

**‘WRITING ABOUT CHINA’ LATIN AMERICAN TRAVELOGUES
DURING THE COLD WAR: BERNARDO KORDON’S ‘600
MILLONES Y UNO’ (1958), AND LUIS OYARZÚN’S ‘DIARIO DE
ORIENTE, UNIÓN SOVIÉTICA, CHINA E INDIA’ (1960)**

**ESCREVENDO SOBRE A CHINA - OS JORNAIS LATINO-
AMERICANOS DURANTE A GUERRA FRIA: “600 MILLONES Y
UNO” DE BERNARDO KORDON (1958), “DIÁRIO DE
ORIENTE, UNIÃO SOVIÉTICA, CHINA E ÍNDIA”, DE LUIS
OYARZÚN (1960)**

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Abstract: This paper explores how travelogues of Latin American travellers to the People’s Republic of China during the Cold War, provided knowledge which informed the Latin American political, economic and cultural discussions of the time. Through an analysis of the travel accounts of the Argentinean Bernardo Kordon’s *600 millones y uno* (1958), and the Chilean Luis Oyarzún’s *Diario de Oriente, Unión Soviética, China e India* (1960), the texts reveal the authors as explorers and interpreters of a model which they afterwards presented at home. Focusing on the complex identities which emerge in their texts, I argue that the travelogues, while essentialising China and its culture, aimed to provide a broader understanding beyond Orientalist views, suggesting a lenient understanding of the subject beyond fixed notions of alterity. Ultimately, I argue that these texts can be considered a successful outcome of the People’s Republic of China’s cultural diplomacy in the region.

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Keywords: China, Latin America, Cultural Diplomacy, Travel Writing, Orientalismo, alterity

Resumen: Este trabajo explora cómo los diarios de viaje publicados por viajeros latinoamericanos a la República Popular China durante la Guerra Fría buscaban proveer un insumo y así intervenir en las discusiones políticas, económicas y culturales de la América Latina de la época. A través de un análisis de dos diarios de viaje, del Argentino Bernardo Kordon *600 millones y uno* (1958) y del chileno Luis Oyarzún *Diario de Oriente: Unión Soviética, China e India* (1960), los textos revelan a los autores como exploradores e intérpretes de un modelo que presentaron al volver a sus países. Enfocándose en las identidades complejas que emergen en sus testimonios, aquí se argumenta que sus diarios de viaje, mientras entregaban una mirada esencialista sobre China y su cultura, simultáneamente buscaban proveer un mayor entendimiento del sujeto, yendo más allá de una noción fija de alteridad. Finalmente, aquí se muestra cómo los textos pueden ser considerados un resultado exitoso de la diplomacia cultural de la República Popular China en la región.

Palabras clave: China, América Latina, Diplomacia Cultural, Literatura de Viajes, Orientalismo, alteridad

Resumo: Este artigo investiga o modo como as crônicas de viagem, publicadas pelos viajantes à República Popular da China durante a Guerra Fria, buscavam prover conhecimento que influencia os discursos políticos, econômicos e culturais da América Latina daquela época. Através de uma análise de duas crônicas de viagem, *600 millones y uno* (1958) do argentino Bernardo Kordon e *Diario de Oriente, Unión Soviética, China e India* (1960) do chileno Luis Oyarzún, o artigo demonstra que estes dois textos revelam os seus autores serem descobridores e intérpretes de um modelo que depois apresentaram nos seus países de origem. Debruçando-se sobre as complexas identidades que emergem nos textos, pretende-se argumentar que embora as crônicas apresentem uma atitude essencial em relação à China e a cultura do país, buscavam apresentar, simultaneamente, um conhecimento mais amplo do mesmo sujeito, além das atitudes Orientalistas e as noções fixas da alteridade. Pretende-se argumentar, finalmente, que estes textos podem ser considerados como resultados bem-sucedidos da diplomacia cultural da parte da à República Popular da China na América Latina.

Palavras-chave: China, América Latina, Diplomacia Cultural, Literatura de Viagem, Orientalismo, alteridade

In the 1960s and 1970s some scholarly research was pursued regarding the relation between and the People's Republic of China (PRC, China), focusing on the PRC influence in Latin America, but not covering Latin American responses or agency in the relation (Halperin, 1967; C. Johnson, 1970; Tretiak, 1966). Lately, scholarship on Latin American-PRC relations have re-emerged, converging on Literature or related to new perspectives on the Cold War and of the Cold War in Latin America. Among other factors, this is due to newly opened archives, memoirs and revisionist research, and to the history of international relations owing to the rising economic exchange between both regions (Joseph & Spenser, 2008; Rothwell, 2013). However, travelogues continue to be understudied for the examination of the period.

This paper studies the written accounts of Latin American travellers to the PRC during the Cold War, and explores how we can understand and characterise this input which informed the Latin American political, economic and cultural discussions of the time. Through close reading of the travel accounts of the Argentinean Bernardo Kordon's *600 millones y uno* (1958), and the Chilean Luis Oyarzún's *Diario de Oriente, Unión Soviética, China e India* (1960), the texts reveal the authors as seeing themselves as explorers inspecting a political, economic and cultural model, as well as a country and a people, which they later present at home. As travelogues, they invite the reader to trust their authority as a kind of truth; the insistence on immediacy promises the reader direct apprehension not permitted by other kinds of texts, such as newspapers, offering a vivid sense of place, allowing the reader to move through Chinese locations and engage in conversation with its people (N. R. Clifford, 2001; Lisle, 2011; Youngs, 2013). The texts studied here can be considered as part of a sustained effort of the PRC of inviting Latin Americans to visit their country and building links previously absent, in order to gain "hearts and minds" (M. Johnson, 2013; Zheng, Liu, & Szonyi, 2010) and, ultimately, diplomatic recognition.

Because there were limited publications by Latin Americans on the PRC and China as a whole in Chile and Argentina, the travellers' first-hand experience presents them with credibility in which knowledge of the "other" is pursued with

the aim of having an informed voice that positions them within political and cultural discussions at home (Franco, 2002; Miller, 1999, p. 131; Rothwell, 2013). By considering assessment of the PRC and the revolution as the particular point of comparison, this article enables to observe how the traveller's images for presenting the PRC coincide and differ.

Drawing on studies which aim to go beyond Orientalism for the study of Latin America's relation with China (López-Calvo, 2014), it is argued that these texts expose complexities which hint towards a non-essentialist understanding of subject and community (Nancy, 2000). The difficulties the authors meet to explain what they perceive as "different" is overcome by the use of images which reflect their overlapping identities which suggest a defiance of fixed notions of alterity. The authors' appropriation of a "Western" identity inflects their writing with what Edward Said has described as Orientalism (Said, 2003), while their sense of belonging to Latin America opens them up to alternative perspectives. In this way, these texts contribute to our understanding of PRC-Latin American relations, shedding light on the cultural aspect of a relation during a period in which political motivations emerge as the main issue through which they engaged. Ultimately, I argue that these texts can be considered a successful outcome of the PRC's cultural diplomacy in the region.

China and Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s

The Chinese revolution contributed to the Left's ideological notion of living in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism; the unity of such project was interrupted by the Sino-soviet split and their debate regarding the methods and protagonists of a world revolutionary process (Cesarín, 2008; Lütthi, 2008; Riquelme, 2015). The PRC thus presented an alternative for the Latin American Left beyond the Soviet model up until the irruption of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Before 1970, China's presence in the region was restricted; the presence of the US in Latin America was substantial throughout the whole period, while the Soviet Union gradually influenced the region.

Throughout the Maoist period, the PRC focused on areas which had more direct significance for the country, either because it was geographically closer or showed more receptivity to Chinese policy overtures (Van Ness, 1970). Latin America held the lowest priority after Asia and Africa in the PRC's strategy, but by no

means had the PRC abandoned the possibility of a revolutionary policy in the region: it apparently felt that it had little to lose and all to gain (Van Ness, 1970). He Li claims that the principal objectives of the PRC in Latin America during the 1950s were to “weaken their ties with the United States, to gain greater influence on their governments, and ultimately to establish official relations with them” (Li, 1991, p. 14); and William Ratliff states that the PRC had no clear policy towards Latin America between 1949 and 1958 (Ratliff, 1969). A more direct relation will only start after the PRC established relations with Cuba in 1960, but then the events of the Sino-Soviet split also came into play. However, the PRC opened channels of communication by different means.

Throughout this period, the PRC used means of cultural diplomacy in its relations with the world and for its entry in Latin America (Hollander, 1981; Liu, 2013): for example, it established a Chinese-Latin American Friendship Association and promoted counterpart associations in Latin America. It also opened channels of communication through visits and exchanges or the publication of Chinese texts in Spanish. The PRC also published Chinese propaganda in Spanish, and held radio transmission in Spanish; by 1962 Xinhua press agency had established branch offices in Cuba, Chile, Brazil and Argentina (Adie, 1962, p. 207; Passin, 1963).

While limited, the PRC also exercised influence within communist parties and supported revolutionary struggles (Van Ness, 1970). By 1960, twenty-two Latin American communist parties had working relations with the Chinese Communist Party (Shixue, 2006, p. 66). By the end of the decade, almost every Latin American country had a Maoist Communist party, but only in Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Bolivia and Paraguay did they rival the pro-Soviet parties in size and influence (Nercesian, 2012; Rothwell, 2013, pp. 23–24). In this sense, an analysis of travelogues from Argentina and Chile share insight into the features which informed the reception of the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party in precisely these countries. Later, the Sino-Soviet Split altered the PRCs positioning in the international sphere, leading to ruptures in communist parties worldwide, including Latin America. The weakening of the radical characteristics of the Cultural Revolution towards the end of the 1960s coincided with the PRCs rapprochement with the US and its entry in the United Nations, once again altering its position worldwide.

Within this context, Argentinian travel to the PRC was regular since 1949 until Juan Carlos Onganía's coup in 1966; nevertheless, Maoist publications continued

circulating in Argentina until 1976 (Celentano, 2012). Juan Domingo Perón's populist "third way" tried to steer clear from between capitalism and socialism, and seemed interested in the PRC, but the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations ended with the military coup of 1955. The military called elections in 1958 (with complete proscription of the *peronistas*), which were won by Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962). Frondizi followed an independent line in foreign affairs, reopening economic exchange with the PRC, which had stopped after the coup, and maintaining good relations with the Kennedy government, and yet at the same time opposing the expulsion of Cuba from the Organization of American States. During Arturo Illia's government (1963-1966) economic interchange with the PRC grew but diplomatic relations continued with the Republic of China in Taiwán. After the coup of 1966, Onganía assumed as president taking a clear anti-communist stance in foreign relations: he favoured relations with the Republic of China and ended economic exchange with the PRC (Oviedo, 2010); Argentina's relations with China were normalized in 1972. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Chile held continuous exchange with the PRC while having diplomatic relations with the Republic of China. With Salvador Allende elected President in 1970, diplomatic relations with the PRC were established in 1971.

Visiting the PRC

The coming to power of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 attracted thousands of Latin Americans to the PRC, many of whom were interested in adapting aspects of Communist China's policies to the Latin American context (Devés & Melgar, 2005; Rothwell, 2013, p. 1; Zolov, 2014). Others, it can be argued, wanted to observe and bear witness to the Chinese Revolution in their home countries through the written word. Ratliff estimated in 1969 that about 1,500 Latin Americans visited the PRC between 1949 and 1960 (Ratliff, 1969, pp. 51–52), the majority of which were invited by the Chinese Government. As Tad Szulc, Latin American correspondent of *The New York Times*, wrote in 1963,

dozens of books, articles, and speeches almost uniformly praising China – or at least showing a grudging admiration for it – have been written by Latin American Congressmen, intellectuals, artists, and labour – and student – union members on their return from guided tours of the Chinese mainland (Szulc, 1963, p. 187).

These invitations were not for Communist Party members only, but the PRC was

selective in choosing people with a certain prestige in their own countries and in certain professional circles, possibly in an attempt to have a greater public impact. Because of this, writers, journalists, politicians, professors and students were normally invited. When back in their own countries, they would share their experiences through conferences, talks, articles and books. Regarding their publications, the historian Victor Alba affirmed in 1961, "there have been at least twenty such books published by Latin American trippers (...) None of them is critical in tone, nor even merely a dispassionate account" (Alba, 1961, p. 55; Ruilova, 1978, p. 98; Szulc, 1963, p. 187). However, as this paper aims to show, nuances did exist.

In his study regarding the main ways in which Maoist ideas were disseminated in Latin America, Matthew Rothwell explores how Latin Americans exercised agency in forging a Maoist identity and politics in a Latin American context, and how the Latin American intellectuals, activists and revolutionaries, tried to apply the concepts studied in China in Latin America (Rothwell, 2013). By studying "travel narratives, political forums, the distribution of propaganda produced in China and through party meetings" (Rothwell, 2013, pp. 1–3, 5–6), Rothwell shows how there was interest in the PRC regarding the showing of how a Third World country could break out of the dependent economic development paradigm, how revolutionary warfare could be reproduced in Latin America or the direct consideration of the PRC as model for economic policies and political reform. From this perspective, it can be suggested that the PRC's process provided input to the Latin American debates regarding economic development, such as those in which the United Nations Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Dependency Theory authors were participating in (Cesarín, 2008; Slipak, 2014, pp. 103–105). The published texts provided to contemporary knowledge of the PRC, their relevance lying "in the key role of personal experience and the communication of that experience to others in ways that circumvented mass media" (Rothwell, 2010, p. 188, 2013, pp. 8–9) or any other medium of knowledge of the PRC in the region. The distinctiveness of this 'counter discourse' emerges when contrasted against the publications of the local newspapers; for example, during the 1950s in Chile the press' coverage of news on China in *El Mercurio* (the right-winged liberal and biggest newspaper of the country at the time) mainly cited Western press agencies (Palma & Montt Strabucchi, 2011).

However, and in contrast to the study of Rothwell, this article focuses on travellers who transferred knowledge from the PRC to Latin America, but whose main aim was not to collaborate specifically in the transfer of Maoism in their own countries. In this sense, the assumption of their drive being revolutionary propaganda can be interrogated. The role they assume in their texts is “educative” presenting a “truth” which they have been witnesses to: they are evaluating what they see (Buzard, 1993). And while the travelogues studied here are not overtly critical in tone, close reading suggests that nuanced views are made available.

The particular point of comparison of the selected texts is given by their specific use of images to describe the PRC that allow for an assessment of both testimonies. Because the selected texts were published in different years, they are also subject to political-historical shifts such as the Cuban Revolution, or changes in the PRC. Within this particular reading, stereotyped and essentialist perspectives regarding China remain. However, the traveller’s aim, or the fact that their experience in China may show them some, if unexpected, points of encounter, challenge fixed notions of alterity. A comparative approach ultimately allows for nuanced perspectives to emerge.

The travellers and their texts: Bernardo Kordon and Luis Oyarzún

Published in Buenos Aires in 1958, Kordon’s testimony can be seen as part of a first group of Latin American travellers who present the PRC in Latin America. Bernardo Kordon (1915-2002) was a journalist, narrator and essayist, and was known as a traveller. He wrote several accounts of his trips to China, of which *600 millones y uno* is the first one. In this text, Kordon narrates his trip to China in 1957 in apparent chronological order. His book starts in Moscow, where he arrives before continuing his trip to China. The trip is described as long with many stops, passing through Leningrad, then Siberia, Ulan Bator and finally Beijing. His visit in China begins with meeting the Chilean artist José Venturelli, who appears as his guide in some passages of the book. He then describes visits to Beijing markets, Tian’anmen square, the Great Wall, the Temple of Heaven, a cloisonné cooperative and the Lama temple. His journey continues by train to Shanghai, now in company of his “amigo Li,” whose presence is not explained to the reader (probably a translator/guide). In Shanghai he visits the centre of the town and a village. He then visits Lu Xun’s museum and describes his visit to the Beijing Opera. He then goes back again to Shanghai, where Kordon meets a “capitalist,”

whose existence within the Communist model surprises him. His trip continues in Guangzhou where he visits schools, Changchun, where he visits industrial sites, and Mukden. He then continues his account with his impressions of Hangzhou. The book ends with a description of a parade in China, and a last dinner with Venturelli's family, before he leaves China.

Luis Oyarzún (1920-1972) studied Law and Philosophy and was a well-travelled writer, poet and teacher (Aránguiz Pinto, 2007). At the time of his trip to PRC, he was Dean of Arts at the *Universidad de Chile*. He travelled to China in 1960, the same year his *Diario de Oriente, Unión Soviética, China e India* was published in Santiago, by *Editorial Universitaria*.¹ Presented in chronological order, Oyarzún also boards a plane to Moscow, and arrives in Beijing in March of 1960. He visits the site of the Peking Man and attends a meeting with the leaders of the non-communist parties of China. His trip continues in Shanghai where he visits markets, a school, a textile and jade workshop, and a Catholic Church. He then goes to Hangzhou before returning to Beijing where he holds an interview with the Minister of Education, visits an ivory workshop, the Temple of Heaven, and is received by Zhou Enlai. He visits the Great Wall, the Ming tombs, and then continues travel to Luoyang where he visits local industries. He then travels to Wuhan, and visits the Academy of Fine Arts of Hubei; later going to Nanjing where he visits a people's commune. From Nanjing he goes to Wuxi, Shanghai and Guangzhou, where he visits another ivory workshop, before leaving China the last days of April of the same year. Oyarzún does not make explicit who travels with him, but in his text he mentions at least three people that are with him in the PRC: his friend Francisco Walker Linares with his wife María Angélica Errázuriz, probably the third person was Juan Gómez Millas, Rector of the *Universidad de Chile* (Chou, 2004, p. 342).

Both travelogues are first-hand travel accounts of male travellers and information regarding how the trip was organized and how or who paid for it, are not stated. Both travellers were probably invited by the Chinese Communist Party, as this was the main way of visiting the PRC at the time result of the country's "people-

¹ *Editorial Universitaria*, established in 1945, counted among its founders with another traveller to PRC during the period, Arturo Matte Alessandri, whose press notes in a Chilean newspaper were published in a book, together with extracts of letters to his mother from the PRC, in 2011 (Matte Alessandri, 2011).

to-people diplomacy;” the PRC would not only pay for the trip but also set the agenda once in the country (Hollander, 1981; Johansson, 2010). This can be presumed because of the similarities of the places visited, and the availability of translators and guides. Both travellers experience similar trips; and when cities differ, they normally are taken to the same type of places (such as the industrial companies in Changchun, for Kordon, and Luoyang, for Oyarzún). An independent trip to the PRC was almost impossible, due to the strict control over visits exerted by the Government; an exception is constituted by Ottocar Rosarios, an Argentinean businessman who travelled independently to the Soviet Union and the PRC in 1962 (Rosarios, 1965).

Due to their formats, both texts seem to describe the PRC and its processes for their home countries, for Latin America and eventually for all Spanish speaking countries or people. Sympathy, or at least not animosity, towards the Communist regime can be assumed from the texts, which would explain why the travellers were invited, why they would accept the invitation and why they would afterwards write about it. Of Kordon we know that he had links with the Communist Party and that he was the main organiser of trips to China from Argentina (Celentano, 2012; Restivo, 2015). While both travellers seem sympathetic towards the Chinese Revolution, Oyarzún’s account immediately presents a more distant and disengaged tone, which can be perceived throughout the whole text. Both authors seem to support the Chinese Communist party government but the main differences are in their assessment of a political process: while Kordon shows no questioning of the system, Oyarzún will appear critical in aspects regarding liberty and freedom of the artists and intellectuals, and regarding dogmatism, possibly result of their own political cultures and identities.

As soon as Kordon arrives in the PRC he continuously mentions all the positive things that the Popular Government has done for China. He recalls the material changes of “el casi increíble milagro de la Liberación” in which “se ha construido todo un eficiente sistema de mejora social y cultural” (Kordon, 1958, pp. 76–77). Material change is perceived as deeply intertwined with social and cultural changes, which were permitted by the coming to power of the Chinese Communist Party. Kordon approves of what he inspects.

Oyarzún shows sympathy towards the Communist regime and describes it as one of the biggest changes in History with the CCP as the central motor and with the

support of international communism, but he immediately questions what he sees. He suggests that a real change that has happened in China is the enhancement of "the people", who can now enter any place and feel possessors of what had once been forbidden them; "la libertad concreta ha crecido inmensamente, para la mayoría" (Oyarzún, 1960, pp. 43, 45, 110). But as appears in the above sentence, he acknowledges that changes have not reached everyone. His doubts also appear when he describes workshops as places where people were given the possibility of following their vocations as artisans, but immediately mentions that they are probably not the genius creators of handicrafts (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 47). While questioning Communism and criticizing Chinese dogmatism, he states the possibility of himself and not the Chinese, being in the wrong. He also allows the possibility of this Chinese dogmatism being temporary, as he considers that dogmatic political systems, though sometimes historically necessary, are essentially transitory, using as example how the Soviet Union has to give more personal liberties to its citizens. He insists on the importance of autonomy of the subject, which allows creativity and which he states will definitely come with a more triumphant and established Revolution, something he has not seen, until then, in the PRC.

In this sense, Oyarzún's account is permeated with admonition towards the regime. For example, after visiting the Academy of Fine Arts in Wuhan, where artists are expected to combine their artistic life with "sembrar acelgas" (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 91), he admits he could not live in a popular commune and spend three months a year doing manual work. He expresses his belief in the differences that are intrinsic to human beings, each one of them with the right to exist and express themselves (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 101). Likewise, he criticizes education in China as he states "todos conocen a Neruda, pero nadie conoce a Rimbaud ni a Hölderlin. ¿No es ello grotesco? Conocen lo que les conviene y les halaga" (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 102). This specific criticism can also be linked to a need of the "other" being corrected which I explore later. Oyarzún's criticism is not always explicit: for example, he presents his interviews and dialogues with Chinese officials in a direct way, with the Minister of Education and some news extracts from the newspapers that refer to the revolutionary changes in China, presenting transcriptions of the interviews and not including any comments (Oyarzún, 1960, pp. 41, 66–67). But it will be through comments in other parts of the texts where they are either further explained in an indirect way, by an ironic commentary in parenthesis in one of the transcribed interviews that Oyarzún distances from the Chinese Revolution, or when he questions what has been told to him.

From a different standpoint, Kordon presents his interviews with officials including the questions he poses; his writing appears as less ironic, reinforcing the idea that what has been told to him is the truth. Kordon's meetings appear as familiar and engage with those interviewed, and he states explicitly how surprised he is with the facts that they put forward. There is no questioning or doubting at all of what is told to him, and he constantly praises the revolution rhetorically: "Toda esta China apacible y tierna es una pasión que arde con el fuego contenido de su destino liberado" (Kordon, 1958, p. 144). He presents all figures, such as the material changes and the conditions of ethnic minorities in the PRC at the time, as fact.

Beyond their political preferences, both authors present traditional "Orientalist" perspectives of the PRC through the appropriation of a European identity and identification with the "West;" even while endorsing the Revolution, they cannot escape the use of stereotypes through overt "othering" and reference to the essentialist ideas of multitude, industriousness, marvellous, and difference.

Chinese people are presented in Kordon's and Oyarzún's accounts in terms such as "the Chinese," while Kordon mentions them as an "océano humano," a "pueblo de campesinos," "ancianos y niños a la vez" and as a "muchedumbre vestida de azul" (Kordon, 1958, pp. 42, 46, 47, 66, 161), and also states "de pronto siento que estoy en medio de un ejército de uniformes azules y soy testigo de la principal batalla que libra el pueblo chino para su liberación" (Kordon, 1958, p. 149). His endorsement of the revolution discloses generalisations and stereotyped views of the Chinese people. The "blue uniforms" will also be present in Oyarzún's descriptions of Chinese people, and he appears even more essentialist in his description than Kordon. He will refer to "los Chinos," "ellos," "todos pobres," "otra humanidad," "lo más extraño que haya visto nunca," "muchedumbre, que todo lo llena en las ciudades chinas" (Oyarzún, 1960, pp. 44, 45, 108). Soon after his arrival, he will mention "nubes de ciclistas," "multitudes uniformes, vestidas de mezclilla azul;" surprised with this "disciplina colectiva, inconcebible entre nosotros," and as "livianos y responsables como hormigas" (Oyarzún, 1960, pp. 39–40). And from then onwards, he will continuously refer to the Chinese as ants and refer to their capacity of working together which he sees not only as part of the Communist Revolution, but also as the adaptation of a collective body to the new conditions of the world. In contrast to this perceived collectivity and sameness, Oyarzún's importance regarding Western individuality emerges.

While Oyarzún sometimes uses an ironic tone, which allows the reader to not take everything stated in his text literally, his generalizations and stereotypical statements are still part of the published text. Expressions of multitude are presented describing the Chinese: “Todos los chinos,” “¡Que buenos son!” everybody enjoying themselves reaching Communism, “Todos están contentos;” through the use of everybody and all, China is seen as acting as a “whole.” Moreover, Oyarzún also mentions how he is followed by “clouds of children” that laugh at their expense, and describes them as “(...) pequeños rozagantes, confiados, diminutos mandarines que expresan la bondad del pueblo chino” (Oyarzún, 1960, pp. 45, 110). The image of children will not only be used for minors in the case of Oyarzún, but also for the Chinese themselves, making explicit a power imbalance and revealing the sameness he sees in the multitude, interrupted by hierarchical political organisation. His ironic utterances reveal the importance of personal liberty that the author thinks the PRC lacks. And though the irony is clear, the idea of the Chinese as “other” remains; he identifies himself with a European intellectuality.

In Kordon’s text, the process of “othering” gains in complexity and is not only related to an us/them division but also identifies Chinese “others.” Kordon finds “others” of the Chinese, where the Chinese appear in a position of power and added sophistication. For example, he mentions the existence of ethnic minorities, which he describes as picturesque and, when describing a Muslim restaurant, states that it is completely “ajena al refinamiento de la comida china” (Kordon, 1958, p. 42). In his description of the Lama Temple in Beijing, he presents the Tibetans as having benefitted from the Revolution, due to the peace it has brought to the nation and its temples (Kordon, 1958, p. 58).

The use of generalizations and stereotypes can also be seen in the use of industriousness, and unceasing smiles, to describe the Chinese, recalling naivety. Oyarzún describes the Chinese as “(...) todos pobres, muy pobres, con lo poco o nada que tienen, trabajando con frenesí, sonrientes” (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 44). He reinforces his introduction to the idea of hierarchy in China, where only the protagonist speaks and the others are “limited to listening and smiling” (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 69). At the people’s commune in Hangzhou eager women smile when the visitors arrive while offering them food (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 55).

Kordon also presents the Chinese as smiling and industrious, with the pride that has been given to them by the Revolution; “Con esa risa conmovedora del ritual

de la hospitalidad china” (Kordon, 1958, pp. 66, 82), as he describes how he is invited to share with poor people in Shanghai. His politically inflected utterances describe a China that has an essential identity, which allows the definition of China as a whole. But just as he displays essentialist and stereotypical views of China, he questions it: “¿Es característica china esta alegría que expresan los rostros que llenan esta callejuela?” (Kordon, 1958, p. 84). Here it is possible to see how the different ways of constructing images of the PRC is in constant interplay, as there is an explicit intent of taking distance from an essentialist approach.

However, the idea of “toda China” and the Chinese as marvellous and different, which can be considered a pattern of an essentialist and fixed East/West division, is clearly present in Kordon’s text as he states that “Lo más importante de este viaje a China es la radiante revelación de lo maravilloso” (Kordon, 1958, p. 97). Kordon tries to reveal a union with the Chinese, while he continues to use elements which ultimately establish difference: he engages with a reflection and encounter of his own self, but ultimately reveals an Oriental experience of magic and difference that happens in an Eastern location. At the same time, the idea of the “marvellous” can be linked to the “marvellous real” which had emerged in discussions about Latin American since the 1940s, used as a literary category for texts related to the abnormal, the supernatural, the impossible, but that were not considered part of the fantasy genre, as they do not present the magical as real, but as if reality was magical (Marcone, 1988, p. 3; Sánchez-Pardo, 2008). From this perspective, he seems to recur to the marvellous as a way of overcoming difference: even though he recalls the marvellous as a faraway one, Kordon states explicitly “lo maravilloso nos une” as he relates his experiences in Chinese theatre to the magical sensations of his infancy (Kordon, 1958, p. 97). And yet, in this utterance, not only does he exoticise China, but he simultaneously exoticises Latin America.

Difference was expected by Kordon, “un mundo distinto a nuestros hábitos,” but he is still surprised at the extent that difference reaches, “está visto que los chinos deben sorprendernos en todo momento y en cualquier situación” (Kordon, 1958, pp. 118, 121). Oyarzún’s presentation of difference is seen through a clear us/them perspective: “En Shanghai hemos despertado aún más curiosidad que en Pekín” (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 45). Kordon assimilates China to the East when “de pronto me dominan los perfumes del Oriente” (Kordon, 1958, p. 42), and he

immediately states why:

las embriagadoras especias y los colores sorprendentes del Asia me llenan hasta el alma porque los conozco. Encuentro el misterio de las especias y de las hierbas de los mercados afro-brasileños, y los colores mágicos de los tejidos bolivianos tendidos en la calle Sagárnaga en La Paz (Kordon, 1958, p. 42).

Therefore, it can be seen that while engaging with an East/West division, he immediately tries to present an alternative trying to break down the binary, either by reference to Latin America or by defying the idea of “wholeness” of the Chinese.

A ‘Western’ Perspective

Throughout the texts, the appropriation of a ‘Western’ identity by the travellers emerges as a regular feature. From this perspective, the impressions in the texts inform of an “Orientalist” perspective of the PRC, which relies on the appropriation of an identification with the “West.” Following Said, “Orientalism” is defined not only as Western ethnocentrism, but as use of a particular set of assumptions, linguistic and descriptive conventions designed to ensure Western control on the non-Western world (Said, 2003). In Orientalism, the Oriental is reduced to a stereotype, based on the notion that it is possible to define an essential nature in the other. And while it can be argued that these travellers are not trying to expand Western imperialism in China, they do use resources that can be considered as offered by an “Orientalist” perspective and that have been used with that purpose in a colonial European context.

Said’s *Orientalism* stimulated discussions in various scholarly fields: Said has been accused of ignoring class relations in the emergence of “Orientalism” and of inconsistency presenting it as a system of representations or misrepresentations (Aijaz Ahmad, 1992); of misappropriating Foucault by presenting no theory of resistance and offering no alternative to what it critiques (Young, 1990), which makes the book theoretically inconsistent (J. Clifford, 1988); of failing to see women as active participants in the power relation and ignoring gender position within the texts, and of emphasizing dominance and power over cultural interaction, among other (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 70). But this does not undermine the fact that power tries to determine representations accepted as “true,” that the

truthfulness is alleged through a position within a discourse, and that this emerged in a structure of imperial domination (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 75). By offering an explanatory system of the historical, political and cultural construction of “Otherness,” Orientalism has proven useful to a wide variety of analytical approaches and areas of study. From a flexible theoretical position, Said presents a strong case of “Orientalism” as a prejudicial mode of knowledge of the “other.” From this perspective, *Orientalism* offers a multi-sidedness which allows a continuous re-thinking of its concept and practices.

Although difficulties have been highlighted for the application of Said’s *Orientalism* to East Asia, especially as his analysis focuses on the “Near Orient,” it is undeniable that Western depictions of China have fallen in “Orientalist” frameworks or set of references and binaries (passivity/activity, illogic/rationality); further questions can be raised on the use of binaries for this historical period, where Cold War oppositions appeared regularly regarding the good/evil, capitalism/communism, among other (Dirlik, 1996). Following Arif Dirlik, “Orientalism” applies to the study of China considering it was constituent and product of “a Eurocentric conceptualization of the world,” which placed Europe at the centre and pinnacle of development, and ordered the globe in accordance to European criteria (Dirlik, 1996, p. 100). Another position is presented by Colin Mackerras who has argued that “Orientalist” views on China have appeared regularly in the Western-China relation, even though there have been many moments in which China has actually been seen or tried to be seen in its own terms (Mackerras, 1989, pp. 266–269).

There is also an ongoing discussion as to whether postcolonial perspectives, such as Said’s *Orientalism*, can be used for Latin America. Here, Peter Hulme’s vision is followed in that the term – postcolonialism – should be used in a way that must include it. Hulme argues that the field of postcolonial studies *needs* (his italics) to find a place for America, where postcolonial is referring to a *process* (his italics) of disengagement, which takes many forms and probably is inescapable of all worlds that have been marked by colonialism (which for America would have started in 1492). Therefore, “postcolonial,” assumed as a descriptive term, and not as describing a condition which assumes that a formal colonial status has been left behind or that its effects can be detached (Fiddian, 2000; Hulme, 1995, p. 123), allows for the use of Said’s *Orientalism* and its critiques in Latin America.

With regards to this, Julia Kushigian has argued that Said’s *Orientalism* cannot be

applied directly to the Hispanic Literary Tradition, as Hispanic Orientalism is not built by binary oppositions but committed to opening a dialogue and exchange with the East, an infinite blending of oppositions where alterity is not the prominent image (Kushigian, 1991a, p. 3). Following Kushigian, Araceli Tinajero argues that for modernism in the Hispano-American context the same can be observed, as the Orient is not related to an imperialist hegemony from Latin America but that, on the contrary, the Orient was gradually forming an imaginary East through a syncretic, eclectic and own literature. Taking distance from Said, Tinajero argues that Latin American modernists' perspectives on Asia are processes of self-identification with other "Europeans" or "Orientals," in which the "Oriental" is not seen as marginal and the "European" is not seen as superior. Thus, the modernist author made evident that there were more variants to his or her positioning, altering the rigid relation set by binaries (Tinajero, 2003, pp. 18, 20, 23–24).

Even though a European discourse can be considered hermetic in its relation to the Orient, as Said states, Latin American travellers to the PRC do appropriate binary oppositions and alterity is a predominant image, while at the same time committing to a dialogue and exchange with the East. And yet the notion of superiority can be attributed to any traveller of the period, and beyond (Ahmed, 2000), not only responding to its identification with "Europe," as adventure abroad was a luxury not available to everyone (Cantú, 2008, p. 5). This, however, does not negate the possibility for the travellers of searching for alternative ways in which to relate to the "other" (Bhabha, 1994; Easthope, 1998). Considering instability to be intrinsic to identity, the travelogues of Latin American travellers to the PRC can be usefully described within a hermetic and closed "Orientalist" perspective on China, and yet in search of variants, informed by their ideological affiliations.

In the texts, the properties attributed to the other, while "othering" the Chinese, appear as resources to explain at home what has been seen in the PRC. Engaging with existing critiques of "Orientalism" and its use for Latin America (Camayd-Freixas, 2013; Kushigian, 1991b; López-Calvo, 2008; Morán, 2005, pp. 383–407; Ramírez E., 2010; Tinajero, 2006, pp. 146–150), perspectives of postcolonialism on the power/knowledge relation and hegemonic systems of knowledge shed light in order to understand the process of "othering" by the appropriation of a European based identity, regarding the "East" as "inferior," or in need of "corrective study"

(Said, 2003, p. 41). European perspectives on the “Orient” provide the travellers with a language and a perspective, where the travellers’ identities engaged in a European/Western standpoint reflect how the PRC is or should be perceived.

From this perspective, an interesting concept to consider is “coloniality,” “a term that encompasses the transhistoric expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects in contemporary times”, and that is intrinsically related to modernity in the American colonies since 1492 (Moraña, Dussel, & Jáuregui, 2008, p. 2). “Coloniality” is an analytical category constitutive and within the logic of modernity. In general terms it argues that modernity, as a modern world-system and worldwide phenomenon, is based on a logic based on capitalism and Eurocentric ideas; it configures itself with the conquest of America and the establishment of ideas of race and capitalism (Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000). “Coloniality” embraces an idea of modernity mediated by the logic of colonialism, where colonialism is considered as the military or legal annexing of a territory by an imperial power, and “coloniality” is related to the cultural rationale of colonial heritage which persist and might multiply after colonialism is over.

Engaging with Said, Castro-Gómez states that “the geopolitical nexus between knowledge and power which created the East is the same which has sustained the Western cultural, economic, and political hegemony over the rest of the world since the Enlightenment” (Castro-Gómez, 2008, p. 268). Following this line of analysis, in the 20th century, the international hegemony of the United States would have reformulated Latin America’s colonial condition, which materialized in military and political interventions. From this perspective, when the travel accounts seem to consider the PRC as a model, they may appear collaborating to a critique of colonialism, while posing the Chinese revolution as a scenario of resistance to Eurocentric systems of hierarchies, knowledge and culture (Moraña et al., 2008, pp. 9, 12). While giving sense to their own experience of travel from their own history, past and context, the travellers reproduce a European discourse on the East, and at the same time try to find alternative ways on how to relate to the “other”.

In both travelogues, differences between a Western self and an “other” appear continuously. Oyarzún present the Chinese in opposition to “nosotros Occidentales:” it is the “other” that has “esta serena armonía, esta falta de pasión exasperada que conduce en la arquitectura y la pintura a un refinamiento que a nosotros,

occidentales, nos cansa al poco tiempo por su perfecta uniformidad" (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 56),² as he finds it difficult to engage with a "Chinese aesthetic." And that "other" has not been changed by the Revolution, what makes the Chinese the "other" is given by something that is inherent to them, an ultimate "other" for the author: "es mucho todavía lo que en China sigue siendo específica e inconfundiblemente chino" (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 56).

The process of "othering" can also be explored by the authors' mention of interpreters in the texts. The mediation process which allows these travel accounts to be written necessarily needs interpreters, as neither author knew the language; interpreters were fundamental for the feasibility and execution of the trip itself, but are only mentioned on limited occasions by both authors. In the case of Kordon, he speaks of interpreters four times in his text, and only towards the end of his book does he make explicit that he has been accompanied by different translators during the whole trip. In the case of Oyarzún, interpreters will only be mentioned when something does not go smoothly. For example, when in Hangzhou, they have to change interpreters during a conversation, as the interpreter, originally from Tientsin, is not able to understand (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 55). He also states:

Liu, nuestro joven intérprete, inteligente alumno del Instituto de Lenguas Extranjeras de Pekín, que habla perfectamente el castellano y ha leído mucho de autores de lengua española, no sabía, hasta ayer, Viernes Santo, día en que yo se lo dije, que Cristo murió crucificado (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 96).

By valorising non-linguistic knowledge, the author can be seen as concealing his lack of knowledge of the language while at the same time "bringing light to" the Chinese, who are seen as lacking "general knowledge" and in need of being corrected; as can also be seen in his criticism on how the Chinese have no knowledge of Rimbaud and Hölderlin, mentioned above. The relation that both authors establish with the interpreters in the texts aims toward having an informed voice that positions them within political and cultural discussions at home through knowledge of the "other." first-hand testimony is emphasized, and the interpreter is in part silenced. This silence can be seen engaging with Michel Foucault's notion of "discourse," which briefly stated holds that discourses exist within a

²If Latin America is actually 'Western,' and how this discussion plays out in Latin America, is beyond the scope of this paper.

complex set of discursive and institutional relationships, defined as much by discontinuities as by unified mechanisms, by what is said and by what is silenced (Foucault, 1972, 1998). The images assemble a discourse of the PRC: the silencing of the interpreters strengthens the travellers' knowledgeable voice and value of their testimony, legitimizing the use of "Orientalist" resources. Oyarzún continues to use "Orientalist" resources even when he wants to take distance from a traditional European perspective: he explicitly differentiates himself from the "capitalistas ingleses" but criticizes that them (the English) "no apreciaron más a un chino que a una hormiga" (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 71).

Dependency on European sources, lack of originality, and a marginal position within larger cultural production, are characteristics that Hernán Taboada argues Latin American travellers to the East between 1786 and 1920 used. Borrowing European categorizations and creating a "peripheric orientalism," these travellers identified themselves with a "cultured Europe," and as Christian and Western (Taboada, 1998, pp. 287, 300). In these travelogues, the Chinese are represented by "contained and represented by dominating frameworks," in which the author, in its European appropriation, is in "a position of strength" (Said, 2003, p. 40). The authors might not intend to exoticise the China they are seeing, but it is the medium they use to explain to the local reader what they see, giving power to their version. In this respect, Said's *Orientalism* provides the authors with a mean to express what they see in the PRC: their direct contact, experience and acquired knowledge of the "other" allows them to describe the "other," assuming a pedagogical role. They have been to the PRC: they are now an informed voice which positions them within the political and cultural discussions at home.

A Latin American Identity

However, the travellers' Orientalism must be problematized, as their reflections regarding a Latin American identity is deployed in such ways that it seems to intervene within an East/West binary. Undeniably, a Latin American identity is far from generating consensus. The idea of a "una Latinoamérica mestiza" or a post-racial Latin America can still be qualified as a myth (Figueroa & Saldívar, 2015); while the use of dualisms to define the "other" within Latin American binaries of indigenous/European and its backward/modern correlation (Miller, 1999, p. 172) is also present in the region. Vertical constructions of otherness exist within Latin American and in Latin American travellers to China, and is disclosed throughout

the travelogues, indeed by the possibility of travel (Kaplan, 1996). However, the equation of knowledge/power of the "other" as control over the "other" present in "Orientalism" is here disputed assuming that the power imbalance does not imply an idea of control of the other, but of control of knowledge on the other for "home." In this article, a Latin American identity is recalled as a functional element, which reveals the possibility of disruption of a dualist division of the world. In this sense, Latin American identity as observed here as trying to break down an East/West binary while bearing in mind dualisms regarding the position of the travellers at home.

In both texts, the travellers' Latin American identity may be found in the references to Latin American experiences and locations, and/or by the attempts to break down the East/West binary. And yet it might demonstrate the difficulty that translating the Chinese experience poses: the only way the author finds to explain it is mediating it through familiar places and experiences. In this way, a Latin American identity is evoked in such a way that it might reinstate precisely what it means to defy.

Kordon processes the foreign within categories of the familiar for a Latin American reader on two different levels: a return to the idea of Latin America as a whole, and a to different parts or countries of the region. It is interesting that he does not refer exclusively to Argentinean places, but uses examples from all Latin America and continuously uses the first person plural "we" without further explanation as to who the "we" might be. Although it can be understood that the "we" stands in for "nosotros los latinoamericanos" (Kordon, 1958, p. 151), dismissing with that statement internal differences and distributions of power, it discloses a secure notion of a Latin American identity, engaging with discourses of a Latin American identity available at the time (Hodara, 2015; Larraín, 1997).

In the case of Kordon's considerations of Latin America as a whole, many of his comparisons are related to traditions, such as how they dry corn in China and Latin America, or to geographical locations: "En el corazón populoso de este lejano Shanghai, me siento como en el corazón desolado de mi América del Sur" (Kordon, 1958, pp. 49, 83, 131). He presents the similarity of locations as an expression that all men in the world are brothers, which, by reference of a Latin American location, is also challenging an East/West binary. He also mentions specific Latin American places and traditions, trying to explain the unknown through familiar references:

the geography of Manchuria reminds him of the “pampa Argentina;” the train to Shanghai evokes the trains that “jadean días y noches para subir el altiplano boliviano;” and China’s prehistory clay pots are “tan parecidas a nuestra cultura diaguita” (Kordon, 1958, pp. 61, 62, 78). He even mentions the physical similarity of Lu Xun with Chilean President Pedro Aguirre Cerda, and states that his face resembles “un rostro criollo, que expresa la bondad de un hombre y la dureza de su vida” (Kordon, 1958, p. 92).

Kordon also expresses a certain connection with the places he sees, reaffirming an identity that is related to Latin America: “tengo la revelación de que otras veces he vivido un momento igual y en lugares parecidos: en un rancho pampeano, o en los desiertos del norte chileno, o en el altiplano boliviano” (Kordon, 1958, p. 83). Kordon makes use of an East/West binary only to distance himself from the West as he mentions “la civilizadora Europa” and “los colonialistas” as “others” to him (Kordon, 1958, p. 70). When mentioning the existence of signs in Chinese parks that did not allow the entrance of “Chinese or dogs” before the Revolution, he states that it escapes his understanding possibly due to the fact that he does not belong to any civilizing power (Kordon, 1958, pp. 74, 75).

On the other hand, Oyarzún does not often refer to a Latin American identity or use a Latin American “we,” and when he does so it is mainly to explain what he sees in China, such as the felling of trees, as analogous to what he has seen in Chile (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 38). A moment when Oyarzún refers to Chile positively as compared to China is when he mentions the “insuperablemente feas” Chinese cities, and then goes on to say that it allows him to be reconciled with Santiago. But this reinforces an essentialist stance, as he then explains that the ugliness cannot only be the fault of the imperialists, but that it must also be associated to some “en algo jugaría una cierta aridez convencional del alma china” (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 93). There is an ultimate differentiation from the “other” which, while regarding the soul, is presented as unchangeable and unsurmountable.

Oyarzún will only refer to himself as Latin American in his account of the interview held with Zhou Enlai where the Chinese official, he describes,

Fue muy preciso en abordar el único tema que podía interesarle frente a nosotros: la dependencia de la América Latina en relación con los EE.UU., el significado continental de la revolución cubana y la política americana frente a la China

comunista y a Chiang-Kai-Shek (Oyarzún, 1960, pp. 67, 68).

He positions himself as a Latin American “we:” “no pueden comprender que nosotros no la compartamos” the aversion against the United States, and that that is made transparent in the “actitudes chinas hacia nosotros, en nuestra condición de latinoamericanos” (Oyarzún, 1960, p. 68). Even though Oyarzún engages socio-politically with the rejection of imperialism, he still does not share the aversion that the Chinese express regarding the US. While at the time the presence of the United States in Latin America is growing, Oyarzún assumes a sort of breadth of vision which allows him to differentiate the country from its imperialism and presence in Latin America. Not necessarily approving the presence of the United States in Latin America, Oyarzún rejects the dogmatism that the Chinese stance takes.

A clear reference to Latin America can be condensed in Kordon’s following quote: “nuestra América morena es un gran camino para penetrar en el difícil mundo de lo maravilloso” (Kordon, 1958, p. 40), which relates to the previous description of the PRC as “magical,” and to the way Kordon rather vaguely and rhetorically sees the future of the relation between the PRC and Latin America. The difference between them is overcome by a shared “marvelousness,” engaging with the “marvellous real” in Latin America at the time. The use of “marvellous” is not only reflecting an identity, but, as the stereotyping process (Bhabha, 1994), it also contributes to the constitution of the “marvellous” identity in Latin America.

Final thoughts

The images of the PRC in these two texts sheds light to a Cold War context in Latin America revealing of the nuanced positioning which however accepts both travel to the PRC and publication of their travel accounts. From this perspective, both authors seem contribute to an alternative discourse on the Communist Revolution in China by silencing any criticism, in the case of Kordon, or presenting criticism while not denouncing the process as a whole, in the case of Oyarzún. In this respect, Szulc’s text of 1963 elucidates on the role of these travellers within a Cold War context,

Though some of this appeal [of the PRC in Latin America] may be traced to the fact that China’s antipodal exoticism in itself is intriguing to Latin Americans,

Chinese influence ranges well beyond the realm of curiosity and novelty. Indeed, it may have highly significant implications for the political future of the Hemisphere (Szulc, 1963, p. 187).

Szulc makes evident a layering between the “exoticism” of China, combined with the political attraction that the Revolution held (Holmes, 2008). He also expresses that there is a “feeling of identification” of Latin Americans with the PRC, based on its problems and aspirations. Simultaneously, he considers the attraction to be to the “revolutionary image”, where considerations of ideology, political and personal liberties seem subordinated to the central interests of Beijing, with the travellers vociferously defending freedom and democracy at home, while “unprotestingly accept[ing] the fact of Communism in China” (Szulc, 1963, p. 187). What our reading reveals is that Kordon openly goes along with the “revolutionary image” and his considerations of ideology, political and personal liberties can be described along Szulc’s perspective. But Oyarzún challenges Szulc’s view, as he criticizes and questions Chinese dogmatism and the limitations he sees in the PRC. The binarial perspective which features in Szulc’s statement is undermined by the more complex views which emerge, if dissimilar, from Kordon and Oyarzún’s text. In Latin America, choices are unveiled as beyond binaries.

While sympathy or curiosity towards the Maoist communist regime will encourage the traveller to a trip to the PRC, or accepting an invitation, and later, or during the trip, will inspire the publication of a written testimony, this does not necessarily imply endorsement of the Chinese revolutionary process. While the mentioning of positive material changes, enhancement of the revolution and of the people within the Revolution, can be seen as constituting a socio-political identification with the Chinese project; this is not necessarily the case if we consider the trip as a way of acquiring cultural capital. Following Nicola Miller, “In a region where the possibilities for acquiring cultural capital have been relatively restricted, participation in the discourse of *lo nacional-popular* became an essential, indeed often overriding, legitimating device” for Spanish American intellectuals (Miller, 1999, p. 131). In other words, knowledge of the Chinese project can also be seen as a way of intervening in local debates.

From this perspective, these texts can be considered a successful outcome of the PRCs efforts in the region as they provide input to discussions on China produced in the region and from first-hand experience. On the other hand, it may silence

aspects that would have been otherwise questioned. For example, that even though they knew they were on a guided tour, taken to see what others had chosen for them to see, they do not stop at this point, and silence is also present regarding the possibility of reproducing the Chinese Revolution project at home. Regarding the latter, the Cuban Revolution had already occurred altering the Latin American context and offering another model of revolution. Moreover, these specific travelogues posit the Chinese as “other,” retaining dualistic frameworks and thus limiting a possible applicability of the model at home.

While Kordon stresses to present the PRC in the light of Latin American sameness, ultimately both texts concur in the use of “Orientalist” perspectives; and yet their recurrence to a Latin American spirit suggests a lenient breach of fixed alterities. Is there something to be made of the complicity of both authors with “Orientalism”? Maybe it is a strategy to communicate with a broader public which expects to read about an “exotic and millenary China” they can relate to, and in this way, contribute to the dissemination of knowledge on China in Latin America.

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