiatives. These were nurtured by the local publishing boom, which gave rise to an unusual Chinese literary archive in Spanish, which I will discuss in detail in chapter 3.

The Twisted Networks of Cultural Diplomacy

Global Maoism in Print

In 1954 the poets Ai Qing (1910–96) and Xiao San (1896–1983) experienced an emergency landing in Argentina.¹ The aircraft transporting the official delegates of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) from Chile back to their home country was forced to stop in Buenos Aires for repairs. Despite the diplomatic constraints that prevented the two Chinese citizens from setting foot in Argentina, the local authorities allowed them to disembark briefly for refreshments. After hearing about the stranded artists, a mixed group of local writers rushed to the airport to treat them with bonbons, souvenirs, and books. Among them was the Communist writer María Rosa Oliver (1898–1977), who had joined them at Pablo Neruda’s birthday celebration a few days earlier in Santiago and also during a meeting of the World Peace Council the year before in Beijing. Present too was Evar Méndez (1888–1955), editor of the avant-garde magazine *Martín Fierro*, who recounts this anecdote in a mea culpa article about his utter ignorance of Chinese culture titled “Examen de conciencia chino” (1955; Chinese examination of consciousness), published in the Communist journal *Cultura China*. Méndez looks back upon the two-hour airport meeting as a “miraculous opportunity” for cultural exchange where, with the aid of interpreters—and despite the

surveillance of security officers—intellectuals from the antipodes shared their views on art, literature, and politics.²

This scene is symptomatic of the forms of circulation of Chinese culture in Latin America during the Maoist years (1949–76). While it acknowledges the existence of a solid infrastructure for the global dissemination of Chinese culture through writers' tours, promotional travel, and translation programs, it also substantiates how informal networks come into play when people-to-people diplomacy substitutes public diplomacy. In the airport, an ultimate nonspace, intellectuals of antagonistic ideological backgrounds came together to welcome, read, and later publish fortuitous Chinese authors that are both novel and familiar and whose work helps the Argentines reflect on their own debates on tradition and intellectual labor, as well as the relationship between art and politics.

In chapter 2 I suggested that the mediation of European languages and the prevalence of the bookstore over the library made Chinese literature accessible to a traditional readership with a taste for foreign cultures. The establishment of the PRC in 1949 drastically changed this scenario. It launched a massive cultural diplomacy program that resulted in a torrent of translations pouring out from Beijing to different corners of the globe and particularly the so-called Third World. In Latin America this materialized in an unprecedented inflow of Chinese printed culture in Spanish that began circulating through the networks of the Communist Party and numerous distributors, publishers, and periodicals, thus widening the realm of consumption and critical readings of Chinese culture. Viewing this high tide of socialist internationalism from the perspective of world literature, it becomes clear that the cultural diplomacy programs of the Maoist years ensured that Chinese literature circulated beyond its national borders to unprecedented destinations, and, as Nicolai Volland argues in *Socialist Cosmopolitanism* (2020), Chinese socialist literature became part of a global circuit of cultural production and consumption.³ Yet, as in all worldly expansions of local canons, inevitable frictions striated the programmatic socialist cosmopolitan impulse, giving its particular shape to this corpus. Instead of consolidating such translations into an organized Maoist canon, the larger structure of translators, distributors, and commentators in the receiving countries subdued, scattered, and silenced them according to the logic of their own cultural field.

In this chapter I argue that during the Maoist years the writing of China in Latin America did not respond to the goals of Chinese cul-

tural diplomacy but rather to the dynamics of the local cultural field. In what follows I claim that Latin American intellectuals used Chinese cultural diplomacy initiatives to fulfill their singular aesthetic projects rather than to rubber stamp Maoism, generating a unique corpus of Chinese literature and criticism in Spanish. This is an effort to read against the logic of cultural diplomacy as an effective tool of literary criticism. In the following pages I reveal the limitations of imposing a mode of reading at a global level but, in turn, I acknowledge the rich infrastructure it provides to track the twisted itineraries of world literature. This approach not only sheds light on a constellation of Chinese texts in Spanish translation that have never been studied before as a consistent archive, but also exposes the political and aesthetic strategies to overwrite that archive.

Cultural diplomacy is based on soft power; that is, the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce.⁴ Because of its double nature as a state-driven governmental practice of foreign affairs and an ideals-based activity carried out by nonstate actors, cultural diplomacy offers a productive framework to study symbolic transfers across borders. This chapter is nurtured by the sociological premise that literature is both a symbolic and a material phenomenon; after all, literature circulates in the form of tangible artifacts mediated by concrete means. When texts cross national borders in translation, they do so in the form of books, journals, and cables, as well as through diverse cultural agents such as publishers, diplomats, critics, and officials.⁵

Traveling to the PRC in the context of cultural diplomacy supposed an unprecedented opportunity for Latin American intellectuals to encounter Chinese culture directly. Even if the Communist Party was the main channel of transmission of Chinese cultural products during these years, writing about China was an intellectual effort not limited to the immediate political interests of the revolution but rather to the humanistic allure of Chinese culture. Partly because the intellectuals involved had varying degrees of commitment to the Communist Party—most of them were “fellow travelers” rather than party leaders—and partly because the nature of their own literary projects, the rhetoric of the revolution in the discussion of Chinese culture takes remarkably singular tones from writer to writer.

My focus on the writing of China during the Maoist years examines humanist Chinese culture in translation; that is, more specifically, the literary publications that filter through the vast Chinese propaganda apparatus, such as classical poetry, folk tales, or revolutionary operas

that begin appearing in literary magazines and publishing series alongside other, non-Chinese texts. As the Chinese revolution progressed, the boundaries between the literary and the political became blurred and any publication was political. Even if the Chinese stopped exporting both traditional and modern cultural artifacts and opted for the doctrinaire works of Mao Zedong's thought, the Latin American promoters of Chinese culture did not always share Mao's interpretation of Marxist aesthetics and in turn presented these materials in ways that responded to their own artistic projects rather than the propaganda guidelines coming from Beijing. On these grounds I contend that studying the writing of China in distant and nonspecialized centers enables a more ambitious discussion of the relationship between culture and politics in times of ideological determinations.

To return to the central question of this book, how did Latin Americans interpret Chinese culture given the absence of an institutional framework for the study of China? Postwar sinology took different directions in this respect. In the United States it became a highly specialized field of research within universities and national security agencies, in a similar move to Latin American studies, which became institutionalized in that period. It was renamed China studies following the area studies model that responded to the need for practical knowledge of regions of strategic interests during the Cold War. Alongside social scientists, "China watchers" based in Hong Kong became the main authors of the English-language bibliography on Communist China.⁶ In Europe the writing of China stirred a more public debate. After the trauma of fascism and the reconsideration of whether social Darwinism should have a place in the classroom, traditional sinology recovered its romantic tone and "the admiration of Chinese Antiquity became its ethos again."⁷ Thus, when Maoist printed culture started to advocate for total rejection of the past, a clash ensued between traditional sinologists and French left-wing intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) and Louis Althusser (1918–90), and, especially, the *Tel Quel* group, who read Maoism as a universal theory of cultural revolution through the lens of structuralism and psychoanalysis.⁸

During the Maoist years the writing of China in Latin America unfolded in literary circles, cultural magazines, and publishing initiatives entirely outside academia and state agencies. Absent sinologists to provide an interpretation of the influx of Chinese texts in philological terms or public strategists to decode them politically, the writing of China was carried out by literary critics, writers, and intellectuals connected to

cultural diplomacy programs. These actors, who had no formal training in Chinese or Asian cultures, did have prolific careers in translating and publishing foreign literatures. The transfer of the book industry from Spain to South America because of the Spanish Civil War facilitated the creation of a large structure for publishing, printing, and editing world literatures in the Spanish language. With universities intermittently closed since the 1930s due to military governments, criticism developed naturally outside the walls of academia and closer to this bustling, new market. The porous nature of the intellectual field becomes even more patent in what Guido Herzovich identifies in Argentina as a shift in the terrain of literary criticism during the 1950s whereby criticism came to perform an essential function for the circulation and appropriation of books and literature.⁹ The massive expansion of the reading public, as well as the founding of literary magazines and publishing houses by new generations of immigrants, not only changed the face of criticism but also reshaped the dynamics of the circulation of print culture at large. In this chapter I focus on Argentina as a case study of Latin America to claim that the writings of China from this period owe their existence largely to the networks of Maoist diplomacy and mostly to its impact on the local expanding book and translation industry.

To complement Cold War scholarship with the frameworks of Translation Studies and World Literature, the chapter is organized into three case studies that evidence the autonomy of the Latin American actors involved in Maoist diplomacy. After an overview of the PRC's initiatives for the export of Chinese printed culture in Spanish, each of the sections examines how local agents adjusted the institutions, canons, and aesthetics of Maoist diplomacy for the purposes of their own intellectual projects. "Cultural Association" examines the short-lived *Asociación Argentina de Cultura China* (AACC; Argentine Association of Chinese Culture) created in the early 1950s against the backdrop of postwar "peaceful coexistence". By analyzing the papers of its president Fina Warschaver (1910–89), I demonstrate how her humanistic efforts to foster cultural exchange were subdued by the orthodoxy of the Soviet-leaning Argentine Communist Party. "Scattered Series" traces translation flows and intellectual networks between China and Argentina from the 1950s to the 1970s. Widening the lens on the cultural Cold War in Latin America to include China, this section explores the wayward trajectories of leftist intellectuals who gravitated between the networks of Maoist diplomacy and the booming book market, using their artistic work to fight both for the Communist and capital-

ist blocs. The last section, “Scarred Intellectual” claims that Ricardo Piglia’s last published work *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi* (2015–17) deliberately appeases and silences the effervescence of his revolutionary militancy of the 1970s.¹⁰

MAOIST CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN LATIN AMERICA

The Third World occupied a critical role in the PRC’s diplomatic map of the Cold War. But at its inception the general Chinese policy toward Latin America was not so clear. Postwar “peaceful coexistence” had immediate applications in the neighboring countries of Asia, but Latin America was too far away to be a priority. Both geographically and historically, it appeared as a region that was exceedingly remote to justify dedicating resources to it at a time when the government was focused on laying the foundations of the new state. But it was also a potentially rich area for the propagation of a rural form of Marxism in the developing world. For example, the Spanish intellectual Victor Alba (1916–2003) identified the communes as a key attraction for progressive Latin Americans “enamored of the theocratic and Communist traditions of the pre-Columbian age [Incas and Aztecs] as well as for conservatives concerned with agrarian reform.”¹¹ Similarly, because of opposition to the United States, absence of foreign debt, and rapid industrialization, different Latin American thinkers found in China a theory of government that could be transplanted into their contexts. Like the Russian revolution—and later the Cuban—the Chinese revolution offered a new system of beliefs and ethical principles of modernity for peripheral capitalisms.

The early years of Communist rule witnessed the emergence of decisive initiatives for the promotion of Chinese printed culture in Spanish that set the grounds for the ensuing continuous flow of information in the decades to come. For years the Chinese invited scholars, liberal professionals, and artists of non-Communist nations to visit the country in supervised tours. This policy of propaganda and invitations, which had its roots in Soviet diplomacy and was carried out similarly in Cuba, was an effective means of building a positive international reputation in the face of widespread nonrecognition. Visitors met with national delegates and were showcased the feats of the new system, such as model factories, hospitals, and agrarian communes. They received publications and brochures in various languages with the expectation that they would

write favorable reports about these facets back home. By using foreigners as a tool to export Chinese culture, the Chinese sought to win allies and neutralize opponents.¹²

Aside from guided tourism, other visitors stayed for longer periods working as translators for the massive state publisher Beijing Foreign Languages Press and as Spanish language professors at Beijing University. Among the most prominent “foreign friends” (*waiguo pengyou*) were the Chilean painter José Venturelli (1924–88) and the poets Luis Enrique Delano (1907–85) and Pablo de Rokha (1895–1968).¹³ The list of short-term guests is too lengthy to enumerate, yet worthy of mention are the Brazilian Jorge Amado (1912–2001) or Nobel Prize laureates such as Pablo Neruda (1904–73) and Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899–1974).¹⁴ These figures were instrumental in bringing Latin American readings into China and introducing Chinese works into their own literary circles back home. Chapter 5 analyzes recent memoirs and documentaries by the children of these long-term visitors who grew up in revolutionary China. As I argue later in the book, the narratives of this second generation construct affective archives that contest their parents’ ideas of international solidarity and political art.

Spanish-language periodicals were also translated for simultaneous distribution worldwide through the China Publications Center (*Guoji Shudian*, known today as China International Book Trading Corporation).¹⁵ The monthly magazine *China Pictorial* (1955) printed high-resolution photo essays about the feats of the New China. The newsletter *Peking Review* began appearing in the 1960s, and many other periodicals on current affairs were added later, among them: *China’s Sports*, *Chinese Literature*, *The Chinese Trade Unions*, *Chinese Medical Journal*, and *Scientia Sinica*, all in their Spanish versions.¹⁶ News, bulletins, and pamphlets streamed from China in the form of not only magazines but also cables. As early as 1949, the Chinese government set up the New China News Agency (later Xinhua) in key cities across the world. In Latin America the first permanent office opened in Havana in 1959 and cooperated with the also newly created Cuban news agency Prensa Latina (Latin Press).

A brief note about visual media and scenic arts is useful to justify this chapter’s emphasis on the written word. Visitors to the PRC never failed to attend Peking Opera performances and screenings of revolutionary films. But the role of theater and cinema in the international propaganda scheme pales in comparison to both the considerable impact of the written word abroad and to the domestic protagonism of the

scenic arts, which I will discuss in detail in chapter 5 in relation to the memories of performances during the Cultural Revolution. The case of cinema is very telling. Film was the crucial pedagogical instrument by which the Communist government sought to reeducate its more than half-a-billion population. Yet, whereas mobile film projection units almost quadrupled during the Cultural Revolution, its use of a rare film format (Super 8–8.75-mm format) precluded the use of these reels elsewhere.¹⁷ According to Chris Berry, the reason why the PRC developed a unique film stock was not only to enable films to reach the countryside with highly portable projection teams but also to reduce dependency on imports. The drawback to this was the limitation it imposed on exports. Beyond the technological issue, the question of the cultural industry remained. If commercial cinema had been a key tool of propaganda in previous large-scale initiatives of cultural diplomacy in Latin America, like the US's Good Neighbor Policy, the Chinese did not possess the global geopolitical standing to employ the power of mass culture abroad. First, very few Latin American countries other than Cuba had formal diplomatic ties with the PRC until the mid-1970s, so all the branches of the film industry (production, distribution, and press) faced inevitable trade barriers. Besides, unlike the popular taste for Hollywood that had facilitated the international success of, for example, the Brazilian bombshell Carmen Miranda's musicals in the 1940s,¹⁸ Chinese model operas and ballets were too stylized, overtly politicized, and acutely dissonant for a Western mass audience. There was still a veil of mystery around the idea of China, which, coupled with the anxiety around Communism in democratic countries, made the mass export of Chinese cultural goods virtually impossible. If China favored a model based on cultural exchange rather than the US approach, rooted in media diplomacy, this was largely because Chinese humanistic culture was highly developed while its media was still not globally integrated.¹⁹ The PRC thus relied heavily on the labor of elite left-wing intellectuals, who could use their humanistic knowledge and political standing to transmit China's high culture to their local publics. To that end, the printed page was their most effective tool.

CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

The Asociación Argentina de Cultura China (AACC) was created as a byproduct of guided tourism. In 1953, its founder, the Argentine writer

Fina Warschaver, toured Beijing and a few other Chinese cities after visiting the Soviet Union with a delegation of the World Peace Council. Enthused by the copious bibliography in foreign languages at her disposal and confident about the socialist ecumenism of the postwar years, Warschaver came up with the idea of founding a cultural association for the promotion of Chinese culture back home (see fig. 2). She soon joined the Chinese Faction of the Argentine Communist Party (PCA) and gathered a group of writers and critics to organize events and collaborate in a journal titled *Cultura China: Revista trimestral de arte, literatura e información general sobre la Nueva China* (Chinese culture: Quarterly magazine on the arts, literature, and general information of the New China).²⁰ Partly because the global peaceful coexistence atmosphere of the period, and also thanks to the unusual congeniality of local Communists and liberal intellectuals gathered in a democratic front against fascism (in its local version, Peronism), the Asociación operated under conditions that seemed optimal for a successful experiment of Chinese cultural diplomacy in the Third World but promptly faced internal backlash. Warschaver's papers provide an invaluable entryway to

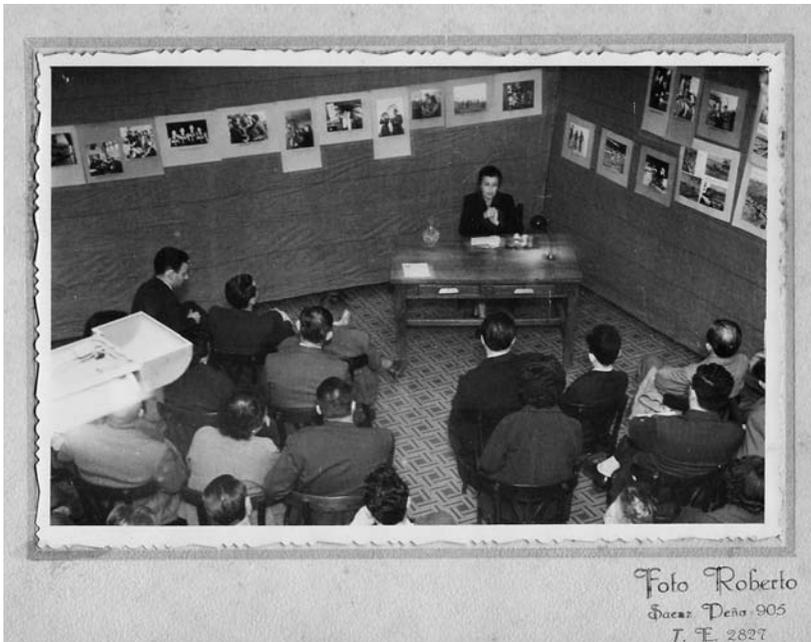


Fig. 2. Fina Warschaver at a public lecture after her trip to the People's Republic of China, 1953. Copyright © Archive Alberto Giudici Warschaver, Buenos Aires.

the premises, prejudices, and fantasies of what it meant for an Argentine intellectual to write about China in the early stages of the Cold War. As I will argue shortly, the disagreement over the precise meanings of “culture” and “Communism” was what doomed the efforts of the AACC.

Employing the amicable rhetoric of peaceful coexistence, both the insignia of the association 交友 (*jiayou*; “friendship”) and the first editor’s letter of the journal *Cultura China* (fig. 3) define their goal as bringing the culture of New China to the general public. The grounds for an epistemological mission based on divulgation can be traced thoroughly in a personal letter to the party leader where Warschaver encourages only partial support for philological research on China: “No en vano en todo el mundo existe una ciencia llamada sinología que estudia la cultura china. La Asociación como organismo de relaciones culturales debe auspiciar esos estudios; no como tarea exclusiva pero sí importante para aquellos que se interesan por ella” (It is not in vain that, all over the world, there is a science called sinology that studies Chinese culture. As an organ of cultural relations, the Association should sponsor this kind of studies; it should not do so exclusively, but as an important form of assistance for those who are interested in it).²¹ Although the editor’s letter does not make specific recommendations, it does put forward a novel understanding of term “culture,” which legitimates the potential for studying the “New” China: “La cultura de un pueblo, sin embargo, no la constituye solamente la manifestación de su actividad técnica o intelectual. La cultura, de acuerdo a los conceptos más modernos de sociología, abarca también las formas de vida y el trabajo anónimo del conjunto social” (Nonetheless, the culture of a nation is not just the manifestation of their technical or intellectual activity. Culture, according to modern sociological standards, includes the lifestyle and the anonymous work of the social body).²² The use of “culture” here is in line with the Marxist redefinition of this keyword that shifts its scope from the humanistic to the sociological; that is, an independent and abstract noun that in the second postwar no longer referred exclusively to the general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development, but also to particular ways of life, whether of a people, period, group, or humanity in general. Apart from translations of the poets Xiao San and Ai Qing mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, *Cultura China* includes works on the lifestyle of common people and cultural policy in general. In its second volume, for example, Warschaver shares her impressions of a day spent in the rural outskirts of Beijing where she exchanged views with villagers about the changes occurring in their

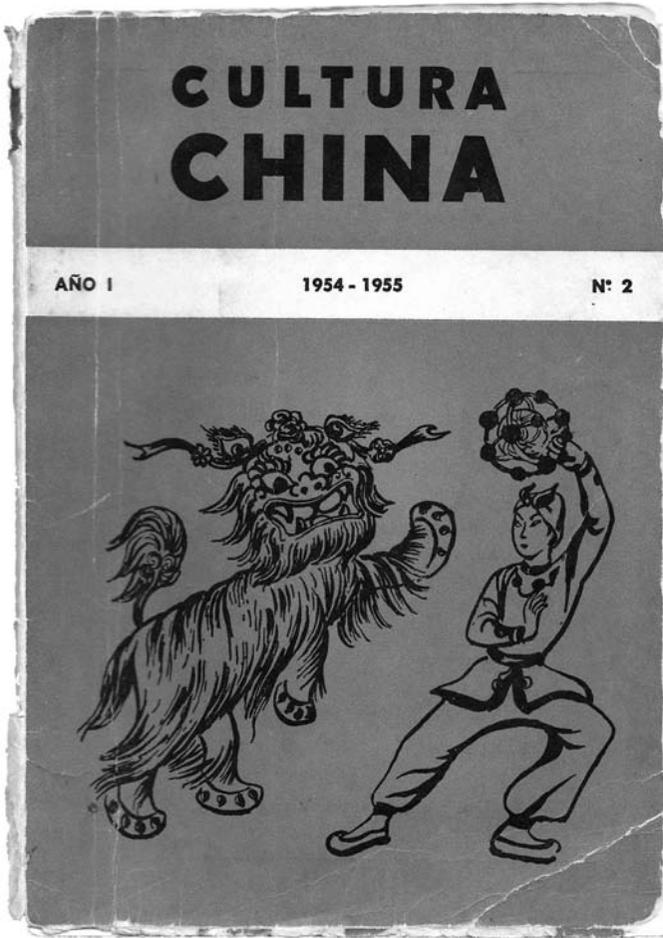


Fig. 3. Cover of the journal *Cultura China* (Asociación Argentina de Cultura China) 1, no. 2 (1954–55). Copyright © Archive Alberto Giudici Warschaver, Buenos Aires.

country. In the typical gesture of revolutionary travel writing from Latin America, the ethnographic nature of the conversation with the locals takes on the density of *testimonio*, by which an individual's personal history of oppression operates as a metonymy of the social body thanks to the mediation of the sympathetic outsider.

The sociological approach to culture is also patent in the attention paid to the official policies regarding the reinterpretation of the Chinese cultural heritage. In tune with this, the two volumes of *Cultura China* include translated reports on official initiatives such as the reopening

of museums and the restoration of ancient pottery, or on the reading of the philosophy of Confucius in the light of socialism. Fina Warschaver legitimates the use of propaganda material by invoking the flexibility of culture as an all-encompassing phenomenon that transcends the dichotomies between high and low or pure and didactic art. She redefines the object of study “culture” in theoretical terms to enable a political reading in view of interlocutors beyond the Party. Methodologically, this gambit recasts the intellectual activity of writing about foreign cultures from philological analysis to sociological commentary and thus endorses the use of propaganda as reliable evidence for a humanistic scrutiny of Chinese culture at large.

The dilemma surrounding Warschaver’s Chinese cultural project is nowhere better rendered than in a long dispatch to the secretary of the Argentine Communist Party Gerónimo Arnedo Álvarez (1897–1980), written sometime in 1956. It must be noted that the AACC operated before the Sino-Soviet split and thus responded to the structure of the Soviet Communist Party. The typed nine-page letter provides an inventory of complaints about the party’s neglect of her initiatives in the Chinese Faction. To some extent, this letter is a reverse archive, a catalog of the Chinese projects that never were. The letter is also marked by the negative, since it is catalogued as a piece of Warschaver’s outgoing mail, and not with a response from Álvarez, which one would expect to find among her correspondence. Did the letter ever go through? Or was this a typed copy for record purposes only? Whichever the case, the absence of Álvarez’s reply in Warschaver’s papers suggests a *mise en abyme* of a one-sided conversation on cultural exchange.

The main disagreements with the party hinged on who the interlocutors of the AACC should be, namely, its constituency and its opposition. Among the activities detailed in the minutes of the association’s meetings, there are art exhibitions, lectures, and events to host visitors to the country, such as the Chilean painter José Venturelli who was then residing in Beijing. In her papers Warschaver advocates for a conciliatory attitude in all fronts. She complains about the lack of support from the party in seizing the legal momentum to increase advertising in large-circulation media. She also encourages the recognition of government institutions and officials, to the extent that she forwards an invitation to the opening of an art exhibit to the president of the nation and publishes his reply in the second issue of the journal.²³ As a general attitude, she vehemently opposes any combative public stance, which she considers a false legitimation of the ideological struggle.

Ultimately, though, what is at stake in Warschaver's clash with the party regarding the promotion of Chinese culture is a symptom of the larger debate about the cultural role of the Communist intellectual. According to Adriana Petra, even if the PCA became the only socialist organization to come up with a policy to regulate intellectual activity, which it integrated into its local and semi-independent structures, it also made sure that it could appease the resistance of those intellectuals who questioned the party's control over their work. In her study of Argentine postwar Communist culture, she concludes that the Communist intellectual is a torn figure: "To serve a universal and transcendent cause, they accept dependence on an external, nonintellectual authority that demands complete commitment and before which they must legitimize themselves. However, as long as they maintain their identity as intellectuals . . . can only be fulfilled within the framework of an organization that bestows a meaning and an orientation on their work that is not purely intellectual, thereby freeing them of the individualism, elitism, and alienation of the capitalist world."²⁴ Herein lies the key to Warschaver's irreconcilable literary and political careers. Accused of "bourgeois formalism," her highly psychoanalytic novels were considered a diversion from Communist labor, and even progressive voices within the party were wary of them. In reference to the publication of her novel *La casa modesta* (Modesta house) in 1949, the socialist poet Elías Castelnuovo (1893–1982) acknowledged the value of the formal exploration of the flow of consciousness but was quick to discredit her work because of her gender: "Leí su libro. Apreciación sintética: bueno. Si se tiene en cuenta que ha sido escrito por una mujer: muy bueno . . . Su fuerte, no obstante, a mi juicio, es su punto vulnerable. Porque su fuerte—el psicoanálisis—es un arma de dos filos. Para frecuentar los llamados 'territorios nocturnos del alma' y proyectar allí alguna luz se requiere una valentía y una franquea difícil en el hombre, casi insalvable en la mujer . . . Insisto, para su gobierno, que Usted tiene condiciones literarias nada frecuentes en la mujer" (I read your book. In short: good. Taking into account that it was written by a woman: very good. . . . Its strength, however, is also its weakness. Because that strength—psychoanalysis—is a double-edged sword. It takes courage to explore the so called "nocturnal territories of the soul" and cast some light upon them; this is a courageous task for a man, an almost insurmountable one for a woman . . . Let me insist that, given your gender, your writing skills are extraordinary).²⁵ Unabashedly discredited on the grounds of the literary aspirations of a woman, Warschaver's fiction as

well as her contributions to the party's discussions on matters of culture, were usually neglected and furthermore overshadowed by those of her husband Ernesto Giudici (1907–91), a prominent party leader in educational matters.

Warschaver's chairmanship of the association and her general attitudes toward the writing of China were sensitive to the major debates within the Communist leadership during those years. As a young female writer invested in an epistemological enterprise about a strategic foreign culture, she had to reconcile her work as a cultural critic with her status as a party intellectual in a rapidly changing ideological scenario. The deterioration of relations between China and the Soviet Union toward the end of the 1960s, as well as the reconsideration of the role of culture within the local Communist Party, terminally compromised the humanistic efforts of her amateur association. Her resignation letter in 1956 confirms both her commitment to the party as well as her sarcasm toward its red tape: "Una dirección que por unanimidad es estalinista y por unanimidad es anti-estalinista posee un don de ubicuidad que considero poco beneficiosa para el partido . . . Pido se me releve de mi actividad como responsable en frente de China y se designe a otro camarada en mi reemplazo. Fina." (A leadership that is unanimously both Stalinist and anti-Stalinist is a remarkably ubiquitous gift, which I do not consider beneficial for the party. . . . I request to be discharged of my responsibilities as head of the China front and to have another comrade appointed in my name").²⁶ The AACC was a short-lived initiative. It dissolved in 1956, printed only two volumes of *Cultura China*, and its editorial board disbanded along the way. Party politics, gender, and a hesitant foreign relations alignment generated insurmountable resistance to her cultural program with China, which resulted in it being subdued from within the same networks that had enabled it in the first place.

SCATTERED SERIES

In the seventeen years between the establishment of the PRC (1949) and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966), state-run publishing houses printed major popular novels known today as the Red Classics (*hongse jingdian*). Initially in line with Soviet socialist realism, these works envisioned a wide-ranging social transformation by creating models of the socialist new person in a more egalitarian and self-

less manner. Among their titles are *Red Sun* (1961), *Red Crag* (1957), *The Builders* (1964), or *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* (1961).²⁷ The meaning of the term “Red Classic” expanded over time to include works from the entire Maoist period (and beyond) that continue to be referred to, reworked, and parodied to the present day.

In a special issue of *Comparative Literature Studies* on global Maoism in 2015, Liu Kang observes the paradox of including this body of literary works in the Chinese cultural diplomacy program. Kang notes that while Mao’s personal idea of world literature and arts was practically nonexistent—he had shown little interest in Western culture, and paid scant attention to Soviet and Russian arts even though he was inspired by the USSR—the Chinese Communist Party still established a massive “external propaganda” machinery, translating and publishing Chinese works of revolutionary literature and arts in hundreds of languages, aimed particularly at the Third World, where the majority of the peasant populations could be potential revolutionary allies. Kang questions the diplomatic effectiveness of the Maoist aesthetic imperative in Europe by arguing that French thinkers invented their version of Maoism “from their thousand plateaus of intellectual, philosophical, and psychoanalytical height, far removed from the impoverished villages and mountains of the Third World, where Chinese Revolutionary Model Plays would have hoped to find their echoes.”²⁸ Nicolai Volland is more optimistic of the original cosmopolitanism of the Chinese socialist canon, as he tracks the unexpected literary diversions of the Red Classics, such as how little-known authors in China would suddenly become stars in the Eastern Bloc thanks to transnational socialist institutions like the Stalin Prize.²⁹ Regarding the Third World, both Kang and Volland note that no evidence to date has shown the actual reception or influence of these classics.

The following pages are an attempt to answer this question and, in the spirit of Kang and Volland, explore the afterlives of the Chinese revolutionary canon in Latin America. A first approach to this question would be to consult the inventory of Spanish translations of Red Classics by the Beijing Foreign Languages Press and then track down their journeys as reprints in local presses. Yet, given the difficulties in obtaining access to the Chinese archives of this period, the titles have to be traced entirely through their reception. In view of this, the following hypotheses are based on the study of the circulation of Chinese printed culture in Argentina. Why Argentina? Maoism penetrated very deeply in Argentina. With the imprint of the New Left and the May 1968 move-

ment, several Maoist groups emerged in dissidence from the Communist and Socialist parties' guidelines. These, as Adrián Celentano has demonstrated, produced a rich body of printed culture that nurtured a local version of Mao Zedong's thought in Spanish.³⁰ But above all, the city of Buenos Aires became the midcentury world's primary producer and exporter of literature in Spanish, and Chinese translations managed to make it into these rich and new series in the most unexpected ways.

The epicenter of the book industry shifted from Europe to Latin America during the Spanish Civil War with the exile of Republican publishers, who settled in Mexico and Buenos Aires, transferring the model of what was a very prosperous business (to mention a few examples of the most famous publishers of this period: Losada, Espasa-Calpe, Tor, Claridad, and Sudamericana). Whereas in Mexico the new industry orbited mainly around the enormous state-sponsored Fondo de Cultura Económica (1934), in Buenos Aires a bevy of publishers proliferated, varying in size, audience, and intellectual spheres, paving the way for a more diffuse but diverse scenario. Amelia Aguado identifies eighty-one presses officially registered up until 1956 and ninety more thereafter.³¹ Many other invisible and short-lived publishers subject to the censorship of the intermittent military governments should be added to this estimated figure. Also, as Gustavo Sorá observes, the unique relationship between the book industry and the state in each of the two countries led to a consistent distribution of dominant genres between Mexico City (social sciences and humanities) and Buenos Aires (literature).³² The South American city had an educated immigrant population, professional translators, and a wide variety of presses. In the 1960s and 1970s, the two massive enterprises Editorial Sudamericana (founded in 1939) and Centro Editorial de América Latina (founded in 1966) catapulted Latin American literature abroad and disseminated foreign literatures in Spanish throughout the continent on a totally new scale. Whereas most of the foreign titles favored the French, English, and Italian literary traditions, the publishing series evidence occasional preferences for Asian works.

Since there is no unified record of Chinese titles published in Argentina during these years, the following hypotheses are based on an empirical reconstruction of Spanish translations of Chinese titles gathered from scattered series of corporate and independent publishers of the period (table 2 [appendix]). The roughly hundred titles of the partial, albeit eloquent, resulting database were put together manually by browsing bibliographies and search engines such as WorldCat and

the UNESCO database *Index Translationum*, and mainly by collecting them individually from second-hand bookstores in Buenos Aires. This list solely includes Chinese titles that are literary works, a criterion that deliberately sets aside a large bibliography of travel narratives, social commentaries, and political essays about China that were written by Latin American authors and proliferated during those years. This section specifically focuses on the translation of fiction, essay, poetry, and drama written by Chinese authors. For its part, the term “Chinese Literature” is vague and heavily contested in Chinese Studies because of the outstanding scope of this category. In addition to the debates about the many periodizations within millennia of textual production, there is scholarly debate about whether Chinese Literature encompasses texts originally crafted in any Sinitic script or by ethnic Chinese authors; within the borders of mainland China or in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other sinophone areas; or before or after 1949. For the purposes of this study, I use the category “Chinese literature” to refer to any literary work produced by Chinese-born authors that was translated into Spanish and published in Buenos Aires roughly between 1940 and 1980.

By looking at the titles of Chinese literature published in Argentina from the 1940s to the 1970s, it becomes clear that none of the Red Classic novels mentioned earlier ever made it to an Argentine publisher during this period. Conversely, the list also illustrates the alternative body of Chinese works that circulated the most in Spanish. Shorter post-1949 pieces imported directly from the PRC such as the play *Entre marido y mujer* (Between husband and wife) by the Beijing People’s Arts Theatre appeared in the magazine *Cultura China* in 1954, and the play *Reacción en la aldea china: Pieza en un acto* (*Struggle against Counter-struggle: A One-Act Play*) by Li Chih Hua came out in 1956, with a preface by Raúl González Tuñón. Sparse verses by Xiao San and Ai Qing were printed in the special volume of the Communist periodical *Cuadernos de Cultura* in 1959 in translation by the renowned poet Juan L. Ortiz (1896–1978). Several Argentine presses close to the Communist Party (La Rosa Blindada, Nativa, Huemul, Ediciones del Tiempo, Marxismo de Hoy, and De la Paloma) reprinted Mao’s writings for years. La Rosa Blindada, the most prominent Maoist publisher in Argentina, was highly invested in promoting the poetry of Mao and of its young, local militants; yet its catalog does not reveal any piece of Chinese revolutionary narrative or poetry in translation.

Instead, the titles examined indicate that this was a period of unprecedented publication of general Chinese literature. Other than the

revolutionary literature mentioned earlier, the bulk of translations examined happen to be either dissident works or pre-1949 works. While several of these were already circulating within the frameworks of the Ibero-American publishing market in translations from French and English, many others were introduced by the Cold War cultural diplomacy programs and then merged into local publishing series. What is revealing is that some books were diverted from their intended ideological itineraries because of agents moving between these two apparently parallel frameworks. The combination of multiple infrastructures for the circulation of Chinese works in foreign languages, a general public ignorant of, but increasingly curious about, China, and particularly the porosity of the local cultural field led to the formation of a heterogeneous, unique, and scattered catalogue of Chinese literature in Spanish.

CULTURAL COLD WAR

The all-time Chinese bestseller in Spanish is Lin Yutang (1895–1976). Hailed as a “Chinese philosopher,” Lin was the modern Chinese writer and intellectual best known to the West in the twentieth century. Because of his Presbyterian education and longtime residence in the United States and Hong Kong, his oeuvre was written for the most part in English and therefore easily available for translation. Editorial Sudamericana published his work uninterruptedly from the early 1940s until the 1990s with record-breaking sales. Colophons evidence more than thirty different titles in Spanish, many of which were reprinted up to a dozen editions. A proclaimed spokesman of Chinese culture, Lin’s fiction pays close attention to manners and customs. It is notable that a novel such as *Peonía roja* (1961; *The Red Peony*) dealing with the love life of a rebellious widow in turn-of-the-century China came out in the Sudamericana series “Horizontes” (Horizons) alongside Anglophone authors like William Faulkner (1897–1962), Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), or John Steinbeck (1902–68). In the logic of the world literary system, as envisioned by Franco Moretti, where the novel of the periphery is a privileged site of compromise involving foreign plot, local characters, and narrative voice, it appears that in the case of *Peonía roja*, distance from its original culture of representation emancipates Lin Yutang from the peripheral dictum.³³ Local color aside, thanks to English, Lin Yutang enters Latin America eminently as Anglo-American literature. Just like Borges argues in his reviews that Chinese novels are fantastic and thus

critiques the world-system mandate that pigeonholes the “peripheral” novel as a national allegory, the editorial gesture of labeling Lin Yutang as an English-speaking author also emancipates him from his alleged marginal position.

Two other authors of Chinese origin come up in Spanish translation: Sheng Cheng (1899–1996) and Eileen Chang (1920–95). The former was a Chinese nationalist Kuomintang supporter who lived in Paris as an exchange scholar during the 1920s. A reform-minded intellectual associated with the May Fourth Movement (1919), Sheng advocated for the opening of China to the West, a cosmopolitan gesture praised by Paul Valéry (1871–1945) in the preface to Sheng’s novel *Ma mère* (1928; *A Son of China*, 1930; *Mi madre*, 1942).³⁴ This allegorical narrative, as well the subsequent *Ma mère et moi à travers la première révolution chinoise* (1929; *My mother and I*; *Mi madre y yo a través de la revolución China*, 1956) weave personal memoirs of his childhood in China with maternal stories into consoling symbols of universal humanism, similar in tone to the literature of Lin Yutang.³⁵ For its part, *La canción de arroz* (1955; *The Rice Sprout Song*) by Eileen Chang, also adds a different voice to the repertoire of Chinese literature in Spanish translation during these years. As David Der-Wei Wang observes in a recent edition of Chang’s novel, “her inquiries into human frailty and trivialities, her stylized depictions of Chinese mannerism, and her celebrations of historical contingency made her a perfect contrast to the discourse of mainstream literature, represented by Lu Xun, Mao Dun, and Ding Ling.”³⁶ Published originally in English, *The Rice Sprout Song* is a ruthless critique of the hardships of domestic life on the eve of Communist rule.

Bilingual, diasporic, and dissident, these three testimonial macronarrators were banned in China during the Mao era. Their emergence in Latin America during these years can be regarded as part of the momentum for Chinese fiction amid the general interest in China. Yet this particular sinophone success also attests to the bipolar logic of the Cold War: the fiction that vilifies Red China erects an alternative canon to the exemplary Red Classics. The Cold War, after all, was a heated confrontation of civilizations, fought eminently through diplomacy and intellectual work on the capitalist and socialist blocs. Now, how does the “cultural cold war” play out in the Latin America? How do the networks of Communist and anti-Communist diplomacy between the USSR, China, and the United States unfold in the Spanish-speaking literary world? Whereas much attention has been paid to the Cuban

revolution in the Soviet cartography of the Cold War, less has been researched about the ways in which Chinese culture comes into play in Latin America.

A closer look at the infrastructure of this alternative Chinese canon in Spanish points to a crucial agent that further complicates the relationship between diplomacy, the Cold War, and the writing of China in Latin America: Victoria Ocampo. Argentine patron of the arts, arguably the main cultural mediator of world literature in Spanish during the twentieth century, Ocampo was also vice president of the Argentine chapter of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), the anti-Communist advocacy group founded in West Berlin in 1949 to challenge the Soviet sympathies of many Western intellectuals and fellow travelers, particularly among liberals and the non-Communist Left. Although it claimed to be an independent organization, it was revealed that the CCF had received funding from US intelligence agencies and private foundations since its inception. Take *La canción de arroz*. Eileen Chang's novel was originally published in English in Hong Kong in 1955 under the sponsorship of the US Information Service, a public agency created in 1953 to understand and influence foreign publics.³⁷ It was quickly translated into Spanish in 1956 at the press of Juan Goyanarte (1900–1967), a Spanish-born editor from Buenos Aires who was also a stakeholder in Victoria Ocampo's journal *Sur*. The translation was done by another member of *Sur*: Alfredo Weiss (1899–1955), who was also responsible for several Spanish versions of Lin Yutang, the Chinese bestselling author almost exclusively published by Sudamericana, the press founded in 1939 by—yet again—Victoria Ocampo. My point is that while *Sur* did not explicitly condemn the Chinese revolution in its pages (as it did with many other crucial historical events of the twentieth century that were the focus of special editions), its constellation of contributors, translators, and publishers were players of the cultural war that confronted—and gathered—progressive intellectuals of diverse ideological backgrounds at the beginning of the Cold War. I do not intend to demonstrate here that *Sur* was directly involved in an organized anti-Maoist campaign, but rather that the actors and institutions of its constellation used the multiple critical infrastructures of cultural diplomacy programs to read and comment on Chinese literature in terms of their own literary agendas.

Because the disputes of the Cold War were eminently ideological, they involved minute linguistic adjustments. For example, how to fathom the concept of totalitarianism after the defeat of fascism? *Sur*, in line

with the social democratic ethos of the CCF, focused on the totalitarian continuities between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, insisting, as Patrick Iber explains, in *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (2015), that “culture could flourish only in the absence of state control and that a just society could not abandon freedom of thought in the way that Communism required.”³⁸ Despite the different nature of their political systems, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, as well as Maoist China and Peronist Argentina, were read by the journal as equally oppressive regimes due to the extent of state intervention. Such are the terms that introduce *La canción de arroz* in the book’s inside flap:

La acción de la obra se desarrolla en la China actual. El Comarada Ku es enviado por el gobierno central a una pequeña aldea asolada por el hambre para catequizar a sus escuálidos habitantes, para demostrarles la excelencia de los hombres que gobiernan al país y cantar loas y augurios de una larga vida de diez mil otoños para el general-presidente Mao y de sólo mil años para el régimen que lo sostiene en el poder. Por momentos, nos sentimos transportados a uno de esos pequeños pueblos agrícolas argentinos de la época recientemente salvada, con sus débiles convulsiones de protesta, y los torpes forcejeos, las mezquinas maquinaciones del caudillejo ventajero imbuido de una autoridad dictatorial, envuelto él mismo a su vez en la aplastante maraña burocrática.

The action is set in contemporary China. Comrade Ku arrives at a famished village in the countryside as an envoy of the Central Government to preach among its starving residents, display the excellence of their rulers, and sing odes and auspices of ten thousands autumns for Chairman Mao—and just one thousand auspices for the regime that holds him in power. At times we are transported to those Argentine agrarian settlements from recently salvaged times, with their feeble attempts at protest, clumsy combats, and selfish deliriums of opportunist warlords vested with dictatorial authority, yet trapped in the overwhelming webs of bureaucracy.³⁹

The book description, most likely authored by either Weiss or Goyanarte, reduces Chang’s novel to a critique of personalism by tracing an

analogy between Chairman Mao and President Juan Domingo Perón (1895–1974). Still haunted by the trauma of Peronism (in the quote the present is referred to as “the recently *salvaged* times,” signaling the 1955 coup that overthrew Perón), the Chinese countryside is portrayed as an iteration of populist totalitarianism in Latin America: a place of social inequality that allows for the cult of personality and the arbitrary use of power of “opportunist warlords vested with dictatorial authority.” Without a word on its style or genre, here the Chinese novel serves as mere evidence for an argument on comparative politics. Although Weiss was a peripheral member of the journal, he interpreted dissident Chinese fiction in ideological terms and, additionally, translated dissident authors and curated a series of modernist poetry inspired by Chinese lyric, such as those by Ezra Pound (1885–1972) and Saint-John Perse (1887–1975). Weiss’s example evidences translation as a complex process of intellectual adaptation that relies on market conditions and personal agency.

THE CHINESE WRITER AND TRADITION

So far the flow of Chinese narrative identified in the present survey follows the expected circuits of Cold War cultural diplomacy: revolutionary works are published by cultural organizations connected to the Communist Party, whereas dissident novels circulate through the networks of the liberal Left, intimately linked to anti-Communist international organizations. Poetry, however, complicates this scheme. The French, English, and to some extent Spanish-language book markets were the entryway for Chinese classical lyric, a genre published consistently in Spanish throughout the twentieth century and, as I will discuss in the chapter 4, yielded the most creative experimentation with any non-European language. Popularized by the Chinese craze of British sinology and Anglo-American modernism, poets dating from the centuries BCE to the Tang dynasty had been published since the 1920s both in series that showcased poetry and world literature in Spanish. Originally translated into French and English, they were later rendered in Spanish by renowned poets as diverse as the Spanish exiles María Teresa León (1903–88) and Rafael Alberti (1902–99) or Raúl Ruy (1937–83). In the foreword to his translation *Poetas chinos vertidos del francés* (1977) (Chinese poets translated from the French), the socialist-realist writer Alvaro Yunque (1889–1982) falls prey to the Orientalist fantasy around

Chinese lyric: “China es un país de poetas. La poesía está íntimamente vinculada a su existencia cotidiana. Es la expresión esencial de su espíritu” (China is a country of poets. Poetry is an intimate part of its daily life. It is the essential expression of its spirit).⁴⁰ Rafael Alberti transcends particularism and identifies the Tang in a way that is evocative of Borges’s claim of universality in “El escritor argentino y la tradición”: “los inmortales de la poesía china son patrimonio de la humanidad” (the timeless Chinese poets are part of the world’s heritage).⁴¹ Tang poetry, I argue, is the literary token of sinophilia, which has elevated it into the ultimate form of Chinese literature that transcends epochs and political views and is thus appropriated by a wide variety of writers and publics. The glaring contrast between the formats of the seven Spanish-language Tang anthologies surveyed here is evidence of their vast audience. Just compare the leather binding, profuse ornamentation, and lacquered motifs of the limited printings of *La flauta de jade* (1951, Editorial Guillermo Kraft; The jade flute) and *La poesía china durante la época Tang* (1952, Sociedad de Amigos del Arte Oriental; Tang dynasty Chinese poetry) with the tiny font and pulp sheets of the slim paperback *Los poetas de la dinastía Tang* (1970, Centro Editor de América Latina, 1970; Tang dynasty poets), published much later. While the former was conceived as a luxury object geared to a public with a taste for art, the latter was part of a massive encyclopedic project that contemplated the mass distribution of books in newsstands, priced “cheaper than a kilo of bread,” according to its editor Boris Spivacow.⁴²

Mao Zedong himself was a fervent reader of Tang lyric. In fact, Mao’s own poetry follows classical Chinese verse. Although the poems he began writing in the 1920s are for the most part exaltations of the feats of New China, their themes—the imposing beauty of the landscape, war, or mythological figures—echo those of Li Bai (701–62), Li Shangyin (c. 813–58), or Li He (790–816). A good grasp of classical letters and calligraphy is required to fully indulge in these pieces. Because poetry in various forms was an important part of the state examinations since the Tang dynasty, Mao also participated in this ancient tradition of classical scholar-officials, all of whom wrote verses at least occasionally, and some even in multiple volumes.⁴³ But there was a generational gap between him and the younger officers of the PRC. In the foreword to a 1974 edition of *Los 37 poemas (Thirty Seven Poems)*, the Uruguayan writer Sarandy Cabrera (1923–2005) is puzzled at the reticence of his colleagues at the Beijing Foreign Languages Press to comment on the chairman’s oeuvre: “Pregunté a varios compañeros de trabajo si podían

entender los poemas de Mao y me contestaron que tenían algunas dificultades para hacerlo. Les pido que me los traduzcan y me dicen que no se animan, aun siendo ellos mismos trabajadores intelectuales” (I asked several colleagues at work if they could understand Mao’s poetry but they replied they had a hard time with it. I ask them to translate some for me, yet, despite being intellectual workers, they do not dare to do this).⁴⁴ Every edition of Mao’s poems had footnotes illuminating the obscure classical references and allusions. Besides, Mao repeatedly claimed that this style of poetry was a mere distraction that was part of his private life, not to be encouraged in the younger generation of artists, who had been instructed to portray the reality of the masses. The double standard of Mao as a poet of the old forms and an ideologue of proletarian art is a paradox that runs through every aspect of Maoist cultural policy and, consequently, of Maoist diplomacy. The crucial question was how to reconcile thousands of years of tradition in a cultural model that sought to do away with the past? How to capitalize such captivating artistic legacy as a tool to gain recognition abroad? Tang poetry offered a pedagogical opportunity. In his guidelines defining the task of the new Chinese writer in 1954, Mao Dun (1896–1981), minister of Culture and chairman of the China Writers’ Association, compared the new, empowered characters, such as heroes of the National Liberation Army, volunteers, model factory workers, peasants, members of youth leagues, women, and children, to those who had been “exploited and oppressed” in the past.⁴⁵ A few years later, Fina Warschaver would publish such a reading of Tang poetry in *Cuadernos de Cultura*, the same journal that had published Mao Dun’s text in Spanish:

Una visión nada plácida de la vida palaciega es la que acompaña la biografía de estos grandes poetas. Ellos cumplen la misión de fustigar la injusticia de los poderosos, recogen el dolor anónimo del pueblo, golpean la conciencia dormida de los gobernantes, denuncian la corrupción administrativa y la rutina, cantan a la libertad. A veces personalizan sus críticas y surge nítido el retrato; por ejemplo, en el poema de Po Chu-i “Las sonrisas de Li Yi-fu,” donde la hipocresía de este funcionario de la corte imperial se expresa gráficamente así: “En la frente una cara sonriente, detrás una daga que mata.”

The biography of these great poets yields a rather unpleasant vision of courtly life. They serve the purpose of punishing

the injustices of the powerful, collecting the anonymous pain of the people, striking a blow to the numb consciousness of their governors, denouncing administrative corruption, or singing songs of freedom. Sometimes, they personalize their criticism and thus make their point. Like in Po Chu-i's poem "Li Yu-fu's smile," which renders the hypocrisy of an imperial officer in the following, graphic terms: "A smiling face in the front conceals a lethal dagger in the back."⁴⁶

By exposing the dark side of life in the courts, Tang poetry becomes an eloquent testimony of social injustice and domination. Warschaver's stress on the sociological reconfigures the genre from an exquisite art form to a revolutionary genre of massive reach. Such was the gesture that also monopolized the work of Lu Xun (1881–1936), the key figure of modern Chinese literature and one of the few authors that survived the revisionism of the Mao years. His use of the vernacular (*baihua*) instead of the literary language (*wenyan*) and his criticism of feudal customs garnered him the unequivocal praise of Mao as a soldier of proletarian literature. When in 1956 the Communist press Editorial Lautaro published *Diario de un loco*, the first ever Spanish-language edition of *Diary of a Madman*, the biography on the front flap identified the then-unknown author in such militant terms: "Fino, humano, dramático y sarcástico, su literatura está identificada con las luchas del pueblo chino, con ese inmenso continente artístico, territorial y humano que es China" (Subtle, humane, dramatic, and sarcastic, Lu Xun's literature sympathizes with the struggles of the Chinese people; with that immense artistic, geographic, and human continent called China).⁴⁷ Whereas only a few Tang anthologies were exported to Latin America via the Beijing Foreign Languages Press, most of the Spanish editions of Lu Xun from this period came from the state press.⁴⁸

Guided readings of the classics, reviews of the folkloric repertoire, and adjustment of operatic scripts were common policies in the PRC to make traditional culture fit into the revolutionary scheme. Despite occasional phases of pluralism like the Hundred Flowers Campaign (1956), intellectual freedom was very limited throughout and became less tolerated over time. For example, the aforementioned poet Ai Qing, who had traveled the world as cultural delegate of the New China, was persecuted during the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957–58) and sent to Northeast China for reeducation. The Cultural Revolution (1966–76) escalated to an attitude of complete *tabula rasa* with the past. This en-

compassed the classical and traditional, imported foreign culture, and even works created during the first seventeen years of Communist rule, when the arts had been managed in Mao's name, by people he no longer trusted.⁴⁹ The campaign to destroy the "Four Olds" (customs, culture, habits, and ideas) targeted writers and literary works, as well as historical sites, artifacts, and archives. Concurrently, it created an unprecedented new proletarian ideal true to a radical interpretation of Mao's vision of the arts at the Yan'an Forum in 1942. For a decade, cultural production became circumscribed internally to the eight model operas and ballets (*yangbanxi*), and the single Chinese author that crossed borders in translation was Mao Zedong. Thus, it is intriguing that the survey of translated books indicates that it is during this latter iconoclast stage that a fair number of Spanish translations of Tang narrative, opera, folktales, and oral literature appear for the first time in Argentina. More intriguing is the fact that all these titles bear the print of a name: Bernardo Kordon (1915–2002), president of the Sino-Argentinian Friendship Association, cultural agent of Maoism in Argentina. This is where the twisted networks of cultural diplomacy come fully into play.

MAOIST AGENT AND SINOPHILE EDITOR

Mesmerized by a performance of the Peking Opera at the Colón Theatre in Buenos Aires in 1956, the writer Bernardo Kordon visited China in 1957 and soon became the president of the Sino-Argentine Friendship Association. Although the exact dates of his tenure are not clear, records indicate him as the intermediary between local intellectuals and Chinese officials up until the early 1980s. In the span of these decades, Kordon made eight trips to China and published five travel narratives on the achievements and transformations of the socialist nation of which he was so fond. Both a sinophile and a Maoist, he distanced himself from the Argentine Communist Party after the Sino-Soviet split but, surprisingly, never joined either of the two pro-China parties that emerged thereafter. An active writer, translator, journalist, publisher, and printer, Kordon curated a personal collection of Chinese literature in Spanish thanks to his privileged—and oscillating—position in the Chinese cultural diplomacy scheme and in Buenos Aires's vibrant publishing scene.

Apart from *Cuentos de la dinastía Tang* (1965, Capricornio; Tang dynasty short stories) and *Cuentos chinos con fantasmas* (1969, Juárez Editor; Chinese stories about ghosts), Kordon translated tales, apho-

risms, legends, and ancient stories in the anthology *Así escriben los chinos: Desde la tradición oral hasta nuestros días* (hereafter *Así escriben los chinos*; 1976, Ediciones Orion; Chinese writing: from oral traditions to the present), reprinted in 1981 as *El cuento chino* (1981, CEAL; The Chinese short story). Contrary to Fina Warschaver's sociological grasp of Chinese culture through an overall illustration of its arts, economy, and current affairs, Kordon retains the mimetic ideal of philology, by which a nation is best depicted in its primitive, indigenous—folkloric—expression (the feats of the New China, of which he talks abundantly, are published in a separate bibliography of travel writing).⁵⁰ This is a singular form of criticism that delimits an ancient corpus to search for the origin of a vernacular culture, but that, unlike philology, disregards erudition, explication, and interpretation:

En esta ocasión, deliberadamente he prescindido de toda referencia erudita, tanto para no fatigar al lector con anotaciones infinitas—e inútiles casi siempre, dado lo alejado de nuestros respectivos contextos históricos—como para dejarlo librado al puro goce estético, al ritmo pleno del relato. También, y correlativamente, he buscado recortar la zona más antigua de la narrativa china, pero destacando su vertiente popular y bullente, antes que la más clásica y dogmática.

In this case, I have deliberately omitted any erudite references, in order not to burden the reader with endless footnotes—endless and usually useless given the distance between our respective historical contexts. Also, to let the reader embrace the pure aesthetic pleasure and the sheer rhythm of the narrative. At the same time, I have tried to delimit the most ancient part of Chinese narrative, highlighting its popular and vibrant corpus, rather than its classical and dogmatic one.⁵¹

According to the preface, the distance between the context of production and reception of the text is such that any possible explanation is futile. Therefore, it is up to the reader to “embrace the pure aesthetic pleasure and the sheer rhythm of the narrative” without any explication. Chinese literature, Kordon appears to suggest, is to be enjoyed, not understood. As the quote concludes, the preference for narrative over lyric also responds to the distaste of “dogmatic” genres, like the extremely formulaic Tang poetry.

A marked distrust for any form of pedagogical literature is also evident in the absence of translations of contemporary authors, which is in keeping with the stances defined by Mao at the Yan'an Forum. The single post-1949 short story Kordon includes in *Así escriben los chinos* is omitted in the reprint of the anthology in 1981, after Mao's death. The closing paragraph of the 1976 preface evidences the reluctance to incorporate this story even during the Mao years:

Y por último cierra esta antología un cuento que ejemplariza la actual literatura china que comienza a formarse con el aporte de “campesinos, obreros y soldados” impulsados a tomar el pincel, que en China tanto sirve para escribir como para dibujar. A esta literatura que expresa la cotidianidad y sus transformaciones pertenece “El retrato”, un cuento del joven escritor Feng Tchang, que vive en Nankin, donde escribe una novela sobre la construcción del gran puente que desde hace poco cruza el legendario Yangsen en su parte más ancha.

The last short story of this anthology is an example of contemporary Chinese literature, which begins to take shape thanks to the contributions of “peasants, workers, and soldiers,” who are encouraged to pick up the brush, which in China is a tool for writing as well as drawing. “The portrait” belongs to this literature that depicts daily life and its transformations. Its author is the young writer Feng Tchang, from Nankin, where he is currently writing a novel about the recent construction of a great bridge that crosses the widest section of the legendary Yangsen.⁵²

Unlike the enthusiasm evident in the introductory discussion of the other stories, the tone here is neutral: Kordon merely situates the piece in literary history and provides a basic biography of the author and a minimal outline of the plot. The use of quotation marks to refer to “peasants, workers, and soldiers” as writers underscores how this statement is quoted rather than voiced. Furthermore, the subsequent reference to the paintbrush in the structure “the brush, which in China is a tool for writing” builds the expectation of the trope of the revolutionary writer, who uses arms and letters interchangeably (“a tool for writing as well as *fighting*”), but revisits the ancient type of the calligrapher who literally uses the brush to write and draw (“a tool for writing as well as

drawing”). The final visual image conveys—with ample irony—a nostalgic feeling for the iconic landscape of Jiangnan. The lower Yangzi River Delta fashioned as a land of beauty and refinement in the arts of the classical period becomes the mere topography of a recent massive infrastructure work, the new protagonist of the story.

How did this cultural agent of Maoism defy the aesthetic imperative he was supposed to represent and in turn put forward his own? The material conditions of his work provide a clue. Contrary to the rigorous bureaucracy watching over official Chinese institutions, there was minimal enforcement from China for its cultural ambassadors locally. In his autobiography the Argentine intellectual Juan José Sebreli (1930–) remembers the precarity of the Friendship Association: “una organización fantasma compuesta casi exclusivamente por Kordon y su mujer, Marina, en posesión de un sello de goma y un papel con membrete. Me adherí junto con algún otro, el crítico literario Jorge Raúl Lafforgue y creo que nadie más” (a phantom organization consisting merely of Kordon and his wife, Marina, that just had a rubber stamp and letterhead paper. I was one of its few members, together with the literary critic Jorge Raúl Lafforgue and probably nobody else).⁵³ Besides, like many other intellectuals in the orbit of China, Kordon was a “fellow traveler,” somebody who sympathized with the party’s goals but was not bound to its authority (and thus did not suffer the leadership’s verticality as Fina Warschaver did with the AACCA). Furthermore, for South American intellectuals, traveling to China meant traveling the world. The long journeys to Asia included stopovers in Paris, and thus those immersed in the allure of Chinese culture could further fill their luggage with European translations of Chinese works.⁵⁴ The aforementioned Jorge R. Lafforgue (1935–2022), a key figure in the Latin American publishing scene, recalls dragging hefty suitcases filled with books across the many airports between Beijing and Buenos Aires in 1965.⁵⁵

Just as the archive of Chinese literature in Spanish is scattered across publishers and series, so is Kordon’s own dossier. Probably to avoid any form of surveillance from Chinese authorities, although most likely to escape the local censorship of the intermittent military governments—he went into exile for a brief period in 1969—each Chinese work he edited, translated, or prefaced came out in different presses, including his own label Capricornio, issued at his family printing business. Kordon’s mark on the Spanish-language Chinese archive should be tracked beyond the books or magazines that indicate his name in any of these trades. Instead, it should be viewed as made possible by the po-

rous configuration of the cultural field in which editors, writers, critics, and scholars worked together in parallel to the university, which was shut down after the 1966 coup. The epitome of this intellectual solidarity is the aforementioned CEAL, an unprecedented editorial enterprise to massively produce low-cost editions of literature, arts, and general knowledge to compensate for the university's neglect of its educational mission in times of coercion. Among the five thousand titles published between 1966 and 1995, CEAL included Tang poetry and narrative anthologies, Lu Xun's novels, art books on Chinese painting, and monographs of ancient and modern literature in series curated by Kordon and Lafforgue: "Por Bernardo leí entonces muchos textos de la literatura clásica china, de la cual yo tenía un conocimiento bastante precario Con él compartí la admiración por la poesía de Li Tai Po y de Tu Fu, disfruté los trabajos de Lu Sin, el escritor contemporáneo favorito de Kordon, y recuerdo que antes de viajar dejé corregidas las pruebas de su antología de *Cuentos de la dinastía Tang*, que tradujo del francés y que se publicó bajo el sello Capricornio" (It was through Bernardo that I read a good deal of Chinese classical literature, with which I was only barely familiar I shared with him the admiration for the poetry of Li Bai and Du Fu, I enjoyed the works of Lu Xun's—Kordon's favorite contemporary author—and I recall that before traveling I completed the proofs of his anthology *Tang Dynasty Short Stories*, which he translated from the French and published in the press Capricornio).⁵⁶ Herein lies the originality of the Chinese literature archive in Spanish. This archive is heterogeneous, slippery, and unforeseen: it was channeled through the networks of Chinese cultural diplomacy and catalogued in world literature series or simply in translation; read in Marxist terms as well as Orientalist ones; and addressed to a disparate audience ranging from Maoist militants to art dilettantes. Distance, no doubt, plays a key role in the fragmentary nature of such body of works, since many of the Spanish translations were completely new, and those who read and circulated the literature of the antipodal country intervened from their literary expertise rather than as specialists on Asia. Perhaps this lack of professional training is what explains the absence of Spanish versions of the Red Classics—or any other long-format narrative, like the novels reviewed by Borges in the 1930s and 1940s—and, in turn, the preeminence of shorter pieces such as short stories, poems, or essays.

But distance is not the one explanation for this scattered archive. Immediate neighboring countries can produce an equally dispersed body of works in translation. Gustavo Sorá demonstrates in *Traducir el Bra-*

sil: Una antropología de la circulación internacional de las ideas (2003; Translating Brazil: An anthropology of the international circulation of ideas) that Argentina was the second place—after Paris—where the largest volume of Brazilian fiction was translated during the twentieth century.⁵⁷ Yet, as Sorá argues, the body of Portuguese translations of the literature of neighboring Argentina was scattered, concealed, and even unknown to its authors for a long time, leading to the general impression of remarkable ignorance between geographically proximate cultures. The lack of a state-sponsored editorial policy to translate, educate in, or promote the literary works of either the closest or furthest possible foreign culture, left this task entirely to the cultural field, where critics, writers, and translators circulate titles, authors, and genres outside the framework of their culture of origin in light of personal preferences and singular aesthetics of their catalogs. The particular “critical infrastructure,” whose origins Guido Herzovich identifies in the simultaneous expansion of the book industry and the eruption of literary criticism in the 1950s, provided a malleable arena for the circulation of Chinese literature in the cultural field during the Maoist years. The vibrant milieu, reconstructed in this chapter as comprised of numerous independent literary journals and presses headed by young, middle-class, left-wing writers and critics, was the major context that diverted Chinese literature from its ideological itineraries of cultural diplomacy and channeled it through critical ones.

SCARRED INTELLECTUAL

If Warschaver and Kordon had read China in a culturalist vein, paying attention to forms of representation and literary history, the younger representatives of the New Left read Chinese culture solely in theoretical terms. The significant “China” in the artistic-cultural field of the 1970s no longer evoked Peking Opera, tradition, or even socialist realism, but rather Mao’s vision of the revolutionary intellectual. With the radicalization of Maoism as an international theory of revolution toward the late 1960s, the proportion of cultural delegations to the PRC diminished in comparison to cohorts of guerrilla trainees, and Mao’s writings almost entirely replaced the previous general interest printed culture that had flowed from Beijing.

No other Argentine publication illustrates the theoretical shift in the reception of Chinese printed culture more vividly than the literary jour-

nal *Los libros* (1969–76). Forerunner of *Punto de Vista* (1978–2008), this mythical periodical was the Spanish-language gateway for the new critical trends in literary theory like structuralism, semiology, and psychoanalysis. Edited by writers and scholars identified with the revolutionary Left such as Beatriz Sarlo (1942–), Carlos Altamirano (1939–), Héctor Schmucler (1931–2018), and Ricardo Piglia (1941–2017), *Los libros* quickly shifted its lens from offering an ambitious review of everything published in the social sciences and humanities to studying the conditions of production of culture or, as its subtitle had it after 1971, a “political critique of culture.” In its most effervescent Maoist stage, the magazine dedicated an entire volume to the legacy of the Cultural Revolution in China. Apart from translated pieces from the French magazines *Cinétique* and *La Chine*, and the Italian *Quindici*, it included two essays on Mao by Ricardo Piglia: “Mao Tse Tung: Práctica estética y lucha de clases” (Mao Zedong: Aesthetic practice and class struggle) and “Lucha ideológica en la construcción del socialismo” (The ideological struggle in the construction of socialism).

In *Marx and Freud in Latin America* (2012), Bruno Bosteels uses Piglia’s two articles in *Los libros* as the ideological backdrop against which to read the fiction that Piglia had written at the time. In a very thorough analysis of Piglia’s short story “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt” (Tribute to Roberto Arlt) included in *Nombre falso* (1975, Fake name), Bosteels suggests that, aside from the Argentine writers Roberto Arlt and Jorge Luis Borges, Mao Zedong is a veiled precursor of that story. In “Homenaje,” Bosteels claims, the combination of Arlt and Borges in the treatment of plagiarism tackles the politico-economic dimension of revolutionary action. Following the premise that epigrams, be they falsely or correctly attributed, are a source of ideology in Piglia, Bosteels reads all kinds of thematic and stylistic textual appropriations in the story. Falsification, he argues, not only brings about a new literary aesthetic but also attempts, by attacking the very principle of the private appropriation of the written, to annihilate the cult of originality that is the basis of aesthetic judgment throughout modernity.

Bosteels stresses the differential ideological value of this story, which has been overlooked by mainstream scholarship on Piglia’s ideas on plagiarism, usually concerned with *Respiración artificial* (1980, *Artificial Respiration*) and the later historical context of dictatorship. He also highlights the rare historiographical appeal of the articles in *Los libros* for the general study of Maoism in Latin America, remarkably timid in criticism (despite the abundance of primary sources) and unjustly silenced by its

own protagonists. While Bosteels laments that many former Maoist intellectuals such as Beatriz Sarlo are adamant about the futility of looking back on their militant years, he is more optimistic about Piglia's ambiguity toward his own Maoist past. Bosteels acknowledges the "strange omission" of the two Maoist articles in the most complete bibliography of Piglia's work as a critic and author of narrative fiction and in *Conversación en Princeton* (1999, Conversation in Princeton), but ultimately hopes that Piglia "perhaps never renounced his Maoist past."⁵⁸ The section of Bosteels's book titled "In the Shadow of Mao" is "an attempt to fight against this cursed tendency toward intellectual orphanhood and forgetfulness."⁵⁹ In what follows I do not intend to challenge Bosteels's analysis of "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt" nor provide theoretical grounds for Piglia's possible retrospective glance over his Maoist militancy. Instead I examine one of the last pieces of Piglia's work, to shed light on how the use of epigrams might suggest Gao Xingjian (1940-) as a veiled precursor that reconfigures Piglia's own position vis-à-vis the revolutionary process, Chinese culture, and world literature. If Piglia's fiction of the mid-1970s is marked by the shadow of Mao and the New Left, his later years reveal the shadow of Gao and the Communist exile.

The most immediate source to explore Piglia's look back on Maoism would be the travelogue of his three-months trip to China in 1973 (fig. 4), which can be consulted at Princeton University, together with his complete papers. Although this text never saw the light, Piglia intended to revise it and publish it alongside his last works from the series *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi* (*The Diaries of Emilio Renzi*). His untimely death in 2017 affected this plan, and even if news articles occasionally announced it, close collaborators confirmed that the Chinese journal would not be published without careful editing.⁶⁰ The single excerpt of the journal that was indeed edited and published came out in the literary supplement of the Argentine newspaper *Clarín* on April 27, 2012, and was reprinted a week later in the Spanish daily *El País*. Titled "Un día perfecto" (A perfect day) and only a thousand-words long, the piece offers a fair number of cues to speculate about Piglia's later ideas on Chinese culture, world literature, and the configuration of a cosmopolitan intellectual.

The opening lines of "Un día perfecto" set the overall retrospective tone of the text: "Aquí, en la costa oriental, el sol se pone en la bahía. Alguien recordó que el atardecer no existía como tema poético para los griegos. Todo el mérito era para el amanecer y sus múltiples metáforas: la aurora, el alba, el despertar. Recién en Roma, con la declinación del imperio, Virgilio y sus amigos empezaron a celebrar el ocaso, el crepús-



Fig. 4. Ricardo Piglia's poses alone in the countryside during his visit to the People's Republic of China, 1973. Copyright © Marta Eguía de Piglia. Courtesy of Ricardo Piglia Papers, Princeton University Special Collections, Princeton, NJ.

culo, el fin del día. ¿Habría entonces escritores del amanecer y escritores del crepúsculo? . . . ¿Cómo podríamos definir un día perfecto? Tal vez sería mejor decir, ¿cómo podría yo narrar un día perfecto?” (Here, on the Oriental coast, the sun sets over the bay. Somebody once said that sunsets were never a trope for the Greek. They only credited sunrise and its multiple metaphors: daybreak, dawn, the awakening. It was as late as Rome, with the decline of the empire, that Virgil and his friends began to celebrate dusk, sunset, the end of the day. Would you say there are sunrise writers and sunset ones? . . . How could we define a perfect day? Or rather, how could I narrate a perfect day?).⁶¹ These first lines suggest that in a parallel move to the setting sun, empires decline and writing also comes to an end. Following this hypothesis, a nostalgic Piglia gazing at the glare of the summer twilight in Uruguay anticipates his attempt to look back and narrate a perfect day. Yet the initial descending metaphor is marked by a paradox. Hinting to the playful geographic ambiguity of “Oriental” as both Asian and Uruguayan, the text in fact opens with a scene of disorientation: in this particular Orient, the sun sets in the East. We are left to wonder, then, how much contradiction will the narrative of his perfect day entail as well?

The text immediately goes back in time with an entry from July 6, 1973, that reproduces the typical tone and tropes of the socialist travelogue, which as Sylvia Saítta has demonstrated in *Hacia la revolución: Viajeros argentinos de izquierda* (2007, Towards the revolution. Left wing Argentine travelers) inaugurated a way of narrating the revolution that quickly evolved into a transnational genre.⁶² Young Piglia describes his triumphal landing in Beijing, his first encounters with the uniformed youth, and his impressions of the massive Tiananmen Square. Political excitement turns into erotic bewilderment: “Me siento tan desorientado que me enamoro de la primera mujer que me habla” (I feel so disoriented that I fall in love with the first woman that talks to me).⁶³ In the closing line of the text, Piglia answers the question from the first paragraph with a rhetorical question. The remote spatial and temporal distance that separates him from his younger self indeed forces him to reexamine the “perfect” nature of that thrilling day. Between parentheses that increase the rhetorical effect of the question, he wonders: “Tenía treinta años. Estaba del otro lado del mundo. ¿Sería así un día perfecto?” (I was thirty years old. I was on the other side of the world. Is that what a perfect day might be like?).⁶⁴ But the crucial answer lies in the penultimate passage, where Piglia recalls the origin of his Chinese trip in another flashback within what is already phrased as reminiscence:

De pronto una tarde me encontré en la calle Corrientes con Bernardo Kordon, a quien yo le había publicado los *Cuentos completos* en la editorial donde trabajo. Nos sentamos a tomar un café, charlamos de bueyes perdidos y al rato Kordon sacó una libretita y me preguntó si quería viajar a China. Había una vacante, Edgar Bailey a último momento no había querido ir. Mucho quilombo, le dijo Edgar. Kordon es presidente de la Asociación de amistad Chino-Argentina, varios escritores nacionales ya han viajado al Celeste Imperio, como él lo llama. No tengo ninguna obligación, y si quiero publicar algo sobre China a la vuelta, mejor. Pensé que podía escribir un diario de viaje que al mismo tiempo fueran las observaciones de un hombre solo.

Walking down Corrientes street one afternoon I suddenly ran into Bernardo Kordon, whose *Complete Short Stories* I had published in the press I work for. We stopped for coffee, chatted about this and that, and out of the blue Kordon took

out a notebook and asked me if I wanted to travel to China. There was a spot, Edgar Baily had cancelled last minute. “Too much of a hassle,” Edgar had said. Kordon is the president of the Sino-Argentine Friendship Association, and has sent many other national writers to the “Celestial Empire,” as he calls it. I am not bound to do anything upon my return; if I want to publish something, all the better. I thought I could write a journal that included one man’s observations.⁶⁵

Once again, cultural diplomacy is marked by chance, literary friendship, and personal projects. According to Kordon, Piglia can travel, even without having to make any publication commitment whatsoever. The travel journal Piglia fantasizes about is equated to what he calls “observaciones de un hombre solo.” Herein lies the key. Is he referring to the writing of China as a solely individual enterprise, detached of an institutional or ideological framework, like Warschaver’s or Kordon’s? Or does “one man’s observations” stress the existential solitude—the bad conscience—of the intellectual in face of the masses? The image of a man separated from the crowd is, after all, recurrent in “Un día perfecto”:

1.

Un campesino de sombrero redondo que trabaja solo en un campo de arroz. Creo que va ser el único hombre solo al que voy a ver a partir de ahora.

2.

En el aeropuerto de Shanghái me separan del resto de los pasajeros.

3.

. . . voy solo en la noche estrellada.

4.

Por fin entramos en la plaza Tien An Men, infinita y vacía.

5.

. . . (la campanilla) suena en algún lugar lejano. Nadie viene.

1.

A peasant with a round hat, working alone at a rice paddy. I think he is the only man that I will see alone from now on.

2.

At Shanghai’s airport I am separated from the rest of the passengers.

3.
... alone I travel under the starry night.
4.
We finally enter Tiananmen Square, infinite and empty.
5.
... (the doorbell) rings in the distance. Nobody comes.

Following Bosteels's premise that epigrams are the source of ideology in Piglia's writing, I also read the phrase "un hombre solo" as an epigram: "at times these are relatively autonomous phrases interpolated into the body of the text, while at others they establish authentic maxims, or rules of thought, at the beginning of a book or chapter. In each case, they serve to condense the ideology of literature as well as its critique on the part of Piglia."⁶⁶ In this light, I argue that the phrase "observaciones de un hombre solo" echoes the Spanish title of Gao Xingjian's novel *El libro de un hombre solo* (2001; *One Man's Bible*), revealing that the new veiled authority of the phrase that condenses the stance of Piglia's Chinese journal is none other than that of a Maoist dissident.

Gao Xingjian's *El libro de un hombre solo* is a personal memoir of brutality in red China. The novel follows the style and themes of the "Scar Literature" genre that emerged in China after the death of Mao, gathering Chinese writers for whom fiction was the only way to heal the wounds of the past decades. Gao, seeking to avoid censorship and political persecution, left for France in the 1980s and has remained there ever since. In 2000 he was the first Chinese national to receive the Nobel Prize for literature, an award condemned by the Chinese authorities. The parallelisms between the narrators of *El libro de un hombre solo* and "Un día perfecto" are remarkable: the novel's unnamed main character is an alter ego of Gao, a successful writer who travels the world and in the solitude of hotel rooms is confronted with memories of his past. The biographical trajectories are also parallel: two male authors from the same generation who embraced the revolutionary utopia of the 1960s from opposite edges of the planet and later became reputable world authors consecrated through translation and cosmopolitan literary networks. My hypothesis on the epigram is my analysis of what I see as an eloquent parallelism. Yet the question remains: did Piglia actually read Gao? It is likely that he was at least familiar with his work. That the first Chinese-born author to win the Nobel Prize for literature was an outspoken critic of Maoism might have caught his attention to some degree. More specific networks of world literature probably exposed

Piglia to his work. Perhaps the French literary residency Maison des Écrivains Étrangers et des Traducteurs in Saint-Nazaire, where they both participated in the 1980s, was a source of contact. Or Piglia's Princeton University years, where an exiled Chinese author living in France could have easily made it into world literature syllabi and symposia. Even in Buenos Aires, through Yu Lou (1984–), Piglia's most recent Chinese translator, Gao might have come up in conversation at some point.⁶⁷ Whether deliberate or not, the reading effect of the epigram is autonomous. It closes Piglia's unstable relationship with his Maoist past and provides a conclusive answer to it. *Pace* Bosteels, there is an obvious ambiguity over Piglia's silence regarding Maoism in his later years. The fact is that an Argentine (ex-?) Maoist and a Chinese dissident share something in their understanding of literary practice to the extent that they rely on basically the same epigram.

A final twist in Piglia's use of epigrams though opens the interrogation again. The introductory paragraphs of "Un día perfecto" reappear verbatim in the final pages of the third tome of Piglia's last published work, *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi* (The diaries of Emilio Renzi). Also titled "Un día perfecto," the new fragments omit both the reference to the Uruguayan sunset and to Piglia in the scene of writing. Immediately after the question "¿cómo podría yo narrar un día perfecto?" (how could I narrate a perfect day?)⁶⁸ the diary moves on to a different entry. Both the connecting phrase "por ejemplo" and the entire recollection of the first day in China have disappeared. In that case, is the 2012 "Un día perfecto" actually a published excerpt of the Chinese journal or Emilio Renzi's diaries? If it is the latter, just like the "strange omissions" of the Maoist articles in Piglia's collected works noted in Bosteels's book, the final volume of *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi* fully overlooks the Chinese episode. This deliberate traffic of epigrams, authored by Gao or Piglia himself, would suggest then that Piglia's ambiguous relation with Maoism is by no means a product of "orphanhood and forgetfulness," as Bosteels laments, but a programmatic ideological take on memorial literature.

The retrospective glance at the Maoist experience has become particularly relevant in recent years with the fiftieth anniversary of the Cultural Revolution and the commemorative work around it. In chapter 5 of this book I analyze recent memoirs and documentaries produced by children of Latin American intellectuals who settled in China to serve the revolution and whose art provides a singular take on intimate genres and political legacies, as well as the historical value of affective

archives. In this chapter, by contrast, I have provided a macro-analysis of Maoist diplomacy by studying its institutions, canons, and aesthetics in Latin America. Rather than a local iteration of global Maoism, I have demonstrated that its twisted networks and intellectual flows nurtured singular aesthetic projects in the reading of Chinese humanist culture at large. In the absence of formal repositories, I have taken a sociological approach to translation to gather titles, articles, and letters never studied before as a consistent archive. Methodologically, I have read paratexts such as book covers, inside flaps, and forewords, as legitimate spaces of critical intervention. The following chapter engages further with the material circulation of the Chinese poetry studied in this chapter but in regarding the optical and haptical experimentations of the ideogram of the avant-gardes throughout the twentieth century. Translation, as I will argue shortly, is also an act of media transfer that implies physically transcreating media across cultural boundaries.

The Surface of the Ideograph

Visual Poetry and the Chinese Script

At the center of Daniel Santoro's drawing *Días peronistas* (2002; Peronist days), the Argentine president Juan Domingo Perón embraces his wife Eva as they stand on a neoclassical pedestal amid a stream of iron bars and arabesque greenery (fig. 5). Evoking fascist symbology, the benevolent-looking leaders embody the industrial strength that is shown as emerging from the nation's fertile soil. Yet, suspended above the figures is a set of Chinese characters that disrupt the aesthetic conventions of this iconography, or at least, of its manifestation in South America. Is this a nod to Maoist visual culture? Even if Mao's propaganda machine coincided with the triumphant imagery of Peronism that Santoro retrospectively reworks, a hypothesis on connected history would refer not to the political regime in the antipodes (which Perón distrusted, by the way) but rather to its past. The rows and columns of Chinese signs in fact compose two poems of the Tang dynasty: "Deer Park" by Wang Wei (699–759) and "Quiet Night Thoughts" by Li Bai. The sudden emergence of a textual fragment from the golden age of Chinese literature in the Argentine's uber-political artwork poses larger questions about the historical interpretation of classical culture, the translation of a text from Asia to South America, and, specifically, the media transfer between poetry and painting.



Fig. 5. Daniel Santoro, *Días peronistas*, ink on paper, *Manual del niño peronista*, 2003. Copyright © Daniel Santoro.

If there is any historic connection between classical Peronism (1946–55) and the Tang dynasty that Santoro’s drawing appears to suggest, it is that both represent the heyday of their respective civilizations. The red characters arranged vertically to the left echo the title of the draw-

ing, also printed in Spanish at the center of the page. 日明光 *ri ming guang* (“day/sun,” “bright,” “light”) is a literal (albeit ungrammatical) translation of “sunny day,” which is the meaning attributed to the Argentine idiom “Peronist Day.”¹ The brightness metaphor woven by the Chinese words signals both the saying in Spanish as well as its pictorial representation: the splendor of Peronism in the drawing of the two leaders, and the grandeur of Chinese culture in the poems, from where the three red characters are drawn.²

The discussion about the poetics of the Chinese script expands if we consider the material production of its signs, the physicality of a writing system that has fascinated the Western imagination for centuries. A long-time student of Mandarin, Santoro also uses his artist’s sketchbooks as language workbooks. In his published exercises *Manual del niño peronista* (2003), political and psychoanalytical motifs coexist with radicals, logograms, and sentences apparently transcribed from a textbook of Mandarin for beginners, such as “Hello, how are you?” or “I am your friend, are you mine?”³ Far from calligraphy, which would imply attention to design and instrumentation in the production of aesthetically pleasing writing, Santoro’s handwriting is hastily scratched in marker pen, and alternates traditional and simplified characters, rendering curious versions of classical Chinese lyric in the standardized script of the PRC. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of text and image in *Días peronistas* resituates the Tang lines back to their original medium: painting. The quartet “Deer Park” is in fact only a fragment of a larger poem written over a massive horizontal landscape scroll, whose original is lost and the earliest surviving copy is from the seventeenth century. A conscious examination of the materiality of the Chinese script opens a cross-cultural consideration of the nature of writing, poetry, and media.

Santoro’s example anticipates the hypothesis that will run through the current chapter: Chinese scriptural poetics penetrated in Latin America not in the continent’s textual tradition but in its visual arts. It was not traditional lyricists but visual poets and plastic artists who innovated poetically with the surface of the Chinese script. If the Chinese language was conceived as the paradigmatic counterexample of phonetical writing from early modernity to poststructuralism, Latin American poets exploring the limits of the word and the image largely ignored what Chinese signs represented, but still represented them in their own ideogrammatic poetry. José Juan Tablada crafts pictographic glyphs with silk, pottery, and other transpacific imports of the Manila Galleon; Haroldo de Campos recreates the architecture of classical quartets in concrete

grids and mimics the cinematic experience of unfolding handscrolls via modern design; Severo Sarduy tattoos ideograms and uses acupuncture needles to puncture writing on the body. In this vein, translation does not entail the linguistic transfer from an original text, but rather the optical and haptical transcreations of an interface across space and time. I retrace this “paleographic” approach to Latin American ideogrammatic poetry in the reconstruction of a decades-long exchange between these and other poets and artists obsessed with Asia such as Octavio Paz or Salvador Elizondo (1932–2006). If there is a uniquely Latin American critique of logocentrism, I conclude, it is the deconstruction of Western writing through the manipulation of the ideograph.

CHINESE TEXTS

To claim a superficial, exterior, slight, or minor echo of Chinese poetics in Latin American letters is not to say that Latin American poets were never interested in China. As I discuss at the beginning of this book, *modernistas* recreated a personal Orient via the portrayal of Asian artifacts and peoples. It can also be argued that colonial connections played a role: Brazilians were somewhat closer to China thanks to the Lusophone poetry of Macao, which used a local patois that combined Portuguese and Cantonese. But if the general *modernista* enthusiasm for Oriental *themes* can be traced to direct sources (trade, immigration, colonialism, etc.), the exposure to Chinese literature is still inescapably tied to the French language, namely, to the anthologies *Le livre de jade* (1867) and *La flûte de jade. Poésies chinoises* (1920).⁴ The former was one of the earliest substantial compilations of Chinese poetry in any European language. Translated by Judith Gautier (1845–1917) and her Chinese tutor Ding Dungling (1831–1886), the anthology was a commercial success, reprinted several times, and for generations the principal source of Chinese lyric for the general public in the West.⁵ In “La muerte de la emperatriz de la China,” Rubén Darío’s sinophile character Recaredo “adores Judith Gautier,” and Gautier, in turn, “adores Chinese princesses” in Darío’s poem “Divagación” (“Digression”).⁶ Machado de Assis (1839–1908) used Gautier’s volume in 1870 for his eight poetic adaptations of the Tang in “Lira Chinesa” (Chinese lyre) as did José Juan Tablada for his homage to Li Bai in *Li-Po y otros poemas* (1920).⁷ If, as chapter 2 demonstrates, sinology was fostering translations of Chinese lyric into English, French, and German in the first half of the twentieth

century, *modernismo* only had ears for French. As Mariano Siskind observes in *Cosmopolitan Desires*, Rubén Darío's idea of the universe, and his resulting vision of the Orient, is inevitably determined by a French standpoint: "Even if Darío's world does not extend far beyond Spain, France, and Western Europe (because his Japonaiseries and Chinoiseries are not attempts to reach Japan or China but rather exoticist representations at the heart of nineteenth-century French culture), he sees that narrow map as the extent of a world that is universal because it is devoid of marks of cultural particularity or Latin American local color. What Darío cannot see—what his modernist subjectivity prevents him from seeing—is that his world is imprinted with some of the most salient markers of French culture."⁸ For *modernistas* at large, the sonority and visuality of Chinese poetry were framed by the harmony of French.

In his later years Octavio Paz (1914–98) lamented that Chinese poetics had so faint an echo in Latin America. Paz is without a doubt the intellectual that engaged most systematically with Asia through Indian philosophy, Japanese aesthetics, and Chinese art. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he took diplomatic positions in Tokyo and New Delhi, where he complemented his readings with impressions of daily life that form the basis of the poems of *Ladera este* (1978; *East Slope*) and the essay *Vislumbres de la India* (1995; *In Light of India*). Paz's Asian sojourn was also central for developing works that engage most explicitly with the limits of writing, mainly *Blanco* (1966; *Blanco*) and *El signo y el garabato* (1973; *The sign and the scribble*). In Asia he also became immersed in *kavya* and tantric poetry, as well as in the structure of Sinitic and Sanskrit languages, which he never read but dared to study to translate Matsuo Bashō's haikus (in collaboration with Eikichi Hayashiya [1919–2016]) and Tang poetry (in consultation with Wai-Lim Yip [1937]). The insights from this lifelong East-West exploration manifest as much in his personal inquiry into the connected histories of Mesoamerica and the Indian subcontinent as in key themes in his work such as poetry, antiquity, rituality, eroticism, or language. In short, Paz read, wrote, lived, and loved Asia.

Paz was the single Spanish-language contributor to book *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* (1987) by the US poet and essayist (and Paz's friend and translator) Eliot Weinberger (1949–). Weinberger's essay is a clever review of the successive translations of Wang Wei's famous poem "Deer Park" (the one on the left in Santoro's *Días peronistas*). With a similarly witty take on translation as Borges's in "Los traductores de las 1001 noches," Weinberger compares twenty versions

of the short Chinese quartet in English, French, German, and Spanish, thus tracing the evolution of the art of translation. A longtime friend and collaborator, Paz wrote the afterword to the book, which starts off with a regret:

[Weinberger's] examples come from English, and, to a lesser extent, from French; I am sure that a parallel exploration of German or Italian would produce similar results. Weinberger cites only one Spanish version, my own. There may be another, and perhaps one or two in Portuguese. One must admit, however, that Spanish and Portuguese do not enjoy a *corpus* of Chinese translation similar in importance or quality to that of other languages. This is regrettable: the modern era has discovered other classicisms besides that of Greco-Roman culture, and one of them is China and Japan.⁹

The note on the discovery of classicism is a reference to the historical sense of Anglo-American modernism: “the drive that compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”¹⁰ Tradition, in the words of T. S. Eliot, is not a fixed canon but, rather, a flexible set of conventions to be molded by younger generations. Although Paz does acknowledge *modernismo*'s cosmopolitan “discovery” of Greek and Latin antiquity (a “discovery” made by the French neoclassicists), he calls for a broader, farther-reaching cosmopolitan attitude, one that extends to the Chinese and Japanese classical periods. Here Paz is thinking of Pound, who stretched the boundaries of tradition through translation and became, in the oft-quoted words of T. S. Eliot, “the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time.” In an operation that Haroldo de Campos understands as the epitome of “transcreation,” Pound used translation to criticize his own linguistic instrument and subject it to the most varied diction for poetic creation:

Thus, Pound . . . embarks on the task of translating Chinese poems and Japanese Noh plays; Provençal troubadours; Guido Cavalcanti; French symbolists; and making use of his experiences in the handling of Laforguean *logopoeia* (“the dance of the intellect among words”), he rewrites Propertius

in “vers de société” and translates the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles into a colloquial American speech driven by the beats of slang. His work is both criticism and pedagogy, since while it diversifies the possibilities of his poetic of idiom, it also offers up to new poets and readers of poetry a whole repertory (often unsuspected or obscured by the conventions of academic taste) of basic poetic products, now reconsidered and revived. “Make it new”: give new life to the valid literary past via translation.¹¹

Translation becomes here an exercise of creative writing, a gloss of world literature in poetic form. Later in the afterword to *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*, Paz concludes that the absence of such poet-translators explains the unfortunate missed connection between Latin America and Asia:

The translations of Chinese and Japanese poetry into English have been so great and so diverse that they themselves form a chapter in the modern poetry of the language. I find nothing similar in French, although there are notable translations, such as those by Claude Roy or François Cheng. Certainly, we owe to Claudel, Segalen, and Saint-John Perse poetic visions of China—but not memorable translations. It’s a pity. In Spanish this lack has impoverished us.¹²

This fragment reveals two substantial premises on the infrastructure of world literature or, in other words, on the conditions of possibility so that a text can cross cultural boundaries. Again, like Borges, for whom Arthur Waley’s “delicate versions of Murasaki are classic works of English literature,”¹³ Paz also considers that a text in translation inaugurates a new poetical lineage in the target language. Borges’s theory of translation is more radical though, since he posits that the utter opacity of the source language is not detrimental to a good translation (as discussed in chap. 2, the further away from the original, the richer a text the translation becomes). Paz, instead, holds that when it comes to poetry “memorable translations” (neither “notable” nor “poetic”) are only executed by translators who are good poets and have a good grasp of the source language. Paz’s taxonomy of translators in the above quote has geopolitical implications: linguistic groups with more poet-translators (such as the English) produce richer poetry than those with

good individual philologists and good poets (France), and evidently more than those in want of either (Spanish). This yields the conclusion that translation is a necessary condition for a text to enter a new cultural sphere; yet poetic translation is what enriches it.

Even though Paz acknowledged the avant-garde innovations of the Mexican Efraín Rebolledo (1877–1929) or José Juan Tablada’s Japonisme, he was not off the mark when in 1987 he bemoaned the virtual absence of poet-translators working from Chinese into Spanish. Direct translation from Chinese into Spanish is a relatively recent phenomenon enabled by the growing interest in China at the turn of the twenty-first century as well as by the formal training of scholars and poets in Chinese. Miguel Ángel Petrecca’s (1979–) translations of modern and contemporary Chinese lyric; Fernando Perez Villalón’s (1975–) Tang poets seen through Pound and Haroldo de Campos; and Guillermo Dañino’s (1929–2023) extensive volumes on Du Fu, Li Bai, and Wang Wei are probably the most remarkable examples of recent direct translations of Chinese poetry in the region.¹⁴ As shown in chapter 3, the coincidence of Maoist cultural diplomacy and the midcentury publishing boom did produce an original catalogue of Tang lyric in Spanish. But those were indirect translations by poets utterly unfamiliar with the Sinitic script. Some had read some Chinese literature; others sympathized ideologically with Communism and interpreted classical voices accordingly; the finest ones happened to be residing in China at the time of translation, and their versions are marked by ongoing conversations with renowned artists (Juan L. Ortiz, to mention the most salient one).¹⁵ In line with Borges’s model of indirect translation, all these translators relied entirely on European specialists when it came to grappling with the original text.¹⁶

Paz’s verdict on poetic translation is particularly fruitful for considering classical Chinese as a source language, given the many layers involved in the translation of an “original” hand-painted poem, in an unpronounceable language, and in a grammar that does not inflect subject, tense, or number. To exhibit this palimpsest feature of Chinese poetry, some bilingual editions include a transcription of the Chinese characters, as well as their transliteration to the pinyin romanization system, the literal correspondence of each Chinese word, and finally, the paraphrased version.¹⁷ Each of these steps implies not only a semantic transference of meaning between languages but also a morphological transformation, a phonological reconstruction, and a spatial reorganization of signs. This palimpsest feature of translation could be a factor when dealing with any language that uses nonalphabetic writing

systems. Yet, in a discussion of poetic translation, the Chinese script is imbued with a set of myths that project the ideas and desires of both Westerners and the Chinese. First, the Chinese script is the main element that has forged the myth of an enduring “Chinese civilization,” which has vested what we now call “China” and “Chinese culture” with an aura of permanence and immutability. This dates back to the early modern figurations via Jesuits’ accounts that saw in the ancient Chinese script the formula for a universal language. In both a philosophical and practical sense, a pictographic system like Chinese, thinkers speculated, would render the immediate connection to the spirit as well as operate as a lingua franca at a time when Latin was fading due to the emergence of European vernaculars. In this “Chinese prejudice,” Jacques Derrida sees a limited initial attempt to overcome the metaphysics of phonetic writing: an attempt “recentered upon ahistorical grounds which reconcile the logico-philosophical (blindness to the condition of the logico-philosophical: phonetic writing) and the theological points of view.”¹⁸ The infatuation with the Chinese script faded in the nineteenth century with the advent of evolutionary philosophies of history. According to Christopher Bush in *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing and Media* (2009), these theories “doubly banished the exteriority, formalism, and lifelessness of writing: temporally, to a prehistorical past, and spatially, to the East. While the latter gesture was consistently reinforced by the isomorphism of every aspect of Oriental cultures (all static, fossilized, ahistorical, materialist, spatial, despotic, and ideographic), the former relied on a normative teleology that opposed these qualities to the West (dynamic, historical, spiritual, temporal, free, and alphabetic).”¹⁹ Bush argues that the reemergence of Oriental writing at so many pivotal moments of modern critical discourse would seem to suggest an overturning of inherited images of the Orient as the antithesis of the modern. Yet the ideograph’s traditional associations were precisely those that attracted the experimental aesthetics of European modernism at large, he claims. With all its errors and fallacies, Ernest Fenollosa’s manuscript, “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,” edited and published by Ezra Pound in 1920, generalized the notion that Chinese poetry was inseparable from its writing system, that its poetic nature resided precisely in the dense metaphorical quality of its signs.²⁰ While this is only true of a very small percentage of Chinese logograms, the idea of poetry as a sequence of clear images became Pound’s ars poetica in *Cathay* (1915) and moved into the English tradition. As Bush concludes

The “ideograph” is conventionally understood as a form of writing that is ancient and Chinese. It is neither. The ideograph is a modern Western invention, one contemporaneous with, and related to, such other modern inventions, such other forms of writing, as the telegraph or the cinematograph (the ideograph posits language’s reduction to a reified, almost technical medium, on the one hand, and a revelation of its material being in an explosion of textures, tones and shapes, on the other. . . . For modernists, the ideograph was, in a word, a way of thinking about language as *writing*.²¹

An imaginary construction of a startlingly rich script, vested with a significant historical aura, and yet terribly alien to Latin American poets, who barely engaged with it in their translation work, the ideograph has only superficially touched the Latin American lyric tradition. Along these lines, Octavio Paz’s theory that poetic translation is the most powerful form of translation that enriches a cultural tradition would yield to the conclusion on the untranslatability between China and Latin America. But, following Emily Apter’s embrace of “untranslatability” as a fundamental principle of comparative literature, I take a step away from habitual frameworks of *adequatio* in Translation Studies and refrain from measuring “semantic and stylistic infidelity to the original literary text,” to emphasize language over literature, and determine “semantic loss and gain as a result of linguistic erosion or extinction.”²²

CHINESE TEXTURES

This brings me back to the second part of my hypothesis that in Latin America the poetics of the Chinese script unfolds on the surface. This claim is a methodological one, which envisions the surface not as a residual external category that conveys the inaccessibility of an alleged essence within but as the opposite. I follow Giuliana Bruno’s notion of “surface” as texture as the locus where the artistic experience unfolds at its fullest. In *Surface Matters: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media* (2014), Bruno elevates the visual object from a strictly optical to a haptical phenomenon, that is, relating to the sense of touch: “the reciprocal contact between us and objects or environments indeed occurs on the surface. It is by way of such tangible, ‘superficial’ contact that we apprehend the art object and the space of art, turning contact into the

communicative interface of a public intimacy.”²³ Bruno explores critical operations in film, architecture, and performing arts that unfold on the surface, with the broader aim of articulating the surface as a site of mediation, transfer, and transformation. The surface understands the object of art as a set of material relations: “Many changes affected by the migration of images manifest themselves texturally as a kind of surface tension, which affects the very ‘skin’ of images and the space of their circulation.”²⁴ I suggest that switching the focus from the linguistic to the visual illuminates a whole new dimension of the Chinese script. In this light the ideograph is no longer conceived as mere text but as texture too. I am interested in how the optical and haptical aspects of the surface of Chinese glyphs (calligraphy, font, style, spacing, etc.), as well as the surfaces on which they are inscribed (paper, silk, parchment, scrolls, porcelain, and skin), pose crucial questions about media, technology, and tradition that are overlooked in the effort to decipher linguistic meaning in a cultural context that is largely blind to it. In this vein I am thinking of writing in terms of what Roland Barthes defines as “scription,” the muscular act of tracing signs. In his “Variations sur l’écriture” (1973; *Variations on writing*), Barthes moves away from the metaphorical implications of writing to explore its corporeality: “that gesture by which the hand holds a tool (awl, cane, pen) places it on top of a surface, and slightly pressures or caresses it tracing regular, recurrent and rhythmic forms (to put it bluntly: let us not forcefully talk about ‘signs’).”²⁵

The invitation to explore the haptical dimension of Chinese writing entails a consideration of the tangible signifying elements of literary languages, some of which are linguistic and some technological, such as supplies, instrumentation, and site of inscription. These aspects become more intriguing when considering translation between distant regions of the globe and remote epochs. I take on Haroldo de Campos’s master concept of transcreation to acknowledge, with Borges, that the further source and target texts are, the richer the translation process becomes: we may say, then, that every translation of a creative text will always be a “re-creation,” a parallel and autonomous, although reciprocal, translation—“transcreation.” The more intricate the text is, the more seducing it is to “re-create” it. Of course in a translation of this type, not only the signified but also the sign itself is translated, that is, the sign’s tangible self, its very materiality (sonorous properties, graphical-visual properties.)²⁶ As a radical modernist, Haroldo understands poetic signification in terms of Pound, Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), or e.e.

cummings (1894–1962), and thus transcends the realm of the referential to engage most intimately with the linguistic materiality of words (their sound, morphology, and graphic design). I propose to take this engagement with the materiality a step further and consider not only the multiple “verbivocovisual” (verbal-vocal-visual) aspects of the signifier Haroldo embraces in his work but, specifically, the technological ones too. Transcreation, in the following pages, stands as the transfer of language technologies; that is, the tangible techniques, skills, methods, and processes used in the recreation of a source text into a target text that illuminate world literature in its material and medial dimension.

In *Beyond Sinology: Chinese Writing and the Scripts of Culture* (2014), Andrea Bachner studies different forms of media inscription of Chinese signs (that she names “sinographs”) to inquire into the signifying principles of this unique language in relation to the many geographical contexts where it unfolds. Her wide-ranging study is focused in Southeast Asia and North America, however Bachner credits the Brazilian concrete poets for their highly theoretical use of the ideograph/sinograph notwithstanding their ignorance of the language. Yet she is less enthusiastic about other Western poets (such as Pound, Tablada, or Victor Segalen) who, in the hype of modernist sinophilia, also explored sinographic material, but with what she considers less interesting results: “Western writers, while reclaiming the ideographic method for their own creative process, hardly ever set out to craft poetry with sinographic material. The poetry resulting from the appeal of Chinese writing by poets creating in European languages and their (mostly) alphabetic scripts might well be ideographic—depending on what the term was intended to express at any given moment—but they are rarely written in Chinese. Indeed, Chinese writing, viewed through the lens of a phonetic script tradition often signifies merely as a figurative specter.”²⁷ While Bachner’s semiotic analysis posits these poets’ sinographs as “figurative specters”—forever metaphorical entities that merely supplement the alphabetic text—I argue that these sinographs instead actualize the matter of writing when seen through the lens of visual culture. It is no surprise that what I consider to be the most insightful discussion of the ideogram in Latin America was conducted by poets who were also visual artists. The modernist poet José Juan Tablada was also an illustrator and art critic; Haroldo de Campos’s modern eye for design shaped his poetry; Severo Sarduy was trained in fine arts and painted throughout his prolific writing career. The three shared a fascination with Asia that led them to incorporate themes and

forms from different fields of the arts and also to engage with the visuality and materiality of sinophone scripts.²⁸ Tablada introduced the poetics of haiku, wrote about ukiyo-e prints, and included a variant of the kanji 壽 (*shou* in Chinese; *kotobuki* in Japanese) in his collection *Li-Po y otros poemas* (1920). In addition to employing the “ideogram” as the general metaphor of concrete poetry, Haroldo de Campos’s transcriptions of Chinese lyric, collected in *Escrito sobre jade: Poesía clásica china reimaginada por Haroldo de Campos* (1996; hereafter *Escrito sobre jade*), include actual transcriptions of literary Chinese verse. Sarduy, whose neobaroque fiction abounds with characters from Havana’s Chinatown or peripatetic Tibetan monks, made a series of paintings in the 1970s that bear traces of these scripts (such as *Première leçon d’acupuncture*, *Demi-visage à la chinoise*, and *Untitled: Abstract in Red with Black Calligraphy*). The philosophical questions on language that these artists addressed are also informed by a plastic inquiry about forms and media. If the Chinese language was used as the paradigmatic counterexample to phonetical writing from early modernity to post-structuralism, these artists exploring the boundaries of the word and the image wondered what and how the signs represented, but, in this very interrogation, they also had to represent them. The poetic potential of this question is boundless: how do you craft symbols without having any of the required linguistic or practical capacity? Except for Haroldo de Campos, who studied kanji under the supervision of a Brazilian professor of Japanese, none of the other artists had any proficiency whatsoever to decipher or reproduce such glyphs. Thus, when examining their “writing” of sinographs, it becomes particularly pertinent to inquire as to the scriptural traditions that came into play. How does calligraphy come into action? What about format, instrumentation, support, and supplies? As I argue in the following pages, a “paleographic” approach to these works (or rather “neographic,” to honor Barthes’s complaint about the lack of a formal study of the aesthetics of modern writing) weaves possible threads between antipodal and seemingly untouched cultural traditions as well as with vernacular scriptural forms (nonverbal writing systems, folk art, and religious rituals).²⁹

This approach also unveils a decades-long conversation on language and visual poetics with other Latin American artists enamored with the East. Sarduy dedicates “Ying Yang,” his essay on Salvador Elizondo in *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* (1969; *Written on a Body*), to Octavio Paz, who in turn dedicates to Elizondo *El signo y el garabato* (1973; *The sign and the scribble*). In this collection, Paz takes up Tablada’s visual

innovations from the early twentieth century, and Elizondo does as much in a raving review of Haroldo de Campos's *Ideograma, poesía, lenguaje* (1978 *Ideogram, poetry, language*). Sarduy also praises Haroldo's ideogrammatic method in his own seminal essay on concrete art "Towards Concreteness" (1979), and Haroldo returns him (and Judith Gautier) the homage in the title of his Chinese translations in *Escrito sobre jade* (*Written in jade*). In 1986 Haroldo publishes his Portuguese transcreation of Paz's *Blanco* together with their correspondence about translation, modernism, and Asia.

All these artists spent considerable time in Asia or were sufficiently immersed in these cultures to experience their poetry in ways that went beyond the merely textual. Both in Himalaya or the outskirts of Paris, they visited Buddhist temples where hanging scrolls were read, worshiped, and preserved; in Tokyo and New York they stocked their book collections with *kibyōshi* pulp fictions as well as Japonist editions that read from right to left; their close ties with migrant communities in their hometowns exposed them to the methodologies of Asian literacy and its writing supplies. In sum, these visual poets transcreate the Chinese script not just in the words of the text but in the very textures of their books.

HIEROGLYPHS AND CUTOUPS

The digitalization of José Juan Tablada's graphic archive by the Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) sheds new light on the crucial role of the visual arts in the Mexican poet's work. In the introductory essay to the archive, titled "La escritura iluminada por la imagen" (2003; *Writing lit by the image*), its curator Rodolfo Mata traces multiple visual articulations in Tablada's intellectual biography: a childhood initiation into the pictorial observation of nature; formal training in watercolor at the military academy; collaborations with other painters from Latin America; illustration of his own editions; art criticism; and public advocacy of the arts in Mexico.³⁰ Tablada's fascination with the Orient, sparked by his actual sojourn in Japan in 1900 (discussed in chap. 1), further informs this graphic inquiry. In his Japanese *crónicas* compiled in *En el país del sol* (1919), he details the plastic art facet of his hobbies:

En las amables siestas de farniente cuando humea el té amoroso y afuera sopla el tifón me entrego a mil faenas exquisi-

tas para mi espíritu de bibeloteur y de enamorado del arte. Ya es la aplicación del ácido oxálico sobre la mancha amarillenta que apareció en el margen de un libro amado que por arcaico merecía ser incunable; ya es la preparación del pegamento para restaurar una deplorablemente rota faienza de Kutani, ya es la renovación de la naftalina que preserva de los destructores lepidópteros el arcón lleno de viejas telas; ya es la fabricación de un diafragma para montar un grabado o bien el simple registro en el catálogo de un bibelot adquirido en un instante de vena.

In the cozy and lazy siestas when the tender tea steams and the typhoon blows outside, I give in to the thousand exquisite chores that nurture my spirit of bibeloteur and lover of the arts. Whether this is applying oxalic acid on a yellowish stain on the margins of a beloved book so old that it seemed to be an incunable; or preparing the glue to mend a dilapidated Kutani faience; whether replacing the mothballs that preserve the old fabrics in the chest from the menacing lepidopterous, or fabricating a diaphragm to mount an etching; or simply registering in the catalog the latest bibelot acquired in a propitious instant.³¹

His poetic collections *Un día: Poemas sintéticos* (1919), *El jarro de flores: Disociaciones líricas* (1922), and *Li-Po y otros poemas* (1920) are rare instances in which *modernista* orientalism embarks on a search for new forms.³² I say “rare” because although Tablada’s representation of Asia consistently retains the *modernista* exoticist gaze of his Francophile peers, his avant-garde experimentations with form (synthesis, fragmentation, and visuality) are intimately marked by an engagement with the materiality of Asian textualities. Much has been written about his introduction of haiku as a poetical form in the Hispanic American tradition and, to a lesser extent, about his ideographic method. But almost nothing has been said about his actual manipulation of the Chinese script and how it can serve as an entryway to a discussion of antiquity, folklore, and world literature. In the following I argue that Tablada’s modernism consists in illuminating the prehistory of writing to deconstruct the metaphysics of the alphabet. He introduces visual poetry in the Hispanic lyric tradition by exploring the semiotic potential of ancient pictographic scripts, both from Asia and Mesoamerica, and thus

complicates the calligrammatic experimentations of the avant-gardes, as well as the geopolitics of primitivism. Like his fellow *modernistas*, he is mesmerized by *chinoiserie* objects, which in his work take on a distinctive textual function. Finally, by shedding light on the traffic of artifacts and raw materials across the Pacific, Tablada redefines the uses of goods such as silk, paper, or porcelain in terms of writing, thus breaking traditional connotations of high and low culture usually associated with calligraphy, *chinoiserie*, and folklore in general.

Tablada's *Li-Po y otros poemas* (1920) introduces visual poetry in Latin America. Together with the Chilean Vicente Huidobro's *Ecuatorial* (1918; *Equatorial*) and *Poemas árticos* (1918; Arctic poems), these are the first pieces in American Spanish to break with the linearity of traditional verse. Following Mallarmé's irregular dispersion of words in *Un coup de dés* (1897), Tablada in these poems suggests that words are not the single signifying elements of poetry but that the blank space can do as much. Thus, throughout the pages of the longer piece "Li-Po" and the other independent ideographic poems, the size and font of words fluctuate; they are clustered in geometrical shapes and stretched out in curves; they stand alongside drawings or draw figures themselves; what is more, they even form a Chinese character. The initial reaction to these poems in Mexico was quite tepid and, in fact, questioned whether ideographic poetry could even constitute a fundamental art at all. In reference to the Mexican poet Ramón López Velarde's criticism, Tablada replied to him in a letter that became a manifesto of sorts for his ideographic method:

Lo que me dice de la ideografía me interesa y me preocupa. Le parece a usted convencional . . . ¿más convencional que seguir expresándose en odas pindáricas, y en sonetos, como Petrarca? . . . La ideografía tiene, a mi modo de ver, la fuerza de una expresión "simultáneamente lírica y gráfica," a reserva de conservar el secular carácter ideofónico. Además, la parte gráfica sustituye ventajosamente la discursiva o la explicativa de la antigua poesía, dejando los temas literarios en calidad de "poesía pura," como lo quería Mallarmé. Mi preocupación actual es la síntesis, en primer lugar porque sólo sintetizando creo poder expresar la vida moderna en su dinamismo y en su multiplicidad; en segundo, porque para subir más, en llegando a ciertas regiones, hay que arrojar lastre . . . Toda la antigua *mise en scène*, mi vieja guardarropía, ardió en la hoguera de Thais.

What you say about ideography both interests and worries me. You say it is conventional . . . yet [is it] more conventional that continuing to express ourselves with Pindaric odes and sonnets, like Petrarch? . . . Ideography has, in my opinion, the strength of an expression that is “simultaneously lyric and graphic,” shedding, of course, its detriment secular ideophonic character. Besides, the graphic advantageously replaces the discursive and explicative nature of ancient poetry, leaving literary themes in their expression as “pure poetry,” as Mallarmé wanted. My concern is that of synthesis; firstly because the dynamism and multiplicity of modern life can only be expressed synthetically; secondly, because in order to climb higher, to reach certain regions, we must drop ballast . . . The ancient *mise en scène*, my old wardrobe, has burnt in Thais’s bonfire.³³

Tablada’s arguments are in tune with Futurism’s drive to capture the dynamism of modern life, as well as with the avant-gardes’ general call for the immediacy of the graphic in lieu of explicative discourse. The melodic “Pindaric odes,” “Petrarchan sonnets,” and other poetical forms dear to *modernismo* are to be eliminated, exclaims Tablada, using a typical *modernista* Greco-Roman metaphor (the evocation of Thais’s bonfire). In this sense the ideographic works as a metaphor of the relation between visual and phonetic representation. When Tablada switches Petrarch for Li Bai (701–62), he is in fact switching the Italian Renaissance as his lyrical model for that of premodern Chinese: just like *dolce stil nuovo* had become emblematic of Western lyric, the *jintishi* (modern form poetry) of the Tang dynasty became the lyrical archetype of East Asia. Pauline Yu has made aware the dangers of transferring generic or critical conventions across cultures, so frequent in Eurocentric attempts of comparative literature to engage with Asian literatures, and she made her case precisely by arguing that although the Chinese short poem (*shi*) and Western lyric appear analogous in nature, the unique roots of each have given rise to rather different sets of critical concerns.³⁴ Yet Tablada’s comparatist slip is not a fall, since the Mexican is not arguing here about the philological equivalence between the two lyrical models, but, like Santoro’s pairing of Peronism and the Tang, Tablada is making a point about their stature within their respective traditions: both Li Bai and Petrarch are metonyms of the golden age of Eastern and Western civilizations, respectively.

Now, how much of Li Bai is there actually in Tablada's "Li-Po"? Very little, I would say. "Li-Po" has Li Bai as a theme: the narrative of the poem is based on legends about this figure, such as his drunkenness, his obsession with the moon, and his accidental death—all elements of a decadent lifestyle very attractive to fin de siècle poets. Because his persona was more popular than his poetry, Kathlyn Liscomb refers to Li Bai as a "poet-icon": "one of a small number of renowned litterateurs who was transformed from a historical personage into a multivalent iconic figure through the cumulative effect of cultural practices involving later people."³⁵

Specialized bibliography on Tablada has looked into the sources that inform the poet's knowledge about Li Bai. Adriana García de Aldridge and Esther Hernández Palacios demonstrated that several fragments of Tablada's poem are in fact glosses from other Tang poems about Li Bai in Gautier's *Le livre de jade* and Herbert Allen Giles's *History of Chinese Literature* (Giles's book being Borges's all-time guide to China; see chap. 2).³⁶ To this list, Michele Pascucci adds *Sages et poètes d'Asie* (1916) by Paul-Louis Couchoud (1879–1959) and enumerates several coincidences with this French text, the most remarkable one being the transcription of Mallarmé's fragment of "Las de l'amer repos" (1914) in the epigraph. Pascucci finds that the use of *Sages et poètes d'Asie* is ironic, since she claims that although Tablada refers to "Chinese sources" to distance himself from Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes: Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre, 1913–1916* (1918) as the central influence of his ideographic poetry, he ends up referring to yet another French secondary text.³⁷ Even though these specialists debate about whether Tablada was a precursor of Apollinaire or vice-versa, the two experiments were contemporary with the larger linguistic discussions of the verbal and visual correspondence in writing systems. Tablada's innovation, I argue, consists in projecting the visual power of the Chinese script. In this light, calligrams are extended ideographs. Following the Orientalist myth that portrays the Chinese script as entirely pictographic, the calligrams hold the same iconic relation between text and image but on a different scale: if pictograms are words with pictorial resemblance to the concept represented; calligrams are groups of words whose layout creates visual resemblance to the concept represented. In the calligram, alphabetic writing becomes a stroke, raw material, pure form at the service of the visual. It is no coincidence that, with the exception of "Talón rouge" and "El puñal," all the other calligrams of *Li-Po y otros poemas* are grouped in the section of poems about the Chinese poet and illustrate the text with the shape of a palanquin, a flower, a bamboo forest, a bird, a frog, and many moons.

Tablada's exploration of alternative writing systems is nowhere better rendered than in the actual inclusion of a Chinese character that occupies all of page 7 and contains a stanza of the poem inside (fig. 6). The sign is a variant of the character 寿 *shou* and stands for "longevity." Is this a wink to the timeless fame of Li Bai, nicknamed "The Banished Immortal"? Philological studies of Tablada's work insist on tracing the literary provenance of this sign. Yet, as Tablada had no philological ambitions but a sharp eye for the arts, he does not read the Sinitic glyph but rather sees it. That the luxury edition of *Hiroshigué: El pintor de la nieve y de la lluvia, de la noche y de la luna* (1914, Hiroshige, painter of snow and rain, of night and moon) contains an erratum in—of all words—the name of the artist (the kanjis are turned upside down) evidences from the start that Sinitic glyphs included in his books are not meant to be read, but rather, to visually complement the alphabetic text alongside the ukiyo-e prints. Tablada's graphic archive includes a photograph of

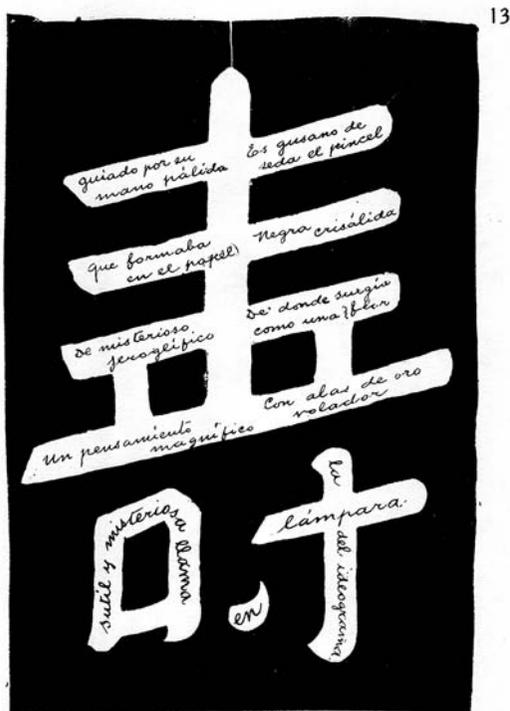


Fig. 6. José Juan Tablada, *Li-Po y otros poemas* (1920), 7. Courtesy of José Juan Tablada: Vida, letra e imagen. Rodolfo Mata (coord.) Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City.

him in his studio dating from 1918 that reveals behind him, among other Japanese bibelots, a wall hanging with at its center the character *shou* (fig. 7). Since longevity is commonly recognized in Chinese culture as one of the “Five Blessings” (together with wealth, health, love of virtue, and peaceful death), the character *shou* is commonly printed on textiles, furniture, and ceramics as an auspicious symbol. Furthermore, the longer phrase containing this logogram *wanshou wujiang* 萬壽無疆 (“may you have ten thousand years of longevity without end”) was used in the eighteenth century as an imperial birthday wish commonly inscribed on royal porcelain and later imitated by the booming china trade³⁸ (the popularity of this glyph is such that up to the day it decorates restaurants and dinnerware around the world, see fig. 8). Thus, as Tablada was a globe-trotter and art collector with a taste for the Orient,



Fig. 7. José Juan Tablada in 1918 in his studio in Coyoacán, displaying a hanging scroll with the Sinitic glyph 壽 *shou*. Courtesy of “José Juan Tablada: Vida, letra e imagen.” Rodolfo Mata (coord.) Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City.



Fig. 8. Chinoiserie melamine bowl with the inscription “longevity” (*shou*). Zoe’s Restaurant, Cambridge, MA, 2022. Photograph by the author.

he most likely borrowed the sign from a decorative item rather than a scholarly text. If, as Araceli Tinajero argues, most *modernistas* represent chinoiserie objects in literary words, in this poem Tablada transfers a word that is already an object: both in the wall hanging from his studio and in his poem “Li-Po,” *shou* is a textual artifact. From this perspective, the character *shou* is a placeholder for Chinese writing in general.

Chinese writing appears in Tablada’s *Li-Po y otros poemas* as an advanced pictographic system. In a *mise en abyme*, the stanza inside the character on page 7 depicts a scene in which nonalphabetic signs (hieroglyphs and ideograms) are written within another nonalphabetic sign (the Chinese logogram *shou*):

Guiado por su mano pálida
 Es gusano de seda el pincel
 Que formaba en el papel
 Negra crisálida
 De misterioso jeroglífico
 De donde surgía
 Entres aromas de flor
 Un pensamiento magnífico

Con alas de oro volador;
Sutil y misteriosa llama
En la lámpara del ideograma!

The brush is a silkworm
Guided by a pallid hand
To form on parchment
A mythic hieroglyph
A black chrysalis from which
Emerges like a blossoming flower
A magnificent thought
Taking flight with gilded wings
A silent slender flame
In the lamp of the ideogram.³⁹

The scene narrates the evolution of the pictogram: through the metaphor of the silkworm's life cycle, hieroglyphs mature from a black chrysalis into a fragrant and radiant ideogram, conveying the modernization of the graphic sign from a premodern esoteric pictorial to a rational conceptual pictorial. It should be noted that in Tablada's linguistic lingo "hieroglyphs" refer to any alleged pictographic system, be it the Chinese, Mayan, or Egyptian. Tablada had equal fascination for Asian as well as Mesoamerican antiquity: he owned an archeological collection of pre-Hispanic artifacts; had illustrated the cover of *Al sol y bajo la luna* (1918) with Aztec glyphs designed by the artist Jorge Enciso (1879–1969); and had announced the publication of a monograph titled "De aztecas y japoneses" in the same series as *Hiroshigué: El pintor de la nieve y de la lluvia, de la noche y de la luna*.⁴⁰ Thus, when Tablada exclaims in the poem "Exégesis," "Es de México y Asia mi alma un jeroglífico" (My soul is a hieroglyph from Mexico and Asia), he is not conveying his exclusive "spiritual identification with the Orient through the symbol of a technique," as Salvador Elizondo observes in his praise of the poet's cosmopolitanism. Instead he is expanding this identification to Mesoamerica too:

Cuando Tablada afirma (en un poema que lleva el significativo y crítico título de "Exégesis") su adscripción espiritual al Oriente mediante el símbolo de una técnica, nos está diciendo dos cosas: en primer lugar, que su poesía, hasta 1918 sigue siendo fiel a los postulados del modernismo que preveía, des-

de sus orígenes, el exotismo literario como uno de sus veneros más importantes, pero que si ese exotismo se volviera hacia el Oriente, encontraría la barrera de un principio general de la visión (y por lo tanto de la escritura), es decir, del pensamiento, radicalmente diferente del que habría operado en la poesía tradicional, no se diga en castellano, en Occidente.

When Tablada asserts (in a poem meaningfully and critically titled “Exégesis”) his spiritual identification with the Orient through the symbol of a technique, he is telling us two things: firstly, that his poetry up until 1918 is still loyal to the *modernista* creed that, from its origins, revered literary exoticism. Yet, if that exoticism turned to the Orient, it would find as a barrier a general principle of vision (and thus writing), that is, of a thinking, that are radically different to that which would have operated in Spanish, to say nothing of traditional Western poetry.⁴¹

In challenging traditional Western poetry, Tablada widens *modernismo*'s mapping of antiquity in a precise way: he includes not only Oriental but also Mesoamerican “barriers to the general principle of vision (and thus writing),” to quote Elizondo. But Tablada still clings to outdated hypotheses about Mesoamerican signs that had, since the early seventeenth century, read them as hieroglyphs and, in so doing, collapsed the New World into the imaginary geography of the Orient. In addition to these hypotheses, Jesuit scholars such as Athanasius Kircher (1602–80) or José de Acosta (1540–1600) had found in the Amerindian codices alternative models of a universal language. Even if over the course of the nineteenth century, scholarship on Maya civilization gradually proved that the expression “Mexican hieroglyphs” referred to a number of distinct script traditions, the legacies of early modern categories endured. Byron Hamman argues that the advancement of positive knowledge in philology also emancipated the transcendental qualities of these scripts and instead located them on a historical continuum: Mayan, Egyptian, and Chinese, respectively, represented touchstones in the evolution of cumbersome pictorial systems leading up to the rational alphabet.⁴² Arranged in a hierarchy of complexity, the Chinese was the most sophisticated of the primitive pictographic scripts precisely because of its longer history.

Tablada's hint to the "longevity" of Chinese writing in this stanza is further stressed in the revision of the physical transformations of its script throughout its many thousand years of existence. If calligraphers divide the history of the Chinese script into seven conventional styles (oracle, bone, bronze, seal, clerical, cursive, and regular) that point to changes in the form, character, and structure of the logograms, Tablada explores the archaeology behind these styles. The attention to the mineral and chemical surfaces that serve as the evolving media of text (particularly silk and paper) becomes all more evident in the comparison of *Li-Po y otros poemas* with two other pieces from Tablada's work. First, the *crónica* "Del corazón de China al riñón del cabaret" (1921; From the heart of China to the cabaret's kidney), published in the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior*, registers Tablada's impressions of the Silk World Fair at the Grand Central Palace in New York, where he resided for several years. The text opens with a mineral metaphor: "¿Qué puede en el tiempo y en el espacio, trazar un puente que una a la China legendaria con la ultra moderna Nueva York, el país de la porcelana con la isla del hierro?" (What could bridge, in time and space, the gap between legendary China—the land of porcelain—and the ultramodern iron island that is New York?).⁴³ In addition to praising the uses of silk as a finished good, Tablada fixes his gaze on the technologies involved in production. To describe the manufacture of the natural dyes that color silk, he employs the silkworm metaphor again:

En la parte industrial el concurrente ve con sus propios ojos, cómo se utilizan los productos de las selvas tropicales y de la hulla, en brillantísimos colores. Y se observa que, como en un milagro, surgen del carbón mineral, de la negra crisálida, las irisadas anilinas como una parvada de mariposas, radiantes y resplandecientes hasta parecer flamas de pirotecnia.

At the industrial section, the visitor witnesses with his own eyes the elaboration of the products of the rainforest as well as the colorful coal into such radiant colors. And he observes that, just like a miracle, iridescent anilines swarm from the mineral coal, the black chrysalis, like radiant and shining butterflies that might as well be fireworks.⁴⁴

In this narrative about silk, the silkworm metaphor is more than an evident literary play. It illuminates its connotations in the earlier poem

“Li-Po”: silk is after all one of the earlier supports of Chinese literature (the paleographic hypothesis is even more evident in Scott Britton’s English translation of *papel* as “parchment”). After millennia of inscribing text in bronze, bone, and stone, the Chinese began using silk around the second century BCE to record writing. Silk was durable, soft, and more portable than the wood or bamboo slips used immediately before.⁴⁵ As a matter of fact, one of the oldest known manuscripts of the most ancient Chinese text, the *Yijing* (circa ninth century BCE; *Book of Changes*), is a silk manuscript.⁴⁶ Tablada’s interest in the production of silk is, to me, partly compatible with Laura Torres-Rodríguez’s reading of “La gloria del bambú” (The glory of bamboo) a sister *crónica* of sorts to “Del corazón de China al riñón del cabaret,” signed from Yokohama in 1901. Seeking to underscore how Tablada’s Japanese *crónicas* are linked to Mexico’s economic modernization, Torres-Rodríguez carefully stresses examples that prove that, for Tablada, bamboo is what largely builds the infrastructure that facilitates communications and trade, such as bridges and ships: “El bambú deja de ser un tropo poético exotizante para convertirse en un símbolo de desarrollo nacional fundado en una forma de fabricación . . . el poeta ofrece a sus lectores mexicanos un ejemplo de capitalización de la producción cultural autóctona” (Bamboo ceases to stand as an exoticist trope and instead becomes a symbol of national development based on a form of production . . . the poet provides his Mexican readers with an example of how to capitalize autochthonous cultural production).⁴⁷ Considering that Tablada also stresses silk’s multiple manufacturing processes, both these texts seem to be odes to commodities rather than to exotic goods. Yet, what Torres-Rodríguez sees as a model of national industry or transpacific trade, in my view serves as a reflection on ancient scriptural technologies that outdate those of Tablada’s Mexican ancestors. Twenty years after his trip to Japan, and writing from New York, Tablada traces a global history of writing.

To this point, Tablada’s take on silk as an ancient scriptural medium is still within the realm of representation: the stanza evokes silk as an ancient support of literature. In this light, the materiality of Chinese writing in “Li-Po” is infused with the connotations of silk as a writing technology: a prohibitive material exclusively used by the lettered elites to record sayings and for miscellaneous documentation of events and procedures. Given the porous texture of its fabric, silk was a more flexible support to absorb the ink from the brush than the hard surface of bamboo, thus enabling the emergence of calligraphy as an art form

during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Over the course of the next centuries, calligraphy would become one of the four main academic and artistic accomplishments required of the ancient Chinese scholar-officials (together with painting, playing the ancient string instrument *guqin*, and mastering the strategy game of Go). Tablada's attention to materiality recalls Victor Segalen's prose poems in *Stèles* (1912) that evoke the ancient stone monuments on the roadsides of rural China from where he drew inspiration for his poems. Haun Saussy observes that Segalen's *Stèles* was a collection so concerned about the materiality of the poetry it evoked that the book itself also functioned as an elaborate artifact that engaged with the multisensorial experience of the poetry of stone inscriptions.⁴⁸ In its first luxury edition, Segalen sought to transcribe the resonances of Chinese historical language through exemplary materiality, something that later mass-produced editions did not quite achieve: "Few readers will have held in their hands a copy of the first or second editions of Segalen's collection of prose poems *Stèles* (1912–14) with their deliberately chosen page size (tailored to evoke the Nestorian stele of Xian), their careful disposition of Chinese and Roman type, their exquisite Korean paper, their Chinese-style thread bindings. Most of us will have consulted a low-cost reprint such as the Gallimard/Folio paperback or the thin-paper *Œuvres complètes* volumes from Laffont. The work's popularity entails an impoverishment of its sensory dimensions for all but a few readers lucky enough to own or have entry to a rare-books collection. But although many dimensions of touch, smell, color, and typography fall out of most readers' experience, some qualities of textual materiality remain as properties of information, reception, and technical reproducibility."⁴⁹ Interestingly, Saussy's observation on the impoverishment of the sensory dimensions of Segalen's original handcrafted edition in its multiple chain of reproduction in turn illuminates the equally revealing textual materiality of mass-produced books, usually overlooked because of their standard book form.

A similar consideration of the mechanical reproduction of an ancient Chinese literary artifact into a modern book format adds yet another layer to the dense palimpsest through which the Chinese character *shou* is transcreated in Tablada's *Li-Po y otros poemas*. Once again, the UNAM's extraordinary digital archive of Tablada's graphic work provides a clue, this time in the facsimile edition of the book originally printed in Caracas in January 1920. Page seven is the only one that has a black background, so that the alphabetic text inside the Chinese sign is printed over the white page (inside the white space traced by the

strokes of the logogram). A very fine stripe connecting the vertical central stroke to the white frame of the page suggests that the Chinese character was probably stenciled. Initially traced, then cut with scissors and finally transferred onto the page with black ink, giving life to a white logogram as well as leaving the mark of the slit through which the blade entered the paper and carved out excess surface. From this perspective, Tablada did not write the character, but cut it, thus dissociating Chinese writing from the high art of calligraphy and silk evoked in the stanza, to associate it with the popular tradition of paper cutting. *Jianzhi* (literally “cut-paper”) was one of the most important types of Chinese folk art since paper became an affordable good in the second century. Originally meant to worship ancestors and gods, it later developed into a leisure craft that produced patterns expressing good auspices and is still found nowadays in common people’s doors and windows.⁵⁰

As for Tablada, his attention to folklore is in tune with the Mexican revolutionary government’s emphasis on Indigenous heritage (an imperative that became globally famous in Diego Rivera’s murals), as well as with the avant-garde’s taste for primitivism.⁵¹ Both Tablada’s later poems in *La feria* (1928; The fair) and his foreword to the massive institutional project on art education—Best Maugard’s *Método de dibujo* (1923)—praise autochthonous art forms.⁵² “Autochthonous,” represents, for Best Maugard, pre-Columbian, colonial, and contemporary art forms, which, as discussed in chapter 1 of this book, are particularly hybrid because of the Spanish and Asian influences of the early modern transpacific trade route of the Manila Galleon. Paper cutting is precisely one of the Chinese artistic elements that flourished in the Mexican city of Puebla as an imported popular art form. Puebla was a stop along the Spanish colonial route through which, roughly between 1565 and 1815, goods sailed from the Philippines to Acapulco across the Pacific Ocean and then transported them by land to Veracruz, on the Gulf of Mexico, to deliver them to Spain. Among porcelain, textiles, and decorative motifs, there was a colored paper made of silk that was given the name of “papel de China” (China paper) and used to make lamps and cut paper ornaments in the style of *jianzhi*. Both the raw material and the technique developed into *papel picado*, or “punched paper,” a now distinctive Puebloan—and by extension, Mexican—handcraft used in banners to honor the dead or to decorate festivities. It is no coincidence that the cover of Tablada’s *La feria* reproduces a *papel picado* banner (fig. 9) stenciled with the exact same technique as the character *shou* in “Li-Po” and painted in a magenta similar to the usually red



Fig. 9. Miguel Covarrubias, book cover project for José Juan Tablada's *La feria*, 1928. Courtesy of José Juan Tablada: *Vida, letra e imagen*. Rodolfo Mata (coord.) Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City.

Chinese handcraft. The design of the cover was conveyed by Tablada, although it was executed by Miguel Covarrubias (1904–57), a Mexican artist who would coincidentally have a close-knit artistic relationship with Communist China a few decades later. Tablada's later homages to Puebla, where he spent part of his childhood, are fraught with affective memories of the “*Nao de la China*,” also the topic of an unpublished novel burnt when his Coyoacán home was ransacked during the Mexican Revolution.

Regarding Tablada's assessment of the Manila Galleon, I—again—partly agree with Laura Torres-Rodríguez's claim that Tablada's emphasis on artifacts and goods traded through the Pacific recasts traditional colonial cartographies:

En este sentido, se rearticula la orientación transpacífica del Virreinato, al reclamar la producción material sincrética de

la colonia como el legado mismo de la saga criolla transpacífica, un signo de distinción estética y cultural. La singularidad estética del arte popular será reconocida en parte por haber sido influenciada directamente por las técnicas artesanales chinas y japonesas. Esto representa una reactivación de las cartografías criollas coloniales, donde México se autoimagina como el lugar de encuentro entre Asia y Europa y, por lo tanto, como el centro de difusión global de una modernidad revolucionaria.

[Tablada's] claiming of the syncretic material production of the colony as a legacy of the transpacific criollo saga—a symbol of aesthetic and cultural distinction—rearticulates the transpacific orientation of the Viceroyalty [of Mexico]. The aesthetic singularity of popular art will be acknowledged partly because it bears the influence of Chinese and Japanese artisanal techniques. This reactivates colonial criollo cartographies, where Mexico thinks of itself as the meeting point of Asia and Europe, and therefore, as the center of global diffusion of revolutionary modernity.⁵³

In my view, this gambit is more ambitious in scale: by crafting poetry with transpacific papercuts, Tablada does indeed resituate Mexico as the Middle Kingdom of the Spanish empire and thus as the center of revolutionary modernity. But in so doing, he also points to a paradox of logocentrism: paper, the main technology of Western writing, is ultimately a Chinese invention. Chinese paper, the thin, nonwoven material made from milled plants and textile fibers, which made its way to the Islamic world in the eighth century and was subsequently refined in European paper mills, where its manufacturing boomed with the development of the printing press in the sixteenth century. The first part of this hypothesis is well known. Latin American scholars of decoloniality have long contended that during the Spanish Conquest, writing was a tool of control, exercised through ethnocentric categories that flattened local scriptural (and semiotic) traditions. In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (1995), Walter Mignolo observes how when a missionary, an educated soldier, or a man of letters was exposed to the artifacts that the Mexicas named *amoxtli* and the Maya named *vuh*, they described them as objects folded like an accordion and translated these terms as “books”: “writ-

ing was naturally conceived in terms of papers and books; and books in terms of the medieval manuscript and the printing press.”⁵⁴ But the spine-bound book, printed on paper and reproduced massively via movable type that generally signifies Western modernity (and its global hegemony) owes its existence to two Chinese inventions. By using paper to carve Chinese signs manually, Tablada rewinds the history of paper and defers its course toward the Pacific, where paper no longer signifies the medium of (Latin) text but the instrument of (Asian) words and (mestizo) motifs. Tablada’s avant-garde primitivism thus consists in illuminating the prehistory of paper to deconstruct the materiality of Western writing.

FONTS AND SCROLLS

In a 1986 review of the concrete movement for the UNESCO magazine *The Courier*, Severo Sarduy celebrated the creative process of the Latin American poets that had reshaped the international canons of visual poetry.

according to Haroldo de Campos, the Pound-like patriarch of the movement and its chief theorist, concretismo is not merely “a hedonistic graphic arrangement or layout,” nor a calligramme in which words are transformed into images of the things they designate (the word “rose” actually becoming a rose). In concrete poetry words are dismantled and modified so that we can see what they are made of, like a complex toy taken to pieces by a wayward child. In short, the poet becomes a “designer” of meaning.⁵⁵

Sarduy advances how the brothers Haroldo and Augusto de Campos (1931–) and Décio Pignatari (1927–2012) transcended the modernist innovations of Mallarmé and Apollinaire, two critical figures of their *paideuma*. In a deconstructive spirit, he details their quasi-surgical (albeit ludic) interventions over words themselves: they dissect and alter them for minute observation. The observation on “designers of meaning” disavows concrete poems as definite works of fine art and instead points to the process of transforming the most basic units of linguistic signification into something else: “the term concretismo is taken from the plastic arts, and designates nonfigurative, geometric and rational

compositions in which the key feature is the objective technique with which they were produced, and a clearly defined iconlike image drained of any residual emotion or subjective content, rather than any message or perception of the ‘other’ reality, which such works might have managed to convey.”⁵⁶ Interestingly Sarduy, who shared with these poets from the Noigandres group a fascination with the stylistic exuberance of the baroque, hails them as technicians of meaning, wordsmiths operating within the parameters of the applied arts.

Concrete poets did not question the semiotic power of the linguistic sign. As Pedro Erber argues, what they did question was its mandate for referentiality: “concretism proposes a form of writing that no longer refers to objects, but exists as an object in itself, among other objects in the world, and holds with them an isomorphic relationship rather than a representative one.”⁵⁷ Theorized in tune with the emerging rhetoric of mass media in the rapidly modernizing city of São Paulo, the concrete poem privileged the architecture of poetry: rigorous geometry and graphic minimalism were at its core. Understanding the word as a physical object implied, among other things, that poetry’s attributes, and therefore its semantic power, were defined by a set of graphic variables (typeface, font, and case), spatial relations (paragraph, spacing, and indentation) and sites of inscription (books and magazines, but also billboards, museums, or maps). Now, how can Sarduy’s observation on design illuminate the textures of the ideograph, not as the overall metaphor of *poesia concreta* but rather as the materialization of the foreign script in Brazilian poetry? In view of a readership ignorant of Asian languages, to what extent are the Chinese logograms in Haroldo’s work also fictional calligraphies, that is, abstract signs devoid of linguistic resonances, which signify precisely through optical and haptical parameters? In sum, how do elements of graphic and editorial design illuminate the traffic of writing technologies, genres, and media from Asia to Latin America in Haroldo’s poetry?

Since the ideogram is the central keyword of *poesia concreta*, establishing a general hypothesis about it in a few pages would be as impossible as “squaring the circle,” to borrow Haroldo’s own metaphor on the task of translating Chinese poetry into Western languages.⁵⁸ Inspired by Pound as the method of poetic composition that could replace traditional linear verse, the ideogram was the recurrent metaphor adapted in different stages of *concretismo* to signal crucial aspects of the new lyric such as simultaneity, spatiality, and sound. Its first articulation in the 1950s reads as follows:

Ideogram: appeal to nonverbal communication. The concrete poem communicates its own structure: structure-content. The concrete poem is an object in and of itself, not the interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings. Its material: word (sound, visual form, semantic charge). Its problem: a problem of functions-relations of this material. Factors of proximity and similitude, Gestalt psychology. Rhythm: relational force. The concrete poem, using phonetics (digits) and analogical syntax, creates a specific linguistic area—*verbivocovisual*—which shares the advantages of nonverbal communication without giving up the word's virtuality. The phenomenon of metacommunication occurs with the concrete poem: coincidence and simultaneity of verbal and nonverbal communication; but—it must be noted—it deals with the communication of forms, of structure-content, not with the usual message communication.⁵⁹

A remarkable polyglot, Haroldo also explored the ideogram within the frameworks of linguistics and not only defended Ernest Fenollosa's landmark essay on the ideogram from the attacks of sinology but also published it in Portuguese in the reader *Ideograma: Lógica, poesia, linguagem* (1977; Ideogram: Logic, poetry, language). The actual incorporation of Chinese logograms in his creative work began with the formal study of the language. Although this occurred as early as the late 1950s with the translation of the Japanese poet Kitasono Katsue's (1902–1978) “Monotonous Space,” and other *Cantos*-like poems such as “via chuang-tse” or “litaipoema,” Haroldo's bilingual transcreations of Asian lyric mostly take place within the postconcretist phase: *Hagoromo de Zeami* (1993), *Crisantempo* (1998), and *Escrito sobre jade* (1996).⁶⁰ This is not to suggest that by this time Haroldo had mastered the language, which he neither did nor aspired to. Instead this signals that at this point he conceived Chinese lyric well beyond the textual. The handling of the Chinese script as the raw material of his poetry is informed by a lifetime practice of concretism, a rich Chinese bibliography, and a mature reflection on the relation between “peripheral” cultures and universal tradition, summarized most effectively in the 1981 article “Anthropophagous Reason: Dialogue and Difference in Brazilian Culture.”⁶¹

Bilingual publishing is a common practice in cultural fields with a relative proximity (and thus proficient readership) to the source lan-

guage. It is also a marker of distinction in critical editions. For Haroldo, however, the exhibition of the poems in the original language is a programmatic aspect of translation. Unlike Octavio Paz, who would erase the original text in his own versions of the Tang—“no he incluido los textos originales: a partir de poemas en otras lenguas quise hacer poemas en la mía” (I have omitted the original texts: basing myself on poems in other languages, I set out to make poems in my own)⁶²—for Haroldo transcreation supposes the intervention on the original sign too: “not only the signified but also the sign itself is translated, that is, the sign’s tangible self, its very materiality (sonorous properties, graphical-visual properties).”⁶³ The poems of *Escrito sobre jade* indeed stress the verbivocovisual correspondence between the new poem and the original. Let us begin by studying Weinberger’s favorite: Wang Wei’s “Deer Park.” “O refúgio dos cervos” reproduces the squared layout of the Chinese quartet in two symmetrical columns, creating a new meter based on visual length rather than syllable count. Absence of punctuation, no capitalization, and parataxis turn the Portuguese signs into the seemingly floating units of the isolating language that must be reorganized analytically by the active reader. “O dique das magnólias,” also by Wang Wei, further accentuates the economy of words and breaks and uses intercalating lines to break with symmetry. “Li Fu-Jen” captures the monosyllabic resonances of Chinese morphemes and onomatopoeias in the sparse rendering of words:

O REFÚGIO DOS CERVOS

montanha vazia	não se vê ninguém
ouvir só se ouve	um alguém de ecos
raios do poente	filtram na espessura
um reflexo ainda	luz no musgo verde

O DIQUE DAS MAGNÓLIAS

na trama das ramas	brilhos de hibiscos
cálices vermelhos	surgem na montanha
cascata e choupana	tal calma: ninguém!
flores tantas flores	viçam e decaem

LI FU-JEN

sim? não?

não? sim?

ora! agora!

paro

olho para

(ruflam passos-plumas)

ela

pluma ante pluma

d e m o r a !

So far, all these poems exhibit familiar visual aspects from the orthodox phase of *poesia concreta*. Now, what about the display of the Chinese “originals” in Haroldo’s translations in *Escrito sobre jade*? Of all the poems, only Wang Wei and Li Bai’s quatrains are read vertically, from right to left as in literary Chinese, while the other poems are read horizontally, from left to right. Also, each poet of the anthology—which ranges from Confucius, to Tang dynasty poets, to Mao Zedong—bears a different calligraphic style. The script styles do not match the era of Chinese calligraphy when each poem was written but respond instead to the typographical preferences of the various English editions consulted. Haroldo acknowledges in the introduction that the Chinese originals were taken from different sources, which may account for the inconsistency in the graphic design. Yet what might initially appear as the messy outcome of a fragmentary bibliography instead provides a profound mediation on the transit of thousand-years-old Chinese handwritten poems to Brazilian mechanically reproduced books. Both editions of *Escrito sobre jade* were produced with minute attention to editorial design: the 1996 edition was handcrafted at Tipografia do Fundo de Ouro Preto by Haroldo and the “*tipoeira*” (typist-poet) Guilherme Mansur (1958–), and the posthumous 2009 edition came out in the boutique press Ateliê Editorial and was designed by the award-winning studio Casa Rex (both from São Paulo) (fig. 10). After all, a closer look at Haroldo’s editorial “inconsistencies” might offer a key to the media transfers of world literature.

Typography was crucial for Brazilian concrete poets. While later on they experimented with different typefaces, their signature font was the Bauhaus-style Futura bold, which was clean, modern, and international.⁶⁴ As Gonzalo Aguilar observes, typography added an extra-linguistic feel of modernity to their poetry: “A tipografia, que pode



Fig. 10. Handscroll-like book cover of Haroldo de Campos, *Escrito sobre jade* (2009) produced by Casa Rex for Ateliê Editorial, São Paulo, Brazil. Courtesy of Gustavo Piquiera.

transmitir por si mesma a experiência do moderno—quebra a estrutura binária do signo e introduz uma significação que não depende do significante, tal como o entende a linguística e sim do desenho do significante (tipos utilizados, tamanho, disposição). Partindo desse princípio, a tipografia seria como o significante do significante” (Typography, which can by itself convey the experience of modernity, breaks with the binary structure of the sign and introduces a signification no longer attached to the signifier, in linguistic terms, but to the design of the signifier [types, size, layout]. From this approach, typography would be like the signifier of the signifier).⁶⁵ Some of the Chinese originals from *Escrito sobre jade* were transcribed and others were stamped; technologically speaking, some were set in typefaces while others reproduced as visual blocs. In terms of production, this entails an uneven distribution of labor as well as an asynchrony in the materiality of the translation chain: while

the reprinted images are less sensitive to human intervention, the transcribed texts are affected by the manipulation of a translator, typist, or proofreader. No different than ancient handwritten manuscripts transferred by scribes, digitally produced texts are also the byproduct of intellectual choices as well as available technological infrastructure.⁶⁶ Whereas it is easy to develop a typeface in alphabetical languages (it requires the design of twenty-something letters plus a dozen symbols), a full Chinese character set requires the design of almost seven thousand glyphs, and, consequently, these are more limited and less diverse. The only typeset poems in this anthology are, curiously, the odes of the *Book of Songs*, which thus present uncanny versions of the most ancient collection of Chinese lyric in the modern Heiti font, a sans-serif variant that is the default Chinese font in most word processors in the West. By transcribing (rather than stamping) the oldest pieces of Chinese poetry in *Escrito sobre jade*, Haroldo establishes a dialogue with Chinese calligraphy, which is not obviously mimetic (if this were so, the oldest Chinese poems in the anthology would bear the oldest calligraphic styles) but disruptively modern. He turns the paradigmatic stylization of the Chinese script into digital type, while also using a global and accessible Chinese typeface—most likely the only one available at his friend’s artisanal publisher in Minas Gerais—that conveys a sense of digital modernity. If typography became especially relevant in the neo-avant-gardes because of the visual rhetoric of mass media and the new typesetting technologies that multiplied the possibilities of mechanical reproduction of linguistic signs, these factors were precisely the causes of its doom as a dated phenomenon, overlooked by the strong philosophical emphasis on language (and the semiotic fixation with concretism) that came with poststructuralism in the 1970s. As Marjorie Perloff notes, current digital technologies create an appropriate environment to revisit the “purported mimeticism and aestheticized composition” of the earlier stages of *poesia concreta*.⁶⁷ Haroldo’s postconcretist manipulations of the Chinese script recuperate foundational notions of the concretist ideogrammatic method, but, above all, they reflect on comparative scriptural technologies in the digital age.

Apart from its meditation of the typography in premodern literatures, the second edition of *Escrito sobre jade* (2009) offers a profound exploration of the reading practices that such lyrical forms bring into play.⁶⁸ Chinese classical poetry is a broad category that encompasses different lyrical styles and formats from the seventh century BCE up to the beginning of the twentieth century, when writers began using the vernacular style of speech in their literary work. Because of the continu-

ous dialogue between oral and literati traditions, as well as the changing scriptural technologies throughout these three millennia, the formats of the poems changed dramatically, as did their reading practices. I propose that, while preserving the codex format of the book, *Escrito sobre jade* (2009) is a modern rendition of handscrolls, one of the predominant formats of Chinese calligraphy. Calligraphic painting handscrolls were texts handwritten in long horizontal scrolls, then wrapped in woven silk, and finally tied with a ribbon to be stored in wooden boxes for the next reader to unfold them again. The profusely ornamented endsheets that occupy the first and last pages of Haroldo's book, which can be seen through the slit in the grey cover, evoke the fine fabrics and textures that separate the reader and the words, reminding us that the reading of Chinese classical poetry is not just an intellectual operation resolved in the immediate eye contact with words, but rather a haptical ritual of caressing textures before the cinematic unfolding of a composition of images and words. It is also a collective ritual, where the author of the literary work is just one of the many names inscribed on the surface of the page, together with the calligrapher, painter, and collectors who owned the manuscript, as well as the distinguished readers who marked it with their seals. Throughout its different paratexts, *Escrito sobre jade* mentions each one of the actors involved in the composition of the latest version of Haroldo's anthology, starting with the Chinese poets, the editor (Trajano Vieira, a classics professor at Universidade de São Paulo), the editor of the first edition (Guilherme Mansur), as well as Ateliê Editorial's editor (Plínio Martins Filho), the proofreader (Genese Andrade), the producer (Aline Sato), and the studio in charge of the book design (Casa Rex). The colophon even details paper quality and typeface, reminding us of the relevance of the extralinguistic connotations of type design: by using a variant of the Bodoni font family (Filosofia, designed by Émigré Foundry, from Oakland), the Brazilian's homage to classical Chinese poetry is vested with the neoclassical feel of the classic Roman type, transcreated via California. Like Tablada, who evokes the Tang to revisit the legacy of the Italian Renaissance in his avant-garde *Li-Po y otros poemas*, *Escrito sobre jade* also signals the Italian Renaissance as the Western mirror of Chinese classical culture. Like Octavio Paz's monumental *Blanco* (1968), *Escrito sobre jade* meditates on the performative rituals of Asian lyric.⁶⁹

The evocation of the rituality of Chinese handscrolls in the book's design is a testament to world literature. As does typography discussed above, *Escrito sobre jade* exposes the inevitable material transforma-

tion of texts conceived within different rhetorical parameters. As such, it nuances the haunting illusion of “original” poems. If, as discussed in chapter 2, Borges caricatures the methodologies of comparative philology to substantiate that “originals” (the Chinese novels he will never “fully” grasp because he does not live in seventeenth-century China) are nothing but triggers for the actual literature that takes shape in the different layers of translation and degrees of separation from them (his reviews of unavailable English versions), *Escrito sobre jade* evokes the methods of paleography to propose that poetry emerges in the adaptation of manuscripts by scribes and copyists operating within specific scriptural technologies, rather than in essential, long-lost originals. What is more, because the 2009 book is a posthumous edition based loosely on speculations on Haroldo’s plans, *Escrito sobre jade* redeems the concretist creed of poetry as an applied art, whose semantic strength lies in the collaborative effort of editorial fields (graphic design, typography, and bookbinding), very much like Chinese handscrolls were produced collectively by painters, poets, and calligraphers. By evidencing the textual instability of Chinese literature in Spanish and Portuguese, Haroldo and Borges do not lament the peripheral writer’s residual access to world literature but instead demonstrate that any form of world literature—or rather, Literature—thrives when it transcends individual talent and place of enunciation.

NEEDLES AND BLADES

Like Tablada and Haroldo de Campos, Severo Sarduy also finds in sinophone scriptural practices a framework for his own theory of writing. The Cuban exile in Paris is probably the most slippery of all in his conceptualization of the ideogram because the ideogram is at the core of his master theory of writing, which conceives of writing as the drawing of images, and writing as bodily inscription. Sarduy’s oeuvre flourishes in the unique constellation of a marginal protagonism in French structural theory, relentless pilgrimage, and a decadent lifestyle as a queer émigré. His unique aesthetic models also combine Spanish baroque and American abstract expressionism. A multimedia artist who easily switched codes as a narrator, essayist, poet, playwright, painter, radio host, and science journalist, Sarduy’s quest for the continuum between the word, image, and body is, I argue, inseparable from the physical exploration of Asian textualities.

In a book as concerned as this one is with geographical distance as a crucial variable for the writing of foreign cultures, Sarduy's relationship to China is probably the most disorienting one. China is at the same time palpable and elusive in Sarduy's mapping of world literature. Apart from the family legend that he had ancestors from Macao, Sarduy did not have to travel to China to write about it: Havana's Chinatown provided him with memories of a community established on his island since the mid-nineteenth century. He did not honor these memories through a realist depiction of the immigrant community, but rather through the burlesque rendering of the Teatro Shanghai from the capital's Barrio Chino, best depicted in his famous novel *De donde son los cantantes* (1967; *Where the singers are from*). If Cuban identity is anything, this novel seemed to suggest, this is a mix of Spanish, African, and Asian heritage travestied by the gaze of an artist who utterly distrusted mimesis and understood writing as distortion. Sarduy did not have to travel to China to write about Maoism either. In 1974 he declined the invitation of an official visit to the PRC with his partner François Wahl (1925–2014) and the editorial board of the literary magazine *Tel quel*. Enthused by what Eric Hayot calls “the chimera of a truly cultural revolution,” that is, “China as both an exotic and ancient culture, disconnected from the political and economic geography of the modern world, and a powerful, exciting actual place able to participate and shape a geopolitical vision,” Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, Marcelin Pleynet, and Roland Barthes culminated a theoretical inquiry into the ancient civilization they had been publishing about with a three-week guided tour through the new nation.⁷⁰ While *Tel quel*'s utopic embrace of Maoism rippled into intellectual circles in Latin America as a renewed version of internationalism backed by French theory (see the discussion on Piglia in chap. 3), Sarduy remained cautious of both his French and Latin American peers' Maoist craze, because Communist China was a reminder of the revolution that deprived him of the possibility of ever returning home to Cuba. Rather than taking in Mao's rhetoric of liberation, Sarduy saw Mao as an oppressor. In his frenzied novel *Maitreya* (1978) he fashions a Cuban Chinese cook who becomes a reincarnation of Buddha, against the parodical backdrop of two political events of the 1950s that up until then had not been compared: Tibet at the moment of the Chinese occupation, and Cuba at the moment of revolution. In the same playful tone, *Cobra* (1972) features a gang of exiled Tibetan lamas who dress like hippies and seek to revive Tantric Buddhism around the world. Tibet became Sarduy's Mecca thanks to his fascination with

Buddhism that began in the early 1970s through Octavio Paz's contagious enthusiasm for India and which grew with pilgrimages through East and Southeast Asia during that decade. The Himalayan countries of Nepal and Bhutan, and the Indian region of Sikkim would become the platforms where he would "climb up to monasteries, partake of ceremonies, chat with monks and observe, next to other exiled people, the borders of Tibet."⁷¹ If India's color and warmth reconnected him to his Caribbean roots, Tibetan Buddhism came to represent the religion of exile, and thus, technically speaking, Sarduy did not travel to China to write about this either. Like Cuba, China became a haunting cultural universe in which Sarduy could not set foot but that he touched from the surface.

The surface, as I have been demonstrating in this chapter, is by no means a secondary—inferior—framework to make sense of China, but rather a positive platform to assert the layers of signification in the materiality of a literary language. In response to the recurrent question of how Sarduy managed to render the complexity of Oriental religions and cultures with his signature neobaroque flamboyance, he would insist precisely on the notion of the surface as the single possible interface for a legitimate writing of Asia:

No se trata de una India trascendental, metafísica o profunda, sino al contrario, una exaltación de la superficie y yo diría hasta de la pacotilla india. Yo creo, y me hubiera gustado que Octavio Paz estuviera de acuerdo—pienso que lo está—que la única descodificación que podemos hacer en tanto que occidentales, que la única lectura no neurótica de la India que nos es posible a partir de nuestro logocentrismo es esa que privilegia su superficie. El resto es traducción cristianizante, sincretismo, verdadera superficialidad.

This is not about a transcendental, metaphysical or profound India, it is exactly the opposite: it is the exaltation of the surface, and, I dare say, it is a shallow India. I believe, and I would have liked for Octavio Paz to agree with me—I'm sure that he does—that as Westerners, the only way we can decode India, the only nonneurotic reading available to us and our logocentrism is that which privileges its surface. Anything else is Christianizing translation, syncretism, true superficiality.⁷²

Precisely because for Sarduy logocentrism sets the limits for decoding India, I think that his incorporation of Buddhism can be read in a similar light. Rather than in a profound exegesis of its philosophical tenets, Buddhism is no better rendered in Sarduy's work than in the surface of its writing: in the opaque texture of the Tibetan language and in the performance of its scriptural rituals. As I will explain shortly, these two interfaces operate more strongly in the dialogue of Sarduy's plastic and narrative work.

The Buddhist rituals Sarduy practiced in the Himalayas or in the Pagode de Vincennes in the suburbs of Paris coincided with the fiery breakthrough of logocentrism (Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* had been published in 1967; Roland Barthes's *L'empire des signes* in 1970). As has been discussed in this chapter, non-Western scripts provided Western philosophy with a new toolkit to revise the metaphysical preeminence of alphabetic writing and to artistically celebrate the written word—the signifier stripped of its denotative content. Intrigued by the opacity of the Tibetan inscriptions that he was now seeing and hearing so often, Sarduy's acrylic paintings from the 1970s come up with fictional scripts in the style of Henri Michaux's Chinese-inspired ideograms. Painting writing becomes for Sarduy a meditative practice, by which the minute reproduction of identical signs follows the logic of the Buddhist mantra, a ritual by which a phrase is repeated ad infinitum as an auspicious gesture. Moving beyond the recurrent etymological metaphor of writing as a textile (since “text” and “textile” share the root “texo”—“to weave,” it is commonplace to say that words are “woven” into a text), Sarduy's *El Cristo de la rue Jacob* instead defines *painting* as the weaving of ancient textiles:

Se trata de repetir un mismo gesto, minúsculo, milimétrico, hecho con el pincel más fino que hay, que se llama 0–0 y que casi no tiene más que un pelo. Ese gesto, siempre el mismo, siempre del mismo color, o más o menos, se va acumulando en la tela. Se ha calculado que hay varios miles en un formato medio. Y el “punto,” así le llamo a cada trazo, va armando solo lo que puede asimilarse a una tela, a un tejido antiguo, a una escritura arcaica. Algunos ven una escritura cuneiforme, otros una escritura hebraica; otros, notaciones musicales.

This involves repeating a single gesture, minute, meticulous, and made with the finest brush there is, the 0000, which

has only about one hair. Always the same, always the same color, more or less, that gesture gradually accumulates on the canvas. It's been estimated that there are thousands in an average work. This "stitch," which is what I call each stroke, slowly constructs on its own something that resembles cloth, an ancient weaving, an archaic writing. Some people see cuneiform, other see Hebrew letters, other musical notation, etc.⁷³

Whereas abstract expressionism, particularly the work of Mark Rothko (1903–70) and Franz Kline (1910–62), had nurtured Sarduy's taste for the spontaneous, gestural, and dramatic color compositions of action painting, Buddhism domesticated his painting style into a quiet and disciplined act of meditation, with results so precise as those of an intricate Asian textile or a mechanically reproduced print (the latter explaining Sarduy's fascination with the Brazilian concretist design techniques). The meditative practice of painting-writing is a ritual of dissolution, both of the artist's subjectivity and the linguistic sign's content. I will return to this shortly.

Apart from the text itself, Tibetan writing takes shape in Sarduy's calligraphic painting in the transformation of the conventional squared white canvas into a rectangular brownish (coffee-tinted) surfaces that evoke the Buddhist horizontal prayer books used in monasteries. In the essay "Para recibir la aurora: La fabricación de los manuscritos sagrados en el Tibet" (In the wake of dawn: The production of sacred manuscripts in Tibet), Sarduy describes the production of the prayer booklets whose unique format, just like the scrolls for Paz and Haroldo, demands a different manipulation from that of Western codex books: "El libro no se hojea paralelamente al cuerpo del lector y de derecha a izquierda, como en Occidente, sino que, con ambas manos se tornan las endebles láminas hacia el cuerpo, hacia el pecho, como si la escritura se entregara hacia una de esas flores simbólicas que marcan la línea media del hombre—los seis çakras—: la que coincide con el corazón" (The reader does not flip through the pages of the book from right to left and in parallel to the body like in the West. Rather, he turns the pages with both hands toward the body, toward the chest, as if writing gave itself to one of those symbolic flowers that delineate the meridian of the body—the six chakras—the one that coincides with the heart).⁷⁴ From the perspective of Buddhism, Sarduy tells us, reading is a physical ritual in which printed words penetrate the body through energetic

points at the level of the chest, in the area of the heart. According to Buddhist (and Tantric) anatomy, chakras are energetic centers considered to be the interface between the physical and nonphysical sides of a subtler anatomy. Yet, what is initially presented as a metaphorical dematerialization of writing is in fact the opposite: in Sarduy literature implies the impression of a permanent mark. As he formulates in what is arguably his most important essay, “Escrito sobre un cuerpo” (1969, “Written on a Body”), literature is the art of tattooing: “La escritura sería el arte de esos grafos, de lo pictorial asumido por el discurso, pero también el arte de la proliferación. La plasticidad del signo escrito y su carácter barroco están presentes en toda literatura que no olvide su naturaleza de inscripción, eso que podía llamarse escripturalidad” (Writing could be the art of those graphies of discourses appropriating the pictorial, but also the proliferation. The bonds between the plastic arts and the written sign as well as its baroque character are present in all literature that retains its inscriptive nature, what we could call its scripturality).⁷⁵

The drawing *Première leçon d'acupuncture* (1971; *First Acupuncture Lesson*) graphically explores writing as the tattooing of pictograms from the anatomical perspective of traditional Asian medicine.⁷⁶ This meticulously colored ink drawing combines two human figures and different signs, some semantic, others not, in an exploration that was then occupying the varied branches of structuralism, notably Roland Barthes's seminars, which Sarduy attended along with many who were to become the leaders of French thought over the next twenty years. The human figure in the drawing is a copy of an illustration of the *Routes of the Fourteen Meridians and Their Functions* (*Shisijing fabui*), a Chinese treatise of the mid-fourteenth century that became a referent in the practice of acupuncture in the West through Jesuit translation. These images depict half-naked male figures exhibiting the meridian that runs through the body from neck to toes and organizes the two dozen chakras of traditional Chinese medicine.

Curiously, while Sarduy's drawing maintains the proportions of the image from the *Routes of the Fourteen Meridians*, the names of the chakras are displayed differently: only those in the area of the heart, at the level of the chest—the ones that absorb the written word, we know from the previous essay—are inscribed over the skin of the figure; the other names float outside the silhouette, connected by an arrow to their position in the meridian. These Han Sinitic glyphs—the only ones in Sarduy's work—untranslated and imitated with minute precision, are

“tattooed” in this area of the body as a cross-cultural statement that reading is a physical performance that marks the body for good.

Now, how do these figurative drawings, rare in Sarduy’s mostly abstract plastic oeuvre, evoke Asian scripts specifically? To what extent do acupuncture and the tattoo function as forms of writing that, through the penetration of metal needles through the surface of the flesh, also leave a wound? *Escrito sobre un cuerpo*, in fact, anticipates pain as a condition for writing: “Pero esta inscripción no es posible sin herida, sin pérdida. Para que la masa informativa se convierta en texto, para que la palabra comunique, el escritor tiene que tatuarla, que insertar en ella sus pictogramas” (“But this inscription is not possible without wounding, without a loss. In order for informational mass to become text, for words to communicate, the writer must tattoo that mass, insert his pictograms in it”).⁷⁷ In a foreword to an exhibition of the French painter-calligrapher Jean Cortot (1925–2018), Sarduy makes an even more explicit link between the flesh and the aesthetic materiality of Oriental writing: “While the conceptual history of writing in the West, is vast, its graphic history remains extremely poor. The concern for elegance in the stroke, for the projection of the line, for curves and flourishes, we assigned to the civilizations of ideograms and arabesques, leaving our script with a purely informative role, a role devoid of ornament, script reduced to its austere legibility. The figurative value of ideograms has, it seems, gradually been lost, but letters in the Orient are still associated with blood and the red seal of representation.”⁷⁸ What might appear at first glance as an Orientalist view of “ornamental” Asian scripts associated with violent cultures (“blood” is here a synecdoche of despotism) becomes a more complex statement in light of religion: red is after all the distinctive color of Mahayana Buddhism, visible in its monks’ garbs and the facades of their monasteries. It is also the color of sacred texts: in a synesthetic move, Sarduy associates red with the sound of the horns that announce prayers at dawn in the Himalaya: “El rojo establece, con el de la sangre, una complicidad secreta. Va circulando, una vez que sus ondas han atravesado la piel, por todo el cuerpo, a un ritmo lento. Su sonido es grave, algo sordo, su voz es de bajo, como el de las grandes trompetas tibetanas que se despliegan en la puerta de los monasterios, a la aurora” (Red establishes a secret complicity with blood. It circulates slowly through the entire body once its waves have penetrated the skin. It has a deep—almost deaf—sound, and its voice is as grave as the giant Tibetan trumpets that rise at dawn at the entrance of monasteries).⁷⁹ Translated in terms of Haroldo de Campos’s concretism, color becomes

a signifying agent of the linguistic ritual in a verbivocovisual scene of preparation, in which blood flows through the body to absorb the signs that will be imprinted—tattooed—onto the skin at the moment of engagement with sacred texts. Red is the ultimate color, the heart of Sarduy's palette, explored through a lifetime veneration of Mark Rothko, whose suicide by razor represented for Sarduy the single true masterpiece. In "Cromoterapia" (Chromotherapy) he concludes: "De cuantas explicaciones se han dado del suicidio de Mark Rothko hay una sola que nunca he encontrado en sus numerosas, y con frecuencia deplorables, biografías: su investigación del rojo llegó a tal profundidad, a tal diálogo, que tuvo que derramar el modelo—y el origen—de todo posible rojo: la sangre humana" (Of all the explanations on Mark Rothko's suicide, there is only one that I have never found in the numerous—and usually deplorable—biographies of him: that his incursion into red reached such depth, such dialogue, that he had to spill the model—and origin—of all possible red: human blood).⁸⁰ In Sarduy's interpretation, death, marked by the fatal penetration of the blade on the surface of the skin, marks the highest point of inspiration for his calligraphic painting, a style translated superficially from the scriptures and rituals of Tibetan Buddhism, but also from the most formal of the abstract expressionists.

Translation is an act of media transfer: a haptic process of identifying the superficial aspects of a literary artifact and recreating—transcreating—them in a new cultural context. Translation of Chinese classical poetry provides multiple forms of arousal of the tactile through linguistic, spatial, and sensory manipulations of the Chinese script, operations that were of particular interest to avant-garde Latin American visual poets who were obsessed with Asia but largely illiterate of its languages. Challenging Octavio Paz's lamentation on the limited repercussions of Chinese poetics in Latin America, I posit that José Juan Tablada, Haroldo de Campos, and Severo Sarduy, in turn, evidence the rich tradition of ideogrammatic translation both through their visual and plastic work and their intense conversation with other central Latin American artists—Paz himself—exploring the limits of language at a critical point in time when the supremacy of the written word was being called into question by Western philosophy. This sensorial approach to literary translation emphasizes tangible signifying elements of literary languages such as instrumentation, supplies, site of inscription, and format that cast light on millenary material exchanges between Asia and Latin America; to account for this, it is necessary to study the physical dispositions that enable such connection. Surfaces, Giuliana Bruno

stresses, are “the site of reciprocal contact between us and objects or environments.” I have argued for the relevance of performance and rituals in the media transfer of these poets, such as Haroldo’s evocation of the cinematic unfolding of antique scrolls, or Sarduy’s calligraphic painting as a meditation practice. These embodied transfers of world literature prompt us to reflect again on the central role of the body in translation. I started this book by studying translation as physical displacement, and how the global traffic of Chinese bodies and the representation of their silhouettes can be understood as a crucial marker of travel literature, ethnographic modernism, and the *modernista* Orientalism at large. In the final chapter of this book I return to the body’s epistemological capacity to affect and be affected. By analyzing the embodied memories of performing arts during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, I take translation as the transfer of affect in the writing of history of China.

Moving Memories

The Affective Archive of the Cultural Revolution

The documentary *No intenso agora* (2017; *In the Intense Now*) by the Brazilian filmmaker João Moreira Salles (1962–) exhibits rare footage of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.¹ Through extraordinary editing work, the two-hour piece weaves together television reports of the May 1968 riots in France, amateur films of the Prague Spring, and home videos of a trip that Moreira Salles’s mother made to China in 1966. Moreira Salles’s voice-over (reflective, calm, forever melancholic) comments on these great events from recent history in light of childhood memories that materialize in questions rather than in answers. Between long sequences showing French student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit (1945–) haranguing masses of students and workers, and scenes of Soviet tanks marching through the streets of Czechoslovakia, Moreira Salles gives in to the colorful shots of his mother strolling along the Great Wall of China, posing in front of temples vandalized by Red Guards, or surrounded by whimsical children holding Mao’s *Little Red Book*: “Ela foi feliz na China, e por isso gosto de pensar nela lá” (She was happy in China, and that is why I like to think of her over there), he concludes about his mother’s transformative journey to the heart of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Alien to any revolutionary activity and moved rather by a bourgeois taste for art history, his mother visited China in 1966 with a group of French aficionados, and, completely

overwhelmed by what she saw, she filmed long hours that record the reality of “um país oposto a tudo o que ela conhecia” (a country unlike anything she had ever known). The contrast in the tone of the narrative is remarkable, but the narrator resolves it in a statement on the nature of the family archive: “As imagens são amadoras. Não foram feitas para a História. São apenas sobras de um momento na vida . . . quando tudo parecia possível” (The images are amateur. They were not made for History. They are mere leftovers of a moment in life . . . when everything seemed possible). This personal footage, says Moreira Salles, is not the private evidence of a scientific account of History—with a capital H—but rather shows the fragments, residues, “leftovers” of an era of utopia. Released between the fiftieth anniversaries of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and May 1968, *No intenso agora* offers a bold revision of the now extinct revolutionary zeal of the New Left as well as the fleeting happiness of that mother, who—the documentary omits—took her own life in the 1980s. Collective memory, family history, and the quest for identity are intertwined here in the recovery of images and gestures that individual memory gradually blurred and filtered into popular culture until they were completely emptied of meaning.

In this book I have sought to demonstrate that the writing of China in Latin America crosses the boundaries of established fields of knowledge, unfolding as an undisciplined critical praxis of translation that produces fragmentary archives. If the previous chapters explored different forms of translation of Chinese artifacts that bypass conventional disciplinary methods such as those of ethnography, philology, international relations, and linguistics, in this final chapter I propose to explore translation as the transfer of affect in the narrative of history. At a juncture in which the academic study of history is in the midst of a “subjective turn” that incorporates emotions as forms of knowledge production, and art criticism is illuminating the workings and transmissions of archival memory (the “archival impulse” in Hal Foster’s 2004 formulation), I ask how the personal archives of Latin American families who experienced the Cultural Revolution first-hand resurface decades later in artistic form.² By affective archive, I refer to written, oral, and visual records strongly marked by feelings and emotions. How do personal correspondence, family photographs and films, or blurry childhood memories weave intimate stories that diverge from the institutionalized versions of one of the most intense episodes of Chinese history and also of the twentieth century? Rather than focusing on the documentary value of these materials in reconstructing the Cultural Revolution

as a historical event, I am interested in how these pieces of evidence are recast from the retrospective gaze of subsequent generations and in turn prompt new questions about heritage, political commitment, and, above all, the relationship between art and politics in the present.

I also take affect as the body's capacity to affect and be affected, which Diana Taylor understands as the performance of corporal epistemologies: "Civic obedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity, for example, are rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere. To understand these as performance suggests that performance also functions as an epistemology. Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing."³ This understanding of affect as a corporeal way of knowing is particularly well suited to grasping the importance of performance and movement during the Cultural Revolution, which resurfaces in various forms in the archives of the period. After all, the Cultural Revolution was all about the body: through its sweeping deployment of symbols and artifacts evoking the figure of Mao Zedong, it filtered through to each aspect of the daily lives of those who lived in China during those years. Following an extreme interpretation of Mao's vision of the arts at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art (1942), the 1966 official campaign to destroy the "Four Olds" (old customs, old culture, old habits, old ideas) sought to achieve a drastic break with the past to edify a new socialist culture. As a result, cultural production, replying on a modern infrastructure of mass media, and coordinated by Mao's wife Jiang Qing (1914–91), became largely circumscribed to a limited repertoire of productions (*yangbanxi*) that were a blended pastiche of socialist realism, Hollywood musicals, and Peking opera. And thanks to a massive manufacturing industry, the imagery of these operas and ballets manifested in posters, postcards, toys, kitchenware, stationary, and magazines, as well as all kinds of trinkets, souvenirs, and utensils that were used, touched, heard, and experienced with the body at all times of the day. Just as the ubiquitous paraphernalia of the Cultural Revolution aroused senses and emotions as much as the intellect, the memorialist strategies to recover it also imply a physical and emotional disposition. In light of this, I seek to apprehend how these feelings, senses, and emotions are archived. How is the affective displayed not only through the archive's content but also in the ways the archives are made, produced, and shared?

This book traces distinct forms of circulation of Chinese culture that are virtually unreadable and undecipherable with the conventional

tools of literary criticism. As I have argued throughout the chapters, translation is not just a textual operation; it is also an act of displacement of the human, visual, and haptic qualities of a literary artifact when it crosses cultural boundaries. The affective turn, highlighting the role of the body as site of knowledge production and signification, moderates the emphasis on the linguistic and instead draws the attention to other forms of perception. As Irene Depetris Chauvin and Natalia Taccetta argue in *Afectos, historia y cultura visual: Una aproximación indisciplina* (2019; Affect, history and visual culture: An indisciplined approach), “el ‘giro afectivo’ no se vincula con un regreso al sujeto, sino con la puesta en evidencia de la discontinuidad constitutiva de la subjetividad contemporánea y la experiencia de la no-intencionalidad de las emociones y afectos en intercambios cotidianos” (The “affective turn” is not a return to the subject; rather, it is linked to the evidence of the constitutive discontinuity of contemporary subjectivity and the experience of the nonintentionality of emotions and affects in everyday exchanges).⁴ The following pages draw attention to the translation of affect in world literature by exploring how childhood and youth embodied memories of performances of music, film, dance, and drama circulate through geographical as well as temporal boundaries. I put forward tentative answers through the concepts of repertoire, mandate, spectacle, mediation, illumination, and silence.

RED DIAPERS

Chapter 3 reconstructed the itineraries of intellectuals and artists from the broad spectrum of the Left who visited the PRC during the first seventeen years after the establishment of Communist rule. These were occasional travelers who became vibrant cultural agents thanks to their political enthusiasm, the momentum of the translation industry, and, above all, the twisted networks of cultural diplomacy. This chapter instead focuses on the trajectories of those Latin American “foreign experts” who resided long-term in Beijing with their families during the years of the Cultural Revolution, a time when China had virtually shut its doors to outsiders.⁵ They were hired as professors of Spanish and Portuguese, translators, proofreaders, and journalists, and enjoyed a special status compared to that of regular diplomats and other foreigners. Their children attended Chinese schools, interacted with Chinese caretakers, and became fluent in Mandarin. In the jargon of the Left they are called

“red diapers,” “children of Communist Party (CP) members, children of former CP members, and children whose parents never became members of the CP but were involved in political, cultural, or educational activities led or supported by the Party.”⁶ The term emerged in the 1920s as a critique of the comrades who rose through the ranks thanks to relatives’ connections, but it rapidly became a literary and cinematographic trope with the addition of subsequent Communist generations. These Latin American red diapers established a unique bond with their adoptive country that shapes their identity to this day: many of them developed global careers in the orbit of China and have followed from up-close the dramatic transformation of China from the capital of socialist revolution to the epicenter of global capitalism. The novel *Volver la vista atrás* (2020; *Retrospective*) by the Colombian writer Juan Gabriel Vásquez (1973–) provides a vivid image of this singular cohort of individuals whose itinerant lives were marked by political and family passions. In a poignant scene toward the end, the protagonist Sergio Cabrera mirrors himself in a photograph of fellow red diapers from Uruguay, who also happen to go by the surname Cabrera, and wonders:

Toda una generación—pensó Sergio allí, viendo la foto de los Cabrera uruguayos—, toda una generación de latinoamericanos cuya vida quedó empeñada en una causa enorme. ¿Dónde estarían ahora? Vivían en Suecia, sí, ¿pero dónde, y con quién, y con qué memorias de su paso por las armas, y con cuánta sensación de que alguien había tomado por ellos decisiones importantes, de que alguien les había robado años de su vida? Eran hijos de un poeta, Sarandy Cabrera, un contemporáneo de Onetti y de Idea Vilariño que tradujo a Ronsard y a Petrarca y prologó los 37 *poemas* de Mao Tse-Tung. ¿Cómo habría sido su vida? ¿En qué se habrá parecido a la vida de Fausto Cabrera, y cuánta influencia habrá tenido en las decisiones de sus hijos? De vez en cuando Sergio dedicaba sus ratos de ocio a rastrear por los laberintos de la red el destino de todos ellos, los viejos protagonistas de sus vidas previas.

A whole generation—Sergio thought there, looking at the photo of the Uruguayan Cabrereras—a whole generation of Latin Americans whose lives were pawned for an enormous cause. Where were they now? They lived in Sweden, yes, but

where, and with whom, and with what memories of their time in arms, and with how much of a feeling that someone had stolen years of their lives? They were the sons of a poet, Sarandy Cabrera, a contemporary of Onetti and Idea Vilariño, who translated Ronsard and Petrarch and wrote a prologue to Mao Tse-tung's 37 *poemas*. How had his life been? How had it resembled Fausto Cabrera's life, and how much influence had he had on his sons' decisions? Sometimes Sergio devoted his free time to combing through the labyrinths of the internet for their destinies, all those protagonists of his previous lives.⁷

A remarkable number of documentaries, memoirs, and biographical fiction by red diapers from all over Latin America have been released over the last ten years, offering possible answers to the destiny of this "Chinese" generation. In *Cartas de Jingzhai* (静斋记事): *Reminiscencias estudiantiles en China 1976-1981* (2014; Jingzhai letters: Student reminiscences of China 1976-1981), the Venezuelan Víctor Ochoa-Piccardo (1955-) looks back on his college years at Tsinghua University as well as on his childhood during the Cultural Revolution. Apart from offering a vast social network of the international community of Beijing, in the eloquent footnotes to the letters the author plays out his own tweaking of the past, the tricks of memory, and a firm resistance to nostalgia. So does Pablo Vicente Rovetta Dubinsky (1958-) in *Los años setenta en China: Recuerdos de un Oriental en Oriente* (2020; The 1970s in China: Memoirs of an Oriental in the Orient), a collection of essays that reflect on Chinese history as seen through the eyes of a Uruguayan who witnessed the end of the Cultural Revolution and China's transformations during the last forty years. The documentary *Hotel de la amistad* (2016; Friendship Hotel) by Pablo (1958-) and Yuri Doudchitzky (1961-) narrates a homecoming journey to Beijing. The Uruguayan brothers become detectives of sorts who track the locations and characters of their years in China by following family albums and interviews only to learn about an unexpected outcome that makes them revisit their childhood nostalgia in a bleak new light. *A ponte de bambú* (2019; *Bamboo Bridge*) by Marcelo Machado (1958-), also brings albums, films, and all kinds of media to reconstruct forty years in the life of the Brazilian Martins family, who have served as "friends of China" from the times of the Cultural Revolution to the present, adapting to the shifting roles prescribed for them at each stage of Chinese diplomacy.⁸

By studying works that document the affective archives of the Latin American youth who experienced the Cultural Revolution, this chapter contributes to ongoing discussions on art, history, and memory unfolding both in China and Latin America. In *Utopian Ruins. A Memorial of the Mao Era* (2020), Jie Li overcomes decades of state-sponsored amnesia and official narratives based on inaccessible archives by putting together a “memorial museum” of corporeal and material evidence of the Mao years. In a monograph designed as an exhibition, Li curates six chapters that scrutinize photographs, films, and memorial sites, as well as her own family’s memories that look back to negotiate the antagonistic paradigms that structure the current intellectual debate about China’s recent past. Li’s notion of “‘utopian ruins’ highlights, on the one hand, the hopes and aspirations that moved so many to participate in the Chinese Revolution, and, on the other hand, the mass suffering and cultural wreckage that occurred in its wake.”⁹ Attentive to the crucial momentum of memory’s generational transfer in present-day China (from the lived to the mediated; from possession to inheritance), Li makes a programmatic call to future curators to salvage past stories and remnants from death and demolition, and to give enduring form to ephemeral memories: “Now is the time to collect documents, artifacts, and testimonies in anticipation of future museums.”¹⁰ This chapter adds to such memorial museums of the Mao era by showcasing scattered documents, experiences, and testimonies of those “friends of China” from the Third World who left their homes to experience the Cultural Revolution in situ. The memories of their children, who were educated as locals yet always treated as foreigners, further complicate notions of identity, community, and internationalism during the Chinese revolutionary process.

The archival lookback on the revolutionary zeal of the 1960s and 1970s has also been at the core of Latin American artistic and critical discourse in the last two decades. As I discussed in chapter 3 regarding Ricardo Piglia’s ambiguous relation to his Maoist past, Bruno Bosteels’s recovery of the repressed militancy of the period through archives that were “censored, forgotten, buried, or destroyed since the mid-1970s” is arguably the most comprehensive project to rescue the legacy of 1968 by actualizing Communism, in the words of Alain Badiou’s *The Communist Hypothesis* (2015).¹¹ In parallel to Bosteels’s emphasis on intellectual history, Erin Graff-Zivin identifies an “archaeological” drive in recent scholarship that also revises dominant narratives, particularly of the Tlatelolco massacre of 1968 in Mexico, yet does so “not in order

to ‘bring to light’ the truth of the Mexican student-popular movement but instead to traverse the fantasy of the movement, together with its dissolution, without seeking to suture the gaps necessarily produced in such readings.”¹² Like Moreira Salles’s *No intenso agora*, these latter works recover the affective and sensorial memories of the episode through alternative forms of evidence such as the subaltern voices of political prisoners and women or the luminous effect of gunfire, flares, and camera flashes that ultimately defined the massacre.¹³ Beatriz Sarlo summarizes the prevalent subjective turn in academia and the public sphere in the following terms: “la actual tendencia académica y del mercado de bienes simbólicos se propone reconstruir la textura de la vida y la verdad albergadas en la rememoración de la experiencia, la revaloración de la primera persona como punto de vista, la reivindicación de una dimensión subjetiva, que hoy se expande sobre los estudios del pasado y los estudios culturales del presente” (the current academic trend, as well as the market for symbolic goods, seek to reconstruct the texture of life and truth anchored in the remembrance of experience, the reevaluation of the first person as a point of view, and the reclaiming of a subjective dimension, which today expands to studies of the past and to cultural studies of the present).¹⁴ Sarlo refers in particular to the Southern Cone, where official gestures of repentance and amnesty legislation to condemn the human rights abuses of recent dictatorships have given a fresh voice to the victims of state terrorism and their descendants, now grouped in organizations such as the Argentine H.I.J.O.S (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio; Children For Identity and Justice, Against Forgetting and Silence) or the Chilean A.F.D.D (Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos; Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared). These policies have facilitated a wealth of artistic production: novels, memoirs, and documentaries *de hijos* (“by children”) configure a robust and ever-growing subgenre of its own.

At the center of these comparable memorialist ecologies from the two cultural fields is the notion of “postmemory,” coined by Marianne Hirsch to describe “the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up, which were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.”¹⁵ While transgenerational memories are always present in the sons and daughters of Maoist militants whose life was shaped by

their parents' political choices, their affective archives do not just seem to constitute but are memories in their own right, since they refer to the second generation's first-hand experience in the revolutionary process and their embodied exposure to the foreign culture. The Cultural Revolution complicates dichotomies usually associated with patterns of postmemory such as perpetrator/victim, state terrorism/revolutionary violence, or past/present because the traumatic decade 1966–76 in China was part of a revolutionary process with global reach and still in power today. Latin American memories of the Cultural Revolution are thus moving both because they spur an emotional response and because they are in motion: they relate to China and Latin America from the inside and from the outside. Released in Spanish and Portuguese, they will most likely go unnoticed by the vigilant regime of the only president of China other than Mao Zedong to have his personal views on socialism elevated to doctrine (since 2018 “Xi Jinping Thought” appears in the preamble to the constitution). In the context of a cultural industry closely monitored by the state, Xi Jinping's (1953–) speech at the Beijing Forum on Literature and Art in 2014, encouraging China's creative industries to promote party ideology and patriotism with their work, echoed Mao's stance at the Yan'an Forum and further reinforced the message that in the postsocialist state intervention of the arts is far from being a thing of the past. These memories also add nuance to Western liberal views of the global legacy of the Cultural Revolution at a juncture when democracy is being challenged worldwide by the rise of populism—an anxiety nowhere better rendered than in the title of a *New Yorker* piece published on January 25, 2021, shortly after right-wing extremists stormed the United States Capitol to overturn the 2020 presidential election: “What Are the Cultural Revolution's Lessons for Our Current Moment? The Great Question of China's Maoist Experiment Now Looms Over the United States: Why Did a Powerful Society Suddenly Start Destroying Itself?”¹⁶ Ultimately, these disorienting memories from all over Latin America that produce the most diverse political and artistic reactions to the utopian ruins of the global revolutionary past highlight the methodological shortcomings of assuming putative frameworks of analysis such as the Third World or the Global South in the comparative study of cultures, because such categories flatten artistic production by seeking to anchor it into particular identities and local histories, while the experience of Latin American red diapers in China is essentially bicultural and transnational. I agree with Florencia Garramuño that contemporary Latin American art combining unspeci-

fied media and aesthetics to call into question notions of belonging and identity ultimately poses a much deeper phenomenological conundrum: what exactly does it mean to inhabit the world?¹⁷

REPERTOIRES

The father of Yuri and Pablo Doudchitzky was a leader of Argentina's Communist Youth who went into exile in Montevideo during the two first Peronist administrations (1946–55). He soon became disenchanted with his pro-Soviet peers—whom he pejoratively called “bureaucrats”—and from the new ranks of Maoism accepted the invitation to undertake “la más grande aventura de su vida como revolucionario” (the greatest adventure of his life as a revolutionary).¹⁸ Together with his wife and three children, he settled in the capital of China from 1963 to 1967 thanks to a contract with the Spanish department of the Beijing Foreign Languages University. The family stayed at the Friendship Hotel, an international compound that initially housed the Soviet specialists who assisted in the transition to socialism but later hosted the “friends of China” coming from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The documentary *Hotel de la amistad* by Yuri and Pablo Doudchitzky follows their return to Beijing fifty years later, where, with the help of photographs, interviews, and blurry memories, they reconstruct the itineraries of their Beijing childhood, the intellectual biography of their father, and their own inscription in a genealogy of militancy that began with their Bolshevik grandparents in Russia.

All the investigations conducted in *Hotel de la amistad* are structured around the question of what really happened to their father's late best friend Mong Futi, with whom the family lost touch after he was arrested by the Red Guards in 1967. There is a photo of Mong that the Doudchitzkys share with their interviewees from a laptop, which only produces sterile answers. Toward the middle of the film we learn from a former student of his that the person in the photograph is not Mong Futi (and we could add, is his name also not spelled *Meng* Futi, since the spelling “Mong” used in the subtitles of the film is not included in either the Wade-Giles or pinyin romanization systems?). It appears that Mong Futi committed suicide because of his humiliation at being labeled a revisionist. Like many university professors during the transition to socialism, Mong came from a middle-class family and had participated in the Kuomintang, two tragic flaws to the radicalized eyes of the Red Guards, the mass student-led paramilitary movement from the early

phase of the Cultural Revolution that sought to destroy all symbols of China's pre-Communist past. What the documentary describes as the historic fate of the Chinese intellectual also functions as a metaphor of the Doudchitzky brothers' disenchantment with their own Chinese childhood. This disenchantment is played out in the subtle editing of original recordings and archival material, where soundtrack, lyrics, and footage of the Cultural Revolution weave an affective narrative that shifts in tone as the plot progresses.

At the beginning of the film, the sound, visual, and verbal registers are aligned. Family photos of lavish banquets, Tai chi practices, and lively classrooms convey the freshness of the intrepid, newly arrived family who had come from afar to join those under the aegis of Mao. The revolutionary song "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman," commonly sung in public during the 1960s by the Red Guards, plays in the background, confirming with its lyrics the faith of these converts to Maoism: "The revolutionary masses cannot do without the Communist Party; Mao Zedong Thought is the sun that forever shines."¹⁹ The story develops and so does the archival narrative. While family albums evoke idyllic reminiscences of the international arcadia of the Friendship Hotel where kids roamed free and role-played war against the American imperialists, the background music raises some questions. To the lyrics of the song "We are the Heirs of Communism," interpreted by the infant voices of the Young Pioneers of China—a mass youth organization created in 1949 and still active today—the viewers are made to wonder about the actual heritage of this fellowship of children of the Third World, whose lingua franca was Mandarin and whose putative guardians were the nannies and teachers who looked after them while their parents served the revolution (fig. 11).

Somewhat perplexed by the awareness of such earnest responsibility entrusted to the staff of the hotel, Yuri's voiceover comments:

Al año de estar trabajando en Pekín, mis padres aprovecharon uno de los privilegios que les daba su contrato y realizaron un viaje de dos meses a Sudamérica para visitar parientes en Argentina, Chile y Uruguay y nos dejaron con siete, cuatro y tres años en las antípodas del planeta a cargo de unas niñeras con las que nunca habían podido hablar por desconocimiento del idioma. Y todo el comentario que hace mi padre al respecto es que al regreso quedaron encantados de que habíamos aprendido una coreografía y una canción.



Fig. 11. Children of foreign residents singing Maoist marches in Beijing. *Hotel de la amistad*, 2016. Copyright © Pablo Doudchitzky.

After a year of working in Beijing, my parents took advantage of one of the privileges that their contract gave them and made a two-month trip to South America to visit relatives in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, leaving us—who were then seven, four, and three years old—in the antipodes of the planet in the care of nannies with whom they had never been able to talk due to the lack of a common language. And the single comment my father made upon his return is that they were delighted that we had learned a choreography and a song.²⁰

The moment of reckoning with the need to sacrifice family life for the sake of political action is a trope in the memorialist genre of the second generation, particularly in works about parents disappeared by the state. These range from the highly controversial Argentine documentary *Los rubios* (2003; *The Blonds*), where the orphan Albertina Carri's open questioning of the value of militancy stirred a heated debate about the ethical limits of this genre (see the Kohan-Macón debate in *Punto de Vista*, 2004), to more laudatory films like *La guardería* (2015; *Our House in Cuba*) by Virginia Croatto or *El edificio de los chilenos* (2010; *The Chilean Building*) by Macarena Aguilo, about the everlasting bond of the children of the guerrilla organizations Montoneros (Argentina) and M.I.R. (Chile) who were sheltered in Cuba as their parents

broke their exile to conduct a counteroffensive strike in 1970s and early 1980s.²¹ *Hotel de la amistad* neither passes judgment nor pardons this sacrifice. Looking back on the mid-1960s, before the New Left radicalized into armed conflict, the film evokes a form of militant utopia at a stage when it was mostly intellectual, romantic, and full of adventure. The Doudchitzkys' father did not die because of his political choices (we learn in the documentary that he passed away in 2005), which casts an utterly different light on the memories of his children's temporary orphanage in China. In fact, as we listen to Yuri speaking the words quoted above, we almost hear a scoff, as if he were grinning at the arcane thought of his father crisscrossing the planet so smoothly. And what appears to be the evidence of such nonchalance—that is, his father's delight that his kids learned a choreography and a song in his absence—is the key to the peculiar quality of the affective memory of this generation that was educated in China. In the film the songs and dances that were part of the children's curriculum do not operate simply as material archives (static, permanent, storable) but rather as repertoires, performative practices that produce knowledge from an embodied memory.²² Patriotic songs such as the aforementioned “Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman” or “We are the Heirs of Communism” are indeed historical records of Maoist cultural policy, and the producers of the film have likely paid copyright fees to a repository to obtain permission to reproduce them in their own film. Yet, for these director-protagonists, these cultural products are the soundtrack of their childhood: the music they heard in films, at official events, and blaring from ubiquitous loudspeakers on the streets; the music they learned by heart at school and interpreted with their bodies, and most likely still hum spontaneously to this day, since, like all effects of early pedagogy, they stay engraved in the affective archive of childhood.

Once the tragic fate of Mong Futi is revealed, the editing no longer endorses nor questions the triumphal melodies of the Cultural Revolution with images; instead, it condemns them by juxtaposing photographs of humiliated teachers wearing dunce caps, mountains of burning books, and ransacked monuments. These rare images that chronicle the most frenzied period of the Cultural Revolution—and that have become the most recognizable storyboards of the Cultural Revolution in Western eyes—come from the photo album *Red-Color News Soldier* (2003) by the dissident Chinese photojournalist Li Zhensheng (1940–2020). A reporter for the *Heilongjiang Daily* from the northern city of Harbin, Li kept more than ten thousand negatives stashed in floorboards for nearly

forty years, making them known to the public in 2003 in a bilingual edition published in New York: “Very little photographic evidence of the excesses of the Cultural Revolution remains, and certainly no books from that time exist that showed the flipside of these policies—making the discovery and publication of an illicit archive from that era all the more remarkable,” states the British photojournalist and collector Martin Parr (1952–) in reference to the historiographical value of these images that are to this day proscribed in mainland China.²³ Are the photographs of the Cultural Revolution in *Hotel de la amistad* the same as those of *Red-Color News Soldier*, from where they are drawn? How do these testimonies of political turmoil take on new tones when twice unearthed: first in the Maoist dissident’s book and then in a memorialist work by the descendants of a Maoist activist from Latin America? A close look at the sequence of how Li Zhensheng’s photos are reproduced in *Hotel de la amistad* reveals that they were filmed directly from the album, since some of them exhibit the convex distortion produced by the binding of the spine of the book. In simulating the act of flipping through the album’s pages, memory is performed as a subjective ongoing action rather than as a static memento: we follow the moving camera cropping the images and zooming in on faces as if through the lens of a magnifying glass. In *Red-Color News Soldier* these silhouettes represent anonymous victims of the Cultural Revolution, whereas in *Hotel de la amistad*—projected through the Doudchitzkys’ inquisitive eyes—they embody the phantasmagorical figure of Mong Futi, the missing person from the directors’ childhood for whom they frantically search in the film. In a cultural context like that of the Southern Cone, with its relentless artistic exploration of the recovering of the bodies of the disappeared by the state—whether through photographs, film, or human-sized cutouts that occupy the public space (to mention the thriving legacy of the 1983 Argentine performance *siluetazo*)—it is worth mentioning that the missing body recuperated artistically in *Hotel de la amistad* is a victim of the same revolutionary regime that their father served in China, not of an antagonist one.²⁴ In this case the fictional restitution of an identity via the nameless figures of a recognizable photo album does not settle the score with a traumatic past but rather creates a new pain: the fall from grace of the Cultural Revolution in the heroic narrative of their father’s intellectual biography. I will return to this complex articulation of the postmemories of the revolutionary Left in my discussion of works about descendants of Shining Path militants in Peru.

Yuri puts into words his disenchantment and that of others. As a farewell to the Beijing sojourn, we see him at a restaurant themed after the Cultural Revolution in the cosmopolitan Chaoyang district, where an amateur troupe dramatizes “The East Is Red,” the de facto anthem narrating Mao’s rise to power that we see at the lively beginning of the documentary in clips from the 1964 model film by the same title directed by Wang Ping (1916–90). Confronted with this low-cost and sparsely attended spectacle, the relieved voice-over concludes that the death of Mong Futi marks “the end of a stage of idealism of his father’s life. It would be tempting to read such political disenchantment as the fading of the idealist theatrical power of the model play, now turned into kitsch memorabilia catering to foreign tourists. Like chinoiserie, souvenirs of the Cultural Revolution thrive in markets inside and outside China as popular collectibles, ironically though, also as exotic commodities that recall the traumatic road to socialism, best summarized by Laurence Coderre in the paradox that “while informed discussion of the Cultural Revolution may well be in short supply in the People’s Republic of China, objects (purportedly) from the Cultural Revolution abound.”²⁵ There is indeed a sharp contrast between the clips of the 1965 version of “The East is Red” and the one filmed in *Hotel de la amistad*, both displaying the entire prelude “Sunflower to the Sun,” a distinctive segment of “The East Is Red” where dancers hold large yellow flowers. While in the model film radiant figures draped in pastel hues enact flawless movements to the score of a massive orchestra, the actors in the themed restaurant drag their floral props across the stage, lip-synching to loud playback music constantly interrupted by cheers from the audience. Amateur performance, which could hastily be read as a nostalgic downgrading of the original lavish model plays, was rather the “key technology of mass (re)production and remediation of revolutionary art” destined to the massive population of the immense Chinese territory.²⁶ In cinematographic format, model operas made it to the most remote corners of the countryside thanks to mobile projection units that gathered entire villages around impromptu screens; as plays they circulated in translation into the countless dialects and operatic traditions from each region of the country, usually performed by non-professional artists.²⁷ After all, revolutionary operas were conceived as Beijing operas, the traditional dramatic form popularly enacted in parks and markets, as much as on the stage. Through amateur routines, revolutionary art penetrated into the bodies of the common people making them active performers of the new culture of the masses: according to

Xiaomei Chen, “the masses were encouraged to imitate the protagonists of the model theatre by watching and even performing model theatrical pieces themselves in order to become better revolutionaries.”²⁸ These common people were older and newer generations of the PRC, among them foreign schoolkids like Yuri and Pablo Doudchitzky, who learned their songs and choreographies by heart while their parents were away making the revolution.

MANDATES

Víctor José Ochoa Gómez (1931–2018) moved with his family to the Chinese capital in 1968 to work as a journalist for the Xinhua news agency. The Venezuelan family stayed for two years altogether, but the son Víctor Ochoa-Piccardo (1955–) returned in 1976 to complete his college degree in architecture with a scholarship from the Chinese government and then settled permanently in 1983 (unable to renew his residence permit in 2012, he now lives in Malaysia). *Cartas de Jingzhai* offers a vivid testimony of the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution in the letters that the young Víctor sent to his family over the years. In the eloquent footnotes to the correspondence that was transcribed for publication in 2014, the author not only reconnects with the China of his youth but also notes the abyss between his China and that of his father.

If there is a repertoire of embodied memory in *Cartas de Jingzhai*, it is the gustatory one. In numerous footnotes, the author displays a sybarite ethnography perfected over nearly five decades of residence in China. We learn about *mantous* and *wotous*, and *jiaozis* (steamed wheat and cornmeal buns, and dumplings, respectively); the incorrigible quality of Chinese cheese; culinary maxims such as “uno podía conectarse con su infancia a través de ciertos alimentos” (one could connect with one’s childhood through certain foods); or the author’s commitment to the bland menu of the Chinese students’ canteen rather than to “las comodidades para consentir a los extranjeros” (the comforts to spoil foreigners).²⁹ Retrospective comments that appeal to the palate show up in the most unexpected notes, as in the following quote repeated twice in the book: “su madre era famosa por haber sido la primera guerrillera griega durante la Segunda Guerra, además cocinaba muy bien, particularmente los postres” (her mother was famous for having been the first Greek guerrilla fighter during the World War II; she also cooked very well, particularly desserts).³⁰

Since the author is an insider to Chinese culture, he contextualizes his youthful impressions retrospectively. The initial surprise of becoming unexpectedly admired because of the freckles on his shoulders is explained decades later in terms of a common racial bias of the Chinese: “Es muy cómico pero los chinos resultan ser muy exquisitos en el tema racial. Por una parte, no les gustan los negros pero admiran su físico, tampoco sienten mayor simpatía por la mayoría de las otras razas asiáticas ni por los árabes” (it is quite amusing that the Chinese turn out to be very picky when it comes to race. On the one hand, they do not like blacks but admire their physique, nor do they feel any particular attraction to most other Asian races or Arabs).³¹ An anecdote of a disagreement with a friend is explained decades later as “ciertamente los chinos son poco curiosos en sentido social, no preguntan qué hizo uno el fin de semana o la noche anterior . . . Quizás es una medida sabia para proteger su intimidad” (indeed the Chinese are not very socially curious, they do not ask what one did last weekend or last before. . . . Perhaps this is a smart way of protecting their own privacy).³² Ochoa-Piccardo himself adopts such evasive Chinese attitude to sensitive issues (known in China as “saving face” [*mianzi*]) by recounting history in a way that avoids uncomfortable statements. Unlike the Doudchitzkys, who assume an openly critical view of the Red Guards, Ochoa-Piccardo exposes different versions of controversial historical episodes for the reader to judge. For example, in the preface he recalls the atmosphere during the Cultural Revolution as “aquel pandemónium revolucionario que se vivía o sufría en la sociedad—depende quién eche el cuento” (that revolutionary pandemonium that was lived or suffered in society, depending on who tells the story).³³ He is impartial with official records too: in reference to the news of the Tangshan earthquake of 1976, he points out: “el cálculo oficial de víctimas oscila entre 250 y 650 mil depende de la fuente y del año. También se debe sumar a esto 700 mil heridos. Las estadísticas en China siempre han sido un misterio” (the official estimate of victims ranges between 250 and 650 thousand depending on the source and year. 700,000 wounded must also be added to this. Statistics in China have always been a mystery).³⁴

While *Hotel de la amistad* is a posthumous tribute to an event in the father’s intellectual biography, *Cartas de Jingzhai* is an open conversation between father and son about the mutating meanings of China during the second half of the twentieth century. As a resident, Ochoa-Piccardo witnesses the postsocialist transition brought about by Deng Xiaoping’s reforms while his father had remained loyal to the China

of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, to which he contributed firmly from Caracas as president of the Venezuelan-China Friendship Association and from his Marxist bookstore *El Viento del Este* (The east wind):

Mi regreso a estudiar en Beijing, si bien fue una decisión personal, estuvo francamente alentada por papá quien aspiraba a que yo recibiera una mejor educación (socialista) a la que estaba recibiendo en la Universidad Central de Venezuela (¿burguesa?) y volviera al país empapado de nuevos valores políticos y culturales. Buena parte de estas cartas reflejan el choque paulatino pero implacable de la realidad cotidiana que vivía descubriendo con los consejos y valores enseñados por él en mis años adolescentes. Ahora, próximo a cumplir 60 años, creo que este debate aún no termina de ser zanjado entre nosotros, aunque últimamente ha concedido que “al capitalismo le quedan dos mil años por lo menos.”

Although it was a personal choice, my return to study in Beijing was frankly encouraged by Dad, who wanted me to receive a better (socialist) education than the (bourgeois?) one I was receiving at the Central University of Venezuela, and to return to our country having soaked up new political and cultural values. A good deal of these letters reflect the gradual but implacable conflict between the daily reality that I lived and discovered, and the advice and values that he taught me in my adolescent years. Now, about to turn 60, I believe that this debate has not yet been settled between us, although he has lately conceded that “capitalism has at least two thousand more years left.”³⁵

Although these “letters to his father” could set the stage for a Kafkaian paternal reprimand, they offer instead a testament of filial piety, the Confucian imperative of respect for one’s parents, elders, and ancestors that haunts the Chinese youth today. Filial piety not only specifies norms within the family but also provides the social and ethical foundations for maintaining social order and thus a stable society. Thus, this imperative curbs a genuine intergenerational discussion on the Cultural Revolution. Yet another hint of Ochoa-Piccardo’s becoming Chinese, his family correspondence conveys the struggle of a generation that,

in growing up, learned the China of their parents and the current one belong to remote universes but, out of ethical virtue and civic duty, they needed to somehow reconcile them. Thus, while the footnotes of *Cartas de Jingzhai* express opinions, they also listen; and although they acknowledge friction, they avoid polemic.

SPECTACLES

The stifling influence of parental expectations is the main theme of *Volver la vista atrás*, a biographical novel by Juan Gabriel Vásquez (1973–) about the everlasting mark of the Cultural Revolution in the life of Sergio Cabrera (1950–). Fleeing the dictatorship of Francisco Franco in 1939, Fausto Cabrera (1924–2016) escaped from Spain and, after years of itinerant strife in the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Venezuela, became a beloved poet, interpreter, and film and television director in Colombia. This restless revolutionary joined the Colombian Communist Party and, seduced by Mao, moved to the Chinese capital in 1963 to work at the Foreign Languages University together with his wife Luz Elena and their children Sergio and Mariánella. The teenagers spent four years in China, two of these without their parents, who purposely left them on their own so as to complete their ideological and proletarian transformation: “llegar a Colombia antes de haber entrado en forma firme en esa transformación me parece simplemente haber perdido el tiempo en China, y no lograr el objetivo” (“Going back to Colombia before having firmly entered into that transformation seems to me to have simply wasted your time in China, and not achieved the objective”).³⁶ The two traveled back to Colombia in 1969 to join the Ejército Popular de Liberación (National Liberation Army) and gradually grew disenchanted with guerrilla, their home country, and world revolution, pushing Sergio into an existential dilemma: “En China no hay nada para mí. En Colombia tampoco. Ni siquiera he cumplido 24 años y ya me estoy preguntando para qué seguir viviendo” (“There is nothing for me in China. Nor in Colombia. I haven’t even turned twenty-four and I’m already wondering what to keep living for”).³⁷ An ambitious family saga that highlights Latin America’s enduring role in the revolutionary cartographies of the twentieth century, the novel is essentially a meditation on fatherhood and, more precisely, a cautionary tale on mixing personal passions with pedagogical models.

The novel opens in 2016 in Barcelona, where the acclaimed Colombian filmmaker learns of the sudden death of his father. Partly honoring his word to participate in a retrospective on his own work organized by the Catalunya Film Archive and partly paralyzed by the memories from the past that suddenly erupt in his face, Sergio decides not to attend the funeral in Bogotá and instead stays for a few days in the Mediterranean city with his son Raúl, just arrived from his native Málaga. With a curious teenaged son and engaged filmgoers as interlocutors, the novel unfolds as a retrospective bildungsroman where the evolution of the protagonist unfolds through the magnetic relation of his father with the performing arts. I read *Volver la vista atrás* as a theatrical performance of Sergio Cabrera's formative years; a performance that is staged during the Cultural Revolution, scripted by his father, and directed by a Latin American novelist.

The Cultural Revolution as a total stage is a trope. As discussed earlier, Chinese cultural policy from 1966 to 1976 privileged scenic arts such as film and theater whose reach stretched beyond the setting of the venue and filtered through the daily lives of common folk, making them actual performers of the model society projected in them. Foreigners also participated in this spectacular effort: the Doudchitzkys with their dances and choreographies at school; Víctor Ochoa-Piccardo proudly singing patriotic songs: “Todos los actos culturales, bien sea en vivo o en cine, comenzaban con todo el público de pie cantando ‘El este es rojo’ y ‘Navegar los mares depende del timonel.’ Nosotros gozábamos cantando con aquel gentío haciendo gala de nuestras voces y de nuestro chino” (All cultural events, whether live or in theaters, began with the entire audience standing up singing “The East is Red” and “Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman.” We enjoyed singing along with those people, showing off our voices and our Chinese).³⁸ Sergio Cabrera, for his part, contributed from backstage by dubbing revolutionary films into Spanish at the Beijing Film Academy under the direction of his father: “Sergio entendió de inmediato cómo funcionaba aquel sortilegio: entendió que se trataba de una actuación completa, aunque su figura nunca se vería en la pantalla, y había algo en el proceso que le gustaba a su timidez: actuar sin que nadie lo viera parecía por momentos una situación ideal” (“Sergio immediately understood how that sorcery worked: he understood that he needed to act completely, even though he’d never be seen on screen, and there was something in the process that his timidity enjoyed; acting without anyone seeing him seemed like an ideal situation at times”).³⁹ Voice-acting in Chinese films under the

direction of his father exposes the shy yet intense Sergio to yet another form of phantasmagorical performance where the boundaries between representation and reality become blurred. Trained in the Stanislavski system by Fausto himself, on stage Sergio is not only a method actor seeking his own inner motives to justify highly emotional dramatic action, but rather finds himself in the only place on earth where he can experience actual paternal love: “Sergio había comenzado a actuar con seriedad; la actuación se había convertido en un espacio de felicidad palpable, pues moverse bajo las órdenes de su padre era cobrar una entidad, una materialidad, que no existía fuera de la escena, y era también tener su atención indivisa” (“Sergio had begun to act seriously; acting had turned into a space of palpable happiness, for to move under the auspices of his father was to take on an entity, a materiality, that did not exist off stage, and was also to have his undivided attention”).⁴⁰ Sergio’s proletarian education in China is also meticulously scripted by his father, who after returning to Colombia with his wife, stays with him in the form of a long oracular letter that guides him in his most drastic decisions, such as enlisting in a faction of the Red Guards, joining the assembly lines of a clock factory, or receiving military training with the People’s Liberation Army: “Buscó la carta larga de su padre, de la cual nunca se separaba, y releó algunos fragmentos. Se había convertido en su manual de instrucciones para estos últimos meses, y a veces lo asalataba la noción de que en la carta, mágicamente, se contestaba a todas las preguntas que Sergio pudiera hacerse y, lo que era más sorprendente, en el mismo instante en que se las hacía” (“After he finished he looked for the long letter from his father, which he always kept with him, and re-read a few fragments. It had turned into his instruction manual for these past months, and sometimes he was struck by the notion that in the letter, magically, all the questions Sergio might ask were answered and, what was more surprising, in the same instant that he asked them”).⁴¹ Perhaps used to disguising real identities in clandestine life, or due to a strict proletarian mandate of refraining from individual—bourgeois—affect, or simply because of a personal inability to express emotions, in *Volver la vista atrás* demonstrations of paternal, as well as filial love, occur exclusively in the context of performance.

The climax of the novel occurs inside a movie theater, where an adult Sergio sees for the first time the moving image of his now late father at the projection of his most acclaimed film *La estrategia del caracol* (1993; *The Strategy of the Snail*) on the last night of the retrospective in Barcelona. To a question from the audience about the biggest challenge of making what

came to be such a successful movie in Colombia, Sergio rambles a few unsatisfactory words but silently realizes that directing his father in the role of Jacinto, a Spanish anarchist and theater director that resembled Fausto in every way, had been the greatest challenge of his entire life:

Pues eso era sobre todo aquella historia de un viejo español anarquista que organiza una rebelión de vecinos: un homenaje a Fausto Cabrera, una carta de amor filial en fotogramas. Con cada parlamento, con cada encuadre, Sergio había querido decirle a su padre cuánto lo quería, cuánto le agradecía tantas cosas, cuánto sentía que de alguna manera misteriosa le debía la vida entera, desde sus comienzos como actor infantil de una televisión incipiente hasta su silla de director de largometrajes. En el medio habían sucedido otras cosas—dolorosas, incómodas, incomprendibles—pero *La estrategia del caracol* sería el bálsamo para cerrar todas las heridas, la pipa de fumar todas las paces, y tener esa conciencia mientras escogía el lugar de la cámara o daba una instrucción a los actores, o mientras echaba humo con una máquina para ver mejor por dónde iba la luz de una escena, fue el mayor reto de su vida.

It was a story about an old Spanish anarchist who organized a neighborly rebellion—it was a homage to Fausto Cabrera, a filial love letter in stills. With each bit of dialogue, the framing of each shot, Sergio had wanted to tell his father how much he loved him, how grateful he was for so many things, how he felt that in some mysterious way he owed him his whole life, from his beginnings as a child actor in the early days of television to his director's seat on feature films. In between, other things had happened—painful, uncomfortable, incomprehensible things—but *The Strategy of the Snail* would be the balm to heal all the wounds, the peace pipe, and keeping that in mind while he chose where to place the camera or gave an instruction to the actors, or while he let smoke out of a machine to see better which way the light was shining in a scene, was the biggest challenge of his life.⁴²

The quote evokes the moment in which their roles changed and the son began directing the father. Now a mature film director, on a stage, in his

dead father's homeland, Sergio is finally able to articulate an obituary, not through the epitaphic words of a bereaved son but through the language of performance: through a reflection on the technique, style, and aesthetics of his own cinema. The final image of this fragment, which depicts a playhouse trick to measure light by artificially casting a cloud of smoke to capture the invisible beams that illuminate the stage, is the recurrent metaphor of *Volver la vista atrás*. Like light, memories are also invisible and thus need an exterior stimulus to materialize: "Sergio, al mirarlo, pensó que los recuerdos eran invisibles como la luz, y así como el humo hacía que la luz se viera, debía haber una forma de que fueran visibles los recuerdos, un humo que pudiera usarse para que los recuerdos salieran de su escondite, para poder acomodarlos y fijarlos para siempre. Tal vez no era otra cosa lo que había sucedido estos días en Barcelona. Tal vez, pensó Sergio, eso era él, eso había sido: un hombre que echa humo sobre sus recuerdos" ("Sergio, as he looked at him, thought that memories were as invisible as light, and just as the smoke allowed him to see light, there must be a way to make memories visible, a smoke you could use to make memories come out of hiding, and adjust them and fix them forever. Maybe what had happened in Barcelona during those days was nothing less. Maybe, Sergio thought, that's what he'd been: a man blowing smoke over his memories").⁴³ Within the plot, Sergio indeed casts smoke over his memories from youth, China, and his father's life, thus weaving a retrospective bildungsroman; but who is it that casts smoke over individual and collective memory in *Volver la vista atrás*, a novel from 2020 authored by the Colombian writer Juan Gabriel Vásquez that was the product of years of conversation and archival research with the actual individual Sergio Cabrera and his family? In the epilogue to the novel, Juan Gabriel Vásquez redeploys the smoke metaphor to describe his own omniscient narration as an act of rendering visible the "invisible" and "manifest" the "secret":

Mi labor de novelista, frente al magma formidable de sus experiencias y las de su hermana, consistió en darles a esos episodios un orden que fuera más allá del recuento biográfico: un orden capaz de sugerir o revelar significados que no son visibles en el simple inventario de los hechos, porque pertenecen a formas distintas del conocimiento. No es otra cosa lo que hacen las novelas. A esto nos referimos, creo, cuando hablamos de imaginación moral: a esa lectura de una vida ajena que consiste en observar para conjeturar, o en penetrar

lo que es manifiesto para descubrir lo oculto o lo secreto. La interpretación es también parte del arte de la ficción; que el personaje en cuestión sea real o inventado es, en la práctica, una distinción inconducente y superflua.

My work as a novelist, faced with the formidable magma of his experiences and those of his sister, consisted of giving those episodes an order that went beyond a biographical recounting: an order capable of suggesting or revealing meanings not visible in a simple inventory of events, because they belong to different forms of knowledge. Novels don't do anything else. This is what we refer to, I believe, when we talk about moral imagination: to that reading of another life that consists of observing in order to surmise, or of penetrating what is manifest to discover the hidden or the secret. Interpretation is also part of the art of fiction; whether the person in question is real or invented is, in practice, an un-conducive or superfluous distinction.⁴⁴

These lines sketch a theory of biographical fiction or, rather, an aesthetic that blossoms along the thin line between history and literature. The first part of the quote is straightforward: a prolific novelist obsessed with private stories that unfold against the backdrop of great historical episodes (whether the drug wars in Colombia, the separation of Panama, or World War II, to mention a few examples from Vásquez's bibliography) finds in the extraordinary life of Sergio Cabrera the material for an ambitious plotment of the twentieth century that meditates on fascism and Communism, to pose the enduring question of what happens when utopia turns into fanaticism. This combines the Latin American Boom realist tradition and its sophisticated ability to depict parallel histories, with the emphasis of contemporary world literature on exile and migration as privileged channels of contact across borders. By navigating the Spanish Civil War, the Chinese Revolution, and the Colombian conflict through a single life story, *Volver la vista atrás* can be read in terms of what Héctor Hoyos calls "global Latin American novels," that is, novels that "reflect upon the experience of globalization and situate themselves beyond the boundaries of national literatures."⁴⁵ Yet through its unique use of the affective archive, *Volver la vista atrás* transcends more than the national boundaries of biographical fiction and poses a question about its generic limits, since it draws from drama

as much as from literature. When Vásquez states in the epilogue that “interpretation is also part of the art of fiction; whether the character in question is real or invented is, in practice, an irrelevant and superfluous distinction,” he refers to “interpretación” as the hermeneutic exercise of explication and deciphering of the meaning of a life, in this case, to Vásquez himself in the act of “blowing smoke on the memories” of the Cabrera family so as to render them visible. Yet—and this is more evident in Spanish than in English—“interpretación” also means “performance” in the sense of “acting” or “scenic representation,” which underscores the second clause suggesting that the distinction between real or invented characters is superfluous. When I suggest that *Volver la vista atrás* can be read as a theatrical performance of Sergio Cabrera’s formative years, I am also implying that the writing process of the novel draws from the conventions of biodrama (biographical theater), particularly its use of the personal archive as a point of departure. Paola Hernández observes how recent articulations of documentary theater in Latin America choose protagonists that are both common people and public figures who bring their personal documents and artifacts onstage to thread narratives based on these: “los Biodramas exponen la relación inestable que existe entre el archivo y los documentos verídicos de historias personales con la forma de percibir y corporalizar estos archivos desde lo efímero del teatro. A la vez, al traer a escena una variedad de biografías personales se crea una conexión con la presencia corporal del actor en el escenario y con la audiencia en un tiempo y un lugar específicos que logra, por un lado, reforzar el aura benjaminiana y, por otro, formular posibles lazos entre lo privado de estas historias y lo que la audiencia llegue a formular de ellas” (Biodramas expose the unstable relationship between, on the one hand, the archive and the real documents of personal stories and, on the other, the way that these archives are perceived and embodied from the ephemeral nature of the theater. At the same time, bringing a variety of personal biographies to the stage creates a connection with the actor’s bodily presence on stage and with the audience in a specific time and place that manages, on the one hand, to reinforce the Benjaminian aura and, on the other, to formulate possible links between what is private in these stories and what the audience comes to formulate about them).⁴⁶ Of course, in the novel Sergio Cabrera has no physical presence, but his personal archive overtakes the pages in the form of intimate WhatsApp messages with his wife transcribed from his phone, confessions about his involvement in the guerrillas during Colombia’s transitional justice process, or in pho-

tographs of letters and journal entries that Cabrera saw for the first time in the final version of the manuscript. Sergio Cabrera is both a protagonist and a reader of *Volver la vista atrás*. And what started out as a novel on the masculine universe of family mandates, exile, and political militancy, eventually carved out a space for Sergio's sister Marianella, who gained protagonism as her archive surfaced during the research process. Vásquez comments on how a conversation during the novel's writing shifted the course of the manuscript: "Lo primero que hizo Carl (Crook) fue sacar de sus anaqueles una caja de latón, como de galletas, y de esa caja todos esos objetos que eran mensajeros del pasado: el brazalete de Marianella, los diarios de Marianella en chino y algunos otros recuerdos en español. Fue el regalo de despedida de Marianella a su novio cuando se fue de China. Eso le agregó otras cien páginas a la novela" (Immediately, Carl produced from the shelves a tin box, like a biscuit tin, and from that box came out a series of objects that were messengers of the past: Marianella's armband, Marianella's diaries in Chinese, and some other souvenirs in Spanish. It had been Marianella's parting gift to her boyfriend when he left China. That added another hundred pages to the novel).⁴⁷ The mediation of the writer gathers the collective memories of the family and renders them visible in fictional form.

MEDIATIONS

Brazilian journalist Jayme Martins (1936–) settled in China on two occasions: from 1962 to 1975, when he was employed in the Portuguese sections of the Beijing Foreign Languages University and Radio Peking (today China Radio International), and then between 1986 and 1989, when he served as correspondent for different Brazilian media outlets. The documentary *A ponte de bambú* (2019; *Bamboo Bridge*) reconstructs the multiple "bridges" that have united Martins with Brazil and China as his family continually adapted to the changing dynamics of Chinese diplomacy.⁴⁸ Throughout the documentary's ninety minutes we see Jayme, his wife Angelina, and their two adult daughters Andrea and Raquel travel to China and revive past memories that arise with the development of more than three thousand negatives from their personal collection, processed at the initiative of the director Marcelo Machado, a personal friend of the family. This film's affective archive is mediated through the gaze of this third person, who interviews them with a voracious interest in Chinese history, while also trying to decipher through

them the key to his own bicultural family, formed in São Paulo with his Chinese wife, an immigrant from Taiwan.

Of all the parents portrayed in this chapter's corpus, Jayme is the most fervent follower of Mao. Through black-and-white square frames, we visualize him in the 1970s cutting his daughters' hair so that they would stand out less among the Asian girls, planting wheat in the garden of the Friendship Hotel to distribute to agricultural communes, or lowering his own salary to match that of his local comrades. The adaptation of his daughters Andrea and Raquel to the ever-changing Chinese context is also one of the boldest testaments to this rare bicultural generation. We see footage of these two unusually bilingual women code-switching between *paulistano* and *putonghua*, captivating auditoriums packed with Chinese businessmen astonished at their linguistic skills. Educated entirely in Chinese schools and universities, both are professional translators and thereby perpetuate the paternal legacy of diplomatic cooperation. Foreign experts became largely obsolete in China with the normalization of relations in the late 1970s because public diplomacy replaced propaganda. Journalists, intellectuals, and broadcasters, who had reached the most diverse audiences of the Third World with news from a proscribed nation, were quickly replaced with regular ambassadors and local translators trained in the languages of the new strategic countries of the capitalist bloc, which China targeted when shifting to a market economy. In a scene where Andrea explains to a fellow red diaper that she now works as the Brazilian representative of a Chinese energy company and he somewhat cynically observes, "you must be playing a crucial role with all the Chinese money going to Latin America," she confidently adds that just like their parents contributed to the construction of China in its first thirty years, it is up to their generation to continue the efforts of cooperation.

If the previously discussed works focus on the impact of specific periods of Chinese history on a family experience, *A ponte de bambú* thoroughly registers five decades of exchange from the Cultural Revolution to the present through eyewitness accounts and a dense archive of primary sources, both from personal and public repositories. Aware of its high documentary value, the film also details the technical genealogy of that archive displayed in plates that divide the timeline with photographs of the devices that physically stored memories at each stage:

1. Rolleiflex 6×6cm film rolls—1965.
2. Philips world receiver shortwave radio—1970.

3. Fluorescent 4×6 inches photo-albums—1988.
4. Newspaper clippings—1989.
5. Sony DVcam metal tapes—2005.
6. USB flash drives—2015.

This technical archive is the record of a decades-long collaboration between a Brazilian documentary filmmaker and a journalist, each of a different generation and united by their common interest in China since *A ponte de bambú* is only their most recent joint venture (Machado and Martins collaborated on the 2003 television documentary *Viagem ao Anhui* [Trip to Anhui] among other projects). Yet beyond journalism, what unites these two men is the unique experience of having formed Brazilian-Chinese families. While the director discloses his friendship with Jayme in the first minutes of the documentary, that his wife is of Chinese origin is revealed later, when we see him in a photo with his in-laws and thus reinterpret the Asian features of his daughters that we saw in the frames at the beginning. Toward the end of the film we see Machado and his wife on screen with the four Martins in a domestic scene of friendship filmed in the Brazilian town of Jundiá. The film, the final plate tells us, is dedicated to “Sung Ian Lin,” Machado’s wife.

In a way, all the questions about the political, economic, and cultural bridges between China and Brazil in the film seek to explore the very definition of belonging. That of the Martins family to a nation idealized through the lens of political militancy; that of Machado’s Taiwanese wife’s family to that same revolutionary nation that had banished them and to the South American one that welcomed them as immigrants; or that of Marcelo Machado’s own daughter, who, we learn from the documentary’s Facebook page, currently lives in Shanghai. “I feel that our parents and us have been a very special part of China when China was isolated. For me it should be a matter of honor that all of us should have a green card” claims a red diaper at a homecoming meeting at the Friendship Hotel in 2015, to which a frustrated Raquel cynically retorts: “Please don’t open that Pandora’s box.” The clear awareness of feeling Chinese but not having the legal credentials of that identity is at the heart of the Martins family, who respond in unison that if they had the chance they would move to China again. This gap between the feeling of belonging and the lack of citizenship rights compels us to revisit the family’s freedom as regards migration: To what extent would they have returned to Brazil had they recovered their passports earlier? We learn that they were only allowed to go back to Brazil in

1975, shortly after the Brazilian embassy started operating in the PRC and clandestine citizens abroad were once again able to apply for identification documents. Or would they not have preferred to avoid that traumatic departure in 1989 after the authorities deported all foreign residents from Beijing to limit the international repercussions of the Tiananmen Square incident? “Não fomos evacuados, tivemos que sair. A coisa aconteceu muito rápido. ‘Têm que ir embora, têm que ir embora!’ ‘Pega duas, três roupas!’ e foi assim como viemos. Fechou o apartamento com tudo lá” (We were not evacuated, we had to leave. It all happened very quickly. “You’ve got to go, got to go!” “Just pack two or three things!” And that’s how we left. We locked the door of our apartment with everything inside).

If the narrator of *Volver la vista atrás* seeks maximum distance from his subjects to orchestrate an epic emplotment of global socialism, the third person in *A ponte de bambú* uses Chinese history as the backdrop to mirror his own biography in that of the Martins family, both in their affective relation to China and in their inquiry into citizenship rights (or lack thereof). Machado’s body, face, and voice appear recurrently on screen, prompting the question about the specificity of cinema in the autobiographical turn of documentary art. Who is this documentary about after all, we might ask? If, as Gonzalo Aguilar observes, one could write the history of cinema as the gradual effacement of the first person in the quest for generic objectivity, contemporary cinema reveals a growing tendency to introduce the image of first person that demands new representational rules: “Considero que es necesario un nuevo arsenal conceptual, porque diferencias binarias muy establecidas como ficción/realidad, lo real / la puesta en escena, ‘cineastas que creen en la imagen’ / ‘cineastas que creen en la realidad,’ perdieron todo sentido. Se trata de dirigir la mirada crítica a las imágenes impuras, *ad astra per nostrum*, y tocar esas distinciones binarias en el momento en que se fusionan, se hacen indiscernibles o se vuelven dramáticas” (I think that we need a new conceptual toolkit, because well-established binary differences such as fiction/reality, the real / the staged, ‘filmmakers who believe in the image’ / ‘filmmakers who believe in reality,’ have lost all meaning. The critical gaze must turn to impure images, *ad astra per nostrum*, and those binary distinctions must be apprehended when they merge, when they become indiscernible, or dramatic).⁴⁹ *A ponte de bambú* as well as *Tempestad en los Andes*, discussed next, dramatize the image of the first person on screen, further complicating the documentary register of history in fictional terms.

ILLUMINATIONS

In 1967 Augusta La Torre (1946–88) landed in China with her husband Abimael Guzmán (1934–). Invited by the Chinese government to observe the Cultural Revolution from up close, the couple returned to Peru determined to conduct their own rebellion in the highlands. Impassioned by China’s dramatic uprooting of the class system of its largely peasant population, they transferred their own version of Chinese Communism to the Quechua-speaking region of Ayacucho, in the Andes. Evoking the legacy of the Communist intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930), who claimed that “Marxism-Leninism will open the shining path to revolution,” they founded their own fraction of the party under the name of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and, along the lines of Mao’s Cultural Revolution, they pronounced Abimael “Chairman Gonzalo,” characterized his doctrine as “Gonzalo Thought,” and his role in world revolution as the “fourth sword of Marxism.” From a strictly clandestine base in Ayacucho they unleashed a liberation campaign that mobilized provincial intellectuals, students, and peasants, but soon radicalized into an internal armed conflict with government forces that paralyzed the country between 1980 and 2000 and took away roughly 70,000 lives, for the most part Indigenous. While the 2003 *Final Report* of the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (Commission for Truth and Reconciliation) sought to bring closure to the trauma accumulated over several years by providing reparations to victims and establishing a record of the human rights abuses perpetrated by terrorist groups and government forces, the process, according to Matthew Rothwell, “is notable internationally for excluding the Shining Path from its registry of victims, deliberations, and organized process, except as interview subjects.”⁵⁰ This stance becomes more patent today as the children of Shining Path release autobiographical works that are both celebrated for nuancing the complexity of the armed Left and condemned as apologies of terrorism. Memoirs such as *Memorias de un soldado desconocido: Autobiografía y antropología de la violencia* (2012, Memories of an unknown soldier: Autobiography and anthropology of violence) by Lurgio Gavilán Sánchez (1980–) or *Los rendidos: Sobre el don de perdonar* (2015, The Surrendered: Reflections by a Son of Shining Path) by José Carlos Agüero (1975–) prompted wide-ranging discussions on the role of children in the Peruvian armed conflict⁵¹—their responsibility, their guilt, their stigmatization—and punctured the myth that people did not want to talk or read about a very troubling period in Peru’s history since

these works became major catalysts for debates on memory and recent history.⁵²

Few members of Shining Path settled long-term in Beijing to work as foreign experts, but, as Rothwell demonstrates in *Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America* (2013), the Chinese lessons penetrated deeply.⁵³ Because of the scale of the conflict, and the fact that the Shining Path conducted the only self-proclaimed Maoist people's war in the Western hemisphere, the accounts of this second generation further complicate some of the patterns evident in the memoirs of red diapers educated in China and of descendants of victims of state terrorism in Latin America. As the sources are abundant and quite complex, and a comprehensive analysis far exceeds the few pages of this chapter, I will focus on Mikael Wiström's 2014 documentary *Tempestad en los Andes* (*Storm in the Andes*) because it decenters the boundaries of local and foreign and private and public in the filmic uses of the affective archive.⁵⁴

Tempestad en los Andes follows the homecoming journey of Josefin Augusta Eckermann (1989–2019), Augusta La Torre's niece, who grew up in Sweden and wants to learn more about the mysterious death of her aunt in 1988 and the actual reasons that forced her Peruvian relatives into exile. No longer convinced of her family's epic tale about the mythic "Comrade Norah" who died fighting for the poor, she reaches out to a Swedish filmmaker who has a long-standing involvement with Peru and joins the documentary that he is filming about Indigenous narratives of the conflict. The film traces the encounter of Josefin with Flor Gonzáles, a young woman from the Andean town of Andahuaylas who is also investigating the enigmatic death of her brother Claudio, murdered without trial at the massacre of El Frontón prison in 1986. Flor is initially reluctant to meet her, but Josefin begs for her sympathy, not for Flor to forgive her family but to genuinely help her gain perspective on their actions. Throughout the film, the camera tracks their conflictive encounter as well as their joint search for any further evidence on the role played by Sendero Luminoso in the disappearance of both their relatives. Toward the end of the film, Flor successfully manages to have her brother included in the official registry of victims (Registro Único de Víctimas), and Josefin leaves Peru torn but in peace for having gained deeper insight into her family's role in the conflict as well as into her own identity. After coming together to conduct their search and trying to reconcile their differences, Flor and Josefin part on amicable terms. In this sense the documentary follows the conventions of what

Fernando Rosenberg calls “novels of truth and reconciliation,” that is, creative works that recreate the conditions of enunciation, investigating the possibilities, limitations, and legacy of the transitional justice framework that became a paradigm to apprehend and address the aftermath of historical processes of human rights violations in the Global South.⁵⁵ Rosenberg notes the international appeal of this genre, which fulfills the enduring magical realist fantasies of Latin America as a region peppered with colorful, violent, and permanent revolutions, while at the same time mobilizing the imaginary that views human rights as capable of finally overcoming insurmountable political disagreements. For the European and Anglo-American markets, whose readership these novels pursue, these novels may serve to confirm the end of the era of revolutions and the possibility of a “culture of tolerance” emanating from these very same sites of supposedly preserved revolutionary utopia, as well as to create anxiety or a sense of loss for what has yet to happen, particularly in places like Spain, where the atrocities from the fascist regime have never been judicially examined or undergone any official scrutiny.⁵⁶ More than in global consumption, I am interested in the global construction of the narrative of truth and reconciliation, with the aim of understanding the extent to which the inclusion of a foreign voice exposes the inner fractures of the nation-state in a process of transitional justice. A documentary made by a Swedish director who built a career in Peru and focused on a young Swedish woman who happens to be the most direct descendant of one of the top leaders of Sendero Luminoso turns the spotlight on those who inhabit the geographical borders of Peruvian society as foreign experts and political exiles, and who claim to also have a say in the memorial reconstruction of the internal conflict. After all, a Chinese-inspired war, with a dramatically high Indigenous death toll, resolved by a report largely unauthored by either of these parties, ultimately questions how “internal” the Peruvian truth and reconciliation process was and points to how global archives of the revolutionary Left and of the centuries-long oppression of Indigenous communities in Latin America can further illuminate the Peruvian internal armed conflict of 1980–2000.⁵⁷

In *Tempestad en los Andes* Wiström repeats a narrative device from his earlier film *Compadre* (2004), which consists in traveling to Peru to reconnect with friends from his first trip to the country in the 1970s. In both films we see the Swedish director on screen, exchanging warm hugs with his South American friends—who tease him by calling him “gringo”—and sharing photographs of their initial encounter decades

ago. The “compadre” (buddy) in *Tempestad en los Andes* is Samuel González, a village leader from the department of Apurímac whom Wiström met while reporting on the land reforms of 1974 and who lost his son Claudio during the armed conflict. Samuel and his daughter Flor take Wiström to the highlands, where they help him identify the sitters from the old photographs and translate into Quechua their accounts of the years of bloodshed. Within the larger context of Flor and Josefín’s parallel searches for the truth about the deaths of Claudio and Augusta, the testimonies of these peasants illuminate the steps of Claudio, who left the countryside to study in Lima during the heat of the conflict and was killed for his alleged sympathies for Sendero Luminoso. In this sense, Wiström’s photographs are both a key to Claudio’s past and a platform for Andean voices to provide their long-overdue accounts of a conflict that they were swept into and became the main victims. In the metonymical move of inscribing Claudio in the larger community of the Andes, Wiström also inscribes his own photographs in a genealogy of *indigenismo*. In a slow sequence with tense background music, Josefín’s voice reads passages of Guamán Poma de Ayala’s *El primer nueva crónica y buen gobierno* (1615; *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*) about the Spanish conquest of the Inca empire. The images of a hand flipping through the pages of the original manuscript housed at the Royal Danish Library blend with black-and-white photographs by the Indigenist photographer Martín Chambi (1891–1973), which stress the class and ethnic abyss separating criollo landowners and native peasants during the first half of the twentieth century. After a still frame of a thunderstorm over snowy mountain peaks that hints to the title of the film and Luis E. Valcárcel’s (1891–1987) 1927 prophetic novel about a new Inca empire, Wiström displays static shots of his own photographs depicting the short-lived success of the peasants land takeover during the 1974 agrarian reform. By bringing his own photographs into this sequence depicting how the Indigenous are oppressed, the Swedish director not only confirms his continuing participant observation of recent Peruvian history but also alludes to the enduring efforts to asserting Indigenous rights and denouncing past wrongdoings from colonial and republican states.

Is this yet another iteration of the European anthropologist enamored with the pre-Hispanic civilizations of South America, capturing ethnic difference through dramatic close-ups and autochthonous music? Or rather, the expression of a Swedish artist committed to human rights and familiar with the demographics of a country historically receptive

of asylum seekers and resettled refugees? Sweden became known as a humanitarian haven in the 1970s and 1980s for embracing people fleeing persecution from both Cold War blocs, a very large number of whom came from Latin America.⁵⁸ Peruvians from all walks of life ended up in Sweden during this time, as illustrated vividly in the following deposition from the *Ley de arrepentimiento* (Repentance Law) issued during the presidency of Alberto Fujimori in 1992 to encourage members of the armed group to make accusations: “al llegar a Suecia están todos los grupos políticos, está Sendero y están también los que están contra Abimael, o sea los de Proseguir ¿no? Hay algunos vinculados al MRTA y hay muchos que están renegados de todo . . . En Suecia hay más exiliados que en cualquier otra parte y de todos los colores, entonces, si tú vas no puedes dejar de tomarte un café con ellos, porque son peruanos además” (When you arrive in Sweden you realize that all the political groups are there. Sendero is there as are those who oppose Abimael, that is, those of Proseguir, right? There are some linked to the MRTA and there are many others who reject everything . . . In Sweden there are more exiles and of more stripes than anywhere else, so if you go there you cannot help but to go have a coffee with them, because they are also Peruvians).⁵⁹ Josefín belongs to one such exiled Peruvian-Scandinavian community. In the first scene of the film, on the plane to Lima, she introduces herself in fluent Spanish showing a photograph of her as a baby at a demonstration in support of Sendero Luminoso in Stockholm in 1992. Adult Josefín, however, reveals the generational clash within her immigrant community by challenging her own postmemories of Peru’s traumatic past in a direct address to her father: “Papá, no querías que yo haga este viaje. ¿Tienes miedo que no sea tan leal con Sendero y Abimael como los demás en la familia? Quiero saber la verdad y sé que no es un cuento” (Dad, you didn’t want me to make this trip. Are you afraid that I won’t be as loyal to Sendero and Abimael as the others in the family? I want to know the truth, and I know it is no fairy tale). Like Wiström, personal photographs from her own past legitimate her presence in Peru and suggest that she can potentially contribute to the truth-seeking process too.

The most valuable photographic evidence Josefín brings from home is a set of prints of Augusta and Abimael’s wedding. These are black-and-white images taken at the La Torres’s home in Ayacucho in 1964 that reveal a cheery teenager and a much older professor in an intimate family celebration. “These photographs are impressive, very, very impressive,” observes in awe the renowned journalist Gustavo Gorriti

(1948–), who covered the conflict for the weekly *Caretas* and who tries to convey to Josefin what it means for a Peruvian investigative reporter to see new images of the two phantasmagorical figures who were both omnipresent and invisible for so long. Walter Alejos Calderón (1947–), the author of these photographs, celebrates having them back in the studio in Ayacucho and dedicates a few lines to his encounter with Josefin in his memoirs: “Afortunadamente, 48 años después, en enero del 2012 tuve la oportunidad de reunirme con la señorita Josefin Augusta Ekermann en mi oficina con motivo de una filmación de un documental sobre las tomas de tierra en el Perú y ella personalmente me entregó 6 ejemplares de aquellas fotos del matrimonio que se habían perdido en el tiempo. Fue realmente un hecho muy emocionante, como fotógrafo, tener nuevamente en mis manos copias de aquellas fotos inéditas y que habían sido conservadas por la familia La Torre en Suecia durante todos estos años” (Fortunately, forty-eight years later, in January 2012, I had the opportunity to meet with Miss Josefin Augusta Ekermann in my office on the occasion of the filming of a documentary on land seizures in Peru, and she personally gave me six copies of those photos of the wedding that had been lost in time. It was really a very exciting event for me, as a photographer, to have back in my hands copies of those unpublished photos that had been kept by the La Torre family in Sweden for all these years).⁶⁰ These photographs preserved in exile reappeared in Peru through this film in 2014 and have been circulated widely ever since, appearing prominently in the press and in most of the recent bibliography on Sendero Luminoso.⁶¹ To thank Josefin for her gift, Alejos digs into the archives of the photo studio and produces various portraits of Augusta taken in the 1960s and 1970s: “son fotos puntuales, para trámites” (they are specific portraits, for bureaucratic purposes), observes the photographer as he shuffles various standard head-to-torso shots of one who used to be a regular middle-class woman from Ayacucho last captured on film by Alejos Calderón himself: “esta fue la última foto que se tomó, con toda seguridad, 73 o 74, y luego ya ellos en 75 entraron en la clandestinidad y nunca más se les volvió a ver” (With all certainty, this is the last picture of her, from 73 or 74; then in 75 they went in hiding and were never seen again). These upper-torso portraits of Augusta la Torre that read as mugshots of a fugitive leader become mundane photo identifications in the hand of her niece. By illuminating her firm expression, caring personality, and family background—after all, she came from a Communist household that welcomed her marriage to the Marxist philosophy professor—in the documentary the family

photographs of Augusta seek to humanize the second-in-command of Sendero Luminoso. The film's move to strip off her identity as the leader of an armed group is summarized most effectively in the visual effect of blending a propaganda image of her wearing a green uniform into a studio shot of her as a young woman from Ayacucho (fig. 12).

These family photographs that seek to humanize the terrorist relate to three crucial challenges of the boundaries between the private and the public in the affective archives of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Latin America, namely, in reference to the cult of the leader, revolutionary theatricality, and its contemporary memorabilia. If descendants of Sendero Luminoso today strive to carve out a space for their voice in Peruvian society by situating their forebears' actions in the larger context of the revolutionary Left, Josefin bears the brunt of holding one of Sendero Luminoso's intellectual authors accountable. In his memoir *Los rendidos*, the historian, poet, and son of Sendero Luminoso's militants, José Carlos Agüero makes a plea for the need to nuance the different levels of engagement with the revolutionary cause: "Hubo senderistas, muchos, que no actuaron como peleles, que no fueron solo objeto de la manipulación. Hijos de su contexto sí, pero tampoco secreciones de las estructuras . . . Este fue el caso de mis padres y de los senderistas que conocí. Tenían sus razones para ser de izquierda, para ser radicales como muchos otros en aquel entonces. Pero tenían una motivación extra, difícil de conocer, inaprensible, que era la de una minoría, para



Fig. 12. A propaganda poster of Camarada Norah blends into a youthful profile shot of Augusta La Torre. *Tempestad en los Andes*, 2014. Copyright © Mikael Wiström.

hacer la guerra, coger las armas, luchar por el poder usando la fuerza” (There were Senderistas, lots of them, who weren’t puppets, who weren’t merely pawns. They were children of their context, yes, but not just by-products of the structures of which they were a part . . . Such was the case of my parents and of the people I met from Shining Path. They had their reasons for being leftists, for being radicals like many others were back then. But they also had an extra motivation that was hard to see or apprehend and that fueled only a minority of people: they wanted to take up arms, to fight power with force).⁶² Yet Augusta was neither a puppet nor a regular intellectual embracing a cause of her time; she was the second-in-command of a highly personalist movement. A straightforward Flor speaks up to Josefin during their first meeting: “De una u otra manera, no tú, pero sí tu familia tiene una responsabilidad política en toda esta situación. Llevaron a miles de jóvenes a involucrarse en un proceso de revolución que confundieron la realidad y muchos de ellos murieron ahí, como mi hermano” (One way or another, not you, but your paternal family has a political responsibility in this whole situation. They led thousands of young men and women into a revolutionary process that misread reality and that took the lives of many of them, including my brother). As a leader, to what extent was Augusta also essentially a public figure in Peru, whose family photographs will never be viewed as personal footage but always as a public record? Do these photographs introduced by *Tempestad en los Andes* to the Peruvian audience also seek to humanize Augusta in the multiple platforms where they have been reproduced henceforth or do they further reinforce her identity of “Camarada Norah”? Unlike the other works discussed in this chapter that use affective archives as a counterpoint to official historical narratives, the phantasmagorical physiognomies of the *lideresa* (female leader) do not complement one another but rather fill a referential void that an entire society had been desperate to seal for years. Paradoxically, the Peruvian cultural revolution that fostered the cult of its chairman and his personalist doctrine in the style of Mao and Stalin had fugitive and secret leaders.

Herein lies one of the most intriguing operations of translation of China in Latin America: How to transfer the total stage of the Cultural Revolution to a strictly clandestine format? If the Chinese Cultural Revolution deployed a permanent spectacular extravaganza that filtered to the bodies of the masses and saturated the public space with the image of the leader, Sendero Luminoso performed such theatricality in private: in prisons and hideouts. It was known that since the 1980s prisons had

become Sendero Luminoso strongholds, where members of the group exercised full control of their quarters and their communication with the exterior. The penitentiary's workshops, as well as its yards were the privileged stages where Sendero Luminoso produced and deployed its visual propaganda aimed at both the community of interns and the journalistic cameras that captured and projected its Maoist-inspired art to a terrified audience outside. *Tempestad en los Andes* includes such footage in the opening scene. Taken from the 1992 BBC documentary *People of the Shining Path*—which was promptly broadcast on multiple Peruvian networks—the footage shows the marches and chants of the Movimiento Femenino Popular (Feminine Popular Movement) at the Canto Grande prison. Dressed in green uniforms and following a strict military choreography, dozens of young women stomp their feet in unison as they hold a portrait of Chairman Gonzalo and voice their loyalty to his “thought.” This choreography, highly resonant of the model ballet *The Red Detachment of Women*, is followed by a play piece with dramatic conventions that were absolutely illegible to the reporter of the magazine *Caretas* in 1992, who in a story did not identify the latter as a revolutionary *huaju* (spoken drama) but rather described it as a derivative hodgepodge of global guerrilla aesthetics: “parte de la fiesta fue una demostración de cómo se derrota el ‘revisionismo, la podrida burguesía, el gobierno genocida y el imperialismo.’ Todo ello en oscuro ropaje polpotiano de khmer-chichas, y con el habitual hieratismo seudochino” (Part of the show consisted of a demonstration of how “revisionism, the rotten bourgeoisie, the genocidal government, and imperialism are to be defeated.” All this in the dark Pol-potian clothing of Khmer-chichas, and with its typical pseudo-Chinese hieraticism).⁶³ Gustavo Gorriti interprets the dramatic catharsis of *Senderista* theater in equally horrific terms, as he shares with Josefin his own experience as a stunned live spectator of such performance: “I had listened to many people chanting revolutionary songs throughout the years but when I went physically inside the perimeter, and stood with my tape recorder, I was nevertheless very impressed. It was a new category in many respects, with an almost religious fervor in the realization of their cause, imposing a war on peasants, imposing a dogma, an absolute dogma, a literally totalitarian dogma on people and provoking so much bloodshed on their own, on the others, and all the people in the middle” (in English in the original). Such trauma found its revenge in the equally spectacular performance of Abimael Guzmán's capture, also at a prison yard. On September 24, 1992, a few days after being caught by the Grupo Especial de Inteligen-

cia (GEIN; Special Intelligence Group), Guzmán was displayed to the press locked up in a cage and wearing black-and-white striped pajamas, resembling those of prisoners in classic Hollywood films, as President Alberto Fujimori wholeheartedly admitted at the time. To the journalists' and police force's furious chant of Peru's national anthem, Guzmán responded with a solo interpretation of *The Internationale*. I cannot help but read this dramatic end to one of the most delayed and affective inflections of the Chinese revolutionary process as the grand finale of the cultural Cold War in Latin America.

Sendero Luminoso indeed invested in the visual deployment of symbols of its cultural revolution with dances and chants, and with murals, posters, paintings, and objects crafted behind bars and channeled to the group's hideouts and temporary residences across the country. When the Peruvian intelligence services identified the hiding place of Abimael Guzmán a few months before his capture in 1992, the cameras were aghast at the motley of revolutionary icons, trinkets, and books that furnished such spaces and revealed in different formats the much sought-after image of Chairman Gonzalo. Where are these artifacts today, we might wonder, two decades after the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission officially called the end of the conflict in 2003? Laurence Coderre studies how the current proliferation of counterfeit Cultural Revolution memorabilia, including badges of Mao, comic books, propaganda posters, and ceramics, is ultimately an indication of the strength of the Maoist collectible market that wrestles with a paradox: enduring socialist concerns in an era of market commodity consumption.⁶⁴ In its translated version in Latin America, what specific issues could the *senderista* memorabilia retrospectively bring up? This question is tricky, since there is no such thing as *senderista* memorabilia in Peru, whether vintage or counterfeit. Perhaps because of the proximity of the conflict in comparison to the more remote 1966–76, and most likely to the transitional justice process that exposed the wounds of a traumatic past as part of a form of healing, Peruvians might just not be ready to adopt an ironic distance vis-à-vis the internal armed conflict by embracing kitsch consumer products. Anouk Guiné notes that fear of political persecution has prompted Peruvian Communist Party members to destroy much of the art the party produced, and that most of what is left can only be viewed online, mainly in webpages of scattered groups such as Movimiento Popular Perú-Alemania.⁶⁵ The few attempts to showcase *senderista* material culture at mass-audience venues in Peru have been framed by curatorial decisions that directly or

indirectly discredit their message; examples of this being Pablo Hare's *Incautados (Seized)* at the Museo de Arte de Lima (Lima Art Museum) in 2017 or *Esquirlas del odio: Violencia de 1980 al VRAEM (Shards of Hate: Violence from 1980 to the VRAEM)* at the Lugar de la Memoria, Tolerancia e Inclusión Social (Place of Memory, Tolerance and Social Inclusion) in 2016, both of which used confiscated artifacts that remain today under the strict surveillance of police forces and can be consulted by appointment at the museum of the Dirección Nacional contra el Terrorismo (DIRCOTE; National Directorate against Terrorism), where they are displayed as war trophies. In her visit to this museum in the film, Josefina caresses the glass case containing the “personal items belonging to the delinquent and terrorist Augusta La Torre Carrasco, alias Camarada Norah” in a futile attempt to get a hold of them: “Mi abuela quiere tener algo de las pertenencias de Augusta” / “Ah sus pertenencias, eso va a ser muy difícil, ¿Quién te va a dar? No te van a dar eso, es muy difícil, muy difícil” (My grandmother wants to keep some of Augusta's belongings / Oh, her belongings, that is going to be very difficult; who is going to give that to you? They are not going to give you that, it is just very, very difficult), prompting us to consider once again the exceptionally fine line separating the private property of Augusta La Torre and the relics of official history in Peru in the affective archive of the cultural revolution publicly displayed in *Tempestad en los Andes*.

SILENCES

Let me conclude by looking back at the rare footage of the Cultural Revolution in João Moreira Salles's *No intenso agora* mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. These are colorful Super 8 sequences of travel in public spaces in Beijing and Shanghai commented by a melancholic third person resonant of Chris Marker's ruminative narrators. Moreira Salles is neither a red diaper nor the son of a disappeared person; he is the child of a renowned Brazilian banker who happened to live in Paris as an expat in the 1960s and a mother who visited China as a tourist in 1966. Unlike the other works discussed in this chapter, *No intenso agora* does not invoke the personal testimony of the revolutionary Left from the protagonist's childhood but rather unfolds as the meditation of a mature filmmaker on the seismic intensity of the New Left, viewed through the prism of his own mother's prime and death. The cinematographic connection between the images of the student demon-

strations of May 1968 and of his mother's trip to China in 1966 is entirely affective: they both signal the climax of a cycle that is political and personal. Through a wealth of archival material, *No intenso agora* poses an eminently technical question: How can cinema convey mourning? Moreira Salles's first-person voice-over is distinctive for its use of silences; in this case, in the deliberate omission of the global impact of the Cultural Revolution and his own mother's suicide.

In *No intenso agora* the footage of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution serves as the stage where his mother experienced her most unexpected happiness, but that she completely misread in political terms. Moreira Salles watches this footage for the first time forty years after it was filmed and cannot help but overwrite it: he translates the slogans from the ubiquitous red signs "that she saw but did not read" and contrasts her superficial observations about Chinese society with highly political passages from Alberto Moravia's (1907–90) contemporaneous travelogue *La rivoluzione culturale in Cina: Ovvero il Convitato di pietra* (1967; *The Red Book and the Great Wall: An Impression of Mao's China*).⁶⁶ In *No intenso agora* China is out of place. Traveling by herself, emancipated from routine and domesticity, his mother felt happily out of place; a paid trip organized by a French art magazine for "dilettantes atrás das belezas de um país" (dilettantes in search of the beauties of the country) during the most iconoclastic stage of the Chinese revolutionary process was, indeed, totally out of place; the narrative of Chinese history in *No intenso agora* is also out of place. For a film that tries to capture the contagious utopia of revolution (and the subsequent disenchantment with it), the silence on the impact of the Chinese Revolution on the French youth is remarkable because the Cultural Revolution epitomizes the sudden rise and fall that so obsesses Moreira Salles: while it was a key reference point for a large number of French sinophiles mesmerized by the image of empowered student brigades supported by their own leader, when French students took the streets in 1968 most of the Red Guards had already been banished to the countryside. French Maoism would thrive years later when the Tel Quel group embraced their own interpretation of Maoism and visited the country in a highly publicized trip in 1974. Yet, in the thorough filmic reconstruction of the rise and fall of the students' revolutionary utopia of 68, the absence of Jean Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967), a prescient and parodic examination of the New Left activism during those years by the director that would become an icon of experimental collectivist cinema in France, is noteworthy; "Godard, o mais babaca

dos maoistas suiços” (Godard, the most idiotic Swiss Maoist), reads a graffiti in the only reference to the director in the entire film. By detaching Chinese history from the May events, Moreira Salles strips the Cultural Revolution of any documentary value and instead retains its pure affect, that which dazzled his mother in 1966.

A very moving silence surrounds his mother’s suicide, which is never stated in words but dramatically edited with images and tones. The second part of the film titled “The Return to the Factory” explores the restoration of order in the summer of 1968 and the traumatic retreat of the students. Fixated with the generalized feeling of failure, Moreira Salles dedicates the last quarter of the film to analyzing footage of the funerals of the fallen militants during the confrontations and wonders how television, independent cinema, and the big screen captured those rituals: What was the audience of the funerary processions really crying for?, he asks repeatedly. What did the cameras want to convey with their close-ups? Moreira Salles’s questions become more specific: how come these people died so young? And thus we realize that those mentioned earlier died by suicide: in protest of the Soviet invasion, the Czech Jan Palach (1948–69) set himself on fire; fleeing the police, Gilles Tautin (1950–68) drowned in the Seine; and Killian Fritsch (1943–70), author of the famous slogan “Sous les pavés, la plage!” (“Beneath the cobblestones, the beach!”), threw himself on the tracks. For the first time in the film, the narrator expresses his opinion and admits his preference for Romain Goupil’s *Mourir à trente ans* (1982; *Half a Life*), a film about Trotskyist militant Michel Recanati’s (1948–78) untimely death: “ao menos para mim, esse é o filme mais bonito sobre o período” (in my view, this is the most beautiful film of the period); and for the only time in the entire picture, we see original footage in a still frame of the Gaité station in Paris where Fritsch took his own life: “Tal vez Fritsch morasse por perto da estação; ou tal vez tenha cruzado a cidade para se matar ali, no último gesto de ironia magra, já que ‘gaité’ em francês, significa alegria” (Maybe Fritsch lived near the station, or maybe he crossed the entire city to kill himself there in a final gesture of bitter irony, since “gaité” in French means joy). This highly personal cinematographic note on fatal happiness is followed by a sequence of home movies of his mother, being lively at the beach and family celebrations in the 1960s, an affect that quickly wanes: “a partir dos anos setenta as imagens começam a rarear, e de oitenta em diante não há quase nada” (starting in the 1970s the images become scarcer, and from the 1980s onward there is almost nothing). The photographic void that signals his mother’s abrupt end

is filled with the Chinese footage that a moved Moreira Salles comments on, referring to her no longer as “minha mãe” (my mother) but with the more infantile form of address “mamãe” (mommy): “A inefável emoção que sucede ao choque do encontro inesperado. . . . Ela foi feliz na China, e por isso gosto de pensar nela lá” (The indescribable emotion that follows the shock with the unexpected encounter. . . . She was happy in China, and that is why I like to think of her there) (fig. 13).

I find a final key into the silences in the Moreira Salles’s family archive, no longer in their home movies but rather in the documentary *Jia Zhangke: Um homem de Fenyang* (2014) (*Jia Zhangke: A Guy from Fenyang*) by João’s brother, Walter Salles’s (1956–). Written in collaboration with the French critic Jean Michel Frodon (1953–), this is a cinephile’s tribute to one of the most important Chinese directors of the present. The film follows Jia Zhangke (1970–) as he travels to his hometown in the Shanxi Province in Northern China to visit family and friends, capturing his meditations on his work at the site of the locations of his earlier films. A leading figure of the “Sixth Generation” of Chinese cinema, in his films Jia shies away from totalizing visions of Chinese society and instead turns the spotlight on those alienated by the



Fig. 13. João Moreira Salles’s mother poses happy during the Cultural Revolution. *No intenso agora*, 2017. Copyright © Videofilmes.

drastic changes China has experienced since its transition to the market economy in the late 1970s. Toward the end of the two-hour interview, where he discusses everything from aesthetics to the film industry and recent history, Jia suddenly mentions his father; it appears that he never quite appreciated Jia's career or celebrated his fame because he was forever terrified. The scars he bore during the Cultural Revolution—having been reeducated in the countryside and burning his entire library out of caution—never fully healed and thus he fretted for his son's life until the day he died. Suddenly, the stoic artist breaks down, sheds a tear, and falters: “He had very few happy moments” (fig. 14). We do not hear or see Walter Salles in the scene, but we know that he is behind the camera, listening in silence to Jia's words through the delayed words of an interpreter. And after watching *No intenso agora*, we also know that he has a secret, which he does not reveal in the film and probably never confessed to his Chinese colleague. The secret is that his mother, on the contrary, was never as happy as during the Cultural Revolution.

Read together, the films by the Moreira Salles siblings reveal a fraternal complicity in the cinematographic treatment of filial love, a common grammar distinctive for its painful silences and highly resonant of Sergio and Fausto Cabrera's intimate theatrical connection as the privileged form of parental affection. After all, the moving image—the most personal of the scenic arts—blurs the boundaries of intimacy and immediacy, and absorbs other genres, archives, and affects in its capacious



Fig. 14. Chinese film director Jia Zhangke falters when talking about his father's pain during the Cultural Revolution. Walter Salles, *Jia Zhangke: Um homem de Fenyang*, 2014. Copyright © Videofilmes.

format. The joint reading of *No intenso agora* and *Jia Zhangke* also reveals the taste for affectively charged images of China, coincidentally the theme of the first collaboration of the Moreira Salles brothers, which initiated João into professional filmmaking: “He (Walter) convinced me to go with the crew and to be his ersatz director for two or three weeks, and I decided to do it. . . . I remember I was at Tiananmen Square on the first day. We arrived there on a Monday, and Tuesday was our first day of shooting. I remember that the cinematographer asked me the scariest question that I had ever heard, and which I had to answer: where should he put the camera? I simply had not realised deciding this was the director’s job. I thought that my job as director was to have beautiful thoughts and that the cinematographer would realise them. So I had to learn just by doing it. Back in Brazil I put the thing together, writing the narration. Formally, it was very conventional, but, at the time, in Brazil it was new, and *China, O Império do centro* (1987) became a success. . . . Since then, I’ve never stopped doing film.”⁶⁷ Disoriented, at the symbolic “gate of the nation” of China, the amateur director from Brazil produced what would become not only a very original film about Chinese culture but also the foundation of one of the most intriguing trajectories of a Latin American intellectual in the world of filmmaking.

“Imposture”

I always thought that I would finish this book with a chapter on representations of China in contemporary Latin American fiction. Throughout the years it took me to write it, I bought, read, and kept track of the numerous “Chinese novels” that sprung from Latin American publishers, in synch with the global rise of China since the start of the twenty-first century. The folder “Book Project / Chapter Five” on my computer’s hard drive accumulated labels reflecting how each new release brought about changes in their positions within my argument. “New Travels” housed novels such as *O livro dos mandarins* (2006, The mandarins book) by Ricardo Lisias, *Reprodução* (2014, Reproduction) by Bernardo Carvalho, *Pekin* (2017, Beijing) by Miguel Ángel Petrecca, or *La máquina de escribir caracteres chinos* (2017, The Chinese typewriter) by Eduardo Berti, which was twice given to me as a present. The titles under “Chinatowns” grew in tandem with the waves of migrants from Fujian that settled in different cities of the region during the last two decades: Ariel Magnus’s *Un chino en bicicleta* (2007, A Chinese man on a bike), Eduardo Lalo’s *Simone* (2012, Simone), Luciana Czudnowski’s *Chuan* (2016, Chuan), Federico Jeanmaire’s *Tacos altos* (2017, High heels), or Manolo Nuñez Negrón’s *Barra China* (2012, Chinese bar), also given to me as a present twice. Then there were Mario Belatín, César Aira, and a few other individual authors who revisit China throughout their work in the most unexpected ways. In a nutshell: there is a wealth of recent Latin American “Chinese novels” out there.

I kept telling myself that I would compose this chapter last to cover as much new material as possible, but I gradually came to realize that I was procrastinating. Had I, perhaps too influenced by Borges, lost interest in the genre that had brought me to love literature in the first place? Or had my critical interests drifted away from the mimetic quality of the novel and turned towards its circulation? Whatever the reason, these Chinese novels no longer stirred the unique intellectual thrill of coming up with something new, which I experienced when researching and writing the other sections of the manuscript. What kept me committed to my original chapter plan (or to the anxiety of including new and thematically relevant material, regardless of its aesthetic or affective value) is a set of hypotheses concerning a few of these novels that I put forward in an early article and wanted to revisit in greater depth. I thought that if I expanded the corpus and added new lines of analysis, that thrill would eventually return. But I was wrong. More powerful ideas and archives had emerged from other sections, and chapter 5 became something completely different. In the end, none of the Chinese novels made it into this book. Or one did.

The article I had planned to resume is titled “Rewriting Travel Literature: A Cosmopolitan Critique of Exoticism in Contemporary Latin American Fiction.” This was my first peer-reviewed publication as a graduate student, and although I would approach it very differently today, I still think its ideas are quite solid. I argued there that recent Latin American novels set in Asia were driven by a dislocating impulse against the particularistic legacy of the Boom. I demonstrated that novels such as *La gruta del Toscano* (2006; Toscano’s grotto) by Ignacio Padilla, *Mongólia* (2003, Mongolia) by Bernardo Carvalho, and *Los impostores* (2002; The impostors) by Santiago Gamboa remove, refute, and ridicule all references to Asia or the Asian cultures that they portrayed as settings. By questioning different articulations of Orientalism, I claimed, these writers were questioning the self-exoticizing aesthetics of magical realism that had universalized Latin American literature by stressing its quaint particular difference. What is more, I posited that these young novelists revisit the archive of European Orientalism by rewriting colonial travelogues and adventure novels in their own fiction. For the post-Boom (“McOndo”/“Crack”) generation, rewriting European literature was their cosmopolitan mode of engagement with the world.

Because I became so focused on Chinese literature, language, and history over the years, *Los impostores* kept popping up in my syllabi and scholarship, while *La gruta del Toscano* (set in the Himalayas) and

Mongólia (about the nomadic tribes of the steppe) lay dormant in my files waiting for a jump start in chapter 5. Gamboa’s novel is a fast-paced and funny text that complicates frameworks of East-West comparison. A Colombian journalist living in Paris, a German philologist in search of adventure, and a Peruvian literary critic based in Texas find themselves enmeshed in a farcical plot in the search of a lost manuscript from the Boxer Rebellion in present-day Beijing. The three are failed writers, who weave the narrative through discordant voices and formats and display a hilarious repertoire of Orientalist clichés. A globe-trotter himself catapulted by the Spanish publishing market, Gamboa winks at the commonplaces of world literature. I was lucky to chat with him about this a few years back when he came to Trinity College as Lecturer in International Studies. Invited by my colleague Vijay Prashad, who had met Gamboa when he was an attaché to the Colombian embassy in India, Gamboa spent a couple of days with us discussing cultural diplomacy, world literature, and Orientalism. In my seminar we devoted an entire session to *Los impostores*, live with the author.

The more I reread *Los impostores*, the more it nurtured my research. First, the novel included a rare reference to Chinese coolies. While Chinese migrants abound in contemporary fiction, the inclusion of a character from the nineteenth-century *tusán* universe from Peru is quite atypical, and what’s more, the character of Nelson Chouchán Otálora adopts a remarkably cynical tone, shamelessly exploiting his Chinese heritage for the sake of literary consecration: “Me voy a Pekín, cholita, a buscar mis orígenes. ¡Llegó la hora de volver a las fuentes! Luego me voy a escribir una novela tan buena que se van a cagar los perros, y después, cuando ya sea famoso, vengo aquí, los mando a todos a la mierda y nos vamos tu y yo a vivir a París” (I’m off to Beijing cholita, to look for my roots. It’s time to return to the origins! Afterwards, the novel I will write it be so goddamn good, and when I become famous, I’ll come back here, send everybody to hell and you and me can finally move to Paris).¹ *Los impostores* also lays out the philological division of labor that I discuss throughout the book. In the novel the expert on China is a German sinologist, while the two Latin Americans after the same manuscript are a journalist and a literary critic, both completely oblivious to China and both living outside Latin America. Even the editorial design of *Los impostores* got me thinking. To my surprise, the Chinese character that illustrates the cover of the first edition of Gamboa’s novel is the exact same logogram that José Juan Tablada uses in his ideographic collection *Li-Po y otros poemas*, which I flesh out in

chapter 4 (fig. 15) There is still more: I came to learn that Gamboa's host during his stay in China while writing this book (and the sister travelogue *Octubre en Pekín* [October in Beijing] from 2001) was the Colombian filmmaker Sergio Cabrera, the red diaper educated in Maoist China and protagonist of Juan Gabriel Vásquez's novel *Volver la vista atrás* discussed in chapter 5. In hindsight, it appears that each of the translations of China studied in this book (migration of coolies,

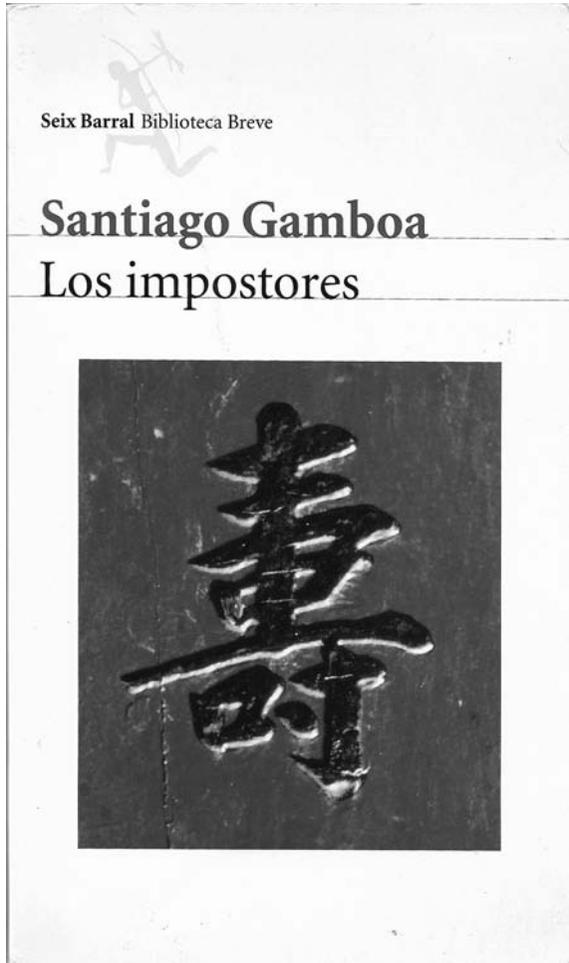


Fig. 15. Cover of the 2002 edition of Santiago Gamboa's *Los impostores*, which uses the same Sinitic logogram as José Juan Tablada's ideographic poem "Li-Po." Copyright © Seix Barral.

transplantation of sinology, transfer of ideograms, and adaptation of Maoism) are fictionalized in *Los impostores*; or conversely, that this book is an uncanny scholarly reverse of Gamboa’s novel.

For a study that revisits Latin American literary modernity chronologically, the temptation of teleology loomed in the background. What better way to evidence my thoughts on an archive formation than with a recent novel that connected each of its distinct parts through a realist fiction? But my claims go precisely in the opposite direction: one of the key findings I offer is that the archive of China in Latin America is deliberately submerged, scattered, or simply slippery. Unlike Orientalism, where “a groups of texts acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large” (strategic formation) thanks to a the stable—hegemonic—point of enunciation (“strategic location”), “disorientation” is a centrifugal process, where references and archives are unstable and dispersed.² When I finally decided to redefine chapter 5 and leave aside the Chinese novels, I still struggled to find ways to squeeze *Los impostores* into the extant text: maybe an observation about the critique of sinophone writing in reference to the coolie passage archive in chapter 1; a footnote about the caricature of the German philologist Gisbert Klaus (mostly likely borrowed from Borges’s sinologist Stephen Albert) or a close reading of the book’s cover alongside Tablada’s ideographic poem (was this a reference to the Latin American ideogrammatic tradition or, rather, another random iteration of a glyph that works as a placeholder for Chinese text, easily available to a corporate publisher like Seix-Barral?). Yet none of these observations added any density to my arguments; they only illustrated them. Finally, *Los impostores* did not make a single appearance in the text.

Now that the book is finished, I wonder: Have I really left out *Los impostores* by not citing it? Or is it that the novel, like the etymology of its title suggests, is placed elsewhere (from Latin, *impostare/imponere*: “place upon, impose upon, deceive”)? Perhaps this novel was a point of departure, an introduction to a set of historical and literary encounters that, after years of research, generated a scholarly account. But I think that what really stayed with me from *Los impostores* is its tone: Gamboa’s witty, nonchalant, but fierce attack on the Latin-Americanist obsession with differential identity as the dominant form of global engagement. Gamboa’s tone conveys the assurance that the Latin American (or any peripheral) intellectual can indeed engage with the world without complying to hegemonic cartographies or adopting

a particularistic—subaltern—place of enunciation; and if they do, this can expose such inertia as ridiculous. The article from my graduate student days opened with a quote by Gamboa that read “Soy colombiano, pero no siento la obligación de que mi escritura esté arraigada en Colombia” (I’m Colombian, yet I don’t feel it my duty to root my writing in Colombia).³ *Los impostores*, Gamboa’s fiction, as well as my own book seek to uproot indigenous mandates of Latin Americanism with impostor gestures of disorientation.

I advocate in this book for a methodological shift from place to posture (from Latin, *positura*: “position, situation; disposition of the several parts of anything with respect to one another or a particular purpose”) to revisit disciplinary frameworks in the study of cross-cultural exchange. Unlike fixed geographies, the bodily dispositions studied in this book are unstable: they suggest a form of navigating the world through trafficked routes, twisted networks, on the edge, from the surface, and in motion. They are contingent positions that make use of given infrastructures but do not conform to their geopolitical logic, because, after all, they deal with literary creation. This postural move is not new to the field: in the 1990s Sylvia Molloy famously called for a positive “politics of posing” to question the attacks on *modernismo*’s frivolous and reprehensible poses. Like her, I also understand posing as a liberating move: “not as a set of bodily or textual affectations at odds with national and continental discourses and concerns from which Latin America ultimately recovers, but as an oppositional practice within those very discourses and concerns, a decisive cultural statement whose political import and destabilizing energy I try to recuperate and assess.”⁴ In this book on the writings of China in Latin America, the destabilizing energy I try to recuperate and assess is what I call disorientation.

Appendix

Table 2. Spanish translations of Chinese literary works published in Buenos Aires, 1942–81

Year	Author	Title	Publisher	Translator
1942	Sheng Cheng	<i>Mi madre</i>	Siglo Veinte	Ernesto Ibarra
1944	Various authors	<i>Cuentistas de la nueva China</i>	Siglo Veinte	María Casado
1944	Various authors	<i>Poesía china</i>	Continental	Alfredo Weiss and H. F. Miri
1946	Lin Yutang	<i>Sabiduría hindú</i>	Biblioteca Nueva	Georgette de Herberg
1946	Lin Yutang	<i>Una llamada en la roca</i>	Sudamericana	Leon Mirras
1947	Various authors	<i>Antología de cuentistas chinos</i>	Espasa-Calpe	Marcela de Juan
1947	Li Qianfu	<i>Dos joyas del teatro asiático</i>	Espasa-Calpe	Alfredo Cahn
1948	Various authors	<i>Cuentos chinos de tradición antigua</i>	Espasa-Calpe	Marcela de Juan
1950	Li Bai	<i>Poemas de Li Tai Po</i>	Cuadernos del Unicornio	Osvaldo Svanascini
1951	Various authors	<i>La flauta de jade</i>	Guillermo Kraft	Angel Battistessa

Year	Author	Title	Publisher	Translator
1952	Lin Yutang	<i>La sabiduría de Confucio</i>	Siglo Veinte	Elena Dukelsky Yoffre
1952	Lin Yutang	<i>La sabiduría de Laotse</i>	Sudamericana	Floreale Mazía
1952	Various authors	<i>La flauta de jade</i>	Guillermo Kraft	Angel Battistessa
1952	Various authors	<i>Antiguos poemas chinos anónimos</i>	Sociedad de Amigos del Arte Oriental	Horacio Becco and Osvaldo Svanascini
1952	Various authors	<i>La poesía china</i>	Sociedad de Amigos del Arte Oriental	Osvaldo Svanascini
1954	Lu Xun	<i>La verdadera historia de AQ</i>	Asociación Argentina de Cultura China	Estela Canto
1954	Beijing People's Art Theatre	<i>Entre marido y mujer</i>	Asociación Argentina de Cultura China	
1955	Xiao San and Ai Qing	<i>Poemas</i>	Revista Cultura China	
1954	Mao Dun	“Nuevas realidades”	Cuadernos de Cultura	
1954	Lin Yutang	<i>Sabiduría china</i>	Biblioteca Nueva	Alfredo Whitelow
1954	Various authors	<i>Cuentos humorísticos orientales</i>	Espasa-Calpe	Marcela de Juan
1955	Eileen Chang	<i>La canción del arroz</i>	Goyanarte	Alfredo Weiss
1954	Mao Zedong	“Dos poemas de Mao Tse Tung”	Capricornio	Fermín Chávez
1955	Li Zhihua	<i>Reacción en la aldea china</i>	Ariadna	Raúl González Tuñón
1956	Sheng Cheng	<i>Mi madre y yo</i>	Cauce	Ernesto Ibarra
1956	Lu Xun	<i>Diario de un loco</i>	Lautaro	Julio Galer
1957	Lin Yutang	<i>Amor e ironía</i>	Biblioteca Nueva	Alfredo Weiss and Héctor Miri

Year	Author	Title	Publisher	Translator
1957	Lin Yutang	<i>Obras escogidas</i>	Sudamericana	Miguel de Hernani and Román Giménez
1958	Han Suyin	<i>El amor es algo maravilloso</i>	Santiago Rueda	Luis Echeverri
1958	Pekin opera	<i>La venganza del pescador</i>	Quetzal	Estela Obarrio Bell
1958	Various authors	Poetas chinos vertidos del francés	Quetzal	Alvaro Yunque
1959	Shao Quanlin	<i>La literatura china actual</i>	Cuadernos de Cultura	
1959	Mao Zedong et al.	<i>Poemas chinos</i>	Cuadernos de Cultura	Juan L. Ortiz and A. Varela
1959	Guo Moruo	<i>La escena de la conspiración</i>	Cuadernos de Cultura	
1959	Mao Zedong	<i>Obras escogidas (2 tomos)</i>	Platina	
1959	Various authors	<i>El teatro tradicional chino</i>	Siglo Veinte	Bernardo Kordon
1960	Various authors	<i>Poesía china</i>	Fabril Editora	María Teresa de León and Rafael Alberti
1960	Han Suyin	<i>La montaña es joven</i>	Guillermo Kraft	Luis Echavarrri
1960	Lin Yutang	<i>Un momento en Pekín</i>	Sudamericana	Rosa de Toryho
1961	Various authors	<i>Cuentos chinos de tradición antigua</i>	Centurión	Marcela de Juan
1961	Various authors	<i>Poetas chinos de la dinastía Tang</i>	Mundonuevo	Raúl A. Ruy
1962	Mao Zedong	<i>20 poemas</i>	Compañía Argentina de Editores	Luis Enrique Délano
1963	Various authors	<i>Teatro de ópera chino: Los niños del jardín</i>	Sudamericana	J. Huang-Hung

Year	Author	Title	Publisher	Translator
1963	Various authors	<i>Las damas de la China</i>	Goyanarte	Virgina Carreño
1963	Lin Yutang	<i>La familia del barrio chino</i>	Sudamericana	León Mirilas
1964	Lin Yutang	<i>Enebro Loa</i>	Sudamericana	Roman A. Jimenez
1965	Huang Zuolin	<i>Teatro chino y teatro occidental</i>	Revista Capricornio	Juan José Sebreli
1965	Li Fuyan, Shen Jiji, Li Gongzuo	<i>Tres cuentos fantásticos</i>	Revista Capricornio	Bernardo Kordon
1965	Various authors	<i>Cuentos de la dinastía Tang</i>	Capricornio	Bernardo Kordon
1965	Lin Yutang	<i>La fuga de los inocentes</i>	Sudamericana	León Mirilas
1965	Mao Zedong	<i>La guerra de guerrillas</i>	Huemul	
1966	Mao Zedong	<i>Sobre arte y literatura</i>	Ediciones del Tiempo	
1966	Various authors	<i>Poetas chinos vertidos del francés</i>	Quetzal	Alvaro Yunque
1967	Lin Yutang	<i>Mi patria y mi pueblo</i>	Sudamericana	Román A. Jimenez
1968	Lin Yutang	<i>Teoría china del arte</i>	Sudamericana	Roberto Bixio
1969	Mao Zedong	<i>Cuatro tesis filosóficas</i>	La Rosa Blindada	
1969	Mao Zedong	<i>Obras escogidas (4 tomos)</i>	La Rosa Blindada-Nativa	
1969	Mao Zedong	<i>Citas del presidente Mao</i>	La Rosa Blindada	
1969	Han Suyin	<i>El amor es algo maravilloso</i>	Santiago Rueda	Luis Echeverri
1969	Various authors	<i>Cuentos chinos con fantasmas</i>	Juarez Editor S.A.	Bernardo Kordon
1970	Lin Yutang	<i>Una hoja en la tormenta</i>	Sudamericana	Atanasio Sánchez

Year	Author	Title	Publisher	Translator
1970	Lu Xun	<i>La verdadera historia de AQ</i>	Centro Editor de América Latina	Luis Enrique Delano
1970	Various authors	<i>Los poetas de la dinastía Tang</i>	Centro Editor de América Latina	Roberto Donoso
1971	Lu Xun	<i>Diario de un loco</i>	Centro Editor de América Latina	Julio Galer
1972	Mao Zedong	<i>Charlas en el foro de Yenan</i>	Marxismo de hoy	
1972	Mao Zedong	<i>Selección de escritos militares</i>	La Rosa Blindada	
1972	Various authors	<i>Poesía china</i>	Fabril Editora	M. T. León and R. Alberti
1973	Various authors	<i>Poetas chinos</i>	Quetzal	Alvaro Yunque
1974	Chen Boda	<i>Lucha de clases en el campo chino</i>	Schapiro	
1974	Mao Zedong	<i>Notas para la lectura</i>	Los libros	
1974	Mao Zedong	<i>Los 37 poemas</i>	Schapiro	
1974	Mao Zedong	<i>Sobre la literatura y el arte</i>	Nativa	
1974	Mao Zedong	<i>Obras escogidas (6 tomos)</i>	De la Paloma	
1974	Mao Zedong	<i>Los 37 poemas</i>	Schapiro	Jorge Enrique Adoum
1975	Mao Zedong	<i>Texto inédito de Mao</i>	Los libros	
1975	Mao Zedong	Escritos inéditos	Mundo Nuevo	
1975		<i>I Ching: El libro de las mutaciones</i>	Sudamericana/Edhasa	
1976	Various authors	<i>Así escriben los chinos</i>	Orion	Bernardo Kordon
1977	Various authors	<i>Poetas chinos de la dinastía Tang</i>	Hachette	Raúl A. Ruy

Year	Author	Title	Publisher	Translator
1977	Various authors	<i>Poesía china: Antología esencial</i>	Andrómeda	Fritz Aguado Pertz
1979	Mao Zedong	<i>Obras escogidas, tomo V</i>	Independencia	
1979	Laozi	<i>El camino y su poder</i>	Kier	
1979	Various authors	<i>La literatura china clásica</i>	Centro Editor de América Latina	Jorge Lafforgue and Miguel Olivera
1980	Various authors	<i>La literatura china moderna</i>	Centro Editor de América Latina	
1981	Various authors	<i>El cuento chino. Li Fu-Yen, Chen Ki-Tsi y otros</i>	Centro Editor de América Latina	Bernardo Kordon

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and Silvina Ocampo, *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1940), 1. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

2. Zhang Longxi, "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (1988): 110.

3. Mariano Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 3; Ignacio Sánchez Prado, *Strategic Occidentalism: On Mexican Fiction, the Neoliberal Book Market, and the Question of World Literature* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 13; and Fernando Degiovanni, *Vernacular Latin Americanisms: War, the Market, and the Making of a Discipline* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 2, respectively.

4. Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao, "Sinographies: An Introduction," in *Sinographies: Writing China*, ed. Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), vii.

5. Hayot, Saussy, and Yao, "Sinographies," vii.

6. David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 1.

7. The debates on world literature that unfolded in the early 2000s were largely an intellectual reaction to the state of the humanities, which in the heyday of globalization at the turn of the twentieth century had ceased to reflect the political culture, research agenda, or epistemological frameworks on which comparative literature had thrived half a century before. The rise of area studies programs during the Cold War had opened a space for academic training

in regions of strategic interest, and, with a social sciences approach, specialists funded by the State Department began to focus on contemporary cultures and their impact on international relations. Also, empowered by the civil rights movements of the 1960s, the new student body that now comprised women, immigrant groups, and other minorities pushed for the creation of specialized fields of study based on particular identities. Multiple ethnic studies departments emerged to propose an interdisciplinary inquiry into the specifically US experience of Asian, African, Chicano, or Jewish identities, to name a few. On the methodological side, postcolonial theory and poststructuralism had sweeping effects on the politics and methods of reading, particularly in English and French departments. As the “canon wars” of the 1980s anticipated, by the turn of the millennium it was no longer possible to disentangle geopolitics from the humanities curriculum. In comparative literature departments this conundrum translated into the struggle of how to reconcile the multiculturalist thrust to diversify the canon with a more traditionalist view that still regarded philology and the classics as the tenets of liberal arts education.

Of the three paradigms of world literature that developed around Franco Moretti, “Conjunctures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 55–67; David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), published originally in 1998 as *La république mondiale des lettres*, Damrosch’s was the boldest. While Moretti and Casanova indeed broadened the scope of the world beyond the few, major Western European literatures of traditional comparativism, both models still regarded the literature from, say, Brazil, China, or Nigeria as putative peripheries of a world system with an axis defined by either a hegemonic genre like the European novel or the city of Paris as the “Greenwich meridian” of newness and modernity. Damrosch, instead, opened an unusually horizontal platform to compare literatures from all geographies, genres, and epochs through translation. In a very capacious formulation, Damrosch’s world literature encompassed “all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language” (*What Is World Literature?* 4).

But as world literature flourished both in the United States and abroad, so did criticism. “What about local knowledges with the new planetary scale of world literature?” wondered Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), calling the attention to the quality, rigor, and language training particular to area studies overlooked by this transregional paradigm suspected of Americanizing of the world. As to methodology, Spivak called on scholars not to overcome but rather to reconcile the humanist philological tradition with a social science framework to decolonize the profusely diverse Global South, formerly read through an Orientalist lens: “in disciplinary method we remain astute. Attention to idiom, demonstration through textual analysis, acquisition of expertise in plotting the play of logic in rhetoric and vice versa. In so far as our object of investigation is concerned, however, we acknowledge as comparativists any attempt that the text makes to go outside of its space-time enclosure, the history and geography

by which the text is determined. Thus disciplinary convention expands toward what would otherwise escape it, and the field expands greatly, in many ways" (Spivak, "Rethinking Comparativism," *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 [2009]: 615). The most articulate critique, though, came from translation theory. Emily Apter's programmatic *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013) questioned the optimistic assumption of translatability at the core of Damrosch's model and in turn posited the relevance of nontranslation, mistranslation, incomparability, and untranslatability as an approach to literary comparativism.

8. David Damrosch, "What Isn't World Literature? Problems of Language, Context, and Politics," plenary lecture of the Institute for World Literature, Cambridge, MA, 2016, <https://iwl.fas.harvard.edu/keynote-plenary-lectures-videos>.

9. Apter, *Against World Literature*, 2.

10. Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, 4.

11. The Germans Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach, and the Czech René Wellek (1903–95) epitomize the figures who infused US literary criticism with the tools of stylistics and hermeneutics and muffled the monolingualism of English departments with their ear for Romance repertoires. But they were part of a larger intellectual exile that had repercussions on the methods and politics of reading foreign literatures in the many other cultural fields that hosted these exiles around the world. Edward Said and Amir Mufti insistently wrote about Auerbach's (and to a lesser extent, Spitzer's) years in Istanbul, where their erudition in Romance philology played out in the complex relationship between Jewish identity, secularization, and the Westernization efforts of the Turkish academic world they inhabited for several years before finally settling in the United States. See Edward W. Said, "Introduction to the Fiftieth-Anniversary Edition," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, by Erich Auerbach, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), xiii; and Amir R. Mufti, "Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 1 (1998): 95–125.

12. Miranda Lida, *Amado Alonso en la Argentina: Una historia global del Instituto de Filología (1927–1946)* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2019).

13. Degiovanni, *Vernacular Latin Americanisms*, 2.

14. To mention an example, Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) was published in Spanish as early as 1945 by the Argentine press Losada and aimed at the general public, while it only became available to English-language readers in 1959, by the hand of Wade Baskins at the Philosophical Library of New York.

15. Lida, *Amado Alonso*, 269.

16. Wellek taught at the University of Iowa for seven years until 1946 and then settled at Yale University, where he established and chaired the department of comparative literature. Auerbach started his career in the US at Pennsylvania State University in 1947 and was appointed professor of Romance philology at Yale University in 1950, a position he held until his death in 1957. Spitzer spent his entire sojourn in the United States at Johns Hopkins University (from 1936 until 1960).

17. Nora Catelli, "Asymmetry: Specters of Comparativism in the Circulation of Theory," *Journal of World Literature* 2, no. 1 (2017): 20.

18. Catelli, "Specters of Comparativism," 15.

19. Christina Lee and Ricardo Padrón, eds., *The Spanish Pacific, 1521–1815: A Reader of Primary Sources* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020).

20. Carles Prado-Fonts, *Secondhand China: Spain, the East, and the Politics of Translation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2022), 9.

21. Martín Bergel, *El Oriente desplazado: Los intelectuales y los orígenes del tercermundismo en la Argentina* (Bernal, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2015), 116.

22. María del Pilar Álvarez and Pablo Forni, "Orientalismo conciliar: El padre Quiles y la creación de la Escuela de Estudios Orientales de la Universidad del Salvador," *Estudios de Asia y África* 53, no. 2 (2018): 442.

23. The study of Asian cultures in general is gradually gaining space in Latin American research centers and universities. See Leila Gándara, "Transformaciones culturales y nuevos campos de conocimiento: Los estudios sobre lengua y cultura china," in *Actas del V Congreso Internacional de Letras*, ed. Américo Cristófolo (Buenos Aires: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras 2014), 1333–42.

24. See Paula Hattori and Pablo Gavirati, "Estudios Inter-Culturales Nikkei / Niquey: Nuevas perspectivas entre Japón y América Latina," *Revista Transas*, <https://www.revistatransas.com/dossier-estudios-interculturales-niquey/>.

25. For a comprehensive study of the literary culture of Peruvians of Chinese heritage, see Ignacio López Calvo, *Dragons in the Land of the Condor: Writing Tusán in Peru* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014).

26. Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 327. I first read about Larkin's infrastructures in Guido Herzovich, "La desigualdad como tarea: Crítica literaria y masificación editorial en Argentina (1950–60)" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2016). Herzovich uses the notion of "critical infrastructures" to describe the constellation of publishers and cultural magazines in 1950s Argentina that enabled the formation of a renewed form of criticism. I used this concept to understand the forms of writing about China in that period and then I redefined it in the global terms of this book. I thank Guido for our initial conversations.

27. Sánchez Prado, *Strategic Occidentalism*, 15.

28. Martin Puchner, *The Written World: The Power of Stories to Shape People, History, and Civilization* (New York: Random House, 2018).

29. Maialen Marín-Lacarta, "Mediated and Marginalised: Translations of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature in Spain (1949–2010)," *Meta* 63, no. 2 (2018): 309.

30. Marín-Lacarta, "Mediated and Marginalised," 306.

31. Andrea Bachner, "World-Literary Hospitality: China, Latin America, Translation," in *The Making of Chinese-Sinophone Literatures as World Literature*, ed. Kuei-fen Chiu and Yingjin Zhang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 2022), 104.

32. Octavio Paz, "Further Comments," in Eliot Weinberger, *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* (Kingston, RI: Asphodel Press, 1987), 47.

33. Araceli Tinajero, *Orientalismo en el modernismo hispanoamericano* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2004).

34. For sinophone, see Shu-mei Shih, “The Concept of the Sinophone,” *PMLA* 126, no. 3 (2011); and for Hispanophone, see Paula Park, “Transpacific Intercoloniality: Rethinking the Globality of Philippine Literature in Spanish,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 20 (2019): 83–97.

35. Brazil is of particular interest in this regard. While the Lusophone country holds the largest Nikkei community outside Japan, relatively few Chinese immigrants made it to the latecomer abolitionist empire. Yet debates over the introduction of Asian workers have played a central role in Brazilian politics since the early nineteenth century, and thanks to the impetus of the aforementioned scholarship on the coolie trade, more scholars working with an ethnic studies intellectual agenda in mind are accounting for it. In *Mandarin Brazil: Race, Representation, and Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), Ana Paulina Lee postulates a global map of race through what she conceptualizes as “circumoceanic memory”: “the transpacific passages that connect the histories of once distant places through the shared experience of racialized exploitative labor and the networked cultural processes that produce racial subaltern subjects” (10).

36. Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen, eds., *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 3.

37. Junyoung Verónica Kim, “Asia–Latin America as Method: The Global South Project and the Dislocation of the West,” *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 3, no. 2 (2017): 102.

38. Diana Sorensen, “Alternative Geographic Mappings for the Twenty-First Century,” introduction to *Territories and Trajectories: Cultures in Circulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 17.

39. Laura Torres-Rodríguez, *Orientaciones transpacificas: La modernidad mexicana y el espectro de Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 17.

40. Eric Hayot, *Humanist Reason: A History. An Argument. A Plan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 18.

41. Erin Graff-Zivin, *Anarchaeologies: Reading as Misreading* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 17.

CHAPTER 1

1. Rubén Darío, “La muerte de la emperatriz de la China,” in *Azul* (Madrid: Mundo Latino, 1917), 160–61; and “The Death of the Empress of China,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. Ilan Stavans, trans. Andrew Hurley, Greg Simon, and Stephen White (New York: Penguin, 2005), 304. Hereafter citations list the original publication first, followed by the translated publication.

2. David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 136.

3. Iván A. Schulman, *El proyecto inconcluso: La vigencia del modernismo, Lingüística y teoría literaria* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 2002).

4. Darío, “La muerte de la emperatriz de la China,” 162; “Death of the Empress of China,” 305.

5. Ericka Beckman, *Capital Fictions: The Literature of Latin America's Export Age* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2013), 44.

6. Arnold J. Meagher, *The Coolie Trade: The Traffic in Chinese Laborers to Latin America, 1847–1874* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2008), 61.

7. Denise Helly, introduction to *The Cuba Commission Report: A Hidden History of the Chinese in Cuba; The Original English-Language Text of 1876* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 20.

8. Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: Free Labor of Neoslavery,” *Contributions in Black Studies* 12, no. 5 (1994): 39.

9. Jason Oliver Chang, *Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880–1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 8.

10. Rudolph Ng, “The Chinese Commission to Cuba (1874): Reexamining International Relations in the Nineteenth Century from a Transcultural Perspective,” *Transcultural Studies* 2 (2014): 41.

11. Jason Oliver Chang, “Toward a Hemispheric Asian American History,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Asian American History*, ed. David K. Yoo and Eiichiro Azuma (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 32.

12. Ignacio López-Calvo, *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 134.

13. Kathleen López, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 125.

14. Martí’s “Letters of New York” set the tone of the Hispanic American genre of the *crónica modernista* as a stylized fusion of journalism, literature, and philology. Aníbal González observes that “as a journalistic genre, the *crónica* was obliged to convey news of current events and to be subject to the commercial law of supply and demand; as a literary genre, it had to be original and entertaining, but it also had to be well written, with a solid philological awareness of the history of language.” Aníbal González, *A Companion to Spanish American Modernismo* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 49.

15. José Martí, “El puente de Brooklyn,” in *Obras completas*, vol. 9 of *En los Estados Unidos: Escenas norteamericanas 1881–1883* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), 9:423–24, and “The Brooklyn Bridge,” in *Selected Writings*, trans. Esther Allen (New York: Penguin, 2002), 141.

16. Martí, “El puente de Brooklyn,” 9:424; “Brooklyn Bridge,” 141.

17. Graciela Montaldo, “Guía Rubén Darío,” in Rubén Darío, *Viajes de un cosmopolita extremo*, selection and preface by Graciela Montaldo (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013), 13.

18. Martí, *Obras completas*, 9:281.

19. Tobías Schwarz, “Políticas de inmigración en América Latina: El extranjero indeseable en las normas nacionales, de la Independencia hasta los años de 1930,” *Procesos: Revista Ecuatoriana de Historia* 36 (2012): 57. For a comprehensive review of immigration legislation by Latin American countries, see the following titles in the bibliography: Alejandro Fernández “La ley argentina de inmigración de 1876 y su contexto histórico,” *Almanack* 17 (2017): 51–

85; Ernesto Maguiña Salinas “Un acercamiento al estudio de las inmigraciones extranjeras en el Perú durante el siglo XIX y las primeras décadas del siglo XX,” *Tierra Nuestra* 8, no. 1 (2010): 65–96; Vera Valdés Lakowsky, “México y China: Cercanía en la distancia,” *Estudios de Asia y Africa* 15, no. 4 (1980): 816–31; and Iván Olaya, “La selección del inmigrante “apto”: Leyes migratorias de inclusión y exclusión en Colombia 1920–1937,” *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* (2018): 1–16.

20. Susana Rotker, *The American Chronicles of José Martí: Journalism and Modernity in Spanish America* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 174.

21. Martí, *Obras completas*, 9:281–82.

22. Martí, *Obras completas*, 9:283.

23. Martí, *Obras completas*, 9:277.

24. Martí, *Obras completas*, 9:278.

25. Martí, *Obras completas*, 9:282.

26. Koichi Hagimoto, *Between Empires: Martí, Rizal, and the Intercolonial Alliance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 95.

27. Martí, *Obras completas*, 9:412.

28. Martí, *Obras completas*, 9:298–99.

29. José Juan Tablada, “Bacanal china,” in *En el país del sol* (New York: Appleton, 1919), 23.

30. Tablada, “Bacanal china,” 22.

31. José Juan Tablada, “La mujer de Tjuan-Tsé,” in *En el país del sol*, 111.

32. Enrique Gómez Carrillo, *De Marsella a Tokio: Sensaciones de Egipto, la India, la China y el Japón* (Paris: Garnier Hermanos, 1906), 189.

33. José Juan Tablada, “El Japón en Occidente,” in *En el país del sol*, 95.

34. Tablada, “El Japón en Occidente,” 94.

35. The 2019 exhibition *Pasajero 21: El Japón de Tablada* at the Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City (July 24 to October 13) presented for the first time part of Tablada’s collection of Japanese prints, his archive and library, as well as his work in favor of the dissemination of Japanese art in Mexico.

36. Christopher Bush, “Unpacking the Present: The Floating World of French Modernity,” in *Pacific Rim Modernisms*, ed. Mary Ann Gillies, Helen Sword, and Steven Yao (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 54.

37. Rubén Darío, “Japoneses de París,” in *Viajes de un cosmopolita extremo*, 136.

38. Darío, “Japoneses de París,” 132.

39. Toake Endoh, *Exporting Japan: Politics of Emigration to Latin America* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 60.

40. Endoh, *Exporting Japan*, 63.

41. Torres-Rodríguez, *Orientaciones transpácificas*, 59.

42. José Juan Tablada, “Divagaciones,” in *En el país del sol*, 96.

43. Adolfo Best Maugard, *Método de dibujo: Tradición, resurgimiento y evolución del arte mexicano* (Mexico City: Departamento de Editorial de la Secretaría de Educación, 1923), 10.

44. Denis Carr, *Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2015), 120.

45. Mariano Bonialian, "Asiáticos en Lima a principios del siglo XVII," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'études andine* 44, no. 2 (2015): 219.

46. Apart from Tablada and Gómez Carrillo, other *modernistas* who traveled to Asia are the Mexican poet Efrén Rebolledo (1877–1929) and the Salvadorean writer and journalist Arturo Ambrogi (1874–1936). Araceli Tinajero's *Orientalismo en el modernismo hispanoamericano* provides the most comprehensive study of their travelogues.

47. Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires*, 225.

48. Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires*, 236.

49. Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires*, 241.

50. Enrique Gómez Carrillo, "Shanghai: Los chinos que trabajan," in *De Marsella a Tokio*, 120.

51. Gómez Carrillo, "Shanghai: Los chinos que trabajan," 120.

52. Enrique Gómez Carrillo, "En Singapur, el paraíso de los chinos," in *De Marsella a Tokio*, 93, 102.

53. Gómez Carrillo, "En Singapur, el paraíso de los chinos," 93.

54. Gómez Carrillo, "En Singapur, el paraíso de los chinos," 93.

55. Jason Chang studies the eminently Spanish infrastructure that enabled the figure of Chinese compradores (specialized commercial middlemen) at transpacific trading ports. For Chang, these intermediaries "provide a historical framework to understand the succession of imperial states, overlapping racializations, and maintenance of a territorial assemblage bridging Asia and the Americas." See Jason Oliver Chang, "Four Centuries of Imperial Succession in the Comprador Pacific," *Pacific Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (2017): 193–227.

56. Gómez Carrillo, "En Singapur, el paraíso de los chinos," 95.

57. Gómez Carrillo, "En Singapur, el paraíso de los chinos," 104.

58. Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini, eds., *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

59. Enrique Gómez Carrillo, "Paisajes y emociones," in *De Marsella a Tokio*, 20.

60. Gómez Carrillo, "Paisajes y emociones," 21.

61. Gómez Carrillo, "Paisajes y emociones," 22.

62. Gómez Carrillo, "Paisajes y emociones," 27.

63. Harris Feinsod, "Canal Zone Modernism: Cendrars, Walrond, and Stevens at the 'Suction Sea,'" *English Language Notes* 57, no. 1 (2019): 117.

64. Elliott Young, *Alien Nation: Chinese Migration in the Americas from the Coolie Era through World War Two* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 30.

65. Lisa Yun, "Under the Hatches: American Coolie Ships and Nineteenth-Century Narratives of the Pacific Passage," *Amerasia Journal* 28, no. 2 (2002): 39.

66. Edgar Holden, "A Chapter on the Coolie Trade," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 29, no. 169 (1864): 6.

67. The story of Holden's article in *Harper's* is fascinating. Almost every scholarly work on the coolie trade, including my own, cites it and reprints its dramatic engravings as the primal source of a first-hand narrative of the coolie passage. Yet it is unclear why Holden was onboard the *Norway* and whether he

was there as crew or as passenger. More curious is the fact that it took him five years to publish such a vehement attack on the atrocities he apparently witnessed at sea. A biography of Edgar Holden (who apparently was a notable physician during the American Civil War) eagerly argues against his presence in the ship, demonstrating that during the two years of the voyage of the *Norway*, he was enrolled at Princeton University (Sandra W. Moss, *Edgar Holden, M.D. of Newark*, 2014). The biography argues that, as a writer and an abolitionist, Holden most likely transcribed the story from his brother Henri, who was involved in mercantile affairs. Historians and biographers might dispute Holden's seaborne experience as a reliable record in their reconstruction of the coolie trade. But in my interest to unveil "the coolie passage archive," I embrace blurred forms of authorship between actual seamen and desktop writers, something I find at the heart of maritime literature in general. Joseph Conrad's, Herman Melville's, or Edgar Allan Poe's sea fictions are largely indebted to memories of navigation overheard in the seafaring circles they frequented.

68. Watt Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru: A History of the Chinese Coolie in Peru, 1849–1874* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1951), 75.

69. *South Pacific Times*, May 24, 1873. Quoted in Stewart, *Chinese Bondage*, 80.

70. The Chinese Educational Mission (1872–81) was a pioneering experiment of study abroad. Designed by the reform-minded Yung Wing, the first Chinese to graduate from a US university, it was an Qing government official program that sent young Chinese students to the United States to train in Western science and engineering. The boys arrived in several detachments, lived with US families in Hartford, Connecticut, and other New England towns; and after graduating high school, went on to college, especially at Yale. The mission came to an end in 1881 because of the escalating hostility toward Chinese in the US and the Qing government's hesitant attitude about the future of the program.

71. Steffen Rimner, "Chinese Abolitionism: The Chinese Educational Mission in Connecticut, Cuba, and Peru," *Journal of Global History* 11 (2016): 358.

72. Helly, *Cuba Commission Report*, 46.

73. I thank Rudolph Ng for this reference. Ng is currently working on a monograph about the extant Peru report.

74. Yung Wing, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt, 1909), 193.

75. Siu Kam Wen, "En alta mar," in *El tramo final* (Lima: Lluvia Editores, 1985), 90.

76. Wen, "En alta mar," 91.

77. Lee, *Mandarin Brazil*.

78. Juan de Arona, *La inmigración en el Perú: Monografía histórico-crítica* (Lima: Imprenta del Universo, de Carlos Prince, 1890), 60.

79. Aurelio García y García, "Informe que contiene importantes detalles sobre la conducta con los emigrantes chinos y otros datos relativos a esta inmigración," "Documentos-Memoria del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores al Congreso de 1874," in *Documentos Parlamentarios* (Lima: Archivo del Congreso de la República del Perú, 1874), 198.

80. Arona, *La inmigración en el Perú*, 64.
81. Henrique Carlos Ribeiro Lisboa, *A China e os chins: Recordações de viagem* (Montevideo: Typographia a Vapor de A. Godel, 1888).
82. Henrique Carlos Ribeiro Lisboa, *Os chins dos Tetartos* (Rio de Janeiro: Empreza Democratica Editora, 1894), 70.
83. There is a partial English translation of this book; see Glenn Thomas Curry, "Nicolás Tanco Armero: A Mid-Century New Granadan's View of China," MA thesis, Vanderbilt Univeristy, 1972.
84. Nicolás Tanco Armero, *Viaje de la Nueva Granada a China y de China a Francia* (Paris: Imprenta de Simón Racon y Compañía, 1861), xxv.
85. Tanco Armero, *Viaje de la Nueva Granada a China*, 425 and 494.
86. Tanco Armero, *Viaje de la Nueva Granada a China*, 425.
87. Tanco Armero, *Viaje de la Nueva Granada a China*, 435.
88. Tanco Armero, *Viaje de la Nueva Granada a China*, 507.
89. Tanco Armero, *Viaje de la Nueva Granada a China*, 195.
90. Frédéric Martínez, "Los relatos de viaje a Oriente en el debate político colombiano (1847–1875)," *Historia y Sociedad* 3 (1996): 104.

CHAPTER 2

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xv.
2. Jorge Luis Borges, "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins," in *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1974), 708; and "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," in *Selected Non-Fictions*, trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin, 1999), 231.
3. Borges, "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins," 708; "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," 231.
4. Beatriz Sarlo, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge* (London: Verso, 1993), 23.
5. Foucault, *Order of Things*, xix.
6. Borges, "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins," 708; "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," 231.
7. Sarlo, *Jorge Luis Borges*, 7.
8. Borges, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," in *Obras completas*, 473; and "The Garden of Forking Paths," in *Labyrinths; Selected Stories and Other Writings*, trans. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 21.
9. Sylvia Molloy, *Signs of Borges* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 35.
10. Molloy, *Signs of Borges*, 35.
11. Molloy, *Signs of Borges*, 35.
12. D. E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), 16. In his oblique mimetic style Borges avoids any explicit connection between Wilkins's scheme of a universal language and his contemporaries' fascination with Chinese language as a model for a lingua franca in "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins."

13. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 123.

14. It is worth mentioning that with the establishment of semicolonial treaty ports along the coast after the Opium Wars cultural exchanges with China gradually provided novel evidence for scholarship. As books and travelers' reports flowed into Europe in ever-increasing volumes, descriptions of the Chinese empire in operation, its rebellions and repeated capitulations to the Western powers, multiplied. Biased and imperfect as many of these were, they served on many points to contradict or undermine the self-image, which the sinologue imbibed through his classical texts. Arthur F. Wright, "The Study of Chinese Civilization," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21, no. 2 (1960): 243.

15. Borges, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," 476; "The Garden of Forking Paths," 24.

16. Daniel Balderston, *Out of Context: Historical Reference and the Representation of Reality in Borges* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 43.

17. Borges, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," 473; "The Garden of Forking Paths," 21.

18. Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 62.

19. Borges, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," 476; "The Garden of Forking Paths," 25.

20. Henri Michaux, *A Barbarian in Asia*, trans. Sylvia Beach (New York: New Directions, 1986), 156.

21. Christopher Bush, "Modernism, Orientalism, and East Asia," in *A Handbook of Modernism Studies*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabate (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2013), 193.

22. Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares "La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An," in Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras completas en colaboración* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1979), 106; and "Tai An's Long Search," in *Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: Dutton, 1981), 138.

23. Borges and Bioy, "Tai An's Long Search," 10.

24. John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 427.

25. Borges, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," 478; "The Garden of Forking Paths," 26. My emphasis.

26. Borges anticipates the connection between sinology and chinoiserie in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" by situating Stephen Albert in the town of Fenton, in Staffordshire, an English county that became a center of ceramic production in the early seventeenth century. Like Parodi, Albert can also be described as "a sinologist; a European surrounded by the tinkle of teacups." Borges and Bioy Casares, "Tai An's Long Search," 138.

27. Porter, *Ideographia*, 136.

28. Borges and Bioy, "La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An," 106; "Tai An's Long Search," 137

29. Borges and Bioy, "La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An," 115; "Tai An's Long Search," 139.

30. Borges and Bioy, “La prolongada búsqueda de Tai An,” 108; “Tai An’s Long Search,” 134.

31. All the stories from this collection are dedicated to grand historical figures such as the prophet Muhammad or Alexander Pope.

32. Jorge Luis Borges, “Ernest Bramah,” in *Textos cautivos: Ensayos y reseñas en El Hogar*, ed. Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Enrique Sacerio-Garí (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1986), 206; and “Ernest Bramah,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 165.

33. Gonzalo Aguilar, “Historia local de la infamia (sobre ‘Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi de H. Bustos Domecq’),” *Variaciones Borges* 27 (2009): 36.

34. Sarlo, *Jorge Luis Borges*, 32.

35. Borges, “El escritor argentino y la tradición,” in *Obras completas*, 273; and “The Argentine Writer and Tradition,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 185.

36. Sarlo, *Jorge Luis Borges*, 30.

37. Borges, “El escritor argentino y la tradición,” 272; and “The Argentine Writer and Tradition,” 184.

38. Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, 34.

39. John King, *Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and Its Role in the Development of a Culture, 1931–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1.

40. The “Four Great Classical Novels” are the four novels commonly regarded by scholars to be the greatest and most influential of premodern Chinese fiction. Dating from the Ming and Qing dynasties, they are well known to most Chinese readers. These are *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, *Water Margin*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

41. Bergel, *El Oriente desplazado*, 341.

42. Carles Prado-Fonts observes that Marcela de Juan’s translations were often equally indirect, mostly based on French translations. Prado-Fonts, *Secondhand China*, 230.

43. Alejandro Dujovne explores this idea in reference to the history of the Jewish book in Argentina. Dujovne reconstructs libraries, personal archives, and publications in Yiddish to conclude that the transnational links of the Jewish community were so determinant in the formulation of ideas about the meaning of “the Jewish” to the extent that the Yiddish book in Argentina followed a completely parallel course to the history of foreign publications in the same place. Alejandro Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío en la Argentina: La cultura judía a través de sus editores, libreros, traductores, imprentas y bibliotecas* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2014).

44. Herbert Allen Giles, *Chuang Tzū: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer* (London: B. Quaritch, 1889).

45. In 1956 Borges started working on a monograph on Buddhism, which he would publish with Alicia Jurado in 1976 as *Qué es el budismo*. Other key titles on Chinese philosophy and history at the National Library’s collection are Fung Yu-lan *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy* (1947); Richard Wilhelm, *Chinese Lebensweisheit* (1950) and *Lao-Tse und der Taoismus* (1948); Wolf-ram Eberhard, *Chinas Geschichte* (1948); and several titles by Laozi. See Laura

Rosato and Germán Álvarez, *Borges, libros y lecturas: Catálogo de la colección Jorge Luis Borges en la Biblioteca Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Biblioteca Nacional, 2010), 23.

46. Jorge Luis Borges, “Palabrería para versos,” in *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (Buenos Aires: Proa, 1926), 23.

47. This book was later translated from the neociollo into Spanish. See Xul Solar, *Relato de los mundos superiores*, trans. Maria Cecilia G. Bendinger (Buenos Aires: Fondo Nacional De Las Artes, 2011).

48. In April 2013 Daniel Balderston told me an anecdote that José Bianco had told him many years ago. Before Bianco joined *Sur* as chief editor in 1938, he had contributed to *El Hogar* for a few months in the section “Books and Authors in Spanish Language.” He recalled that *El Hogar* received monthly dispatches of books that came directly from publishing houses. These were mostly the leftovers of the stock, a motley collection of recent themes and genres cluttered randomly in wooden boxes. Bianco said he systematically ignored them because of his office’s space restrictions, but conversely, Borges would go over them carefully and thoughtfully.

49. Jorge Luis Borges, “Sobre una alegoría china,” in *Textos recobrados* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1997), 203; and “Arthur Waley: *Monkey*,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 254.

50. José Luis de Diego, *Editores y políticas editoriales en Argentina, 1880–2000* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006).

51. Rosato and Álvarez, *Borges, libros y lecturas*, 27.

52. Rosato and Álvarez, *Borges, libros y lecturas*, 29.

53. Jorge Luis Borges, “Clement Egerton: *The Golden Lotus*, Routledge,” in *Jorge Luis Borges en Sur, 1931–1980* (Barcelona: Emecé Editores, 1999), 211.

54. Sylvia Molloy, “Borges y la distancia literaria,” *Sur* 138 (1969): 29.

55. Jorge Luis Borges, “*Chinese Fairy Tales and Folk Tales*, traducidos por Wolfram Wberhard,” in *Textos cautivos*, 204.

56. Borges, “Sobre una alegoría china,” 201.

57. Jorge Luis Borges, “Las versiones homéricas,” in *Obras completas*, 239; and “The Homeric Versions,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 69.

58. Jorge Luis Borges, “Las dos maneras de traducir,” in *Textos recobrados*, 258.

59. Jorge Luis Borges, “Una versión de los cantares más antiguos del mundo,” in *Textos cautivos*, 279; “An English versión of the Oldest Songs in the World,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 190. My emphasis.

60. Giles, *Chuang Tzŭ*, xvii.

61. Sergio Pastormerlo, *Borges crítico* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007), 23.

62. Haiqing Sun, “Hong Lou Meng in Jorge Luis Borges’s Narrative,” *Variaciones Borges* 22 (2006): 17.

63. Jorge Luis Borges, “El sueño del aposento rojo, de Tsao Hsue Kin,” in *Textos cautivos*, 102.

64. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 81.

65. Borges, “Clement Egerton,” 211.

66. Annick Louis, *Borges ante el fascismo* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 140.
67. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 1, no. 5 (1986): 69.
68. Borges, "Clement Egerton," 211.
69. Borges, "El sueño del aposento rojo," 103.
70. Borges, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," 478; "The Garden of Forking Paths," 27.
71. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Borges, una teoría de la literatura fantástica," *Revista Iberoamericana* 95 (1976): 179.
72. Borges, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," 479; "The Garden of Forking Paths," 29.
73. Said, "Introduction to the Fiftieth-Anniversary Edition," xiii.
74. Said, "Introduction to the Fiftieth-Anniversary Edition," xi.
75. Fernando Degiovanni and Guillermo Toscano y García, "'Las alarmas del Doctor Américo Castro': Institucionalización filológica y autoridad disciplinaria," *Variaciones Borges* 30 (2010): 11.
76. Jorge Luis Borges, "Las alarmas del doctor Américo Castro," in *Obras completas*; and "The Alarms of Doctor Américo Castro," in *Other Inquisitions, 1937–1952* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964).
77. Borges, "Las alarmas del doctor Américo Castro," 654; and "The Alarms of Doctor Américo Castro," 27.

CHAPTER 3

1. In the sources from the 1950s Xiao San is transcribed "Emi Siao."
2. Evar Méndez, "Examen de consciencia chino," *Revista Cultura China* 2 (1954–55): 38.
3. Nicolai Volland, *Socialist Cosmopolitanism: The Chinese Literary Universe, 1945–1965* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 3.
4. Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 24.
5. Gisele Sapiro, "How Do Literary Works Cross Borders (or Not)? A Sociological Approach to World Literature," *Journal of World Literature* 1 (2016): 82.
6. James Peck, "The Roots of Rhetoric: The Professional Ideology of America's China Watchers," in *America's Asia: Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations*, ed. Edward Friedman and Mark Selden (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 45.
7. Ho-Fu Hung, "Orientalism and Area Studies: The Case of Sinology," in *Overcoming the Two Cultures: Science Versus the Humanities in the Modern World-System*, ed. Richard E. Lee, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Aytar Volkan (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), 97.
8. This debate can be illustrated in the polemic between the Belgian sinologist Simon Leys (1935–2014) and the intellectuals from the Tel Quel group, who, according to Leys, were wickedly mesmerized by the utopian vision of the Cultural Revolution: "comment expliquer que tant d'éminents esprits se soient laissé abuser, manipuler quand d'autres, idéologues professionnels, adoraient Mao comme ils avaient adoré Staline?" (How come so many eminent

spirits have let themselves be abused and manipulated when others, professional ideologues, adored Mao just like they had adored Stalin?). Pierre Boncenne, *Le parapluie de Simon Leys* (Paris: Éditions Philippe Rey, 2015), 24.

9. Herzovich, *La desigualdad como tarea*, ii.

10. *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi: Los años felices* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2016); and *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi: Un día en la vida* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2017).

11. Victor Alba, “The Chinese in Latin America,” *China Quarterly* 5 (1961): 56.

12. I have analyzed these trips in “Intellectual Cartographies of the Cold War: Argentine Visitors to the People’s Republic of China, 1952–1958,” in *Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. Robert Tally (London: Routledge, 2016), 337–48.

13. Long-term visitors were known, according to Anne-Marie Brady, as “foreign experts, *waiguo zhuanjia* or, more generally, foreign friends, *waiguo pengyou*. In addition to their technical assistance, they had an important symbolic role, one of which they were very conscious. They were nominated as a mark of their special status differentiating them from diplomats and other foreigners in China. . . . The China-based friends worked as scientists, military advisers, propagandists, translators, teachers, medical personnel, researchers, and technicians. In the 1950s they were mostly from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and after 1960 their makeup was more diverse. Despite the economic and political changes of the post-Cultural Revolution era, foreign experts working in China continue to have a symbolic role.” Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners the People’s Republic* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 19.

14. For a comprehensive study of Brazilian visitors to the PRC, see Siwei Wang, “Transcontinental Revolutionary Imagination: Literary Translation between China and Brazil (1952–1964),” *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 6, no. 1 (2019): 70–98.

15. The Guoji Shudian opened strategic branches worldwide and supplied printed culture for free. The Venezuelan architect Victor Ochoa-Piccardo explains that thanks to the subsidies of the Chinese government, his father’s bookstore in Caracas, El Viento del Este, was a facade of a business meant to spread the Maoist creed. With the opening of China in the late 1970s, the Guoji Shudian started operating as a regular commercial firm, which forced Ochoa-Piccardo’s father to file bankruptcy: “He was devastated” (interview with Victor Ochoa-Piccardo, June 2017). Local distributors were instrumental in furthering this effort. According to William Ratliff, the Communist publisher Ediciones Pueblos Unidos from Uruguay listed over 125 books dealing with China in 1957.

16. William E. Ratliff, “Chinese Communist Cultural Diplomacy toward Latin America, 1949–1960,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 49, no. 1 (1969): 70.

17. Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 45.

18. Darlene Sadlier, *Americans All: The Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy during World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 147.

19. Yiwei Wang, "Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 259.

20. Jorge Joaquín Locane and María Montt Strabucchi, "Cultura china y Capricornio: Dos proyectos pioneros para el comercio simbólico (y material) entre América Latina y China," *Revista Izquierdas* 49 (2020): 2522.

21. "Estimado camarada," unpublished letter, c. 1956, Alberto Giudici Warschaver Archive, Buenos Aires.

22. Fina Warschaver, "Amistad y cultura," *Revista Cultura China* 1 (1954): 3.

23. Fina Warschaver, *Revista Cultura China* 2 (1955).

24. Adriana Petra, *Intellectuals and Communist Culture: Itineraries, Problems, and Debates in Post-War Argentina* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 6.

25. Elías Castelnuovo to Fina Warschaver, 1949, Alberto Giudici Warschaver Archive, Buenos Aires. Bracketed ellipses in the original.

26. Fina Warschaver to Gerónimo Arnedo, 1956, Alberto Giudici Warschaver Archive, Buenos Aires.

27. Rosemary Roberts and Li Li identify the Red Classics as the following novels: Wu Qiang, *Red Sun*; Yang Yiyan and Luo Guangbin, *Red Crag*; Liang Bin, *Genealogy of the Red Flag*; Liu Qing, *The Builders*; Yang Mo, *Song of Youth*; Zhou Libo, *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*; Du Pengcheng, *Protect Yan'an*; Qu Bo, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*; along a less fixed set of secondary works that included narratives such as Zhi Xia, *Railroad Guerillas*, and Zhou Erfu, *Morning in Shanghai*. Rosemary Roberts and Li Li, *The Making and Remaking of China's "Red Classics": Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017).

28. Liu Kang, "Maoism: Revolutionary Globalism for the Third World Revisited," *Comparative Literature Studies* 52, no. 1 (2015): 18.

29. Nicolai Volland, "Inventing a Proletarian Fiction for China: The Stalin Prize, Cultural Diplomacy, and the Creation of a Pan-Socialist Identity," in *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia*, ed. T. Vu and W. Wongsurawat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 94.

30. Adrián Celentano, "El maoísmo argentino entre 1963 y 1976: Libros, revistas y periódicos para una práctica política," *Políticas de la Memoria* 14 (2013/14): 151–65.

31. Amelia Aguado, "1956–1975: La consolidación del mercado interno," in *Editores y políticas editoriales en Argentina, 1880–2000*, ed. José Luis de Diego (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 129.

32. Gustavo Sorá, "El libro y la edición en Argentina: Libros para todos y modelo hispanoamericano," *Políticas de la Memoria* 10/11/12 (2009/11): 138.

33. Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 65.

34. Cheng Sheng, *Mi madre*, trans. Ernesto Ibarra, prologue by Paul Valery (Buenos Aires: Editorial Cauce, 1942).

35. Cheng Sheng, *Mi madre y yo a través de la revolución China*, trans. Ernesto Ibarra (Buenos Aires: Editorial Cauce, 1942).

36. David Der-wei Wang, introduction to *The Rice Sprout Song* by Eileen Chang (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), vii.

37. David Der-wei Wang, "Three Hungry Women," in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 60.
38. Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 2.
39. Eileen Chang, *La canción de arroz*, trans. Alfredo Weiss (Buenos Aires: Goyanarte, 1956), inside flap.
40. Álvaro Yunque, "Liminar," in *Poetas chinos vertidos del francés*, trans. Álvaro Yunque (Buenos Aires: Quetzal, 1958), 8.
41. Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León, "Prólogo," in *Poesía china*, trans. Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León (Buenos Aires: Compañía General Fabril Editora, 1960), 7.
42. Spivacow argued that books were a basic need, which should cost cheaper than a kilo of bread; see Judith Gociol, *Más libros para más: Colecciones del Centro Editor de América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Nacional, 200), 12.
43. Karl-Heinz Pohl, "Mao Zedong's Poetry: Form as Statement," in *Tyrants Writing Poetry: The Art of Language and Violence*, ed. Konstantin Kaminskij and Albrecht Koschorke (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017), 173.
44. Sarandy Cabrera, "Nota preliminar," in *Los 37 poemas de Mao Tsetung*, trans. J. E. Adom (Buenos Aires: Schapire, 1974), 21.
45. Mao Tun, "Nuevas realidades y nuevas tareas de los escritores chinos," *Cuadernos de Cultura* 16 (1954): 8.
46. Fina Warschaver, "Confrontaciones literarias para el conocimiento de China," *Cuadernos de Cultura* 43 (1959): 71.
47. Lu Xun, *Diario de un loco* (Buenos Aires: Lautaro, 1956), front flap.
48. Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman* was translated in Buenos Aires from the English by Julio Galer (translator too of Langston Hughes and Arthur Miller) from a 1954 Beijing Foreign Languages Press English edition. Fina Warschaver wrote the preface to the first edition and included the first chapter of *La verdadera historia de AQ*, translated by Estela Canto, in the first volume of *Cultura China*. The 1970 CEAL edition of *La verdadera historia de AQ* is a reprint of a 1962 edition from the Beijing Foreign Languages Press.
49. Richard King, *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966–76* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 6.
50. Bernardo Kordon, *600 millones y uno* (Buenos Aires: Leviatán, 1958), *China o la revolución para siempre* (Buenos Aires: Jorge Álvarez, 1969), *Reportaje a China: Una visión personal del país que conmueve al mundo* (Buenos Aires: Treinta Días, 1964), *Testigos de China* (Buenos Aires: Carlos Pérez Editor, 1968), and *Viaje nada secreto al país de los misterios: China extraña y clara* (Buenos Aires: Buschi, 1985).
51. Bernardo Kordon, "Estudio preliminar," in *El cuento chino: Li Fu-yen, Chen Ki-tsi y otros* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1981), viii.
52. Bernardo Kordon, "Diez milenios de escritura china," in *Así escriben los chinos: Desde la tradición oral hasta nuestros días* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Orion, 1976), 13.

53. Juan José Sebreli, *El tiempo de una vida* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana 2005), 234.

54. Up until the 1960s, trips to China were combined with tours of the USSR, so most visitors entered the country through northern border points in Mongolia after stopping in several cities in Western and Eastern Europe. With the Sino-Soviet split, the routes were diverted to Southeast Asia and had Hong Kong as the principal entry port to mainland China. The only Western airline that operated flights to China since 1966 was Air France. Central Intelligence Agency, *Intelligence Memorandum: Communist International Civil Air Activities in the Free World since 1965* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1968).

55. Interview with Jorge Lafforgue (Buenos Aires, September 15, 2015). I find Mariano López Seoane's metaphor of "excess baggage" remarkably apt to express the crucial role of the informal importer of cultural goods in forging a relation of cultural dependency that is by no means a subaltern one but is, because of its displacements and slips, the source of South American originality. Mariano López Seoane, "Exceso de equipaje: La cultura argentina y el encanto de lo importado" (Excess baggage: Argentine culture and the charm of imports) (PhD diss., New York University, 2010).

56. Jorge Lafforgue, "Kordon: Crónica de una amistad," in *Hipótesis y Discusiones* 31 (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2016), 23.

57. Gustavo Sorá, *Traducir el Brasil: Una antropología de la circulación internacional de las ideas* (Buenos Aires: Libros del Zorzal, 2003).

58. Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis and Religion in Times of Terror* (New York: Verso, 2012), 215.

59. Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America*, 216.

60. "y por lo otro, parece que no saldrá el diario de la China, Ricardo no lo quería publicar porque no llegó a revisarlo" (email message to author from Edgardo Dieleke, Piglia's friend and assistant, September 3, 2017).

61. Ricardo Piglia, "Un día perfecto," *Revista Ñ*, April 27, 2012, 5.

62. Sylvia Saitta, *Hacia la revolución: Viajeros argentinos de izquierda* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007).

63. Piglia, "Un día perfecto," 5.

64. Piglia, "Un día perfecto," 5.

65. Piglia, "Un día perfecto," 5.

66. Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America*, 199.

67. See Yu Lou, "El día que Piglia llegó a los lectores chinos," *Anfibia*, January 9, 2017, <http://www.revistaanfibia.com/ensayo/dia-piglia-llego-los-lectores-chinos/>

68. Piglia, "Un día perfecto," 5.

CHAPTER 4

1. The phrase was coined by the radio journalist Luis Elias Sojit on October 17, 1945, the day when trade unions and workers gathered in a massive demonstration at Plaza de Mayo to demand the liberation of Perón. Legend has

it that it was a shiny spring day, and Sojit exclaimed, “hoy es un día peronista!” signaling to the combination of brightness, optimism, and the working class (Juan Sasturain, “Sojit el meteorólogo,” *Página* 12, March 17, 2004). This calls for a longer discussion on the omnipresence of Peronist lingo in Argentine culture, where to this day even a staunch anti-Peronist will use the expression “día peronista” to refer to a sunny day.

2. The red characters 日月光 (*ri ming guang*: day/sun, bright, light) are a slightly modified version of the three last characters of the first line of Li Bai’s poem: 明月光 (*ming yue guang*: bright, moon, light). In a nod to the yin and yang, Santoro changes moon/night for sun/day.

3. Daniel Santoro, *Manual del niño peronista* (Buenos Aires: La Marca Editora, 2003).

4. Judith Gautier, *Le livre de jade* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre Editeur, 1867); and Franz Toussaint, *La flûte de jade: Poésies chinoises* (Paris: L’Édition d’Art Henri Piazza, 1920).

5. Pauline Yu, “Your Alabaster in this Porcelain: Judith Gautier’s ‘Le livre de jade,’” *PMLA* 122, no. 2 (2007): 465.

6. “Me deleitan la seda, el oro, el raso. / Gautier adoraba a las princesas chinas.” Rubén Darío, “Divagación,” in *Prosas Profanas, Obras Completas*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Mundo Latino, 1917–20), 29; “I am delighted by silk, gold, satin. / Gautier adored Chinese princesses” Rubén Darío, “Digression,” *Stories and Poems—Cuentos y poesías. A Dual-Language Book*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum (Mineola NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 97.

7. Joaquim F. Machado de Assis, *Falenas* (Rio de Janeiro: B.-L. Garnier, 1870).

8. Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires*, 191–92.

9. Paz, “Further Comments,” 47.

10. T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), 7.

11. Haroldo de Campos, “Translation as Creation and Criticism,” in *Novas: Selected Writings by Haroldo de Campos*, ed. Antonio Sergio Bessa and Odile Cisneros (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 316–17.

12. Paz, “Further Comments,” 49.

13. Borges, “Arthur Waley: *Monkey*,” 252.

14. Among their translations are Miguel Ángel Petrecca, *Un país mental. 100 poemas chinos contemporáneos* (Buenos Aires: Gog y Magog, 2010; Santiago de Chile: LOM, 2013); *Un país mental. 150 poemas chinos contemporáneos* (Buenos Aires: Gog y Magog, 2023); Fernando Pérez Villalón, *Escrito en el aire: Tres poetas clásicos chinos* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Tácitas, 2003); Guillermo Dañino, *Manantial de vino (poemas escogidos)* (Lima: Fondo Editorial, 1998; Madrid: Ediciones Hiperión, 2016); *La montaña vacía (poemas de Wang Wei)* (Lima: Fondo Editorial, 2004; Madrid, Ediciones Hiperión, 2004); *Bosque de pinceles (poemas de Tu Fu)* (Lima: Fondo Editorial, 2002; Madrid, Ediciones Hiperión, 2006). About Latin American translations of Asian poetry in general, see Álvaro Fernández Bravo “Traducción, tráfico y transcripción: Huellas de la lírica asiática en la poesía latinoamericana,” *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 87, no. 1 (2018): 39–66.

15. See Miguel Ángel Petrecca, “Algunas cuestiones en torno a las traducciones chinas de Juan Laurentino Ortiz,” *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 9, no. 3 (2020): 74–97; and Haroldo de Campos, “A retórica seca de um poeta fluvial,” *Folha de São Paulo*, September 14, 1997.

16. Let us briefly illustrate a Spanish-language translator’s dependency on the mediating language in the case of classical Chinese poetry. Following Weinberger’s exercise in *Nineteen Ways*, let us compare the Argentine poet Raúl A. Ruy’s two versions of Wang Wei’s “Deer Park.” The first one, “En el parque de los ciervos” from 1961, is an almost literal translation Soame Jenyns’s “The Deer Park,” in *A Further Selection from the Three Hundred Poems of the Tang Dynasty* (London: John Murray, 1944), 74. Ruy mimics the English syntax, choice of pronouns, and the uncanny botanical image of “blue lichens” to refer to what almost all translators render as “green moss/grass:”

Una colina vacía y nadie a la vista;
Solamente oigo el eco de las voces.
El oblicuo sol del atardecer
penetra en los tupidos bosques
Y brilla reflejado en los azules líquenes
(trans. Raúl A. Ruy, 1961)

An empty hill, and no one in sight
But I hear the echo of voices.
The slanting sun at evening penetrates the deep woods
And shines reflected on the blue lichens.
(trans. Soame Jenyns, 1944)

In a 1977 edition of the same anthology, Ruy uses an older English-language model. Judging by the references he cites in the foreword it is probably Witter Bynner’s “Deer-Park Hermitage” (*The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology Being Three Hundred Poems of the Tang Dynasty*, 618–906 [New York: Alfred Knopf, 1929], 189) that now operates as the mediating text. This can be detected not so much in the lexicon or syntax of Ruy’s version, but rather in the deliberate subjective imprint over the grammatically impersonal text (*I think, I hear, shines back to me*, translates Bynner). Ruy’s lines in this subsequent edition are fairly similar to his 1961 version, but the poem is now entitled “Desolación” (Desolation), conveying not only the ontological state of emptiness of the silent mountain but also the phenomenological anguish of the lyrical voice in front of a sublime landscape:

Una colina desierta
y nadie a la vista;
Sólo el eco de unas voces
llega a mis oídos.
El oblicuo sol del atardecer
penetra en los espesos bosques

Y se refleja en los verdes musgos.
(trans. Raúl A. Ruy, 1977)

There seems to be no one on the empty mountain . . .
And yet I think I hear a voice,
Where sunlight, entering a grove,
Shines back to me from the green moss.
(trans. W. Bynner and Kiang Kang-Hu, 1929).

Whereas the comparison of the two versions traces a sharp genealogy of indirect translation, it still offers little insight into the profuse poetic possibilities of Chinese verse, à la Pound.

17. Hilario Fernández Long renders these four layers in the Argentine poetry periodical *Diario de poesía*. A structural engineer, polyglot, and the founder of the Go Argentine Federation, Fernández Long's amateur translations of classical Chinese convey his scholarly pedagogy as well as his fascination with Chinese grammar. Hilario Fernández Long, "Lengua y poesía china: Poesía de la Dinastía Tang," *Diario de Poesía* 39 (1996): 32–33.

18. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 76.

19. Christopher Bush, *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

20. Bush, *Ideographic Modernism*, 3.

21. Bush, *Ideographic Modernism*, 3.

22. Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 5.

23. Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 1.

24. Bruno, *Surface*, 3.

25. Roland Barthes, "Variations sur l'écriture," in *Oeuvres complètes IV: 1972–1976*, ed. Eric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 93–94.

26. Campos, "Translation as Creation and Criticism," 315.

27. Andrea Bachner, *Beyond Sinology: Chinese Writing and the Scripts of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 74.

28. I follow Shu-mei Shih's transregional concept of the Sinophone (Shih, "Concept of the Sinophone") to refer to the Sinitic script as well as other writing systems within the borders of China (e.g., Tibetan) and languages that borrowed elements from its writing system (e.g., Japanese uses a combination of logographic kanjis, which are adopted Chinese characters, and the syllabic katakana and hiragana scripts).

29. "Nuestros sabios solamente han estudiado bien las escrituras antiguas: la ciencia de la escritura nunca ha recibido otro nombre que el de paleografía, descripción finita, minuciosa, de los jeroglíficos, de las letras griegas y latinas, instinto de los arqueólogos para descifrar antiguas escrituras desconocidas; pero, acerca de nuestra escritura moderna, nada: la paleografía se detiene en el siglo xvi, y, sin embargo, ¿cómo no pensar que de una "neografía" que no existe saldría toda una sociología histórica, toda una imagen de las relaciones que el

hombre clásico mantenía con su cuerpo, sus leyes, sus orígenes?” (Our sages have studied ancient writings only. The science of writing has never received any other name than paleography, a finite, meticulous description of hieroglyphs, Greek and Latin signs, by the instinct of archaeologists to decipher ancient writings. Yet, there is nothing about our modern writing: paleography stops in the sixteenth century. To what extent such non-existent “neography?” could produce an entire historical sociology depicting the total set of relationships that the classical human maintained with their body, their laws, their origins?). Roland Barthes, *Variaciones sobre la escritura* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2002), 93–94.

30. Rodolfo Mata, “José Juan Tablada: La escritura iluminada por la imagen,” in *José Juan Tablada: Vida, letra e imagen*, Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Coordinación de Publicaciones Digitales DGSCA Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003, www.tablada.unam.mx.

31. Tablada, “Divagaciones,” 128.

32. José Juan Tablada, *Un día: Poemas sintéticos* (Caracas: Imprenta Bolívar, 1919), *El jarro de flores* (New York: Escritores Sindicados, 1922), and *Li-Po y otros poemas* (Caracas: Imprenta Bolívar, 1920).

33. Ramón López Velarde, *Poesías, cartas, documentos e iconografía*, ed. Elena Molina Ortega (Mexico: Imprenta Universitaria, 1952), 77.

34. Pauline Yu, “Alienation Effects: Comparative Literature and the Chinese Tradition,” in *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice*, ed. Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 163.

35. Kathlyn Liscomb, “Li Bai Drinks with the Moon: The Cultural Afterlife of a Poetic Conceit and Related Lore,” *Artibus Asiae* 70, no. 2 (2010): 331.

36. See Adriana García de Aldridge, “Las fuentes chinas de José Juan Tablada,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 60, no. 2 (1983): 109–19; and Esther Hernández Palacios, “Antes de Tablada: Li-Po,” *Biblioteca de México* 6–7 (1991/92): 34–38.

37. Michele M. Pascucci, “José Juan Tablada y el ideograma kotobuki: Sus fuentes y su uso en ‘Li-Po,’” *Hispanic Review* 82, no. 1 (2014): 44.

38. Susan Kotz, ed., *Imperial Taste: Chinese Ceramics from the Percival David Foundation* (Los Angeles: Chronicle Books and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 45.

39. José Juan Tablada, *Li-Po y otros poemas* (Caracas: Imprenta Bolívar, 1920), 7; and José Juan Tablada, *The Experimental Poetry of José Juan Tablada: A Collection in Spanish and English*, trans. A. Scott Britton (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016), 97.

40. José Juan Tablada, *Al sol y bajo la luna* (Paris: Librería de la Vda. de Ch. Bouret, 1918), and *Hiroshigué: El pintor de la nieve y de la lluvia, de la noche y de la luna* (Mexico City: Monografías Japonesas, 1914).

41. Salvador Elizondo, “José Juan Tablada,” in *Escritos Mexicanos* (Mexico City: ISSSTE, 2000), 57–58.

42. Byron Ellsworth Hamann, “How Maya Hieroglyphs Got Their Name: Egypt, Mexico, and China in Western Grammatology since the Fifteenth Century,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 152, no. 1 (2008): 40.

43. José Juan Tablada, “Del corazón de China al riñón del cabaret,” *Excelsior* 5, no. 2 (1478), April 3, 1921, 21.

44. Tablada, “Del corazón de China,” 21.

45. Tsuen-Hsui Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 143.

46. Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the Changes: Recently Discovered Manuscripts of the Yi Jing (I Ching) and Related Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 8.

47. José Juan Tablada, “La gloria del bambú,” in *En el país del sol*, 62.

48. Haun Saussy, “Impressions de Chine; or, How to Translate from a Non-existent Original,” in Hayot, Saussy, and Yao, *Sinographies*, 64–85.

49. Saussy, “Impressions de Chine,” 72.

50. The fact that *jianzhi* (papercuts) illustrate the cover of the two volumes of the Argentine magazine *Cultura China*, discussed in chapter 3 (see fig. 3), further illustrates the Communist government’s emphasis on tradition, folklore, and popular art in the early years of the People’s Republic of China.

51. Throughout her chapter on Tablada, Laura Torres-Rodríguez provides a detailed contextualization of Tablada’s transpacific politics, since his years in Japan responded to Porfirio Díaz’s rule, while his later work, to the revolutionary government that actually overthrew Díaz.

52. José Juan Tablada, *La feria* (New York: F. Mayans, 1928); and Tablada, foreword to Best Maugard, *Método de dibujo*, i–xxvi.

53. Torres-Rodríguez, *Orientaciones transpacificas*, 75.

54. Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 74. Mignolo’s understanding of the book as a hegemonic object during the time of the conquest has been heavily criticized on the grounds that by that time the book was only starting to replace parchment, vellum scrolls, codices, and thus was only becoming the standard reading format of the following centuries. My point is based on this latter claim of the book as the predominant format of Western modernity at large, not specifically of the Spanish conquistadores’ habitus. I take Mignolo’s scene as the initial contact zone of European and Mesoamerican writing technologies to stress the Atlantic provenance of the book. For a more elaborate critique of Mignolo, see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Ties in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University 2001).

55. Severo Sarduy, “The Concrete Poetry Movement,” *The Courier* 12 (1986): 28.

56. Sarduy, “Concrete Poetry Movement,” 28.

57. Pedro Erber, *Breaching the Frame: The Rise of Contemporary Art in Brazil and Japan* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 135.

58. Haroldo de Campos, “A quadratura do círculo,” in *Arte no horizonte do provável* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1969), 121.

59. Haroldo de Campos, “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” in *Novas*, 218.

60. Haroldo de Campos, *Hagoromo de Zeami: O chame sutil* (São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 1993), *Crisantempo: No espaço curvo nasce um* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1980), and *Escrito sobre jade: Poesia clássica chinesa / Reimagi-*

nada por Haroldo de Campos a partir dos ideogramas originais, ed. Guilherme Mansur (Ouro Preto: Tipografia do Fundo, 1996).

61. Haroldo de Campos, “Anthropophagous Reason: Dialogue and Difference in Brazilian Culture,” in *Novas*, 157–77.

62. Octavio Paz, “Introducción,” in *Versiones y diversiones* (Mexico City: Joaquín Moritz, 1973), 9.

63. Campos, “Translation as Creation and Criticism,” 315.

64. According to Simon Mortley, “in 1927, the quest for an internationally and universally applicable alphabet led to the most perfect embodiment of the new rationalist, geometric, spirit—‘Futura,’ designed by Paul Renner at the Bauer Type Foundry in Germany. ‘Futura’ is still widely used, though it has since been joined by other sans serifs that also build on ‘grotesque’ and ‘Renaissance’ styles.” Simon Mortley, *Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 79.

65. Gonzalo Aguilar, *Poesia concreta brasileira: as vanguardas na encruzilhada modernista* (São Paulo: EdUSP, 2003), 223.

66. Take the example of *La montaña vacía*, an anthology of poetry by Wang Wei translated in 2004 by the Peruvian Beijing-resident Guillermo Dañino. Published by the renowned Spanish poetry press Hiperión, the bilingual edition exhibits a structural typographical error in the transcription of Chinese signs that runs through the four hundred pages of the book: the tone markers of the pinyin romanization change the font of the tonic letters, making them stand out visually and thus revealing that the typeface used by the Spanish publisher did not include Chinese tonal markers in its font family. Indeed, this evidences the rarity of Chinese bilingual publishing in Spanish, but it also speaks of the challenges of Chinese type design in general. Guillermo Dañino, *Wang Wei: La montaña vacía*, trans. Guillermo Dañino (Madrid: Hiperión, 2004).

67. Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 52.

68. Haroldo de Campos, *Escrito sobre jade: Poesia clássica chinesa / Reimaginada por Haroldo de Campos a partir dos ideogramas originais*, ed. Trajano Vieira, 2nd ed. (Cotia, São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial, 2009).

69. Octavio Paz’s *Blanco* (Mexico City: Joaquín Moritz, 1967) indeed made a case about fonts to multiply the possible readings of the juxtaposed colored columns of the remarkable mantra-like poem. But like Paz’s poetical artifacts *Discos visuales* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1968) and *Vrindaban* (Geneva, Switzerland: C. Givaudan, 1966), *Blanco* further explored the physical architecture of the poem by arranging the text in a single page folded vertically like the tantra scrolls that Paz had become familiar with in India. In a later reflection on the choice for such format, Paz wrote:

Mis modelos fueron los rollos de pintura oriental. No los rollos de pintura china—pienso sobre todo en los rollos de la época Sung, que al desenrollarse muestran un paisaje. La sensación que dan estos rollos es la de caminar mentalmente por un sendero entre montañas, riachuelos, etc. No: mis modelos fueron los rollos tántricos—de Nepal, Bengala y

el Tíbet. En estos rollos, a medida que se desenrollan, se despliega ante nuestros ojos una sucesión de figuras, pero estas imágenes son, más que nada, signos. En fin: en un rollo chino, contemplamos un paisaje; en el rollo nepalés o tibetano leemos un ritual. Bueno, yo lo que quise fue eso: una especie de ritual. (Paz, “Cuarenta años de escribir poesía,” in *Archivo Blanco*, ed. Enrico María Santí [Mexico City: Ediciones del Equilibrista / El Colegio Nacional, 1995], 118)

My models were Oriental painting scrolls. I am not referring to Chinese painting—particularly the Sung dynasty scrolls that reveal a landscape when unrolled. Those scrolls convey the feeling of a mental stroll through a trail in the mountains, among streams, etc. No: my models were Tantric scrolls—from Nepal, Bengal, and Tibet. As they unfold, these scrolls reveal a sequence of figures, which are, above all, signs. In sum: in a Chinese scroll, we witness a landscape; in the Nepalese or Tibetan, we read a ritual. So, this is what I aimed at: a kind of a ritual.

It is striking that despite their common scrutiny of logocentrism and their profound interest in Asian literatures, Paz and Haroldo do not mention the formal aspects of Asian poetry in their intense correspondence. Although they dedicate several letters to comment (or rather, to celebrate) Haroldo’s Portuguese translation of *Blanco* in 1981, their dialogue on Asian lyric is limited to scattered observations on Pound (see Haroldo de Campos, *Transblanco: En torno a Blanco de Octavio Paz*, 1986).

70. Eric Hayot, *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel Quel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 123.

71. Gustavo Guerrero, “El Oriente de Severo Sarduy,” in *El Oriente de Severo Sarduy* (Alcalá de Henares: Instituto Cervantes, 2008), 22.

72. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, “Conversación con Severo Sarduy,” *Revista de Occidente* 93 (1970): 320.

73. Severo Sarduy, “El Cristo de la rue Jacob,” in *Obra completa*, ed. Gustavo Guerrero and Francois Wahl (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1999), 78; and “Christ on the Rue Jacob,” trans. Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1987), 86.

74. Severo Sarduy, “Para recibir la aurora. La fabricación de los manuscritos sagrados en el Tíbet,” in *Obra completa*, 49.

75. Severo Sarduy, “Escrito sobre un cuerpo,” in *Obra completa*, 52; and *Written on a Body*, trans. Carol Maier (New York: Lumen Books, 1989), 41.

76. Première leçon d’acupuncture is included in the Severo Sarduy Collection (GC190), Graphic Arts Collection at Princeton University Library (see François Wahl, Françoise Gramet, and Richard Sieburth, “Biography of a Few Paintings,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 73, no. 3 [2012]: 443–62). However, during the production of this book, the copyright holders of Sarduy’s work claimed that this drawing is not his, and thus I have been unable to include a reproduction of it in these pages. I think it is.

77. Sarduy, “Escrito sobre un cuerpo,” 52; *Written on a Body*, 41.

78. Severo Sarduy, “Dessin et dessein / Inscription and Intention,” in *Jean Cortot*, by Jean Cortot (Paris: Maeght Éditeur, 1992), 5.

79. Sarduy, “Para recibir la aurora,” 34.

80. Severo Sarduy, “Cromoterapia,” in *Obra completa*, 36.

CHAPTER 5

1. *No intenso agora*, dir. João Moreira Salles (Rio de Janeiro: Videofilms 2017).

2. Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (2004): 3–22.

3. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

4. Irene Depetris Chauvin and Natalia Tacceta, *Afectos, Historia y Cultura Visual: Una aproximación indisciplinada* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2019), 10.

5. The periodization of the Cultural Revolution is as disputed as many other episodes in recent Chinese history. The official party version situates it between May 1966 and October 1976, a decade of “domestic turmoil and catastrophe” initiated by Mao Zedong, marked by the rise and fall of Lin Biao, and the arrest of Jiang Qing. The social conflict version coincides with this chronology but attributes the agency of the revolution to the antagonism of rebel and conservatives factions, rather than to top ruling elite. “Three-year” versions focus on the main thrust of the violence in 1966–69 directed against what the Rebel Red Guards called the “bureaucratic class” or the “red capitalist class.” See J. Zhang and J. D. Wright, *Violence, Periodization and Definition of the Cultural Revolution* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2018), 131–38. For the purposes of this chapter, I take the more capacious formulation that situates the Cultural Revolution roughly between 1966 and 1976.

6. Lynn Shapiro and Judy Kaplan, *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 3.

7. Juan Gabriel Vásquez, *Volver la vista atrás* (Bogotá: Penguin Random House 2020), 453; and *Retrospective*, trans. Anne McLean (New York: Riverhead Books, 2023), 414.

8. I only mention the work of Latin Americans “red diapers,” although there are works by individuals of many nationalities.

9. Jie Li, *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial of the Mao Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 5.

10. Li, *Utopian Ruins*, 266.

11. Bosteels, *Marx and Freud*, 21.

12. Graff-Zivin, *Anarchaeologies*, 37.

13. For the former, see Susana Draper, *1968 Mexico Constellations of Freedom and Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); and for the latter, Samuel Steinberg, *Photopoetics at Tlatelolco: Afterimages of Mexico 1968* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).

14. Beatriz Sarlo, *Tiempo pasado: Cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo, una discusión* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2005), 22.

15. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

16. Pankaj Mishra, "What Are the Cultural Revolution's Lessons for Our Current Moment?" *New Yorker*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/02/01/what-are-the-cultural-revolutions-lessons-for-our-current-moment>.

17. Florencia Garramuño, *Mundos en común: Ensayos sobre la inespecificidad en el arte* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015).

18. *Hotel de la amistad*, dir. Pablo Doudchitzky (Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires Produce, 2016), 68 min.

19. *Hotel de la amistad*.

20. *Hotel de la amistad*.

21. Martín Kohan. "La apariencia celebrada," *Punto de vista* 78 (2004): 24–30; Cecilia Macón, "Los Rubios o del trauma como presencia," *Punto de Vista* 80 (2004): 44–47; Martín Kohan. "Una crítica en general y una película en particular," *Punto de Vista* 80 (2004): 47–48.

22. Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

23. Martin Parr, *The Chinese Photobook: From the 1900s to the Present* (New York: Aperture, 2015), 217.

24. In September 1983, the Argentine visual artists Rodolfo Aguerreberry (1947–97), Julio Flores (1950–), and Guillermo Kexel (1953–) joined the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in an artistic action to reclaim the lives of the disappeared by the state. They cut thousands of life-sized silhouettes on cardboard paper and painted them black, inviting militants and passersby to join their collective workshop at Plaza de Mayo during the March of Resistance. The action lasted until midnight and quickly rippled into similar interventions across parks and public spaces throughout the country in the months that followed. In the midst of a hostile and repressive context, a temporary space of collective creation redefined the artistic and political practice in the struggle for human rights. See Ana Longoni and Gustavo Bruzzone. *El Siluetazo* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2008).

25. Laurence Coderre, "The Curator, the Investor, and the Dupe: Consumer Desire and Chinese Cultural Revolution Memorabilia," *Journal of Material Culture* 21, no. 4 (2016): 431.

26. Laurence Coderre, "Breaking Bad: Sabotaging the Production of the Hero in the Amateur Performance of Yangbanxi," in *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution: Music, Politics, and Cultural Continuities*, ed. Laikwan, Paul Clark, and Tsai Tsan-Huang (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 65.

27. Laikwan Pang, "Dialects as Untamable: How to Revolutionize Cantonese Opera?" in Pang, Clark, and Tsai, *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution*, 129.

28. Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 33.

29. Victor Ochoa-Piccardo, *Cartas de Jingzhai: Reminiscencias estudiantiles en China 1976–1981* (Singapore: Partridge Publishing, 2014), 175, 64.

30. Ochoa-Piccardo, *Cartas de Jingzhai*, 121, 311.

31. Ochoa-Piccardo, *Cartas de Jingzhai*, 232.

32. Ochoa-Piccardo, *Cartas de Jingzhai*, 182.

33. Ochoa-Piccardo, *Cartas de Jingzhai*, 21.

34. Ochoa-Piccardo, *Cartas de Jingzhai*, 80.
35. Ochoa-Piccardo, *Cartas de Jingzhai*, 28.
36. Vásquez, *Volver la vista atrás*, 173; Vásquez, *Retrospective*, 152.
37. Vásquez, *Volver la vista atrás*, 460; Vásquez, *Retrospective*, 421.
38. Ochoa-Piccardo, *Cartas de Jingzhai*, 22.
39. Vásquez, *Volver la vista atrás*, 122; Vásquez, *Retrospective*, 103.
40. Vásquez, *Volver la vista atrás*, 89; Vásquez, *Retrospective*, 72.
41. Vásquez, *Volver la vista atrás*, 276; Vásquez, *Retrospective*, 251.
42. Vásquez, *Volver la vista atrás*, 456; Vásquez, *Retrospective*, 417–18.
43. Vásquez, *Volver la vista atrás*, 457; Vásquez, *Retrospective*, 418.
44. Vásquez, *Volver la vista atrás*, 474–75; Vásquez, *Retrospective*, 435.
45. Héctor Hoyos, *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 16.
46. Paola Hernández, “Biografías escénicas: Mi vida después de Lola Arias,” *Latin American Theatre Review* 45, no. 1 (2011): 119.
47. Juan Gabriel Vásquez and Sergio Cabrera in Conversation,” HAY Festival, Cartagena, Colombia, January 30, 2021, <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-17364-juan-gabriel-vasquez-and-sergio-cabrera-in-conversation-with-claudia-morales.aspx>.
48. Marcelo Machado, dir., *A ponte de bambú* (São Paulo: MMTV, 2020).
49. Gonzalo Aguilar, *Más allá del pueblo. Imágenes, indicios y políticas del cine* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015), 92.
50. Matthew Rothwell, “Gonzalo in the Middle Kingdom: What Abimael Guzmán Tells Us in His Three Discussions of His Two Trips to China,” *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 9, no. 3 (2020): 115.
51. Lurgio Gavilán Sánchez, *Memorias de un soldado desconocido: Autobiografía y antropología de la violencia* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2012); and José Carlos Agüero, *Los rendidos: Sobre el don de perdonar* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2015); José Carlos Agüero, *The Surrendered: Reflections by a Son of Shining Path*, ed. Michael J. Lazzara and Charles F. Walker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).
52. Michael J. Lazzara and Charles F. Walker, editors’ introduction to José Carlos Agüero, *The Surrendered: Reflections by a Son of Shining Path* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 2.
53. Matthew D. Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
54. Mikael Wiström, dir., *Tempestad en los Andes* (Stockholm: Mänharen Film; Lima: Casablanca, 2014), 100 min.
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63. "Sendero en Canto Grande," *Caretas: Ilustración peruana*, July 30, 1991, 37.

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AFTERWORD

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2. Said, *Orientalism*, 20.

3. Rosario Hubert, "Rewriting Travel Literature: A Cosmopolitan Critique of Exoticism in Contemporary Latin American Fiction," in *Peripheral Transmodernities: South-South Intercultural Dialogues between the Luso-Hispanic World and "the Orient,"* ed. Ignacio López Calvo (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 42.

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