From *A Chicano in China* to Chicano-inspired subcultures in Japan: When Aztlan Intersects with Asia[1]

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I was a pilgrim who went to China, I visited the holy mountains and temples, and I prayed at the ancient shrines; I also walked the polluted streets of the cities, I mixed with the people, I touched them, I pulled them into my dream. I walked their factories, their prisons, their hospitals, and their markets, and I sat in their homes. I was a humble pilgrim who went to commune, and these are the impressions of that communication (x)[2]

Abstract

In the travel writing *A Chicano in China* (1986), Rudolfo Anaya offers the reader his perception of a society and culture, that of China, which should be alien to him. However, the New Mexican author does not live his Chinese journey as a mere observer, but, on the contrary, he turns his trip into a pilgrimage, a quest for a reality that transcends mere observation. Through his works, and the symbols that are present in them, Anaya tries to understand the reasons behind the epiphanic moments that he feels when walking the streets of Chinese towns and cities. A revealing recognition that influences him on three levels, as a writer, when he sees his artistic motives reflected in the Chinese culture, as a Chicano, when he verifies how the inhabitants of Southwest U.S. and China share incessant experiential similarities, and as a Nuevomexicano, when he identifies parts of the Chinese landscape with his native New Mexico. Starting from the experiences described by Anaya in *A Chicano in China*, this article will study the cultural connections between Asia and Chicanos through Anaya's eyes, but also through much more

unknown and current influences ranging from lowrider subculture to Chicano-inspired music in Japan. The ultimate goal will be to demonstrate that West and East have a common point in the Chicano people.
Keywords: Anaya, Chicanos, China, Japan, lowriders, music

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INTRODUCTION

Everyone who works in the field of American Studies knows what Aztlan is. Yet, to give a specific connotation of the term is rather complex. Aztlan is many things at once and its meaning varies according to the political, social, educational, geographical, or cultural prism it is approached from (Anaya, Lomelí & Lamadrid). In short, defining Aztlan is a difficult task, although we all know what it is. For this work, Aztlan identifies with the place where the Mexica came from before the founding of Tenochtitlan. A mythical territory, to the north, which could well be the current southwestern United States. A space that Mexico lost in 1848 and in which a group of descendants of Mexica and Spaniards were located after the American annexation. From that indigenous, Spanish, and mestizo population emerged the Chicano (McWilliams). However, the origin of this community in the United States predates the Spanish and American conquests. It even precedes the Mexica migration to the Valley of Mexico. The origin of the Chicano is also in Asia, in the peoples that one day, around fifteen-thousands years ago, crossed the Bering Strait to settle in America. These people brought with them their cultures, languages, traditions, and a common Asian origin.

Chicanos, due to their double origin, are thus recognized as an intersection point between the West, represented by the Spanish conquerors who arrived from Europe, and the East, the original land of the first human settlers of the Americas (3). A crossroad that the New Mexico author Rudolfo Anaya experienced first-hand during his journey to China in 1984. Anaya began this trip to China as a tourist, but, very soon, he realized that it was more than that. The journey became for the author a vital experience and a return to the origin of the Americas, its people, symbols, and culture. His Chinese stay would end up influencing him on three levels: as a writer, as a Chicano, and as a New Mexican. The epitome of those

revelations resulted in the writing of his work *A Chicano in China* (1986). At the beginning of this book, Anaya pointed out how he embarked "on a trip to China, a pilgrimage that turned out to be one of the most incredible trips I have ever made" (v). A visit that would respond to many of his artistic and personal concerns, for, as Anaya acknowledged, "in the process of the trip, at the corners we turn in distant places [is] where we come face to face with the epiphany, the sudden impact of recognition" (vi). An affinity, both individual and collective, that led him to establish links between the Chicano people, his own literary production, and China (Torres; Fernández Olmos).

However, the connections between Aztlan and the East did not stop with Anaya's epiphanic experiences during his visit to China. Thirty-five years later, Aztlan can still be felt in Asia through three Chicano-inspired subculture realities currently developed in Japan. The first one is associated with the dressing manners adopted by some Japanese youngsters that essentially imitate the Chicano urban outfit: low shorts, high socks, loads of gear repping Los Angeles, and tattoos covering their torsos. This form of dressing is directly linked to the group's music preference for Chicano rap that includes Japanese Chicana-style rapper MoNa aka Sad Girl, very popular in her native country and California, or Japanese Chicano-style musician Night Tha Funksta, who focuses on the positive aspects of Mexican American culture. And the third aspect is the advance of a lowrider subculture that, along with dressing and music, has transgressed the streets of LA, San Antonio or Albuquerque and found a new spiritual home in Japan (Horncastle). This is the case of the Nagoya lowrider community, and whose best-known automobile association is the Pharaoh Car Club. This club was founded by Japanese lowrider Junichi Shimodaira and has been active for more than 30 years (Syakirah).

Drawing from the experiences described by Anaya in his travel writing, this article will study the cultural intersections between China and the American Southwest through the eyes of the New Mexican author. It will also seek that connection through the much more contemporary, and little studied academically, Japanese subculture derived from lowriders and Chicano-inspired music. The ultimate goal will be to show that the West and the East have a common meeting point in the Chicano people. To do this, the first part will present how travel writing is not only the result of curiosity,

but also a true vital necessity for the writer. The second part will present how *A Chicano in China* links the Chinese world to Anaya's vital experiences as a writer, as a Chicano, and as a New Mexican. And, before the conclusion, the last section will be a starting point for future academic studies on how Chicano culture is influencing Japan's own popular culture.

1. TRAVEL WRITING

There has always been travel literature because the journey, as part of the human condition, is not only the result of curiosity, but also a truly needed vital experience (Alburquerque-García). As human beings have sensed the urge to travel, voyagers have also felt the impulse to record their trips (Brettell) through the description of their experiences in foreign lands and cultures (Santos Rovira & Encinas-Arquero). When both premises meet, travel literature appears. In the Western context, for example, Homer's *Odyssey* represents the earliest typical masterpiece. Over the centuries, this type of literature was followed by innumerable variations and modifications in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish literary practice (Xia). On some occasions, these travel literary works were real, in others, they were fictious, imaginative or descriptive, poetic, fantastic or fictionalized (Porras Castro). And here is where resides the difference between travel writing (of factual nature) and travel narrative (of fictional nature). Whereas the former is generically aimed at the truth (Campbell)–i.e. Herodotu's *The Histories*,–in the latter there is room for adventure, science fiction, utopias, etc. (Alburquerque-García). In summary, all travel writing is travel literature, but not all travel literature is travel writing.

It is important to anticipate that this essay does not seek to identify any essential characteristic supposedly possessed by the bewildering diversity of forms, modes, and itineraries of travel writing (Fussell; Raban; Thompson). In that sense, the analysis sticks to the four features proposed by Alburquerque-García to recognize this type of literature:

1. They are factual writings because they are based on fact and because fiction is not the most prominent element, although it may appear. The story is born, develops and ends by following the thread of events lived in a time and space

that form its backbone. This condition does not exclude its literary character, although literary specialists have generally paid more attention to the voyage as a motif than to the travel account as a work of literature with its own literary devices (Brettell).

2. Description–of people, situations, customs, legends, myths, etc.–prevails over narrative. The narrative elements of this type of writings are also subject to the chronology of the trip, and the path traveled and described. And the rhetorical figures are used by the author as a descriptive mechanism to present the reader with reality.
3. Given its testimonial nature, in the balance between the objective and the subjective, this type of writing opts for the former. Travel writings tell what an author has experienced, showing closeness and commitment to what is narrated. Yet, it is possible to find elements of subjectivity, marks of a writer influenced by literary conventions and intellectual context (Fussell).
4. Paratextuality and intertextuality are present, too. The former is found in the titles of the books, the headings and the beginning of the chapters, the prologues, or the illustrations themselves. These paratextual marks make the readers realized that they are before an accomplished journey that comes in the form of a true experience. At the same time, travel writings are intertextual because they establish a dialogue with previous works that serve as literary referents (Romero Tobar).

At this point, it is important to mention the distinction between the explorer, the traveler, and the tourist. It is true that the three make journeys, and the three may write about those experiences. However, "the explorer seeks the undiscovered, the traveler that which has been discovered by the mind working in history, [and] the tourist that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity" (Fussell 39). Whereas Fussell prefers a more exclusive view of travel writing, limiting its production to the category of travelers, other authors, such as Thompson, opt for a broader and more inclusive definition, incorporating the other two categories. Anyhow, both the inclusive and exclusive positions

recognize that travel writing incorporates ethnographic (Brettell) and geographic (Suárez-Japón) descriptions.

To travel is to make a journey, a movement through space, which inevitably means to encounter difference and otherness. Travel writers record this meeting between the Self and the other, and narrate the negotiation between similarity and difference that the contact entails. Travel writings have, then, a two-fold aspect. On the one hand, they report unfamiliar people or places. And, on the other, they are very much influenced by the writer's values, preoccupations, and assumptions (Regales Serna), revealing, thus, much "of the culture from which that writer emerged, and/or the culture for which [the] text is intended" (Thompson 10). It is undeniable that throughout history, especially the European one, this type of expression has conceited racist intolerance. But it is also irrefutable that modern travel writing has also been an attempt "to overcome cultural distance through a protracted act of understanding" (Porter 3). Sharing travel stories help preserve and transfer cultural values from one generation to the next through re-enacting well-transited paths of memory (Oberholtzer).

Recent events associated with the pandemic provoked by COVID-19 have proven that we live in an era of escalating globalization. In our times, transnational mobility, travel, and cross-cultural contact are realities of life and an everyday experience for many people (Thompson; Cañero "El español como factor vertebrador de la latinidad"). Contemporary travel writings have echoed this new world, which, in turn, has made this type of literature very popular as it currently fosters "an internationalist vision, and implicitly, a cosmopolitan attitude that encourages tolerance, understanding and a sense of global community" (Thompson 6). If readers want to learn about the past and present of different places, travel writings made it possible to acquire that knowledge through the eyes of the travelers (Brettell). At the same time, this type of literature can help scholars, no matter whether they are historians, literary critics, or ethnographers, to understand the purposes behind such writings. This is the case of the author studied in this paper because, for Rudolfo Anaya, travel is "one of the crucial ways in which we gain knowledge about the integrated Earth on which we live" (ix).

2. ANAYA MEETS CHINA…

Rudolfo Anaya's *A Chicano in China* is a form of travel writing and, thus, part of travel literature. In this book, Anaya adopts the perspective of a travel writer who, through his inquiring Chicano eyes, introduces the reader to the Chinese landscape, people, and culture. He is able to do so because he always travels letting "the people and places to seep under my skin, to work their way into my blood, until I have become part of their secret" (vi). This knowledge allows him to give accurate physical descriptions of Chinese rivers, museums, people, and food. The author also reflects on past events, religions, and political theories through his many encounters with Buddhism, Maoism, the Cultural Revolution, and traditional Chinese wisdom. And very often, his day-to-day notes present one of Anaya's most remarkable literary characteristics: his wit and irony (Shirley). They both can be seen, for instance, when he compares Empress Suchi's sunk marble boat with the adobe-made airplanes and submarines built by the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF) and the Royal Chicano Navy during the Movimiento: "Let that be a lesson to you, Raza! Next time build the fleet of marble. It, at least, lasts" (28). *A Chicano in China* constitutes, then, a spiritual account of an expanding perspective in which the Land of Enchantment fuses with the Land of Dragons (Geuder). As in all travel writing, it is a text where reality prevails over fiction, although the author's dreams -or reflections, inspirations, intuitions, and divinations,–are constantly present to connect the West and the East–. A union felt and described by Anaya in three different spheres of his Self: as a writer, as a Chicano, and as a New Mexican.

2.1. The Recognition of a Common Symbology

A Chicano in China is the result of a journey that Rudolfo Anaya conceives as a quest to understand the set of secret symbols and images–"a fish, an owl, a door" (6),–which have appeared in his previous writings. That is why in the book he sees himself as a pilgrim who intends to find "a key to turn, a door to enter, a new way to see his role in the universe" (viii). At the same time, and, due to the discoveries he makes, he understands why he has gone to China: "to connect the streams of time, to connect the people. To connect and connect and keep making the connections" (124). This voyage is a homage to the ancient past of half of his nature, his Native American side, whose

origin is not in Europe or the United States, but in Asia. Thousands of years ago, Asian people migrated to the Americas crossing the then frozen Bering Strait. These migrants brought and preserved with them signs, symbols, archetypal memories, links, and an ancient history which have influenced Anaya's literary production (Shirley).

The images and symbols of his writings are reflected in China, and the author sets himself the task of arranging or rearranging that which he finds to give sense to his literature. Anaya realizes how many Chinese symbols are reflected in his own work. In *A Chicano in China*, he recognizes, when discussing the communion between West and East through the Chicano, that the "Waters of the Earth are connected; the memory of the people is connected" (160). Some years before this trip to Asia, Anaya wrote *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972). The protagonist of the novel, Tony Márez, is told by Ultima, the old *curandera*, that the "waters are one" (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 121). Acknowledging that connection, Tony is finally able to reconcile his, until that moment, antagonistic (vaquero/farmer) genealogy. Like Antonio in the novel, Anaya can understand his bond with China and the Asian world. The trip fills him with personal and artistic meanings that, eventually, will continue to appear in his works.

This is the case of the image of the dragon that appears in *Zia Summer* (1995) when the main character, Sonny Baca, remarks the parallels between ancient Aztec and oriental mythologies (Fernández Olmos). The connection made by Sonny is previously discussed by Anaya in *A Chicano in China*. During a walk in Beijing, the author compares the buildings he sees, where dragons are used as decoration to express supreme power and wisdom, with the constructions of Teotihuacán in Mexico. Like the dragon for the Chinese, the flaming Quetzalcóatl also represents power and wisdom in the Aztec world. It was the holy feathered Serpent who brought knowledge and learning to the Toltecs of ancient Mexico (21-22). This sudden epiphany reveals to Anaya the connection between himself and the first Asiatic people who moved into the Americas, and who brought with them their dragon dreams (21). Dragon visions that start to disturb the author's sleep while in China. Even though he tries to stay serene and centered (32), during his dreams, Anaya, swarmed with Chinese poetry, begins to absorb China–her land, and people,–as the dragon possesses his entire body. It is only then, when the thrashing dragon has completely

taken over his dreams, that the New Mexican writer is still. He is finally in peace with China. And when he wakes up, he feels refresh, a new man, a "dragon man" (46), a "Chicano Chinaman" (47). And upon his departure from China, Anaya takes the dragon dreams with him to plant them in New Mexico soil. The dreams and insights of "a pilgrim to China, a Chicano from the Southwest…" (179).

After his return to New Mexico, Anaya is very much aware of the reason why he went to China. He went to make connections, to learn about his soul as a man, and as an artist. As he was taught, he hopes to "teach others to see into the soul of things, to make that simple, human connection, which unites us all" (202). Of all the symbols that he finds and that connect his artistic imagery with China and Asia, the one that stands out the most is that of the "golden carp". In his most iconic work, *Bless Me, Ultima*, the golden carp represents a supernatural and pre-Christian divinity that destroys the corrupt universe and establishes a new order. Rudolfo Anaya finds the origin of this myth in China, which he revealingly calls the "land of the golden carp" (37). The author traces the origin of this symbol, which becomes a leitmotif during his trip to China and Japan, to the vision he had as a child of a group of carps swimming in El Rito, the little river in Santa Rosa, New Mexico. Years later, this vision would inspire him with the legend of the people turned into carps and the god who, also adopting the form of a carp, decided to live among them. The feeling experienced during his childhood is identical to the one he feels on his journey through Asia. Amidst the Chinese human swarm, Anaya sees a huge golden carp that leads him to point out: "[this] is the closest I have come to saying that a god lives among us" (152).

The similarities in the myths and symbols of his work and the Chinese world are not coincidental. These resemblances are part of the union that exists between Asia and Aztlan. It is not surprising that, when seeing a small lake full of carps, the author affirms that there "the West meets the East" (152). The different epiphanic moments experienced, when seeing how his artistic legends and symbols are connected to China, make Anaya exclaim: "Yes, I have returned to the land of the golden carp, I have returned home. My pilgrimage is complete…" (159). The East and Aztlan come together through a common past enlivened in the author's conscience. Centuries ago, "China sent part of her memory to the Americas and memory may sleep for thousands of years, but it will

awaken" (152). Through his work, Anaya tries to ignite in the Chicanos the urge for communion with the Asian peoples because the memory of both people "is connected" (160). As a storyteller of his southwestern culture, Anaya feels the impulse to tell the history of his people because with it, they will blossom with freedom. For Rudolfo Anaya, making a connection with China liberated him. He decided that it was his duty to liberate one more person, one at a time, who, eventually, will help him to liberate another. It is a continuous process, a historical process, "a slow march towards our eventual enlightenment–a knowledge and practice of our humanism" (177).

The golden carp is not the only symbol Anaya recognizes from his artistic production in China. "I find a pond." Says the New Mexican writer. "It is packed with turtles. Small turtles fill the pond, float in the water, sit in the rocks and sun themselves. In the water two golden carp swim slowly. What a sight. The turtles and the holy fish of my stories together..." (188). For Anaya, the turtles embody patience and resistance. *Tortuga* (1979) is of one of his most paradigmatic novels. The main character, called Tortuga, is a paralyzed young man who serves as an example of perseverance, of an endlessness capacity to excel (Cañero *Literatura chicana*). Like a turtle, the character moves slowly towards his future, liberating in his unhurried walk those who are locked with him in the hospital where they are staying. Everything in the clinic is designed to constrain the will of those who look for a cure in it (Ortego y Gasca). But Tortuga is able to transcend the walls of injustice and to transform himself into a symbol of hope for the rest of the hospital's patients. It is in China where Anaya finally understands why the turtle, as an archetypal image, has always haunted his writings. There, he finds a room with huge turtles supporting tablets with engraved words. Anaya considers that words are civilization, the Chinese civilization. Turtles, then, help to support the Chinese civilization. In the same sense, Chicanos need to move like Anaya's character, Tortuga, to make way into their future, overcoming the social difficulties they are certainly going to find. And in that journey, Chicanos need to rely on their own culture, on their own symbols, on their own identity. Those are decisive instruments to reach real freedom and equality.

Anaya does not endorse, however, a cruel revolution against discrimination. Quite the opposite. Turtles personify peaceful but

tenacious cultural resistance, like his own writing. And that is why Anaya was criticized as a writer during the Chicano Movement. Just as much as the Gang of Four curtailed the creative spirit of Chinese artists during the repressive years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Anaya recalls how some Chicano zealots derided artists "who dared to think and create in their own ways, that is, Chicanos who dared to think in ways other than the party slogan… I remember the Marxist critics who spoke out against me and others like me" (119). And those fanatics criticized him because he wrote stories like that of Tony Marez, who grew up in New Mexico seeing the beauty and magic of the golden carp, or that of Tortuga, who found freedom through resilience and appealing to the spirit of unity. The Chicano Marxist critics that dominated the academic arena at the time wanted Anaya to write about social reality, useful art. But Anaya did not give in the Chicano Gang of Four and, acknowledging that freedom for the oppressed was needed, he went on defending that Chicanos also needed "their house of art, their legacy, their history" (120). His Asian journey proves that the path he chose as an artist allowed him to connect with his own people. As much as he connected with the Chinese people during his trip to China.

2.2. A Not So Unknown People

There are two reasons that impel Anaya to call his travel writing *A Chicano in China*. The first one is because he is part of the Chicano community, which has nurtured his body and spirit. And second, because, as a Chicano, he also takes pride in the part of him that is an indigenous person of the American continent. "I always seek out the history and thought of the Americas," says Anaya, "because by understanding that past I understand better the present me" (vii-viii). This past links the author to the old Asian world, long before the arrival of the Spaniards, or the foundation of Mexico, when the original Mesoamerican populations crossed the Bering Strait bringing with them all the mythology and thought which has intrigued and interested him for many years (3). China is the ancestral homeland (Shirley) that pre-dated the foundation of Aztlan, and in her, Anaya seeks his own literary imagery. But there is more to get from China than mythical symbols. Anaya also looks for communion with the Chinese people, as when he recognizes a woman from

Laguna Pueblo in the face of Mrs. Wang, his Chinese guide. The writer is in China both to find part of his artistic Self, and to "embrace the Chinese Brown brothers, Raza!" (17).

Anaya is very much aware of the influence exercised by China and Asia on his literary creations and on the Chicanos. Thus, the writer seeks the footprint of China in his own people: "there is a strain in my memory that feels connected to the collective memory of these people. I see myself in their eyes and the color of their skin" (94-95). The Jungian communal unconscious, which all human beings store as a set of common archetypal formulas and memories (Abrams), connects the Chicanos with Aztlan, with pre-Columbian and contemporary Mexico, and with Asia. Cultural, racial, and even social similarities between China and Aztlan are perceived by the author during his trip, reinforcing the ties between both communities. He wants his *paisanos* to dream in Chinese characters (15). Anaya aspires to unite western Chicanos with oriental Chicanos, who are "a billion new souls for 'La Raza'..." (17). The combination between both groups could help them to even "rule the world" (17). Yet, Anaya soon discovers that in what both people are united is in their poverty. Both are part of the Third World: "We know it well. Chicanos are El Tercer Mundo in the soul of the United States" (27). Only the language is different: "I pause to talk to a man at work repairing a bike. He speaks Chinese. I speak the Spanish of New Mexico. We part on good terms" (66).

It is probably with the description of the Chinese people and their culture where Anaya finds the greater number of resemblances between Asians and Chicanos. As he spends time in the Asian giant, he begins to see more and more similarities, for instance in their culinary traditions. In the region of Sichuan, the writer has his first spicy meal in weeks and, as his tongue burns, he asks for more *chile*. He feels at home, eating at his favorite Mexican restaurant and drinking Chinese beer (83). Anaya's sense of humor is felt when he realizes that one of the beer's brand name is Tsingtao but pronounced like *Chingao*. The funny name makes him connect the Chinese with Aztlan: "Think of it, Raza, in the Southwest a beer with a name of Tsingtao would become more popular than Coors" (141). And he also feels connected to the Chinese cuisine when he eats lotus, the soul food, a delicacy he had not encountered before. The experience

is not completely new for the writer as, for him, it is like "eating posole for Christmas in New Mexico–soul food" (155).

There are many other moments during the trip that take Anaya back to the people and culture of his native land. In one of the cities, the group of Americans he is going with is invited to a ballroom. There is some dancing going on. The band reminds Anaya of a Mexican *conjunto*, and the first melody they play is like a Mexican *ranchera*. The writer and his wife, Patricia, take the dance floor and dance along the music. "Suddenly," Anaya declares, "it is like being back home at a wedding dance or in some small village where the dance hall is just getting warmed up" (155). In an antique shop, Anaya sees a porcelain Buddha with little children around his shoulders and compares it to the typical clay figures of a woman surrounded by children made by New Mexico Indian Pueblos (162). "History is recorded in the stories of the people; the Buddha is another Kachina we welcome into the pueblo", the author adds (162). And more similarities, like when Anaya sees millions of bicycles crowding the streets of Beijing, and he compares them to the Chicano '57 Chevys (22).

During his visit to a university dedicated to the teaching of Chinese diversity, Anaya is amazed by the fact that minorities are granted certain autonomy to preserve their culture, religion, and language. Together, he also acknowledges that the standard Mandarin is imposed by the central government in Beijing and is spoken by the majority of the population. He parallels this reality to his own experience at home, in the United States, where Hispanics are one of the oldest language-defined groups in the country. However, the Anglo-American authorities have always been reluctant to teach Hispanic or Native American thought and language (108). The Chicanos of the Southwest have been struggling to retain their history, language, and cultural identity, but the resources were always removed from them (55). This disadvantage position in the US makes Anaya think they are strangers in their own land; "Illegal aliens" (84). Anaya suggests, after he visits the Great Wall, to turn the Hispanic culture into a Great Wall of resistance against any kind of imposition. For the first Anglo-Americans who swept into New Mexico "the Great Wall of resistance was the Hispanic culture they found there. That wall of culture has been battered and bruised, but it's still in place" (43). Anaya believes that his Hispanic culture is "a

force connecting us to our history, a force as powerful as the Great Wall of China, that wall which is a symbol of Chinese resistance" (43). Both cultures have survived after suffering similar attacks from external forces. In 1984, Anaya felt the Chinese continued contesting foreign impositions, and that their endurance, working as the Great Wall, should also be the pathway for Atzlán (37).

Whereas Anaya seeks and appreciates the connections between China and his native homeland, the other Americans in the group only express complaints about Chinese culture and traditions. Just like the Eurocentric travelers from earlier periods, they display a cultural superiority that annoys the writer. The reason for Anaya's irritation resides in how Anglo-Americans went to Hispanic New Mexico in the 19th Century, telling New Mexicans how to run their own land. Those Hispanics had many strengths, but the foreign Anglo-Americans only saw weaknesses in them. Anaya equates those Anglo-American strangers from the past with this group of American visitors who only see China's weaknesses and never her assets. Anaya proposes to look at those strengths and recommends sending "people of good will to China" (146). Looking back in time, everyone in Anaya's group would be surprised of how quickly China has modernized and turned into a true economic dragon during the 21st Century.

But the China they are visiting in 1984 still has a long path to walk before transforming itself into an economic power. The country in front of Anaya's dissecting eyes is full of rice fields and vegetable gardens worked by Chinese men and women. He sees in the villages the same village life he grew up in rural New Mexico. The author feels connected to the brown men and women he sees working those lands (40). This communion is very similar to the one experienced by Joe Calabasa, a character in *Alburquerque* (1992), while fighting in Vietnam. Serving as a soldier during the war, Joe is shot by an old Vietnamese farmer. Instead of killing each other, Joe begins to sing an old traditional Native American chant from his Pueblo tribe. The old Vietnamese responds with a local song. The reaction of both contenders creates a communion that fills up their hearts and overcomes the external forces that impelled them to fight. The shot serves as an epiphanic moment to Joe, who finally realizes that people should always be above any ideology. The old Vietnamese farmer was not fighting for Marx, Ho, or Mao. He was just a farmer defending his

family and his land. Joe understands that a peasant needs strong arms to farm (Anaya, *Albuquerque*), not to fight. Like Joe in *Alburquerque*, Anaya senses a strong spirit of communion with all the Chinese farmers. His trip to China is full of meaning and endless associations. Practically everywhere he goes, he sees something which reminds him of his people and his home (Shirley).

2.3. The Importance of the Landscape

Rudolfo Anaya's literary production is closely linked to southwestern United States. For the nuevomexicano author, both its landscape and those who inhabit it are in communion. From this man-landscape relationship arises the 'metaphor' and the 'epiphany': on one side of the metaphor will be the man and on the other the landscape. The epiphany, according to Anaya ("A Writer Discusses his Craft"), is a human being's natural response to the landscape. In this way, once the individual opens up to the power of the landscape and, consequently, experiences the epiphany, he becomes a completely new being. This new-man is capable of dissolving the polarity of the metaphor (man-landscape) and is able of creating unity in the epiphany. The epiphany of the place produces a healing effect on the individual. Thus, when he is separated from his land, the individual becomes alienated and frustrated, since he loses its center and his source of redemption. But when he is in it, he feels safe and in unity with his environment and community. Although, as Anaya recognizes, a Chicano in China is far from Aztlan (115), the third element that connects his artistic discourse with the Asian nation is its landscape and the epiphanic moments the author lives through while observing it.

The communion Anaya feels with the Chinese symbols and people is also revealed through China's landscape. The author does not see himself as a foreigner while walking the Chinese cities, villages, and fields. On the contrary, he feels he is part of the landscape as much as, after his return to New Mexico, he doesn't know if he is "a Chicano in China, dreaming I am a Chinese visitor to New Mexico, or if I am a Chinese visitor to New Mexico dreaming I am a Chicano in China" (192). The conjunction between the Chinese landscape and the New Mexican author is such that it resembles the sensations that the writer gets from admiring New Mexico's landscape. The landscape epiphany so characteristic of his fiction transcends Anaya's literary works to connect with the East. The author assumes his oriental

heritage and looks through it at the Chinese landscape that is offered to him. The image that the writer sees gives him peace of mind, sure that the place he steps on is familiar: "Looking at the pines I do not know if I am in the western hills of Beijing or in Taos, New Mexico" (46); or "[in] the afternoon we ride home in an extraordinary light, a sharp, yet mellow light, the kind of light that comes slanting over my West Mesa in Albuquerque in the afternoon. The green of the canal is the radiant water of the golden carp" (36); and even more: "I feel as much at home here as I have felt walking the streets of Mexico. The hole-in-the-wall shops are the same, people sitting on the sidewalks selling soft drinks, eggs, and vegetables are the same" (67).

Anaya recognizes that he feels so close to China because, during his formative years, he experienced a peasant, rural culture in New Mexico. It was a difficult life, but rewarding. In his journey, the writer finds many villages composed of unites, communes, like Puerto de Luna, his grandfather's home. In Puerto de Luna, "the farmers owned their land, they nourished their families from the earth, they sold their produce, but they led a communal life" (39-40). On his road to the Great Wall, Anaya passes through small farm villages, and everywhere he sees men and women working and talking. The author senses how the "life spirit of the commune flows into the fields, fields of rice, wheat, peach orchards, vegetables; all around us as far as I can see in the haze…" (41). Many of these fields are nurtured by ditches, *acequias*. That is another aspect of New Mexican village life he finds in China: the canals that irrigate the fields. Growing up in Puerto de Luna, Anaya remembers how the *acequia madre* brought water to the fields from the Pecos River. The care of the ditch was a communal responsibility, creating "a communal sharing; all of one and one for all, assignment of labor, the equal sharing of the water" (40).

Not only the communal part of Anaya's life in Puerto de Luna is evoked by Chinese villages. Visiting a traditional Chinese house, Anaya is brought back to his childhood in that rural New Mexico. The owner of the house invites the author to enter her home, very much like *mi casa es su casa* Chicano / *Mexicano* style. Once inside the house, he notices it is plain, simple, and clean. Just like his grandfather's house in New Mexico. Then, he looks at the wrinkled face of the woman and feels at home: "I feel I am back in my childhood and the woman is a neighbor who has come to visit my mother. Our

home was much like this woman's home, plain and simple. We were a rural country people" (74). That simpleness is also perceived by Anaya's witty irony when he describes Chinese toilets in rural China. Chinese toilets are nothing but a hole in the ground. Chinese people have built their toilets around the art of squatting, and when they feel the urge, "a good squat clears the air" (70). This comic observation leads the author to another parallelism between both cultures. He remembers how, when he was a child in Santa Rosa, each home had an outhouse they called *comunes*: "Outside toilets without running water" (70). Those childhood experiences are long past, and he is now used to the Chinese toilets (and their stench). The author does not criticize this Chinese custom. On the contrary, he acknowledges how spoiled foreigners to China have become in dealing with their habits and how "natural the Chinese system is" (70).

Rivers also constitute archetypal landscape elements that continuously catch Anaya's attention. The author recognizes China and her people in the Yangtze River. It is China's history, her blood, and her past, future, and present (118). The same applies for the Chicanos and the Rio Grande River of New Mexico. Anaya sees in both the Yangtze and the Rio Grande a common current that goes beyond the similar chocolate color of their waters. Both rivers embody the writer's dreams, imagination, source of creative inspiration, and poetic numen. The real and the magical come together in the two rivers whose original connection is placed by the writer in the eastern migrations to the new world, many centuries before his European ancestors "disturbed the Rio Grande valley, disturbed the peace of the Pueblos" (32). As the Chinese in China, the Indo-Hispano people of Aztlan "are heirs of that magical realism that built the cities and temples of the Americas before Columbus" (118). Anaya realizes that both rivers figuratively run through his literary imagination, shedding symbols, metaphors, and magic realism all over his fictional work. The origin of his artistic creations is as much in Asia as it is in Aztlan. He finally finds the answer to the uncertainties he had before starting his journey to China. And the response produces a redemptive effect on the author: "I have made my personal connection to China and I feel liberated" (176). He establishes a bond that was primarily personal and artistic but becomes communal. Before leaving China, Anaya buys a wind bell

for his terrace at home so that the "southwest winds of Aztlan will make Chinese sounds on the West Mesa of Albuquerque" (190). In the author's eyes, that union will never be dissolved.

3. … AND ASIA MEETS AZTLÁN: PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Only someone like Anaya, whose educated eyes have also seen the hardness and beauty of growing up in a rural setting, can describe with such accuracy the connections between his homeland and Asia. A link that the author traces in his work and perceives in himself, as a Chicano descendant of the Spanish conquistadors and the native people who first populated the Americas. Today, there are others who have recreated those links from Asia. It is not the China described by Anaya, but the Japan of the 21st century. A whole new area opens up within American Studies thanks to Chicano-inspired subcultures in the country of the rising sun. There is no theoretical framework to address these subcultures yet, and it would be really important to develop academic studies in this regard. This article presents the issue, but it would be up to others to academically investigate the reasons behind the adoption of Chicano-inspired cultural traits by young and not-so-young Japanese.

There are three elements to highlight within the Chicano-inspired subculture currently developed in Japan. The first one is related to the dressing codes adopted by Japanese youngster that essentially try to imitate the Chicano urban outfits. Some Japanese kids dress like hip kids from a *barrio* in the United States. The *cholo/chola* style serves these Japanese kids to rebel, as nonconformist *cholos/as* did (Laboy). Japanese kids are influenced by movies, music videos, and the social networks. The Internet has become a globalizer in itself, allowing to put in contact distant cultures and cultural constructs. One of the most popular artistic creations is Chicano rap. When performed by Chicanos, this type of music presents unique features that include "lyrics that mix Spanish and English, Spanglish and caló and visual iconography that indexes Chicano nationalism and Mexicanidad" (Helland 25). Groups of Japanese youngsters have turned to dress in the Cholo/a style and are listening to this type of music. Chicano rap musicians regularly perform at Japanese concerts and collaborate with Japanese artists who perform Chicano rap. This type of music is the second element that today links Asia with Aztlan.

Helland has analyzed from a multilingual, multimodal critical discourse approach the music videos of a Japanese artist called Mona aka Sad Girl. This is probably one of the few academic approaches to this subculture. In her study, Helland explains how this artist has adopted the language, semiotic symbols, and themes of Chicano rap, but adapted to the local Japanese contexts. The Japanese female rapper even performs in Chicano rap style, including in her songs some words in Japanese, English, Spanish, and caló. As it could not be otherwise, the artist has also adopted a Chicano iconography and style. Another noteworthy Japanese Chicano-style musician is Night Tha Funksta. In his compositions, instead of emphasizing stereotypical images of Chicano culture (in themes such as gangs and the like), he only references the positive traits of Chicano culture. For him, elements of Chicano culture such as loyalty, bonding, unity, and the importance of family emphasize the connections between each member of the community (Syakirah). According to Helland, to understand "the growing popularity of Chicano rap in Japan, it must be seen as part of the broader phenomenon of lowrider culture worldwide" (26).

The third element that connects this Japanese subculture to the urban Chicano scene is that of the lowriders. Probably brought by the Mexican American soldiers serving in the American military bases of Japan, the lowrider culture, originally from Southwest US, goes hand in hand with rap and the *cholo/a* dressing style in Japan. There is a great amount of literature on lowriding, its origins in Los Angeles, and how Chicanos used their cars not as a source of transport, but as ethnic statements. By driving slowly and slamming their cars to the ground, some Chicanos showed their nonconformist and rebellious spirit in the urban areas of Aztlan. Their cars were full of religious imagery and Mexican American symbolism, making them more pieces of art than cars (Horncastle). This slow driving taste for Chicano imagery and symbolism are what today can be seen in Nagoya, Tokyo, or Chiba in Japan. There are even Japanese lowrider clubs that occasionally meet, and people from all over the country come to share hamburgers, guacamole, and imported beers. This is the perfect end for an "incredible fusion car scene" (Horncastle). There are many possible reasons to be researched on why these Chicano trends are so popular in Japan. Maybe, as Anaya saw in the Chinese a reflection of the Chicanos' ancestral origin, the

Japanese feel attracted to the Chicano culture because they do not see it as completely foreign to them. These are the answers that future studies should pursuit.

CONCLUSION

Travel writing represents a cathartic moment for the writer, but also for those who follow the author through the pages of a travel book. This is the case of *A Chicano in China*. Once it is finished, "the reader finds he has learned much about modern China, not only the physical features, but also about the cultural and spiritual life of the people" (Shirley 97). This is only possible thanks to Anaya's rich narrative as he enrolls the reader in a trip that will accompany him as part of the author's personal history. Rudolfo Anaya went to China, as a humble pilgrim, to learn. And he learned to connect the streams of time, to connect the people, and to keep making the connections (124). He saw his own literary symbols made real in the ponds and rivers of China. He was a Chicano in the arms of billions of Chinese. And China, her traditions, and her people, let the writer go back home in peace, "renewed, fulfilled" (196). He took some real and spiritual fragments from China to New Mexico forever. The sense of communion that Anaya found in China was not accidental. That union between Asia and Aztlan had always been there, in a common original culture brought by the Asian people to the Americas. Anaya was able to recognize those hidden connections in his own literature.

The China Anaya encountered in 1984 is very different from today. Now the Dragon has awakened and is a world economic and military power. The situation of Chicanos is also different, better maybe, although they still lag behind most U.S. social and economic indicators. It would be really interesting to know what Anaya had written had he visited the Asian giant now. He would probably be surprised by this change. As he would also be astonished to observe those groups of young people who have recreated Aztlan in Japan, revealing unexpected cultural preferences for Chicano rap, outfit, and lowriding. Anaya understood the importance of Chicanos in this spiritual union between East and West. It is the task of future studies to investigate the reasons behind these Japanese cultural preferences that seem to continue to place Chicanos and their culture as a point of communion between Asia and Aztlan.

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NOTES

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2 Anaya, Rudolfo. *A Chicano in China.* University of New Mexico Press, 1986. All subsequent quotes belong to this edition. They appear in the text only with the page number(s).