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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures

Decolonizing Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in "World Literature":

Decolonial Translation and Magical-Traumatic Realism in Can Xue

by
Deanna Ren

A thesis presented to
Washington University in St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

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Acknowledgments

I was once asked whether the term "diaspora" ought to be retired in Comparative Literature given that many immigrants are "localized" now. The question was posed in terms of a stable "localized" ethnic identity, a "here-ness" distinct from "there-ness." I responded that I conceived of diaspora as a continually constructed and contested process of nonnormative, out-of-sync living in the wake of global imperialism and racial capitalism. I am referring to the affective, temporal and spatial "gaps" constituting diaspora that are often taken as negative spaces to be filled as quickly as possible with identity politics. I would like to acknowledge these gaps that will always condition the way I am moved by languages, between languages—and move them back, move back between them. I am profoundly thankful to my late grandparents overseas who raised me as I first began to move, my parents come-overseas, and my friends come-over-borders-and-seas for sharing their kindness, struggles, inspiration and growth with me as they move between the spaces of their own gaps, our overlapping gaps.

Deanna Ren

Washington University in St. Louis

May 2023

Introduction: Translation from Area Studies to World Literature

Insofar as Can Xue (1953-) has actively participated in English translations and publications of her works written in Chinese and is rendered legible to an Anglophone literary polysystem[1] primarily as a "universal avant-gardist," her scholars often refer to her English translations as "world literature" (i.e., transnational literature). Yet it is not enough to say that a work *is* world literature, as if this status is passively and ontologically granted through translation. Mandarin-to-English translation, literary history, and globalized circulation are all processes of *production* and *reproduction*, mediated by flesh and figurative bodies bound in power relations that must be historicized. This study re-examines Mandarin-to-English translations, including my own, of Can Xue through neoliberal academic discourses of "world-ness." I ground these Anglophone discourses in the legacies of Sinology, area studies and post-Cold War historiography (which teleologically constructs a linear and binary "Maoist" and "Post-Maoist" temporal arrow 'forward').

The motion by Anglophone, Chinese and Sinophone[2] scholars to affix the category of "world literature" to a translated text to gain access to transnational discourses and institutional representation is often predicated on drawing out "universalist" elements of "humanity" in the source text. Without engaging in a mode of thinking that historicizes and intervenes to decolonize this problematic neoliberal paradigm (presenting as a post-racial, post-political condition), this "worlding" risks obscuring rather than clarifying translation studies, given by the Anglophone academy's general lack of critical engagement with translations from Mandarin beyond aesthetic valorization and direct quotation in literary analyses. Thus, I argue for a decolonial translation praxis (theory and practice) in engaging with the "world-ness" of Chinese texts of the 1970s-80s in English translation, following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999): "to think globality is to think the politics of thinking globality" (364). With regards to the *productions* of translation, I will engage Chinese literary and cultural studies in a project of historicization. It is my hope that an articulation of infrastructural and discursive productions of Mandarin-to-English translation from this period will also have decolonial insights to offer to contemporary Sinophone discourses of "world-ness" in resistance to 21st century Chinese ethnic and economic statist hegemony in Asia. One may be tempted to wonder how and why decolonial methods can apply to 1970s-80s China (an officially "independent," "postcolonial" nation apart from formal British colonization of Hong Kong until 1997); I invite a reconsideration of the assumptions undergirding this question by grounding its construction in neoliberalism as neocolonialism, and the colonial disciplinary origins that continue to circumscribe how translation from Chinese texts are commercialized and intellectualized—as "knowledge"—in the West.

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[1] Referring to Itamar Even-Zohar's 1970 polysystem hypothesis: "the idea that semiotic phenomena i.e., sign-governed human patterns of communication (e.g. culture, language, literature, society) should be regarded as [relational] systems rather than . . . the positivistic [i.e., objective] collection of data" (288).

[2] Shu-mei Shih defines Sinophone literature as "Sinitic-language communities and cultures outside China as well as ethnic minority communities and cultures within China where Mandarin is adopted or imposed" (Shih 2013, 11, quoted in Chiu and Zhang 12).

Michael Gotz (1976) usefully, if reductively, historicizes the movement of trends in modern Chinese literary studies in the West through the categories of an area studies "Cold War anticommunist group" of the 1950s and 60s, a Marxist-historicized "Prague School" of the same era, a post-USSR "liberal group" of the 60s and 70s, and a "new generation" critically evaluating functions of pre-revolutionary, revolutionary and post-revolutionary literature through Western and non-Western criteria. To this list some may wish to add an explicitly world-facing "ethnic and cultural studies group" from the 90s onwards. One could easily point to such a periodization and claim that all discussion of area studies and the Cold War are "outdated" and irrelevant in this neoliberal age of humanism and post-humanism. However, this assumption only holds logical meaning if neoliberal humanist rhetoric has been disassembled of imperialist, neo-colonial, and Orientalist power relations. To the contrary, Chinese literary studies and its purported relationship to translation has reinscribed an apologist reproduction of Westernized neoliberalism as norm, mediated through a deracinated category of "world." Hegemonically grounded in English as a "world language," an Anglophone study such as this one would be exercising a case of global amnesia to disengage the historical consequences of September 11, 2001 on Anglophone knowledge production of Orientalized flesh and textual bodies.

As Yenna Wu (2009) notes, in 2006, the U.S. Department of State established a National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) to "further strengthen national security in the 21st century through education, especially in developing foreign language skills" (85), emphatically targeting Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, and Farsi. In 2007, the Modern Language Association "called for a 'revolutionary' change, urging [foreign language and literature departments] to 'merge study of language and literature while adding more study of history, culture, economics, and society—in some respects turning language programs into area studies programs" (Wu 83). Accordingly, MLA job listings for Chinese language and literature instructors rose from two out of 463 positions in 1982 to nineteen out of 425 in 2008 (from 0.4 to 4.5 percent), compared to the more stabilized Japanese listings of 1.5 percent in 1982 to 1.6 percent in 2008 (Wu 88-89). Indeed, according to a 2006 Fall MLA survey collected from 2,795 universities, after Arabic (which saw a 126.5 percent increase in teaching), Chinese (which saw a 51 percent increase in teaching) was the second most-taught "foreign" language in the U.S. (91). In 2007, the Committee to Review the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays International Education Programs (CRTVI) declared that "a pervasive lack of knowledge about foreign cultures and foreign languages threatens the security of the United States as well as its ability to compete in the global marketplace and produce an informed citizenry" (85).

Clearly, a marketized "informed citizenship" ("world citizenship") was a fundamental goal and source of funding of Anglophone knowledge production on foreign cultures and languages as objects. The power relations governing the funding and ideological currency of the field reveals that the Western imperialist hegemony supposedly "deconstructed" by the "cultural turn" of the 90s has been reinvested by avowedly anti-imperialist scholars into the very notion of "world" citizenship that remains to be decolonized.

The term "decolonization" invokes the historical spatio-temporality of the 1955 gathering of twenty-nine colonially-extracted African and Asian states at the Bandung Conference, and the 1961 Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in the Cold War, in which the urgency of a "Third World Liberation" gained discursive and material traction. The idea of decolonizing (not returning to a "before" coloniality but constantly grappling with and deconstructing the apparatuses of coloniality), as Walter Mignolo (2011) points out, was articulated much earlier in 16th century Peruvian indigenous and later 18th century West African resistance to Spanish and British colonization. Quechua translator Guaman Poma de Ayala and enslaved worker Ottobah Cugoano organized and envisioned decoloniality as "a sovereignty that first considers people, not the institution," articulating decoloniality as an "epistemic and political project" (xxv). According to Mignolo, decoloniality articulates and delinks from a "colonial matrix of power" (xxvii), an interlocked discursive and material structure centering Western theology, philosophy and patriarchy. This trinity of Western rhetoric is upheld by the interlocking pillars of "knowledge & subjectivity," "racism, gender & sexuality," "[moralized, militarized and politicized] authority," and "economy" (9). Translation from Chinese to English is precisely historically and linguistically bound to this matrix in the intensely "modernizing" 19th century, through proselytizing and salvific, racial capitalism and imperialism. As such, we cannot delink Chinese literary studies in the

Anglophone academy from this matrix of power without critically engaging the governmental and institutional production and reproduction of translation as it continues in the 21st century.

To that end, I intend to critically re-situate and re-temporalize Frederic Jameson's (1986) argument that "the reinvention of cultural studies in the United States demands the reinvention, in a new situation, of what Goethe long ago theorized as 'world literature'" (68)—not through Jameson's 20th century claim that "all third-world texts are necessarily . . . national allegories" (69), but in the sense that the literatures rendered linguistically and socio-politically legible to an Anglophone sphere as "world-ed" works in the 21st century are "in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism" (68). I mean to shift the focus from a synchronic treatment of a text with assumed stable, essential meaning to a diachronic question of "what has occurred between the time of "Third World" as a politico-historical category and a normalized neoliberal globalization. What is the relationship between this shift and discourses of "world literature," and what has happened to materially grounded geopolitical specificities in terms like "Third World," such that they become disavowed as a pre-requisite for entry into "world citizenship"? In other words, why should anyone take for granted that the translatory performance of "world literature" is any less geopolitically fragmented as blocs than the categories of "First World literature" and "Third World literature"? The "world" under hegemonic globalization has not even undergone decolonization in praxis, but has rather intensified its coloniality spatio-temporally through late-stage global capitalism.

To argue for decolonial translations of Can Xue's works from the 70s-80s as "world literature" in 2023, then, it is necessary to first investigate the extent to which Mandarin-to-English translation remains colonial (or rather, neocolonial, in Spivak's (1999) sense of referring largely to economic rather than territorial control, though I argue both are equally integral to translation under neoliberalism and world citizenship) in praxis. It is necessary to question whether claims to “being” “world literature” have in fact decolonized English translations of Chinese literature (or literature in Chinese), or simply obscured the neo-coloniality of world citizenship, whose humanist rhetoric presents itself as profoundly unrelated to (totally liberated from) ideological discourses of citizenship in China and the Anglophone states. As such, this introduction seeks to bring the seemingly distant yet relentlessly entangled partners of area studies, Mandarin-to-English translation, and world literature into conversation. From there, I will investigate the relationship between the application of vague, uncontextualized categories of “avant-garde” and “grotesque” to Can Xue’s works, and how the circulation of these aesthetic categories come to bear on the interpretation and representation of a Mandarin text in English. On the “practice” end of praxis, I will also analyze my own translation of Can Xue’s emblematic short story “Small Shed on a Mountain” (《山上的小屋》) (1985), alongside the only published English translation by Janssen and Zhang (1989). Finally, I will propose magical-traumatic realism (an intersection of magical realism and traumatic realism) as an alternative lens with which to contextualize, decolonize and re-embody Can Xue’s works in both source and “world” translational contexts.

Chapter 1: A Genealogy of Translations of Can Xue's Works

I begin by deploying a genealogical method, "developed by Nietzsche and Foucault … [as] a form of historical representation that depicts . . . a discontinuous succession of division and hierarchy, domination and exclusion, which destabilize the seeming unity of the present by constituting a past with plural, heterogeneous meanings" (Wang 39). I nuance this definition by adding that discontinuity exists bracketed within hegemonic perpetuations of norms, and that a decolonial genealogy of Can Xue's works in translation deconstructs binaries of universalism and particularity (as false dichotomies that constitute one another), shifting focus to otherings and accumulations of material, discursive power at shifting nodes over and through time.

I use the term "deconstruction" loosely, both referring to Derrida's (1967) framing of signs and ideas as inherently adding and negating multiple meanings, rendering texts semantically relational and unstable, and as a decolonial mode of articulating, intervening in, and dismantling the logics of modernity-as-coloniality. Given Derrida's view of textual meaning as not fundamentally located in the text itself, a decolonial motion is necessary to argue that *bodies* are always presented (or displaced) in the text-ing of narratives, that bodies are necessarily involved in the production of relationships and knowledges prior, during and after the writing and translating of a text. Indeed, "translation" is etymologically rooted in the medieval Christian practice of moving the remains or *bodies* of saints to a new location, from the Latin *translatus* (a part participle of *transferre*), to bring or carry over. Whose bodies or remains, then, are carried over from Chinese to English by American publishing institutions and academics? What is implied by the deployment of *translatus* as past participle—that translations are finished products, finished pasts?

Translation studies scholar Maria Tymoczko has historicized translation studies as a discipline emerging concomitantly with area studies from World War II, which depended intimately on translation as “instrumental to the war effort . . . with most translators involved in gathering intelligence, strategic negotiations, and production of propaganda” (Tymoczko 2010, 4). Chinese-to-English translation—institutionalized with Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci’s Chinese “missions” in the 16th century and so-called “Oriental studies” centers in Rome in 1603—was no less instrumentalized during WWII and the onset of the Cold War. In this intensely nationalist context, everything “Chinese” increasingly signified a negative absence of Western state-sanctioned values, discursive morality, and modernity-as-coloniality. By 1985, even as area studies began to supposedly turn to cultural studies, Gideon Toury remarked that “translations are facts of one system only: the target[3] system” (Toury 1985, 19, quoted in Tymoczko 3).

Area studies, defined by French historian Jean B. Duroselle as “the scientific study of a region presenting a certain politico-social unity with a view to understanding and explaining its place and its role in international society” (Powers 82), already presupposes a Western-centric “world system” that liberalist academics framed as “Can a fresh approach by our academic world to its national and international responsibilities aid in the achievement of a more durable and satisfactory peace?” (83). Tellingly, the question is to aid in “satisfactory peace” (belonging to an unnamed subject, which in Western academia defaults to a white, bourgeois male), rather than an analysis of what constitutes justice (to whom) and how knowledge production is instrumentalized in equally violent ways. Tymoczko notes that in the 1970s and 80s, with the shift from prescriptive to descriptive and relational translation studies and Even-Zohar’s (1978) concept of literary polysystems (which include translated texts, a precursor to world literature), “descriptive studies have correlated translation shifts with larger historical and geopolitical patterns in receiving cultures, revealing political constraints on translator's choices and implicit cultural and political initiatives undertaken by translators" (7).

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[3] I.e., the translated language’s cultural and political systems (rather than those of the source text’s).

Contemporaneous with the rise of feminist translations and translation as social activism in the 90s in the global South was Venuti's (1995) call for a "visibilization" of the translator, resisting "what he saw as the presumptive invisibility [apolitical neutrality] of translators in dominant Western literary and commercial practices" (7). While Tymoczko frames this diverse era of resistant translation as having "no obvious opponent or ideological target" unlike wartime translation and area studies, I argue that in the context of Mandarin-to-English translation post-1985, it is less useful today to conceive of resistance as implying a single "opponent or ideological target." Rather, I am concerned with articulating and articulating against a diffuse yet entangled neoliberal network of institutional power and commerciality that thrives on the liberal humanist rhetoric of universalism embedded in violent material and epistemological neocolonial practices.

Western translation theory—particularly the binary framing of English poet and translator John Dryden's "free" ("imitation") versus "literal" ("metaphrase") translation—maps its values onto Sinology through dichotomizing "inauthentic ethnological representation" and "authentic ethnological representation." Harvard premodern sinologist Stephen Owen (1946-), whose translated *Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (1996) is often taught as a "translated canon" in American institutions, complained in 1990 that translators of "Third World poets" were pandering to a Western audience seeking a "cozy ethnicity" instead of "true [Chinese] national identity":

> Most of these poems translate themselves. These could just as easily be translations from a Slovak or an Estonian or a Philippine poet . . . We must wonder if such collections of poetry in translation become publishable only because the publisher and the readership

> have been assured that the poetry was lost in translation. But what if the poetry wasn't lost in translation? What if this is it? This *is* it. (Owen 1990, 31, quoted in Chow 189)

Owen's own questionable translation decisions with respect to gendered Victorian interpretations of Chinese premodern poetry are not theorized, but merely described as "Western scholars and translators['] . . . own special dialect of English" (Owen 1996, xliv), seemingly outside the discourse of translation altogether as a "special dialect of English" that somehow expresses "authentic ethnological representation." The effect of this claim to ethnological authenticity in translation and representation is a claim to a will-to-knowledge and will-to-truth as power, building upon an academic tradition that Chow (2001) notes: "Western anthropologists persistently neglect the 'colonial situation' that lies at the origin of their 'field of research' in most parts of the world" (194). It is thus hugely insufficient and uncritical (untheoretical and immaterialist) for modern Chinese literary studies to halfheartedly engage with 20th century Sinologist translations such as Owen's by simply remarking of their (neo-orientalist) aesthetics as "elegant and tasteful" (Wu 99), given that these literary translations are canonized and anthologized as transmitting "The" literary history of China. Millennia of "Chinese" history are periodized and contextualized (or not) into selective categories according to what the translator and academic market deems "valuable."

It is not simply that "Chinese" literature (as if this is a stable category throughout centuries of territorial and ethnicized disunity and fluctuation) in translation retains a problematic theoretical and rhetorical grounding in the ethnologist, humanist civilizational discourse of area studies (which purports that "objective" knowledge is obtainable through practically and ideologically political institutions). It is that aspects of "Chinese" history have themselves influenced Western academic and nonacademic practices and methods despite sinologist and Chinese literary scholars' disavowal of it as "other," as Chow describes:

> Poststructuralism's dismantling of the sign, which grew out of a criticism of phonetic logocentrism from within the Western tradition and which was to activate interest in text and discourse across humanistic studies, began in an era when Western intellectuals, in particular those in France (Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, to name a few) 'turned East' to China for philosophical and political alternatives. (203)

Ironically, or perhaps tellingly, at the same time these French scholars sought "alternatives" to their own traditions and politics, Barthes and Kristeva articulated these "alternatives" through the very same ethnological, ideological lens they sought to escape.[4]

Chow then notes how Western feminist and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s drew on Chinese Communists' mobilizing strategies of "encouraging peasants, especially peasant women, to 'speak bitterness' against an oppressive patriarchal system" (203). Post-1985, after the "fall" of the USSR and China's Cultural Revolution, area studies/sinology/Chinese literary studies presented "Chinese" subjects as Spivak's (1999) "subaltern," dispossessed subjects in need of spokespeople (Anglophone translators and readers) and Western modernity (as if that had not already began incurring dramatic aftereffects in the Opium Wars). This "marginality" has been held in tension with the Chinese state's rapidly capitalizing local and global economic hegemonic influence (at the expense of Chinese and Southeast Asian workers) in the 21st century, taken up by Sinophone studies. It is at this global scale that I would like to turn to English translations of Can Xue's short stories, pouring into American markets from the very same post-1985 period.

According to Zhang Zhuoya (2019), Can Xue was relatively unrecognized in literary circles in China until the late 1980s (1987 thereabouts), at which point avant-garde literature entered its "second wave" (the "first wave" marked by the year 1985, when Can Xue's "Small Shed on a Mountain" 《山上的小屋》 was also published). In this "second wave," Can Xue gained widespread local and overseas American recognition as part of "post-Cold War" interest in Chinese literature as a source of ethnographic "social history" (mainly regarding the Cultural Revolution). Additionally, Chinese avant-garde literature, compared to Socialist Realist literature, was much more aesthetically familiar (and politically acceptable) to mainstream capitalist-acclimated American academists and the neoliberal postmodernity of the late 20th century. Thus, Can Xue was widely translated into English for the American academic market in the 1990s, starting with the translation pair Ronald R. Janssen (professor of Writing Studies and Composition at Hofstra University) and Zhang Jian (an American Council on Education Fellow), responsible for the short-story collection *Dialogues in Paradise* (1991) (《天堂里的对话》)[5], and *The Embroidered Shoes* (1997) (《绣花鞋》), as well as the novella collection *Old Floating Cloud* (1991) (《苍老的浮云》). Subsequently came the translation team Karen Gernant (professor of Chinese history at Oregon University) and Chen Zeping (professor of Chinese at Fujian University), responsible for *Blue Light in the Sky and Other Stories* (2007) (《天堂里的蓝光》) and *Vertical Motion: Stories* (2011) (《垂直运动》).

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[4] See Barthes' *Travels in China* (written in 1974, translated in 2012 by Andrew Brown, and Kristeva's *About Chinese Women* (published in French in 1974, translated in 1977 by Anita Barrows).

While numerous translators (Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi (1960), William Lyell (1990), Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt (1995) and Julia Lovell (2009), to name a few) have published translations of the same source texts for early 20th century Chinese authors like Lu Xun, the same cannot be said for Can Xue. Each translation of Can Xue's works—emphatically her earlier works—has acted as a de facto “definitive” version in that literary polysystem. Once her earlier short stories were translated, translators moved on to Can Xue’s more recent novels, such as *The Last Lover* (2014) (《最后的情人》) and *Love in the New Millennium* (2018) (《新世纪爱情故事》) translated by Annelise Finegan, and *Frontier* (2017) (《边疆》) translated by Gernant and Chen. Zhang (2019) attributes Can Xue’s continued celebration in Western academia to the fact that Can Xue herself actively promotes English translations of her works in these spaces, and that “avant-garde” has undergone a highly successful commercial and aesthetic branding, enhancing Can Xue’s authorship and exceptionalism among mainstream Chinese authors.

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[5] There exists also one French translation of *Dialogues in Paradise* (*Dialogues en Paradis*) by Françoise Naour; this short story collection is summarized on WorldCat as "Terreur, horreur et cauchemar" (Terror, horror and nightmare") and "Un texte autobiographique" (an autobiographical text") "sur la vie en Chine à l'époque du Grand Bond en avant" ("on life in China in the era of the Great Leap Forward"), rendering the text a 'native informant's' ethnographic manual of communist horrors marketed to a French brand of Orientalism.

However, unlike categories such as Socialist Realism, which reference a specific historical materiality and network of actors as well as a set of principles and goals, “avant-garde” as deployed by scholars of Chinese literature does not necessarily elucidate any specific content or aesthetic. Avant-garde once referred to early 20th century surrealists and Dadaists in Paris, and was then reappropriated to apply to legion contexts, implying more about the intents of its users than its actual signification. Is avant-garde literature written in 1985 necessarily avant-garde in 2023, and if so, what makes it avant-garde if it is not being newly translated (i.e., newly engaged in antihegemonic nonnormative thinking) and reinterpreted, like Lu Xun’s works? Does avant-garde in 1985 China convey the same stakes as it would in 1991, in 2014, in 2023? What is at stake in the traditionally institutional American academic sanctification and canonization of “Chinese avant-garde” as a totalizing signification of Western-derived individualism and neoliberalism, operating under the rhetoric of universalist “post-racial” humanism?

Zhang (2019) characterizes Can Xue as an author who refrained from relying on showcasing “local cultural characteristics” of China, and rather adapted the narrative techniques of authors like Kafka and Borges—modernist techniques for a postmodern age. Zhang claims these influences make her work “easier” to translate, since there is less chance of cultural-linguistic material being “lost in translation” (“避免了语言文化特征流失的翻译困境”) (86). Can Xue herself has stated her works are “extraordinarily suitable for transmission through translation” (“她的小说非常适合翻译传播”) (86), but I question the degree to which “suitability” equates to “ease” of translation, given the non-normative psycho-affective spatio-temporalities of her texts, the consensus towards her “avant-garde” genre, and academic and nonacademic complaints of her “abstruse,” “difficult” writing content and style. Zhang (and perhaps Can Xue herself) claims that this “ease” of translation is made possible by the lack of “obstacles” posed by “local cultural characteristics,” transcended by “universal humanist emotions” (“人类共同情感”) (86).

Can Xue claimed in a 2002 interview with the Ohio State University MCLC (Modern Chinese Literature and Culture) Resource Center that “one of her translators, Janssen, overemphasizes the sociopolitical aspect of her novels, but luckily Zhang Jian emphasizes literariness” (“译者之一詹森过于强调她作品中的社会政治层面，好在张健注重作品的文学性”), and that her works “contain absolutely no political elements whatsoever” (“我的作品中没有任何政治因素”) (Zhang 87). To the murkiness of the “avant-garde” label that we will return to, we must add the murkiness of “universal vs. local” framing, and the claim to absolute apolitical “neutrality.” Can Xue’s claim to “apolitical” writing is nonetheless compromised by the historical and material reality of the American publishing industry and area studies/sinology/Chinese literary studies, not to mention Even-Zohar’s (1990) framing of translated literature as forming a rhetorical and cultural-political role in a literary polysystem. There is also the matter of what is at stake in Can Xue’s claim to bearing “no political elements whatsoever,” signifying negative and particularistic (anti-universal) rhetoric onto “political,” and whether this “apoliticality” is actually a possibility (or even a desirability) in the translation and marketing of her works under a capitalist commodification of knowledge.

Clearly, "universalist" rhetoric had been circulating back and forth between American scholars and Can Xue, as even in Michael Duke's 1989 *Modern Chinese Women Writers,* he describes Can Xue as "currently China's most anti-tradition, modernist-inflected woman writer; Chinese critics don't even consider her writing to be Chinese literature" (87, back-translation mine). In effect, Duke has articulated what Zhang (2019) recapitulates, a false dichotomy between "ethnic" and "universalist" citizenship, so that to be "worldly" is to renounce the "Chinese" part of Chinese literature. Ethnicized "Chineseness" is signified in the Orientalist area studies and sinologist tradition as hyper-nationalist, hyper-"traditional," and hopelessly Other, overcome only by neoliberal world citizenship—which claims to be apolitical despite the very condition of citizenship indexing belonging to a *polity*. Duke and Zhang's valuation of Can Xue's lack of "local cultural characteristics" in effect recapitulates Owen's 1990 complaint of "cozy ethnicity," but unlike Owen who glorified "true national identity" as the goal to be revealed through English translation, Duke and Zhang seem to require a negation of the "ethnic nation" entirely as entry point into world (Anglophone) literature.

Can Xue's emphasis on being an apolitical writer in English interviews invokes a history of the invested signification in the term "politics" in area studies' discursive obsession with representing and negating "communism," Chinese wartime and postwar censorship and mass thought persecution, and neoliberal pretentions to a post-politics. Even Chow's (2001) anxieties over condemnations of "theory" (204) as elitist in the American academy and comparisons to how intellectuals were persecuted during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-76) indexes a reaction to the overdetermined legacy of area studies (think John K. Fairbank and Orville Schell) signifying all class analysis as “despotic political persecution.” In actuality, the original context of American academic critique of elitist theory are arguments like Barbara Christian’s 1987 “The Race for Theory,” and post-1985 black feminist criticism against longstanding Eurocentric hegemonic praxis in the academy. The continual intervention of area studies’ claims to objectivity and “scientific knowledge” as access to “satisfactory peace” in a world system come to bear on Zhang’s (2019) positioning of Can Xue’s works as “world literature” (“世界文学”) (93). Can Xue’s English translations are considered “world literature” only on the condition of universalist “transcendence” of “cultural characteristics” and direct involvement with translators and publishers (assuming direct involvement is never mediated by larger political systems).

Damrosch (2013) and Bermann (2012) have historicized world literature-as-discipline in the United States as a phenomenon of the mid-twentieth century that relies heavily on translated texts, unlike comparative literature’s focus on source texts (Chiu and Zhang, 2022). This 20th century expression was built on Goethe’s discussion of ‘Weltliteratur’ in 1827, which displaced the discursive power of source texts in favor of translations: “national literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand” (Goethe 2012, 19, quoted in translation in Chiu and Zhang 3). Chiu and Zhang (2022) argue that “the shift from questions of Chinese and Chineseness to questions of the circulation, reception, and reinvention of a new life in a host culture thus distinguishes Chinese-Sinophone literatures as world literature as a critical practice” (12). Yet even “world literature” and world systems are not extra-national systems, given that the world-as-such is intelligible to Western academia precisely insofar as it indexes the frictions and flows between ethnicized, bordered nation-states, reflected in distinctions between ‘Sinophone literature’ and ‘Chinese literature’ produced within China. Chiu and Zhang take “Chinese-Sinophone literatures as world literature” to refer to “works characterized by cross-linguistic spatial movement, intent on acquiring a new life by claiming the recognition of readers beyond the literary circles of Chinese-speaking communities… for instance, Li Bai, Lu Xun, Mo Yan" (12)—and now Can Xue. According to Chiu and Zhang, "the plural form of "Chinese-Sinophone literatures as world literature" . . . is designed to preserve the space of premodern Chinese literature as world literature on the one hand and, on the other, the tension between modern Chinese literature and Sinophone literature since the late nineteenth century" (13).

A claim to a place in "world literature" doesn't end there, however; there is always the matter of the positionality and historical moment from which one is seeking recognition by and membership among world powers as world citizens. As Theo D'Haen (2021) remarks in *World Literature in an Age of Geopolitics* of Kadir (2004), "the comparatist talking of world literature should be aware of 'where she is coming from' so as to avoid unconsciously reproducing the hegemonic imbalance of power in the world that she professes to remedy by furthering the cause of 'world' literature over any form of national literature" (quoted in D'Haen 2021, 1), asking instead "who carries out its worlding and why" (2). Specifically with regards to Even-Zohar's literary polysystems in which translated texts are marketized and commodified as knowledge and aesthetic objects in the academy, Spivak in *Death of a Discipline* (2003) observes that world literature as translated Anglophone literature is overrepresented in American markets compared to other national markets, evidenced by the fact that Can Xue's translations currently exist overwhelmingly in English and through American academic publishers (such as Northwestern University Press and Yale University Press). Far from being extra-national or even extra-regional, "world literature" arises as a spatio-temporal praxis from the neoliberalization of the globe in the 1980s and 90s. Sarah Lawall's 1994 *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice* and Franco Moretti's "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000) and *Distant Reading* (2013) all furthered the tradition of "world literature as largely synonymous with European or more generally Western literature," "evident from the anthologies used for teaching world literature courses in United States undergraduate curricula until the mid-1990s" (D'Haen 14), which, according to D'Haen (2021), "run parallel to the importance generally conceded to Europe and the West also in terms of politics and economics until the very end of the twentieth century" (14), upon which a kind of "neo-area studies" resurged with China's state economy and re-signification as an existential "threat" to the West.

Rather than proposing a kind of "universalist," transcendentalist definition of world literature as Zhang (2019) applies to Can Xue, Damrosch (2003) in *What is World Literature?* proposes "a threefold definition focused on the world, the text, and the reader," declaring that "World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures," "World literature is writing that gains in translation," and "World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time" (281). But what, and on what (on whose) terms, is "world literature" "gaining" in "elliptical" translation which is *circulated* as knowledge-commodity in an Anglophone market? If we replace the subject "world literature" in Damrosch's scheme with his definitions, we get: "an elliptical refraction of national literatures gains in translation as a mode of reading." If we ask what "an elliptical refraction of national literatures" is referring to, that is, the circulation of translation itself through literary polysystems (source and translated markets), then we see that actually, "translation gains in translation as a mode of distant reading" becomes a circular, not elliptical, logic. A comprehensive investigation of reading strategies is beyond the scope of this paper, but I would like to emphasize simply that the production of "world literature" cannot simply be charted as movement from source culture to target culture and back, especially since its movement towards the target culture in Can

Xue's case is trumpeted as "transcending" the target culture and even negating it in order to access world citizenship. Furthermore, additional contextualization is needed to articulate Can Xue's categorical denial of political engagement in the geopolitics of "world" translation circulation and re-Orientalization of Chinese bodies and knowledges in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic and the Trump presidency, which has re-entrenched citizenship in intensified ethno-nationalism.

According to Wang Ning (2010), world literature "implies translation, and translation in Chinese literary history has mostly served foreign literatures to colonize Chinese literature and culture," which is apparently remedied by "the recent trend of cultural globalization in the Chinese context . . . [which] will help promote Chinese culture and literature worldwide" (Wang 13, quoted in D'Haen 2021, 37), paralleling D'Haen's observation that "In the Chinese case, as in the American and European ones, world literature emerges as glocalization aspiring to globalization" (38). In addressing the vexed tension between Ning's framing of cultural globalization as remedy to colonization and globalization (modernity) *as a form of coloniality,* I turn to Pheng Cheah's (2016) postcolonial reckoning with "world literature." Cheah frames "world literature" as a primarily temporal, then spatial "subordination of all regions of the globe to Greenwich Mean Time as the point zero for the synchronization of clocks" as a "synecdoche for European colonial domination of the rest of the world because it enables a mapping that places Europe at the world's center . . . [as] a form of imprisonment that smothers lived local temporalities" (Cheah 1). In temporalizing world literature, Cheah redefines world literature to address "a fundamental contradiction of the modern capitalist world-system . . . [which, as Marx points out] creates the material conditions for a community of the greatest possible extension [while] also radically undermin[ing] the achievement of a human community of global reach" (2).

Cheah's argument for "understanding world literature as a normalizing force of world-making[6] activity clarifies the connections it has to cosmopolitanism that existing scholarship has obscured" (2, emphasis mine), given that theories of world literature associate "cosmopolitanism with an abstract universal normative view of the ideal unity of the world, whereas [world literature theorists] are concerned with how literary texts attain worldliness as a result of . . . circulation" (3). Cheah also distinguishes his use of world literature as "a force of world-making" (3) from narratological possible-world theories and views that "each discipline of knowledge produces its own cartography of the world" (4) on the grounds that the ontological reality of literary possible-worlds is "not a causal power in the actual world" like world literature is, presumably—an argument I will respond to in later analyses of Can Xue's "Small Shed on a Mountain" (1985).

In the context of Can Xue's works in English translation, I argue for a working postcolonial definition of "world literature" as a continually commodifying, temporal-spatial "world-making" from within which the "avant-garde" and magical-traumatic realism work deconstructively. Jameson offers a useful articulation of postmodern literature as "representative of contemporary society to the degree that it represents the gap that obtains between reality and representation, and ensnares the reader in the simulacral universe of late capitalism," distinguishing between "the possibilities for a 'radical cultural politics' in modernism and the impossibility of such politics in postmodernism" (quoted in D'Haen 31). Given Can Xue's claims to apolitical diegetic worlds in her works, I question the degree to which her narrative techniques can be said to align with modernism and Jameson's "possibilities for a 'radical cultural politics.' I argue that in the 1980s and 90s, Can Xue's works were being published in both Chinese and English translation into a

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[6] "World literature" presupposes a stable ontological existence of a "world", while "world-making literature" grapples with the very discursive and material (infrastructural, economic, political) pathways in which the "world" as a global (read: capitalist) entity is continually constructed and challenged.

Chinese-modernity-as-imbricated-in-Western-hegemonic-postmodernity. Rather than leaving alone postmodernity as an "impossible" site for radical politics, however, I am far more interested in nuancing Stephen Slemon's (1991) argument that "an *interested* postcolonial critical practice would want to allow for the positive production of oppositional [i.e., non-normative] truth-claims in these texts" (quoted in D'Haen 32-33), rather than a nihilistic or self-loathing attitude.

To that end, I invoke Anthony Giddens' (1990) characterization of globalization as involving a trifecta of perceptual, institutional, and economic-temporal (business in real-time, ready-made industries) features (Boltuc 263), forming a "close link between language dominance and economic, technological, military, ideological and cultural power" (267). A "world literature" first presupposes a "world language," or in Pheng Cheah's terms, a world-making language, as evidenced by the fact that English has *become* (rather than simply "is") the primary native language in the countries and colonial territories of

> Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, the British Indian Ocean Territory, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Dominica, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Guam, Gernesy, Guyana, the Isle of Man, Jesery, Montserrat, the Pitcairn Islands, Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan de Cunha, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands . . . Hong Kong and Nicaragua's Mosquito Coast . . . [and] many international organizations, including the UN" . . . [as such,] despite the fact that English is not the official language in most countries, it is the most often taught foreign language and is often referred to as the 'world language' or the 'lingua franca' of the modern era. (Crystal 2003, 2013, quoted in Boltuc 259-260)

This spatial, geopolitical world-making of world language as world literature precisely, as Cheah notes, follows Marx's articulation of globalized capitalist markets, which after WWII came increasingly to bear upon the global south. "In its politics of translation, the United States followed a conception of translation as 'transfer' from one language to another, just as global markets transfer people and goods" (Tymoczko 2007, 6, quoted in Carcelén-Estrada 258).

In analyzing Lefevere's conceptualization of literary systems and the structural factors determining selection and reception of source and translated texts, Carcelén-Estrada (2018) argues "the political implication of Lefevere's analysis is that translation creates citizenship as well as borders" (259). According to activist-translator Carcelén-Estrada, a decolonial act of writing and reading literary translation forms a readership and authorship of "alternative conception of the self and organization of the community" (262) as part of decolonial praxis. A decolonial translator "must make room in their texts for hybridity . . . inhabit queer bodies or coexist with them, and intertwine multiple temporalities to dismantle [and unsettle] the lineal time of the state" (264). It is this methodology of unsettlement that I seek to take up in my translation of Can Xue.

The outpouring of attention to Sinophone and Chinese literature as world literature from American, Sinophone and Chinese academic communities is circumscribed by post-Cold War fetishistic scrutiny of "modernizing or worlding Chineseness." Daniel Vukovich (2010) elaborates: "since the 1980s . . . China has been more or less an anything-goes free-for-all for the production of knowledge and an attendant "archive," including the creation of, for example, famine statistics, tell-it-all memoirs, anecdotes and anonymous interviews, isolated county annals, and so on" (161), not to mention the American publishing industry's fetishistic capitalization of immigrant narratives. The explosion in "archiving" in the context of world-making means that "China studies—and the knowledge of China produced in other fields—has gone through neither a process of decolonization nor what Chen Kuan-Hsing calls the de-cold war[7]" (161).

This is nowhere clearer than in the fact that the field has also not undergone a decolonizing of its world-making translations, literary and otherwise. I will return to the implications and stakes of claims to world citizenship through world-making literature; for now, I would like to reprise Zhang's (2019) argument that Western readers of Can Xue are thwarted from access to historical knowledge of China by Can Xue's "modernist" employment of absurdity, terror, dark humor, dreamlike sequences and satire. Zhang claims these elements render the reader unable to treat the texts as a native informant, and restricts the reader to the level of "aesthetics, affect, symbols, and the representation of humanity as immanent to the text itself" ("只能将经理放到对语言的感知，意象象征，人性的刻画，跟随作者的语言文字") (89). With the aim of ultimately elucidating a decolonial translation praxis of Can Xue, I must first attend to the productive tension between the American, Sinophone and Chinese academic labeling of Can Xue's works as simultaneously "avant-garde" (non-normative) and "world literature" (conforming to "world" norms). What, exactly, is involved in an "avant-garde" world-making literature, and is it necessarily the same "world" implied by "world literature"?

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[7] I.e., an active and continual dismantling of Cold War (area studies) paradigms of thought and practice.

Chapter 2: Can Xue's "Avant-Garde," "Modernist" Literature in a Postmodern World

As noted by Peter Bürger in "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde" (2011), translated from German by Bettina Brandt and Daniel Purdy, "for many academics and critics the term [avant-garde] only refers to whatever is the most current (most progressive) movement in modern art" (696). A historicized consideration of avant-garde, however, marks "a point in the continuum of time . . . starting with Dadaism, surrealism, and constructivism," grounded in an "attack on the institution of art" and "the revolutionizing of life as a whole" (696), located both within and resisting the apparatuses of modernism. Bo Cheng (2006) thus takes care to identify the temporal dimension of "avant-garde" in applying it to Can Xue's source texts in the 1980s, defining its general characteristics as containing "experimental features" that "deploy an aesthetic not in line with dominant and popular aesthetics of the time, manifesting as "inscrutability," "opening new horizons in the development of art," and critically "*self-subversive*, continually subverting one's own aesthetics and formal aspects, *playing* with aesthetics" (3, emphases mine).

Avant-garde in its Dadaist roots can be distilled to "spontaneity, negation and . . . absurdity" (Kristiansen 458) as deployed by a generally materially unconcerned group (i.e., "intellectuals") espousing distrust and disillusionment with unity given the incipience of World War I (as well as the sprawling growth of Western colonialism in the 20th century). However, in the case of early 20th century China, Chinese literature's benchmarks of "innovative" (progressive) versus "traditional" categories of literature have held different referents from their Western contemporaries. Cheng notes that while European and American literary innovation in the early 20th century took place within a post-Enlightenment socioeconomic disillusionment and even aesthetic boredom, China's New Literature movements were explicitly and of necessity politicized and nationalized in resistance to imperial and colonial force and discourse.

Cheng also recognizes the rise of avant-garde in the 1980s Chinese context with traditional "elitism" in the sense that avant-garde literature, in its heyday post-1985, came to be associated with "high literature" as opposed to "low (popular) literature." Traceable to the anti-imperialist May Fourth literary movements[8] in the first two decades of the 20th century, New Literature hardly envisioned deconstructing "mainstream/elite" distinctions in literature, rather more concerned with "classical/vernacular" distinctions for the sake of mass mobilization and sociopolitical change. Cheng notes that the most progressive trends in New Literature tended to become mainstream, rather than "avant-garde" (outlier), such as the egalitarian Socialist Realism of the 50s and 60s, and 70s surge of memoirist "scar literature."[9] While "avant-garde" literature retained its "high literature" status from the New Literature era, in the early 80s it remained fringe, until later recognized (more so in the U.S. academy) after 1985.

The beginnings of avant-garde literature in China as "temporal semi-rupture" (still imbricated within legacies of local and Western hegemonic world-making) from dominant norms took root in underground writing groups of the 1960s, like Chengdu's "Wild Grass Poetry Society," and Beijing's "Baiyangdian Lake Poetry Collective" (including poets like Bei Dao, Yan Li, and Jiang He), penning frustrated and embittered poems on the theme of selfhood (Cheng 2). From the underground poetry collectives of the 60s bloomed the "Misty Poets"[10] literary movement, characterized by aesthetic techniques of symbolism and deconstructions of realism. As the first wave of cohesive avant-garde literature, “misty poems” first appeared in 1978 folk poetry magazines and the 1980 *Fujian Literature and Poetry*. The poems receiving the most popular recognition were the mildest in “rebelliousness,” but then, Misty Poets relied more on “avant-garde poetry circles” than mainstream presses anyway, which deemed their work “inscrutable” (Cheng 5-6), a refrain largely taken up by academia as a token of avant-gardism and an excuse to not think further of avant-gardism beyond Freudian psychoanalyses and national allegories.

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[8] The May Fourth movement protested, among other things, the stipulated handover of colonized Chinese lands from Japan to Germany in the Treaty of Versailles.

[9] Referring to the officially supported outpouring of survivor memoirs and reflections following the Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976).

[10] A literal translation from "朦胧诗派", referring to a poetic school marked by "haziness", "mistiness."

Misty Poet selfhood located itself in the vexed relationship between a modern Chinese “self” (inscribed with statist anti-imperialism) and society, expressed within affective, textual landscapes eschewing dominant archetypal tropes of “the brave hero” (Cheng 6) common to mainstream mobilizing narratives of the 50s and 60s. Contrary to the organized action of literature and political affirmation in the 50s and 60s, Misty Poets urged one to “listen, look, think, [and] don’t hasten to act” (6). Despite their troubled relationship to society, Misty Poets’ “avant-garde” search for alternatives to restrictive norms in fact surged (in its post-1985 second wave) alongside intense mainstream criticism of the 50s and 60s. This meant that while Misty Poets attracted avant-gardists seeking alternatives to prior mainstream systems, they were also quickly absorbed and interpolated into mainstream socioeconomic and political efforts to re-signify and re-economize selfhood and nationhood in the wake of the death of Mao and “fall” of the global Third World Liberation movements at the hands of finance capitalism and Western military consolidation.

Still, Misty poems differed from statist “enlightenment” discourses in form and aesthetics: Cheng describes Misty poems as more preoccupied with lifelong struggle than a fixed and unified destination, so Misty poems maintained “avant-garde” impulses in resisting realist form in favor of experimentality, claimed in service of a “revival of individualism and humanism” (8). Yet as I have begun to and will continue to argue, all claims to universalism-as-world-citizenship must be bracketed in English scholarship by its originating discourses of liberalism and globalized division of labor under racial capitalism. Chinese "Scar literature," "reflective literature," "reformist literature" and "root-seeking literature" all called for a subject's *restoration or replacement of norm* barred by prior systems, while Misty poems are much more concerned with resistance via *destruction* or *deconstruction* of prior norms (Cheng 13), on the surface aligning with the "negation" of Dadaist avant-gardism. However, rather than championing spontaneity through "renouncing the idea of autonomy" (Bürger 696), later manifesting in surrealist seances, Misty Poets persistently played with the figure of the self and selfhood (not to be mistaken or reduced to a stand-in for a "universal self modeled after a Western middle-class man"). At the time of Can Xue's publication of "Small Shed on a Mountain" in 1985, avant-garde previously-underground literature was still not as popular or widespread as romanticist "root-seeking literature," which is commonly academically condemned using the colonial framework of "backwardness."

Cheng connects the Misty Poets' late 60s and 70s avant-gardist deconstruction and destruction of realist norms and forms to Can Xue's earliest works in the "second wave" of avant-garde literature in the period after 1985, including "Small Shed on a Mountain." According to Cheng, avant-gardist aesthetics in the context of 1980s China figures in Can Xue through deconstruction and subversion of normative realist relationships between interior and exterior realities. Rather, Can Xue's narrative subject consistently positions themselves through

> . . . an "individual body" placed into part-outlined part-amorphous pressure and crisis, who has no way to find from the external world a method of representation to rely on, and can only rely on the 'individual' body's sensory and affective responses to an external world, as well as mining the depths of their own interiority to represent their crisis, only at this time able to, temporarily, unburden themselves of oppression from an external world (at a

> certain moment, in a certain place unburdened, at another moment needing to face all over again the same crisis, leading Can Xue's novels to generally deploy a repetition of psychoaffective processes). (Cheng 50, translation mine)

Cheng's framing of Can Xue's narrative strategies articulates layers to the application of a Western "avant-garde" label to subversive literature in China in the 80s. The declaratively negative subject of Dadaist avant-gardism must be nuanced in this context as a productive tension between deconstruction as finality and a generative postcolonial struggle produced in the very act of deconstructing. It is this ongoing, participatory process of deconstructing hegemony that continues as decolonial struggle in the act of translating into a hegemonic language. I will later take up Cheng's framing of Can Xue's avant-garde aesthetics as such in the genre of magical-traumatic realism (a modified realism given that sensory perception plays a key role in mediating the representation of interiority in Can Xue).

In contrast to Cheng's definition of avant-gardism in China as an outgrowing of Misty Poet underground literature of selfhood, Yu Zhansui (2017) claims that "the ultimate goal of Chinese avant-garde writers is to expose the truth behind Communist ideology, especially the Maoist doctrine" (56). Yu teleologically views all of "Chinese" (referring to a China unified as the People's Republic of China led by Mao in 1949 after civil and imperialist wars) literature through Mao alone, overdetermining the purpose of scar literature as a whole in the late 70s as a move "to expose the darkness and brutality of the Cultural Revolution" (1), and subsequent root-searching literature as an effort "to break away from the highly politicized paradigm which had dominated previous literary forms" (2), as if post-Mao politics is no longer political for having divested itself of its discursively-constituted as much as materially real figurehead. While none of these claims may be untruthful in their own right, insofar as these arguments are produced in English to be circulated through world scholarship and world literature in English, they reproduce area studies' vested anxieties towards the shadowy imagination of all things "communist" (an unspecific, uncontextualized black-hole signifier for any and all traumas), "Far-eastern," and "other."

The problem with posing individualism as an antipode to "communism" (which is then generally collapsed into the use of the term "politics") is that it requires reinscribing Enlightenment Eurocentric humanism's belief that the Western "modern" intellectual male, a product of global racial capitalism and imperialism, is the neutral apolitical template for humankind, a fantasy of universalism that imagines the personal as an ahistorical, apolitical immanence. While Yu usefully historizes that "Chinese avant-gardists rejected the Confucian and Maoist tradition of literary didacticism and instrumentalism" and instead "embraced literary autonomy and the idea of the writer as the independent subject in literary creation" (3), it is not enough to recapitulate these observations and stop there when interpolating these works into world-making literature. As such, there is also a limitation to the usefulness of the even the term "avant-garde" in application to experimental fiction in China throughout the ages (since avant-garde is a modernist 20th century term, and to be deemed "avant-garde" is in a way to be deemed "modernist," i.e., "under the influence of Western aesthetics"). Given that Yu's stated goal is to analyze avant-garde fiction in China through Western philosophical perspectives, a teleological view of late twentieth century fiction in China is hardly out of place.

Unlike Cheng, Yu places Can Xue into the "first wave" of avant-garde fiction in China in the mid-80s alongside Mo Yan (1955-), and reserves for the "mature second wave" the authors Su Tong (1963-), Yu Hua (1960-), and Ge Fei (1964-). Yu frames avant-garde literature in China as a "high culture fever," "Chinese modernism or postmodernism" (22), drawing on the dominant approaches of Jin Wang's *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics and Ideology in Deng's China,* and Zhang Xudong's *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema*. The association of avant-garde fiction and post-1980 politics in China with "high culture" is complicated not only by, as aforementioned, May Fourth New Literature's continual association of intellectual prestige with subversive literature, but also Rong Cai's (2004) characterization that "Western concepts of all sorts were eagerly swallowed up, hastily digested, and hurriedly circulated by the intellectually starved Chinese critics to both create and fill up a new discursive space, where the critics' position in the changing society was negotiated and their own notion of modernity articulated and disseminated" (1) in this marketizing and neoliberalizing period.

Cai does not directly invoke avant-gardism in her discursive mapping of the 1980s, but rather categorizes two broad "parallel discourses of the subject . . . an autonomous Enlightenment humanist subject . . . by writers from the preliberation generation, the rightist generation, and the educated youth (*zhiqing*) generation . . . [and] post-Mao . . . problematic subjects, beings who suffer either from highly symbolic physical deformities or a paralyzed agency that debunks their apparent normalcy" (x). The latter "problematic subject" is deployed much more often in avant-garde literature, which Cai claims is "transcended in the post-Mao design of modernity" (x), aligning with Zhang's (2019) characterization of Can Xue's works as transcending "Chineseness" (signified in an ironically problematic way as Mao) towards a modernity of world literature. Cai places "socialist modernization" (referring to government-sanctioned programs of reform in the post-Cultural Revolution period) into an antinomic relationship with "subjectivity." For Cai, Chinese subjectivity is "couched in the epistemological framework of the Enlightenment" and aims to turn "China into a rising world power" (2) in the 1976-1989 period of capitalist global reintegration, echoing the statist positionality of intellectuals in the post-WWI May Fourth movement.

Whereas fiercely vernacularizing literature[11] served as a crucial component of the New Literature of the early 20th century in China, in the "Socialist New China" (bracketed to distinguish between state rhetoric and increasingly capitalist worlding practices) of the 80s, David Der-wei Wang observes a self-destructive "dilapidated and grotesque[12] haven filled with souls that are maimed either physically or spiritually" (quoted in Cai 11). Cai intervenes to suggest that "to confine the interpretation of such characters within the Communist past fails to recognize the full force of their representation as a historical phenomenon at the intersection of China's transition from Mao to the post-Mao era," and that the implications of these subjects actually pertain more profoundly to "human subjectivity" (12), concluding that "it is time for us to recognize the prophetic role of the problematic subject and acknowledge the limit in the power of literature to transcend its own social and historical circumstances" (13).

However, rather than invoking the historical materialism producing "post-Mao" as a discursive-temporal category, Cai blames "New China's" literary subject for "its incapacity to claim agency" (21), suggesting the limits in the power of the literary to transcend its time lie in the limits in the power of "New China" citizens to reclaim their agency not only from the past, but the present and future as determined by local and world-making hegemonies. Rather than focalizing avant-garde as a means of deconstructing and destroying this withholding of agency, Cai focuses on Can Xue as an absurdist writer "highlighting the existential conditions of the subject" (21), placing the subject "in a timeless metaphysical eternity where temporality and transformation are simply irrelevant" (21). Rather than destroying or deconstructing (as per avant-gardist impulses) norms, Cai claims Can Xue simply (indulgently) ignores them.

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[11] Venularization from classical, bureaucratic and scholastic Chinese script was championed as a central component of engaging mass participation (through literacy and linguistic politicization) in anti-imperialist, anti-monarchy self-determination in the early 20th century in China.

[12] While "grotesque" potentially poses a productive ironic interpretative lens if engaged anti-colonially, invoked in these dominant interpretations of Can Xue, they are usually attended by locating the source of the grotesque in the pathological failures of the "ethnic Chinese body," or "evil Chinese leader," rather than a violent globalized, ethnicized rupture between Chinese selfhood and social relationality, which I will explore further on in my retranslation of "Small Shed on a Mountain" and through magical-traumatic realism in Chapter 4.

Herein lies the crux of my disagreement and reframing: rather than locating subjects in time-irrelevant and transformation-independent spaces as Cai argues, I register Can Xue's subjects through an *intensification* of psychological and affective relationship to time and time loops. These circular phenomenological and external temporalities jar against the lineal "progress" time of Socialist Realism *and* neoliberal world-making. For Cai, "this [absurdist] making a problem of time and agency paralyzes the post-Mao project at its epistemological foundation that emphasized the self's power to analyze, intervene, and develop" (21). I argue that Cai's analysis, strictly attuned to the "Mao/Post-Mao" temporal (and discursive) binary, could use a more diachronic and world-ed contextualization and decolonization if Can Xue's works are simultaneously going to be engaged with as "world literature."

Perplexingly, Can Xue scholars like Cai claim that Can Xue's works are absurdist insofar as they are purposely abstract and abstruse, "isolated from any identifiable social context" (93), when in works such as "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" (《美丽南方之夏日》) (1968), the narrator explicitly mentions the year 1962 and later, the time "when rebel factions were searching homes during the Cultural Revolution" ("文革造反派抄家时" (Xue 1968, 10)). If Cai were to read subjecthood in Can Xue diachronically from the semi-autobiographical "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South," she might be more inclined to read the continuous themes of countryside life and life forms (specifically insects) in more nuanced ways. What a decolonial relationship to reading symbols in Can Xue can offer is a more productive alternative to the normative view that "the proliferation of insects and worms is symbolic of the ceaseless attacks and hostility plaguing the individual. The death of these hateful creatures in the closing scenes, then, also indicates the demise of the plaguers themselves" (Cai 121).[13]

Across Can Xue's works, there is a continually unconventional signification of insects with nostalgia and gestures to *positive* affect. As evidenced in "Small Shed on the Mountain" through the characterization of the contents of the narrator's drawer: "several dead moths and dead dragonflies had been thrown onto the ground . . . things I cherished" ("几只死蛾子，死蜻蜓全扔到了地上 . . . 我心爱的东西") (Xue 1985, 67). This "cherishing" of insects (or rather what "insects" re-signify) is carried over thematically from "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South," which Cai Rong and David Der-wei Wang overdetermine and write off, against the text, as opaque and "grotesque" deformity of self. Read monolithically and teleologically as symptomatic of allegorical grotesque (as a stand-in for the helpless subjects of the helpless nation), Cai concludes that "in Can Xue's writing such essential elements of realist fiction as plot, characterization, and frequently, even common sense are kept to a minimum. As a result, her stories are indeed surrealistic and difficult to read . . . rationality and believable characters and events are not Can Xue's concerns" (97). It is not enough to leave an analysis of a text as "difficult to read" (especially without elaborating on what is meant and produced by the judgment of "difficulty" to a specific audience), however, especially if this is a text that is being propped up, as I've been arguing, as "universalist" and "world-ed." It is also more dismissive than clarifying to refer to "common sense"—because sense is precisely not universal (common), especially self-alienated and globally Othered sense. In Can Xue's short stories "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" and "Small

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[13] For example, in "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South", the child narrator remarks on how "The cricket chirps were dark, I didn't like them; the long-horned beetles and grasshoppers were light, while the owls were dark. Summer was light; of the four seasons I liked summer best, while winter was dark and gloomy, with the smell of mothballs" (Xue 1968, 5), translation mine.

Shed on a Mountain," there is a firmly established thematic causality between externality and internality (the narrator tries to organize their drawer, their family interferes so they cannot, the narrator asks them to remember, their family says it pains them to remember). Rather than serving as a source or symptom of hindrance to selfhood, nonnormative signs and affects are deployed by Can Xue *productively,* as she claims to "gather all my emotion and ideals and fight against iron-strong reality" (Cai 97).

Cai misses the point in arguing that "instead of highlighting the sociopolitical factors responsible for the twisted human connections, as other writers do, Can Xue focuses on the grotesque relationships themselves" (97)—for one thing, Can Xue *does* highlight sociopolitical factors all over "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South," which extend diachronically to "Small Shed on a Mountain" and beyond (deploying continuous family dynamics and a semi-autobiographical father figure). I will later argue that magical-traumatic realism can operate as a more productive affective and spatio-temporal elaboration on the "grotesque" symbols in Can Xue than "absurdist and difficult," especially with regards to the triptych of "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South," "Small Shed on a Mountain" and "Apple Tree in the Corridor."

Just as "avant-garde" is often taken for granted as a self-explanatory category for literary scholars, so too is "grotesque," which must be historicized and contextualized particularly in English translations and discourses on Can Xue (not to mention the source text and context). Geoffrey Harpham (1976) historicizes the aesthetic category of "grotesque" as a "byproduct of the Renaissance interest in Antiquity" (461), spatio-temporally marked by European excavations of caves near Rome at the end of the 15th century, and the discovery of murals in which "human and animal figures are intertwined with foliage in ways which violate not only the laws of statics and gravity, but common sense and plain observation" (461). More bluntly, "grotesque" emerged as a

European discursive and material dichotomization between European "civilized" subjects, and enslaved, "uncivilized" subjects in the first wave of European imperial expansion overseas (the 15th century Catholic Iberians of contemporary Portugal and Spain, driven to find alternate sea routes after the closing of the Silk Road, established overseas colonial monopolies of spices, sugar and slavery markets from Africa).

Since the early modern or, as Ania Loomba (2014) argues, early colonial age, grotesque has also featured prominently as an exoticized, racialized aspect of various gothic literatures, in which the alien, the "savage" other is associated with the unknown and untamed natural world (which in later Protestant iterations must be "tamed" through labor and production). To this point, Peter Fingesten (1984) notes that "before modern artists looked at primitive art as art, it was generally considered aesthetically grotesque because neither its purposes, its form, nor its symbolism were understood [by them]" (419). In other words, even claiming something as "understandable" as marker of shared humanity or demarcated inhumanity invokes a relation of power and difference between the object of study as such and its representer.

Harpham acknowledges the fluidity and vagueness of "grotesque" as a common set of features, viewing it as "the structure of estrangement" (462) after Wolfgang Kayser's modernist approach in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature.* According to Kayser, "grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death" (462); but it would benefit us to keep in mind the positionality of those invoking the label of grotesque, whether it is being instrumentalized as an elite aestheticization of a fear of "inhuman" life as *inherently deadly* (beastly), or as a reaction to facing death or dehumanization as an instrument of oppression and becoming alienated from life itself (think Kafka's *Metamorphosis*). In line with Harpham's association of grotesque structure with modernist estrangement, Fingesten defines grotesque as "the presence and clash, incongruity, or juxtaposition of two or more different or even contradictory elements within the same work that may result in a visual and/or psychological surprise or shock" (420). This broad definition in the context of modernism can be read to mean that modernity itself, in addition to functioning as a global coloniality, is experienced as a global grotesque.

However, traditional Eurocentric applications of grotesque, even in modernity, do not identify material-political productions of the source of unease, rather mythicizing unease as "demonic" forces (Steig 253), or "evil in general" (254). In striking continuity, Cai argues that "Can Xue's stories illustrate that the construction of a new identity free of the evil influence of the old is a formidable process" (126), claiming that

> . . . the exhaustion of the narrator in 'The Hut' . . . is symbolic of the fatigue of a whole younger generation that, worn out by abnormal and malignant human relationships, has trouble imagining a self outside the Other's look. After a lifelong suppression by powerful authority figures, people have become incapable of creating a self. With no positive models to follow, they cannot transform themselves for the future. (126)

There is a logical slippage between the categorical distinctions of avant-garde (in which deconstruction *is* a positive speech-act) and root-searching (in which reconstructed models are sought elsewhere) here, driven by Cai's consistent holding of avant-garde literature to the standards of root-searching literature, in which the goal is to recover agency through a pre-existing mode. Cai locates the grotesque "evil" of Can Xue's absurdist literature in "powerful authority figures" as well as "abnormal and malignant human relationships," a diffuse source to categorically refer to as "evil influence of the old" (126) given that "malignant human relationships" are neither old nor new. Perhaps an affective spatio-temporal analysis of the central relationship unit in Can Xue's "Small Shed on a Mountain"—the family—can help us think more productively with regards to what makes this work "avant-garde" in its source context, and what a decolonial translation might entail.

Set near an unnamed mountain in an unidentified time, but published amid the 1980s outpouring of "scar literature" reflecting on the recent past—which academic archives emphatically fixate on through the Cultural Revolution (1966-76)[14]—the fragmented setting and problematics of time in "Small Shed on a Mountain" (《山上的小屋》) (1985) appear to map onto the rural exile and reorientation of "political dissenters" and "sent-down" youth. This semi-autobiographical (not explicitly referential but informed by lived experience) short story is narrated through simultaneously overlaid yet discrete temporalities and spatialities of the home, the drawer in the home, and the small shed on the mountain, as experienced by a family of four. The plot follows a narrator's thwarted attempts to organize their drawer of "cherished things" and reconnect disjointed spatio-temporalities by engaging their family members in this project of organization and recovery of memory. Can Xue scholars have described this anti-mimetic "modernist" text as demonstrating a "poetics of negation" and "grotesque" (Liu 171), but a postmodern narratological analysis of "Small Shed on a Mountain" as an anti-mimetic metanarrative on memory and retelling can shed light on anti-mimesis as a deconstructive *possibilization* of impossible worlds.[15] Rather than existing as externally representable through Socialist Realism, the shed on the mountain and the drawer in the home index interior space-times de-linked from an external world which has failed to correspond sign and signifier, and breaks with its normative lineal time of "progress/modernity."

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[14] Occurring in a decade of global anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist liberational protests (the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., the May 68 student protests in France, and numerous independence movements in former colonies), the Cultural Revolution also coincided with the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of communist Czechoslovakia and breakdown in coalitional direction and trust in the Eastern bloc. In China, this breakdown of trust manifested through an upending of the educational system; 17 million urban middle and high school youths (Zhou and Hou 12) were "sent down" to the countryside to remedy urban unemployment industrialize rural marginalities. Increased state centralization and pressure from a neoliberalizing, encroaching West (the U.S. had just annexed Hawai'i) informed Chinese state policies of mass surveillance, thought policing and city resource hoarding, exacerbating already devastating rural food shortages and famines.

[15] I use "impossible world" in the narratological sense of an "impossible reality" that cannot come to be according to the logics of the current reality.

Can Xue's parents were lifelong revolutionary party members; her father joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1937 at the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War and risked his life for the party and its anti-imperialist ideals numerous times, but was later persecuted as a "counter-revolutionary" in 1957.[16] In an interview with her Japanese translator, Can Xue notes that while many other so-called "counter-revolutionaries" lost their "will to live"[17] in an environment of intense psychological and socioeconomic persecution, her father maintained the same idealistic zeal for Marxist-Leninism as before. His idealist zeal was, to Can Xue, a pursuit of external truth (effecting direct change upon the external), whereas Can Xue supposedly looks within for truth—an anti-mimetic truth (revealing the ironic disjunction between the signified and purported signifier, and framing 'truth' itself as occupying a liminal space held tense between internal and external validation).

Can Xue's truth is anti-mimetic in relation to a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Socialist Realism, traceable to Lukacs' 19th century Eurocentric "universally mimetic" realism which "proposed that realism be chosen as the means of looking at reality in its typicality (subject-object relationship), as opposed to naturalism, which provides only the artistic rendering of reportage" (Lukacs 27). What gives this realism its "realness" is a conventional mimesis, which "is supposed to concern the [reproductive] relation of art to a directly given outside reality" (36). The Socialist Realism of Can Xue's historical past would have been a "proletarian mimesis": "the broadest sections of the people [in China], constituting more than 90 per cent of our total population, are the workers, peasants, soldiers and urban petty bourgeoise. Therefore, our literature and art are first for the workers, the class that leads the revolution" (Mao 1942). However, while informed by lived experiences of the Cultural Revolution in setting (exilic rural mountainside) and affective response (to mass mutual surveillance), "Small Shed on a Mountain" is pointedly anti-mimetic in a way that defamiliarizes the spaces of the mind, the home and the mountain, such that the mind is not held inside the body but spatialized as a drawer, a shed, a mountain, and requires witnesses to attest to its truths at the same time that it maintains its own integrity as an ironic instability.

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[16] Xue, Can. "Mei Li Nan Fang Zhi Xia Ri" ("The Beautiful Summer Days of the South"), *Tamen Wen Xue Cong Shu: San Wen Juan (Their Literary Collections: Essays), Yunan People's Press,* 2000.

[17] "Truth and Falsity in Creation" interview by Ri Yue, sampled from *Can Xue* (1999), translation mine.

The first sentence of the story mediates the triangulated relationship between narrator's home, the mountain and the small shed through spatialization: "On the barren mountain just behind my home, there's a small shed made of wooden planks."[18] We do not know who built the shed—in the whole family, only the narrator is willing to acknowledges its existence. The next sentence introduces a temporal distance, in addition to spatial, between the shed on the mountain and the home, through the temporality of repetition: "Every day, I'm organizing the drawers at home." It is within the space of the home that the narrator organizes their drawer against the wishes of their mother and father, who are triggered psycho-affectively into temporal paralysis and retrospection by the opening and closing of the drawer full of the narrator's "cherished items." The unnamed, unaged (presumably young by their desire to seek affirmation and clarity from their parents) narrator shares a home with their mother, father, and younger sister, though each keeps to their own "zone" outside of mealtimes:

> I'd been itching to finish organizing the drawer, but Mama kept working against me from the shadows. From the room next door, she walked to and fro, stirring up a *ta ta* noise, driving my thoughts all over the place. I wanted to forget those footsteps. . . My little

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[18] All uncited quotes in English from Can Xue's short-stories are my own translations.

> sister privately came to tell me, mother had been planning all this time to break my arm, because the sound of my opening and closing the drawer drove her insane, whenever she heard that sound she would painfully dunk her head into cold water, submerging herself until she came down with a serious cold.

What links the narrator's room to their mother's is not the home, but the *sound* (traveling through space as the words cannot) of restless footsteps that carry over what they are unable to communicate linguistically. Similarly, the mother is linked to the narrator through the sound of the opening and closing drawer, which "sounds" the narrator's desire to organize the drawer and forget the conditions that render it an interminable task. Only the younger sister is able to enter the narrator's space—privately, as a messenger to both the narrator and reader. Where the narrator keeps their thoughts in a drawer, the mother forcefully rejects them, dunking her head into cold water until her body rejects them as an illness.

At the height of the Cultural Revolution, the space of the urban home was turned inside out through the dislocation of "counterrevolutionaries" and urban youth to rural farms ("if not executed, [so-called counter-revolutionary] professors, teachers, and artists were sent for re-education to the countryside" (Raschke 72)) and the blurring of boundaries between public and private spaces of surveillance, broached by routine house inspections for "counterrevolutionary" materials:

> Under the moonlight, there were so many thieves loitering about this house of ours. When I turned on the light, I saw that the window had been poked by innumerable fingers with tiny holes. In the next room over, your and father's snores rang out ponderously, thundering so violently that the bottles and jars in the cupboard jumped about. I kicked at the bed

> frame, turning my swollen head, hearing that person locked in the small shed violently ramming against the wooden door, the sound persisting until daylight.

The rapidly shifting spatial focus between the perforated windows, the narrator's room, the "next room over" belonging to their parents whose snores shake the house, and a small shed in which a person vehemently attempts to escape (or knock themselves unconscious) conjure discrete spaces without spatial continuity (the narrator does not remark on walking into their parents' room, merely describing the sounds from within). Rather than spoken, material and psycho-affective impacts of persecution from state and local agents are spatialized—through sound—as hole-poked windows, "thundering" snores, and the door-ramming of the also unnamed (perhaps unnamable, insofar as they are "stripped" of exterior validation and internalized) person locked in the small shed.

Focalized through the narrator, the externality of space (from the outside window-pokers, parents, and shed hostage) collectively concentrates as a hostile encroachment upon the narrator's sense of *personal space*, which is then re-spatialized into their drawer:

> I discovered that [my family had] taken advantage of my absence to turn my drawer inside out; several dead moths and dead dragonflies had been thrown onto the ground, and they knew clearly these were things I cherished.

While it is easy, according to realist convention, to read the contents of the narrator's drawer as "grotesque" (or at the very least morbid, for being dead), in Can Xue's previous works (namely "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" (1968)), she has written on her childhood relationship to insects, flora and fauna of the rural outdoors, and how they constituted a dreamlike landscape of childhood fantasy and one-ness with an environment teeming with a vitality contrasting human privation. Given that many of her short stories reference one another in symbolic objects carried over, I argue the space of the drawer contains the narrator's nostalgia for a now-expired spatio-temporal childhood, and the "organizing" of these memories gestures to an attempt to reflect on but also hang on to the past to cope with the unfathomable, unwitness-able present.

The narrator's journey up the mountain, in contrast, is spatialized as almost infinite (in that way also a futurity), impossible to inhabit externally:

> One day, I decided to go up the mountain and see for myself. When the wind stopped, I went up; I walked for so long, the sunlight piercing me until my head swam and vision blurred, every single pebble scintillated with a small, white flame. Coughing, I wandered around the mountain. The salty sweat beaded upon my brows slid into my eyes, I couldn't see, I couldn't hear.

Despite being able to locate the mountain as directly behind their home, the journey up the mountain seems like a fever dream—beyond sight, beyond hearing, even, a spatial device of communication that had only been possible at home because the narrator was not alone, but in the company of their family, who were also making sounds. The shed can only be accessed through hearing when the narrator is at home, through the "violent ramming" of "the person" locked inside, a kind of "collective memory" traveling through space—a collective trauma, as Jiewen Liu (2021) argues, of people's desire (and inability) to escape the suffocating confinement of behavioral and thought policing in the countryside.

Yet we must be careful not to overdetermine all tension in the story through teleological confirmation bias as deriving solely from a historical political campaign that affected different regions and people in different ways.[19] It is de-colonially necessary to also observe from the source text that the narrator's main points of reference aside from the internally-externalized drawer and shed *are the other members of their family*, and the hole-poked window is part of, but not all, of what makes up the unnavigability of the home. The narrator's attempt to travel up to the shed on the mountain reflects an attempt to reconcile the "two categories [of externally referential] social memory and personal memory," a demonstration of "how personal memory intervenes with and reacts to historical 'truth'" (Chen 166). Taking the three spaces of the home, the drawer, and the small shed on the mountain together, what ties them to one another is not only an inversion (the home is public and the mountain is collectively private) and indexing of public and private space and memory, but also the juxtaposing of the interior-made-external spaces of the drawer and shed with the exterior-but-inaccessible spaces of their rooms and speech acts.

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[19] Honig and Zhao (2015) note, for example, that "in many places, the presence of sent-down youth created new economic relationships, involving the exchange of gifts, buying, selling and trading with locals" (502), and that many youth worked with peasants to develop sideline enterprises aside from state-owned enterprises, and helped to pave roads, establish electricity, postal service and telephone service in remote areas such as Huma, at the northern tip of China.

Liu writes that "the dimension of time in Can Xue's novels is often blurred, the contextual setting is also significantly emptied out . . . the structures of the stories are largely constituted by a series of proliferating narrative symbols" (149). To the times symbolized in the space of the drawer (past), home (present), and shed (present-future), we can also add Abbott's (2008) "story-time" and "discourse-time." The story-time, relating to plot, is a circular and disembodied time of repeated attempts, while the discourse-time, relating to methods of representation, is metanarrativistic time (the implied author's anti-mimetic attempt to represent the un-witnessable). On the level of story-time, the implication of a time out of sync with external space is a time ruled by internal (mental) space. For the narrator who searches ceaselessly for meaning and clarity through the repetitive daily action of attempting to organize a drawer in their room, this is a cyclical, habitualized time. While the narrator is caught in the circular temporality of a thwarted attempt to "organize" their memories and past, their mother is caught in the circular temporality of attempting to avoid it:

> "Every time you come into my room to look for something, you scare me so badly I can't stop shivering." Mama cautiously eyed me, backing away towards the door; I saw that the flesh on one side of her face was absurdly spasming.

In the shared physical space of the home, these intergenerational relationships to time and memory are overlaid upon one another, proceeding simultaneously in disjointed spaces, unlinked conversations (one speaks but the other cannot listen) and daily preoccupations, as in a "chrono-lepsis," a constant jarring between linear historical time and circular psycho-affective time.

This "chrono-lepsis" is marked by "unwitnessed" dialogues in which speakers speak over one another according to their own internal temporalities, and cannot respond directly to one another on the same level, even during a shared mealtime:

> When we were eating, I said to them: "On the mountain, there's a small shed." Every one of them had buried their heads slurping noisily at the soup, likely indicating they hadn't heard what I said . . . "The sandstone on the mountain rumbled towards the back wall of our house, you were all so scared you worked up a cold sweat from the soles of your feet, don't you remember?"

In the narrator's call to remember, story-time (on the level of plot) and discourse-time (on the level of representation) bleed into one another, intertwining narratorial self, storytelling self, implied authorial self, and "actual" Chinese reader. A call to remember is not only a call to recall the contents of an event, but also a call to *narrativize it to yourself and others*.

The narrator who is attempting to confirm both their historical and psycho-affective internal reality by asking their parents to remember begins by trying to link up their internal space-times: "…to tell the truth, our whole family's seen it before. There is indeed a person crouched in there [in the shed], with two large, purple, fist-sized haloes below his eyes, the result of staying up all night.” Yet to this, their father responds (and redirects): “Every time you scrape against that chiseled stone when digging by the well, your mother and I are suspended mid-air, trembling, kicking with our bare feet, unable to tread ground.” Father avoided my gaze, turning towards the window.” On the level of story and discourse-time, the father is unable to look at, witness, and validate the narrator when speaking (story), leading the narrator to repetitively narrate their unsuccessful attempts to organize their drawer on their own, from the beginning of the text to the end (discourse).

I borrow from Genette’s (1972) distinctions between diegetic levels, and his term “metadiegetic” which implies a movement of attempting to break out of one’s current framework with the purpose of gaining greater clarity. At the metadiegetic level, the narrator literally attempts to break out of their circular internal temporality by trying to connect it to a relational, historical linearity, asking their parents to remember the impact and occurrence of historical events. The narrator’s persistence in attempting to “sort out” the past by organizing their drawer is also an attempt to reconnect and re-externalize the spatio-temporality of the home (as a vessel of intergenerational and interpersonal memory)—to achieve a kind of intellectual and affective closure and closeness with one’s fellow witnesses and family members at a historical time when children were officially encouraged and rewarded for reporting their family members for “reactionary” thoughts and behaviors.

By Abbott's (2008) definition, closure is “achieved” “when a narrative resolves a conflict” (82). In addition to the challenges to closure posed by the impossibly enmeshed linear-circular temporalties of each family member (who adapt to live in the historical present while caught in an internal loop of repetition), closure is also rendered inaccessible by the disjointed spatialities of the family members in the same physical space of the home. In “Small Shed on a Mountain,” the conflict is not only historical, but also internal, a conflict of remembering, and it cannot be "resolved" because it cannot be perfectly "remembered" or "rationalized" (re-embodied); therefore, its contents are projected onto space and objects, disembodied. This fragmented spatiality is reflected in each family member's own isolated "zone" in the home: the narrator has their drawer, the mother her room in which she endlessly paces, and the father is at the well attempting to retrieve a pair of beloved scissors he had lost (and which he had, in Can Xue's "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" (1968), used to repair his broken watch—his broken time). Finally, there is the externalized projection of an anguished, sleepless person trapped in the shed on the mountain, banging on the door. A short story with more closure would treat this mysterious figure as the main event, and the reveal of their identity or eventual escape would amount to a "resolution" of suspense. Can Xue, however, denies the reader's anticipations, denying closure at the level of expectations and questions (Abbott 2008):

> That day, I indeed went up the mountain again, I remember it vividly. At first, I sat in the armchair, placing both hands atop my knees, and then I opened the door, walking into the white light. I climbed the mountain, eyes brimming with the flames of white pebbles, there were no grapes, there was no small shed.

Not only have we been deceived as to the very external "reality" of the shed—we have been thrown for a discursive loop back to the "beginning" of the narration, with the narrator sitting in the armchair and placing both hands atop their knees. We cannot be sure that the "ending" of the text proceeds in linear historical time. As long as the narrator keeps attempting to organize their drawer (and they never claim to have stopped), they will likely continue to attempt their journey up the mountain, and continue to hear a person ramming against the shed door on the mountain.

I do not read this external deception as a passive nihilistic dismissal, but rather an actively deconstructive anti-mimetic reflection of the disconnection between internal/external space-times, significant as an event in and of itself: the externalization of the shed as an unknowable and inaccessible memory is a way for the narrator to compartmentalize and organize the past and present, in a way that allows them to survive the real by placing a barrier between themselves and the reality. The disconnection between external and internal time-space endlessly defers closure, not merely in the manner of an "open-ended" or "open-signification" conclusion (in Rabinowitz's (2002) applications of closure), but also in the way of a metanarrative in which the process of "completion" or "closure" is always *already incomplete* in one's traumatic relationship to intergenerational memory. The search for clarity and connection persists, endlessly—it is precisely, never completed, and the baton is handed off to the reader.

I argue that this kind of anti-mimetic deceptive closure actually "opens," at the level of affective resignification, the existence of *possible internal worlds* in an *impossible external world.* According to Alice Bell and Marie-Laure Ryan (2019), "If we associate possibility with respect of the laws of logic (non- contradiction and excluded middle), impossible worlds could be defined as collections of values for propositions that defy these laws" (5). But what is an anti-mimetic possible world[20]? Is it the shed on the mountain, the drawer? In the end, the story "closes" on a disavowal of the externality of the possible worlds of the drawer and shed, which I read not merely as a simple "aesthetics of negation," but also an "aesthetics of positive symbolics." While these possible worlds cannot be externalized insofar as the state continues to perpetuate thought-policing and mass-surveillance despite condemning the very same policies in the Cultural Revolution as a "dark period of history," they constitute a discursive resistance to the silencing of historical time.

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[20] In other words, where do we locate an anti-realist reality, a possible alternate world with its own logics?

Bakhtin notes that “a literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope” (16). However, “unity” between external and internal reality in Can Xue is precisely thrown into confusion, only apprehensible via anti-mimetic representations of familial yet defamiliarized space and time in crisis. The act of translating this “crisis space and time” for Anglophone ethnological and literary consumption directly interpolates its local dimensions into a global crisis of capitalism (which has its own logics of time and space), thus requiring decolonial intervention from the outset.

Chapter 3: “Worlding” Can Xue’s “Small Shed on a Mountain” (1985) in English Translation

If we consider Can Xue’s deconstruction of realism and the lineal temporality of nation-state modernity to be hallmarks of avant-gardist impulses, how might we envision *translating* these impulses—decolonizing or “avant-garding” the English translation? The only English version of “Small Shed on a Mountain” that currently exists in publication is Ronald R. Janssen and Jian Zhang’s version published in 1989 in the collection *Dialogues in Paradise* (《天堂里的对话》) by Northwestern University Press, translated as “Hut on the Mountain.” The title 《山上的小屋》 translates literally as “mountain’s small room/house,” and the only descriptions of the structure in the source text are its wood-plank composition (“木板搭起来的” (Xue 2004, 67)) and the fact that it has a fir bark roof (“杉木皮搭成的屋顶” (67)). “Cabin” would speak to the structure’s wooden composition, but “small cabin” signifies a much more *Walden*-esque seclusion by choice in translation than it does in the source text.

“Hut” in the Merriam Webster dictionary denotes an “often small and temporary dwelling of simple construction; shack,” or “a simple shelter from the elements,” but has also been over-determinedly applied to describe “primitive” dwellings of Indigenous peoples since Columbus’ encroachment of the Americas in 1492. As gleaned from Edward Hale’s translations of Columbus’ letters and journals: upon “discovering” Haiti, “Columbus then sent out nine men, with an Indian, who found a town of a thousand huts” (Hale 36). Joseph Conrad re-entrenches the “primitivism” signified by “huts” in *Heart of Darkness* (1899): “the huts gaped black, rotting, all askew within the fallen enclosures” (Conrad 7); “I lived in a hut in the yard, but to be out of the chaos I would sometimes get into the accountant’s office” (15); “he lived all alone in a clay hut with a sort of veranda” (19). It doesn’t matter what the structure is made of—animal skin, clay, or wood, if it belongs to a "primitive" colonial subject, it is a "hut." Other than being qualified as "small," there is no indication in the source text that this structure, enforced on all sides by wood sturdy enough to withstand constant ramming and wind, would be accurately described and prescribed as a "hut" by any colonial figure (other than that of the translator, potentially).

I opted for "shed" to delink from the ethnographic differentiation in the term "hut" and allow this structure to enter into a spatialized relationship to the narrator's family home (from which it is first invoked), since wooden sheds are often built as additions to a home to store what cannot be safely kept in the home (often garden equipment, ladders, mechanical tools, etc.). Crucially, in the source text, the Chinese signifier referring to the structure in the title is the same one used continuously to refer to rooms within the narrator's home. Another option would be "Small Room on the Mountain," but in English rooms are seldom standalone structures, rather parts of a house, whereas in Chinese it can signify both. Janssen and Zhang then translate "'抽屉永生永世也清理不好，哼。' 妈妈说，朝我做出一个虚伪的笑容" (Xue 67) (literally: "'the drawer will forever be unorganized, *heng*.' Mama said, towards me making an artificial smile") as "'Huh, you'll never get done with those drawers,' said Mother, forcing a smile. 'Not in your lifetime'" (Janssen and Zhang 47), reducing an abstract "forever" to a concrete "your lifetime," failing to translate the derision in the mother's scoff at the end, and not distinguishing between when then narrator describes their mother as "mama" and "mother" ("妈妈" and "母亲"), two tonally different registers that would allow for more affectively-nuanced readings of the text and its relationships therein.

The fact that Janssen and Zhang flatten the mother as "mother" (rather than "mama") holds implications for their translation of the first speech act the narrator engages in with their mother, which in the source texts reads "'所有的人的耳朵都出了毛病。' 我憋着一口气说下去 . . ."

(67) (literally: “‘everyone’s ears all have something wrong with them.’ I held my breath and continued . . .”). Janssen and Zhang translate this as “‘There’s something wrong with everyone ears,’ I said with suppressed annoyance” (47), not only adding in the emotion of “annoyance” directed at the “mother,” but also failing to note the condensed spatiality in the act of trying to speak: the narrator is *running out of breath* in attempting to find external validation and attestation to their external reality (that they have a problem with their hearing—that *they cannot hear one another meaningfully*). To feel annoyed is very different from feeling estranged and choked-up, and to feel annoyed *at one’s mother* rather than seeking answers from “mama” are also radically different frameworks of representing affective relationality. To keep these tensions and desires for closeness and closure, I kept the source text’s distinctions between “mama” and “mother.”

Janssen and Zhang’s “Hut on the Mountain” translation consistently reduces and redirects ambiguity and tensions in the source text, most crucially disambiguating the narrator’s referral to the mysterious inhabitant of the shed as “the man locked up in the hut” (47), when the narrator refers most often to this subject as “that person,” only using a gender pronoun “he” in a later iteration of attempting to tell their parents of the shed, and leaving the person ungendered (and therefore possibly referring to anyone, even their mother) in their first speech act to their mother. Janssen and Zhang even overdetermine the gender of the narrator (possibly based on their assumption of autobiographical authorship) in translating “我回家时在房门外站了一会，看见镜子里那个人鞋上沾满了湿泥巴，眼圈周围浮着两大团紫晕” (67) (literally: “When I came home I stood outside the front door for a while, seeing in the mirror the mud stained on that person’s shoes, the two large purple circles around their eyes”) as “When I reached home . . . I saw that the person reflected in the mirror had mud on her shoes and dark purple pouches under her eyes” (Janssen and Zhang 48, emphasis mine), rendering potentially generative readings of the source text's interior-made-exterior movement of the narrator and their family members *as the person in the shed* at different moments in time impossible. The colonial baggage of Mandarin-to-English translation is not only a question of mistranslation, but also omitted translation and disambiguated translation, as explored in the example of Janssen and Zhang's interpretations.

I argue for decolonial translations of "Small Shed on a Mountain" to suggest that the act of translating literature from Mandarin to English in the 21st century will always have to reckon with coloniality, whether the translator wishes to acknowledge the role of translation in neocolonialism or not. What I mean by this is: the translated, Anglicized text is marketized in an academic field still bound to Cold War epistemological practices (treating texts as "knowledge objects" from which historical claims to "objectivist truth" can be extracted through symptomatic, overdetermined readings that normalize colonial gazes and vocabularies). Don Mee Choi (2020) argues that translation, occupying a "deformation zone," is "a wound that makes impossible connections between languages, unsettling stable ideas of language" (4). Furthermore, "in a neocolonial zone, as Deleuze and Guattari have already noted, 'there is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language'" (5).

A decolonial translation *de-forms* dominant understandings of Western aesthetics ("grotesque" and "avant-garde") which have been valorized and removed from historical and material contexts. A decolonial translation of Can Xue values the manifold, not binary, frictions between witnessing, community and estrangement in the source text. To practice decolonial thinking in translation is to unsettle stabilized representations of Chinese history as "backwards." To be constructed as "backwards" is to be produced as "behind time," separate from a stable "normal time." Yet the "future progress" promised by modern, capitalist time only exists insofar it engages in *temporal theft* through profit extraction from the very bodies declared "behind time."

In other words, the process of translation into English does not "progress" the source text as a piece of "world" literature, but rather destabilizes both source and translated texts, which enter into temporally nonlinear, asymmetric cross-cultural and cross-historical commercial relationships.

The neocolonial double-bind that Frank Chin (1991) has criticized facing linguistically nonhegemonic translators to resist erasure (underrepresentation) *and* exoticization (overrepresentation) in translation necessitates a greater, not lesser, engagement with decolonial theory and global linkages. Elaine Kim's research on early missionaries' exoticized translations of "see" (*kan jian)* in Chinese to "look-see" in English, "conversation' (*liao yi liao*) as 'talk-a-talk,' 'weather' (*tian qi*) as 'heaven's breath' and 'American' (*mei guo*) as 'land of Mei' (Wang 9) illustrate an ethnographic bent inherent to viewing translation as a forensic curiosity, rather than a semantic and syntactically historicized production. Zhang Longxi (2022) argues "there is nothing inherently benign in the concept of 'foreignization' in translation" (32) in response to a non-Chinese speaking reviewer's assumption that "Chinese as an oriental language must be fundamentally different from English or any other Western language and . . . smooth translation must have erased the radical difference and rendered invisible the foreignness of those very foreign texts" (32).

A decolonial translation picks up this argument and steers it away from uncritically championing "domesticated" translations, rather seeing the deconstruction of this binary itself and visibilizing (in Venuti's terms) the positionalities of its translators as integral to decentering the hegemonic gaze of the Anglophone market in the production of "world (Anglophone) literature." In the foreign/domestic dichotomy as applied in the 21st century, one concept cannot exist without the other, and the discursive opposition of these two identities actually reinforces an epistemological violence that declares difference from Western norms must be hollowed out (domesticated) by commercialization to be engaged meaningfully, or else discursively hollowed out by the logic of neo-coloniality, which holds the other as “foreign” by “objective” markers of wealth and technology at the same time this wealth and technology is only produced materially by racial capitalism and slavery, and the extraction of futures and wealth *from the very same “other” now declared a priori to be ontologically disadvantaged.*

A. Berman (1999) and T. Niranjana (1992) historicize 19th century German Romanticist (notably Goethe and Schleiermacher) foreignizing/domesticating frameworks as a critique of “the [European theocentric] dualist model of translation, which distinguishes an original from a copy” (Rao 73). This dualism suited the rhetoric of colonization, in which “Europe was regarded as the great Original, and the colonies were therefore copies, or ‘translations’ of Europe” (Bassnett 1999, 4, quoted in Rao 74). Seemingly disengaged from the rhetoric of coloniality, Schleiermacher distinguished between “business/trade” translation and interpreting, and a much more valorized “creative” literary and scientific translation, leaving us, on the one hand, with a useful historical perspective of his position on specialized translation fields at the time. On the other hand, the uncritical distinction between “trade” and “literary” translation obscures the fact that literary translation in the Mandarin-to-English case *has always simultaneously supported a “trade” built on knowledge-practices inherited from Western missionaries and businessmen* whose governments called on them to “civilize” and “commercialize” China, and who went on to establish the first Chinese language and literature departments in the United States (at Yale and Harvard in the late 19th century). As such, discourses of foreignizing versus domesticating Chinese texts are intimately linked to the discursive opposition between the universal/particular. The debate on whether to “foreignize” or “domesticate” *an already foreignized* text is keenly appropriated as a debate between ethnographically "particularizing" or erasing one's ethnicity to "universalize" a text in translation.

According to Naoki Sakai, "universalism and particularism reinforce and supplement each other . . . to form a symmetrical, mutually supporting relationship by every means in order to avoid a dialogic encounter which would necessarily jeopardize their reputedly secure and harmonized monologic worlds" (Sakai 1989, 105, quoted in Chow 193). As such, Chow argues nationalism as a particularism is not a critique of universalism, but a component of it. A decolonial translation deconstructs a text as over-determinedly allegorizing a nation-state while at the same time recognizing and decentering commercialized exoticization driven by hegemonic gazes that market world literature *to national markets* (the "worldness" of Can Xue is gatekept by the American academy and publishing industry). Another way to delink from translation as a colonial trade and epistemology is to approach texts diachronically, rather than exclusively synchronically (which risks essentializing one moment as representative of the *entirety of an ethnicity-as-such*).

I now turn to contextualize "Small Shed on a Mountain" diachronically among Can Xue's other works, which have gained considerably less attention, as "Small Shed on a Mountain" has taken on a problematically emblematic role as the posterchild of 80s trauma literature with an avant-garde bent. In re-engaging several of Can Xue's short[21] and mid-length stories together, I argue for a re-grounding of the "avant-garde" not in fetishizations of individualism (as a gateway to neoliberal universalism), but in the relationalities *between* individuals seeking to contest hegemonic norms. Through relational analyses, I seek to read the bodies in Can Xue's source texts not as stable or pathologized trauma bodies, but as bodies transforming signs of trauma into possibilities of alternate realities through magical realism.

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[21] By "short" story, I mean stories of roughly ten pages or less.

Chapter 4: Magical-Traumatic Realism as Decolonial Praxis in "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" (1968), "Small Shed on a Mountain" (1985) and "Apple Tree in the Corridor" (1987)

I propose to closely and diachronically read Can Xue's semi-autobiographical "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" (first published in 1968 in《中国》), "Small Shed on a Mountain" (1985,《人民文学》) and "Apple Tree in the Corridor" (1987,《钟山》) as a literary embodiment of intergenerational memories grounded in the context of family witnessing rather than national allegories or apolitical universalist aesthetics. Read this way, we can track changes in the child narrator's bodily relationship with modes of representation from age six in "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" to likely a teen or young adult in "Small Shed on a Mountain" to an adult (around thirty-five years old) in "Apple Tree in the Corridor." In reading Can Xue's works this way, we not only grapple with non-normative (non-lineal) temporalities of delayed trauma-processing, but also relational memories socialized as family memories. The child's fantastical relationship to trauma, resilience and wonder through magical realism in "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" gives way to alienated traumatic realism in "Small Shed on a Mountain," and is later re-infused with magical elements in "Apple Tree in the Corridor." In this final text, magical realism matures as a powerful and persuasive subversion of traditional realism (in which internal subjectivity corresponds to external reality), creating a possibility for decolonial approaches to memory and representations of truth.

If, according to Paul Ricoeur's (2004) understanding, natural memory imprints the historical "event" (as realist sign), while artificial memory conversely *fantasizes* it (as magical sign), where do we locate along these poles a magical-traumatic realist relationship to one's memory and trauma? When traumatic natural memory is either blocked, forgotten in reserve, or of traumatized necessity disembodied, where in the realist, objective, postmodern world can natural memory go? The natural memory (the realist sign) can only transform (magical-ize) itself to survive. Through magical-traumatic realism, the collective, family memories of Can Xue's characters absorb the individual's incapacity for direct processing, forming a fabric of intergenerational, re-embodied temporality. In both traumatic realism (originating in Holocaust literature discourses) and magical realism (originating in Latin American literature discourses), there is an inherent transformation of the natural/artificial divide, in that the artificial is no longer strictly “false” or “fantastical,” but becomes the *real* expression of the *natural* imprint of the traumatized body's lived time and space. Can Xue's “Small Shed on a Mountain,” “The Beautiful Summer of the South” and “Apple Tree in a Corridor” cannot be considered pure memoir (“natural”) of the past nor pure fantasy (artificial), but rather a dialogue between traumatic juxtaposition and magical transformation that takes place in the present body, the passed-down generational body, and the body of family memories held by bodies occupying shared space and time. What is “real” or “true” to Can Xue is not the realist, Platonic likeness to the external appearance of the original, but the “essence” of that event, its nature as experienced by human beings in their traumatic psycho-spatial[22] temporality.

Ricoeur observes of artificial memory that “the body—eventually the brain—or the soul joined to the body is no longer the support for this imprint [of the event], but rather the imagination considered as a spiritual power” (62). I argue the opposite, that magical-traumatic realism, by mediating between imagination and physicality, re-embodies rather than leaves behind the original event (the experience of the event) through representations of bodily distortion and illness. This re-embodied trauma is by nature intergenerational, passed down literally as a next-generation body, similarly afflicted by body illnesses, mutations, and vulnerability to cold and hunger. What Ricoeur calls artificial (habit) aptly applies to traumatic memory: “spatialization obliterates temporalization. Not the [Aristotelian] spatiality of the lived body and its environing world, but that of the mind. . .memory no longer consists in recalling the past but in actualizing what has been learned and stored in a mental space” (62-63). But, with the faculties of magical realism, this “imaginative spatiality” actually *restores bodily externality* to the traumatized individual, subverting the superficially imposed divide which fails to account for pasts that “cannot be recalled” in a way that doesn't threaten the body in its current lived environment and official cultural memory. It would seem that natural memory and realism are at first glance compatible. But in the case of traumatic postmemory writing, contrary to the definition of realism as a “mirror or of a window onto the world” (Rothberg 110), the mirror or window does not “show the world,” but rather the “surface of the world which has already been displaced from its signification (truth/false), its lived actuality.” Realism, idealism, and the mirror reflect a failure of the realist reality to be true to itself, true to the body and mind.

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[22] By “psycho-spatial” I mean the external, projected spatialization of one’s inner psychological world, such that an external object/place reflects what one’s internal mind cannot process, hold, or access.

In the early 20th century, Mexican poet and diplomat Octavio Paz described magical realism as “conceiving the universe as a[n] . . . animated [whole], and each part is in living communication with that whole. . .everything is anxious to get out of itself and to transform itself into something similar or into its opposite” (Warnes 13). The bodily and spatial tension of the object's anxiety to “get out of itself” is readily applicable to the compromised “unity” of traumatic memory and subjects, bound to the point of suffocation by the realism and ‘rationality’ which produced the conditions of global-local-personal trauma in the first place. Warnes further notes that “as the supernatural is (re)integrated into the realm of the natural by magical realist means, so is the age-old otherness of magic reimagined, reclaimed and recast. . .part of a much larger unfolding narrative about the nature of reality, about who gets to decide this and about how such definitions can be challenged and changed" (14). In other words, magical realism is an innately subversive challenge to rationalist realism in its ability to re-embody and re-frame links between signifiers and signified in a way that reflects the *othering* of the magical (traumatic) subject and their memories by traumatic events causing the ironic rupture between realist signifiers and what is phenomenologically, psycho-affectively experienced.

Magical-traumatic realism thus "speaks from the margin" in its ironic treatment of official signifier-signified legitimacy as memorialized in official cultural memory, realism and modernism. German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 coined the term magical realism to describe "various types of painting in which objects are depicted with photographic naturalism but which because of paradoxical elements or strange juxtapositions convey a feeling of unreality" (D'Haen 1995, 191)—it is precisely this "strange juxtaposition" of traumatic "unreality" which magical realism is aptly equipped to represent. Ignacio Lopez-Calvo (2014) positions magical realism as an organic growth in Latin America in response to Freudian surrealism (which one of its founders, Andre Breton (1924), defined as "the belief in the superior reality . . . of dream . . . the disinterested play of thought" characterized by "the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern" (26)) in France to move beyond Eurocentrism. Ignacio quotes from Luis Leal that magical realism's opposition to Freudian surrealism means its "key events have no logical or psychological explanation. The magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality (as the realists did) or to wound it (as the Surrealists did) but to seize the mystery that breathes behind things" (xxi), but I argue that a decolonial magical-traumatic realism in Can Xue can be read as attempt to represent a *non-Freudian-signified* psycho-affective phenomenal world. Magical-traumatic realism also functions in Can Xue to deconstruct, through defamiliarization and estrangement (i.e., the “avant-garde”), the *normalizing* impulse of magical realism (which treats all ‘extra-realistic’ phenomena as equal to ‘realistic’), introducing a productive tension and friction against hegemonic modes of representation.

As Wendy Faris (2004) argues, magical realism can radically intervene in “the dominant mode of realism in the West, challenging its basis of representation from within. That destabilization of a dominant form means that it has served as a particularly effective decolonizing agent” (Lopez-Calvo xviii). I would add that depending how this magical realism is read (e.g., as a European “grotesque,” or as “mythic and therefore primitive and unscientific”), it can either reinscribe logics of coloniality (that the symbols in Can Xue are all indexes of “inherent historical and ethnic depravity and evil”) or present the reader with a means of deconstructing the expectations of both Socialist Realism ***and*** a neoliberal multiculturalism that uncritically posits world citizenship as salvation.

Ben Holgate (2020) attributes the rise of magical realism in 1980s China as well as East Asia at large to “contemporary issues that result from modernity, market-oriented economies, authoritarian political regimes and the erosion of traditional culture and values” (182). To this I add that magical realism in China specifically responds to an intensified flux of condensation and elongation of temporality in the 20th century. First, Chinese anti-imperialist modernity rapidly condensed time and space through industrialization and urbanization. Then, urban-rural stratification and anticolonial warfare suspended space and time through starvation and exile. In the 80s and 90s, new forms of alienation under rapid capitalization (through inflow of foreign direct investments) re-condensed time and space. The subsequent neoliberal narratives of progress and state-mediated cultural citizenship suspended time-space again by violently disallowing reflective engagement with postcoloniality and popular participation in politics.

Holgate grants Mo Yan, Yan Lianke and Yu Hua central positions in Chinese magical realism, Mo Yan for his deployment of the supernatural "as a strategy to reimagine an alternative historiography for China, thereby exposing the official history constructed by the CCP" (185) and Yan Lianke for his mythorealism which "captures a hidden internal logic contained within China's reality" (194). Can Xue is, in contrast, an overlooked postmemory and magical-traumatic realist writer in the sense of lack of attention to her use of magical realism. Her deployment of magical realism is overlooked not merely in the allegorical or mythorealist mode which grapples with power dynamics and people's roles in relation to one another, but also in the magical-traumatic realist mode which revels in the rupture and re-embodiment of intergenerational memories and trauma through an emphasis on the reflexive transformation between internal and external time and space. This dismissal, I argue, is partly due to a lack of engagement with what magical realism can offer, beyond national allegories or survivor memoirs.

Ato Quayson (2020) distinguishes between iconicity, "more symbolic and allegorical than historical or real," and a historically factual "indexicality" which "points in a more or less direct way to the recognisable world outside of the text" (83), harkening to Ricoeur's natural/artificial binary. However, in the case of magical-traumatic realism, the "index" is also the "icon" which is also the real experience. In her essay "The 3D World," Can Xue writes that her works "on the surface seem clouded, unfamiliar, strange, without structure. . . [but that, under the text] a kind of structure will begin to gradually emerge . . . profound logic . . . facing an ever-extending future" (79).[23] The family home and externally spatialized self in Can Xue as symbolic index of a "profound logic . . . facing an ever-extending future" is an emblematic feature of magical-traumatic realist postmemory writing, wherein time and space become a chaotic flux of internal and external in a forever-delayed balance characteristic of the fragmentary and reflexive postmodern subject. Can Xue herself characterizes her “new experimental literature” as an experimental spatial-temporality where the discourse of truth proceeds internally: in contrast to the realist, objective norm, the external world now becomes a reflection of one's internal world, long-suppressed by the external.

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[23] Can Xue's personal essays cited in this essay are translated by myself from *Can Xue Literary Recollections* (2017).

We start with a six-year-old’s perception of the magical unity between the ‘natural’ and internal world in “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South” (1968). The story-time recalls 1959, both when The Great Leap was underway and when Can Xue's entire family was punitively uprooted from their housing provided by the newspaper her father worked at, to the countryside. The magical realism imparted to the child via their grandmother is a legacy of survival and family memory, framed by an external spatiality of grasshoppers and long-horned beetles' cries waking the child from their dreams. The child notes how under the moonlight, threads of white smoke curl up from their grandmother's hair, originally from her (empty) stomach. Her hair is likely white in old age, conflated with smoke as something having being burnt away, like the meals she cooks but gives to the children instead of eating herself. “As long as you hold your breath and listen carefully, you'll be able to hear a kind of sound” (4), the grandmother says. i.e., as long as you become aware of your own body and hold it in suspense, you'll be able to integrate into a kind of awareness and unity with the entire natural world around you.

When the child cries out in fear of the dark at night on their walk to the latrine, their grandmother comes running, coughing (likely from widespread tuberculosis) with a burning torch, advising the child to “想一些红的，亮的，发光的东西” (“think of some red, bright, glowing things”) (5) (foreshadowing the child's beacon of alternative hope in Mo Yan’s “The Transparent Red Radish” (1985)). The child distinguishes between ‘light’ and ‘dark’ soundscapes, beetles, grasshoppers and sunlight occupying the former while crickets and winter occupy the latter. Ricoeur writes that “the social framework ceases to be simply an objective notion and becomes a dimension [i.e., time, space] inherent in the work of recollection” (122)—thus from the child's memory, the figure of the grandmother and her values become the foundation of truth for the child: the grandmother becomes the zero point against which the external world is to be measured as truthful or deceitful.

Can Xue freely admits that her grandmother was easily the closest family member to her in her childhood; she lived spatially and temporally separate from her parents, who were more often away at re-education camps. Family memory occupies not only a common temporal and geographical space, but also a shared pool of values, contested or absorbed. The supernatural strength of character embodied in the figure of the grandmother is constructed by the child, who notes that their grandmother “must've been an energetic, beautiful young woman in the past. Her teeth were white and sturdy, able to bite through metal wire” (6). The image of the metal wire, unattached to any specific contraption, becomes an image of a cage or fence, in other words, a boundary. Kluger's mapping of the concentrationary (i.e., internment) universe through repetition of boundary image of “barbed wire” becomes “a tool for prying open the multiplicity of relations within the camps and between victims and their nonvictimized contemporaries” (Rothberg 130), and also features as an artifact of intergenerational postmemory in Can Xue. The figure of the grandmother, who can bite through wire, who can break through the superficially-imposed separation between inside and outside, is all the more magical for her absorption into the natural world, her intimate knowledge of every single grass and herb on the mountain which enabled the children to survive the starvation of the Great Leap.[24] The grandmother who regularly fasted and was engaged in heavy manual labor eventually died of oedema (excess of watery fluid from malnutrition), shared by the family members in “Small Shed on a Mountain” and “Apple Tree in a Corridor” who all suffer from water-bloated, swollen limbs.

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[24] When calm, the grandmother would look out the window at the summer sun, smiling and asking the children if they remembered what happened in the summer—though we are never privy to the which event exactly the

The contradiction between a child's magical view of their grandmother and the physical reality of malnutrition and starvation threatens the child's mental fortress, forcing them to confront the notion of mortality as borderland. After their grandmother dies, the child overhears from other adults of their father's heart disease. “In that dark, dark night, my small heart *thump-thump-thumped*, ears alert for the snoring from the room next door; an unbearably cold, lonely horror gripped me, my heart from warm compassion twisting into a knot” (Xue 2000, 10). With regards to the deathly still mountain ranges outside and the sky full of stars, for the first time the child has a strange, fearful thought (that there was no magical unity, perhaps?), and they are afraid to wake up in the middle of the night, alone. The child notes that the doctor had said many times before their father wouldn't live past 50, but he had already lived to 57, like Can Xue's own father.

According to her essay “The Hovering Black Cloak,” Can Xue, too, had overheard at age five that her father, due to heart disease, would not live past 50. She was numbed, frightened and panicked, preoccupied with thoughts of death and bodily impermanence. During the day she kept her mind occupied, but at night she “ultimately realized: you can never escape the poisonous snakes, in one's life journey, one ultimately walks alongside them” (26), responding to the grandmother’s advice to the child in “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South” to circle around behind snakes to stay out of their grasp. The extremity of death in contrast to the normalization of life shakes up the child's notion of truth as the timeless, glowing, red object that they latch desperately onto, like the dawn sun that rises the next morning, foreshadowing their delayed

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grandmother is referencing. The grown-up child in “Apple Tree in a Corridor” later tries to tell his mother of “what happened in the summer”, connecting the two works psycho-spatially.

confrontation with the fear of the failure of magic—the fear of the failure of a hopeful, happy truth to be externally true.

As a prefiguration of fully disembodied traumatic realism of the home and shed in “Small Shed on a Mountain,” the specter of death in “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South” gestures to conspicuous absence, the “traces of trauma” which “preserve and even expose the abyss between everyday reality and real extremity” (Rothberg 139). It is against this absence and trauma that the child struggles to maintain their magical internal/external unity, imagining the candy their dying grandmother gives them contains her blood because it is sweet, and continuing the habit of holding their breath and listening for some kind of external validation of their internal hope. The child notes that in 1962, “by the time we'd finished eating our father's clothes of nicer materials[25], the hardest days were over. Father still had one leather jacket, bought for 300 yuan” (Xue 2000, 8). This leather jacket figures prominently in “Apple Tree in a Corridor” as a sign of the father's absence from home and the ironic failure of his idealism to yield corresponding external results.

In “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South,” the child notes their father kept a watch which was slow by half an hour every day, using a pair of scissors to open the watch cover and adjust the time. This effort was in vain, but the father never minded; he was happy to fix the watch anew. Temporality (the watch) is broken, the link between idealism and external reality is broken, but the father reorients himself in his persistence: when trimming his toenails, his poor eyesight aways resulted in cut skin and toes speckled with blood, but he persisted, going so far as to apply ringworm pesticide. When the child points out the pesticide hasn't done much good for the father's feet, the father again denies this. Like the superhuman diligence of the grandmother, the child notes that “perhaps precisely because of this superhuman stubbornness, to this day he has maintained high spirits" (10). But is stubbornness alone enough? The beautiful days spent with their grandmother end with the ominous start of house-searching and anti-rightists jumping in fear at the ringworm pesticide, which the child cheekily points out is "toxic." To willfully apply toxins to oneself in the name of idealism is to conflate the idealism with toxicity, absorbed and expressed by bodily illness that the narrator in "Small Shed on a Mountain" attempts to speak and organize into truth.

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[25] In the absence of other edible options.

"The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" exists in the space of intergenerational family isolated from social support; still, the father's and even the child's body nonetheless remember. The child on the cusp of traumatic realization of the incompatibility between the extreme and the ordinary, and of the fruitlessness of their father's denial of this incompatibility, lays the temporal and representational foundation for "Small Shed on a Mountain," in which traumatic experience "has become distorted in its submersion" (Laub 76). The internal/external magical and bodily spatiality constructed by the grandmother and child in "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" morphs into the concentrationary space of the home in "Small Shed on a Mountain" (haunted by the recurring howls of wolves in the night) through the "recognition that this space can only be represented traumatically as the registration of a repetitive structure of *time*" (Rothberg 100).

In "Small Shed on a Mountain," the space and time of trauma is the family home where one eats, sleeps, and ages—where one's body is engaged in repetitive routine, which normalizes the extreme but also heightens the degree of tension and stress in one's body at its baseline, the two "at once held together and kept forever apart" in the mode of traumatic realism (129-130). Trauma is cited by Kim Etherington et al. (2003) as "the origin of neurosis [i.e., a distorted perception of reality, or rather, a perception of distorted reality]: the state of condition caused by a physical or emotional shock." The very definition of trauma documents a departure from a realist perception of reality by the unthinkable made possible, in which case “if people feel there is something they can do in a catastrophic situation, some control they can exert, no matter how minor, they fare far better emotionally than do those who feel utterly helpless” (22). Thus, the “Beautiful Summer Days of the South” child-turned-adolescent or young adult in “Small Shed on a Mountain” ceaselessly attempts to organize the contents of a drawer, trying to safekeep cherished memories signified by insects and moths from the southern summer landscape of their childhood, trying to keep a rational metanarrative of reality alive in the externalized self-witness in the shed, precisely impossible because the reality defies rationality.

Etherington et al. further note that “when a child's mind becomes overwhelmed as a result of trauma the 'physical self' can split from the ‘mental self’ . . . emotions are not expressed directly [but] the body continues to respond to the emotion” (29). As a continuation of the child who is unable to fathom the death of their grandmother and forecasted death of their father in “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South,” the young narrator in “Small Shed on a Mountain” effectively splits their physical self from their emotional self in signifying their own memories as insect corpses in a physical drawer and as a disembodied alter-self locked in a Small Shed on a Mountain. Can the narrator still be a witness to themselves if they have split themselves (mind/body) apart?

Ricoeur states that “displacements of the body and even its remaining in place cannot be spoken of, nor even thought, nor even at the limit experienced without some, at least allusive, reference to points, lines, surfaces, volumes, distances” (150)—thus justifying the mountain, the shed, and the rooms as psycho-spatial externalizations of internal experience. Witnessing is outsourced, in a sense, to the natural, external world as a substitute for the absent mind. While every family member in “Small Shed on a Mountain” responds anxiously to delinked reality-realism by sweating from the soles of their feet every night, and the mother's hand is described as cold and dripping water (again referencing the bloated, watery condition of oedema in response to malnutrition), there is no emotion attached to this symptom. Only when the contents of the drawer are purposely disturbed are the narrator's “mind . . . all a mess” (Xue 2004, 339); their emotion has been signified onto the insects from the magical-natural world. However, as Ricoeur previously noted that social relationships form a dimension of memory, and given that dimensionality is spatio-temporal, the cramped, stifling spatiality of the home in the story echoes the stifling denial of memory by the narrator's family members, who desperately ensure that the narrator's drawer of cherished memories can never be completely recalled. The self-censorship of others who claim to “reorganize” the narrator's drawer while throwing its contents on the floor, denies a space for the narrator's memories to inhabit; instead, these memories become diffused, timeless, spaceless, disembodied, and haunting, prefiguring the haunted corridor in “Apple Tree in the Corridor.”

The narrator who comes to realize the ironic falsity in their father's pursuit of idealism in “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South” has become an even more critical narrator in “Small Shed on a Mountain”; there is an attempt to re-embody self and memory in the narrator's sweaty, dizzy excursions to the mountain, which are always derailed by blinding force of sunlight (no longer the warm sunlight—the positive relationship between internal and external worlds—of childhood). Upon return, the narrator sees “a person” in the mirror, splattered with mud and eyes rimmed with purple. The realist representation of the self (the mirror) maintains the dis-embodiment of mind and body. This abyss between internal and external worlds is further externalized through the figure of the window as a boundary between private space intruded upon by the public, poked through with holes. The realist window, the realist mirror, presents the narrator with a boundary beyond which the rational, objective reality fails to be understood in any rational manner. One sees but one cannot process what one sees. The narrator reaches for realism but cannot really represent and liberate themselves through realism (a “real” shed on the mountain).

Even though the narrator attempts to cross this “unspeakable” boundary through the imperative to tell, unlike their grandmother who was able to tell them how to survive as still-developing child, the traumatized individual who tells is not saying anything other traumatized individuals don't already know. The narrator in “Small Shed on a Mountain” attempts to draw the family members into a psycho-temporally shared space in the question “do you remember,” to fix a relationally validated referentiality to their suppressed internal worlds. But their father simply glares, and they realized he turned into a wolf among the pack at night, prowling around the house. Given Can Xue's father's “counter-revolutionary” label during the Cultural Revolution, he was one of the “Four Types (landlords, [“]rich[”] peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and bad elements) (Su 39)” under community surveillance, visited at night by armed militiamen who would inspect the house; the father's vilification as a ‘wolf’ is likely how he was labeled by the party.

In contrast to the father who was content to fix his broken watch with scissors every day in “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South,” the father now admits: “Every time you dig . . . me and your mother become suspended in midair, shaking, trying to tread ground . . . at the bottom of that well, there's a pair of scissors I dropped. In my dreams I secretly swore to myself, I would get it back. . .I've been troubled by this matter for decades” (340). The scissors with which the child's father fixed his watch, giving the illusion of thereby fixing his traumatic temporality within the paradigms of idealism, has since morphed into his sign of trauma, an index of trauma that “points to a necessary absence” (Rothberg 104) of external truth validated by internal idealism.

The family is then left to externalize their internal memories and truths through geological referents of space: mountains, forests, and sheds, hence why the narrator attempts to “see for themselves” the matter of the shed in the mountains. But in the end, when the narrator presses the matter to its impossible realist conclusion, there is no shed on the mountain, echoing the grandmother's statement of there being no magic or ghosts. The internal memory and self which has been disfigured will not find any objective, realist representation of the fact, precisely a traumatic realization-in-itself. “Traumatic realism develops out of and in response to the demand for documentation that an extreme historical event poses to those who would seek to understand it. 'Documentation' consists of two elements—reference and narrative—that correspond to its nominal and verbal meanings” (Rothberg 100). The narrator who attempted, as best they could, to “safekeep” their own memories and witnessing of their external historical reality through compartmentalization and projection was unable to do so in a realist mode, but their body nonetheless documented it through sweating, eye bags, and a torn mind. These traumatized internal and bodily landscapes cannot be reached in the realist, rationale mode, but can be represented *as* misaligned and reclaimed through magical-traumatic realist re-signification, as is the case of “Apple Tree in the Corridor.” In this longer work, the adult narrator Awen, gendered as “he,” knows he is traumatized and turns to internal re-alignment of relationality rather than a realist search for an external shed.

The documentation traumatic realistic texts seek moves beyond direct 1:1 realist signification but still rests on some kind of narrative construction, formed by “a socially shared universe of meaning. . .defamiliarized by its inextricability form an other world: in this case, the concentrationary universe” (Rothberg 140). This “socially shared universe” in these three Can Xue works is the space of the family home, intergenerational memory connecting the psycho-spatiality of wide-open summer days and the closed-in shed. Halbwachs notes “each family has its proper mentality, its memories which it alone commemorates, and its secrets that are revealed only to its members” (59), and this notion of the “secret memory” in a “secret, internal space” becomes the central issue for the now-grown-up Awen: “Everyone in my family has a secret they cannot reveal to others, those secrets are necessarily terrifying” (Xue 1998, 85). As traumatic realism aims to not to express mimetically but transform the trauma’s relationship to its readers and subjects, I argue magical realism in Can Xue also transforms its traumatized subjects and readers, enabling them to see and feel themselves as bodied, reflexive subjects (recall that in magical realism “everything is anxious to get out of itself and to transform itself into something similar or into its opposite” (Warnes 13), to re-embody and re-signify meaning).

Just as in “Small Shed on a Mountain,” everyone in the “Apple Tree in the Corridor” extended family has a secret, played out in a single physical and emotional corridor of intergenerational lived space, time and memory. This passage between their internal rooms and external reality is also the distance between their memories as members of different generations and experiences; the distance between each room marks the inability of each family member to communicate, to witness, another. When they communicate, it is often in the non-Freudian dreamscape, significant to Can Xue as noted in “The Three Levels of Internal Life” as an expression of the “fundamental essence of things . . . [where] the self also becomes an object, an Other” (70). According to her essay, the first level is the chaotic surface phenomena one observes and thinks about, the second the dream world, and the third the level of artistic, intellectual creation and representation made by the “human spirit.”

Where windows in “Small Shed on a Mountain” were the mediation between public and private, internal and external space, the corridor becomes the passageway facilitating internal to external passage. In contrast to “Small Shed on a Mountain” where the family seals themselves in their rooms, the family in “Apple Tree in the Corridor” is eager to exit physically or emotionally from their rooms, to escape to the mountains, the temple, or in suitcases under the bed. Rather than sifting through cherished insect-memories in a drawer, the family puts their own body into their drawers—attempting to re-embody, and bury them. But as they all come out into the corridor at one point or another throughout their day, they are still burdened to cross the internal/external reality divide, yearning for the transformation of the self and body in magical-traumatic realism which would give their traumas a safe space to inhabit.

At night, as in “Small Shed on a Mountain” and “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South,” the corridor takes on a haunting, ghostly, terrifying quality, absorbing what the family members cannot express to each other and themselves. In “Small Shed on a Mountain” the narrator determines something is wrong with everyone's hearing, and Awen similarly comments on something being wrong with everyone's eyesight, as they all pretend not to see one another struggling. What has changed is that the void of the corridor expands the traumatic spatiality of the shed: the corridor can be walked through, there can be and must be movement in this passageway, the psycho-spatial void can be traversed by the imperative to tell and be witnessed. Awen's 50-something year-old upstairs neighbor frequently strolls in his corridor, wanting to run into someone, having “no more hope for this life,” just wanting “to find someone to tell my story to” (126).

At night, a hand ceaselessly scratches against the wall, which Awen's third sister attributes to a piece of steel wire. “这勾起我无端的愁思” (“This triggers my irrational anxiety”) (101), she confesses to Awen. The steel wire that their grandmother could bite through with her superhuman teeth now scratches against the wall of their home incessantly, the external world no longer assimilable to the internal as a magical whole—rather a hook, the traumatic temporality that won't “let them off the hook.” One morning Awen wakes with swollen legs, and ventures outside under a poisonous sun (recall the movement from the generous southern sun in “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South” to the blinding sun in “Small Shed in a Mountain” now to a poisonous sun), confessing to an old man: “I've encountered so many people, I pull on their sleeves, wanting to tell somebody, but my capability of speech is tremendously obstructed” (101). The old man simply replies that the (poisonous) sunlight is wonderful, in effect applying the poison to his feet like the father in “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South,” self-censoring and censoring others too in the name of idealism.

While the father in “Small Shed on a Mountain” essentially pleads with the narrator not to trigger his own memories and painful inability to confront them, in “Apple Tree in the Corridor,” Awen dreams that his father to gives him permission to tell. In his dream, his father says: “You must talk about your horror. . .your endurance is very poor. . .We've all been there, myself and your mother; those vultures, we brought them upon us. In the beginning we had held our heads in our hands and cried" (140). While his father starts off validating the imperative to tell, he soon self-censors in the form of invalidating the use of telling; “everyone has been there,” thus the son's feelings are nothing special, which Awen pre-emptively realizes, self-deprecatingly remarking of himself that he was “speaking bitterness like a good-for-nothing.” His father encourages him to adapt to the environment instead of expecting it to change, and Awen realized: “the dream was not actually my own creation, it was inherited.” The dream space, as the distillation of surface phenomena, is not an individual object, but the intergenerational postponement of the permission to tell and be witnessed. Awen's father then says the empty rooms were merely products of Awen’s imagination, “because you did not actually place yourself there at the field, we are always only ever on the fringes of the field”—invoking both the impossibility of truly returning to the past and Awen’s status as a member of the 1.5 generation, not fully cognizant of and responsible for bearing the same burdens as their parents. How then, is Awen to reconnect with his family memories and historicize his internal space?

It is Awen's mother, ironically, who first enables the re-embodiment of the trauma violently disembodied in “Small Shed on a Mountain”: she finally affirms that “pretty much everyone has an illness” (87), though they may pretend otherwise. Can Xue's father's commitment to externalized idealism again appears in “Apple Tree in the Corridor,” this time partially-embodied. The father’s idealism is symbolized as a “fake leg” that he had purposely broke his real leg to attach, in order “to realize an incomprehensible idealistic fantasy” (84). His entire spirit had been funneled into this substitute leg, much like the narrator's treasured insects in their drawer from “Small Shed on a Mountain.” Can Xue remarked in “Truth and Falsity in Creation” that her father's impassioned pursuit of Marxist-Leninist ideals under Mao was a pursuit of falsity, that 理想 = 虚 (ideals = false, artificial). So then, if the realist and the idealist are false, what is true?

When I use the word “false,” I mean to say that the signifier fails to actually point to the signified (so, for example, a political slogan may act as a signifier to a certain outcome or reality, but fail to correspond to, or repress the correspondence of that reality becoming real). Can Xue's notion of truth relies on a transformation of the 1:1 signification between signifier and signified ostensibly upheld but actually betrayed in realist and idealist doublespeak. This transformation is precisely the magical-traumatic realist project of re-embodying trauma and ironicizing the oppressive power and failure of realism and idealism. Per Marta Dynel (2018), “untruthfulness is commonly thought to lead to (an attempt at) *deception* . . . what one believes to be false . . . in order to sustain/invite a false belief in the targeted hearer” (2). Thus, Dynel defines irony as an “overt untruthfulness. . .breaking the pattern of expectation of the person faced with the ironic utterance or event” (89). Hence, magical re-signification and traumatic juxtaposition of the extreme/ordinary are both inherently ironic in disrupting the repressive realist and idealist normality in which the traumatic lived space-time is also normalized, thereby silenced.

To “tell” the story, to assume one can send out a simple reception and be exactly received, is the realist mode. To “make noise” is to rupture the sign of recollection, to signify instead the abyss between one's past and present traumatically and vertically held together. In a way, postmemory is also a “post-family,” a fragmented intergenerational social body in which the gap between family identity and traumatic reality inserts itself into the fabric of daily life. Awen tells his mother he has been looking for their family for so long, he can hardly lift his legs anymore (in contrast to his father who claims his fake leg is “as light as a feather,” unburdened by embodiment). Awen is looking for his family, not just the people (their bodies), but the family as a social reservoir, the connective memory of family. “Just where were my family members? They had to have at least left behind some kind of trace, right?” (Xue 1998, 89). His mother says his search will not yield rational results: “In the blind expanses of your memory there are certainly numerous banged-up suitcases, one here, one there, did you think there was something inside?” (88-89). In contrast to the grandmother telling the child to focus on something beautiful, hopeful and red, Awen's parents caution him against thinking at all. Still, Awen kept trying to tell his mother about “what happened that summer,” to re-invoke the spatial security between grandmother and child in “The Beautiful Summer Days of the South.”

In “Apple Tree in the Corridor,” family figures through traumatic absence: “living bodies should be ones you can touch and see, but mother was neither there to be felt or seen” (96). Awen confesses to his neighbor that “this house at night echoes with emptiness, everyone hides away, I can't even find the door or windows anymore, it's like a sealed casket. . .my sister declared that I had never gotten up at night at all. Tell me, am I making any sound from my mouth?” (93), looking for an external validation of truth not provided by realism and idealism. Awen is alone in his postmemory desire to understand and be understood: his third sister declares that the hallway “ever since I can remember [has] been teeming with a kind of gloomy, miserable air, there's no way for you to see past four of five steps, nor any way to hear your own steps being made” (118)—impenetrable. In the chapter titled “Third Sister Speaks her Inner Thoughts,” she confesses that she wants to get to the end of the hallway and reunite with her absent aunt to tell her about everything that had happened over the years, but at the last moment twists her imperative to tell into an inability: “Actually, that's a lie . . . actually, I don’t know how to/I won’t tell anything” (119). When she encounters the box of her aunt's personal belongings, she violently kicks it out the window, treating the internal/external boundary as a garbage chute for unwanted memories, erased by a refusal to see or acknowledge them, abandoning signs of the past to “move on.”

Relating to her third daughter's desire to reach the end of the corridor, the mother remarks that “if you look towards the very end, you won't be able to see anything, you'll never be able to see anything” (117), echoing her statement in “Small Shed on a Mountain” that the drawer will never be completely organized. Because they all share physical space and intergenerational signs of trauma but also cannot share (tell) them, the spatiality of memory and the external world fuse in a bottomless abyss; one’s feeling of being real (recognized) is perpetually delayed in this traumatic temporality. The mother's memory-scape is externalized as a forest, much like the narrator's mountains on which there is an imaginary shed. However, where the narrator is met with nothing (“lost memory”) on the mountain, the mother's memory-forest is hauntingly plentiful. She comments that everything happened too fast, a comment on the temporal-spatiality of both socialist and post-socialist modernity. In his second dream, Awen, too, runs through his mother’s forest, rather he runs away from it—he imagines he could run from it. His vision is lined with tall buildings of modernity, windows lit in piercing light and open. In this faraway modernity, people appear to have no trouble reconciling their internal/external worlds, for they have “moved on.” Awen sees his father waving from such a window, smiling and trembling on his thin legs, on the last legs of his idealism in a modernity which has no use, beyond neoliberal doublespeak, for it.

Dori Laub (1992) in his studies of Holocaust testimonies defines an icon as a projected witness for someone who cannot themselves witness their external reality. Through iconifying witnessing, “survival takes place through the creative act of establishing and maintaining an internal [or projected] witness who substitutes for the lack of witnessing in real life” (87). In the chapter titled “Mother's Ravings,” Awen's mother iconifies the figure of a camel to represent the abyss between her own memories chafed by a younger generation's contradictory desire to “move on” yet “tell,” their collective inability to witness the traumatic past. When her son asks where the camel came from, she answers that the camel has always been there (internally naturalized). Her daughter scoffs and says the camel was in fact simply a dog, that her mother was delusional, that the dog had run away a while back when she poured dirty water out the window. In a reversal—or a full circle—of the mother-child relationship in “Small Shed on a Mountain,” here the mother tries desperately to encode her own “glowing, red, bright things” (Xue 2000, 5) into the figure of the camel (which she remembered riding, feeling “fearless and free” (Xue 2004, 134)), dashed by her children's identification of the unreality of her nostalgia and memory. In the mother's memory, as she rides a camel down the street, no one looks, which perplexes her: “If they finally admitted the undeniable truth, if I made the dazzling scene of riding on the back of the camel known to the public, what would that look like?” (134). Indeed, what it be like if everyone could admit to, could tell, what cannot be ignored?

In order to forget (to remember the hopeful, beautiful, red, glowing things), the child in "The Beautiful Summer Days of the South" forced themselves to fall asleep when they woke up in the middle of the night. In his third dream, Awen, already asleep, wishes for the ultimate escape: "Now, I want to go to the cliffs, as long as I jump, I'll wake right up" (144). Wishing to wake up from his reality which has become dreamlike in its rupture from signifier/signified unity, Awen's dreamscape actually provides him, through its representation, with the first step to re-embodiment and reconstitution of the family fabric. Not only is he able to admit (witness) to himself his hopes, wishes, and disappointments, he is able to converse freely with his father. His father, who had run away to the mountains with a travel bag supposedly full of game and fish, turns out to carry around an empty sack. In his dreams, Awen's father shares with him stories of his own alienation from external time and space, just as the narrator in "Small Shed on a Mountain" tried to tell their family about their alienated self in the shed. Awen yearns for his father to open his memories to the family, to allow them to be re-embodied. As Rothberg notes, "the abyss at the heart of trauma entails not only the exile of the real but also its insistence" (140), and so Awen, in the magical-traumatic realist mode, insists "everything that happened seemed real" (148). Not real as in objectively external, but real as in a reflexive relationship between internal/external. Real as in *really felt.*

In Awen's last dream, he learns that his father and sister have also tried to "jump off the cliff" to no avail (they still remember). He concludes that "我只能留在原地" ("I can only stay right here") (148), embodied in the present of postmemory, not in an imaginary shed nor in the beautiful bygone summer. Levin (1997) warns that "by attempting to chase memories as if they were concrete truths, we might place ourselves in danger of becoming sucked back into the 'trauma vortex' again . . . reinforcing our sense of powerlessness" (quoted in Etherington 32)—as the narrator in "Small Shed on a Mountain" experiences. Instead, Awen ultimately accepts the continual project of grappling with postmemory as a postmodern destabilization of space and temporality. Awen deploys magical-traumatic deconstruction of external reality to transform his relationship to it: “Everything that happened all seemed to be real: the apple tree planted upon cement in the corridor bore fruit; the camel's shadow appeared before the window” (148). It is in Awen's present that “the magic object opens before us its blazing abyss: it invites us to change and to be other without leaving off being ourselves” (Warnes 13). Everyone in “Apple Tree in the Corridor” is tethered to the psycho-spatial temporality of the corridor at night. Everyone has their own sign of trauma and of hope: the apple tree for the family, the camel for the mother, the fake leg and leather jacket for the father and the dreams for Awen. The embodiment of their family legacy as bodily distortions, as well as attempted bodily destruction (“jumping off the cliff”) comes as close to “talking about the horror” as they can—not in the realist mode which naturalizes the trauma, but in the magical-traumatic realist mode which “yields the fruit” of ironic critique of realism and the bittersweet, compassionate postmodern amalgam of yearning for reconstituted identity and transformation of internal and historical truth in the face of its rupture.

Yang (2005) argues Sartre's “Hell is Other People” sums up “Apple Tree in the Corridor,” but I would shift the focus from “other people” to “the inability to reach oneself and other people,” each confined to their own personal traumas as a legacy of family, socioeconomic and historical hell-making. As Ricoeur writes of Halbwach's collective memory, “to remember, we need others” (120); how could others be hell if they constitute us as recognized, witnessed beings? Contrary to Yang's statement that “in Can Xue's works, fears and agitations are not generated by real assaults” (80), the fear of wolf howls (anti-rightist patrollers) and the night (nightmares, unprocessed past) have very external, objective grounding—but this historical grounding is represented in a traumatic, magical-realist mode in which truth becomes articulated as one's postmemory relationship to physical and emotional intergenerational trauma, rather than an unironic objective reality. The “distorted and dreamlike” surface of Can Xue's writing, rather than moving away from “historical truth,” moves beneath it, re-inhabits it, transforms it, and re-embodies it, “by contesting and reclaiming the otherness of magic, the possibility of different orders of knowledge, which may, in turn, perhaps underpin a different order of sociality, of relations between selves and others” (Warnes 28-29). It is for this reason that I argue a magical-traumatic realist reading of Can Xue can point us toward a decolonial methodology of translation and alterity.

Chapter 5: Reflections on the Visibility of the Translator in World-making Literature

Decolonial praxis engages not only the level of interpretation and translation, but also self-reflection in the production of knowledge itself as a discipline. As Liu Kang (1993) argues, "when we examine politics closely as it is internalized or institutionalized in academic critical practice, rather than treating it as an extraliterary or extrinsic factor that can be brushed aside once we enter the serious business of intrinsic literary criticism," we might begin to forge alternate ways of engaging with the "entanglement of politics, ideology, and Chinese literature" (15). This entanglement is mediated through translation from source texts and contexts to a translated text and context, invisibilized as a producing a stable, ahistorical, apolitical "translated canon." Thus, examining politics *within* the institution and marketization of literary translation begins with what Venuti (1995) calls the "visibility" of the translator, "to elaborate the theoretical, critical, and textual means by which translation can be studied and practiced as a locus of difference, instead of the homogeneity that widely characterizes it today" (42).

Venuti observes that "in the United States, the most common contractual definition of the translated text has not been 'original work of authorship,' but 'work made for hire,' a category in American copyright law whereby 'the employer or person for whom the work was prepared . . . unless the parties have expressly agreed otherwise in a written instrument signed by them, owns all the rights comprised in the copyright' (17 US Code, sections 101, 201, quoted in Venuti 6). The material reality of work-for-hire contracts which disproportionately profit the publisher and institution also make the very career of literary translation a precarious one and thus more accessible to corporate and federal-funded academic institutions where translators are commonly literary or history professors, translating "on the side" and with their own research in mind. The

U.S. academy and publishing industry at large have also been historically dominated by White translators, with the exception in recent years of Chinese and Sinophone science fiction texts translated by Ken Liu and Sinophone translators. Generally, however, translation from Chinese and Sinophone texts as a mode of capitalist production within world literature reinscribes an international division of labor (knowledge production), in the sense that mainly American and European academics with stable incomes and area studies backgrounds will be afforded the position of representing the other, while people of color are disproportionately engaged in maintaining the material productivity of the neoliberal world in which the institution is positioned as a "creative frontier."

Very rarely have I seen published translations from bilingual and bicultural translators—that is, seldom have I ever seen published translations from Chinese American or Sinophone American translators, an invisibilization of an entire population situated in the very liminal space that translation engages. There are undoubtedly structural reasons behind this gaping lack—such as the historical epistemological privileging of area-studies "experts" (given by the history of Sinology as founded by Protestant missionaries who went on missions in China, then war-era historians like Fairbank and his cohort), the strong assimilative forces and "world-language" economics of English that destroy retention of and access to non-English languages and texts over generations, and then Chinese and Sinophone scholars distanced from meaningful dialogue with their Asian American counterparts in Ethnic Studies (generally subsumed under American Cultural Studies) by the geopolitical logic of area-studies which partitions, but does not traverse.

In the spirit of positioning and visibilizing the structures and theories of my own decolonial translation praxis as a bilingual, bicultural diasporic translator, I invoke the arguably redundant concept of "cultural translation," which Wang Guanglin (2019) places in conversation with historian James Clifford's idea of translation as "traveling," "a kind of cultural traveling in which input and output happens at the same time, and it is difficult to trace the cultural source according to traditional translation definitions because cultures have hybridized" (4). According to Clifford,

> Through the traveling discourse, writers may represent their departure, loss, a sense of relocation and a sense of return, and express, through a metaphorical language, their journey and a desire of return. On the one hand, they still carry their own traces of culture, tradition, history, language, and belief; on the other hand, they have to communicate with the host culture in order to get recognition and reconciliation. So, the diasporic subject must necessarily be the product of different cultures who are engaged in "dwelling-in-traveling and traveling-in-dwelling. (Clifford 1997, 36, quoted in Wang 4)

As a diasporic translator whose access to a heritage environment has always been mediated by U.S.-China official politics and now the academy, I hardly see diaspora or translation as a form of leisure "travel," rather a deconstructive liminality that constantly resituates and calls into question the politics and materiality of "crossing-over." Rather than relying solely on the identity politics of Homi Bhabha's hybridization, wherein "the immigrant culture or the culture of dislocation adapts itself selectively to the host culture, merging and developing into a new culture, which is closely connected with, but at the same time different from, the home culture and host culture" (Wang 14), I participate in these Anglophone discourse and productions of knowledge to vex the false dichotomies of "home" and "host," and deconstruct the seemingly apolitical identification of a work as "world literature," which simply shifts the locus of identity politics of the ethnic individual, group and nation to "world"/"cosmopolitan" identity-as-citizenship.

A world-making literature requires analysis at the level of world-making, so I turn to Eddy Kent and Terri Tomsky's (2017) genealogy of the concept of "negative cosmopolitanism," from “the school of Cynical philosophy, whose founder, Diogenes of Sinope, coined the term *kosmopolites* in response to Athenians who asked him which community he belonged to” (4). Kent and Tomsky trace “cosmopolitanism” as “worldliness” in modernity to Kant’s 1795 article “Perpetual Peace,” in which Kant posits imperialism as a benign force aiding humans in divesting themselves of “superstition and provincial thinking” (quoted in Kent and Tomsky 5), allowing them to join the ranks of the white, intellectual male default of a universal Enlightened individual as part of “a universal cosmopolitan existence” (5). According to Kant, universalism is infrastructurally enabled by economic globalization, which Marx and Engels reframe as a “the need for a constantly changing market . . . to change production and consumption in every country” such that “individual creations of individual nations become common property” (6). Marx and Engels articulate a globalized propertied class, a global “elite” that Kent and Tomsky define as “the bureaucrats, corporate executives, and academics who participate in what Ulf Hannerz describes as ‘transnational culture’” (9)—a global making-into-property of language through translation as an economic product. The simultaneous market exploitation of translators and exploitation *by* translators and academics of their subject materials and institutional privileges makes a decolonial deconstruction of world aesthetics as immanent that much more necessary.

Cosmopolitanism has been nuanced in Kwame Appiah’s concept of a “rooted” cosmopolitan, referring to “someone who is ‘attached to a home of one’s own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people’” (quoted in Kent and Tomsky 9). I argue that this optimistic treatment of the term “home” as a stable belonging of “one’s own” cannot adequately deconstruct the fact that “home” is always already compromised discursively and materially in the diasporic and postcolonial reality, as Sakai argued of the false dichotomy between the particular and universal.

As such, Kent and Tomsky argue for a "negative cosmopolitanism" to acknowledge "the evident disjuncture between intellectual fatigue with cosmopolitanism, and the manifest desire by individuals across the world to organize and claim a greater degree of world citizenship" (10)—that there are political structures that render world citizenship *as a desirable option* in the same way modernity was paradoxically imposed at the same time it was proposed and materially guaranteed at the expense of the exploited.

Tomsky and Kent argue that "negative cosmopolitanism . . . reveals the apparent [figurative] flatness of the world, characterized by cultural homogenization and economic disenfranchisement . . . from labor precarity, market instability, and credit crunches of capital finance, to the regimes of surveillance and biopolitical management" (26). Starkly contrasted to the self-subversive and deconstruction of norm in the avant-garde impulse, Kant's world citizenship "offers a normative principle for regulating actions in a global age" (3), which Timothy Brennan (1997) reframes as "operating sometimes as a cultural commodity, and other times as the thin veneer on an expanding American hegemony" (quoted in Kent and Tomsky 6). The asymmetrical power dynamics of world citizenship are reflected in the domination of Can Xue's "world literature" translations by American publishers and institutions. It is not enough to theorize through the academy to a global Anglophone marketplace without theorizing the academy *as globalizing Anglophone marketplace*. It is not enough to invoke Can Xue in translation as world literature without invoking Can Xue's works as world-making and world-unmaking through the production and contestation of translation methods.

Part of delinking from a colonial matrix of power involves relational interdisciplinary and diachronic methods, and I borrow from Jodi A. Byrd's (2011) reframing of empire as *transit* in the context of Indigenous critiques of colonialism to suggest a similar reframing of translation as transit (the continual carrying rather than an assumed knowledge-object that has already been carried). I engage translation-as-transit as "fluidity, noise and instability . . . in a world of increasing global capital and environmental change," and to approach "world-ing" texts, discourses and material bodies as produced "in motion, to exist liminally in the ungrievable spaces of suspicion and unintelligibility" (xv). To translate, to be translated, "is to be *made* to move" (xv, emphasis mine) diachronically across space-time through hegemonic coercion and funneling of bodies into webs of productions of knowledge and power. Bilingual translator Sylvia Molloy (2003) reflects that "the writing of a bilingual writer, I would venture, is of need always altered, never "dis-altered"; always thirsty, always wanting, never satisfied" (74)—a generative *carrying-over* of gaps and fissures, bodies and memories, a decolonial resistance to multiple epistemological and economic exploitations under neoliberalism, universalist world citizenship, and the re-territorialization of translated texts as stable linguistic-national (Anglophone) commodities.

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