

RESEARCH ON ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT'S ANTISLAVERY THOUGHT AND HIS PHASED REFORMATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ABOLISH SLAVERY IN LATIN AMERICA

XiaoFang Ma, HongWei Yang*

School of History and Culture, Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, China.

Corresponding Author: HongWei Yang, Email: yhw@lzu.edu.cn

Abstract: Humboldt was a humanitarian abolitionist as well as a physical geographer whose antislavery thought has exerted a positive influence on Latin American Independence Movement in the early-to-middle 19th century. However, with the intense focus on his scientific expeditions and discoveries, previous studies have failed to examine his antislavery thought. In view of this, the present study systematically reviewed academic works, diaries and letters of Humboldt himself and previous researches on him, and presents findings as follows: a). The seed of his Anti-slavery thought was planted by the Enlightenment thinkers of Prussia in his early youth; b). The miserable living conditions of the enslaved and the inhumane scenes of slave trade that he had witnessed during his expeditions hardened his determination to abolish slavery; c). Irritated by the slaveholders' insatiable avarice for wealth at the cost of lives of the enslaved, Humboldt envisioned a phased reformative solution to end slavery gradually in Latin America. This is the first comprehensive research regarding Humboldt as a abolitionist. The research findings can serve as significant implications for a better understanding of the formation and influences of anti-slavery thought of scientific travelers like him in the early post-colonial era.

Keywords: Alexander von Humboldt; antislavery thought; Latin America; slave trade; Abolitionist Movement

1 INTRODUCTION

Humboldt(1769-1859), the Prussian born observant scientific traveler, was not only the founder of modern physical geography whose discoveries in geology, climatology, botany, and magnetism, etc. contributed to widening the bounds of human knowledge, but also a humanitarian Scholar who 'questioned the heritage of Spanish colonial rule, and spoke out against slavery' [1]while conducting his scientific explorations in the Spanish colonized Americas. The scientific thought and the views of anti-colonialism and anti-slavery of this man, whom Charles R. Darwin formerly admired and later adored, have exerted a great influence on the development of science and humanities for more than 200 years and is still shaping our thinking today. However, A close look into the previous studies suggests that most of the recent journal articles on Humboldt have wrestled with his scientific travel Narrative and his Latin American expedition, few have explored his scientific activities, discoveries and their references for practitioners of modern science today, even fewer have probed into his Environmental Protection Theory which is also an integral part of his great thoughts, shedding lights on natural resource preservation today. Only one of the journal articles has mentioned his anti-slavery thought while discussing his anti-colonial and anti-racist views. Although these previous researches have contributed much from different perspectives to revive the 'Humboldtian Science' and have opened new areas for its development, they have failed to regard his anti-slavery view as a non-negligible part of his humanistic thought and one basic guiding principle of his scientific expeditions. Therefore, based on the academic works, diaries and letters of Humboldt himself, and the books, newspaper reports and academic papers on him, the present research explores, for the very first time, Humboldt's anti-slavery thought and the phased reformative solutions he envisioned to abolish slavery in Latin America gradually. And the theme is discussed in this paper from three aspects: education that germinated his anti-slavery thought, scientific expedition to 'Spanish Americas' that forged his view on slavery and solutions he envisioned to end slavery in Latin America.

1 EDUCATION THAT GERMINATED HUMBOLDT'S ANTI-SLAVERY THOUGHT

Although Humboldt was said to be the revolutionary scientific traveller 'standing on the Old World with his left leg and on the New World with his right leg'[2], his view on the abolition of slavery was not germinated in the New World—the Spanish colonized Americas, but in the 'liberal Jewish intellectual circles' of Berlin where he was arranged an elite education and in the lecture halls of Frankfurt, Göttingen and Hamburg where he received his academic education.

Alexander von Humboldt was born on 14 Sep. 1769, the same year as Napoleon Bonaparte. Born into an intellectually connected aristocratic family whose name was held high in regard in the principality of Prussia, Young Alexander von Humboldt, together with his elder brother, Wilhelm von Humboldt, was granted an elite education and even privileged to have the future king, Friedrich Wilhelm III, as his godfather. Hardly had Alexander reached the age of nine, his beloved father who had always been charming and affectionate towards the boys died suddenly of illness. Though this domestic calamity disheartened his mother who became a rich widow for the second time, nothing changed in the way she educated her sons. As always, this formal, rigid and emotionally cold woman who seldom cared much about her sons' need for maternal love and familial intimacy, hired a series of enlightenment thinkers like J.H. Campe, the German translator of *Robinson Crusoe*, botanist K.L. Willdenow, physicist M. Herz and others who were the followers of Rousseau's educational philosophy like them, to provide the boys with the best education available in the then Prussia right at home. And this string of enlightenment thinkers were the very ones who had planted the seeds of views on liberty, equality, tolerance of 'otherness' and 'connectedness' of natural forces in Alexander while lecturing him on classic aristocratic learning course. With maternal warmth he had longed for so desperately never satisfied, and independent and liberal thinking gradually and fully inspired by these tutors, Alexander von Humboldt (henceforth simply referred to as Humboldt), from a very young age on, enjoyed being outdoors, collecting insects, observing plants and stones, and hoping one day he could be far away from this landlocked country 'which has no direct communication with either the East or the West Indies', and travel into 'distant regions little known to Europeans'. [3]

Humboldt was raised at a changing time characterized by increasing globalization via colonization, with European colonial powers expanding their holdings to tropical countries in Asia, Africa and Americas. Fittingly, this particular period also witnessed great scientific discoveries, technological breakthroughs and epic explorations. New scientific inventions made the industrial revolution possible in Europe, which in turn gave an impetus to technological innovations that affected various aspects of life all over the world. Newton's discovery of mechanical laws underlying physical phenomena, the invention of telescopes and microscopes, sextant, barometers, compasses, thermometers and hygrometers among many others which Humboldt's earliest youth had seen, were facilitating scientists' revealing of the laws that govern the natural world and would be of great importance in his exploration of the Spanish Americas when the time came.

Living through the age of Enlightenment and coming of age before the dawn of Romanticism made Humboldt 'a child of the Enlightenment'[4] who yearned to launch explorations and adventures in distant regions, especially the tropic countries in South America where he could possibly see the palms and other tropical plants in their natural environments. Discoveries of Benjamin Franklin and Lavoisier, invention of James Watt and books of Captain Cook and others about their circumnavigations enhanced his innate curiosity in nature study and fueled his desire for freedom and exploration in the tropics. However, being totally dependent on his emotionally distant mother for financial support, Humboldt could not pursue his heart's desire as he wanted. In compliance with his mother's wish for him to enter the civil services of the Prussian court, Humboldt enrolled himself in the University of Göttingen to study textile manufacturing and finance. But rather than study the courses that he was supposed to take in this university, Humboldt, the boy fed up with the atmosphere of repression imposed by his mother back at home for the past two decades, chose to attend the scientific lectures such as 'botany, literature, archaeology, electricity, mineralogy and the natural sciences', especially those in geology, that interested him to a great deal.

It was in Göttingen that Humboldt studied with Johann F. Blumenbach (1752-1840), the well established scholar in anatomy, physiology and anthropology. Although Blumenbach is mistakenly regarded as the one who proposed the

white-centrism and was frequently demonized for identifying five races, with the white race as the original form from which the other four had ‘degenerated’, he firmly believed and ardently defended the view that every race had the capacity for intellectual and moral improvement. And in order to prove the validity of his view, he showed every visitor his collection of books written by black skinned Africans who, in the eyes of the champions of white supremacy, were all ‘savage’, to show that these so called primitive and inferior people were actually the most distinguished with their admirable capacity for ‘scientific culture’. This anti-racist view of Blumenbach deeply influenced Humboldt who attended every lecture of his on anthropology and greatly fueled the student’s thought on liberty and freedom which had already been planted in him by the enlightenment thinkers back in Berlin.

Like Blumenbach, Humboldt believed that only the society endowed with freedom can function well. Therefore, in 1792, after a brief period of study in the Freiburg School of Mining where he had been exposed to the renowned geologist J. Werner’s latest theories in mineralogy and geology, Humboldt was appointed by the Prussian government an Inspector of Mines in the Upper Franconia region of the Kingdom of Prussia as his mother’s wish. This job enabled him to travel across the vast domains of Prussia, collecting data concerning minerals, rocks and flora growing in various mining areas. Driven by his belief of liberty and freedom as well as his concern for the mine laborers who were usually slaves ‘dragged in chains’ from Africa, Humboldt established the first training school in Europe for miners. As a reward for this unprecedented interest granted upon them, the slave miners broke all previous records of productivity.

Although Humboldt was nourished with the views of Enlightenment thinkers and thus, can be said to be ‘a product of the Enlightenment’ or ‘a child of Enlightenment’, one fact that can not be denied is that he was receptive to romantic influences at the same time since he had come of age shortly before the dawn of Romanticism, and gained friendship and partnership of the famous German poet Goethe and other romantic writers. Besides, Humboldt was also a devoted follower of Adam Smith whose philosophy of plutonomy roused his deeply rooted ‘love of political freedom and his hatred of slavery’¹ and thus, established in him a determination to be a liberal and a resolute abolitionist of slavery.

2 EPIC EXPEDITION to ‘SPANISH AMERICAS’ THAT FORGED HUMBOLDT’S VIEW on SLAVERY

As discussed above, Humboldt’s view on slavery was germinated by the education he had received since his earliest childhood, among Enlightenment thinkers of Berlin and Göttingen, and also under the direct or indirect influence of eminent figures like Goethe, Schiller, James Cook and Louis Antoine de Bougainville through their friendships or writings. However, it did not even begin to come into a clear shape until he launched his epic expedition to the ‘Spanish Americas’, because it was what he saw and heard during his explorations to those slave-holding Spanish colonies that matured and forged his anti-slavery thought and made him an ardent abolitionist.

Reading the books and journals of capt. James Cook and Louis Antoine de Bougainville who had circumnavigated the globe, Young Humboldt always imagined himself far away in the tropical regions rarely known to Europeans. The short passage from his *Personal Narrative* confirms this well:

From my earliest youth I felt an ardent desire to travel into distant regions, seldom visited by Europeans. This desire is characteristic of a period of our existence when life appears an unlimited horizon, and when we find an irresistible attraction in the impetuous agitations of the mind, and the image of positive danger. Though educated in a country which has no direct communication with either the East or the West Indies, living amidst mountains remote from coasts, and celebrated for their numerous mines, I felt an increasing passion for the sea and distant expeditions. And the pleasures we were deprived of seem to possess a fascinating power, compared with all we daily feel.[5]

This then explains where Humboldt’s wanderlust came: the desire to follow the footsteps of great navigators who had travelled around the world through storms on the top of sea waves and the desire to escape from home where pleasure and familial warmth had been deprived of by his emotionally cold mother ever since his beloved father had died when he was only a nine-year old little boy. Having resolved to visit Americas when adulthood was hardly reached, Humboldt prepared himself by taking a four-month trip across Europe, visiting some of the most interesting landscapes outside of the mining areas of Prussia where he had grown up and would be exploring as an inspector still for several years once graduated from the Mining Academy at the age of 25. This short time exploration was joined by a much older friend of

his, George Forster, whom he had become acquainted with in Göttingen. This companion of his is the one who 'at Humboldt's age had accompanied Captain Cook on his second expedition to the Pacific'[6] and some other parts of the world. They talked about that great voyage of Captain Cook during this trip and Forster's vivid descriptions of the natural panorama, humane landscapes and cultural relics of the alien lands, especially those of the South Pacific islands, made Humboldt's wanderlust to Americas even more irrepressible.

The death of his mother at the end of 1796 made Humboldt a rich man who could finally pursue his life dream without any emotional or financial constraints. Therefore, Humboldt quit his job as a mining inspector appointed by the Prussian government, purchased 40 some pieces of scientific instruments available at that time, including compasses, telescopes, Thermometers, Hygrometers, etc. with the substantial inheritance that his mother had left him and started preparing for the epic expedition of fact-finding which shaped his highly mobile life, forged his anti-slavery thought and made him legendary across the whole world. After two years of preparation, including exploration of various places in Europe that 'might enable himself to compare the geological structures of these two portions of the globe and acquiring a practical acquaintance with the instruments best adapted for aiding him in his observations'[7], Humboldt launched, with his companion Aimé Bonpland, the significant expedition that has been called 'the scientific discovery of the New World'. [8] Having learned after the best French naturalists in Paris, Aimé Bonpland at this period of time, had greatly distinguished himself by his numerous discoveries in botany. Humboldt found in this twenty-five-year old French botanist the same passion for long distant adventures and mutual adoration for Botany and Geology after bumping into each other and talking for a few times in the corridors of their rented accommodation in Paris.

Thrilled by the shared scientific interests, Humboldt set off with this young French botanist and a few others on their journey to the Spanish kingdom to apply for the permission to travel to Spanish American colonies. Having acquired the Royal passport from the Spanish king, Carlos IV, he boarded the corvette Pizarro with his team on 7 June 1799, shortly before his thirtieth birthday, setting sail from the Spanish port of La Coruña for the destination of Spanish possessions in Latin America. He and Bonpland would eventually explore six-thousand-mile swath through the unspoiled New Continent-Cuba, New Granada (now Columbia), Ecuador, Peru, Ecuador (a second time), New Spain (now Mexico), Cuba (a second time) during this great expedition. Though in essence, this best-known journey of Humboldt's was a scientific exploration, aimed at 'studying different species and their characteristics—a subject that is still being pursued far too exclusively' and discovering 'how nature's forces act upon one another and how the geographic environment works on animals and plants.' But a systematic study of Humboldt's letters, academic works and Diaries concerning this expedition suggests that Humboldt's research interest in this New World was not only limited to the scientific exploration, but also in the inhumanity of mass slavery in the context of the world economy.

3.1 First Impression of Slavery in Venezuela

Having drifted at sea for 41 days, Humboldt and his small team saw on the horizon, the coast of New Andalusia(today part of Venezuela). Humboldt had known from his previous education that Latin America, the New World he had always dreamed of, had long become colonies of European countries headed by Spain after the age of Great Navigation. The aborigines had almost been slaughtered out by the colonial Powers from Europe and the tiny fraction of the native people who had been 'lucky' enough not to be killed, were reduced to coolies in mines and sugar plantations. Besides, those colonists had been importing black slaves from Africa, especially from South Africa, to replenish manpower because plantations' demand of slave labor was huge and slave mortality was high. Therefore, Humboldt noticed both of these two forms of slavery as soon as he went ashore at New Andalusia's capital city Cumaná, a city founded by the Spanish in the early 16th century at the beginning of its global colonization, in the most eastern part of the New Continent they had occupied by force and diplomatic conspiracy.

The political situation in Spanish Latin America was not favorable for Humboldt. Since the early sixteenth century, the Spanish had imported slaves to their colonies in Latin America and other places around the world, and continued to do so when Humboldt arrived in 1799. The plantation owners there, who were at the same time slave owners and traders, were Creole colonizers of Spanish Empire. they had been kept on a tight leash by their own kingdom from the very

beginning of Spanish Colonization and especially so, ever since the American War of Independence had fired the opening shot and spread very soon, through the entire British North American colonies, and what was later known as the Haitian revolution broke out in French colonized San Domingo in the last quarter of the 18th century. They, though still Spaniards if seen from the perspective of nationality, were required of grant from the king himself every time their trading ships entered the port of the colonies, demanded of absurdly high taxes by their mother country but forever excluded from local government institutions for fear of their following of the Americans' suit. Therefore, the relation between the local Creole elites with their mother country was tense when Humboldt arrived in 1799. While Humboldt, the scientific traveler, was the one who had received his Royal passport from the Spanish King to explore at his own will all the Spanish holdings in Americas and arrived on the vessel 'named after one of the most brutal conquistadors of all'[9], Pizarro. All these facts inevitably drew their suspicion to him, thinking that he was financially aided by the Spanish King and in the King's service in return. This means that Humboldt, although financed his own expedition largely with his inheritance from his mother and not really in service to the Spanish crown at all, had to tread very carefully in his scientific exploration of Spanish Americas, especially when observing and analyzing slave trade of the local Creole elite of Venezuela and Cuba, the regions with the most developed plantation economy among all the Spanish colonies in Latin America.

Needless to say, Humboldt's primary intention of taking this epic Latin American expedition was to conduct scientific researches on geology, climatology, botany, mineralogy, etc. since he was a scientific explorer in essence. But the barbarism and slavery he saw everywhere along the way left him no other choice, but to silently observe and note down in his manuscript which would eventually come out in public five years later when He and his companion Aimé Bonpland finished their American expeditions and returned safely back to Europe. Therefore, his manuscript which would be published within the next 20 years as 'some thirty volumes relating to the findings of this expedition'[10] contained many passages condemning explicitly the Spanish slavery and their greedy extraction of resources at the expense of massive deforestation and starvation of the aborigines.

Cumaná was the first city where Humboldt lived at the very beginning of his mobile exploratory life in the New world. This is also the place which presented him with the very first vivid picture of slavery. His diplomatic talents allowed him to enter without much difficulty the Spanish colonial circle, the highest class in Spanish colonies, and enabled him to collect fullest and newest first-hand information about slave economy from his interactions with them. The more information he collected and the more merciless remarks concerning the sufferings of slave laborers he heard, the more his heart was dampened. But what made him furious was the scenes of slave trading and miserable living conditions of slave laborers he saw with his own passionate eyes in Cumaná and other coastal cities of Spanish Latin America. In a letter to his dear elder brother Wilhelm, Humboldt depicted the miserable living conditions of the aborigines who had been reduced to slave workers in mines and plantations as follows:

Outside of the town(Cumaná) live the copper-colored Indians of which the men are almost completely nude. The huts are made of bamboo covered with coco leaves. I went into one of the huts. The mother was sitting with her children, in place of chairs on branches of coral thrown up by the sea. Each of them had before them a coconut shell in place of a plate out of which they were eating some fish.[11]

And this aforementioned fish was not fresh fish caught by the householder from any nearby river or sea, but the salted fish allotted by their masters to supplement for the small amount of pickled meat which was worth no more than 12 riyals, corn, and sweet potatoes that could hardly meet their basic need for survival.

What saddened his heart even more and what hardened his determination to become 'a life-long abolitionist' was the scenes happened everyday right under his window. Humboldt and his companion Aimé Bonpland rented a house on the main Square of the city Cumaná. This house was right opposite the slave market on the same square where young black slaves raided and smuggled from Africa were put on sale. Every morning these young men aged no more than twenty were forced by the slave wholesalers, to rub their black skin with coconut oil to render it gleam and glossy. Then they were paraded in rows, waiting to be sold to plantations or mines. Then Prospective buyers would shoulder their way through the captives and jerked open their mouths to judge their age and health from their teeth just like what horse

buyers usually do to horses on sale in an animal market then, and sometimes these proud buyers would sear their newly purchased slaves with a red-hot branding iron to recognize them again at the first sight if they would escape one day. This treatment bestowed by the rapacious Creole colonizers who were supposedly Christian, on those black slaves who would save other men the labour of sowing, tilling, and reaping incited Humboldt's fury so much that he could not help but question sorrowfully and rhetorically, 'What are the duties of humanity, national honor, or the laws of their country, to men stimulated by the speculations of sordid interest?'[12]

Indeed, It is Cumaná that gave Humboldt the first impression of slavery, but other cities along the Caribbean coast of Venezuela and its capital, Caracas, were also important centers for slave trading which hurt the feelings of Humboldt who believed that 'the best air of all is breathed in liberty'[13]to a great extent. Slaves were sold on Bazaars of those cities along with traditional commodities like sugar, cocoa, coffee, livestock, tobacco, etc. Caracas is also the place where Humboldt started to notice a change in the use of slaves before the Bolivarian War which led to Latin America's gradual independence in early 19th century. During his stay in Caracas From 22 November 1799 to 7 February 1800, Humboldt witnessed a sharp increase in the number of black slaves in the warehouses he called in his works 'House of Black Slaves' but actually served as barracks where slave soldiers were kept. Humboldt wrote in his manuscript, 'Before the outbreak of the impending war, slavery surged so much that merchants from Grenada and Jamaica wanted to build new houses of black slaves in Caracas.'[14] These slave soldiers were forced to work on the plantations of those Creole elites like Simón Bolívar himself in the day time and locked up in big barracks when night fell.

Besides that, Humboldt was exposed to other forms of barbarism and slavery during his stay in Venezuela. His interactions with the Creole elites enabled him to know the miserable living conditions of slaves which interested him so much and dampened his heart no less after seeing with his own eyes, and at the same time, deepened his hatred of slavery and violence against slaves even more. Fernando Peñalver Pellón was a slave Owner and Jacobin in Venezuela like Bolívar who would launch the Independence Movement of Latin American colonies together with other historical figures in 1810 and lead six Latin America countries (Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Bolivia) to achieve their independence one by one within 15 years. But unlike Bolívar who wanted to abolish slavery system and establish a republican regimes in Venezuela and other Latin American countries, This man dreamed of launching a Jacobin style revolution to establish 'a White Republic' that would reserve slavery in Venezuela. A dairy of Humboldt written on 22 February,1800 depicted the Creole elites' celebration of a local carnival in the house of Fernando Peñalver Pellón and the fury of Humboldt after hearing Peñalver's assumption of the so called 'White Republic':

The circle of Valencia(Where Peñalver's house was located) seems more cultivated than that of Caracas. Talk is more casual. Mr.Fernando Peñalver received the same education as his brother, also thin like a dog, but taller, and boasted himself as Adonis. Poor vanity! For the first few days is always about Renard, encyclopedia, human freedom..., then, to common humanity. The Portuguese Think that a White Republic should be established [...];In the White Republic, even the free mulattoes should not have rights, slaves should kneel while serving their masters. They(the masters) should sell the sons of slaves... this is the result of the American Enlightenment! Throw away your Encyclopedia and Renard, you bastards![15]

In Humboldt's view, Slavery was absolute tyranny forced upon the maroon aborigines and the raided African blacks. Due to the personal intercourse with the Creole elites, Humboldt had the chance to witness the real living conditions of the slave laborers. His diary was filled with horrendous scenes of suffering of the slaves besides the miserable living conditions of them as discussed above: one plantation owner in Caracas tortured his slaves with needles, whereas another forced his slaves to eat their own excrement, not to mention the scars of whiplash on the backs of slaves and iron marks on their faces or arms wherever and whenever he turned his eyes to. Horrible stories concerning the extreme cruelty with which the slaves were treated even by Christian missionaries who had been supposed to be the one spreading Love and Saving Grace of God to all sufferers were also recorded in his diary:

An aboriginal slave boy's testicles were bitten off by his master, a missionary in his Mission Station, just because he had kissed a slave girl. This means that Indians who had been reduced to be free laborers were not treated any better than the black slaves smuggled from Africa.[16]

The vivid pictures of slavery Venezuela presented before the eyes of Humboldt horrified and irritated him, and finally forged him into a resolute adversary of slavery who firmly believed that ‘Slavery is no doubt the greatest evil that afflicts human nature’[17] and inaction in the face of slavery was simply a crime.

3.2 An In-Depth Observation of Slave Trade in Cuba

Slave trade is a non-negligible node in Spain and other European colonial powers' American holdings. While Venezuela left Humboldt the vivid impression of barbarism and cruelty with which the slaves, both the African blacks and the aborigines, live in their miserable enslaved life, Cuba provided Humboldt with the ‘luck’ to collect more information about slave smuggling and real living conditions of the slaves in Cuba as well.

Humboldt had been in Cuba twice during his expedition of Spanish Americas spanning five years from 1799 to 1804 and stayed there for more than four months all together. Due to his superb diplomatic skill, Humboldt not only gained for himself friendship and financial support from sucrose oligarchs such as Luis de la Questa and his father-in-law Gabriel Raymond de Azi Carat, a prominent figure in the circle of conservative Creole elites, but also secured himself an opportunity of witnessing real living conditions of slaves. Living in the magnificent house of Questa in Havana at his invitation allowed Humboldt access to the first-hand data of slave trade and slave ships. And all the sufferings of slaves and scenes of massive slave trade were recorded in his famous diary *Havana 1804* which started to come into shape page after page when he was still living in Questa’s house, but only published under the name *Isle de Cube, Antilles en général* a few years later for fear of offending Questa, the slaveholder and trader, who had provided him with free accommodation and other conveniences for him to interact with slave-owning Creole elites and conduct his humanistic research on the living conditions of enslaved maroon and black laborers working in sugar plantations. The passages attacking Spanish slavery and the unfair division of population in Castes in Cuba, especially in its capital Havana, were all included in his *Political Essays on the Island of Cuba* published in 1826 when six Latin American countries including Venezuela, had gained their independence and Humboldt had returned to Europe. These same materials were so typical in reflecting the miserable fate of slaves and the development of slave trade in Cuba that they were reemphasized in his *Personal Narrative*, the famous book published later the same year as his *Political Essays on the Island of Cuba* when his sustained indignation over slavery had been mounted to its very extreme.

Being constantly haunted by the ‘recollection of crimes produced by the fanaticism and insatiable avarice of the first conquerors ’[18], Humboldt could not help but repeat his abolitionist view of ‘slavery had no place in society’[19] throughout his expedition in Latin America, though more implicitly and tactfully when he was still in Spanish colonies in gratitude for the Spanish monarch's having granted him Royal passport and patronage to do scientific explorations in his possessions. The third volume of his *Personal Narrative*, The book published when he was in Spanish American colonies no more, included a long section explicitly exposing and attacking the barbarism of slavery conducted by the Spanish colonizers in Cuba and the plantation system there.

Cuba was of critical importance among the Spanish American colonies in Slave trading and plantation economy since the very beginning of its colonization. Its capital Havana was situated at the entrance of the Mexican Mediterranean, making it the geographical center and major seaport of Cuba and even Spanish colonies in Americas, as what New York was to English North America. Cuba had started its slave trading business since the early 16th century when it had become apparent that the native maroon Americans could never provide enough labor for the Spanish colonizers’ ever-expanding mines and sugar plantations, and continued to do so for another 80 years after Humboldt’s departure from Spanish colonized Cuba in 29 April 1804. As a resolute adversary of slavery who believed that ‘human society needed freedom in order to function well’, Humboldt angrily recorded the shameful scenes of slave trade, though quite implicitly considering his personal relationship with Questa and slave-holding sucrose oligarchs like him in Cuba, in his *Political Essay on the Island of Cuba*: ‘There was a botanical garden near Campo de Marte, a place worthy of government attention. The existence of one thing, barracks, in that garden, was both outrageous and shocking! slaves were miserably displayed in front of the barracks, waiting to be sold.’[20]

Although more than eight million Africans had been transported to or via the Port of Havana and other major seaports in

Cuba, constituting more than eighty percent of all slaves introduced to the New World, the proportion of free blacks and mulattoes in Cuba was higher than that of other Spanish possessions and higher even more than that of French Santo Domingo and English West Indies where continued inhumane slavery led to horrible social political catastrophe of bloody slave rebellion one after another in the last quarter of the 18th century, just a few years before Humboldt's first arrival there. Nevertheless, the fact that there lived a small proportion of free African blacks and mulattoes does not necessarily mean that these people could breathe the free air and live a totally independent life as they wished, but rather a miserable one not significantly better than that of the enslaved. Because in the eyes of the Whites, even the mulattoes should not have any rights[21] and should be banned from any kind of handicraft production, let alone the so called free African blacks. Their fate was to be dispersed to the inland slave-holding regions to farm the fields of the Creole Whites for fear of their rebellion following the suit of the black slaves of Santo Domingo.

However, facilitated by the British Industrial Revolution which had started in the 1760s and encouraged by French political revolution which had broken out 10 years before Humboldt launched his expedition of Spanish Latin America, Slavery that had been in existence for more than 300 years in European colonies around the world started to undergo a series of fundamental changes: Anti-colonial revolution which escalated very soon into a full-scale war of Independence; The epoch-making American Revolution which led to the independence of the 13 English North American colonies and the founding of the democratic United States of America, Broke out in North America in 1775; Then in 1791, the Haitian Revolution broke out in Santo Domingo under the leadership of François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture and finally declared the independence of Haiti on 1 January 1804. As to Cuba, not only did the anti-slavery wars elsewhere not shake the foundations of its slavery, but made, on the contrary, its slave trading industry more prosperous than any other part of the Spanish colonies because the Haitian Revolution had driven much of Santo Domingo's sugar trade to Cuba. And by the time Humboldt published his diary *Havana 1804* under the name of *Isle de Cube, Antilles en général* and *Personal Narrative* in 1826 Cuba's plantations would have become a major world producer of sugar and coffee beans. This was a dangerous economic development path for Cuba to take when the foundations of colonization and slavery economy with which the former had been built up were gradually vacillated by anti-colonial revolutions and slave-abolitionist movements, because its 'sugar market in particular, was unstable and both capital-and labor-intensive. And that labor was, of course, slave labor.' [22] According to Humboldt's statement, 'every drop of sugarcane juice costs blood and groans' [23] And this fretted Humboldt to a great extent because, although he admired the French Revolution, he held no appreciation of 'horrendous catastrophe', terrorism, caused by the Jacobin style riot of force and bloodshed: crippling slave soldiers, dismembering the slaves alive with dogs, whipping slaves 200 to 300 times before shooting them, shooting all the slave captives, etc. As to the possible ways of ending slavery, Humboldt had his own thinking.

3 HUMBOLDT'S PHASED REFORMATIVE SOLUTIONS to END SLAVERY in LATIN AMERICA

Although Venezuela, Cuba and other Spanish colonies in Latin America showed Humboldt slavery softener that what it was in French West Indies or back in Europe, yet his concern about slavery there was no less when he and his companion finished their scientific exploration and humanistic research in Spanish Latin America and set out for the newly founded independent United States of America: 'I preserved, on quitting America, the same horror of slavery which I had felt in Europe.' [24] That horror was roused by what Humboldt had experienced in slave-holding regions in Latin America: He had seen the Creole colonizers' burning desire of breaking the leash of their mother country, Spain, and establishing several independent White republican countries in its Latin American colonies at the expense of bloodshed and tears of slaves. At the same time, he had felt on the slaves' part, the 'courage of despair, and a desire of vengeance, nourished by the rigor of the Whites'. [25] That horror was also enhanced by the haunted memory of how he and Bonpland backed off for fear of potential danger when a maroon young man, one of the slaves escaped from the prison where they were chained, asked for help, and how the ship-men conspired to seize the poor fugitives who were all clothed only in heavy chains, and sell them secretly at another coastal city far away from where they had been found. His own reaction of not having trusted the poor slave boy and the ship-men's conspiracy of raiding him and his

companions troubled Humboldt so much that he could not help but ask himself: Has slavery deadened the ennobling instinct of pity in human beings?[26] The answer was No. As a matter of fact, The more Dampened his heart was, the more hardened his determination to abolish the shameful slavery was. And that determination prompted him to ponder over the possible solutions to put an end to the sufferings of the enslaved African blacks and aborigines in Latin America.

In Humboldt's view, Slave trade was not only barbarous, but also unreasonable: On one hand, slave economy was fundamentally inefficient: Slave-holding regions, taking Cuba as an example, could hardly produce enough food to feed its population with its large amount of arable land and at the cost of life of vast multitudes of slaves ruthlessly exploited and used up 'as a beast of burden'.[27] On the other, slave trade was a political crime against the enslaved and was dangerous for the slaveholders in turn. In the eyes of the white colonizers, Haitian Revolution was due to nothing worse than loose governance and could never shake the foundation of their colonial ruling power. Although Humboldt held no sympathy for his fellow Whites and held a sincere appreciation for the great success the black slaves had achieved in the French Santo Domingo, The complacency of the white slave-holding colonizers troubled him to a great extent, because he believed that if slaves were deprived of the innate rights granted by the laws of nature, they would surely rise and seize those rights for themselves and things would become uncontrollable then. This attitude of Humboldt was understandable. He was a humanitarian who admired the achievement of the French political revolution but kept some distance from the Haitian Revolution because he was always in disfavor of radicalism and loathed barbarous killing of bloodthirsty extremists on either side.

Humboldt believed that ending slavery was not only the hearts' cry of the enslaved, but also in line with the economic and political interests of the Creole elites who wanted to establish new forms of local government independent from their mother Countries. He also held a firm faith that 'slave states did not have to end in violence'[28], they could gain their independence by adopting a peaceful repairing solution that could avoid massive bloodshed while eradicating the most inveterate moral evil of slavery and consoling the misfortunes of the enslaved. However, Humboldt was realistic, he knew that the abolition of slavery without violence would not happen overnight(Humboldt was right, slavery continued till 1888, nearly 30 years after Humboldt's death, in various evolved forms in some independent countries that used to be former slave-holding regions of the Americas). Accordingly, the solution he envisioned to end slavery in Spanish Americas was one of peaceful repairing reforms with prudent humane measures to 'prevent the destruction of the blacks'[29], to avoid bloody slave rebellion and bring about the final victory in the abolition of slavery, though probably gradually.

The first phase of reforms, Humboldt argued, was to improve the living conditions of the blacks from various aspects: a).to exempt female slaves from labor during pregnancy; b).to establish good child care system to ease slave parents' burden and to improve infant survival rates; c). to provide separate dwellings for every slave family; d). to provide food of good quality and in sufficient quantity; and e).to allow slaves days of rest to make them less unhappy and less perishable. While the second phase of reforms was to make the slave-holding regions one or several self-governing republican country or countries: to free all the enslaved, both the maroon aborigines and imported African blacks and their native born children as well, and to transform the slave population into an agricultural one to ensure that every cultivator tills on his own share of farmland. Humboldt explained his reason for this reformative solution to abolish slavery in his manuscript of *Isle de Cube, Antilles en general*: 'If it is dangerous for the government to give the blacks freedom at once, they could at least improve the situation of them and make them less unhappy. Inaction is a crime'[30]. For Humboldt, If there was no hope to end slavery in the short term. the slaveholders should at least reform their slavery practices to lessen the suffering of the enslaved who should have enjoyed their natural inborn liberty but were mercilessly deprived of by them. It was a crime to do nothing in the face of bloodshed and tears of the enslaved population.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the great Prussian born natural scientist and a humanitarian scholar Alexander von Humboldt's anti-slavery thought and his solution to abolish slavery in Latin America. A systemic reading of his academic works, diaries and letters, and of those books, newspaper reports and academic papers about his well-known scientific expeditions to North and South Americas reveals that Humboldt was a fierce critic of slavery and supported the revolutions in Latin America though kept some distance from the Jacobin style radicalism. Humboldt was an uncompromising abolitionist who never stopped condemning slavery in his manuscripts recorded during his scientific explorations to the slave-holding regions of the Americas. The seed of his anti-slavery thought was planted by the Enlightenment thinkers who tutored him in his early youth and nurtured by the associations with intellectuals like Blumenbach and Goethe, etc. in his young adulthood. The epic expedition to Spanish Americas which presented him with unbearably cruel scenes of slave trading and the miserable living conditions of the enslaved aboriginal Indians and the smuggled African blacks forged his anti-slavery thought and made him an ardent abolitionist. Fretted by slaveholders' insatiable avarice for wealth at the expense of the lives of slaves, and grieved by the sufferings of the enslaved 'colored fellowmen' Humboldt envisioned a phased reformatory solution to end slavery gradually in Spanish Americas. Although he failed to witness the success of Latin American abolitionism in his lifetime, his anti-slavery view exerted great influence on liberals and abolitionists all over the world and made him 'a visionary, a thinker far ahead of his time' and the 'second Columbus' of the New World who was hailed and is still being hailed by the admirers of liberty and equality worldwide even today.

This is the first comprehensive study into the anti-slavery thought of Alexander von Humboldt. Although it is possible that there are still important questions remain to be found out and clarified, the aforementioned research findings can serve as significant implications for a better understanding of the formation and influences of anti-slavery views of scientific travelers like Humboldt in the early post-colonial era. The main weakness of this study was the paucity of materials from journal articles and other forms of works written in German and French due to the difficulties of data collecting and the authors' insufficient proficiency of those two languages. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be conducted in aspects as follows: a). collecting original manuscripts of Humboldt, and other relevant materials of him and about him written not only in English, but also in German, French and other possible languages to obtain a fuller understanding of the essence of Humboldt's anti-slavery thought; b). exploring Humboldt's anti-colonial thought as for Humboldt, colonialism and slavery were basically one and the same'; and c). analyzing the relationship between these two thoughts and his concepts of 'connectedness', because colonialism and slavery are interwoven with man's relationship to nature and the exploitation of natural resources.

COMPETING INTERESTS

No potential conflict of interest exists between the authors.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

The corresponding author: Hongwei Yang. Hongwei Yang is a professor of History and a doctoral supervisor of Chinese History at the School of History and Culture, Lanzhou University, No. 222, Tianshui Road, Chengguan District, Lanzhou 730030, Gansu Province, China. Phone number: +86-13609370305; Email: yhw@lzu.edu.cn

The first author: Xiaofang Ma. Xiaofang Ma is a doctoral student of Chinese history at the School of History and Culture, Lanzhou University, No. 222, Tianshui Road, Chengguan District, Lanzhou 730030, Gansu Province, China. Phone number: +86-13893282392; Email: 120220906460@lzu.edu.cn

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