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Worlding and decolonizing the literary world-system: Asian-Latin American literature as an alternative type of *Weltliteratur*

Because these accounts of world literature reduce worldliness to global processes of marketing, circulation, and distribution, they efface literature's temporal dimension, its world-making power as a structure of address that announces a subject and a process that imparts meaning.

(Cheah 2014: 326)

Where is the worldliness in a literary text¹? Is this worldliness inseparable from globalization, global circulation, translation into English, and unequal power relations between Western cores and non-Western peripheries? In this essay, I challenge the notion of world literature as a market commodity (in the case of peripheral literatures, they suffer unequal, hegemonic market conditions and power relations) and propose instead the idea of world literature as writing and reading practices that move beyond the framework of the national and of Eurocentrism, being molded instead by a critical, planetary consciousness. World literature would then become a decolonial literature beyond Eurocentric models, a literature that opens up the world beyond obsolete colonial models. In other words, this new concept would turn the concept of world literature into the opposite of Eurocentric literature, into an open challenge to traditional Eurocentrism. Through this reformulation of the concept of world literature, which represents a change in cognitive mapping from the Eurocentric/local to the decolonial/international/global and takes into account literature's temporal dimension as mentioned by Pheng Cheah in the epigraph, I also propose a re-conceptualization of Asian-Latin American cultural production and, by extension, other “minor” literatures as an alternative type of *Weltliteratur*.

As is well known, the term *Weltliteratur* or “world literature” is normally applied, rather than to the sum of all the literature produced in the world, to

1 I would like to thank Nelson Maldonado-Torres for his feedback on my thesis on world literature during a conference in Jeju island, South Korea.

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works that *circulate* beyond the national borders of the country where they were written. In David Damrosch's terms,

I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in the original language [...] a work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture [...] world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike. (2003: 4–5)

Damrosch later adds that “literature stays within its national or regional tradition when it usually loses in translation, whereas works become world literature when they gain on balance in translation, stylistic losses offset by an expansion in depth as they increase their range” (Damrosch 2003: 289). In contrast with the old-fashioned Eurocentric conception of the literary world-system as a canon of European masterpieces within their own national traditions, the definition of world literature by Damrosch, Moretti and others now enjoys a more global outreach. The Internet, as may be expected, has also made the circulation of international texts much more accessible, both in their original languages and in translation. However, I believe that circulation itself should not be a requisite for a text to attain the rank of world literature.

Some of the first recorded reflections on world literature came from the German writer and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Curiously, as Anis Shivani points out, his proto-comparative literature reflections, which were “part of his project of charging German literature with enough doses of internationalism to overcome the dominance of France” (Shivani 2013) came as a reaction to reading Chinese literature in translation on January 31, 1827:

The people think, act, and feel almost exactly as we do, and very soon one senses that one is like them, except that with them everything happens more cleanly, lucidly, and morally. With them everything is reasonable, steady, and without great passion or poetic verve and in this respect is very similar to my Hermann und Dorothea as well as to the English novels of Richardson. It differs, however, in that with them external nature always lives side by side with the human figures. (Cited in Shivani 2013)

Therefore, east-west cross-cultural dialogues have been at the root of Weltliteratur debates since the coining of the term. Along the lines of this East-West paradigm, Emily Apter, in her criticism of Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, states:

A competitive model of literary world-systems drafted from Moretti's evolutionary teleology might at the very least prove useful in addressing the need for viable paradigms of

East-West comparatism. As Asia and Euro-America increasingly position themselves as bipolar models of one-worldedness, each vying to outflank the other in becoming the sole arbiter or default mode for the terms of cultural comparison, survivalism comes back into play, albeit in a rebarbatively Malthusian mode. (2009: 53)

In this essay, I suggest that Asian-Latin American literature, as a paramount non-Eurocentric body of work, can extend links and bridges to soften, beyond withered orientalist approaches, this purported rivalry between the Asian and Euro-American world-systems vying for literary hegemony in the twenty-first century.

If we accept Damrosch's definition of world literature, focusing exclusively on the publishing industry, global patterns of textual mobility, the world literary market, power struggles or the number of translations, virtually none of the literary production by Latin American authors of Asian descent, on which this essay focuses, can be included within the metaphoric concept of the World Republic of Letters (to use Pascale Casanova's concept), as this literary corpus has undoubtedly not reached the status and cultural capital of the conventional literary world-system. By contrast if, as Damrosch himself claims, "Since the mid-1990s, the classical and masterpiece approaches have increasingly been supplemented by an emphasis on a view of world literature as a set of windows on the world", and authors in world literature anthologies "need not be dominant figures even in their home culture" (Damrosch 2009: 5–6), then this marginal literary production fulfills this basic paradigm of the definition of world literature. It indeed offers non-Eurocentric and oftentimes decolonial windows, not only to the axiologies and aesthetic values of Latin America and the Far East, but also to the hybrid, border thinking or the cosmopolitan worldview of Nikkei (overseas Japanese) and Tusán (Chinese-Latin American) minority communities.

Furthermore, taking into account the second earliest recorded definition of world literature (after that of Goethe), that of Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, one realizes that their notion of worldliness is delinked from market developments and circumscribed, instead, to a celebrated internationalization of literature beyond national borders: "And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature" (Marx/Engels 2005: 11). From this perspective, if we focus, like Marx and Engels, on literature that goes beyond local and national limitations and thus reject the aforementioned conventional, Eurocentric definitions, Asian-Latin American literature may be easily considered within this ranking. The same approach is justified if we accept Pheng Cheah's proposal: "I seek to develop an alternative notion of world literature as an active power of world making that

contests the world made by capitalist globalization: that is, world literature is reconceived as a site of processes of worlding and as an agent that participates and intervenes in these processes” (Cheah 2014: 303). This perspective reformulates the concept of world literature to refer instead to globally oriented authors who address their writings to a world audience; that is, those whose opuses have a global reach beyond Eurocentrism, not in the literary market, but in their global sensitivity and consciousness, through the settings where they take place and the worldviews they present. After all, as Shivani states, “A certain *placelessness* – not to be confused with notions of artistic pseudo-exile – seems to be essential to appreciate world literature” (Shivani 2013). In a similar vein, Nicholas Birns and Juan E. De Castro, in their re-articulation of the Chilean Roberto Bolaño’s opus as world literature, state: “Not just Bolaño’s recognition but also his material is global. As a writer he covers the entire world” (Birns/de Castro 2017: 8). They then proceed to explore Bolaño’s representation of Africa, Asia, Europe, the United States, Latin America, and claim that “Bolaño’s world literary status in many ways has to do with how he is part of so many cultural formations, and does not seem to be bound by one identity: both Mexican and Chilean, American and European, poet and novelist” (Birns/de Castro 2017: 11). Asian-Latin American literature tends to share this same non-Eurocentric coverage of vast regions of the planet in their settings and is often unbound by single identities, negotiating not only several national, transnational and cultural identities, but also strategically entering and leaving them according to the sociopolitical and economic circumstances, as I have explained elsewhere.

This change in perspective, which sidesteps essentialist approaches related to the notion of multiculturalism, widens the theoretical and critical scope of world literature by providing world literary status to the works of those Asian-Latin American authors who move from narrow-minded national circumscription to decolonial, global contexts. Indeed, this literary corpus often responds to an either post-national (close to a non-Eurocentric cosmopolitanism) or to a transnational approach. In the last iteration, it provides peripheral, south-to-south dialogues with other regions of the global south (for example, south-to-south cultural exchanges between China on the one hand and Cuba, Peru, or Mexico on the other; likewise between (pre-Meiji Restoration) Japan with Peru or Brazil, or addresses, from the outside, the readers and concerns of the metropolitan, north-Atlantic, hegemonic centers (the case of the dialogues and identification with European and Asian cultures that characterize the writings of the Sino-Peruvian women authors Julia Wong and Sui Yun). After all, “transcultural comparison” is a category that Damrosch finds indispensable for a text in order to enter world-literature status, in addition to being read as literature, translated, and circulating beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin. Likewise, in the same way

that the apparent intention of addressing global issues from a non-Eurocentric perspective and reaching global audiences beyond national readerships does not necessarily translate per se into a wide international distribution of these works, one could also argue that success in the global market should not automatically provide a work with literary world ranking.

These evolving global-south dynamics are apparent in the works of those Sino-Latin American authors whose worldviews fuse the Latin American reality in which they live with the Chinese cultural values and literary traditions inherited from their ancestors. If we consider that Japan was also part of the global south until the Meiji Restoration, which began in 1868 and would achieve the modernization of the country by the end of the nineteenth century, some Nippo-Latin American authors could also be considered within this south-to-south category. The expanded study of the intercultural connections between literary works by Asian-Latin American authors and the worldviews of the rest of the global south (particularly those of the distant and diverse cultures of East Asia) can, therefore, become an effective critical intervention in current debates over world literature. It can lead us to conceive a good part of Asian-Latin American cultural production as world literature, beyond the traditional sociology of the dependency on European and North American publishing centers, marketing strategies, canonizing institutions, and international literary prizes. In addition, this decolonial cultural production often offers a contrasting view of, and sometimes even a response to, the traditional orientalism (or a more benign one, in some cases, as Julia Kushigian showed in her *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition*) that has characterized numerous Latin American literary texts from the time of Rubén Darío and other *modernistas*².

² The publications dealing with orientalism in Latin America and the Caribbean include the following studies: Julia Kushigian's *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition: In Dialogue with Borges, Paz, and Sarduy* (1991), Araceli Tinajero's *Orientalismo en el modernismo hispanoamericano* (2003), Axel Gasquet's *Oriente al Sur. El orientalismo literario argentino de Esteban Echeverría a Roberto Arlt* (2007) and *El llamado de Oriente. Historia cultural del orientalismo argentino (1900–1950)*, as well as my edited volumes *Alternative Orientalisms in Latin America and Beyond* (2007), *One World Periphery Reads the Other: Knowing the "Oriental" in the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula* (2009), and *Peripheral Transmodernities: South-to-South Dialogues between the Luso-Hispanic World and "the Orient"* (2012). Many other books have been devoted to cultural production by and about Hispanic authors of Asian ancestry, including Debbie Lee-DiStefano's *Three Asian-Hispanic Writers from Peru: Doris Moromisato, José Watanabe, Siu Kam Wen* (2008), Rebecca Riger Tsurumi's *The Closed Hand: Images of the Japanese in Modern Peruvian Literature* (2012), Koichi Hagimoto's *Between Empires: Martí, Rizal, and the Intercolonial Alliance* (2013), and my *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* (2008), *The Affinity of the Eye: Writing Nikkei in Peru* (2013), and *Dragons in the Land of the Condor: Writing Tusán in Peru* (2014).

This alternative approach transforms Damrosch's concept of world literature as a mode of circulation and reading into an internationalized, non-Eurocentric cosmopolitan, or post-national mode of writing that, in some cases, attempts to think *from* both the West and the East. In his own words, it becomes "a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time" (Damrosch 2003: 282). As a caveat, the East addressed in these writings may be a real-life one or may well be imagined or even idealized, for instance, the nostalgic re-creation of the exotic world of his Chinese ancestors in the Chinese Cuban Regino Pedroso's poetry collection of "Chinese poems", *El ciruelo de Yuan Pei Fu* (1955), the Chinese Peruvian Siu Kam Wen's short-story collection *La primera espada del imperio* (1988), or the novel *La eternidad del instante* (2004) by the Cuban Zoé Valdés, who also claims Chinese ancestry. On occasion, therefore, their representation of Asian spaces and worldviews is tainted by self-orientalization and the latent idealization or exoticization of the cultural refinement of their ancestors' culture in detrimental contrast with local Latin American cultures. In other words, I am aware of the potential danger of falling into essentialism when discussing Eastern and Western worldviews. As Zhang Longxi elucidates,

Those differences, however, do not fall neatly along the lines of a simple East-West divide, or the borderline of cultural identities. In fact, members of the same culture may hold very different views and argue with one another, while agreement may sometimes come from people faraway and long ago, living under very different cultural and social conditions. (2009: 70)

In general terms, either the Middle East or the Far East has traditionally been conceived as the ultimate Other of the West, because of their major cultural differences and contrasting views of knowing and being in the world. Since Asian-Latin American cultural production tends to look outside the Eurocentric, national framework, it can extend a useful bridge to read across these cultural divides, potentially facilitating global tolerance, understanding, and empathy. This further step toward deterritorializing the valuing of the literary capital of Latin American works may also offer a window to the emerging decolonial discourses and epistemologies of diasporic minority groups, such as those of Sino-Latin Americans and the Latin American Nikkei. Part of this literary production, which tackles thorny episodes of the Asian diaspora's experience in Latin America – including the coolie trade, semi-slavery on plantation and guano mines, the 1940 riots in Lima, forced displacement in Peru, Brazil and Mexico, deportation and internment during World War II, and the 1940s terrorism of the Nikkei group Shindo Remnei in Brazil – becomes a strategic tool against epistemic violence and erasure from the national consciousness. These works, which historicize the Asian immigrant experience in Latin America and the Caribbean,

dare to contest worn-out stereotypes (often orientalist stereotypes, in the case of Asian-Latin American literature) and to negotiate evolving ethnic and national identities, beyond the stagnation of presumed fixed (often Eurocentric) identities. In Cheah's words,

This distinction between global connectedness through the spatial diffusion and extensiveness achieved through media and market processes and belonging to a shared world corresponds to the fundamental contradiction between globalization and cosmopolitanism: although globalization creates the material conditions for a community of the greatest extension possible, capitalism radically undermines the achievement of a genuinely human world. The globe is not a world. This is a necessary premise if the cosmopolitan vocation of world literature can be meaningful today. (2014: 319)

Paradoxically, Asian-Latin American literature claims both cultural difference and a place in the national projects of their respective countries, all the while attempting (in vain so far) to find their place in world literature (as traditionally understood) and access to global markets.

In both Nippo-Latin American and Sino-Latin American literary works, one can observe the rejection of the traditional ethnic politics by which minority groups are supposed to accommodate to mainstream society's values. The frequent description of international landscapes and urbanscapes reflects this same global sense of attachment. Their border thinking also responds to their rejection of the epistemic racism that reduces their inherited Chinese/Tusán or Japanese/Nikkei belief systems as mere myth or folklore. In a sense, Asian-Latin American literature, without entirely rejecting Western modernity, offers the possibility of an alternative modernity, a counter-narrative to the nationalist modernities of their Latin American country and their ancestors' countries in East Asia. Furthermore, as I have explored elsewhere, in the case of the cultural production by Nippo-Peruvians and Nippo-Brazilians, some works propose their Nikkei community, often imagined as a perfect reflection of the work ethics and resiliency of the Japanese in Japan, or Japanese society as role models for majority Brazilians and Peruvians. These strategic cultural politics that unveil the supposed need for the Nipponization of Brazil, encouraging their fellow citizens to learn from Japanese or Nikkei patriotism, civility and work ethics is noticeable as, for example, in the *dekasegi*³ "temporary worker" Agenor Kakazu's *Crônicas*

³ The *dekasegi* phenomenon here refers to the "inverse" migration of the second diaspora of Latin American Nikkei moving to Japan to work in mid-size factories, which began at the end of the 1980s. At one point, 250,000 Brazilian Nikkei had moved to Japan, but many have now returned to Brazil after the 2008 economic recession in Japan.

de um Garoto que Também Amava Os Beatles e Os Rolling Stones and in Silvio Sam's *Sonhos Que De Cá Segui*.

But of course, there is a lot of heterogeneity within Asian-Latin American literature. Along with this anti-epistemicidal approach and the proposal to Nipponize Latin American countries, many other works in this minor (sometimes invisible) literature, opt for a more post-national and cosmopolitan approach. Thus, several of the works by Peruvian Nikkei authors (Fernando Iwasaki and Carlos Yushimito or the Tusán women writers Julia Wong and Sui Yun) while proudly celebrating their Asian cultural heritage, distance themselves even further from national outlooks, offering instead a rooted, non-Eurocentric cosmopolitan and post-national approach⁴. Rather than accommodating to mainstream society's values, they choose to display an international and transnational self-identification in their writings through the description of their travels (Wong, for example, has lived in Peru, Argentina, Germany, Macau, and Hong Kong, among other places) and the international settings of their poems and narratives. Another strategy used by Tusán authors such as Julia Wong and Sui Yun, who lived several years in countries other than their native Peru, is to place themselves in the interstices between national borders by resorting to code-switching in English, German, and other European languages, beyond their native Spanish, or by writing entire poems in those languages. In certain poems, their cosmopolitan outlook and non-Eurocentric, planetary consciousness lead them to delink themselves from national projects and to rhetorically reject their native country, Peru⁵. This type of worldly literature, therefore, has the potential of forging cosmopolitan, intercultural tolerance by revealing the differences and similarities of human values across time and cultures – be they of the south-to-south or of the core-peripheries variety.

Thus, their collective thinking beyond fixed (Eurocentric) ethnic or national identities, beyond the national bounds of Peru and China, brings them closer to the aforementioned alternative idea of a decolonial world literature. Their own western axiologies dialog with the inherited Asian cultural values of their ancestors in a fruitful cross-cultural enrichment, strategically moving in and out of their Peruvianness and/or Chineseness. Like Julia Wong's, Sui Yun's poetry expresses

⁴ For close readings of Asian-Latin American authors' works, see my books *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* (2008), *The Affinity of the Eye: Writing Nikkei in Peru* (2013), *Dragons in the Land of the Condor: Writing Tusán in Peru* (2014), and *Saudades of Japan and Brazil: Contested Modernities in Lusophone Nikkei Cultural Production* (forthcoming 2018).

⁵ Their countryman, Siu Kam Wen, who lives in Hawaii, has also pursued the world citizenship that characterizes world literature by translating by himself some of his own novels into English.

a similar rooted cosmopolitanism, making the different countries where she has lived (Peru, Spain, the United States, Paris, and Germany) her home and identifying with pluriversal values beyond those of her native Peru. In my view, rather than passive objects circulating worldwide at the mercy of market-driven world systems and power struggles between core and global-south periphery, these examples of Asian-Latin American literature constitute a viable, alternative type of *Weltliteratur*, of a non-Eurocentric worldliness in literary texts that reflects world citizenship and that can potentially contribute to create a planetary sensibility.

Along these lines, in contrast with other Peruvian Nikkei authors, like Doris Moromisato in her poetry collections *Chambala era un camino* (1999) and *Diario de la mujer esponja* (2004), who often display ethno-nationalistic pride (Okinawan in her case), several of the short stories included in Carlos Yushimito's *Las islas* (2006) and *Lecciones para un niño que llega tarde* (2011), for example, take place in Brazil (a country he had never visited when writing the stories) and other places, rather than in his native Peru; these often have no relation with his ethnic Japanese heritage, thus celebrating a post-nationalist and post-identitarian approach. Consequently, when Yushimito was asked in an interview about his relationship with Peruvian literature, he responded:

I believe that my relationship with it is as extraterritorial as with any other. I have never felt comfortable with national margins, because I do not think there is a limit when it comes to reading. Perhaps there are limits with respect to the sensitivity it evokes, which brings you closer to an author than to another but, of course, this configures a completely different cartography that dismantles the political maps that we have made an effort to build. (Guerrero 2011: 14)⁶

As to the use of Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* (shantytowns) or the Brazilian *sertões* (the northeastern semiarid backcountry) as the settings in many of his stories, Yushimito, in another interview, interprets his choice within the framework of his generation's literature:

Perhaps now we see everything through a different lens which makes us read outside the tradition of national literatures – a tradition which wasn't defined exclusively by the spaces that were represented (be they local or cosmopolitan), but rather by the urge or need to write in order to understand or question national identities. This was already partly the

6 “Creo que mi relación con ella es tan extraterritorial como con cualquier otra. Nunca me he sentido cómodo con los márgenes nacionales, porque no creo que haya un límite en la lectura. Quizá hay límites en la sensibilidad que reúne, que te aproxima a un autor más que a otro, pero desde luego eso configura una cartografía completamente distinta, que desmonta los mapas políticos que nos hemos esforzado en construir”.

intention of previous generations, but with Bolaño and perhaps with ourselves as substitutes (I hesitate to use the word “heirs”), the idea of identity starts to shift, becoming less stable, less certain. This leads us to question not just the role of the state but also of other institutions. And that means we have a greater affinity with some authors than with others. What I mean is that it’s possible to continue being a Peruvian or Mexican or Panamanian writer without giving up that national label, but also without giving up our individual roles, which find common ties in language, imagination and expectations. (*Granta* 2010)

Yushimito’s Brazilian literary setting is merely an allegorical, imagined scenario that he finds suitable for exploring universal themes, including his own country’s problems. In his own words, “when I accepted the fact that there was a need for the stories to take place there and not elsewhere, what I wanted to do was to venture into fiction itself, to delight by re-inventing Brazil on the basis of my own referents and even of my own ignorance, which were what finally allow me to give them life” (Ruiz-Ortega 2010)⁷. From the point of departure of ignorance, the author looks outside the national, even when he is dealing with problematic social issues that affect his native country.

Latin American social groups of Asian ancestry typically belong to the middle or upper classes, and are often conceived as “model minorities” (using the problematic American notion of the term). As a result, they do not suffer the same level of economic and sociopolitical marginalization of other minority groups in the region. Their cultural production is nonetheless part of a struggle against epistemicide – in this case, the attempted erasure of ancestral culture at different stages of these communities’ history through the government’s imposition of forced assimilation policies – that can be contextualized alongside the peripheral struggles of other global south epistemologies. One such example is the struggle against the epistemicidal campaign launched by the Getúlio Vargas’s (1882–1954) regime in Brazil, known as *Estado Novo* (New State; 1937–1945), which prohibited the possession or use of any printed material in Japanese, the teaching of Japanese language, and its use in public. Against this epistemic violence, while sometimes claiming cultural belonging in a Latin American country, some Asian-Latin American authors (particularly those born in Latin America) also appropriate the millenary cultural traditions of their ancestors as a strategic tool to mark their social group’s cultural differences and epistemological privilege. Asian-Latin American authors’ appropriation of Asian literary traditions, such as the

7 “Cuando acepté la necesidad de que las historias sucedieran ahí y no en alguna otra parte, lo que quise fue aventurarme en su propia ficción, regodearme inventando el Brasil a partir de mis propios referentes e incluso de mi propio desconocimiento, que era la mayor licencia para darle finalmente vida”.

use of (the concept of, rather than the techniques of) haiku by Nikkei poets José Watanabe and Nicolás Matayoshi in Peru and Teruko Oda in Brazil, which tends to yield hybrid products that drastically alter the original literary practice. Oda, for example, innovates traditional haiku by introducing similes and the voice of the poetic “I”, as well as by focusing on an often personified Brazilian nature and the quintessential Brazilian yearning known as *saudade*. In turn, Watanabe admitted the hybrid nature of his haiku in an interview with Randy Muth: “I do not write haiku. But the spirit is perhaps in my poems, which are a bit longer, learning that language somehow dictates the poems. The poem is already written in nature and one only has to pick it up” (Watanabe 2009)⁸. However, Watanabe claimed that his verses shared the spirit of haiku, which he wrote avoiding dramatization and without reaching conclusions. Furthermore, in another interview, this time with Rebecca Riger Tsurumi, he identified precisely this dialogue with Japanese haiku as his own distinctive trait as a poet: “I have been influenced by haiku poetry. This is what makes me different. I write re-created haiku” (Tsurumi 2012: 242)⁹. Therefore, in spite of the abundance of cultural translations in this literature, it should not be assumed that all Nikkei and *Tusán* Latin American authors are necessarily familiar with or proficient in Asian literary and cultural traditions or, even less so, that they share the same cultural worldviews and literary traits with the Chinese in China or the Japanese in Japan. It is well known that the traffic in ideas and worldviews between East and West has traditionally been much more complicated matter. The legibility among cultures is more evident, however, when dealing with authors born and raised in Asia, and who later moved to Latin America, authors like Chinese-born Siu Kam Wen or Japanese-born Seiichi Higashide, author of the fascinating testimonial *Namida no Adiósu: Nikkei Peru imin, Beikoku kyosei shuyo no ki* (1981) (Translated into English with the title *Adiós to Tears: The Memoirs of a Japanese-Peruvian Internee in U.S. Concentration Camps*, 2000).

By contrast, authors like the Japanese Peruvian Fernando Iwasaki, understandably tired of reading reviews about their work that “find” Asian traits in their writing (it often happens with interpretations of Watanabe’s poetry as well), strive to distance themselves from an Asian identity only to end up peppering their opus with repeated references to their Asian heritage – if only from

⁸ “No escribo Haiku. Pero el espíritu tal vez sí está en mis poemas que son un poco más largos, el aprender que la naturaleza de alguna manera nos dicta los poemas. El poema ya está escrito en la naturaleza y uno solamente tiene que recogerlo”.

⁹ “Tengo una influencia de poesía de haiku. Esto es lo que me hace diferente. Escribo haiku recreado”.

an ironic perspective – thus bringing attention to an aspect that was supposedly being avoided. In this context, Iwasaki's caricaturization of Japanese stereotypes in the short-story collection *España, aparte de mí estos premios* (2009) is part of his attempt to de-ethnify his writing. Yet, if one takes into account that, besides this text, three others – the historical study *Extremo Oriente y el Perú en el siglo XVI* (2005), the short story “La sombra del guerrero”, (2008) and the long essay *Mi poncho es un kimono flamenco* (2005) – also deal with Japanese issues and characters, it is not difficult to point out the failure of his attempt at de-ethnification. Be it as it may, as already stated, the contact zones between Asian and Latin American peripheral epistemologies in this literary corpus should not be taken for granted, as they are sometimes disconnected, imagined, or blatantly contrived.

As an example of the aforementioned non-Eurocentric, global, post-national citizenship and planetary sensibility, Iwasaki often reminds his interlocutors that he refuses to identify with any single national identity: neither the Peruvian identity of his country of birth, nor the Japanese identity of his ancestors, nor the Spanish identity of his host country. In fact, he finds having multiple identities a more comfortable status. Thus, in his essay “La visa múltiple como identidad en la narrativa peruana contemporánea”, included in *Mi poncho es un kimono flamenco*, Iwasaki asks: “Why does one have to be from just one country when one can be from all and from none?” (Iwasaki 2005: 45)¹⁰. He then sarcastically rejects the omnipresent literary or philological border customs where national identity must be shown: “I do not accept cultural border customs and I do not acknowledge anyone's authority to require the literary passport ... what I intend to have is a multiple and undefined identity – Peruvian, Japanese, Italian, and Spanish, with its respective passports – to the dismay of literary critics” (Iwasaki 2005: 48)¹¹. Finally, in another essay of the same collection titled “*Die kartoffelblüte* o la flor de papa”, he again celebrates literary transnationalism: “To travel the world with a Spanish passport, while having a Japanese surname and being born in Peru, has turned me into a living refutation of regionalisms, identities, and traditional outfits” (Iwasaki 2005: 51)¹². In another piece, “El escritor

¹⁰ “¿Por qué hay que ser de un solo país cuando se puede ser de todos y de ninguno?”.

¹¹ “No acepto las aduanas culturales y no le reconozco a nadie la autoridad de exigir el pasaporte literario... lo que me propongo tener es una identidad múltiple e indefinida—peruana, japonesa, italiana y española, con sus respectivos pasaportes – para horror de los críticos literarios”.

¹² “Viajar por el mundo con un pasaporte español, teniendo un apellido japonés y habiendo nacido en Perú, me ha convertido en una refutación viviente de los regionalismos, las identidades y los trajes típicos”.

‘comunitario’. Fútbol, identidad y literatura”, he celebrates being an expatriate: “exile and rootlessness are wonderful for artists, poets, writers, and soccer players in order to discover the illusions and limitations that come with national identity”¹³ (Iwasaki 2007: 45). This type of global thinking reflects precisely the non-Eurocentric worldliness in Asian-Latin American thinking and writing that I am proposing as an alternative type of world literature.

The transnationalism of Asian-Latin American literature is particularly evident in *dekasegi* narratives, such as the Peruvian Nikkei Augusto Higa’s testimonial *Japón no da dos oportunidades* (1994), which narrates the author’s negative experience as a temporary worker in Japan, or similar – albeit more positive and optimistic – texts by Brazilian Nikkei about their own *dekasegi* experiences, including Kakazu’s chronicle collection *Crônicas de um Garoto* (1988) and Silvio Sam’s novel *Sonhos que de Cá Segui* (1997). As I have explored elsewhere, while establishing links between Eastern and Western cultures, these testimonials and novels also become vehicles for claiming full citizenship and for proving their authors’ true Latin Americanness as well as that of their ethnic groups. These feel concomitantly rejected as *gaijin* (foreigners) in Japan and guilty for having abandoned their native countries in times of drastic economic depression. In fact, some of these authors openly distance themselves from the Japanese culture of their ancestors together with that of their host country, claiming instead to share a common history with the mainstream societies in their Latin countries or even with indigenous groups in Peru or Japan¹⁴.

Indeed, we sometimes see the identification of déclassé *dekasegi* now working in Japanese middle-size factories with the marginalization of indigenous people in Peru. In Ricardo Ganaja’s testimonial *Okinawa, el reino de la cortesía, y testimonio de un peruano okinawense* (2008), we find a condemnation of the treatment received by Latin American *dekasegi* in Japan: “if they think that you are *dekasegi*, you are just like an indigenous person who just came down from the mountains to Lima”¹⁵ (Ganaja 2008: 124). The author subsequently pledges kindness to indigenous people after his return to Peru. In fact, throughout the book, the marginalization of *dekasegi* and Okinawans in Japan constantly reminds him of that of indigenous people in his country. Similarly,

13 “A los artistas, poetas, escritores y futbolistas nos vienen de maravilla el destierro y el desarraigo para descubrir los espejismos y las limitaciones de la identidad nacional”.

14 Curiously, Alberto Fujimori used a populist strategy during the 1990 Peruvian presidential elections to reach power; he would often wear indigenous garb to present himself as an ally of indigenous people, in contrast to his political opponent, Mario Vargas Llosa, whom he accused of representing the white oligarchy.

15 “Si ellos piensan que eres *dekasegi* eres como el serrano recién bajado a Lima”.

both Julia Wong and Sui Yun strategically identify in their works with Andean indigenous culture and Amazonian indigenous culture respectively. In any case, the mobility of these *dekasegi* transmigrants, shuttling back and forth between Japan and Brazil or Peru, has created strong links between the motherland and the distant host country that are often highlighted in their testimonials.

A common trait of Asian-Latin American literature is its attempt to empathetically connect the reader to a culture and time different from those of the contemporary Latin America where this cultural production was produced, be it the inherited Asian culture of the authors' ancestors, their Nikkei and *Tusán* ethnocultural worldviews, or the countries they have visited or lived in. This often leads to a deterritorialized global sensitivity that goes beyond national and even hemispheric borders, which does not necessarily mean that the literary text is de-nationalized, but rather that it became at least bi-nationalized and, in many cases, multi-nationalized. This approach, along with their collective critique of hegemonic Western modernity, their border thinking, and the cosmopolitan, post-national, planetary sense of place manifested in much of Asian-Latin American literature, positions this literary corpus well as a candidate to represent a new, decolonial understanding of world literature. Moving beyond the economic reductionism that only looks at markets or sociological interpretations, it focuses instead on hegemonic literary capitals in the West and the politics of English translation. Asian-Latin American literature provides, in addition, a channel of cultural and spiritual understanding between Western and Eastern worldviews.

As Cheah, arguing against analogies that describe world literature exclusively as a passive product of circulation and market exchange, points out, "Perhaps all sociological accounts of world literature necessarily attenuate the worldly force of literature by reducing its worldliness to social forces as exemplified by market processes" (Cheah 2014: 316). In this sense, Asian-Latin American literature's transnationalism returns agency to the reader who, while no longer a mere consumer, will have a potentially transformative access to a window to the – perhaps new for her – non-Eurocentric cosmovisions of distant cultures or ethnocultural minority groups. It thus allows for cultural and historical differences, along with geopolitical specificities, to be highlighted and respected. Concomitantly, yet in another manifestation of the potential transformative agency of literature, the cultural capital collected in and produced by these worldly texts (the new sense I propose), also contributes to increasing the sometimes much-needed self-esteem of historically silenced minority communities.

In conclusion, how is it that much of this untranslated, non-commodified Asian-Latin American literature, which has very limited access to world literary networks, can achieve the status of world literature? In my view, through

the dialectical way in which this minor literary production moves beyond the Eurocentric/national to, instead, veer the worldviews of East and West into engaging each other in a productive decolonial and cross-cultural encounter (at times blending them to create an in-between third space of communication). It contributes to the creation of a non-Eurocentric world consciousness, thus becoming a literature that may be considered *Weltliteratur*. The study of Asian-Latin American literature, knowledges and memory (mostly produced in Latin America, but also written by *dekasegi* in Japan and by other Asian-Latin American emigrants in different regions, like Siu Kam Wen in Hawaii), which looks toward East Asia, can prevent us from the risk, raised by Emily Apter, of “producing a facile globalism in which distinct literary worlds are flattened to fit homogenous paradigms of laws of comparability” (2009: 57). Although at times permeated by contradictions, self-orientalization, and a will to power and representation, Asian-Latin American literature still has the potential to offer a rich contribution to cross-cultural understanding, an ethical enterprise that is often associated with the definition of world literature, without necessarily falling into utopian, visionary speech.

If one considers world literature in the term’s alternative sense (a literature with a non-Eurocentric, decolonial, planetary, global consciousness beyond national projects), these works, coupled with those of other “minor” literatures, have the potential to change the cartography of the global literary field. They also open their national literary canons to more transnational approaches and even to question the official discourse of mestizo national identities (Andean countries, for example) or the black and white dichotomies prevalent in Brazil or the Caribbean basin. Yet, so far, this cosmopolitan impetus has clashed with what Oswaldo Zavala has called “the insurmountable limitation of the ‘world literature’ paradigm as a system that reproduces the silences and the exclusions of the dominant English-language global editorial market, dependent on and conditioned by the scarce number of translations” (2017: 82). In other words, currently, when literature is not “legitimized” by being translated into English – the case with most of Asian-Latin American literature – its chances of reaching the cultural capital of world literature rankings are virtually inexistent. For this mindset to change, or to bypass cultural hegemony and commodification, we would have to change the meaning of “world” (i.e., a non-Eurocentric world) in “world literature”. Were literary critics to rethink the agenda of world literature and what it is that furnishes worldliness to a literary text, this alternative understanding of the concept of world literature would give back transformative agency to these minor literatures that are often essential to a diasporic, minority discourse in search for place within their own countries and national literary canons.

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