

THEY NEED NOTHING: HISPANIC-ASIAN
ENCOUNTERS IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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ROBERT RICHMOND ELLIS

They Need Nothing

Hispanic-Asian Encounters
of the Colonial Period

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Contents

Illustrations vii

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 3

1 Japanese and Spaniards in the Christian Century 24

2 The Middle Kingdom through Spanish Eyes 67

3 The Quest for Cambodia 110

4 Constructing the Philippines and Contesting
the Legacy 129

Conclusion 178

Notes 185

Works Cited 210

Index 227

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Illustrations

- 1.1 'Screens of Europeans in Japan.' Tōshōdai-ji, Nara 56
- 1.2 'Four Great Cities of the West' (Seville). Kobe City Museum, Kobe 60
- 2.1 Banquet and performance of a Chinese play during the Ming period. In Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: From 1840 to the Present Day* 77
- 2.2 'Missionary Martyr.' The Orient Museum, Lisbon 92
- 2.3 'Missionary Martyr.' The Orient Museum, Lisbon 93
- 4.1 'Descripcion de las Yndias Occidentales.' In Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas i tierra firme del mar océano* 132
- 4.2 'Descripcion de las Indias del Poniente.' In Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas i tierra firme del mar océano* 133

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THEY NEED NOTHING: HISPANIC-ASIAN
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Introduction

In the mid-1580s the recently established colonial administration of the Philippines proposed to King Philip II of Spain a plan for conquering China. The primary advocate of conquest was a Jesuit clergyman, Alonso Sánchez, who carried a document outlining the plan to Spain to present to the Crown and the Council of the Indies.¹ The Spanish government, however, rejected the Philippine scheme, perhaps, as Manuel Ollé speculates, because of the defeat of the Spanish Armada by England, which occurred just as Sánchez was about to make his case (*La empresa* 7). Although the Spanish never attempted to invade China, during most of the seventeenth century they remained deeply involved in Chinese affairs through the Catholic missionary project.

With hindsight, the notion of a Spanish conquest of China might seem incredible. But more startling is the argument that Sánchez invokes to justify conquest. According to Sánchez, Spain should conquer China because of the exemplary nature of the Chinese people, who differ in every way from those heretofore conquered by the Spanish:

[P]or ser la gente tan ladina y de tanto entendimiento blanca, vistosa, y de linda disposicion y tan noble y tan rica y que no tiene cosa de indios sino que salva la Fe y valentia en todo lo demas nos hacen ventaja. (Colín 443)

[Because the people are so clever and so wise, white, attractive, and pleasant, and are so noble and rich, and nothing like Indians, they have the advantage over us in everything except for the faith that saves and courage.]²

According to Sánchez, not only should Spain conquer China, but the Spanish and the Chinese should intermarry. Although in his view

4 They Need Nothing

miscegenation between Spaniards and indigenous peoples has resulted in the degradation of the former, he recommends intermarriage between Spaniards and Chinese as if in this way Spain might achieve its ideal destiny as a nation:

[S]era muy llano y ordinario honesto y honroso . . . el casarse los españoles capitanes y soldados mercaderes y de todas suertes aunque sean ilustres con ellas y asentar y arraigar en la China y con esto mezclarse propagarse multiplicarse, unirse y hermanarse y cristianarse todo en breve, lo cual nunca ha habido ni se ha hecho en ninguna parte de las Indias que se han descubierto y poblado que por ser la gente bárbara y vil pobre y fea nunca ha habido nudo ni union de casamientos o han sido pocos y afrentosos y tenidos ellos y sus hijos y descendientes por genero de infamia y deshonra. (Colín 443)

[It will be very natural and normal, and honourable and proper for Spanish captains, soldiers, merchants, and men of all classes, including the most illustrious, to marry them (Chinese women) and settle and become established in China. In this way they will mix, propagate, multiply, and in short (the two peoples) will unite and become brothers and Christians. This is something that has never occurred or been accomplished in any part of the Indies thus far discovered and settled, since the people there are so barbarous, vile, poor, and ugly that there have never been bonds or unions of marriage. In the few cases of such marriages, they have been considered ignominious, and the parties, with their children and descendants, have incurred a sort of infamy and disgrace.]

From Sánchez's point of view the Chinese are endowed with what is most positive in human nature. They are, first and foremost, wise. They are further characterized as white, beautiful, temperate, and noble. What is more, they possess material bounty. In all of these ways they differ from *indios* [Indians], whom Sánchez thoroughly deprecates. Except for their lack of Christian faith and Spanish valour, the Chinese in fact exceed the Spanish as models of humanity.

At first glance this passage suggests that Sánchez had a clear idea of what is and is not of value in human nature and culture. But it also reveals a fundamental problem with which early modern Europeans struggled as they increasingly interacted with non-European peoples – not that some, like *indios*, were in their view inferior to Europeans but that others, like the Chinese, were seemingly superior. As Domingo Fernández Navarrete, a seventeenth-century Spanish missionary in

China, would ask, how was it possible that God had chosen to shower his greatest blessings on a people who were not Christian? Although this conundrum would not shake the faith of the missionaries, it would lead certain Spanish writers of the early modern period to question profoundly their personal identities and cultural assumptions.

Contemporary readers might nevertheless be struck by the fact that one of the positive characteristics Sánchez attributes to the Chinese is skin colour and specifically whiteness. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish representations of non-Europeans both the Chinese and Japanese are typically described as white peoples, in contradistinction to Southeast and South Asians, Africans, and Amerindians. Given that the Chinese and Japanese were also considered more highly civilized than other non-Europeans, whiteness might seem to be, if not a determinant, at least a condition of cultural superiority. In European writings of the period, however, references to skin colour tend to reflect classical and medieval conceptions of the effects of climate and geography on human beings and not a biologicistic view that some people are inherently superior to others. In fact, skin colour as a marker of human value remains fluid in early modern European writings on Asia, and only gradually do Europeans categorize East Asians as non-white. As Michael Keevak demonstrates in his groundbreaking work, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking*, the notion of a yellow race as different from and inferior to a white race is a product of European race theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³

Most sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish writers on China and Japan also remark on what they perceive to be a greater frequency and toleration of male-male sex in East Asia than in Europe. Though the Chinese and Japanese of the period did not conceive of male-male sex in terms of sin (and though in certain social contexts, such as that of the samurai, male-male sexual relations were actually fostered), male-male sex in Ming-dynasty China was technically illegal (Spence, *Memory* 226). Nonetheless, early modern Europeans often cite the practice of sodomy among East Asians as a justification for Christian evangelization.⁴ In the early Spanish-imperial period, writers such as Francisco López de Gómara, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés increasingly attribute male effeminacy and/or sodomy to non-European groups targeted for conquest. This practice is orientalist insofar as it conflates non-Europeans and, by extension Europeans themselves, irrespective of their particular histories and cultures, and leads to an essentialized vision of the Western and non-Western worlds.

The tendency to create a reified East/West duality is clearly present in much Asian-focused, Spanish-language discourse, especially in texts with an explicitly religious or imperialist agenda. But as John MacKenzie remarks in his discussion of orientalist art, 'the artistic record of imperial culture has in fact been one of constant change, instability, heterogeneity and sheer porousness' (327). Such characteristics are also present in Hispanic writings on East and Southeast Asia from the Spanish imperial period. In reality, these are often hybrid works that meld Hispanic-European and Asian world views. They thus, despite the Iberian origin of most of the writers, differ from putatively autochthonous Spanish writings. Moreover, the Hispanic-Asian encounters that occurred in the wake of European overseas expansion are represented not solely by Spaniards but also by Asian writers and artists from late sixteenth-century Japan and China to the late nineteenth-century Philippines. Together, these texts demonstrate the reciprocal tensions of cultural interchange during the early modern and colonial periods and the pivotal role of Spain not only in the production of Western images of Asia but also in the continual making and remaking of what it means to be Western and ultimately human.

Conceptions of Selfhood and Alterity

In his magisterial study of the relationship between place and identity in Europe's world view at the dawn of European overseas expansion, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*, Nicolás Wey Gómez shows how Europeans regarded latitude, and more specifically climate, as a primary condition of human nature and, by extension, human societies. Wey Gómez focuses his study on Columbus's understanding of geography, which, he argues, motivated his decision to sail southward and west rather than directly west, since his veritable aim was not China but lands identified as 'India,' 'the parts of India,' or 'the Indies' (4). As Wey Gómez explains, Columbus shared the view of many classical and medieval geographers that places with similar climates produced similar kinds of peoples and cultures. According to this deeply engrained vision of the world, the temperate climate of the Mediterranean region was conducive to civilization whereas the colder climates of the north and the hotter climates of the south thwarted civility and led to barbarism. Nations thus 'owed their unique physiologies, characters, and *mores* (customs) to their natural locations' (69). The effects of climate were further related to skin colour. Wey Gómez cites the Roman writer Pliny, who maintained that cold climates produced

fair-skinned people and hot climates produced dark-skinned people, both of whom were unable to govern properly; '[i]n contrast, the earth's temperate region fostered people of medium complexion whose "moderate customs, keen senses, [and] fertile intellects" enabled them to wield the political authority that eluded their neighbors in the earth's cold and hot regions' (70). Extremes in climate, according to the scholastic philosopher Albertus Magnus, negatively affected the body, which in turn hindered the soul's ability to cultivate 'the moral virtues necessary for building a proper polity' (Wey Gómez 285). In this 'pre-history of race,' as Ruth Hill describes the early modern period ('Between' 271), climate, rather than any specific body characteristic such as skin colour, was considered the most decisive influence on human nature. For Wey Gómez, moreover, the tripartite division of the world into cold, temperate, and hot zones, which early modern Europe inherited from antiquity and the Middle Ages, informed not only early European colonialism but also the politics of present-day distinctions 'between the "developed" nations of the north and the "developing" nations of the south' (57).

In his analysis of the writings of Columbus, Wey Gómez further argues that classical and medieval notions of tripartite geography and the effects of climate on human nature influenced early modern Spaniards' perceptions of East Asians. He highlights one particular portolan from the late fourteenth century, known as the *Libro del conocimiento de todos los rregnos e tierras et señoríos que son por el mundo*, in which '[t]he author emphatically teaches his readers "that Catayo [Cathay] is the end of the face of the earth in the line of Spain"' (345). In describing the peoples of Tibet, situated in the text directly between China and India, the author writes that they 'were "of good understanding and healthy memory," "learned," "lawful," and "pious" because they stood on the easternmost part of the inhabited world, and this kingdom was rooted "in the middle clime, where natures are temperate"' (345). Wey Gómez argues that these words reflected a widespread European view, based on a belief in the effects of climate, that China (like Mediterranean Europe) was temperate and civilized and that the Asian lands to the south (India, and for Columbus the 'Indies' of the Caribbean) were hot and barbarous. This distinction between a civilized Asia and a barbarous Asia would affect the ways Spaniards in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries regarded the Chinese, Japanese, Cambodians, and Filipinos, and would be reiterated in the Spanish histories and ethnographies of these peoples throughout the colonial period.

Though early modern Spanish writers, like their classical and medieval predecessors, highlight skin colour in their descriptions of the peoples of the world, and though they implicitly associate different skin colours with different levels of civility, the primary category of social identity in colonial Spanish society was caste, not race. As Hill reminds us in 'Between Black and White: A Critical Race Theory Approach to Caste Poetry in the Spanish New World,' Spanish colonial societies 'were not racial societies; they were caste societies' (271). She argues, nevertheless, that contemporary critical race theory, albeit formulated in response to nineteenth- and twentieth-century biological notions of race, can be used to understand Spanish colonial hierarchies provided we remember that these hierarchies were basically social and political. She highlights the theory of the 'racial project' advanced by Michael Omi and Howard Winant. According to Omi and Winant, racial projects link racial representations, which form part of the superstructure of the Marxist paradigm, with the material base: 'A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines' (56). Hill recontextualizes the theory of the 'racial project' and undertakes a reading of colonial caste poems as examples of 'caste projects.' These poems, she argues, 'link representation to social structure . . . [and] seek to legitimate the social hierarchy rooted in caste (*casta*), religious and professional purity (*limpieza de sangre y de oficio*), and estate (*estamento* or *condición*)' ('Between' 271). Such 'caste projects' are also clearly present in Spanish colonial writings from the Philippines.

Hill's work on caste marks a paradigmatic shift in the study of Spanish colonial identities. In 'Casta as Culture and the *sociedad de castas* as Literature' she warns against 'presentism' and in particular the all-too-frequent effort to filter colonial societies 'through postcolonial ideologies and theories of race, class and gender' (259). Rather than seek modern notions of identity in Spanish colonial discourse, she urges us to recognize the 'contradictions and ambiguities' that arose when Old World categories of origin, religion, and estate were applied to New World realities (245). As she demonstrates, concepts eventually understood as purely racial, such as *mestizo* or *mulato* (persons of mixed Spanish and indigenous or African origin), initially 'related to religion as much as biology' (237). As a telling example of pre-Conquest *mestizaje* she cites the medieval *metis* (a Latinate version of the word *mestizos*), who were Christian in name but Muslim in belief (234–5). If from the contempo-

rary vantage point identities in the early Spanish-colonial world seem contradictory and ambiguous, this is because early Spanish-colonial society was neither medieval nor fully modern (nor grounded solely in ideologies of religion or science) but rather a site wherein conflicting meanings of the human were in a state of continuous flux. Yet these meanings are of significance not only to Spanish colonial culture. What they ultimately reveal is that the cultures from which they derived and those to which they led were themselves never static or fixed but always in a process of change.

Whereas some scholars, such as George M. Frederickson and James H. Sweet, highlight what they regard as the proto-racist aspects of pre-Conquest Iberia, others, such as Sylvia Wynter, contend that the 'new symbolic construct' that emerged in the Spanish empire was in fact 'that of "race"' (34).⁵ In Spanish colonial societies, however, race only supersedes caste in the late colonial period, as revealed in the colonialist diatribes of the nineteenth-century Philippines. In the early colonial period, as Irene Silverblatt explains in her study of caste and race in colonial Peru,

[t]he caste system was patently a device of political order; and even though descent played a part, even though colour . . . was singled out as one constituent, caste is understood to be a legal or social (as opposed to biological) construct at heart . . . Unlike caste, race is understood to be principally a question of ancestry and phenotype, a biological phenomenon (or so goes the ideology), and, consequently, to be independent of social or political regimes. (17)

According to Silverblatt, the categories of caste and race are both produced through concrete political and economic relations, although they are ultimately perceived as independent material realities. What is more, they do not exist independently of each other, as if Spanishness or whiteness could be conceived of separately from Indianness or brownness or blackness (115).

Despite the hierarchies of caste in Spanish colonial society, Spaniards, at least in the early centuries of colonialism, believed in the universality of social and cultural norms, and when they described non-Europeans, they tended to highlight what they saw as similar to themselves. As Anthony Pagden argues in *The Fall of Natural Man*, early modern European observers thus differed from modern ethnologists, who seek to describe the difference, or "'otherness" of the "other"' (5). According

to Michel Foucault, by the beginning of the seventeenth century European writings on non-Europeans began to focus on difference rather than resemblance. But Pagden maintains that '[m]ost men, and in particular theologians and historians (with whom Foucault is, of course, largely unconcerned) went on searching in human behaviour for "the restrictive figures of similitude"' (5). Though Pagden centres his study on Native Americans, his comments also apply to early modern Spanish descriptions of the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos, which were penned largely by clerics. If these texts depict the Chinese and Japanese as equally, if not more, civilized than Europeans themselves, they tend to portray Filipinos (whom they label *indios*) as less civilized. They nevertheless implicitly posit a commonality of human beings since all humans, they believed, were endowed with natural reason and whether Christian or pagan, were able 'to "see" the world as it is, to distinguish between good and evil and to act accordingly' (61).

According to early Jesuit writings on China, the ancient Confucians, through the exercise of natural reason, came close to intuiting the essential truths of Christianity. From the Jesuit perspective, this was possible because they lived in a civilized society and were thus capable of directing their inherent natural reason to higher ends. Early modern Spanish thinkers, however, tended to depict those living outside what they considered civilized society, or so-called natural man (Native Americans and, by extension, Filipinos), as 'something less than human, for they had cut themselves off from the meaning which God had granted to every man that he might achieve his end, his *telos*' (Pagden, *Fall* 9). Whereas for Rousseau, 'natural man' was free from the shackles of society that inhibited the exercise of natural reason, sixteenth-century Spaniards believed that 'natural man' was deprived of the means through which natural reason might properly function. As Pagden notes, 'the Indian,' in the writing of Francisco de Vitoria, is like 'a fully grown child whose rational faculties are complete but still potential rather than actual. Indians have to be trained to perceive what other men perceive without effort, to accept what other men regard as axiomatic without prior reflection' (104). This logic, although articulated by a thinker sensitive to the brutalities of the Conquest, justified the subjugation of those peoples precisely unable to repel Spanish military incursions, that is, Native Americans and Filipinos.

In their portrayals of East and Southeast Asians early modern Spanish writers not only reveal the caste concerns of origin and descent and how these relate to levels of civilization; they also highlight char-

acteristics now typically associated with gender and sexuality. In his theorization of orientalism, Edward W. Said declares that the West has historically represented the Orient as feminine and thus predisposed to Western domination: 'he [the Westerner] could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape and meaning to the great Asiatic mystery, as Disraeli once called it' (*Orientalism* 44). Although the body feminized in orientalist discourse is typically female, as Richard C. Trexler and others have demonstrated through their analyses of Hispanic representations of Native Americans, it is also often male. José Piedra argues that in early Hispanic writing the feminization of Native American men at times entailed a process of prior masculinization that functioned to enhance the stature of the conqueror. In his rumination on the conquest of the Caribbean he indicates that indigenous men were imagined as 'aggressive young males ready to capitulate' to bigger, more powerful European males (248). Myths of 'Indian femininity,' nevertheless, persisted long after Native Americans had been Christianized and inducted into European sexual mores. Various colonial writers interpreted such physical characteristics as the 'lack' of facial hair in certain Native American men as a sign of femininity (Bleys 45). Male femininity, moreover, was often related to the effects of climatic heat, which, as Wey Gómez has argued, early modern Europeans regarded as a hindrance to the exercise of right reason and the formation of rationally ordered societies.

Despite the tendency of some European writers to represent Asia and Asians as feminine, early Spanish commentators of East and Southeast Asia do not typically depict Asian men as either more or less masculine than their European counterparts.⁶ Indeed, they often highlight instances of masculine bravery and valour, especially in the case of the samurai. Several note that Chinese women are kept more secluded than European women, but in keeping with their own European views of gender they interpret this as a positive sign of male dominance. What early Spanish writers disparage in East Asian societies (albeit not in the pre-Hispanic Philippines) is a toleration of male-male sexual expression. In so doing they echo long-held Christian-European perceptions of the non-Christian world. As far back as the Crusades and throughout the early modern period, Europeans often levelled charges of sodomy against entire populations (including both Muslims and Native Americans), especially when they sought to conquer these populations. López de Gómara, for instance, states in his history of the conquest of Mexico that the indigenous men 'se dan muchísimo a la carnalidad,

así con hombres como con mujeres, sin pena ni vergüenza' (450) [are much given to carnality, with men as well as women, without embarrassment or shame]. Sepúlveda invoked the 'pecado nefando' [nefarious sin (of sodomy)] as a reason for war against the Indians (Book 1, 57). And Oviedo y Valdés denounced them all as sodomites and for this reason beyond the pale of conversion, an accusation that the Indian apologist Bartolomé de las Casas emphatically denied (*Historia* 326). Though such denials in the short run advanced the cause of the Native Americans, they did little to check the rise of what Rudi C. Bleys has intriguingly described as 'the geography of perversion.' Yet given that the modern 'science' of homosexual deviance, like that of racial inferiority, was not elucidated until the nineteenth century, what these early Spanish writings on Asia delineate might more properly be labelled a 'geography of sin.'

Early modern Spanish writings on Asia, however, are not solely of interest for the ways they represent Asians. They also provide a site through which Spanishness and, perhaps more important, European-ness is constructed. Silverblatt notes that in the seventeenth century, although Spain existed less as a nation than as an assemblage of kingdoms and principalities under Hapsburg rule, 'there was a sense of "Spanishness," and that sense emerged as early modern colonialism took form' (219). But in early modern Spanish writings on Asia, there also appears a notion of European-ness (independent of Christianity, since by this time large numbers of non-Europeans were Christian), associated with certain aspects of the body, a particular geographic space, and the amorphous but increasingly deeply imagined identity of 'Western.'

Fernando Coronil reminds us that the terms 'Western' and 'Eastern' and even 'Europe' and 'European' are in fact problematic, since the external referents to which they correspond always were and continue to be ambiguous and shifting – despite whatever illusion of fixed reality they might create (52). In reflecting on the genesis of the East-West dichotomy he cites Raymond Williams, who traces the distinction between East and West to the Roman Empire and the subsequent separation of the Christian and Muslim regions of the world (Coronil 53, Williams 333). But he recognizes the error of 'reading history backward, extending the existence of present-day Europe into the past beyond a time when one could reasonably recognize its presence' (53). Early modern Spanish writers, nevertheless, do invoke the term 'Europe' (and in the case of Diego de Pantoja, 'nuestra Europa' [our Europe])

to distinguish Asia from what they consider to be their culture of origin. Yet as their texts reveal, 'their Europe' is actually drawn into discourse precisely as they write their accounts of Asia. What is more, its contours are never fully delimited, either geographically or culturally.

In theorizing the discursive structures of East-West relations, Coronil seeks to reorient critical focus from 'Western representations of "Otherness" to the implicit constructions of "Selfhood" that underwrite them' (56). In so doing he responds to the challenge of Said in 'Orientalism Reconsidered' to examine not only orientalism but also the role of the orientalist in the creation of the Orient as a conceptual category (55–6). Coronil, however, chooses to call the orientalist an 'occidental' since he is particularly interested in the way orientalism presupposes and in fact produces certain notions of the West. His aim is not simply to turn from representations of the 'eastern other' to representations of the 'western self' but rather to reveal the relational nature of the terms 'Occident' and 'Orient' and 'self' and 'other,' bringing 'out into the open their genesis in asymmetrical relations of power, including the power to obscure their genesis in inequality' (56). For Coronil, 'Occidentalism . . . is thus not the reverse of Orientalism but its condition of possibility' (56). More specifically, although ethnic hierarchization is not strictly a Western phenomenon, occidentalism, according to Coronil, differs from other similar instances of asymmetrical social relationships in that it is exercised in conjunction with a 'deployment of global power' and in the context of 'global capitalism' (56–7).

Early modern Spanish representations of East and Southeast Asians are produced precisely as Spain advances as a global power, albeit still in the initial phase of world capitalism. Moreover, representations of Spaniards and Filipinos in the colonial Philippines clearly depict a hierarchical relationship, even in texts sympathetic to the Filipino people under Spanish rule. Concomitant representations of the Chinese and Japanese, however, are not necessarily asymmetrical precisely because the military power of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not greater than that of China and Japan. Furthermore, the Spanish missionaries of the period, while convinced they were the bearers of the true religion, were less certain of the superiority of European cultural accomplishments, although the Chinese and Japanese valued European astronomy, cartography, and ship-building technology. Some Spaniards, such as Navarrete, were in fact adamant in their conviction that Chinese civilization surpassed European civilization in every area

except religion, whereas others, such as Pantoja, subtly affirmed the pre-eminence of Europe over China.

The recent volume of innovative essays, titled *Sinographies: Writing China*, provides useful guidance on how to read European depictions of China (and by extension East and Southeast Asia in general) as well as the Western writing subject. The editors of the collection distinguish between sinology, a discipline (however contested) that seeks to know China, and sinography, a reflection on how such an epistemological enterprise is carried out. If sinology focuses on China as a discrete object of inquiry, sinography aims to understand the process through which China is written. Sinography is thus interested 'in a China of meanings rather than a China of facts,' since 'the road to the China of fact passes through, not around, the China of meaning' (Hayot, Saussy, and Yao xix). In the case of Western representations of China, what matters is not the degree to which they approximate or deviate from the reality of China, but how they affect and indeed participate in the production of that reality and make possible the experience of it. Of equal importance is how the expression and production of China are 'also a form of self-expression and self-production' (xi). As the editors of *Sinographies* make clear in a reference to Ian Hacking's work, the problems of representation (of the self and the Other) are nevertheless ultimately political and ethical, because '[r]epresenting, in a human context, is always intervening' (xv). These questions of representation are particularly germane to my study since the texts I discuss are, if not instances of 'sinography,' what might more broadly be described as 'Hispanic Asianography.'

Hispanic Asianography

Spain and Portugal were the leading European powers present in East and Southeast Asia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Spanish and Portuguese writers were the first to represent these regions of the world to Europe during the initial phase of European overseas expansion. The Japan, China, Cambodia, and Philippines known and experienced by early modern Europeans, both within Asia and Europe, were therefore mediated by Iberia and its particular histories and traditions. One Spanish chronicler, Juan González de Mendoza, authored the most widely read European treatise on China of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although he never reached China on his own voyages, he had access to the writings of the first official Spanish visitors to the Chinese mainland in the mid-1570s. His text, however,

and the China he produced for European readers, actually formed part of a discursive continuum that through the sources he incorporated traced back to medieval and ancient Iberian and European writings. Mendoza's 'road to China' was thus always and only a 'road of meanings.'

Early modern Spanish observers typically represent Japan and China in positive terms even if, from their perspective, the Japanese and Chinese lacked Christianity. Whereas Pantoja attempts to depict European cultural accomplishments as superior to those of China, Navarrete exalts Chinese civilization and holds it up as a model through which he attacks European institutions and practices. Francisco Xavier describes the Japanese as the best people thus far 'discovered' by Europeans, and at times regards the Chinese even more highly.⁷ Yet overall, the images of Japan and China that early modern Spanish writers make available to the West are varied and nuanced. Rarely do they form generalizations about Asian culture or people as a whole, and for the most part they seem keenly aware of differences between Asian societies. Although with hindsight one might detect certain orientalist tendencies in their writings, they do not represent Asia or the Orient as a culturally and geographically unified and homogeneous space. In fact, it would not be until the nineteenth century that the all-encompassing and reductive term 'Extremo Oriente,' or 'Far East,' appeared regularly in European writings on East and Southeast Asia.⁸

Whereas early modern Spanish writers participate in the production of meanings that Europeans will come to know and experience as Japan, China, Cambodia, and the Philippines, they do so not solely from a Hispanic or European perspective but from a vantage point that mediates their European and Asian experiences. From the moment they leave Europe (and indeed from the moment Mendoza first reads China-related texts), they no longer envision the world with what might be imagined as purely or authentically European eyes. Thus, while Xavier rails against the Japanese toleration of the 'nefarious sin' of sodomy, Navarrete makes light of European conceptions of carnality and wonders whether Spanish bullfighting is not as barbaric as the Japanese practice of ritual suicide that Europeans routinely abhor. By looking at Europe from Asian perspectives these writers begin to question the cultural assumptions of Europe. But in so doing they also come to regard themselves in a new and different light. Their discursive production of Asian societies therefore also entails a concomitant production (or reproduction) of the self.

Spanish observers of East and Southeast Asia from the colonial period develop modern historiographies to the extent that they represent Asian societies from a secular perspective – although given that most early writers were clerics, they at times place secular history within a larger, sacred context. But like modern travel writers, they also occasionally express their own personal reactions to what they see, and reflect on their subjective experiences of what for them are profoundly foreign cultures. After a riverboat crossing in China, Navarrete recalls feeling as if he had crossed over into another world, not only because the Chinese seem to him so different but because he suddenly finds himself the object of an alien gaze. Gradually, he internalizes this gaze and begins to recreate his own persona in Chinese terms. If for him the experience of cultural self-transformation is exhilarating, for Pantoja it is subtly but profoundly disconcerting, as he discovers when the Chinese paint his portrait and depict him not as European but Chinese. Xavier, at the end of his sojourn in Japan, declares that only when he saw himself reflected in the Japanese did he understand himself for the first time in his life. In his case self-discovery is ultimately a realization and an acceptance of his own sinful nature. Diego Aduarte, in contrast, attempts to avoid the self-reflection that typically results from encounters with other cultures. After an ambiguous experience in a Buddhist temple in Cambodia, he reports rushing back to the boat where his comrades await him and telling them of his adventure, as if through the act of telling he might distance himself from the incident and create an illusion of safety – from the Other and from the person he might become. As these examples suggest, early Spanish writings on East and Southeast Asia are not only histories but also, to a certain degree, autobiographies, since the authors narrate the lives both of others and themselves and in the process grapple with their own sense of self.

Although these texts reveal the impact of the early European-Asian encounter on the lives of the authors and the Asians with whom they interacted, they exerted their greatest influence on the development of European images of Asians and Asian history, and ultimately on the generations of Asians themselves who have been compelled to negotiate, both individually and collectively, the meanings and consequences of these images. Spanish representations of Asians are always, as the authors of *Sinographies* would argue, interventions in Asian lives. Yet they are not, ipso facto, always unethical interventions even if, from the contemporary perspective, colonialism is regarded as inherently unethical. Some Spanish writers of the colonial Philippines, such as