

Axel Gasquet and Goriça Majstorovic, eds. *Cultural and Literary Dialogues Between Asia and Latin America*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. 274 pp.

PAULA C. PARK
WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

As of late, it is no longer a novelty to speak of the historical, economic, diplomatic, and cultural relations between Latin America and Asia in a scholarly context. As Axel Gasquet and Goriça Majstorovic indicate in their volume *Cultural and Literary Dialogues Between Asia and Latin America*, the contacts between these two world regions are “a long-standing and tangible reality” (2). Revealing the complexity and contemporary relevance of this reality, the present volume offers a series of analyses of cultural products from Latin America that resonate, in one way or another, throughout Asia, and vice versa. The fourteen contributions by established and emerging scholars are preceded by a critical introduction co-authored by Majstorovic and Gasquet, which succinctly and effectively surveys centuries of contact and connections between Asia and Latin America, by way of Europe at first: it begins with Vasco da Gama’s arrival in India in 1498 and concludes with mentions of China’s massive investments throughout Latin America in the present. While the plethora of historical figures, authors, theorists, critics, titles of works, and places mentioned in each chapter may result overwhelming to the reader, the volume’s undeniable forte as a whole is precisely the range of works examined as well as the various theoretical frameworks employed. Another strength is how the editors, Gasquet and Majstorovic, have organized it into four thematic sections.

In the first part of the volume, titled “Asian Hybrid Identities and Latin American Transnational Narratives,” María Montt Strabucchi, Lila McDowell Carlsen, and Verónica Torres offer close readings of recent works by contemporary writers who reflect on the experiences of various Asian diasporas in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. Montt Strabucchi analyzes the subject formation of the young Sino-Argentine protagonist in Federico Jeanmarie’s coming-of-age novel *Tacos altos* (2016). McDowell Carlsen turns to Chilean writer Lina Meruane’s *Volverse palestina* (2012), which offers a candid reflection of the author’s Palestine identity following a trip she made to Palestinian territories throughout Israel. For her part, Torres offers an analysis of Carlos Martínez Assad’s *Memoria de Líbano* (2003) and Maruan Soto Antaki’s *Casa Damasco* (2013), which center on the experiences of Mexicans of Lebanese and Syrian origin. Altogether, the works studied by McDowell Carlsen and Torres unravel the hidden wounds in the collective memory of family and the open-endedness of the respective

diasporic authors' personal journeys into their hybrid identities. It could be said that Meruane, Martínez Assad, and Soto Antaki articulate a preference for the “recognition of ‘strangeness’ and its slippery definitions which ultimately challenged any closed definition of identity and nation” (33), a phrase I borrow from Montt Strabucchi’s conclusion to her analysis of Jeanmarie’s novel.

Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, Puo-An Wu Fu, and Suk-Kyun Woo are the authors of the chapters that comprise the second part of the edited volume, titled “Reception and Translations of Latin American Writers in Asia.” Sánchez Prado looks into the effects of global capitalism and what he refers to as the “neoliberal aesthetics” in Mexican writer Julián Herbert’s *La casa del dolor ajeno* (2015) and Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai’s *Happy Together* (1997), the latter being a film set in Buenos Aires. Wu Fu offers a thought-provoking analysis of the novel *Mongolia* (2015) by Peruvian *Tusán*, Julia Wong, and a short story by US-Argentine writer of Japanese and German descent Anna Kazumi Stahl, focusing on “fragile” metaphors in translation, in particular that of bridges between languages, a common metaphor that rushes to undo or hide the unequal power relations between different cultures. Wu Fu’s rigorous dialogue with translation theory serves as a transition into Suk-Kyun’s essay on the proliferation of Chilean literature in translation in South Korea, which invites us to rethink the globality of the reception of Boom and Post-Boom novelists like José Donoso, Isabel Allende, and Antonio Skármeta. Having said this, Woo focuses on the ways in which Pablo Neruda, whose leftist sympathies are well known, shaped the political imagination of South Korean poets Kim Soo-young and Kim Nam-Ju, the latter known as the “Korean Che Guevara,” prior to the 1980s.

Part III, “Diffraction Worlds of Nikkei Identities,” features essays by Ignacio López-Calvo, Shigeko Mato, Seth Jacobowitz, and José I. Suárez. López-Calvo begins his chapter with the theorization of what he refers to as the “monstrification” of the “immigrant Other” in Peruvian Jorge Salazar’s *La medianoche del japonés* (1991) and Mexican Juan José Rodríguez’s *Asesinato en una lavandería china* (1996). While Salazar and Rodríguez, López-Calvo argues, attempt to empathize with Asian migrants and reveal the racism they face, both novelists fall into the trap of exoticizing them and associating them with extreme violence, thus making us wonder whether these texts ultimately perpetuate or manage to question and criticize the fear of the “Asian Other” in Latin America. The following chapter in the volume delves into contemporary Peruvian writer Carlos Yumishito del Valle’s works, wherein one can detect, according to critic Shigeko Mato, a rebellious spirit against the established order that draws from old Japanese folktales, while Jacobowitz’s contribution centers on intergeneration conflicts of Japanese Brazilians before and after World War II, a time in which they were persecuted and their ties of transnational belonging put in question. For this, Jacobowitz analyzes

a prewar short-story by Japanese immigrant writer Sugi Takeo and the film *Corações Sujos* (2011) directed by Vicente Amorin. José I. Suárez goes further back in history: he centers on the failed attempt of Jesuit missionaries to Christianize Japan in the sixteenth century, as featured in Shusaku Endo's novels *The Sea and Poison* (1958) and *Silence* (1966). Suárez's chapter lacks a Latin American focus making it an outlier in the volume. Having said this, in the end Suárez states that more than being about the persecution of Catholics in sixteenth-century Japan, Endo's novels "reveal much more about colonialism and 'coloniality'" (184). This sudden mention of "coloniality," which hints at Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano's concept of "coloniality of power," could have been developed, but it effectively reminds us that Latin America does not have to be a case study of intercultural contacts, but a site of theoretical production.

The volume ends with a section titled "Crossroads of Asia-Latin American Narratives and Travel Writing." First, Axel Gasquet turns to prominent Filipino intellectual Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera's trip to Argentina in 1914 to visit his younger brother, sculptor Félix Pardo de Tavera, who had settled in Buenos Aires years prior. Gasquet focuses on the extent to which Argentina serves as a model modern nation to Filipinos for Pardo de Tavera, concluding that his views on immigration, education, the economy, relations with the United States, etc. align with those of the Argentine elites. In his contribution, Jorge Mojarro offers a fascinating comparison between foundational fictions of nineteenth-century Latin American writers and Filipino national hero José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (1887). Mojarro sets out to go beyond the reading of Rizal as "an isolated genius" (210) in the Philippines by placing *Noli Me Tangere* alongside Latin American contemporaneous uses of literature, in particular the novel, as a tool to legitimize the concept of nation. The last two essays of the edited volume come back to the genre of travel literature. Everton V. Machado offers a close reading of chronicles Brazilian poet Cecília Meireles wrote during her trip to India in 1953 to attend a seminar on Gandhi. Unlike Pardo de Tavera, Meireles purposely confuses the natural and cultural landscapes of Brazil and India, effortlessly questioning the East-West divide, although on occasion her views on the "essentially fabulous" India end up "reinforcing the perennial idea of the impenetrability of the Orient" (237), according to Machado. Last but not least, Estefanía Bournot's essay examines a trend encouraged in the 1990s and early 2000s by two major publishing houses, Mondadori and Companhia das Letras, to increase the production of travel literature among younger Latin American writers. Although this was a trend driven by a global market economy, those who traveled to regions and countries of the Global South, Bournot brilliantly argues, helped interrogate and ultimately redefine the horizons of the idea of Latin America, the "Orient," as well as world literature.

Perhaps *Cultural and Literary Dialogues Between Asia and Latin America* will easily be confused with or even lost amongst other edited volumes with the same foci that have appeared in the last five years, such as Zelideth María Rivas and Debbie Lee-Distefano's *Imagining Asia in the Americas* (2016), Koichi Hagimoto's *Trans-Pacific Encounters: Asia and the Hispanic World* (2016) or Jie Lu and Martín Camps' *Transpacific Literary and Cultural Connections: Latin American Influence in Asia* (2020), not to mention recent journal issues, such as the 2017 issue edited by Andrea Bachner and Pedro Erber for *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, titled "Between Asia and Latin America: New Transpacific Perspectives," or the 2018 special issue in *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, titled "Asia en América Latina," and edited by Kim Beachesne, Koichi Hagimoto and Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger. Yet this is a good "problem" to have. Altogether, they are a testament to the extraordinarily rich and numerous connections and complexities within and between Latin America and Asia, as well as the ongoing "critical journey"—to borrow a phrase employed by Majstorovic and Gasquet—that is the transareal field of Asia-Latin American studies.