

The Strait Called Anian: Juan Cobo, Fernando de los Ríos Coronel, and the Northern Pacific (1590s)

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...toda la tierra de Indias está continuada con la de Asia, Europa y África y el Mundo Nuevo con el Viejo, aunque hasta el día presente no está descubierta la tierra que *añuda y junta* estos dos mundos, o si hay mar en medio es tan corto que lo pueden pasar a nado fieras y hombres, en pobres barcos. Mas dejando esta filosofía, volvamos a nuestra historia (Acosta 2006, book 7, 362)

our Merchants may have course and recourse with their merchandize, from these our Northernmost parts of Europe, to those Orientall coasts of Asia, in much shorter time, and with greater benefite than any others (Richard Hakluyt. *The Principal Navigations*, vol. 7, p. 212).¹

While in Asia in the 1590s, Fernando de los Ríos Coronel had two navigational fixations: the Islas Ricas and the Strait of Anian (referred to as Anyang 暗洋 or An'ao 暗澳 in Chinese texts).² He was not the only one concerned about Amerasian geographies. As indicated in the first epigraph, in America, the respected Joseph de Acosta's *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* (1590) asserted thought-provoking Asia-America connections. The citation above conveys the theoretical notion—"philosophy," he terms it—that a continuous landmass stretches across all the continents in combination with the theoretical possibility that Asia and America are divided by a "narrow" strait.³ In Europe, Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations* (1589-1600) contains pleas for the straits to be surveyed, which would take his nation to a new level in global politics.⁴ In the realm of literature, images of new geographies were plentiful, though ill-defined. In the Spanish *comedia nueva*, for example, *Angelica in Catai* by Lope de Vega includes a character who identifies China with America. In *El nuevo rey Gallinato* (1599-1601) by Claramonte, Cambodia is situated in Chile (De Armas 2001, 41-42). In cartographical documents, Asian places are in America. For instance, Calicut—under the name of Calicutan—was in *Tierra Nueva America*, instead of in India; Tenochtitlan was identified with a Chinese city; or China was located directly

¹ As quoted in Mingjun Lu 2015, 435.

² Neither Ricardo Padrón nor John Newsome Crossley discuss the Strait of Anian. Those authors had different approaches in their books: literary versus scientific, roughly speaking. The present article uses both approaches, thus helping to bridge this gap. For the discussion of the Chinese names, see Chien 2012, 69-96.

³ When the original Spanish says "añuda y junta," this continuous Amerasia would have been the perfect theoretical solution to the polygeneticism issue—the concept of multiple creations—caused by the discovery of American biological diversity. For a discussion on polygeneticism, see Crosby 1972, 14. These "philosophies" can be reconciled in several basic types that will be seen in the next pages.

⁴ Imperialistic overtones concerning the trade routes with Cathay are not unique to Hakluyt. As Lu demonstrates, John Donne's global vision is populated with calls to explore passages and straits taking English explorers "thither" (Lu 2015, 436). Beyond Hakluyt and Donne, cartographers also had this vision. Gerard Mercator said that the northern passage was the strait and short way to get to the west and even Cathay, where the English explorers "shall gather the most noble merchandise of all the world, and shall make the name of Christ to be known unto many idolatrous and Heathen people" (as quoted in Nicholas Crane 2003, 269). For a broader view of the Venetian geographic imagination of America, see Horodowich 2022, 89-142. For English reflections on Amerasia, see Horodowich and Nagel 2023, 205-23.

north of Tenochtitlan; even Moctezuma became identified with the Last Great Khan (Nunn 1929, 12; Wey Gómez 2008, 212-13; Hodorowich and Nagel, *Amerasia* 65, 133-37, 219-21; Caboara 2022, 86). For more than two hundred years after 1492, the overlapping areas between Asia and America were a fertile terrain for speculation, to the point that recently it has been said that Amerasia served as a locus of contact (Horodowich and Nagel 2023, 11, 356, 365-67). The questions of how both land masses did or did not connect, and of finding the most economical way to travel from Europe to Asia, are related to the larger idea of this Amerasia locus in literature, geography, politics, explorations, and commerce— a manifestation of the notion at the time that there was an overlap between America and Asia (De Armas 2001, 41-42; Padrón 2020a, 75-78; Hodorowich and Nagel, *Amerasia* 11). Acknowledging the epistemological vastness of the phenomenon, in the present article, we will narrow our scope to the case of two Spaniards' writing about Amerasia from the Asiatic rim of the Pacific Ocean, specifically from Luzon: Juan Cobo (c. 1546–1592) and Fernando de los Ríos Coronel (1559-1624).

Juan Cobo was a Spanish Dominican missionary whose work enriched early Sinology and contributed to Sino-Iberian relations at the time.⁵ Fray Juan Cobo traveled to Mexico in 1586 and later to Manila in 1588. Cobo was deeply involved in the production of knowledge in the Philippines and its subsequent export to mainland China and the Habsburg court in Spain. Beyond his possible involvement in the production of the *Boxer Codex* (c. 1593),⁶ Juan Cobo translated the *Mingxin baojian* 明心寶鑑 (*Precious Mirror for Enlightening the Mind*) (circa 1590),⁷ one of the most popular moral tracts of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), into Spanish as *Espejo rico del claro corazón*.⁸ For some, this manuscript contains the first Chinese book translated into Spanish.⁹ Furthermore, he and his Chinese helpers wrote a theological and scientific text, *Bian zhengjiao*

⁵ There is some academic debate about when Sinology started. In the Spanish and Portuguese traditions, there is a contention that it started with the first contacts in the sixteenth century between Iberians and Chinese. See Liam Matthew Brockey 2012, 69-84.

⁶ It is worth noting that since 2016, there has been considerable debate about who is behind the collection of reports known as the *Boxer Codex*. The recent book on the topic, edited by Manel Ollé and Joan-Pau Rubiés, contains a multiplicity of opinions. Juan Cobo's name emerges convincingly in several chapters as the editor of the codex (2020, 19, 22, 25, 91-109). Ollé makes a sophisticated contextualization of the role of Juan Cobo in the "complex and plural authorship" of the document (2020, 24-25). By emphasizing Cobo's relationship with the manuscript, the roles of other candidates, such as Martín de Rada, are diminished and even marginalized. As a result, an implicit answer emerges to George Bryan Souza and Jeffrey Turley's edition of the codex. In the same volume, John N. Crossley, who published a monograph on the Das Marinas as governors of the Philippines in 2016, advances with force the hypothesis that one of the Das Marinas is the mastermind behind the *Boxer Codex*, helped by the Dominican Juan Cobo and his multiple contacts in the Sangley community, which made the manuscript's creation possible (*El Códice Boxer* 2020, 91-110). Conversely, the Souza and Turley edition published in 2016 makes it clear that their choice for the author (or compiler) is Antonio de Morga Sánchez Garay (Souza 2016, 23-26). Ollé's opinion is also challenged by Isaac Donoso, editor of another bilingual version of the *Boxer Codex* published in 2018, who seems to propose the second of the Das Marinas governors as the author of the book (129-30).

⁷ *Mingxin baojian*, a collection of aphorisms and moral sayings urging people to do good deeds, was compiled by Fan Liben 范立本. It was finished and first printed in Wulin 武林 (present-day Hangzhou 杭州) in 1393. It must be noted that there is some academic discussion as to whether the book was originally compiled by Fan Liben. Borao acknowledges the debate about the role of Fan Liben in the compilation, as well as the date of the book's publication: see José Eugenio Borao 2013, 217-19.

⁸ The manuscript is in the National Library of Spain. See Juan Cobo 1590, MS No. 6040. In Spanish circles, it is known as *BSPC*. This is also the convention used in the description of the manuscript in the National Library in Madrid (BNM) as well as in the transcribed editions by Carlos Sanz (1959) and Liu Li-Mei 劉莉美 (2005). See Juan Cobo 1959 and Juan Cobo 2005. Manel Ollé also edited the manuscript in 1998 for a large readership.

⁹ See José Eugenio Borao 2021, 53-54, where he discusses the translation by Michele Ruggieri dated 1590, which was dedicated to the king of Spain, Philip II.

zhenchuan shilu 辯正教真傳實錄 (*Testimony of the True Religion*), which, using the Chinese woodblock printing technology available in Parián, Manila, was published posthumously in 1593 (hereafter referred to as the *Shilu*).¹⁰ In this xylographed book, he included the sketch of the Northern Pacific that we refer to in this article (Figure 1). In addition, he was one of the authors of a *Doctrina Christiana* in the Chinese variety spoken by the locals in Manila.

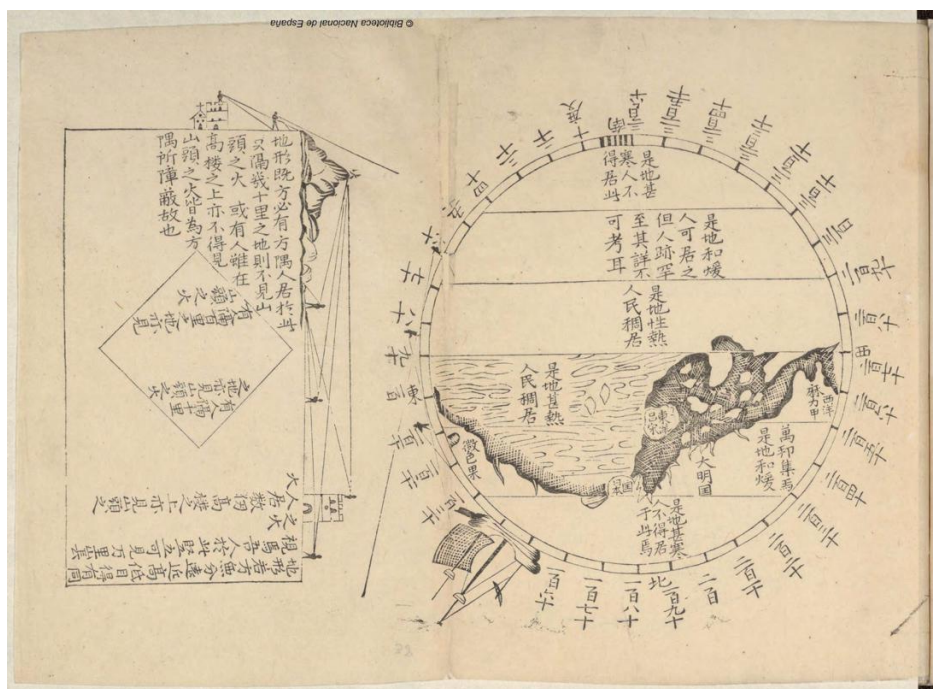


Figure 1. Map-(31d-e). *Shilu*, *Apología de la Verdadera Religión* (1593), Juan Cobo. MS N°. R/33396, Biblioteca Nacional de España.

The other central figure is Fernando de los Ríos Coronel (c. 1559-1624), who also lived in Manila and has been described as a Renaissance man with a large breadth of knowledge. As Luis Pérez das Mariñas portrayed him in 1597, De los Ríos was a virtuous and upright resident of the Philippines who possessed great knowledge on important matters, such as mathematics and astrology.¹¹ His biographer, John Newsome Crossley, enlarges his accomplishments by mentioning that he was a soldier, cartographer, mathematician, naval pilot, administrator, priest, inventor, and lobbyist (Crossley 2011, 3). He developed technology to make life aboard ships and navigation safer and more comfortable. He was “procurador general de Filipinas en la corte” and visited the court on several occasions. As an unyielding advocate of the colony in Luzon, he worked with all possibilities that could be incorporated into the debate about the connections

¹⁰ The only extant copy is held in the National Library of Spain. See, Juan Cobo 1593, MS No. 33396. It is also known as the *Shilu* 實錄. There is a trilingual edition of this book by Fidel Villarreal; see Juan Cobo 1986.

¹¹ Luis Pérez das Mariñas described him in these terms: “En estas islas está una persona llamada Hernando de los Ríos Coronel de mucha noticia de cosas importantes y particularmente [...] matemática y astrología, y de tanta virtud [...] celo y deseo del servicio de Dios y de Vuestra Merced [...] que no sé si en estas partes hay quien le exceda,” see De los Ríos Coronel 1597. See the English translation in Blair and Robertson 1973, 299.

between Luzon, Tierra Nueva,¹² New Mexico,¹³ and Florida. Between 1588 and 1622, De los Ríos wrote several memorials, letters, and charted maps related to Luzon and the Philippine colony.¹⁴

In Figure 2, we can appreciate De los Ríos Coronel's cartographic abilities as early as 1597 in an area that urgently needed as much mapping as possible. He placed the island of Luzon at the center of his map in relation to Taiwan (Isla Hermosa), Fujian and Guangdong (Costa de la China), the Ryukyu Islands (Lequios), and even had references to Japan (Figure 3). Concerning Taiwan, he talks extensively about the "Puerto de Keilang," situated in the bay at the north of Taiwan. He promotes the idea that this seaport in northern Taiwan will secure commerce between China and Manila, since it is the route all boats take, and, according to De los Ríos, since the Chinese are afraid of the locals attacking them, obtaining a port will secure commerce in Manila. As predicated by the lobbyist in 1597, the enterprise of establishing a colony in Taiwan was indeed doable; his military advice was to post three hundred men in the well-shaped natural port of Keilang (present-day Jilong 基隆):

Tiene pocos puertos pero uno que está [a] la cabeza de la parte que mira al Japón es muy acomodada y fuerte [lla]mado Keilang. Y ahora no tiene defensa ninguna. Metidos allí trescient[os] hombres con un fuerte, todo el poder de estas partes no basta a ofenderlos p[orque] la boca es muy angosta y se puede con artillería defender ... Es gran puerto y muy fondeable y la boca se cierra con una isla por [la] parte del nordeste poblada de hasta trescientos indios. El retrato de la cual [...] sacado envío con esta a vuestra majestad.¹⁵

The reason for this plan, he adds immediately, is the security of "these islands," meaning Luzon and its commerce. Indeed, in 1596, a crisis erupted with Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the new leader of Japan, and, consequently, a survey of Taiwan's coast was conducted to protect Manila from a possible Japanese invasion. De los Ríos drew a map, which was attached to his memorial (Figure 2). It was not until 1626, after the passing of De los Ríos, that a flotilla established a colony in Keilang, a "successful trip of only two galleys accompanied by a dozen of junks."¹⁶

¹² Basically, Sonora and Arizona today. Francis Drake's search for the strait in the late 1570s shook the Spanish world and probably justified mounting new expeditions not only to California but also to the *Tierra Nueva* through the Tepima corridor in Sonora and Arizona (Mathes 1983, 58; Gil-Osle 2021, 44-51).

¹³ Known as Tiguex at the time. The possibility of a connection between New Mexico and Asia was made very clear by Castañeda de Nájera. Pedro Castañeda de Nájera, in part 2, chapter 6, situated the Amerasian land bridge deep into a mainland mass connecting with Asia in the *Mar del Sur* (Pacific Ocean) and Norway in the *Mar del Norte* (Atlantic Ocean). He said: "Yo creo se tomarán ricas noticias y se entrará en las tierras de donde aquellas gentes proceden que según el rumbo es principio de la India Mayor aunque partes remotas y no sabidas ni conocidas porque según la demostración de la costa es muy tierra adentro entre la Noruega y la China". Quoted from Carmen de Mora's version in *Las siete ciudades de Cibola* (1992, 125). See the Flint version (2005) 422, 478; the contextualizing comments made by Flint on pages 380-82.

¹⁴ Crossley includes four memorials between 1619 and 1621 in his bibliography (2011, 228-29). Yet, the list of extant documents by the hand of De los Ríos Coronel is larger.

¹⁵ De los Ríos Coronel 1597, 9. See the English translation in Blair and Robertson 1973, 304-07, which has some minor inaccuracies.

¹⁶ Borao 2009, 209.

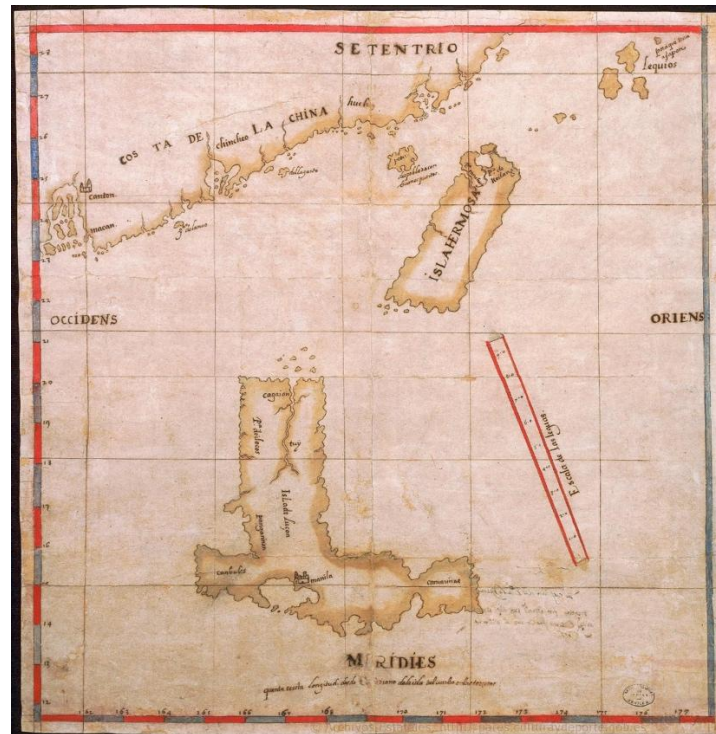


Figure 2. Fernando de los Ríos Coronel, 1597. Luzon in the lower part, Formosa in the middle, and the Fujian coastal line in the upper part of this map. “Discrepción [sic] de la Isla Hermosa dirigida por Hernando de los Ríos Coronel al Rey con carta fecha en Manila a 27 de junio de 1597.” ES.41091.AGI//MP-FILIPINAS, 6. Archivo General de Indias.

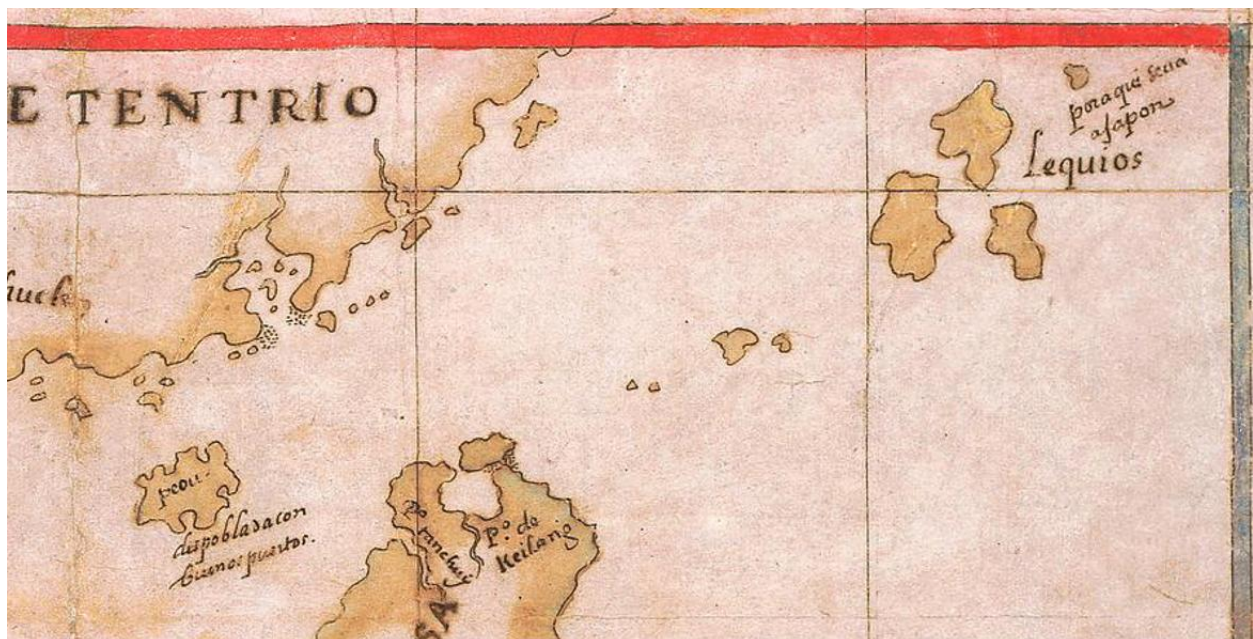


Figure 3. Detail. Fernando de los Ríos Coronel, 1597. Luzon in the lower part, Formosa in the middle, and the Fujian coastal line in the upper part of this map. “Discrepción [sic] de la Isla Hermosa dirigida por Hernando de los Ríos Coronel al Rey con carta fecha en Manila a 27 de junio de 1597.” ES.41091.AGI//MP-FILIPINAS, 6. Archivo General de Indias.

As De los Ríos thought Luzon's strategic value for the crown was undeniable, the same could be said about Juan Cobo, since Luzon was the stepping stone for the Dominicans to enter China to evangelize. Fray Juan Cobo and Fernando de los Ríos Coronel placed Luzon at the center of their maps, and both expressed their views about the Amerasian connections. Cobo's and De los Ríos's writings on Amerasia and the importance of Luzon in the long trade routes that included North America can be included in what Kim Beachesne terms the "visión periférica" (2013). The cogitations of these two *manilenses* do not belong to the main corpus favored by the court at the time or by today's scholars. In that sense, following Beachesne, the two documents analyzed here belong to a minor discourse that has long been marginalized. Her book focuses on the marginalization of narratives from interior areas of Latin American countries and the Amazonian basin. Since they were difficult to access from the Vice Royal seats, the discourses related to those areas have suffered the destiny of both rejection and attraction (Beachesne 2013, 23). In addition, Spanish is not the official language of Manila, which makes these types of colonial narratives even more marginalized since they have little importance in education curricula.

As the peripheric and marginal nature of the documents studied in this article has already been established, we will now analyze some critical reflections on the Strait of Anian.

The following is a summary of the last 180 years of criticism on the Strait of Anian. Since the mid-19th century, academics such as Martín Fernández de Navarrete (1849), Thomas Rundall (1849),¹⁷ Godfrey Sykes (1915),¹⁸ George Nunn (1929),¹⁹ Joseph W. Zdenek (1973),²⁰ Robert R.

¹⁷ Two fundamental works were published on the connection or continuity between America and Asia in 1849: one in Spain, the other in England. Martín Fernández de Navarrete's monograph on apocryphal discoveries made by Juan de Fuca, Maldonado, and others in the quest for a northern passage to China demonstrates the state of knowledge about the topic in the mid-nineteenth century (1849). The book's introduction is still a fundamental study. While it centers on Spanish explorations, it also references those made by other nations. In the same year, Thomas Rundall published a monograph in The Hakluyt Society on England's efforts to find an economical passage to China and the Molucca Islands, such as the trips of Frobisher and Davis, which were also included on the Mercator map *Septentrionalium Terrarum Descriptio. Per Gerardum Mercatorem Cum Privilegio* published in 1595.

¹⁸ In 1915, Godfrey Sykes published an article in the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* where he presented an impressive set of images about the history of what he described as a "strangely persistent myth," including sketches of Maldonado's fantasies and others' cogitations (1915, 172).

¹⁹ In 1929, George E. Nunn published a 58-page booklet about the topic. Nunn explains that after the flurry of expeditions to discover riches north of New Spain and Cuba had failed—both before and after Cabeza de Vaca and his group—cartographers and politicians had to reevaluate their priorities beyond the 40th parallel: "Cartographers, as a result, were forced to revise their record. Cathay and the other Asiatic countries and cities parted company with Mexico and New Spain" (Nunn 1929, 15). For Nunn, given the results of these expeditions, a school of thought in the 1540s started to nurture the idea that America and Asia were different landmasses. Nunn includes a sketch of Orontius Finaeus' work in 1531, where Cathay is literally on top of "Messigo" and in surprisingly narrow proximity to Tenochtitlan and the lake system of Mexico City (Nunn 1929, 12). Meanwhile, he starts the book with a map that has a footnote reading "The earliest known map showing the Strait of Anian." It is not until page 20 that he allows the avid lector to quench their thirst by stating "the first map that showed this separation by means of the Strait of Anian was known as the Bolognino Zaltieri of 1566" (Nunn 1929; 20, 35). With those two images, Nunn demonstrates that the Columbian vision of Tierra Firme as part of Cathay had been dispelled by the expeditions between 1539–42, and the ensuing Italian cartographic works and thinking culminated in the Zaltieri 1566 map based on Gastaldi's previous work (Nunn, Origin 35). Nunn's booklet, at times, is difficult to read. One of the reasons may be that he tries to avoid fashioning Gastaldi as a backward cartographer. Without a doubt, Gastaldi's maps are a good example of the metageographical theory of land continuity between both continents (1546 map), evolving towards a revised version including the Strait of Anian in a non-extant map (1562 map).

²⁰ Zdenek points out that the Strait of Anian was connected to California's geographical definition (1973). Therefore, there are grounds to consider Strait-of-Anian-related texts as part of a Southwest marginal literature.

Owens (1975),²¹ W. Michael Mathes (1983),²² MacMillan (2003), Chien Hung-Yi 簡宏逸 (2012),²³ Jimena Nélica Rodríguez (2015, 2018, 2021),²⁴ Mingjun Lu (2015), Ricardo Padrón (2020a),²⁵ and Marco Caboara (2022) have expanded our understanding of different aspects related to the Strait of Anian. Yet, to our knowledge, no article has focused on the coastline between California and Japan in Juan Cobo's 1593 map.²⁶ There is only one article that touches on the topic of De los Ríos's speculative geography of the northern hemisphere, and it does so in passing: Mathes (1983). Furthermore, there are a few contributions that attempt to systematize the theoretical thinking behind this meta-geographical concept of Amerasia. The two that we are considering in this article are Padrón (2020a) and Horodowich and Nagel (2023).

In a 1983 article about California, W. Michael Mathes included the issue of the strait and the lobbyist Fernando de los Ríos Coronel. Mathes mentions apocryphal reports, rumors about Portuguese discoveries, and lost accounts, among other details (1983, 55). His perspective is important since Frobisher and Francis Drake's search for the strait in the late 1570s shook the Spanish world and probably justified mounting new expeditions not only to California but also to the *Tierra Nueva* through the Tepima corridor in Sonora and Arizona (Rodríguez, "De estrechos" 125-26; Mathes 1983, 58; Gil-Osle 2021, 44-51; Bawfl, *The Secret* 61). Mathes stresses the connection between the strait and the establishment of the concept of California as an island, and the much-reproduced 1625 map of Henry Briggs (1983, 54, 57). He shows how many lies kept spreading and why so many serious and credible people were repeatedly involved in this chimera.

In 2020, Ricardo Padrón published a wonderful analysis of the theory of Amerindian insularity versus the "old theory of Amerasian continuity" in his book *The Indies of the Setting*

²¹ As Hakluyt asserted, it was all a business enterprise. Owens' article contextualizes beautifully Hakluyt's notion of the Strait of Anian in *Principal Navigations*, in connection with "Cathaia in Asia," the "Ilandes of Moluccae," and "the easterne riches" (Owens 1975, 135).

²² Mathes (1983, 55) refers to various apocryphal reports, rumors of Portuguese discoveries, and lost accounts, among other intriguing details. His interpretation is particularly significant because Francis Drake's search for the strait in the late 1570s deeply unsettled the Spanish world, likely prompting renewed efforts to explore not only California but also the *Tierra Nueva* via the Tepima corridor across present-day Sonora and Arizona (Mathes 1983, 58; Gil-Osle 2021, 44-51).

²³ To counter the Eurocentric view, it is also important to introduce what was known or believed from the Asian perspective. João de Barros indicated that Chinese cosmographers affirmed that the coast extended northeast to "50 degrees of septentrional latitude" and that was the extent of Portuguese knowledge on that topic (Nunn 1929, 19-20). Another source for these perspectives is news about trips to Japan by the English and Dutch, such as John Saris in 1613 and Willem Barents in the 1590s. In her 2012 article "The Story of Anian: The Dutch Arctic Voyage Told in the Gazette of Taiwan Prefecture," Hung-Yi Chien emphasizes that the myth of Anian is present in the works of Qing-period literati in China due to Willem Barents' project to find the Northern Passage by sailing along the northern coast of Eurasia. Chien presents not only an analysis of the influence of "Willem Barents' tragic third voyage to the Arctic for the Northeast Passage to Asia undertaken in 1596" in the Chinese imagination of Taiwan, but also an explanation of the connection between the words representing the Strait of Anian in Portuguese, Spanish, and Chinese. Chien's article suggests that the name Anian comes from Marco Polo's travel records, in which a certain Cheinan is mentioned, supposedly located between present-day China and Vietnam. Compared to Chien's view on the origin of the name Anian, Lu offers an alternative point of view: its origin was a Chinese province name.

²⁴ In 2015 Jimena Rodríguez analyzed the topic of Anian from an Oceanic Studies perspective and summarized the main explorations seeking a way to overcome the obstacles on the route to Cathay (135).

²⁵ Padrón's reading is based on his interpretation of the importance of López de Velasco's *Geografía y descripción de las Indias* (1574) for the creation of the uniqueness of America (Padrón 2020a, 142-45). He does not address the question of Anian specifically, but the larger issue of America-Asia discontinuity in the creation of the concept of America.

²⁶ Concerning this map, there is a book chapter by Ricardo Padrón that does not consider the Amerasian continuity issue, or at least not from the perspective of this essay. See Ricardo Padrón 2020b, 54-57.

Sun (Padrón 2020a, 145). On many global maps made before the period between the 1540s and 1560s, America and Asia are disconnected, and the name Strait of Anian is not yet present. Thus, the presence of separation between both landmasses precedes the “Strait of Anian” label on globes and maps. The existence of globes that included a separation, along with the existence of maps that did not, indicates that there were at least two schools of thought defending either the theory of Amerindian insularity or the theory of Amerasian continuity. Padrón’s reading is based on his interpretation of the importance of López de Velasco’s *Geografía y descripción de las Indias* (1574) for the creation of the uniqueness of America (Padrón 2020a, 142-45). Building upon his work, we believe that there is an expanded framework for Amerasia. Once the New World started to be identified as a new landmass,²⁷ the need for ways to circumnavigate or cross it became a fertile terrain for theories, projects, geographical and cartographical works, apocryphal reports, and literature. As a result, several theoretical models were in use at the time, not just two. Beyond the cases where the relation between Asia and America is left undecided,²⁸ the multiple variations could be categorized into the following basic types. In early maps, locations in Asia and America are conflated.²⁹ In other cases, miscalculating longitude gives space for the creation of concepts like the Isthmus of Verrezzano, or statements about incredibly short trips by land between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, such as Menéndez de Avilés’ and De los Ríos’s claims. Beyond that, the imperfect knowledge about the interior of North America and the extensive use of fluvial transportation by Native Americans opened the opportunity to explore internal waterways that hopefully would connect the North Atlantic with the North Pacific.³⁰ Furthermore, the concept of a land passage between America and Asia was persistent until the 1700s.³¹ An alternative notion was the competing idea of a strait. In some cases, it was a narrow one;³² in others, it was a large body of water.³³ A complementary concept to this last option is the idea of a Northern Passage—“la vuelta de China.”³⁴ As we will see when commenting on the writings of Fernando de los Ríos, certainly full of inaccuracies but still very meaningful, he seems to believe in an assortment of three options: the internal rivers, the Amerasian land continuity, and the “vuelta de China.”³⁵ Conversely, on Juan Cobo’s map, there appears only one of the options: the land bridge. A ghostly

²⁷ For America as an island of the archipelago see Horodowich and Nagel 2023, 174

²⁸ See Horodowich and Nagel 2023; 179, 212-13.

²⁹ Horodowich and Nagel 2023; 132-136, 215, 220, 225-228.

³⁰ See the T map of the rivers of North America included in Gil-Osle 2023, 85; see also the writings of Menéndez de Avilés, and the following analysis of Fernando de los Ríos’s 1597 report.

³¹ This land bridge can be seen on many maps: Battista Agnese (c. 1542), Giacomo Castaldi (1546), Paolo Forlani (1565), but also in the sketch of the North Pacific made by Juan Cobo (1593). See more examples in Horodowich and Nagel 2023, 129, 230-31, 336, 356. The idea of this land passage has been called by Nunn the “Columbus-Schöner concept of the connection of Asia and America” (Nunn 1929, 20); Ricardo Padrón denotes it as “the old theory of Amerasian continuity” (Padrón 2020a, 145); Elizabeth Horodowich and Alexander Nagel use the term “Amerasia” from cover to cover of their book of the same title (2023).

³² As the Strait of Anian in the work of Zaltieri and Forlani in 1566 (Nunn 1929, 20).

³³ As in Mercator’s world map of 1569, Ortelius’s 1570 *Theatrum*; in addition to Matteo Ricci and his collaborators Li Zhizao and Zhang Wentao in the 1602 version of the “Kunyu wanguo quantu” (坤輿萬國全圖), North America is not connected with China or Europe. In fact, this 1602 map says that both the northern passage and the strait needed to be navigated to complete the journey to China: “In the past, it was said that the two parts of this land were connected. But now, it is known that the land is divided by an ocean leading to the northern sea” (“A Complete Map”). For more cases, see Horodowich and Nagel 2023, 241-44, 340, 368.

³⁴ See MacMillan 2003, 417-18.

³⁵ In the case of Acosta, he invokes the last two options of the four, which includes the land passage and strait theories (2006).

coastline denotes that he entertained the hopes that the theory of land continuity between Northern California and Japan was plausible (Figures 1 and 5).

As a corollary to our review of the extant scholarship, we would like to include the latest work published on the topic, *Amerasia* (2023) by Elizabeth Horodowich and Alexander Nagel. This work explores the impressive intellectual space that fostered theories about the America-Asia connection from 1492 to 1875. In many early modern cartographic and other associated documents, Asian places are found in America, or America is placed in intimate contact with Asia. For Horodowich and Nagel, categorizing these occurrences as a mistake eradicates a fundamental epistemological framework of early modernity: the meta-geographical construct called Amerasia. Some manifestations of it are Calicut—under the name of Calicutan—placed in *Tierra Nueva* America, instead of in India; Tenochtitlan, identified with a Chinese city; or China as located directly north of Tenochtitlan. Even Moctezuma came to be identified with the Last Great Khan. While acknowledging the epistemological vastness of the phenomenon, Horodowich and Nagel present the notion of an Amerasia that was a “major organizing paradigm of the world for centuries, accompanying and possibly enabling the rise of Europe as an idea,” even though the concept did not survive (24). During the 19th and 20th centuries, the meta-geographical Amerasian concept was supplanted by the “modern metageography of the seven continents” (364). Horodowich and Nagel do not allow themselves to fall into simplifications about the phenomenon and delve into these tremendously thought-provoking notions, as well as they offer an answer to Padrón’s vision of America-Asia continuity as an “old theory.”

After contextualizing the academic debate, in the next section of the article, we will analyze in detail what Juan Cobo and Fernando de los Ríos Coronel depicted or wrote about Amerasian connections from Luzon in the 1590s.



Figure 4. Coronel Fernando de los Ríos. *Memorial y relación para su majestad, del procurador general de las Filipinas*, Madrid: Viuda de Fernando Correa, 1621, Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid

On Juan Cobo's 1593 map—oriented with south at the top and concerned with the northern hemisphere of the Pacific Ocean—we find a line denoting an Amerasian coastal continuity and an open ocean (Figures 1 and 5).³⁶ In the sketch, special emphasis is given to different climate zones, and in that regard, it is associated with zonal maps of the Macrobian tradition. Juan Cobo depicts the island of Luzon, where Manila is the largest city, as the center of the Northern Pacific.³⁷ Luzon is not only equidistant from Malacca and California, but is also located between the darkened waters of the South/West/East China Seas and the Pacific Ocean, which some called the Spanish Lake.³⁸ The Luzon-centric view of the world built by Juan Cobo coincides with a similar intent by De los Ríos to make this far-away colony the next stepping stone for the Habsburg global conglomerate. Between Riben guo 日本國 (Japan) and Weise guo 微色果 (Mexico),³⁹ there is a line that must represent Asia-America continental continuity, or the Columbus-Schöner concept.⁴⁰ Taken to the extreme, the Asia-America land passage reduced the Pacific Ocean to a gulf.⁴¹ Contrary to certain Italian maps, Cobo's sketch does not convey the idea that the Pacific Ocean could be reduced to an inlet between southwest North America and Asia, but his longitude measurements were faulty. By 1593, the concept of the Pacific Ocean as a bay had to be difficult to accept for people who crossed it from Mexico to the Philippines. By sea, the perilous voyage lasted four months, and an optimistic desire that a safer route by land or water was possible justified many enterprises into the terra incognita, both from New Spain and Luzon. In short, Cobo's map is a rough approximation of the mapping of the Pacific coast of North America (including Mexico and California), where a ghostly coastline indicates a land passage between North America and Asia.

³⁶ His map is included in the *Shilu*, published posthumously in Manila, 1593.

³⁷ See Zhang and Gil-Osle, "Mapping Climate," forthcoming.

³⁸ Concerning longitude, Luzon is equidistant from Malacca and Mexico. While longitude is incorrect, as it used to be in Renaissance cartography, it has been said that latitude is more or less correct. The latitudes of Mexico, Japan, Luzon, and Malacca are placed respectively at "25°-30°, 15°-30°, 20°, and 5° north latitude." For these reasons, Liu Dun considers that the map presents "an accurate reflection of the level of mathematical and geographical knowledge of his day" (Liu Dun 1998, 4, 55).

³⁹ In contemporary maps, the Chinese name for Mexico seems to be unstable. In 1593, Juan Cobo uses *Weise guo* 微色果; in 1602, Matteo Ricci uses *Mosike guo* 墨思可國. As indicated by an anonymous reviewer, the Chinese had similar difficulties as Cobo and Ricci did when transcribing foreign names. Nevertheless, given the phonetic difference between *Weise guo* and *Mosike guo*, there might be other factors to consider.

⁴⁰ Horodowich and Nagel include in their monograph many maps with this coastline connecting America and Asia.

⁴¹ For instance, the North Pacific Ocean, which is engulfed by the Golfo di Tonza, and the land passage uniting California, New Mexico, and Arizona—basically called *Tierra Nueva*—with China is colossal. In contrast, Forlani's map reduces the Pacific Ocean to a gulf, due to the coastal continuity. See, Giacomo Castaldi's *Universale* (1546) and Paolo Forlani's *Universale descrizione di tutta la terra conosciuta fin qui* (Venecia, 1562-65).

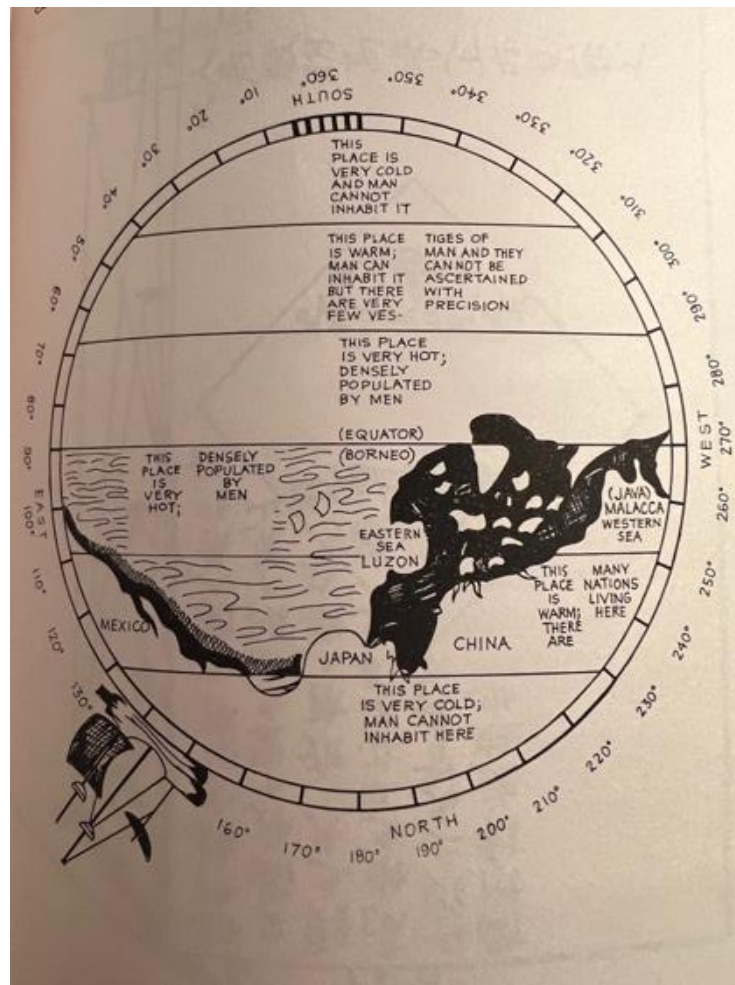


Figure 5. Villarroel's edition of the *Apología de la Verdadera Religión* de Juan Cobo includes this translation of the map into English. (Cobo, *Pien Cheng-chiao Chen-ch'uan Shih-lu* 辯正教真傳實錄. Ed. Fidel Villarroel, O. P. (Manila, Philippines: University of Santo Tomas, 1986, 233)

The likely appearance of the continental continuity on Cobo's 1593 map allows us to imagine the quest for the Strait of Anian from Luzon. For years to come, in his search for more profitable routes, Fernando de los Ríos let himself be swayed by hearsay that existed in the streets of Manila concerning not only the Strait of Anian, but also waterways in America, and northern passages that reached the South China Sea. Even Governor Das Mariñas had a plan to send De los Ríos to explore the land and waterways to speed up communications with the metropole. This must refer to Luis Pérez das Mariñas's father, Governor Gómez Pérez das Mariñas, who was beheaded by his Chinese crew during a sea expedition in 1593.⁴² It appears that the governors Das Mariñas (1590-96) were not only interested in the exploration of Amerasian connections, but also the father, Gómez Pérez das Mariñas, was instructed by Philip II to concentrate their energies not on plans to conquer China, but on augmenting the Castilian presence in the South China Sea. Back at the court in Madrid, after ten years of deliberations, the Crown had decided to dismiss the plans for a conquest of China proposed by some factions in Manila. This decision had consequences: Alonso Sánchez lost his position as *procurador* of the Philippines, and Gómez Pérez das Mariñas was sent

⁴² See the vivid narrative of Das Mariñas' father being killed at the hands of Chinese rowers (Crossley 2016, 1-3).

as governor (Ollé 2002, 227). Governor Das Mariñas, as already mentioned, had instructions to abandon the *empresa de China* plans and redirect the investment in the Philippines to a larger project.

Within this context, De los Ríos's thoughts about the connection between America and Asia were included in a letter sent by Luis Pérez das Mariñas in Manila to Philip II in 1597.⁴³ De los Ríos, in his desire to justify the value of the colony for sustained investment, informed His Majesty that there were two new routes to be explored, and also indicated that the deceased Governor Gómez Pérez das Mariñas planned to send him to explore them.⁴⁴ Of these two routes, one involved a "brazo de mar" that connected "la tierra de los bacalaos" in the Northern Atlantic with New Mexico, and the second was the Strait of Anian through which a Basque named Joanes de Rivas reported that some Portuguese had reached India and China, and then sailed down to "Ucheo" from where they returned to Lisbon in forty-five days.⁴⁵ A remarkably fast return voyage compared to the six months of sailing that the journey from just Manila to Acapulco could last.⁴⁶ Here, De los Ríos defends an alternate two-month route from Taiwan, Isla Hermosa, to Lisbon that would use the waterways believed to connect China with the North Atlantic (Figure 6).

⁴³ Fernando de los Ríos Coronel 1597.

⁴⁴ "El primer año que vino a esta tierra Gómez Pérez das Mariñas por gobernador trató conmigo de enviarme a descubrir el estrecho de Danián [sic] y causa de la jornada que pretendió hacer al Maluco ... y como le mataron tan desgraciadamente cesó todo" De los Ríos Coronel 1597, 9. See Blair and Robertson 1973, 301, "The first year after Gomez Perez de las Marinas arrived in this country as governor, he conferred with me about sending me to explore the strait of Danián [sic]. By reason of the expedition which he intended to make to Maluco, he deferred the other; and when he was so unfortunately killed, it put an end to the project."

⁴⁵ "Un vizcaíno hombre de bien llamado Joanes de Ribas natural de San Sebastián me dijo que andando a las ballenas en Terranova tuvo noticia que el año de cuarenta y cinco habían unos bretones desde la punta de Breton que está como ochenta leguas al oeste de la punta de Bacalaos que esta en cuarenta y nueve o cincuenta grados de latitud y el decía que [estaba en cincuenta y dos?] corriendo al noroeste cien leguas toparon con un estrecho por cuya relación unos portugueses vinieron a la India y a la China y desde Ucheo dicen que en cuarenta y cinco días llegaron a Lisboa" (De los Ríos Coronel 1597, 8). The Blair and Robertson translation reads: "A worthy Viscayan, named Juanes de Ribas, a native of San Sebastian, told me that while he was going after whales to Terranova [i. e., Newfoundland] he received information that in the year forty-five some Bretons were carried [by storms] from the cape of Breton, which lies about eighty leguas west of the cape of Bacallaos, which lies in forty-nine or fifty degrees of latitude. He said that in latitude fifty-two degrees, after sailing to the northwest a hundred leguas, they encountered an strait. And, according to these relations, some Portuguese came to India and China; they say that in forty-five days they arrived from Ucheo at Lisboa" (Blair and Robertson 1973, 308).

⁴⁶ See Borao 2009, "this [the return trip] was a dangerous trip of five to six months, much longer than the secure trip from Acapulco to Manila that lasted only three months" (3).

Menéndez de Avilés and the information that he might have obtained from French settlers in Florida. Since Menéndez de Avilés was in contact with the French military and sailors in Florida in the 1560s, he was aware that explorers under the protection of the French crown had geographical theories and aspirations to reach China and the Molucca Islands via North America:

[He] convinced that the rivers leading inland from Newfoundland flowed into the Pacific and a maritime route to Asia, warned that any French foothold in North America—from Newfoundland to Florida—would pose a threat to Spanish commerce in Mexico and the Caribbean, as well as access to trade with China and the Molucca Islands. (Borchard 2021, 92)⁵²

Menéndez de Avilés's interest in crossing North America to China does not end here. In 1566, he had a conversation and exchange of documents with the Augustinian friar Andrés de Urdaneta y Ceraín,⁵³ who had navigated relatively far north in the Pacific Ocean in his *tornavuelta* from Cebu, about the foreseeable location of the strait connecting America and China: "As for the uncharted strait across North America, Urdaneta speculated that it lay at a latitude much farther north than the Bahía of Santa María," today's Chesapeake Bay.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, in Habana, Menéndez de Avilés kept thinking that from Chesapeake, the Florida-China point of connection could be reached.⁵⁵ Furthermore, concerning geopolitical positioning, Menéndez de Avilés was obsessed with the advantages taken in Florida by other nations, and otherwise, he believed that the vulnerability of Spanish Florida would be the seed of losing the San Martín and Zacatecas mines in Mexico:

Y si hasta agora han dejado de fortificarse allí, ha sido por meterse en las Indias y tener sus fronteras en la Canal de Bahama, donde tenían el fuerte para ser señores de las naos y las flotas que navegasen por allí y teniendo seguro aquello, poblar a Santa Elena y la bahía de Santa María que tienen bien reconocidas y fortificarse en el Estrecho de la tierra, que hay un cuarto de legua o media, detrás de la Sierras que están al Norte de la bahía de Santa María como he dicho, para señorear aquel brazo de mar que va a la Tierra Nova y el que

⁵² "As Clifford Lewis and Alford Loomie pointed out in 1953, Menéndez's misconceptions of North American geography were consistent with sixteenth-century French maps that "exaggerated the length of the St. Lawrence" and "showed a strait by which the Hudson and Richelieu rivers afforded a passage between the Atlantic and the St. Lawrence." In addition to the testimony of participants in French voyages, such maps likely contributed to Menéndez's conviction that it would be possible to navigate to Asia via the Chesapeake Bay" (Borchard 2021, n.p.). Furthermore, see Hoffman 1990, 225; Clifford Merle Lewis and Albert Joseph Loomie 1953.

⁵³ Beyond traveling together to the Philippines in the 1558 Legazpi expedition, Andrés de Urdaneta and Martín de Rada were Augustinian friars, both were *Vizcaino* speakers, and there are historical records indicating that both of them were involved in conversations about the Strait of Anian. Rada and Urdaneta were two of the first five Augustinians sent to missionize in the Philippines, the others being Diego de Herrera, Pedro de Gamboa, and Andrés de Aguirre.

⁵⁴ Fernández de Navarrete 1943, 88; and Kessell 2002, 63.

⁵⁵ Menéndez de Avilés said in a letter from Havana that, from a conversation with Andrés de Urdaneta, he inferred what the best route to China was: "Con el Padre Fr. Andrés de Urdaneta, que aquí llegó de la China traté sobre el Estrecho que se tiene por cierto hay en la Florida, que va la vuelta de la China, de que él tiene gran relación muchos años ha, y la manera que se podrá tener para saber el secreto, que es la que a Vuestra majestad tengo dado muchos años ha, por memorial, porque se hará con más brevedad y mejor y a menos costa, y se sabrá mejor y más presto la verdad de aquel secreto, y por ser cosa que tanto importa al Servicio de Dios Nuestro Señor, y acrecentamiento de los Reinos de V. M. y de su Real hacienda, yo procuraré todo lo posible, ser el invierno que viene en estos Reinos; si pudiere, enviaré Capitán con el Indio de la bahía de Santa María para que por vista de ojo vea este brazo de mar para que Vuestra Majestad provea en ello" (Fernández de Navarrete 1943, 88).

sale a la Mar del Sur, la vuelta de la China, y beneficiar las minas que hallasen en las Sierras y aun ir con facilidad por allí, a las minas de San Martín y las Zacatecas, y la navegación muy más breve y más fácil que nosotros la tenemos, que de Francia a la Tierra Nova. (Fernández de Navarrete 1943, 80)

This excerpt from the letter written by the Governor Pedro Menéndez de Avilés to King Philip II in 1566 situates Florida one hundred leagues from the Pacific Ocean and China, “and close to this bay, a quarter or half a league distant, there is another arm of the sea, which goes in the direction of China and this is considered certain, although no one has entered the South Sea.” The short distances and accessibility of China had to be explained. Menéndez de Avilés invokes an “*ancón*” or bay and two “*brazos*” or waterways. One of the arms goes to Newfoundland, and the other to the Pacific, and thence to China. The “*ancón*” is like the Verrazzano Sea concept, which is not surprising since most of this information might have come from Frenchmen that ended up as prisoners. The “*brazos*” going to Newfoundland and the Pacific Ocean could also merge with the Mississippi. Since the oral sources used by De los Ríos had firsthand experience in the exploration of Florida, it is not by coincidence that De los Ríos’s description, included in his 1597 memorial, resonates with the one that Menéndez de Avilés included in his 1566 letter. De los Ríos stated:

El otro camino y navegación es por el Nuevo México en altura de cuarenta y cinco grados... Entraron por un brazo de mar encima de la contra costa de la Florida y navegando hacia el oeste muchos días hallaron acabarse el otro brazo o ensenada y que vieron luego media legua de allí otro brazo de mar y haciendo un bergantín [...]ron por el navegando algunos días y toparon una ciudad muy [pobla]da de gente.⁵⁶

There are very good reasons for the similarities between both writers’ descriptions of North American interior waterways. According to De los Ríos, his source is the Jesuit Antonio Sedeño, a resident of Manila, who had decades earlier accompanied Pedro Menéndez de Avilés to Florida. Sedeño talked to De los Ríos on many occasions about these waterways to China.⁵⁷

In an overstretched empire that prioritized the political and intellectual life of its centers—such as New Spain, Cuba, and Perú—the obsession with finding a safer and faster route to China was closely tied to the need to advocate for its peripheral colonies—including Luzon, New Mexico, and Florida. In De los Ríos’s exaltation of the peripheral northern colonies, his interest in whether Florida’s backcountry held a water route to China, and whether an Amerasian connection between New Mexico and China was possible,⁵⁸ Luzon was thus brought closer, at least on paper, to justify the risk of investing in the Philippines. Clearly, in terms of motivations and effects, this speculative geography is as real as it is invented.⁵⁹ On the one hand, these ideas can be perceived as one more of the manifestations of the typical 16th and 17th-century mentality in which the scientific and non-scientific cohabited in many thinkers to the point that their writings sound like an odd mix of fantasy and reality, and the epistemological frameworks behind the notion of Amerasia are no

⁵⁶ De los Ríos Coronel 1597, 11. See an English translation in Blair and Robertson 1973, 310-11.

⁵⁷ “El padre Antonio Sedeño rector de la Compañía de Jesús de esta ciu[dad] que murió habrá dos años decía habérselo dicho muchas veces Pero Melez [...] en la Florida,” see De los Ríos Coronel 1597, 11. See an English translation in Blair and Robertson 1973, 311.

⁵⁸ On the spreading of such ideas by Venetian printers and Italian intellectuals, see Horodowich 2018; on the process of replacing Ptolemy to include the “new eastern regions of the ecumene,” see Milanese 2022, 80-86.

⁵⁹ On this aspect of the cartography of the Northern Pacific, see Ricardo Padrón 2020a.

exception. Furthermore, there is an obsession with business and empire-building. As Warren L. Cook (1973) termed it, there was a “flood tide of empire” that percolated around the globe. The necessity of conquest as a profitable business for venture capital, as presented by Nicole D. Legnani (2020), can be utilized to explain geographical speculations about peripheral colonies such as Luzon. In fact, the economic viability of Luzon is a constant in De los Ríos’s writing. Of course, what constitutes the center and its relative peripheries is subject to discussion and dependent upon context and systems of power. The project of Juan Cobo and Fernando de los Ríos in creating a Luzon-centered world—the system whose power they both represented in Luzon and also sought to influence—might be chimeric as well as visionary in their attempt to change their contexts and affect the Spanish Empire. Cobo’s and De los Ríos’s documents are valuable testaments to the empire’s inner struggles, while both draw upon and add to meta-geographical theories of the time and their cartographical and literary representations, as well as, of course, their uses as political tools.

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