


The present of China is the future of Latin America: South American leftists and the invention of an imagined community with China (1950-1974)*

El presente de China es el futuro de América Latina: las izquierdas sudamericanas y la invención de una comunidad imaginada con China (1950-1974)

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Abstract: The article delves into the portrayal of China in South American leftist publications between 1950 and 1974, following China's post-revolution period. It explores the travelogues of Latin American visitors to China, focusing on the parallels established by the authors between those two realities. Overcoming prevalent orientalist stereotypes, these texts sought to construct a

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bond between the regions. Drawing on Koselleck's notion of horizon of expectation, I propose the existence of a shift in representing the East post-World War II that contributed to the creation of narratives aligning Latin America and an idealized East. After that, I outline the intellectual operation that made possible the invention of a shared past and a common future between China and Latin America based on different leftist theoretical repertoires available at that moment.

Keywords: lefts; China; Latin America; cold war; travelogues.

Resumen: El artículo analiza la representación de China en las publicaciones de las izquierdas sudamericanas entre 1950 y 1974, tras el periodo posrevolucionario en China. Por medio de relatos de viaje exploro las experiencias de visitantes latinoamericanos en China, con especial enfoque en los paralelos establecidos por los autores entre las dos realidades. Superando estereotipos orientalistas prevalentes, estos textos buscaban construir un vínculo entre las dos regiones. Basándome en el concepto de horizonte de expectativas de Koselleck, propongo la existencia de un cambio en la representación del Oriente posterior a la segunda guerra mundial que contribuiría para la elaboración de narrativas que alineaban a América Latina y un Oriente idealizado. Después, describo la operación intelectual que posibilitó la invención de un pasado compartido y un futuro común entre China y América Latina, basada en diferentes repertorios teóricos disponibles en ese momento.

Palabras clave: izquierdas; China; América Latina; guerra fría; relatos de viaje.

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INTRODUCTION: CHINA AND THE FUTURE OF LATIN AMERICA

There is an immense voice which goes from China to Cuba, which goes from Cuba to China; Latin America understands it, it is its destiny, it understands it as its own.

Pablo de Rokha, *Cuba desde China*, 2020, p. 88.

On December 24, 1953, the Argentinian communist poet Raúl González Tuñón arrived in Beijing for the first time. Tuñón's voyage began months earlier when he traveled through the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland as a member of the Argentinian Peace Movement. Later, along with other Latin Americans, he received an invitation to visit the People's Republic of China. He was welcomed by the Chilean couple, Delia and José Venturelli, who were residents in the capital, and toured the country intensively for about a month.

The visit was part of an initiative of the Chinese government to overcome the isolation imposed by Western powers after 1949 and to disseminate a positive image of the revolutionary process. Between 1950 and 1959, almost 1200 individuals from 19 Latin American nations visited China; and only in 1959-1960, during commemorations of ten years of the victory of the revolution, up to 1000 men and women traveled to Beijing, mostly non-communists (Ratliff, 1972, p. 859; Shicheng, 2006, p. 103). These visits were generally organized by international Communist organizations and by local Communist parties and organizations with Chinese support. The conditions of the travel depended on the context of each country; while many could freely visit China without major repercussions, others had to do it in secret to avoid repression back home.¹

¹ According to Wladimir Pomar (2015), son of the communist Pedro Pomar, the Brazilian military junta had an agreement with the CIA to receive photographs of the visas of Brazilian citizens that travelled to Pakistan, one of the known routes to China (p. 290). In Montevideo Vicente Rovetta's bookstore –known for publishing Chinese material– was shot and, later, bombed by a right-wing death squad. During his exile in Buenos Aires, he was constantly harassed by the police and had his name put on a "death list" by the *Argentine Anticommunist Alliance* (Rovetta Dubinsky, 2020, pp. 31, 33).

The travelers followed a meticulously planned program, and even if they sought means to escape the guide's oversight, it is certain that the language barrier, the use of official translators, and the existence of a fixed itinerary or script ended up conditioning what could be seen and said. However, the conclusions drawn varied with each author.² This people-to-people diplomacy aimed at militants of Communist Parties around the globe, as well as workers and union representatives and progressive intellectuals who shared sympathy for the cause. For the government, it was a way to attract supporters, advertise the Revolution's successes, and later contend with the Soviets for hegemony over the Communist world (Lovell, 2015).

For militants, the trip was a way to experience a part of daily life under socialism and witness what they scarcely knew before, since most of them had not been in China before the revolution. Many would receive political and military training, especially during the Cultural Revolution, and it certainly gave them prestige and distinction among their peers, as well as some authority to discuss the paths their own organizations should take.

Tuñón was fascinated by what he perceived as the progress of the young Chinese "Popular Democracy". Excited to continue his journey, he informed the reader that "Soon we will have a broader view of this new China" and quoted Kuo Mo-Jo to highlight the importance of his journey, because, according to the Chinese poet, "the past of China is the present of Latin America, and the present of China is the future of Latin America" (González Tuñón, 1954, p. 161).

Other travelers shared a similar opinion. Carlos de la Riva, a Peruvian communist who visited China in 1959, stated that the "breeze of pureness and dignity" emanated from the revolution could serve revolutionaries from his own country, and Vicente Rovetta, an independent bookstore owner and edi-

² Chinese strategies to convince visitors were studied by authors such as Lovell (2015, 2019), Wolin (2010), and Hollander (1998). Traveler's agency is a matter of discussion: While Chinese authorities created a careful schedule to conquer the hearts and minds of visitors, it would be naïve to believe that foreigners reproduced every detail shown to them. They tried to elude the guides, forced non-programed interactions (Galeano, 1964, p.13), visited cities without any guidance in some opportunities (Telles, 2011, pp. 72-73) or were guided by other Latin Americans more or less trusted by the government. In the end, many of them questioned what they saw and the official aspects of their visits. Even if their perceptions were certainly influenced by limitations imposed by the Chinese state, it was up to them to interpret and create representations about their experience according to their own cultural backgrounds, political views and publication purposes.

tor from Montevideo, did not measure words after his visit in 1966 wishing that “all peoples of the world had as their vanguard a revolutionary party like China’s and a leader like Mao Zedong!” (Riva, 1961, p. 134; Rovetta, 1968, p. 72). Even skeptic visitors, such as Eduardo Galeano (1964), agreed that China was the “aggressive symbol of the rebellion of the poor” (p. 9).

Those accounts and the numerous experiences of travel, cultural, and political exchange highlight China’s growing importance among the various groups of the Latin American left, whose magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets would be filled with material about the Asian nation, especially after 1949. So far, historians have investigated this experience as a sign of Chinese influence in Latin America, a part of its foreign policy, or as the dissemination and appropriation of Maoism in the region. Even if they were interested in what Popular China meant to Latin Americans and how its experience was appropriated, many of those works did not pay enough attention to the intellectual operations that explained Chinese reality to Latin American readers and how it was possible, considering the previous lack of communication between China and many of those countries. More importantly, they minimized the intellectual effort to explain why China mattered and how Latin Americans could relate to it. Therefore, I propose an analysis of the emergence of such narratives and the elements that compose them.

This article thus offers a study of how many Latin American leftists represented China after their travels and how they sought to build a narrative that connected both regions. I argue that a new form of representing the East among leftist groups emerged after the Second World War, contributing to the formation of new narratives of world order during the cold war that brought closer the destinies of Latin America and an idealized East, and China was an important experience in that regard. After that, I outline the intellectual operation that made possible the invention of a shared past and a common future between China and Latin America.

The main sources are travel accounts from South Americans in China and journals, magazines, and papers of several leftist groups that discussed issues about the Asian country between 1950 and 1976, a moment when it was perceived by many as a supporter of revolutionary movements across the world. They were collected from different groups and countries to describe one common representation of the political cultures of the region’s left.

I use 14 travel accounts from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay, written by leftists from different tendencies (progressives, socialists,

communists) who visited China.³ Most were written after the visits and were published in several editorial houses, including those of the Communist Party, but some appeared as newspaper chronicles during the travel.⁴ These accounts are interesting to detect discussions about the Chinese political process, but also about matters of identity, otherness, similarities, and oppositions. They allow the study of imaginaries related to a country and experience that was at the time little-known, but progressively becoming a more important actor on the international stage. That changing world order would soon force Latin Americans to define their own position.

I also rely on cultural magazines and periodicals to broaden the discussion about a change of perspective among the Latin American left and situate the debate about China in a larger field of representations. These publications were directed at a broader public, not only members of parties or political groups. They were cultural and political artifacts designed to intervene in public debate, shape reality, and form its readers. At the same time, they were expressions of intellectual practices and political disputes of a specific time and moment (Beigel, 2003, p. 108; Sarlo, 1992, p. 15). By doing so, I hope to contribute to the studies on the Latin American left political cultures, especially its imaginary concerning the East and its narratives about world order, its narratives about world order, its narratives about world order, and the complex relations between Latin America and China.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section discusses the historiography of Latin American-Chinese relations and states the chosen theoretical approach. After that, I present the emergence of a new form of horizon

³ Most authors extended their insights beyond their immediate home countries. They freely used this historical, political and cultural construct known as “Latin America” as a basis of comparison with what they saw in China. In a sense, those South Americans were also (re) inventing or reaffirming interpretations on what Latin America was or should be. Therefore, even if the sources are restricted to a specific part of the region (specially the Southern Cone), I will maintain the use of *Latin America* in order to respect the historical usage of the term by the authors.

⁴ I use the term “travel accounts” instead of “travelogues” because there was no unity in the literary genre of those texts. Many were indeed travelogues, but others were written as chronicles or even as poems. Since the accounts were published after the visits, the Chinese did not have control over what the visitors would say. Authors that had minor criticisms and disagreements, such as Bernardo Kordon, were invited to visit the country again. Eduardo Galeano was an exception, his interviews with Zhou Enlai and Puyi, the last Qing emperor, were published in *Marcha* while he was still in China. Both answered his questions in Mandarin and their answers were typed by a tachygrapher and checked by interpreters.

of expectation among the Latin American left after World War II. I argue that it allowed the creating of a set of images, ideas, and discourses –but also silences, reductions, and stereotypes– that positively represented the East, conceiving and idealizing it as the space of revolution and radical change, a place where Latin Americans could regard as a challenge to Western imperialism and hegemony, as well as an inspiration for its own revolutions, a community which one could relate to and share future expectations. China would play an important role in producing those representations, as many militants saw its revolution as a more plausible model for their own realities. The article then turns its attention to the efforts of South American leftists to create a narrative that connected China and Latin America. By analyzing travel accounts, I show their importance in deconstructing stereotypes about China in a context of scarce information and how they contributed to create new images that connected past, present, and future of Latin America and China. Through this exercise, I investigate the cultural and ideological elements present in the intellectual operations of producing those narratives.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

Scholars are increasingly paying more attention to Sino-Latin American relations. Between the 1960s and 1980s, a part of Anglophone historiography reduced the connections with China to an allegedly Communist infiltration in the Americas. As Matthew Rothwell points out, this cold war scholarship was more interested in identifying and denouncing connections and actions of United States enemies in Latin America (Rothwell, 2013, pp. 3-4). The interpretations established a hierarchy between the two regions: on one side were the Chinese cultural diplomacy and political and military training, the true active agents of the relation; on the other were Latin Americans who passively received the message and served the higher purposes of Beijing.

This minimized agency was recovered in post-cold war scholarship, especially in the past two decades, when the image of China as a global power and its growing presence in the region led to investigations about mutual relations. Historians interested in examining the revolutionary left directed their attention to the divisions caused by the Sino-Soviet Split, the emergence of Maoist groups, the impacts of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, as well as the domestication of Maoism in several countries (Celentano, 2005,

2014; Lovell, 2019; Ribeiro, 2014; Rothwell, 2015; Rugar, 2017; Urrego, 2017), and the diffusion, translation, and publication of Chinese material (Celen-tano, 2014; Montt Strabucchi, 2010; Rugar, 2020; Wang, 2019; Zhang y Xie, 2019). They reinforced the importance of Maoism but also pointed out that leftists incorporated the Chinese experience in more or less creative ways based on their own cultural and political backgrounds. However, when analyzing material about Chinese culture and politics produced in Latin America, scholars often reduced them to signs of international circulation of Maoism (Locane y Montt Strabucchi, 2020), even in a moment when it was not yet established as a specific tendency of Marxism or coherent set of ideas and practices in Latin America, such as the early 1950s.

Recently, historians and literary critics have gone beyond this reduction and tried to understand what the Chinese experience meant to Latin Americans by focusing on the processes of cultural translation or political appropriation or their complex perception of the Chinese Revolution (Montt Strabucchi, 2016; Ortega, 2020; Teng, 2020). They also used travelogues to investigate matters of alterity and the way historical actors related it to their own realities, producing representations that often eluded strict definitions such as Maoism (Ortega, 2020).

Representations are not neutral discourses but historical and social constructs created by groups. They produce narratives, strategies, and practices that impose authority over other individuals, legitimize projects, confer order and meaning to an ever-changing world, or justify practices to alter that order (Chartier, 1988, p. 17; 1989). Those representations, present in travel accounts and other texts produced by historical actors, allow us to perceive how China populated the broader imaginary of the left and how it constituted an important part of the repertoire and language of dissent of various groups.

In *Latin America's Radical Left*, Aldo Marchesi (2019) discusses the formation of a repertoire of dissent and a repertoire of contention in the Southern Cone, inspired mainly by the Cuban Revolution. Marchesi argues that revolutionary movements, such as the Uruguayan Tupamaros, based their practices, tactics, discourses, and worldview in dialogue with the Cuban experience and its similarities or differences with their own local contexts. His work greatly extends and deepens Jeremi Suri's (2003) notion of the "language of dissent", counterhegemonic discourses created by educated youth in higher education institutions after the Second War, based on a widely

distributed bibliography written by authors perceived as disruptive. I call a repertoire of dissent a set of ideas, representations, and practices formulated and adopted by the various revolutionary groups in Latin America during the cold war that elaborated disruptive narratives seeking to bring about radical change. China and, later, Maoism played an important role in a part of that repertoire both in the imagination and discourses of individuals and in the construction of political organizations and their strategies.

This is where the article differentiates from previous contributions: it considers representations created about China as one perception of the world, but it also takes into account that those representations obey specific cultural forms. This means that leftists needed to rely on a political and affective repertoire to invent a bond between China and Latin America. In short, this article aims to contribute to studies of the formation of the repertoire of dissent in Latin America.⁵

In this exercise on Intellectual History, I rely on two key concepts, Koselleck's "horizon of expectation" and Anderson's "imagined communities". Expectations, as argued by Koselleck (2004), can be experienced, and as such, they are subject to historical investigation (p. 261). The horizon of expectations is a category used not only to analyze the representations of time but also to analyze the various possible articulations of temporalities. I argue it can also be applied to study discourses to understand how groups process their experiences and what outcomes they expect in certain contexts, which helps explain how individuals act and try to transform their realities and how they imagine the world they live in. In that sense, horizons of expectation condition the way individuals represent their reality, (re)interpret their past, and project their future, but they are also historical constructs conditioned by representations possible at the time, meaning that they transform discourses and can only be expressed by them. The emergence of a new horizon of expectation among the Latin American lefts made possible a reappraisal of the past and present that allowed actors to imagine a communion with other margins, such as Asia.

⁵ The article does not include studies about Peruvian Sendero Luminoso. It was, by far, the biggest and most important Maoist movement in Latin America, and its members established direct connections with China during the 1960s and early 1970s, prior to the armed conflict. Nevertheless, this experience was more studied than others. Therefore, I chose to focus on less-known aspects of Latin American-Chinese relations.

That is the case for an imagined community as defined by Anderson (2006) because most of the members will never meet, and the community needs to be delimited, defined and invented. It also presupposes comradeship and fraternity that overshadow differences, conflicts, and contradictions (pp. 6-7).⁶ That can be applied not only to nations but also to other larger communities: The Third World, the Global South, the East, or Latin America are, as well, imagined communities and invented geographies. The concept serves us to analyze the operation designed by leftists to create that community, based, as we will see, on a perceived similar history, problems, and dilemmas.

AS HISTORY MARCHES EAST: SHIFTING HORIZONS OF EXPECTATION AMONG THE POSTWAR LATIN AMERICAN LEFT(S)

Let us momentarily return to the statement of González Tuñón about the present of China being the future of Latin America. It could be interpreted as a regular communist macro narrative about the socialist bloc, but the description of China as a possible model for the future of Latin America indicates a gradual change in the imaginary of the region's left, considering the previously limited interaction between Chinese and Latin Americans, especially in the Southern Cone.⁷ In fact, Tuñón's accounts broke away from previous representations of China as a backward and uncivilized country.

Until the 1950s, no significant research institutions in Latin America focused on the East and academic disciplines such as Sinology did not have a vast development like in Central Europe or the United States.⁸ It did not

⁶ Anne Garland Mahler (2018) prefers Christopher Lee's concept *Communitas* for it "refers to a community of feeling, an affective community of solidarity that transcends national and regional geography and whose affinities are not based on location, language, or blood" (p. 10).

⁷ Mexico and Peru are exceptions, Spanish conquest of the Philippines provided early connections with China, especially through commerce.

⁸ The *Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais* was created in Brazil in 1959 as an institute of Universidade Federal da Bahia, the *Centro de Estudios de Asia y África* was founded in 1964 in Colegio de México, and the *Escuela de Estudios Orientales* and the *Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Comparados Oriente-Occidente* only emerged in 1967 and 1973 in Argentina. Sinology also did not have an institutional framework in the first half of the twentieth century. Rosario Hubert (2015) states that the pioneers were amateur critics of comparative religions that started publishing about Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. In the Argentinian case, she claims, writers like Bor-

mean that representations about the East were inexistent. Rather, they mostly followed orientalist protocols of producing knowledge about a place that was felt as distant, a legacy of European colonialism and adherence to this hegemonic view of the world. This dependency on European sources to construct a discourse about the East led to the establishment of what Hernán Taboada defines as “peripheric orientalism”, a non-systematic discourse and marginalized cultural field that tended to reproduce European orientalism without much inventiveness (Taboada, 1998, p. 287).

Asia and Africa played a role in the definition of the Americas, from Columbus’ voyage to the European conquest and colonization the Indigenous inhabitants of the continent were often described based on the imagined East of cosmographical and biblical knowledge. However, orientalist stereotypes were not a mere copy; the East had an internal importance in several political discourses, such as those of the nineteenth-century independencies that associated the Spanish empire to “Eastern tyrannies” (Taboada, 2008). Travels to North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia at the end of that century increased the number of representations created by Latin Americans, but most still derived from Western pejorative descriptions.

China was an object of such negative imagery.⁹ Sinophobia was common in Latin American newspapers and pamphlets, especially where immigration created considerable Chinese communities (Cuba, Mexico, and Peru). Local derogative discourses were complemented by cultural productions that circulated in popular culture: travelers recurrently expressed that what they saw in China was a different picture from that presented in adventure movies or thrillers and crime fiction literature set in Shanghai or the opium dens of Chinese migrant neighborhoods.

However, different representations were elaborated, especially after the First World War. Latin American public figures were astonished by the barbarism of the conflict and sought alternatives to European cultural and civilizational inspiration (Compagnon, 2013). The disseminated sense of a “Decline of the West” led some intellectuals to direct their eyes inward to their own nations, their own pasts, and to the American continent as the beacon of the

ges were some of the first to review and promote Chinese literature and culture, even without knowledge of the language (pp. 85-86).

⁹ For instance, check Lee (2018).

future, as they believed like the activist students of Argentinian University Reform of 1918 to be “living an American hour”.¹⁰

Others took a different path, and the East seemed an appealing alternative to what was perceived as the decadence of traditional culture. According to Martín Bergel, South American intellectuals took great interest in anticolonial movements in China, India, Egypt, and Morocco in this moment of crisis. Spiritualism, present in Latin America since the late nineteenth century, and anti-imperialism turned out to be new key trends in imagining the East. This “resurgence of the East” occupied several pages of cultural magazines such as the Costa Rican *Repertorio Americano* or the Argentinian *Revista de Oriente* and influenced Marxists like Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui and anti-imperialistic organizations, as in the case of the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA), highly inspired by the Chinese Kuomintang. Bergel brilliantly argues that the East gained a different meaning among leftists and anti-imperialists, where positive stereotypes and generalizations would then coexist with derogatory ones in what the author defines as an “inverted orientalism” (Bergel, 2006, 2015).¹¹

Increasingly, Latin American progressists showed more interest in the East, a clear sign of the transnational ties established in the Anti-Imperialist Leagues and in the Komintern, but it was after the end of World War II that Asia and Africa would firmly establish a presence among the left’s narratives about world order. The discussions sparked by the victory of the Chinese communists and the Korean War reached a wide assortment of leftist groups beyond the local communist parties, which soon reverberated the crescent wave of discontentment, the decolonization movements, and the struggles for independence around the globe.

In December 1951 Anibal Enrique Alzaga wrote in *Marcha*, one of the most influential newspapers of the South American left, that recent events

¹⁰ Students at the University of Cordoba launched a manifest in 1918 to reform higher education, to modernize and democratize the university. Their manifest quickly gained resonance in Latin America and made famous their call to all the “free men of South America” (*hombres libres de Sud América*) and the belief of be “living an American hour” (*estamos viviendo una hora americana*).

¹¹ This movement was not restricted to Latin Americans, they, in fact, were in contact with Western authors that had similar opinions. Oswald Spengler already had discussed a possible resurgence of China as global power in his book *The Decline of the West*, immensely popular among Latin American intellectuals and appropriated in various forms, in spite of the author’s conservative and nationalist positions (Spence, 1999, p. 211).

changed power relations in the world and Europe no longer held authority, while the United States still contended for supremacy. The Mediterranean Sea was relegated to a secondary lake, Britain also lost its imperial power, marking the end of the “Bourgeois-Atlantic Era”. It was the time of the Pacific and Latin Americans had to choose their path “as the axis of history shifts to the East”, the author argued.¹²

Alzaga’s piece was preceded by a series of articles that pointed to the decline of the West. According to *Marcha*’s contributors, the colonial nations finally wrote their own histories and defined their own destinies.¹³ For them, the struggle of a ransacked Asia was the “beginning of a historic counteroffensive, an inversion in the balance of power between cultures and races”.¹⁴

China too populated the imagination of a revolutionary East, a process potentialized by visits organized by the state and by the material sent to Latin America.¹⁵ In 1954, Fina Warschaver published in Buenos Aires the cultural magazine *Cultura China*; to explain the decision to create such a publication in a country with scarce Chinese influence, she argued that China had a central role in the present and that its destiny was connected to the Americas:

And if today we are so interested in knowing the millenary Chinese culture, it is because we are witnessing the growing weight of China on the world scene. The struggle of Asian peoples for their independence is one of the greatest events of our time. All those who fought for the independence of their own people cannot see it except with sympathy. America feels close to the Asian continent because the trajectory of its historical development has many points of similar contact. The possible racial affinities –documented by ethnologists– between the indigenous peoples of America and Asia are not the most important points of contact. These are, indeed, the historical circumstances

¹² Aníbal Enrique Alzaga, “El Uruguay antes las dos revoluciones mundiales”, *Marcha*, 14 de diciembre de 1951, Montevideo.

¹³ “Al borde de la guerra”, *Marcha*, 8 de diciembre de 1950, Montevideo.

¹⁴ A. F. Suárez, “Helena de Troya en Singapur”, *Marcha*, 22 de diciembre de 1950, Montevideo.

¹⁵ By 1958 the Foreign Language Press and the Chinese International Bookstore had published at least 60 books and pamphlets in Spanish and by mid 1950s they already started sending magazines translated to Spanish, such as *China Reconstruye*, *Mujer China* and *Pekín Informa*. Portuguese translations would follow during the 1960s. Ratliff (1969, pp. 69-70). News from *Radio Pekín/Radio Pequim* were also reproduced by local communist parties in Brazil and Peru.

that made us free thanks to our emancipatory deed and that we are now witnessing in the struggle for national independence in Asia. China has already said its decisive word in this regard. The interest of the Argentine people to know China has its starting point in this transcendental fact.¹⁶

For the editors of *Cultura China* geography or race did not matter, a shared history and a common destiny were the elements that connected Latin America to China and Asia. Several other articles and publications discussed this in the same terms. Although the authors perceived themselves as a part of this declining West, they also argued that Latin America occupied a marginal cultural and economic position. Gradually, they started discussing whether their countries' destiny lay elsewhere, outside the Eurocentric spectrum that once was their model for civilization. They felt that the world was changing, and that Latin America changed with it, as colonial empires crumbled, and new actors emerged some leftist intellectuals started to wonder that the fate of the region was somewhere else. This shift represents a change of perspective for the present and the future among part of the Latin American lefts.

In *Futures Past*, Reinhart Koselleck (2004) claims that lived experiences and the expectations of active human agents constitute all histories. Experience is the present past, remembered, and retold through several forms, while expectation is the future made present, a hope directed to the not-yet, the non-experienced. Once the experience is accomplished, it becomes the past, while the expectations made real are again extended to future temporalities (pp. 258-259). Concrete history, both as a process and as a discipline devoted to narrating the past, is produced by actors between these two categories. The space of experience and the horizon of expectation are interdependent: experiences are collections of the past made by social groups that are always changing; they can be faulty and are open to new expectations that lead to a reappraisal of that same past and to the remaking of narratives that give meaning to the present.

Cases similar to those in *Marcha* and *Cultura China* show how a new horizon of expectation was open to a part of the Latin American left, and the way they represented themselves and the world slowly shifted away from tra-

¹⁶ "Amistad y cultura", *Cultura China*, núm. 1, 1954, Buenos Aires.

ditional European references, although never fully breaking away from them.¹⁷ The perceived advancement of communism in the margins of the world, the anticolonial uprisings, and the defeat of empires allowed Latin Americans to conceive Asia and Africa as the places where the future of humanity would be decided. Internally, the context varied according to each country, but antiimperialist stances, the positive revaluation of nationalism, and the growing discredit of liberal democracy and possibilities of change within it after the establishment of military dictatorships opened possibilities for militants to look outside continental borders for inspiration. This horizon of expectation would be further expanded after the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and its growing radicalization, as well as the formation of the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) in 1966. The imagery produced on the island and its support for revolution in the three continents helped to shape a new glance towards the margins of the world and to transform revolutionary strategies in Latin America, as many groups opted for armed struggle instead of electoral paths and popular frontisms that prevailed before.

As we shall see, Marxist terms such as semicolony or semi-feudal, existing since the birth of the Third International to describe the edges of European empires, gained ground to interpret local realities, reverberated by discourses of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) on center and periphery and its criticism developed by Dependency Theory. Besides, the popularization of the concept *Third World*, vague and easily appropriated, helped to increase the vocabulary of dissent used to narrate a present and an imagined future that connected Latin American to the margins of the global order.¹⁸ All this contributed to the formation of a political imaginary, a discourse and a set of images, practices, semantics, and choices of allies or enemies that postulated a bond with an idealized rebel-

¹⁷ Western authors such as André Malraux, Bertolt Brecht and Edgar Snow were important readings that represented the “awakening of the East” and criticized European imperialism, especially regarding China. The three were occasionally mentioned as references by Latin American travelers in that country. For this “radical” perceptions of China, check *The Chan’s Great Continent* (Spence, 1998, pp. 187-205).

¹⁸ *Marcha* was the first publication to systematically use the term Third World in the Southern Cone, starting in August of 1956: A. F. Suárez, “800 millones de manumitidos en diez años”, *Marcha*, núm. 828, 31 de agosto de 1956, pp. 12-14, Montevideo. For a history of the concept in the region and the controversies in its uses check Albuquerque (2010, 2014).

lious East, to an imagined community that arose especially after the 1955 Bandung Conference (Lee, 2010, pp. 3-4; Pešta, 2022, pp. 80-81).

Gradually several publications started associating Latin America to this Third World; they supposedly shared a history of oppression, a present of struggle, and a future of liberation. According to *Che*, one of the so-called first newspapers of the Argentinian “New Left”, Africa led an unprecedented phenomenon of decolonization that would change global power balance and accelerated the course of history. However, its tasks were similar to those of other revolutions, such as the Chinese, and its obstacles were experimented by others, such as *balkanization*, the fragmentation of a region into several conflicting smaller countries.¹⁹ The term *balkanization* was initially coined to refer to the division of the Balkan peninsula during the decadence of the Ottoman Empire. However, it was vastly used by leftists in Latin America to describe the fragmentation of the Spanish colonial possessions in many nations. This process, many authors argued, was backed by British imperialists to prevent a supposed unification of the region that would be able to keep its interests at bay. Even if the idea might be questionable, the recourse of such a concept shows how the editors intended to explain African reality to their public by using terms they were accustomed to, but it also shows how they imagined that Africa could be relatable and present similarities to Argentina.

In fact, even the future of the world revolution was perceived to be on course in countries vastly unknown by Latin Americans. Vietnam was perhaps the most famous case, especially after further United States involvement. Images of farmers in arms and Vietcong fighters figured on the covers of magazines and the first pages of leftist newspapers, Ho Chi Minh’s images and messages of solidarity with the Vietnamese appeared in publications siding with news about national matters and were considered as important. The Peronist Revolutionary Front was clear to assert that “All peoples of the world that today awaken to glimpse a new and bright destiny [...] are waiting for the development of the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people”. Vietnam was the role model, not Europe, the United States, or the Soviet Union, and Latin America and Argentina, “which also suffers the invasion of

¹⁹ Claude Krief, “África: un continente despedazado”, *Che Compañero*, núm. 1, 4 de octubre de 1960, pp. 6-8, Buenos Aires.

imperialism”, should follow its example.²⁰ This solidarity discourse helped build an imagined community that surpassed distance, language, or culture barriers as they supposedly shared the same goals, the same values and the same enemies, the Vietnamese were “also fighting for us” and according to an Uruguayan journalist “The anti-Yankee struggle unites us as brothers in a common destiny”.²¹

China also served as a source of inspiration, even if the country had already resumed the civil war, due to its anti-imperialistic rhetoric that openly harassed the United States, the encouragement for pursuing armed liberation and the rebellious discourse of the Cultural Revolution. It was regarded as a poor, agrarian country that was industrializing fast, raising living standards, and tackling the modernization effort that many communists considered critical. By 1951 the Brazilian Communist Party already pointed out that China specifically had something to teach. “Without claiming any analogy between the historical formation of Brazil and China, and without forgetting what is particular in the formation of our Party, the Chinese example draws our attention to the task we face today, and which is undoubtedly one of similar nature”.²²

Arnedo Álvarez (1957), secretary of the Communist Party of Argentina, after his visit to China in 1956, stated his perspective in a striking similar way “Without being able to trace a sign of identity between the revolution that is in operation in China and the one that is maturing in Argentina, both nevertheless have common features, which make it particularly interesting and useful for us to know what happened and what is happening there”.²³

The trend of setting China as a reference grew especially after the Sino-Soviet Split, the Cultural Revolution, and the spread of Maoism as a distinct current of Marxism. Mentions of this revolutionary East excluded the Soviet Union, and China alone was the big power to look up to. For Carlos Castillo Ríos (1973), a prestigious Peruvian educator, events in China were

²⁰ “Al heroico Pueblo vietnamita”, *Che Compañero*, núm. 4, agosto de 1968, p. 4, Buenos Aires.

²¹ “Salón Homenaje al Vietnam”, *La Rosa Blindada*, núm. 9, septiembre de 1966, p. 60, Buenos Aires; Schvarz, “El fantasma de Dien Bien Phu”, *Marcha*, núm. 1390, 19 de febrero de 1968, pp. 19-20, Montevideo.

²² Luis Carlos Prestes, “Nossa Política”, *Revista Problemas*, núm. 34, mayo-junio de 1951.

²³ The quote is on the book flap.

“the most heroic, most colossal and most violent deed that the history of this century has seen” (p. 14).

Like Ríos, others also believed that it was the Chinese Revolution of 1949 that shook the “imperialist system, gave impetus to national liberation struggles and *opened new horizons* for the revolutionary movement”.²⁴ For Argentinian Maoists, the Cultural Revolution solidified socialism in that country and led to a “shift in power relations at a global level”. The Chinese Revolution showed that only radical ruptures could defeat Western imperialism, and its lessons could be transformed into “tools for the struggle for national liberation and to the construction of a new society in Argentina”.²⁵

González Tuñón’s (1954) argument about the “future of Latin America” was based in this expanded horizon of expectation. He still placed the Soviet Union as the unquestionable leader of the world revolution, but in China one could perceive that a profound change was underway and “nothing and no one can stop it” (p. 238). In addition, this movement was taking place not in the heart of the Soviet Union, but on the borders, in Asia, Africa, and, according to González Tuñón, in Latin America, a semicolonial and dependent region that reminded him of China before the liberation (p. 263). Therefore, the reality and history of his homeland appeared to be much closer to that of China, “whose experience vividly interests Latin-Americans because this country was 80% rural and the imperialists harassed it” (p. 161).

Several other travelers visited China after Tuñón, and most of them agreed that the Asian country shaped the world in which they lived and changed the way the future was to be regarded. Guillermo Bernhard (1964) described its revolution as something “unparalleled in the history of humanity” (p. 71), and Bernardo Kordon (1962, 1969) defined the Chinese Revolution as the “most important historical event that occurred after the Second World War” (p. 20), important to the whole Third World, and “ultimately the key to the future of humanity” (p. 192). Even if they did not support the whole transformation process, it seemed undeniable that China was now an actor to be looked upon.

These travelers played a role in translating the Chinese experience to Latin America. Their accounts were circulated in newspaper chronicles, arti-

²⁴ “Salve a vitória da revolução cultural proletária”, *A Classe Operária*, núm 25, noviembre de 1968, p. 3, Rio de Janeiro. Italics are mine.

²⁵ “Editorial”, *Los Libros*, núm. 35, mayo-junio de 1974, p. 3, Buenos Aires.

cles in cultural magazines, public speeches or lectures, books, organizations' minutes, and police and security forces. Little information circulated in the region, most came from news from foreign agencies and, later, from Chinese material that was, many times, apprehended by authorities. In this context of (progressively less) scarce contact with China, these texts served to bring different perspectives about the country and create a shared imagined community with it.

THE REVOLUTION FROM THE MARGINS IS OUR REVOLUTION: DECONSTRUCTION OF STEREOTYPES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SHARED HISTORY

The accounts of China were remarkably similar, mostly due to the program proposed by the State and the restrictions of what could be seen. Visitors went to popular communes, industrial cities, writers' associations, theaters, and landmarks and talked to peasants or workers with the help of a translator; the guide selected some, and the visitor chose others. Some of those visitors met high-ranking party members, such as Mao Zedong or Zhou Enlai. Despite each author's position, they all wanted to bring to their readers an experience that was highly interesting but barely known to many.

Those accounts had a pattern and followed the conventions of highlighting important events in China, showing curiosities and describing the land and the people, usually comparing it with similar features in their own countries to make it relatable to the reader: "the Yangtze River is like the Río de la Plata" or "Shanghai is a port city comparable to Montevideo", "The outskirts of Shanghai are analogous to those of Buenos Aires, but without the slums". Those conventions on how and what to represent on the trip are related to what François Hartog (1991) calls "rhetoric of otherness", a set of employed figures, procedures and operative rules used to produce the other discursively (p. 224), and in the case of China, also to fabricate similarities.

Regarding the instruments used to elaborate the narrative, the travelers tried to deconstruct orientalist stereotypes, used differentiations to highlight positive traits in the new people's republic, and, at last, relied on comparisons and concepts that allowed one to create an image of a shared history and destiny between China and Latin America.

To recreate the image of China, it was necessary to demolish a previous one. As mentioned, most Latin American travelers had not been to China before and had little contact with small Chinese immigrant communities in their own countries, with few exceptions. Most of the information they had about the country was acquired through occasional news in newspapers through foreign agencies, literature, and popular culture produced both locally and internationally, films such as *Shanghai Express* (1932) and André Malraux's novels *The Conquerors* (1928) and *Man's Fate* (1933). Many of those representations –Malraux excepted– were full of pejorative stereotypes depicting the Chinese as a dirty, dangerous, malicious mob that lived in a mysterious, exotic country full of thrills for daring white men. Sinophobia and Yellow Peril hysteria filled newspapers and local literature, shaping racial relations and immigration policies.

The travelers knew that these negative views influenced their cultural background, especially when they visited Shanghai. The center of old imperial domination was always remembered as being represented like “a paradise for adventurers” and known for its “histories of crime and homicide” (Bernhard, 1964, pp. 17-18; Riva, 1961, p. 28). There was criticism to the creators of those representations, but Latin Americans recognized that there was some reality to it. Their point was not to persevere with the stereotype, but to locate it exclusively in the past, in the China that was.

The Communist government explored this image; the idea of a New China was based on the discourse of a rupture with a past of humiliation, subservience, and moral degeneration. This was also the image that travelers presented to their public, even when they were not sympathetic to the government: For them, there was a vilified “before” and a redemptive or at least a dignified “present” made possible by the Revolution.

Their accounts were intended to show a changing China, a country no longer relatable to those negative traits popularized in Western culture. China was, to them, a modernizing nation ushering into the future without denying its traditions. It was no longer a backward country full of vices, stagnated into the past, alien to transformations of history, all characteristics of Western orientalist discourse. According to Bernardo Kordon (1969), president of the Argentinian Association of Chinese Culture and a deep connoisseur of Chinese theater, “picturesque China seems to be gone forever, but another more original possibly begins” (p. 188). In addition, this new country was now the horizon to which the world looked. For Eduardo Galeano (1964), China

was before 1949 a “traditional source for profit, prostitutes, coolies and detectives for the Western use”, but after the Revolution it became “the shining center of all gazes –half in panic and half in astonishment” (p. 165). Still, some acknowledged that this was an arduous path and clearly stated that China was a poor country, economically undeveloped (Bernhard, 1964, pp. 14, 86; Oyarzún, 2016, position 1634; Telles, 2011, p. 68).

Instead of the malicious yellow barbarian of crime fiction, they described hard-working people who toiled to improve a home devastated by imperial exploitation guided by a wise leader, even if some criticized the increasing personalism in Chinese politics. Going to China was important to see this first-hand and rebuke biased Western accounts that did not fully understand what was happening in the country or had ill intentions toward it. Visitors who were more aligned with the Chinese line, such as Vicente Rovetta (1968), went further and openly declared that most news were imperialist, and revisionist lies, visiting the country served to acquire knowledge to question critics of the Maoist “cult of personality”, the use of violence against opponents or famine, usually ignored or minimized (pp. 14, 15, 30, 72).

Mao’s leadership is an interesting case of cultural translation into Latin American reality. Spanish-speaking travelers constantly referred to him as a *caudillo*. In South America, especially in Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, the term had ambiguous meanings beyond the mere translation as leader. It is and was used to refer to nineteenth-century agrarian elite that ruled the interior and exercised power over regional communities in a paternalistic way, ruling over peasants and traditional groups deeply connected to them. Liberals usually described the *caudillos* as petty tyrants that stood against the values of modernity, whereas reactionaries saw in them the strong, centralizing leadership that brought order and maintained social hierarchy. During the 1950s and 1960s, many leftist intellectuals reappropriated those characters as popular leaders that cared for the masses, stood for national sovereignty, and embodied values, traditions, and political desires of the people. The term was, of course, extended to leaders of the twentieth century. In all those interpretations the *caudillo* was depicted as a strong, charismatic leadership that rallied the masses behind him and that was the sense used to describe Mao in a way that many used to describe Perón or Fidel Castro. Authors like Bernardo Kordon knew that his public would share that interpretation and spe-

cifically described that the Chinese people did not refer to Mao *caudillo* but Great Helmsman (Kordon, 1969, p. 74).²⁶

Those efforts were also intended to represent the Chinese reality in its own terms. The authors recognized their position as Westerners in China (“the West, the world of the white, *my world*”)²⁷ and, as such, they could not and did not aspire to comprehend this new reality fully. At certain points, travelers just pointed out that some elements were too difficult for Westerners to understand (Bernhard, 1964, p. 87). Nevertheless, when stating the differences, they usually saw in the Chinese positive traits that they, westerners, lacked: they valued its people’s unity and the collective work for building socialism for future generations, the strived for self-sufficiency, inventiveness under harsh conditions and their support for international revolution.

More important than highlighting those differences, however, was the construction of similarities, and that was no easy task. Culturally and geographically, they seemed very distant. Historically, there were some exchanges but no deep connections; even the national histories were narrated without mentioning one another. As for international relations, China occupied a spot in the Socialist world, at least before the Sino-Soviet Split, and the first Latin American country to formally join it would be Cuba in the late 1960s, after its own disagreements with the Chinese.

The strategy was to defend that they shared a single historical feature but a decisive one: Western imperialism connected the margins in one global exploitative system and created a power relation that put countries of those regions in the same group. Arnedo Álvarez recognized this when explaining to his Argentinian comrades what brought them closer to China:

The working masses of our country and different social groups today look at the great Chinese nation with admiration and sympathy. We are connected to this great people by shared sentiments for the defense of national independence against imperialist colonizers. The victorious and heroic struggle that the great people of China have waged for their liberation and national independence encourages and stimulates our feelings as true Argentine patriots against imperialist and oligarchic oppression (Arnedo Álvarez, 1958, p. 61).

²⁶ For further discussions on historiography on *caudillismo* and its political uses check Goldman & Salvatore (2005), and Goebel (2013).

²⁷ Galeano, 1964, p. 73. Italics were used by the author.

The shifting horizon of expectation and the reappraisal of the past allowed travelers to elaborate a historical narrative using widely spread terms that conformed to the language of dissent of the postwar left. The specificities of Chinese history were important, but the nation supposedly followed laws of History applicable to other regions. China was liberated in 1949 and was changing fast, but its past, argued the authors, was quite like the past and present of their own lands. They described a country that for centuries was subject to “vicious feudalism” whose population was a victim of exploitation by merciless landlords (Bernhard, 1964, p. 73; Riva, 1961, p. 96). Only a revolution could end the “inert forms of feudalism” (Oliver y Frontini, 1955, p. 334).²⁸ Many orthodox Marxists in Latin America also argued that the Spanish and Portuguese empires transposed their old feudal institutions to their colonies and that many were still in place.²⁹ Regardless of the validity of the thesis, the discussion was widely known in literate circles, and most readers could understand and relate to those terms.

They also claimed that imperial domination was a common trend between those regions. China was never formally colonized, like Latin America, but European, North American, and Japanese aggression and the anti-imperialist struggles in the country carried by nationalists and communists served as the basis for the formulation of a concept of *semicolony*, which became very disseminated among leftist intellectuals. It was used to describe relations that benefited economically and politically a foreign elite that profited from cheap labor in poor non-industrialized countries, a state and rural national elite that exploited a small, disorganized proletariat and a large peasantry while maintaining order and hierarchy, and a small urban bourgeoisie that acted as intermediaries. The Third International popularized the term

²⁸ María Rosa Oliver and Norberto Frontini pointed that Chinese landscape, nature, its people and the similarities between ancient Chinese art and Pre-Colombian Mesoamerican and Andean art led them to *confirm* that Asia and Latin America were once connected by land, conveniently ignoring the United States and Canada. Alongside with “feudalism, numerical predominance of peasants, [...] invasions, exploitation, and colonialism” it was the element that made them think about their homelands (Oliver y Frontini, 1955, pp. 69-70).

²⁹ There was no consensus about this thesis and by the 1970s it was already very criticized inside leftist circles. For early criticisms in the debates over capitalism and feudalism in Latin America check the works of Brazilian historian Caio Prado Júnior *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo* (1942) and *A Revolução Brasileira* (1966), and Argentinian Sergio Bagú *Economía de la sociedad colonial* (1949).

and its Sixth Congress in 1928 included Latin America as a “semicolonial” region.

With different degrees of agreement over that definition, Latin American Marxists very soon included it in their debates.³⁰ By the 1950s, when travelers started to visit China, it was already present in their conceptual repertoire. It is no surprise then that Raul González Tuñón could easily ponder about “our Latin American countries, dependent and semi-colonial –in many aspects significantly similar to China before the liberation” (González Tuñón, 1954, p. 263). The added term, dependent, was used almost as a synonym, taken from Lenin’s work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

The argument was that Latin America, like China in the past, was only formally independent, but its destiny was still in foreign hands. Eduardo Galeano, when analyzing the content of the Sino-Soviet polemic, pointed out the contradictions of the Russian stance for peaceful co-existence and lack of support for armed struggle and asked his readers: “Two hundred million Latin American inhabitants belong to independent countries? What does ‘independence’ mean? [...] Is formal political independence, the creation of an institutional apparatus of its own, enough to make a country free?” (Galeano, 1964, pp. 89-90). The answer was negative, and it resounded leftists’ discussions about a “second independence”, maybe similar to what the Chinese did.

There was a fluid exchange of terms; feudal, semifeudal, semi-colonial, and dependent, sometimes appearing in the same text without much care for conceptual accuracy. The accounts were, after all, directed to an intended large public, and the use of those expressions was sufficient to create familiarity between Chinese and Latin American histories.³¹ This set of conceptual references and theoretical corpus helped define how narratives of proximity could be articulated.

During the Sino-Soviet Split, narratives that connected China to the Socialist Bloc gradually diminished and almost disappeared after the Cul-

³⁰ In 1929 Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui already proposed a more complex analysis of “semi-colonial” regions differentiating the context of Latin America and China. Mariátegui, *Punto de vista anti-imperialista*. Available in: https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/ideologia_y_politica/paginas/punto%20de%20vista.htm#3

³¹ Dependency Theory was a recent addition to Latin American Marxist repertoire in the late 1960s. However, there was a recurrent use of the term “dependent” and the representation of Shanghai as the local center of imperialism and the headquarters of the national elite that benefited from foreign powers, similar to what dependentists would later call *enclave*.

tural Revolution. The authors started to refer to China as one of the countries in the margins or peripheries. Again, it was a complex operation, China encountered several difficulties in the Non-Aligned Movement, it had a main role in splitting the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) and the Organization of Solidarity with People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), and openly clashed with Cubans during the Tricontinental Conference of Havana in 1966 (Mahler, 2018, p. 77).

However, due to its support for armed struggle and the intention to lead the global revolution, it is recognized as one of the most important representatives of the "aggressive rebellion of the poor". To Galeano, they shared the thesis that the revolutionary storm of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America was the fundamental contradiction of the present (Galeano, 1964, p. 32). Galeano named this part of his book as "The revolution from the margins is our revolution" (*La revolución de las orillas es nuestra revolución*), using the possessive in the first person of plural (*nuestra*), possibly affirming that the revolution from the margins had a meaning both to Asians and Latin Americans. At the end of the section, he was elated to testify that the Chinese were enthusiastic when speaking about Fidel Castro, even if they removed his photos during his visit to Moscow in June 1963. Internationalism and solidarity were reframed to be centered mainly not on class issues, but on the margins and anticolonial struggle.

Finally, some authors used Alfred Sauvy's Third World concept to construct a sense of belonging that united China and Latin America. The term, as mentioned, could be appropriated in several forms and could have different connotations for different actors. The Third World, as Eugenia Palieraki (2020, p. 275) argues, is not an abstract entity, but a performative concept. It needs to be imagined, expressed, and practiced; it does not only describe reality, but also changes it, meaning that individuals that use the term are actually forging connections between different regions, peoples, and contexts, they are inventing one Third World.

For those that associated that concept with global revolution, anti-imperialism, and national self-determination, the Third World meant not a place, but a project (Generoso, 2019, pp. 4-5; Prashad, 2008, p. 1), and, may I add, an imagined community and shared destiny, a group of peoples that supposedly had the same goals and headed the same direction in the course of History. Geography or frontiers did not matter; the Third World was a position in the system of power relations and an assumed ideological project

of liberation. In that sense, Bernardo Kordon (1969) was able to imagine (and reaffirm) that the fate of Latin America was connected to the fate of the Asian country because its struggles “are extended to all China, [...] to the Third World, [...] to the revolution on a global scale” and that the Chinese Cultural Revolution represented “the long march that awaits the Third World in the unequal fight for its liberation” (pp. 142, 191).³²

Not only did it allow one to construct a proximity between Latin America and China, but it also allowed one to set the latter as a model and a reference. Carlos de la Riva (1961) defied traditional geographical representations because “the crazy imperialist geography [...] classifies Czechoslovakia as ‘East’ and Japan as ‘West’” (p. 134), but Kordon, an admirer of Chinese culture, went further and imagined a world where Latin America could be the East, as he described in a particularly interesting scene, a moment when he gazed at a Chinese map:

(As always) I look for Latin America and I do not find it, at least it does not exist in the West. In this Chinese map, the three Americas must be sought in the East: here, we figure in the East of China. When it [China] is situated in the center of the map –certainly natural in a map used exclusively by 700 million Chinese– we constitute the Far East of the Chinese World. This contrast with our traditional conventions (in maps and other values that we so blindly follow) may be useful to explain some Chinese points of view: maybe they do not come from wrong evaluations but from realities that emerge from a particular but truthful perspective. Will we someday make our own world maps instead of accepting our marginality in a map where Europe is still located in the center of the Earth? If we make a world map with America in its center, China will be our West and Europe, our Far East: putting Latin America in the center means disrupting the world, but it must be done one day (Kordon, 1969, p. 142-143).

Affirming and inventing that China and Latin America occupied the same place in the world and shared a similar past helped explain why the

³² Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Three Worlds Theory did not appear in our sources as most of them precede the year the term was created (1974). However, Sendero Luminoso’s leader Abimael Guzmán memoirs *Memorias desde Némesis* contains uses of both Three Worlds Theory and the term Third World in a free manner, sometimes meaning the same thing.

Asian country was important at that moment. It meant that if they had similar problems –already being solved by the Chinese– they could also share the same solutions, China could be an inspiration, and many Latin Americans saw in China “a model of development and modernization that was working (or perceived to be working) in a Third World country” (Rothwell, 2013, p. 93). In this sense, there was some universality in the Chinese experience: part of the authors’ work was to convince their readers that Latin America and China were a part of the universal modernity created on the margins by capitalism. But still, some authors reminded their readers that they were Westerners and could not fully understand or judge what was happening in China; some uniqueness had to be respected. They argued that Chinese culture and forms of social organization conferred them traits that were supposedly advantageous for radical transformation of society, such as discipline, sense of community, voluntarism, and consciousness of its revolutionary responsibility, elements that, according to the authors, the West lacked (Bernhard, 1964, p. 87; Galeano, 1964, pp. 12, 41; Kordon, 1969, pp. 40, 52-53, 85-86).

Nevertheless, this conflicted perspective was overcome: in a context where Europe allegedly offered no plausible revolutionary models, China and, more broadly, Asia and Africa were revalued, their history was rewritten, and they could finally serve as the basis for the present and future.

CONCLUSION –A REVOLUTIONARY EAST?

This article presented the emergence of a new, positive, and systematic form of representing the East in the discourses of Latin American lefts post-World War Two. The decay of European empires and the independences in Asia and Africa sparked the imagination of leftists who started questioning the destiny of Latin America related to that of the imperialist West. This new horizon of expectation allowed the elaboration of a narrative that presented Latin America and the East as a community that shared a history of oppression, a present of struggle, and a future of liberation. The Chinese Revolution, the third triumphant communist state outside Europe (preceded by Mongolia and North Korea), inspired many leftists from different spectrums. Their experience, soon followed by others such as the Non-Aligned Movement and Third-Worldist projects, collaborated to create that narrative.

This community was an invention, an intellectual operation based on specific cultural forms and political perspectives. It was built on concepts and images familiar to Latin American readers. First, it was necessary to deconstruct the stereotypes that marked the representations of China and then explain why China mattered to the various countries of Latin America. This explanation was mediated by several Marxist concepts and interpretations widely disseminated in Latin America, but also on elements specific to a particular country. The idea was to establish a common past between the two regions and that, with more or less appropriation, would lead to similar resolutions to present problems. China could be viewed as a model because it was similar to Latin America and because both occupied the same place in the world, at least until the late 1970s, when the conflict with Vietnam and Deng Xiaoping reforms created a wave of criticisms within the Latin American left and made China gradually fade from many of its publications.

The considerations in this article lead us to a final reflection regarding the ways of representing China, and one imagined East among Latin Americans. Jaime Ortega suggests that Mexican travelers in China never criticized the revolutionary process and presented a monolithic image of the country. He claims that these travelers reframed old orientalist discourses into a “Red Orientalism” that represented China as a timeless, millenary society fully dominated by the State, an argument that resembled concepts such as “Oriental Despotism” (Ortega, 2020, pp. 566-568).

South American sources appear to be more flexible than those presented in the Mexican case, more critical, even, but the idea of a reframed orientalism is appealing because Latin American leftists were (re)constructing stereotypes about an experience they perceived as “Eastern”. However, those stereotypes were presented in a positive manner and broke away from previous derogatory representations, even if sometimes incurring the reproduction of old images, as Ortega argues.

It seems interesting, then, to investigate further the topic proposed in this article and analyze the production of such discourses. This “Revolutionary East”, as I call it, is a set of images, ideas, discourses, silences, and stereotypes elaborated post-World War Two that positively recovered the “East” and projected it as a space of radical transformation in which the future of history is played out. The elaboration of imagined geographies and histories “remystified” the East, not only China, as the place of the Revolution. Studying those discourses, their vocabulary, theoretical choices, recurrent narrative

structures and the institutions that mediated their production in a large text corpus would allow us to understand how leftist political cultures in Latin America related to non-western revolutionary experiences.

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