ISSN 1949-8519 (Print)
ISSN 2154-6711 (Online)

Forum for World Literature Studies

世界文学研究论坛 Vol.17 No.3 September 2025

Forum for World Literature Studies
世界文学研究论坛
Vol.17 No.3 September 2025

Literature
الأدب
Littérature
Literatura
Литература

Knowledge Hub Publishing Company Limited
Hong Kong • West Lafayette

Forum for World Literature Studies

Vol.17, No.3, September 2025

Knowledge Hub Publishing Company Limited
Hong Kong · West Lafayette

世界文学研究论坛

2025 年第 3 期

香港 • 西拉法叶

Forum for World Literature Studies

Vol.17, No.3, September 2025

Special Thematic Issue

Discourse Innovation and Practical Exploration in Chinese African Literaturology

Edited by

Yang Gexin, Zhejiang University, China

Quan Wei, Shanghai Normal University, China

Knowledge Hub Publishing Company Limited
Hong Kong · West Lafayette

世界文学研究论坛

2025 年第 3 期

学术专刊

中国非洲文学学的话语创新与实践探索

专刊主编

杨革新 / 浙江大学（中国）

全　薇 / 上海师范大学（中国）

香港 • 西拉法叶

Editorial Board

编委会

Forum for World Literature Studies (Print ISSN: 1949-8519; Online ISSN: 2154-6711), published by Knowledge Hub Publishing Company Limited, is a peer reviewed academic journal sponsored by Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and Zhejiang University and co-edited by Professor Nie Zhenzhao of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and Professor Charles Ross of Purdue University. This journal provides a forum to promote diversity in world literature, with a particular interest in the study of literatures of those neglected countries and culture regions. With four issues coming out every year, this journal publishes original articles on topics including theoretical studies, literary criticism, literary history, and cultural studies, as well as book review articles.

Forum for World Literature Studies accepts submissions in English or Chinese by authors from all over the world. The manuscript is expected to be of about 5000-8000 words and must follow the MLA style. Submission should be made including an abstract of about 200 words, a short biography of the author, and three to five keywords, as well as the main body of the essay. Manuscripts should be sent to: fwlstudies@163.com or fwlsmarket@163.com. Website: http://www.fwls.org.

***The Publisher and Editorial Office Address*:** Knowledge Hub Publishing Company Limited, Hong Kong SAR, China. To subscribe to this journal or purchase any single issue, please contact the editorial office at 6 East Building, Zijingang Campus, Zhejiang University, 866 Yuhangtang Rd, Hangzhou 310058, P.R. China. Tel: +86-571-8898-2010, Email: fwlsmarket@163.com or fwlstudies@163.com.

Forum for World Literature Studies is indexed in ESCI, SCOPUS and also included in the databases of EBSCO, Gale, MLA (MLA International Bibliography) and ABELL (The Annual Bibligraphy of English Language and Literature).

Contents

Special Thematic Issue

Discourse Innovation and Practical Exploration in Chinese African Literaturology

目　录

学术专刊

中国非洲文学学的话语创新与实践探索

Discourse Innovation and Practical Exploration in Chinese African Literaturology: An Introduction

Yang Gexin
School of International Studies, Zhejiang University
Yuhangtang Rd. 668, Xihu District, Hangzhou, 310058, China
Email: ygx80080@163.com

Abstract This special issue introduces "Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea," a pioneering theoretical framework developed by Professor Zhu Zhenwu that challenges Western epistemological hegemony in African literary studies. The introduction examines how this paradigm shift from Eurocentric perspectives toward multipolar knowledge production fundamentally remaps world literature. This intellectual project demonstrates how Chinese scholars can develop independent theoretical frameworks rooted in non-Western intellectual traditions while engaging African literature through sustained fieldwork, cultural contextualization, and collaborative practice. By foregrounding African agency and Chinese perspectives as co-equal partners in knowledge production, this framework contributes to genuinely pluralistic world literature studies that honor cultural specificity, foster civilizational dialogue, and challenge the center-periphery dynamics that have historically marginalized Global South literatures. The issue marks a significant moment in comparative literature's evolution toward epistemological decolonization and equitable intercultural exchange.

Keywords Chinese African Literaturology; Africanness; world literature; Zhu Zhenwu; Global South

Author **Yang Gexin** is Professor at the School of International Studies, Zhejiang University (Hangzhou 310058, China). He is primarily engaged in British and American literature, Western literary theories and ethical literary criticism (Emai: ygx80080@163.com).

Introduction

For far too long, African literature has occupied a marginalized position within the global literary landscape. Its profound historical and cultural heritage, distinctive

spiritual essence, and transformative aesthetic innovations have remained largely obscured beneath the shadows of Western epistemological hegemony. The narrative of African letters has been predominantly filtered through Eurocentric lenses—interpreted, canonized, and theorized according to frameworks developed in Cambridge, Oxford, Columbia, and the Sorbonne. This intellectual colonization has perpetuated a troubling paradox: while African literature speaks with urgent, authentic voices about colonialism, identity, diaspora, and cultural resilience, the scholarly apparatus examining these works has largely remained tethered to the very imperial paradigms these texts so powerfully resist.

Yet the tides are shifting. In recent years, African literature has begun to command broader recognition due to its decoloniality, diasporicity, and hybridity, demonstrating increasingly significant value in global civilizational dialogues. The collective emergence of the "Global South" as a significant geopolitical and cultural force signals profound transformations in the world literary field. As a key member of the Global South, China is playing a leading role in breaking the long-standing monopoly of Western discourse, constructing an autonomous perspective for African literary studies, and fundamentally remapping the landscape of world literature.

This special column assembles five groundbreaking articles that collectively explore the pioneering theoretical framework of "Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea" (中国非洲文学学), developed by Professor Zhu Zhenwu (朱振武), lead expert of China's first major national program on African literature, "History of African Literature Written in English." These contributions represent more than incremental advances in a specialized field; they constitute a paradigm shift in how we conceptualize, study, and value literary production beyond the traditional centers of Euro-American cultural power.

The significance of this scholarly endeavor extends well beyond African literary studies itself. It addresses fundamental questions about knowledge production, cultural authority, and the politics of interpretation in an increasingly multipolar world. Can non-Western scholars develop theoretical frameworks that authentically engage with non-Western literatures without reflexively defaulting to Western critical vocabularies? Can we imagine a genuinely polycentric world literature that moves beyond tokenistic inclusion toward substantive epistemological transformation? How do we construct bridges for mutual learning among civilizations while respecting cultural specificity and avoiding homogenizing universalism? These are the urgent questions animating the intellectual project this column documents.

Breaking from Eurocentric Paradigms: The Foundations of Chinese African Literaturology

Professor Zhu Zhenwu, a distinguished scholar in comparative literature and world literature studies at Shanghai Normal University, has consistently grounded his academic research in cultural confidence and theoretical self-awareness, rejecting the mechanical appropriation of Western theories. His work emerges from a deep awareness that scholarly discourses from the Anglo-American world cannot substitute for Chinese voices, and that academics must ground their research in native cultural soil while strengthening cultural autonomy and constructing independent theoretical frameworks.

The theoretical architecture of Chinese African Literaturology rests on four foundational pillars, each representing a significant conceptual innovation:

First, the concept of Africanness emphasizes African literature's role in reclaiming cultural sovereignty and resisting colonial narratives. As Zhu and Li define it in their landmark article "The Africanness of African Literatures and New Patterns in Human Civilization," Africanness refers to "the deep identification of African and Afro-descended people with the history and culture of the African continent and their deep attachment to their homeland" (Zhu and Li 114). This cultural quality encompasses a determination to uphold selfhood, bridge divides, remember history, yet perpetually look toward the future (Zhu and Li 114). Unlike Western postcolonial theory, which often positions African texts as objects requiring Western theoretical rescue, Zhu's conceptualization centers African agency in defining cultural identity. Africanness manifests through decoloniality, diasporicity, and hybridity—three interrelated dimensions that collectively challenge Western-centric master narratives and affirm African literature's capacity to participate effectively in world literary dialogue on its own terms (Zhu and Li 114-27).

Second, the theory of "Four Major Diasporas" expands conventional diaspora studies by addressing intra-continental hybridity and post-return alienation among African intellectuals. Zhu's framework identifies four distinct modes of diasporic experience: Foreign diaspora (异邦流散), referring to traditional patterns of outward migration to Europe and the Americas; Native diaspora (本土流散), a uniquely African phenomenon wherein indigenous populations experience cultural displacement without physical migration due to colonial policies, language imposition, and racial segregation within their own countries; Colonial diaspora (殖民流散), encompassing white settlers and their descendants who participated in imperial expansion yet developed complex attachments to African territories;

and Been-to diaspora or Foreign-native diaspora (宾土流散，或异邦本土流散), describing intellectuals who return home after extended periods abroad only to find themselves culturally estranged from both their homeland and their former host countries (Zhu and Yuan 135-58).

This typology represents a significant theoretical advancement beyond Paul Gilroy's influential "Black Atlantic" model, which primarily examines transatlantic flows between Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Zhu's framework captures the multidimensional complexity of African diasporic experiences, including internal displacements rarely acknowledged in Western scholarship. By recognizing that diaspora encompasses cultural rupture rather than geographical migration alone, this theory provides analytical tools for understanding the psychological dimensions of colonial trauma, the negotiation of hybrid identities, and the generative potential of cross-cultural encounters.

Third, the principle of Balanced Absorption (均衡吸纳说) advocates for balanced engagement between global and local literary traditions, explicitly rejecting both uncritical Westernization and insular nationalism (Zhu and Jiang). This concept directly challenges the hierarchical binaries that have structured world literature discourse—center versus periphery, mainstream versus marginal, universal versus particular. Instead, Zhu proposes a dynamic equilibrium model wherein diverse literary traditions engage in mutual learning without subordinating local specificities to presumed universal standards. The theory calls for integrating global literary achievements while maintaining cultural distinctiveness, fostering what Zhu terms "horizontal comparativism" rather than vertical hierarchies of aesthetic value.

Fourth, the vision of Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures (文化共栖共生说), inspired by Marxist-humanist ideals, envisions literature as a catalyst for symbiotic civilizational exchange. This framework directly counters Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis by prioritizing intercultural harmony and shared ethical futures over competitive antagonism. Drawing from Confucian principles of "seeking harmony but not uniformity" and the ideal that "only when everyone's beauty is beauty and everyone appreciates other's beauty, can all beauties co-exist," Zhu articulates a vision of world literature as a networked ecosystem of pluralistic co-creation rather than a competitive arena for cultural supremacy (Yang 8).

Together, these four theoretical pillars form a cohesive analytical lens that decentralizes Eurocentric paradigms, foregrounds marginalized voices, and redefines global literary studies through principles of equity, hybridity, and mutual respect. They represent not merely an alternative perspective on African literature but a fundamental reconceptualization of how we might construct more equitable

frameworks for engaging with all literatures beyond traditional Western canons.

The Articles: A Multidimensional Exploration

The five articles comprising this special column approach Chinese African Literaturology from complementary angles, collectively demonstrating both its theoretical sophistication and practical applicability.

Yang Zhongju's "Zhu Zhenwu and Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea" provides the theoretical foundation, elucidating the core tenets of this framework from its conceptual genesis, structural architecture, and intellectual genealogy. Yang emphasizes that Chinese African Literaturology represents not merely a regional supplement to existing world literary studies but rather a paradigm shift from "center-periphery" hierarchies toward multi-centered coexistence and equal dialogue among diverse civilizational traditions. The article traces how Zhu's decades-long engagement with "non-mainstream" literatures—encompassing Irish, Canadian, Australian, Caribbean, and African traditions—provided the empirical and conceptual groundwork for this theoretical intervention.

Zhang Xiuli's "Balancing the Mainstream and the 'Non-Mainstream': A Critical Examination of Zhu Zhenwu's Literary Research Philosophy" explores the methodological sophistication undergirding Zhu's work, particularly his commitment to principles of "balance" that critique Eurocentric binary thinking while avoiding simplistic reversals or oppositional logic. Zhang meticulously traces Zhu's academic trajectory, revealing how his philosophical approach constructs a pluralistic framework fostering dynamic equilibrium between mainstream and non-mainstream discourses. The concept of "balance" permeates every dimension of Zhu's scholarship—from his advocacy for balanced absorption of global literary traditions to his insistence on maintaining equilibrium between domestication and foreignization in translation practice.

Qian Pingyun's "From 'Seeking Aesthetic Similarity' to 'Striking a Balance Between Domestication and Foreignization': A Probe into Zhu Zhenwu's Translation Philosophy" examines how Zhu's theoretical commitments manifest in the concrete practice of literary translation. Translation, Qian argues, serves as a crucial testing ground for theories of cultural exchange, revealing in microcosm the power dynamics, aesthetic negotiations, and ethical choices inherent in all cross-cultural encounters. Zhu's evolution from early emphasis on "aesthetic similarity" to his mature theory of "Domestication-Foreignization Balance" (归异平衡) reflects deepening engagement with fundamental questions about cultural identity, difference, and mutual intelligibility. Qian demonstrates how Zhu's translation

philosophy breaks free from longstanding pitfalls of either condescending appropriation ("looking down upon" source cultures) or uncritical veneration ("looking up to" them), instead seeking optimal balance points that respect both source and target cultures. This approach resonates powerfully with his theory of Balanced Absorption, emphasizing that only through equitable engagement with diverse literary traditions can we overcome cognitive biases and enable Chinese scholars to contribute distinctive, valuable voices to cross-cultural dialogue.

Gao Jing's "Doris Lessing as an African Diasporic Writer and the 'Africanness' in *The Grass Is Singing*: Based on Chinese African Literaturology" exemplifies how Chinese African Literaturology generates fresh interpretive insights through textual analysis. Employing Zhu's theories of the Four Major Diasporas and Africanness as her methodology, Gao redefines the literary identity of Nobel laureate Doris Lessing, challenging the conventional categorization of Lessing as a "British writer." Through close reading of *The Grass Is Singing* and other works, Gao demonstrates that Lessing's characterization, narrative settings, and thematic preoccupations reflect profound Africanness and diasporic consciousness that are central to understanding her achievement as a world literary figure. Gao's analysis reveals how Lessing's dual identity as insider and outsider, her simultaneous belonging and non-belonging, enabled unique critical perspectives on colonialism's psychic costs for colonizers as well as colonized. This study demonstrates the practical value of Chinese African Literaturology for generating novel interpretations that challenge established critical orthodoxies.

Quan Wei's "Remapping the Landscape of World Literature: Discourse Innovation and Critical Practice of 'Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea'—Focused on *African Literary Studies* (Ten-Volume Series)" examines the monumental scholarly achievement that embodies Chinese African Literaturology's critical practice. Quan analyzes the series' innovative structure—particularly its dual categorization of "Classic" and "Select" works—which simultaneously acknowledges texts already recognized by international literary establishments while amplifying marginalized voices and regional literatures that Western canons have overlooked. The series encompasses not only anglophone African literature but also significant works in French, Portuguese, Arabic, and other African languages, providing unprecedented comprehensive coverage. Quan argues that this achievement fills critical gaps in China's African literary studies while offering new pathways for global scholarship, demonstrating how Chinese perspectives can enrich rather than merely replicate existing knowledge.

Theoretical Innovation and Methodological Rigor: Advancing Global Literary Studies

The intellectual project documented in this special column transcends mere regional or national interest, addressing fundamental questions about the future of comparative literature and world literary studies in an era of profound geopolitical transformation. Several key innovations deserve particular emphasis.

Epistemological Decolonization

Chinese African Literaturology represents a sustained effort to decolonize literary studies by challenging Western epistemological monopolies. As Zhu forcefully argues, "Our studies on African literature should not be mere replicas of Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard or Columbia studies, nor should it parrot colonial discourses, summarize existing Western achievements, or serve as annotations or commentaries on Western scholarship" (Zhu qtd. in Quan 10). This stance reflects acute awareness that intellectual decolonization requires more than additive inclusion—incorporating previously marginalized voices into existing frameworks—but rather fundamental restructuring of theoretical architectures themselves.

Western postcolonial theory, despite its progressive intentions and significant contributions, often reproduces problematic dynamics. Edward Said's Orientalism, Gayatri Spivak's interrogations of subaltern speech, and Homi Bhabha's theories of hybridity remain primarily concerned with critiquing Western power and representation. While valuable, this critical focus can inadvertently recenter Western agency even as it contests Western hegemony. African texts become significant primarily as sites for demonstrating Western theoretical propositions rather than sources of theoretical insight in their own right.

Chinese African Literaturology shifts the analytical ground by foregrounding African and Chinese perspectives as co-equal partners in knowledge production. This approach recognizes that meaningful decolonization requires developing alternative theoretical vocabularies rooted in non-Western intellectual traditions. Concepts like "cultural symbiosis," "balanced absorption," and the four-fold diaspora typology emerge from sustained engagement with Chinese philosophical traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, Marxism) and African cultural practices (orature, indigenous knowledge systems, pan-African thought) rather than derivative applications of Western frameworks.

Heterarchical Rather Than Hierarchical Models

A crucial innovation involves replacing hierarchical with heterarchical

conceptualizations of world literature. Traditional models position European and North American literatures at the center of a world literary system, with other traditions arranged in concentric circles of decreasing importance and influence. This cartography reflects and reproduces colonial power relations, naturalizing Euro-American cultural dominance as aesthetic superiority.

Zhu proposes instead a tripartite schema distinguishing "First-World literature" (US and UK), "Second-World literature" (Japan, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain), and "Third-World literature" (China, Africa, Latin America), with the explicit recognition that this categorization should facilitate rather than impede movement toward genuine pluralism (Yang 11). The goal is not inverting existing hierarchies—replacing Euro-American centrality with Sino-African centrality—but rather establishing what Zhu terms "horizontal comparativism": lateral exchanges among traditions understood as possessing intrinsic rather than derivative value.

This heterarchical vision challenges the ontological colonialism embedded in much world literature theory. Franco Moretti's influential "distant reading" methodology, for instance, proposes studying world literature through patterns and systems rather than close engagement with individual texts. While offering valuable macro-level insights, this approach risks reproducing center-periphery dynamics by applying metropolitan analytical tools to peripheral materials. David Damrosch's definition of world literature as "a mode of circulation and reading" (Damrosch 5) foregrounds transnational flows but can inadvertently privilege texts that circulate successfully in Western markets and academic institutions. Chinese African Literaturology insists instead that African literatures must be understood according to their own aesthetic principles, historical contexts, and cultural logics rather than their capacity to satisfy Western readerly expectations or conform to Western generic conventions.

Dialectical Integration of Theory and Practice

A particularly compelling dimension of this scholarly project involves the dialectical relationship between theoretical innovation and concrete critical practice. Chinese African Literaturology did not emerge as abstract philosophical speculation subsequently applied to literary texts; rather, it developed through sustained immersive engagement with African literary production, cultural contexts, and scholarly communities. As Zhu and his team emphasize, their methodology involves "conducting field research, combing through first-hand material, making direct contact with Africa, its writers and personnel working in literary and cultural fields, integrating into the texture and interstices of African culture, and delving into African literary texts" (Qian and Zhu qtd. in Yang 6).

This methodological commitment to grounded scholarship distinguishes Chinese African Literaturology from much postcolonial theory, which often privileges theoretical sophistication over sustained engagement with specific literary traditions and cultural contexts. The Ten-Volume Series exemplifies how rigorous textual analysis, cultural contextualization, and theoretical reflection mutually inform and enrich each other. Each volume combines comprehensive literary historical surveys with close readings of individual works, attention to aesthetic innovation and thematic concerns, and analysis of how texts participate in broader cultural conversations about identity, history, and futurity.

Moreover, this approach recognizes translation as integral to cross-cultural literary understanding rather than peripheral or merely technical. Zhu's extensive work translating English literature into Chinese and examining how sinologists translate Chinese literature into English informs his understanding of the complex negotiations involved in all intercultural exchange. His concept of "Domestication-Foreignization Balance" emerges from wrestling with specific translational challenges rather than abstract theorization, demonstrating how practical problems can generate theoretical insights with broad applicability.

Toward a New World Literary Order: Implications and Future Directions

The scholarly project documented in this special column carries implications extending well beyond African literary studies or even comparative literature more broadly. It participates in urgent contemporary debates about knowledge production, cultural authority, and the possibility of genuinely multipolar intellectual exchange in an era of profound geopolitical transformation.

Civilizational Dialogue and Cultural Symbiosis

Chinese African Literaturology embodies a vision of cultural symbiosis and civilizational mutual learning that offers alternatives to dominant paradigms of both civilizational clash (Huntington) and liberal cosmopolitanism (Appiah). Against Huntington's pessimistic forecast of inevitable conflict between civilizational blocs, Zhu proposes that literature can model collaborative coexistence by demonstrating how cultural difference enriches rather than threatens collective human flourishing. African literature's demonstrated capacity to synthesize indigenous traditions with European modernist aesthetics, oral storytelling with written fiction, local specificity with global consciousness exemplifies productive cultural hybridity.

Against liberal cosmopolitan visions that often tacitly privilege Western universalism, Chinese African Literaturology insists on substantive rather than merely rhetorical pluralism. Genuine mutual learning requires that all participants

recognize others as equals possessing valuable knowledge rather than positioning some as teachers and others as perpetual students. As Zhu emphasizes: "We must keep a foothold in Chinese culture while breaking Western discourse patterns, critical clichés, and cognitive liminality and constructing our own literary and cultural concepts" (Qian and Zhu qtd. in Yang 9). Chinese scholars engaging African literature should neither assume pedagogical authority nor adopt positions of deferential subordination, but rather approach African texts as sources of aesthetic pleasure, intellectual insight, and theoretical innovation in their own right.

This vision resonates with UNESCO's goals of preserving intangible heritage and advancing global intellectual equity, as well as with Chinese foreign policy emphases on South-South cooperation and building communities of shared future. By facilitating direct Sino-African scholarly collaboration that bypasses Western epistemological gatekeeping, Chinese African Literaturology models alternative infrastructures for knowledge circulation. The 2024 partnership between Zhu's research team and Kenya Literature Bureau to promote Sino-African literary exchanges, and the designation of 2026 as "the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges" at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, demonstrate how academic scholarship can inform and inspire broader cultural diplomacy.

Reconstructing World Literature Studies

Chinese African Literaturology participates in broader efforts to reconstruct world literature as a genuinely global rather than thinly disguised Euro-American enterprise. As Theo D'haen observes, "The meteoric rise of China is bound to 're-orient' the world, and hence also world maps, including the map of world literature, within the already foreseeable future" (D'haen qtd. in Quan 20). The question is whether this reorientation will generate genuinely new cartographies or merely redraw existing maps with different centers.

The risk of reproduction looms large. Simply replacing Western centrality with Chinese centrality—substituting Beijing for London or New York as the privileged site from which global literary value gets adjudicated—would replicate rather than resolve fundamental problems. Chinese African Literaturology's commitment to horizontal comparativism and heterarchical models suggests awareness of this danger and determination to avoid it.

The emphasis on "balance"—between mainstream and non-mainstream, domestication and foreignization, local and global, tradition and innovation—reflects not methodological timidity but rather philosophical sophistication about the dialectical relationships required for sustainable intercultural exchange. Imbalance in any direction—toward uncritical globalization or defensive insularity,

wholesale adoption of foreign models or xenophobic rejection, privileging only elite experimental writing or only popular accessible fiction—produces distortions that impede understanding.

The practical challenge involves institutionalizing this vision beyond individual scholarly projects. Chinese African Literaturology has made remarkable strides through national research funding, academic publications, university curricula, international conferences, and translation initiatives. Sustaining and expanding this momentum requires training new generations of scholars, developing robust institutional infrastructures, and fostering ongoing collaboration with African and other global intellectual communities.

Challenges and Critical Responses

Any scholarly intervention of this ambition inevitably faces challenges and invites critical scrutiny. Several potential concerns merit acknowledgment and response.

First, some might question whether "Chinese" African Literaturology risks reproducing problematic dynamics it critiques—replacing Western interpretive authority with Chinese authority over African cultural production. This concern has legitimacy and requires vigilant self-reflexivity. The project's emphasis on collaboration with African scholars, direct engagement with African cultural contexts, and recognition that Chinese perspectives constitute one among many valid approaches helps mitigate this risk. The goal is not replacing Western monopoly with Chinese monopoly but rather contributing to genuine pluralism wherein multiple interpretive communities engage texts according to their distinct but equally legitimate frameworks.

Second, the language question deserves consideration. Most scholarship emerging from this project appears in Chinese, potentially limiting accessibility for non-Chinese-speaking audiences including most African scholars and readers. While some work receives English translation, systematic translation remains incomplete. This linguistic limitation ironically reproduces asymmetries the project critiques, wherein Western scholarship's predominant use of English enables global circulation while work in other languages remains marginalized. Addressing this challenge requires expanded translation efforts in multiple directions—not only translating Chinese scholarship into English but also into African languages, and translating African literature directly into Chinese without English mediation.

Third, questions about periodization and canon formation persist. While the Ten-Volume Series' dual structure of "Classic" and "Select" volumes innovatively acknowledges multiple evaluative frameworks, decisions about which works merit

inclusion in "Select" categories inevitably involve subjective judgment. What criteria determine selections? How do scholars avoid reproducing their own cultural biases and blind spots? The project's methodological commitment to fieldwork, collaboration, and cultural contextualization provides partial answers, but ongoing critical reflection remains essential.

Fourth, the relationship between political and intellectual dimensions requires careful navigation. Chinese African Literaturology emerges within contexts of expanding Sino-African economic and diplomatic relationships, raising questions about how scholarly work relates to state interests. Maintaining intellectual autonomy and critical distance while acknowledging that scholarship never occurs in political vacuums requires vigilance and integrity. The project's grounding in genuine scholarly values—rigorous textual analysis, theoretical sophistication, respect for cultural difference, commitment to knowledge rather than propaganda—provides reassurance, but ongoing attention to these dynamics remains necessary.

Conclusion

This special issue documents a significant moment in the evolution of comparative literature and world literary studies—a moment when scholars from the Global South assert authority to theorize literary production on their own terms, to develop analytical frameworks emerging from their own intellectual traditions, and to participate as equal partners in global conversations about aesthetic value, cultural meaning, and human creativity.

Chinese African Literaturology represents more than a regional specialty or national variation within an otherwise unchanged disciplinary landscape. It embodies principles of cognitive justice: the recognition that all cultures and communities possess legitimate knowledge systems deserving respect, that intellectual authority should not remain permanently concentrated in former imperial metropoles, and that genuinely global scholarship requires infrastructure enabling circulation of ideas from multiple origins on equitable terms.

The five articles comprising this column—examining theoretical foundations, methodological sophistication, translational practice, textual interpretation, and monumental scholarly achievement—collectively demonstrate how these abstract principles manifest in concrete scholarly work. They show that epistemological decolonization requires patient, rigorous engagement rather than polemical declaration; that alternative frameworks must prove their analytical power through compelling interpretations rather than asserting moral superiority; and that sustainable change emerges through collaborative institution-building rather than

individual heroics.

The road ahead remains long and challenging. Existing power structures resist transformation; established habits of thought prove difficult to unlearn; practical obstacles of language, funding, and institutional inertia impede even well-intentioned efforts. Yet the work documented in this special column provides inspiration and guidance for continuing this essential journey toward more just, inclusive, and intellectually vibrant modes of engaging with the world's literary riches.

The discourse innovation and practical exploration documented here mark not an endpoint but a beginning—an invitation to reimagine possibilities, to challenge inherited assumptions, to build new infrastructures for intellectual exchange, and to participate in the ongoing project of making world literature truly worldly. May this special column inspire readers to take up this vital work with energy, integrity, and hope for what we might collectively achieve.

Works Cited

Cheng, Yale and Zhenwu Zhu. "The Rationale for the Construction of Chinese African-literaturology: An Interview with Professor Zhu Zhenwu." *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, no. 5, 2023, pp.1-9.

Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2003.

D'Haen, Theo. "Mapping World Literature." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, edited by D'Haen, Theo, Damrosch, David, and Kadir, Djelal, London: Routledge, 2012, pp.413-22.

Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks [Peau noire, masques blancs]. Translated by Charles Lam Markman. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

Lessing, Doris. *The Grass Is Singing*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008.

—. *This Was the Old Chief's Country: Collected African Stories* Volume one. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003.

Liu, Miqing. *An Aesthetic Study of Literary Translation*. Taipei: Student Book Company, 1995.

M'Bow, Amadou-Mahtar. "Preface." *General History of Africa*, vol. I, edited by J. Ki-Zerbo, Heinemann and UNESCO, 2000.

Nord, Christiane. *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997.

Qian, Pingjun and Zhenwu Zhu. "On English Translations of Chinese Classics and Foreign Literature Teaching and Studying: An Interview with Professor Zhu Zhenwu." *Journal of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*, no. 5, 2022, pp.16-23.

Safran, William. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland Return." *Diaspora*, no.1,

1991, pp. 83-99.

Xu, Yuanchong. *Selected Literary Essays of Xu Yuanchong*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999.

Zhu, Zhenwu. "Revealing the Diversity of World Literature and Constructing Chinese African Literaturology." *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, 22 Oct. 2021, p.4.

—. "Mutual Appreciation in Dissemination and Domestication-Foreignization Balance in Chinese and Foreign Literatures: Centered on the Construction Logic of 'Chinese African Literaturology'." *Foreign Literature Studies*, no. 1, 2025, pp. 50-58.

— and Chuting Jiang. "Zhu Zhenwu: Balancing and Absorbing the Spirit of Global Literary Cultures." *Wenhui Reading Weekly*, 30 Dec. 2011.

Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li. "The Africanness of African Literatures and New Patterns in Human Civilization." *Social Sciences in China* [English Edition], no. 3, 2022, pp.113-27.

—. "African Literatures and the Diversity of Civilizations." *Social Sciences in China* [Chinese Edition], no. 8, 2022, pp.163-84.

Zhu, Zhenwu and Junqing Yuan. "Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance: A Case Study of African Literature in English." *Social Sciences in China* [Chinese Edition], no. 7, 2019, pp. 135-58.

Zhu Zhenwu and Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea

Yang Zhongju
Communication School, Linyi University
Linyi 276000, China
Email: yangzh66@126.com

Abstract Prof. Zhu Zhenwu, a prominent translator and scholar of world literature in China, has captured great attention and accolades among his peers for introducing his concepts of "non-mainstream literature," "four major diasporas," and "Africanness" based on his perceptions about mutual learning between civilizations and the significance of cultural diversity. In his recent studies, he has made amazing yet timely significant stride in pioneering a new field of literary studies with his theory on what has been termed as the "Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea," namely, the Chinese studies of African literature. So far, his groundbreaking work and his grand vision for this field have garnered enthusiastic response and widespread support from numerous scholars of world literature. The reason lies in their shared commitment to incorporating the adumbrated and marginalized African literature into the new system of world literature and redrawing the landscape of world literature studies. This article tries to clarify the definition of Prof. Zhu's theory of "Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea".

Keywords Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea; non-mainstream literature; four major diasporas; Africanness

Author **Yang Zhongju**, Ph.D., is Professor at the Communication School, Linyi University (Linyi 276000, China). His research interests include foreign literature and translation studies, diasporic poetic studies, and cross-cultural communication studies.

Introduction

African literature, with its unique historical and cultural background, is an important part of world literature. The African continent has a great ancient civilization and a long oral tradition, nevertheless, under the oppression of colonialism and racism, African culture has been severely marginalized. In this context, African writers ground their work in the culture and history of the African continent, drawing strength

from oral literature, and absorbing the outstanding achievements of world literature to develop independent written literature with a unique artistic style and expression. The achievements of African literature not only inject new vitality and connotation into world literature, but also provide an important way for us to understand African history and culture. Amid the growing global attention towards African literature, research on African literature within Chinese academia has also achieved a milestone breakthrough. In 2019, a research project titled "History of African Literature Written in English", led by Prof. Zhu Zhenwu (朱振武), received funding support from the prestigious National Social Science Fund of China, indicating that African literary studies in China has entered a new era. Prof. Zhu's team published a series of influential papers in top-tier journals such as *Social Sciences in China* and *Foreign Literature Studies*. Building on the various research, Prof. Zhu formally proposed the theoretical framework of "Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea". This theory emphasizes interpreting African literature from a "Chinese perspective," avoiding the entrenched frameworks of Western academia, while also advocating for the exploration of new ideas and values generated through cross-civilizational dialogues in African literature. It provides an innovative theoretical paradigm for African literary studies both in China and globally.

African literature in the Global Canon

With the European colonization coming to its end in the mid-20th century, African nations declared independence one after another, thus launching a process of decolonization and enhancing, gradually but tenaciously, the cultural awareness across the African continent. Since the 1960s, African literary writing has entered an explosive phase. Seven African writers have won the Nobel Prize for Literature, including Albert Camus from Algeria, Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, Naguib Mahfouz from Egypt, Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee from South Africa, Doris Lessing from Zimbabwe, and Abdulrazak Gurnah from Tanzania. In addition, more writers have received the Booker Prize, the Goncourt Prize, the Camões Prize, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and the Caine Prize for African Writing. The achievement of African literature garnered broad attention from the academia around the world, but the academia in the West seems unable to free itself from the bondage of Eurocentrism, or stop its usual practice of scrutinizing and defining African literature as "the other" in accordance with Euro-American criteria either in its literary criticism or in its selection of award/prize recipients.

Such a phenomenon is clearly evidenced by Africa's lack of a well-deserving position within the global literary space and a respectable presence in world

literature. We know that the term "Weltliterartur" ("World Literature") was first coined in 1827 by Goethe, who proclaimed at the time: "The epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach" (qtd. in Damrosch 21-22). Unfortunately, to the academia in Europe and North America, the term largely meant "classics" like Homer's epics or *Beowulf* onward, or other popular writings by their writers. Some scholars of postcolonial literature, such as Robert Young and Pheng Cheah, claim that postcolonial literature is what world literature should be because their scholarship has addressed African literature well. Other scholars, such as David Damrosch and Martin Puchner, disagreed. In their view, postcolonial literature is politically active, and it merely covers African writings during the period of European colonialism, not before and after, so it has its limitations. World literature, they assert, is politically neutral, and it covers a much broader and deeper history of literature. Since the early 2000s, a series of major publications, especially David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* (2003) and *World Literature in Theory* (2014), Theo D'haen's *World Literature in an Age of Geopolitics* (2021), and Martin Puchner's *Literature for a Changing Planet* (2022), have introduced and promoted the idea of "new world literature," advocating re-reading literature, not just from the West but also around the world, exploring the need for the "decanonization" and "recanonization" of world literature, and expanding the borders of world literature studies.

There is no disputing that the balance in world literature has been shifting with the sweeping changes, both political and economic, in the world. As a result, European and North American literatures, which used to be considered the dominant part of world literature, are gradually losing their importance and influence, whereas the interest in African literature has been quickly increasing due to its rising position in the world order through its robust economic growth and powerful political voice. While such a long-awaited change is encouraging, many people wish it to go beyond various anthologies and sustain in the field of world literature studies. In other words, non-Western writers and critics should have a viable voice in this debate over the transition from postcolonial literature to the so-called "new world literature."

Zhu Zhenwu (朱振武), a prominent translator, critic, and professor at Shanghai Normal University, is one of the first scholars of world literature in China to question the long-established Eurocentric canonization in world literature and demand a voice for the under-represented literatures in the formation of a "new world literature." In his article, "Revealing the Diversity of World Literature and Constructing Chinese African Literaturology," published in *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, one of China's most prestigious academic journals, Zhu redefines the concept of world literature in

the fast-changing world and shares his approach to facilitating the mutual learning between civilizations: "The world literature, as we know it today, is lack of diversity. As a matter of fact, the world literature as defined by Goethe, or the world literature from Westerners' perspective today, or even the world literature accepted and acknowledged by all of us in the academia, does not represent the world literature per se. At least, it does not contain the initial features of world literature. Conversely, it is the so-called "world literature" constructed by Westerners primarily based on the literary elements from a few major European countries, along with limited selections from other countries and regions. Accordingly, the mutual learning between civilizations is hard to accomplish".

Due to a late start in its study of African literature and a persistent influence from the West, the Chinese academia mostly followed Western theories and research methods in reading and critiquing the works by African writers, and it has failed to evince its independence, innovativeness, and systematicity. To break the existing mindset and norm in the Chinese studies of African literature, Zhu took the lead in calling for a thorough reform that would generate a fresh and distinctly Chinese perspective, approach, and discourse. He urged people to rediscover and understand Africa, with a deep cultural awareness, in consonance with the universal values of mankind, such as peace, development, equality, justice, democracy, and freedom: "With concrete steps like conducting field research, combing through first-hand material, making direct contact with Africa, its writers and personnel working in literary and cultural fields, integrating into the texture and interstices of African culture, and delving into African literary texts, we may reset the objectives of our research, define our aesthetic standard, and position the coordinate system for African literature as well as the literature and culture of the world. That, in turn, will enable Chinese scholars not only to share our insights and findings, but also to actively facilitate the inter-cultural, inter-disciplinary, inter-spatial, and cross-perspective theoretical thinking and international dialogue by using Chinese literature and culture as a starting point and relying on the literatures and cultures around the world as reference" (Qian and Zhu 19).

Here, Zhu lays out his vision, plan, and action for the reform. Since 2012, Zhu and his team have been moving forward fruitfully in this direction. They have focused their studies on a representative part of African literature, namely, the origin and flow of African literature written in English and English literature in African countries, so that they could present a wide range of writings from African literature to the readers and scholars around the world, analyze the complex relationship between native and foreign cultures, colonial and postcolonial cultures, African and

Western civilizations, and demonstrate the long-neglected value of African literature and, particularly, its significance to the advancement of cultural diversity and the "recanonization" of the new world literature.

The fact that the research project, "History of African Literature Written in English," led by Zhu, received the sponsorship from the prestigious National Social Science Fund of China in 2019 indicates that the Chinese studies of African literature has entered a new phase. Since then, Zhu has published a series of articles, such as "Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance" and "African Literatures and the Diversity of Civilizations," in *Social Sciences in China*, sharing his theoretical consideration of African literature as a whole, establishing his theory of "Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea."

Theoretical Foundations of Chinese African Literaturology

At the heart of Prof. Zhu's intervention into world-literature studies lies a normative claim: the epistemic legitimacy of any newly emergent field is inseparable from the ethical ends it serves. Rather than treating African writing as an empirical corpus awaiting neutral description, Chinese African Literaturology begins by foregrounding two mutually reinforcing axiological commitments—cultural diversity and inter-civilizational dialogue. These commitments, I contend, do not serve as extrinsic ideological window-dressing, instead, they constitute the field's methodological point of departure, heuristic lens, and ultimate telos. In what follows, I excavate the Confucian and Mohist genealogies that underwrite this stance, demonstrate their compatibility with contemporary UNESCO paradigms of "pluralism" and "conviviality," and argue that their activation within a Chinese critical idiom offers a necessary corrective to the asymmetrical tolerance long embedded in Euro-American world-literature discourse.

Advancing cultural diversity and promoting mutual learning between civilizations are the core concepts in Zhu's theory of Chinese African Literaturology, a theory that stemmed from the traditional ideas of Chinese culture, namely, "seeking harmony but not uniformity" and "only when everyone's beauty is beauty and everyone appreciates others' beauty, can all beauties co-exist, and universal harmony be possible." Such a concept aligns with the universal values of a happy, rich, equal, just, peaceful, and harmonious life. These values, as they are all desired by mankind, may resonate with people from different races, regions, and nations and prompt their recognition of psychological sensibility and humanistic spirit.

The idea of "harmony" has a long history in Chinese culture. Lao Tzu once explored the idea about "downsizing a country with a sparse population" just to

ensure "delicious food, beautiful clothes, comfortable houses, and joy in life for its citizens" (*Tao Te Ching* Chapter 18). It seems a little conservative, but it implies a simple hope for peace and health. Mozi's interpretation of universal love might serve as a prototype for empathy and mutual learning between different schools of thoughts: "see others' country as you would see your own, see others' family as you would see your own, and see others as you would see yourself" (*Universal Love* Part II). The idea about the Mean and Harmony constitutes the core of Confucianism, and it is one of the key components of Chinese culture as well. Confucius attached special importance to the Doctrine of the Mean: "The Doctrine of the Mean is the highest virtue, but its practice has been rare for a long time" (*The Analects of Confucius* Yong Ye). He regarded the Mean as the consummate tactic and realm of life, but some people discarded what he said as a variation of opportunism, eclecticism, and reconciliationism. What he really meant by the Mean has nothing to do with reconciliation or being an eclectic. Instead, he tried to stress the importance in being moderate, adaptive, appropriate, suitable, and timely. The essence of being "moderate" is acting according to the norms and seeking harmony but not uniformity, because harmony is the discipline or principle in the Chinese way of living and handling affairs, the code of gentlemen's conduct, and the ideal approach in dealing with the relationships between nations, cultures, and literatures.

In Zhu's cultural consciousness, there exists a deeply rooted faith in the Chinese culture of harmony. His proposal to use the two goals of "enhancing cultural diversity and facilitating mutual learning between civilizations" as the guiding principles in constructing the "new world literature," with a proper coverage for African literature and other Third-World literatures, could be seen as a brilliant move that has effectively taken the advantage of the Chinese cultural heritage on the one hand and, on the other, perfectly corresponded to the values commonly advocated by various countries around the world, such as peace, development, equality, justice, democracy, and freedom, hence underscoring the burgeoning innovative spirit and cultural confidence of Chinese academia. Zhu articulates his intent and vision confidently: "We must keep a foothold in Chinese culture while breaking Western discourse patterns, critical clichés, and cognitive liminality and constructing our own literary and cultural concepts, so that we can draw a new cultural landscape in the world and establish a new system of world literature. By then, I am sure, mutual learning between civilizations could take place, in a true sense, within the context of a diverse world literature, and a Chinese critical discourse and theoretical system would be established and fully capable of contributing to the endeavor to bring about cultural diversity all over the world and

construct a dynamic community of literatures and cultures" (Qian and Zhu 21).

A change in concept often leads to an innovation for a disciplinary theory and a new discourse system. Replicating the existing one from Europe and America will not enable us to present any objective, fair study and evaluation about African literature or literatures of other Third-World countries. To this end, a group of Chinese scholars, led by Zhu, have come up with their theories on a range of issues, such as "non-mainstream English literature," "colonial diaspora," "native diaspora," "foreign diaspora," and "Africanness," by drawing from excellent traditions in Chinese literature, cultivating the mainstream literature in the West, and consulting the translation and study of Chinese literature by sinologists in the West. What they have accomplished so far is much more than just starting a new chapter for the Chinese studies of African literature because their research findings, textual appreciations, and theoretic conclusions have been disseminated incessantly through journal articles, conference presentations, and scholarly books. One of their major and widely endorsed claims is that "the interconnection, or integration, among issues, such as decolonization, diaspora, and hybridity, has made it possible for African literature and other non-mainstream literatures to transcend themselves across the gaps and differences of time, place, and race" (Zhu and Li 164-65).

From Non-Mainstream Literature to Chinese African Literaturology

Obviously, the Chinese African Literaturology, envisioned and constructed by Zhu and his peers, is quite different from the African literaturology in Africa, let alone the West. It is nothing like a mechanical carryover, or replica, from the conventions in the Euro-American or African academia. It was established in consequence of a turn in China's study of non-mainstream literature, which is part of the big cultural aftermath from the European colonization, i.e., the huge amount of literature written in the languages of suzerains. Written away from the suzerains, it is not considered part of the literature in the suzerains, but it is not wholly accepted as part of the native literature of colonies, because it is the literature written in the suzerains' languages either by the migrant writers from suzerains or the writers in colonies. Former colonial empires, including Britain, France, Spain, and Portuguese, produced an abundant non-mainstream literary legacy, such as non-mainstream literature in English, French, Spanish, etc., during and after colonization. Since the beginning of the 20th century, non-mainstream literature has been flourishing continuously. To a large extent, the Irish literature represented by Joyce, Yeats, and Beckett, the Canadian literature by Atwood and Munro, the Australian literature by Lawson and White, the African literature by Soyinka, Gordimer, Coetzee, and

Gurnah, the Caribbean literature by Walcott and Selvon, and the Indian literature by Tagore have redrawn the chart of mainstream literature in Europe and America.

How did these literatures influence the cultural and literary development in the colonized countries? How did they affect the cultural and literary development in the suzerains? Did they have an impact on the value and significance of world literature? Given their ties to the relationship between different cultures and their involvement in the writing and propagation of literature with a new style, they are definitely worthy of scholarly research. In fact, they have already become the hot topic in the study of world literature and increasingly expanded the scope of this field. The team of Chinese scholars, headed by Zhu, was the first to initiate this "turn," clarify the relationship between three kinds of literature, and introduce a new chart for the study of world literature: "the First-World literature" represented by US and the UK; "the Second-World literature" represented by Japan, France, German, Italy, Russia, and Spain; "the Third-World literature" represented by China, Africa, and Latin America. The first two categories belong to "mainstream literature," while the last one belongs to "non-mainstream literature" (Zhu, "Revealing" 4).

To understand Zhu's theory of Chinese African Literaturology, it is imperative to know what the study of the non-mainstream English language literature is all about. Generally, non-mainstream literature refers to the literary works written and published in English by writers in countries and regions around the world, excluding the works in English and American literature. It is different from English and American literature, but it is not the same as native literature, either. Its writer may have been influenced by the historical and cultural traditions conveyed through the English language and, at the same time, the literature he/she has created in English may have been deeply immersed in the native culture, the geographic environment, and the political atmosphere of his/her region or country.

African literature is a typical part of non-mainstream literature. Before the 20th century, African literature was almost ignored by the world, whereas the image of Africa was mostly presented by the literary works written in colonizers' languages after the 20th century started. It is primarily through these works that the world came to know and understand Africa. Most of the time, the translation, award selection, and literary criticism of African literature started from non-mainstream literature and operated on the long-established conventions and standards that were often mixed with Eurocentric prejudices. Zhu's research is different since he refuses to follow the Eurocentric approach. Instead, he has upheld his belief in cultural consciousness and the advancement of cultural diversity and ventured into the uncultivated territory of literary studies. So far, he has successfully initiated a new research field for non-

mainstream literature and the nation-based English literature in Africa. To lay out the premise, framework, and goal of this field, Zhu has authored or edited a series of scholarly books, including *Introduction to the Chinese Study of English Literature in Countries Other than England and America* (2013), *The Study of Canadian and New Zealand English Literature in China* (2013), *Root and Flow of African English Literature* (2019), *Study of African English Literature* (2019), and *Study of English Literature in African Countries* (2019). The most striking success in his research is the way in which his analysis starts with a look over the origin and development of the English language literature around the world before examining the English language literature in different African countries, from its source and flow to its time period, its leading writers and writings, its relationship with its suzerain, and its contribution to world literature. After their research program, "History of African Literature Written in English," received the sponsorship from the National Social Science Fund of China in 2019, Zhu and his team have published a series of research papers, introducing their new concepts and presenting their objective assessment of the characteristics and achievements in African literature. They have fully confirmed, based on their findings and conclusions, that the non-mainstream literature has already dropped off its "non-mainstream" label and caught up with, or even overtaken, the mainstream literature. With his persistent probe on the "frontiers" of literature over the years, such as the non-mainstream literature, the non-mainstream English literature, and the history of African literature written in English, Zhu has taken all the necessary steps to build the scholarly foundations, one layer at a time, for the establishment of Chinese African Literaturology.

The Four Major African Diasporas: a Typology

Given a combination of factors, such as its rare misfortunes in colonialization, the trade of black slaves, and its complex indigenous cultures, Africans went through the ordeals of the physical cross-border migration, the spiritual and cultural exile, and the marginalization of national identity. So many people, namely, migrants, settlers, natives, and immigrants with double or multiple nationalities, fell into the interstices of diasporic domains. The diaspora literature generated from these domains, therefore, is much richer and far more complicated than that of any other region. It has been a major component of literature in most of the African countries, except Egypt, Algeria, and very few other countries north of the Sahara Desert, and "diasporicity" has become a dominant representation of African literature. Based on his analysis of various diasporas and their literary performance, Zhu summed up four major paradigms in African diaspora literature: Native diaspora, Foreign

diaspora, Colonial diaspora,[1] and Foreign-native diaspora (between two or more countries).[2] These paradigms, as a whole, may work well in delivering accurate observations on a range of issues, such as the clash, reference, fusion, variation, and the "chemical reaction" and consequence in its generative process, that would occur in the interplay between African and other heterogenous literatures.

The concept of diaspora often evokes images of people dispersed across geographical boundaries, yet Africa presents a distinctive variant—the "native diaspora". Unlike traditional diasporas characterized by physical displacement, this phenomenon describes a condition where indigenous Africans experience a form of cultural displacement within their own homelands. This paradoxical situation arises from the complex interplay of colonial policies, cultural subjugation, and the imposition of foreign cultural norms. As we delve into this unique aspect of African cultural history, we uncover how colonial forces created a state of internal exile, marginalizing Africans within their own cultural and social landscapes.

Regarding Native Diaspora, Zhu accurately defined its connotation: "It refers to those African natives who were forced into a kind of diasporic cultural environment in their own country by the colonial policies, through which the colonizers tried to promote their colonial language and Christianity, plunder the land of the colony, and enforce racial segregation and the divide-and-conquer plans, even though the natives never had any migration experience overseas, let along in the First-World countries, nor faced any cultural conflict that was usually caused by one's "spatial shift," nor delt with the consequent problems after barging into a foreign country, such as identity predicament, anxiety over their rootlessness, search for home and recognition, and isolation" (Zhu and Yuan 144).

The African continent is second to none in terms of its prolonged experience under colonization, the depth of impact on its culture, and the intensity and scale of its conflict with colonizers. As a dominant power, the colonial culture marginalized Africans and their cultures and confined them, culturally and spiritually, in a similar diasporic situation. Though living on the land of their own country and in their own culture, they had no voice whatsoever. Such a state of dispersion is more unfair, tragic, and painful, and the composition of its "hybridity" is more complicated. Frantz Fanon, a black theorist who migrated to France, provides a pertinent explanation of the

1 See the article by Zhu, Zhenwu and Junqing Yuan, "Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance: A Case Study of African Literature in English," *Social Sciences in China*, no. 7, 2019, pp. 135-58.

2 For a detailed definition of the term, see the article by Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li, "African Literature and Culture," *Social Sciences in China*, no. 8, 2022, p. 170.

dissociative identity disorder among native Africans under colonization: "The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question" (Fanon 17).

In this relationship, the black man's identity is in crisis, while the white man's identity is strengthened because he sees his own superiority from the black man's identity as the other. The black man's vulnerable position of being governed and dominated induce his sense of self-inferiority about his identity and his urge to imitate and attach himself to the white culture: "Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (Fanon 18).

As Western colonizers forcefully carried out their cultural colonization and imposed mother countries' languages, cultures, and discourse systems in education, literary writing, publication, and media, black writers resorted, extensively and heavily, to the methods of Western literary writing in their literary writings, so as to give themselves a voice in front of the Western world. Naturally, literature served as a tool for propagating the Western culture in colonies and precipitated the spread and fusion of surrealism and symbolism in black literary writings and cultural activities. Once they realized that an excessive drawing from, or a blind imitation of, others would lead to the abandonment of one's own national traditions, native writers tried to figure out how to learn from the West but free themselves from the cultural hegemony of colonialism while ensuring the independent development of their national culture. This appears to be the only choice for African literature to be integrated into world literature.

The colonial enterprise, as a historical phenomenon, was not merely a political and economic endeavor but also a profound cultural and literary project. The movement of people from the colonizing powers to the colonies created complex webs of cultural interaction, conflict, and hybridity.

The idea of "Colonial diaspora" may help explain the cultural experience and literary production in colonies among the migrants and their descendants from mother countries. It is intended to answer the following questions: How did the colonizers, as a minority, adopt a powerful cultural attitude in writing about, or dealing with, their relationship to the culture of colonies? How did they

affect the culture in colonies? How did the culture of colonies, in turn, affect the colonial diasporas? What is the specific cultural consequence, or regeneration, of their mutual influence? The literature of the African "colonial diaspora" mostly consists of the works written by white writers and their descendants from European countries, such as Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal, whose writing went through a drastic transformation from depicting African society based on the perspective of their superior culture to reconsidering the impact on Africa from the colonization, revealing the widespread confusion after the powerful culture's loss of its position, and exploring issues concerning cultural compromise and integration.

J.M. Coetzee's literary evolution epitomizes the transformative characteristic of the colonial diaspora. His early works, such as Dusklands, exemplify the imperial gaze, objectifying the South African landscape and indigenous bodies to reinforce white supremacy. This phase aligns with the initial colonial project of cultural dominance and territorial subjugation. However, Coetzee's mid-career novels, particularly *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life & Times of Michael K*, pivot towards an introspective critique of colonial violence. Here, the narrative lens shifts to the internal mechanics of the colonial apparatus, exposing the moral bankruptcy of imperial discourse. The protagonist K's "escape" symbolizes a subversive act against the spatial and ideological order of colonization. In his later oeuvre, including *Disgrace* and *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee delves deeper into the postcolonial predicament. Set against the backdrop of democratic South Africa, these texts portray the descendants of empire grappling with linguistic disempowerment and existential crises. The erstwhile cultural capital of the colonizers is relegated to a "second language," necessitating renegotiation. Throughout this trajectory, Coetzee consciously employs a stylistic "de-anglicization." His prose becomes increasingly austere, divesting the symbolic framework of colonial romanticism. The narrative voice adopts a detached, "outsider" tone, mirroring the "re-alienation" of colonial progeny within their ancestral terrain. Thus, his writing transcends mere exoticism, evolving into a site of mutual interrogation and transformation between the metropole's language and the colony's historical reality.

Coetzee's case illuminates the central paradox of colonial diaspora literature: it must first enter the discursive center via the imperial language to progressively hollow out its hegemonic content and ultimately cede aesthetic ground to the colonized space. This process not only reconfigures the narrative authority of white writers in Africa but also furnishes a microcosmic model for observing how colonial culture can retroactively permeate the colonized culture. In other words, the more the diasporic writer clings to a superior perspective, the more their text internally generates fissures

in their cultural positioning. It is within these fissures that the new hybrid identities and ethical imaginaries required by postcolonial society begin to germinate.

The term "Foreign Diaspora" has long been associated with the traditional notion of migration, where individuals and communities are displaced from their homelands to other countries. This movement often involves a complex interplay between the minority culture of the diaspora and the dominant culture of the host country. In the context of Africa, the foreign diaspora represents a significant and multifaceted phenomenon, particularly in Euro-American countries.

Foreign diaspora usually means diaspora in its traditional sense, namely, people migrating to other countries. It denotes a mode of exchange, the weak culture of diasporic minority and the powerful culture of the majority in the adopted country. Specifically, African foreign diaspora refers to people migrating, voluntarily or involuntarily, to Euro-American countries or regions. Take the black diaspora in America and England for example. As strangers in a foreign country, their living conditions went through transnational, cross-lingual, cross-cultural, and interracial changes. Africans and their descendants scattering all over the world (mostly in their former suzerains) have created a rich history of the black foreign diaspora literature, which has evolved through suppression, marginalization, awakening, and resurgence, is accompanied by a historical process in which the national consciousness of blacks was awakened and the struggle against colonial and racial oppression was sustained around the globe. The ideological trends of globalization and multiculturalism accelerated the process in which the black diaspora literature moved from edge to center and, thereby, flowed like a branch into the mainstream.

The history of the African foreign diaspora in the Global North is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of communities in the face of significant challenges. From the early struggles of migration and marginalization to the eventual rise of a vibrant and influential literary tradition, the black diaspora has consistently demonstrated its capacity for cultural renewal and resistance. The ideological currents of globalization and multiculturalism have played a crucial role in this evolution, facilitating the transition of black diaspora literature from the periphery to the mainstream. This shift not only reflects a broader recognition of the contributions of African communities to global culture but also underscores the ongoing struggle for equality and representation. As we continue to explore the complexities of the African foreign diaspora, we are reminded of the enduring power of literature to articulate the human experience and to foster a deeper understanding of our shared humanity.

"Foreign-native diaspora" (Been-to Diaspora) refers to migrants who dispersed

to foreign countries and then returned, or the transnational sojourners who moved between their homeland and foreign countries, or "multiple transnational residents" who migrated to a third geographical and cultural space. This term denotes a mode of "double or multiple cultural dwelling." The Trinidadian-British writer, V. S. Naipaul, for instance, wrote about Trinidad, England, India, and Africa in English and often went back, as a visitor, to these countries. Many characteristics of the multiple transnational diasporas are well presented in his works. Major African transnational writers include Chinua Achebe (America and homeland) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (England, America, and homeland) from Nigeria, Peter Abrahams (homeland, England, and Jamaica) from South Africa, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (America and homeland) from Kenya, all of whom lived and worked under double or multiple cultural environment and developed their multiple perspectives toward different cultures as the "other," "observer," "self," and "participant."

"Foreign-native Diaspora" reveals a unique migratory pattern where individuals experience a cultural oscillation between their homeland and foreign countries. This movement is not just physical but deeply cultural, as these migrants often return to their native lands with a transformed sense of identity. They bring back foreign cultural elements, which they integrate into their native contexts, creating a rich tapestry of hybrid cultural expressions. Writers such as V. S. Naipaul and Chinua Achebe exemplify this phenomenon, as their works reflect a deep engagement with multiple cultural milieus. Naipaul's narratives, for instance, often explore themes of cultural displacement and reconnection, while Achebe's writings highlight the complexities of maintaining a connection to one's roots while navigating foreign cultural landscapes. This dual cultural dwelling allows these writers to develop a multifaceted perspective, where they can critique, observe, and participate in different cultures simultaneously. This dynamic not only enriches their literary output but also provides a deeper understanding of the complexities of identity and belonging in a transnational context.

The theory of these "four diasporas" may assist us, as Zhu suggests, in drawing a clear line between various African diaspora literatures in terms of their orientations and levels, expanding the scope of the research on diaspora literature well beyond the limitations of the study on classical and modern diasporas, and highlighting the internal pattern of its diasporicity, hybridity, and cultural reproductivity. Given its extensive scope and logical stratification, the theory of the "four diasporas" developed by Zhu and his team can help the ever-growing study on the transnational diaspora in the context of globalization and serve as a vital source of reference in our handling of different cultural relationships as well. At the same time, Zhu also

pointed out the internal connections between the four types of diaspora: "There are similarities and differences among these four types of diaspora, and they have a certain degree of overlap, all facing conflicts and integrations between different cultures, especially heterogeneous cultures"("Mutual Appreciation" 57). This provides a Chinese theoretical perspective for the academic community to better understand and study African literature.

Africanness: The Core Quality of African Literature

The quintessential quality of African literature is its "Africanness" or "Africanity,"[1] which embodies the very innate provisions that have made African literature what it is and the core of the African literature studies, just as what "Chineseness" does for Chinese literature or what "Americanness" does for American literature. Such a quality determines that African literature, as a cultural system, is as independent as literatures in Europe, rather than a marginalized appendage under the cultural hegemony of colonization. Furthermore, it warns us that literary studies can no longer treat it as a follower or a derivative of mother countries' literature.

"Africanness" represents the African cultural and literary concept that contains a relatively consistent connotation but keeps changing constantly. It changes along with the development of African society, culture, and literature, and it generates more vitality and cultural flexibility, such as blackness, nativeness, coloniality, postcoloniality, diasporicity, hybridity, and foreignness. "Africanness" epitomizes different characteristics during the different historical periods of the African continent and the different developmental phases of African culture and literature. According to Zhu, the term, "Africanness," "emphasizes African people's and their descendants' firm identification with the history and culture originated from the African continent and their deep attachment to the native land. What it embodies is a distinct cultural quality, namely, a determination to uphold selfhood, break down barriers, remember history, but always look forward toward the future" (Zhu and Li 164). In other words, this quality is a unity between the unchangeability and changeability of African culture. Its rich connotations have been figuratively expressed, in varying degrees, in the works by Gurnah and other writers. National and native factors, such as the natural environment, geography, history, culture, and language of the African continent, constitute the relatively stable cultural quality of "Africanness,"

1 The two terms, "Africanness" and "Africanity," are frequently seen in the Western scholarly discourse. Their suffix, -ness or ity, carries the implication of "quality, state, and characteristic." "Africanness" has been mostly used in the study of African literature since the 1990s to represent the "African characteristics" in African literature objectively and specifically.

a quality that is always forward-looking, changeable, and abreast of time in the face of international challenges. What's more, "Africanness" is an ideological concept that crosses geographical, historical, and cultural spaces because it has redefined the meaning and value of African culture as well as its position in world culture, rather than a colonialist (imperialist) definitive schema.[1] Zhu's analysis of "Africanness" is centered around the historical foundation of African literature and the various connotations of "Africanness" concerning coloniality, diasporicity, and hybridity.[52]

"Africanness" is the soul of African culture and literature because it is deeply rooted in the native history and culture of Africa that has been passed on continuously among the African people. The former Director-General of UNESCO, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, put it well, "The efforts of the peoples of Africa to conquer or strengthen their independence, secure their development, and assert their cultural characteristics must be rooted in historical awareness renewed, keenly felt and taken up by each succeeding generation" (M'Bow xx-xxi). Such an awareness has been concretely represented in the history, culture, literature, and other civilizational achievements created by the African people. The history of Africa is not the history of a tribe, and the history of African literature is not a literary history of merely one country or nation, either. Rather, it encompasses the history and literature of the entire African continent. In short, "Africanness" stands for the unity of African culture's entirety and hybridity.

Due to the impact from the European transatlantic slave trade and the massive migration within Africa during the 16th and 19th centuries, the cultural collisions between the cultures in and outside Africa went on frequently and extensively. Under such circumstances, the tragic destiny of slaves and their memories of the native land back in Africa became perpetual themes in African diasporic black literature. Around the late 19th and early 20th centuries, European colonists invaded into the spheres of politics, economy, culture, and education in Africa and caused so much serious damage on the independence and self-reliance of African culture that Africans rose in resistance using the European languages, ideas, and cultural concepts to search for the control and legitimacy of their own culture. They put forth a series of ideological concepts, such as "blackness," "Africanity," and "Pan-Africanism," in attempt to identify, safeguard, and advocate the original values of African culture on the one hand and, on the other, seek their national independence and the self-esteem,

1 For more details, see Ali A. Mazrui's *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui*, Africa World Press, 2002.

2 See the article by Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li, "African Literatures and the Diversity of Civilizations." *Social Sciences in China*, no. 8, 2022, pp. 163-84.

pride, and self-sufficiency of their culture. Their endeavor facilitated the revival of black culture and highlighted its diasporic, revolutionary, decolonial, and hybrid traits. After the 1950s and 1960s, nations in Africa declared independence one after another. African culture and literature started to advance in full swing, displaying a set of reflective, autonomous, and innovative trends as well as a yearning for a co-existent community in its development. Zhu's idea about the unity of the variance and invariance of "Africanness" provides us with a scientific dialectic approach in understanding and studying the ever progressing African literature.

The great achievement in African literature in the last 50 years resulted from the "positive-sum game." While reflecting on the history of African ordeal in nearly one thousand years, African writers also looked back at the centennial history of their revolution. To integrate the Western and Eastern civilizations more organically, they opened a two-fold dialogue through literature—one among themselves and the other for reach out—to maintain the cultural spirit of the African continent, while drawing appropriate lessons from foreign cultures for their own benefit. In doing so , they cultivated the deep soil for "Africanness" and, accommodated the diverse elements (international elements) in modern and contemporary African literature. There is no doubt that such an experience of African literature is not just a direct confutation of the argument about "the clash of civilizations," but rather an excellent model for mutual learning between cultures in the world and the construction of a more diverse world literature.

Conclusion

Zhu's intervention is not a regional addendum to extant world-literature debates but an epistemic re-grounding of world literature. His quartet of diasporic paradigms—Native, Colonial, Foreign, and Foreign-Native (Been-to) diaspora—illuminates the historically obscured vectors of African literary mobility, while the articulation of "Africanness" as a mobile, self-reflexive cultural grammar destabilizes the residual taxonomies that continue to position African writing as Europe's ontological Other. What emerges is a theory whose methodological core—cultural diversity as an ethical imperative and mutual learning as a procedural protocol—reorients comparative literature from a cartography of centers and peripheries toward a polycentric lattice of co-eval negotiations.

If these trajectories are pursued with the reflexivity that Zhu advocates, Chinese African Literaturology will not merely supplement world literature; it will reshape its operative logic, replacing the zero-sum calculus of canon-formation with what could be termed a "positive-sum aesthetics," in which every act of critical

recognition enlarges, rather than delimits, the commons of world letters.

Overall, the Chinese African Literaturology has already embarked on a path of further construction and prosperity. We have ample reason to believe that with the studies of African literature written in English, French, Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese unfolding and the study of African languages and literatures further expanding, the discipline formation, scholarly community, and discourse system of the Chinese African Literaturology will be improved and consolidated continuously, so it will surely make greater contributions to the construction of a new world literature and a new paradigm for the mutual learning between civilizations.

Funding: This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China under Major National Program "History of African Literature Written in English" [19ZDA296].

Works Cited

Damrosch, David, editor. *World Literature in Theory*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* [*Peau noire, masques blancs*]. Translated by Charles Lam Markman. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

M'Bow, Amadou-Mahtar. "Preface". *General History of Africa.* vol.1, edited by J. Ki-Zerbo, Heinemann and UNESCO, 2000.

钱屏匀、朱振武："自信自觉潜心华典外译, 思辨思政教研外国文学——朱振武教授访谈录"，《广东外语外贸大学学报》，2022(05): 16-23。

[Qian, Pingjun and Zhenwu Zhu. "On English Translations of Chinese Classics and Foreign Literature Teaching and Studying: An Interview with Professor Zhu Zhenwu." *Journal of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*, no. 5, 2022, pp.16-23.]

朱振武："揭示世界文学多样性，构建中国非洲文学学"，《中国社会科学报》，2021.10.22，第 4 版。

[Zhu, Zhenwu. "Revealing the Diversity of World Literature and Constructing Chinese African Literaturology." *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, 22 Oct. 2021, p.4.]

朱振武、李丹："非洲文学与文明多样性"，《中国社会科学》，2022 (08): 163-84。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li. "African Literatures and the Diversity of Civilizations." *Social Sciences in China*, no. 8, 2022, pp.163-84.]

朱振武、袁俊卿："流散文学的时代表征及其世界意义——以非洲英语文学为例"，《中国社会科学》, 2019(07): 135-58。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Junqing Yuan. "Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance: A Case Study of African Literature in English." *Social Sciences in China*, no. 7, 2019, pp. 135-58.]

Balancing the Mainstream and the "Non-Mainstream": A Critical Examination of Zhu Zhenwu's Literary Research Philosophy

Zhang Xiuli
School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai University
Shanghai 200444, China
Email: xllczhang@hotmail.com

Abstract Prof. Zhu Zhenwu, a pioneering scholar in Chinese comparative literature, has redefined global literary studies through his transformative research philosophy, which challenges Eurocentric paradigms while fostering transcultural reciprocity. Central to his work is the construction of Chinese African literaturology: the New Quality Idea, a theoretical framework that integrates four core pillars: (1) Africanness, emphasizing African literature's role in reclaiming cultural sovereignty and resisting colonial narratives; (2) Four Major Diasporas, to address intra-continental hybridity and post-return alienation among African intellectuals; (3) Balanced Absorption, advocating balanced engagement between global and local literary traditions; and (4) Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures, envisioning literature as a catalyst for intercultural harmony. Zhu's scholarship transcends adversarial binaries in postcolonial theory. Prioritizing "problem consciousness" over abstract universalism, Zhu's work reimagines world literature as a networked ecosystem of pluralistic co-creation, displacing hierarchical oppositions with transcultural solidarity. His scholarship not only deconstructs entrenched asymmetries but also charts a transformative path for global humanities, one where marginalized narratives and mainstream discourses coexist as interdependent forces of civilizational renewal.

Keywords Zhu Zhenwu; Chinese African literaturology; Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures; "Non-Mainstream"

Author **Zhang Xiuli** is Associate Professor at the School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai University (Shanghai 200444, China). Her research interests include English Literatures and Culture.

Introduction

Prof. Zhu Zhenwu (朱振武 hereafter referred to as Zhu), a distinguished pro-fessor at

Shanghai Normal University and a leading figure in Chinese comparative literature and world literature studies, has pioneered a transformative research philosophy that bridges Chinese and global literary traditions while challenging Eurocentric academic paradigms. Over two decades, his work has centered on Chinese African literaturology: The New Quality Idea (中国非洲文学学), a theore-tical system that repositions African literature within global humanities through a Chinese lens. This framework integrates four core theories: Africanness, defined as the "deep identification of African and Afro-descended people with the continent's history and culture," underscores African literature's role in resisting colonial narratives and fostering civilizational diversity by reclaiming indigenous cultural sovereignty (Zhu and Han; Zhu and Li "The Africanness of African Literatures" 114; Zhu and Li "African Literatures"); Four Diasporic Typologies, expanding Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, categorizes African diasporas into foreign (geographic displacement), colonial (settler descendants), native (cultural displacement within Africa), and "been-to" (post-travel identity struggles), emphasizing intra-continental cultural hybridity and psychological dislocation; the theory of Balanced Absorption (均衡吸纳说), advocating for balanced engagement with global literatures, rejects Western hegemony while promoting mutual learning between Chinese and African literary traditions through dialectical integration rather than unilateral imitation (Zhu and Jiang; Zhu "Mutual Appreciation"); and Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures (文化共栖共生说), inspired by Marxist-humanist ideals, envisions literature as a catalyst for symbiotic civilizational exchange, countering Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* by prioritizing intercultural harmony and shared ethical futures ("Revealing the Diversity"; "Mutual Appreciation"). Together, these theories form a cohesive analytical lens that decentralizes Eurocentric paradigms, foregrounds marginalized voices, and redefines global literary studies through principles of equity, hybridity, and mutual respect.

Zhu's prolific output includes over 20 monographs, 30 translations, and 400 academic articles. Notable works include: *Root and Flower of African English Literature* (2019): A foundational text tracing the evolution of African anglophone literature, highlighting its decolonial ethos and aesthetic distinctiveness. The *African Literary Studies* (10-volume series), edited by Zhu, Principal Investigator of the key project of the National Social Science Fund of China *History of African Literatures Written in English*, is a landmark contribution to African literary scholarship. Spanning 3.7 million words, the series systematically examines over 130 works by 90+ African authors across genres, including novels, poetry, drama, and nonfiction, while integrating French, Portuguese, and Arabic literatures.

Structured into "Classics" and "Selected" sections, it balances canonical texts (e.g., works by Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee) with understudied gems unearthed through fieldwork and critical reevaluation, offering a holistic view of Africa's literary diversity. This series redefines African literary studies by challenging Eurocentric narratives. Unlike Western-centric analyses, it foregrounds Chinese scholars' independent interpretations, rooted in cross-cultural dialogue and theoretical frameworks like Zhu's Chinese African Literaturology. Its "Selected" works, curated through rigorous translation and research, amplify marginalized voices and regional literatures (e.g., Botswana's postcolonial trajectory, Central African poetry, etc.), correcting historical oversights. Hailed as a "paradigm shift" by African scholars, the series avoids regurgitating colonial-era discourse or Western academic trends. Instead, it fosters transdisciplinary dialogue, blending literary analysis with anthropology and postcolonial theory. Kenyan critics emphasize its role in restoring Africa's literary agency, while Ugandan writers highlight its potential to dismantle Western scholarly monopolies. As China's first major African literary project, it bridges cultural divides by promoting mutual translation and academic exchanges. For instance, the series has been integrated into Kenya Literature Bureau's collections and inspired partnerships for Sino-African writer residencies and joint publications. By advocating for literary-cultural solidarity, it aligns with UNESCO's goals of preserving intangible heritage and advancing global intellectual equity.

This paper argues that Zhu's scholarship redefines global literary studies by transcending the adversarial binaries of postcolonial theory and recentering transcultural reciprocity. While Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) critiques Western hegemony and Gayatri Spivak interrogates subaltern silence ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 1988), Zhu's cultural symbiosis shifts focus to bidirectional exchange, harmonizing African orality, Chinese hermeneutics, and Western formalism as co-constitutive forces. Unlike Homi Bhabha's fragmented "third space" (*The Location of Culture* 1994) or Paul Gilroy's transatlantic diasporic flows (*The Black Atlantic* 1993), Zhu's "been-to" diaspora typology expands Safran's unidirectional homeland myth (1991) by analyzing post-return alienation under neocolonial cultural erosion. His Marxist-Confucian framework challenges Eurocentric universalism (Damrosch's *What is World Literature*? 2003), proposing a heterarchical model where marginalized narratives reshape global literary canons through equitable interdependence. By prioritizing context-specific "problem consciousness" over abstract universalism, Zhu's work displaces hierarchical oppositions, reimagining world literature as a networked ecosystem of pluralistic co-creation.

Literary Diversity and the Value of "Non-Mainstream" Literature

Zhu conceptualizes "non-mainstream" English literatures as dynamic literary traditions emerging from postcolonial regions such as Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia, arguing that these traditions challenge Eurocentric hierarchies through formal innovation and epistemological autonomy. Central to his theoretical framework is the paradigm shift from a monolithic conception of "English Literature" to pluralized "English literatures," a transition that, as Zhu and Li assert, "dismantles colonial epistemologies by decentralizing metropolitan authority and legitimizing subaltern voices" ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 117). By framing world literature as a contested domain, Zhu critiques its current limitations, contending that "while world literature inherently encompasses diversity, the 'world literature' we know today is one lacking genuine diversity, as the so-called Western mainstream or dominant culture has suppressed and obscured true literary diversity" ("Revealing the Diversity"). This framework systematically critiques Anglo-American cultural hegemony, emphasizing linguistic hybridity, cultural syncretism, and localized engagements with postcolonial realities, including diasporic identity and racial politics, as defining features of non-mainstream literatures. Importantly, Zhu positions the value of these traditions not merely in their resistance to colonial legacies but in their capacity to forge "independent aesthetic judgment" and construct "autonomous aesthetic systems" rooted in region-specific sociohistorical contexts ("Revealing the Diversity"; *Study of African English Literature*). Through this lens, postcolonial English writing emerges as both a decolonial practice and a generative force for redefining literary canons beyond Western epistemic boundaries.

Zhu's analysis of non-mainstream literary forms, such as Nigeria's Onitsha Market Literature, underscores their historical and ideological significance in articulating grassroots anti-colonial and decolonial consciousness, even amid Western dismissals of their perceived "low" artistic merit. By examining pamphlets that mythologize figures like Nnamdi Azikiwe and Patrice Lumumba, Zhu reveals how these texts reframed political struggles as symbolic resistance, memorializing global icons such as John F. Kennedy to critique racial injustice and articulate "the masses' aspiration for racial dignity and national autonomy" (Zhu and Feng; Feng and Zhu 94). This perspective directly challenges Western scholarly tendencies to reductively categorize African English writing as mere extensions of "Commonwealth Literature" or "New Literatures in English," frameworks that erase its localized political urgency. As Zhu and Li (2019) demonstrate, Western

critics historically dismissed Nigerian English literature as a byproduct of colonial "achievement," failing to recognize its role as a deliberate narrative strategy to negotiate cultural sovereignty in postcolonial contexts. For instance, early Western scholarship framed Nigerian Anglophone works not as "Nigerian literature" but as geographically expanded iterations of English literary traditions, overlooking the complex sociohistorical imperatives behind African writers' linguistic choices (Zhu and Li "Nigerian English Literature in the West" 55-56). Zhu counters this epistemic erasure by positioning Onitsha Market Literature as a precursor to Nigeria's postcolonial canon, arguing that it bridges elite intellectual discourses and popular narratives to reflect the nation's trajectory "from anti-colonial resistance to critiques of neocolonialism" (Feng and Zhu 94). He emphasizes that "decolonization is almost a central theme actively explored by Nigerian writers across generations" (94), thereby redefining these texts not as derivative forms but as dynamic sites of ideological innovation. This reevaluation advocates for embracing literary diversity to fully capture Africa's multifaceted cultural and political landscapes, while exposing the limitations of Western interpretive paradigms that reduce African literary production to Eurocentric taxonomies.

Similarly, in Zimbabwean literature, post-independence writers subvert colonial stereotypes by reconstructing African identities through indigenous oral traditions. The rise of short stories as a dominant genre in Zimbabwean literature further challenges Western literary canons, aligning with African oral traditions and providing a nuanced portrayal of the "Zimbabwe Crisis" (Zhu and Lan 58, 60, 62-64). In this context, contemporary Zimbabwean writing often functions as testimonial discourse on national history, addressing intertwined crises such as hyperinflation, economic collapse, mass displacement, and corruption, while foregrounding the resilience and ethical commitments of ordinary people (Zhu and Lan 65). Diaspora writing—exemplified by NoViolet Bulawayo—extends this field by narrating cross-border displacement and collective trauma.

Zhu further elucidates the decolonial potential of non-mainstream literatures through Ghanaian Anglophone writing, framing it as a paradigm of localized resistance and cultural reclamation. He argues that Ghanaian literature exemplifies how "several generations of Ghanaian writers have successfully realized the Indigenization of Ghanaian literature with great efforts, and provided precious experience for the development of African English literature and other 'non-mainstream' literature" (Zhu and Xue 62). Tracing its evolution from early anti-colonial polemics to post-independence introspection, Zhu highlights how writers like Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo transcended mimicry by embedding

indigenous oral traditions and sociohistorical critiques into their works. For instance, Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) critiques post-independence moral decay through a protagonist who resists systemic corruption, embodying "the tension between individual integrity and societal collapse" (Zhu and Xue 65). Similarly, Aidoo's plays interrogate cultural hybridity, as seen in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), where generational and cultural conflicts mirror Ghana's struggle to reconcile tradition with modernity. Zhu emphasizes that Ghana's 21st-century children's literature, exemplified by Meshack Asare's internationally acclaimed works, demonstrates how "localized narratives can universalize African experiences without compromising cultural specificity" (Zhu and Xue 67). By foregrounding Ghana's literary trajectory, from resistance to aesthetic sovereignty, Zhu positions it as a microcosm of non-mainstream literatures' capacity to dismantle Eurocentric paradigms while asserting global relevance.

Zhu positions Caribbean literature as a radical reimagining of Eurocentric forms through localized poetics(Zhu and Zhou, "Caribbean English Literature"). By examining key examples and theoretical interventions, Zhu constructs a framework for understanding how these literatures transcend mimicry and resistance to assert their aesthetic and intellectual sovereignty. Zhu illustrates the transition from colonial mimicry to poetic originality through Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a postcolonial revision of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys recenters the silenced Creole protagonist Antoinette Cosway, embedding her narrative with Caribbean landscapes and hybrid linguistic registers. Zhu argues that such "writing back" to the Western canon is not merely reactive but generative, constructing a Caribbean Poetics, a term popularized by Saillant Silvio Torres (1997), that synthesizes oral traditions, creole dialects, and cosmopolitan forms. This poetics rejects passive imitation, instead reclaiming historical agency through narratives of slavery, migration, and cultural syncretism. Similarly, Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990) reimagines Homeric epic via Afro-Caribbean oral storytelling, transforming classical tropes into vehicles for postcolonial memory. For Zhu, these works exemplify non-mainstream literatures' capacity to forge autonomous aesthetic systems rooted in localized sociohistorical contexts.

Zhu critiques the limitations of applying Eurocentric theories like postcolonialism uncritically to Caribbean texts. He cites Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), which employs code-switching between Trinidadian Creole and British English to capture migrant alienation. While postcolonial frameworks might interpret this linguistic hybridity as resistance, Zhu emphasizes its role as an aesthetic innovation, reflecting Kamau Brathwaite's concept of

"nation language", a vernacular mode rooted in African rhythms and Caribbean orality. Such examples, Zhu contends, demand criticism grounded in regional epistemologies rather than universalizing Western models. This aligns with Michael Dash's assertion (*The Other America*, 1998) that Caribbean literature exists in a "liminal space" where global and local discourses intersect (Dash 163). Zhu thus advocates for methodologies privileging indigenous critical frameworks, such as Brathwaite's theories of creolization and Wilson Harris's "magical realism", a narrative mode blending Amerindian myth and modernist fragmentation in *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), to disrupt colonial historiography (Mikics 374). Edward Kamau Brathwaite's creolization theory posits cultural hybridity as a dynamic process of syncretism between African, European, and Indigenous traditions under colonialism, emphasizing the emergence of new cultural formations rather than passive mimicry (Brathwaite 2005). Zhu transcends this framework by integrating Marxist dialectics to analyze the material conditions of literary exchange, positing African literatures as both archives of colonial violence and catalysts for a new form of human civilization rooted in equitable translation practices and decolonized epistemologies (Zhu "Marxism and Indigenous Diasporic Writers"; Zhu and Li "The Africanness of African Literatures").

Zhu's theoretical framework on "non-mainstream" literature fundamentally challenges Eurocentric literary hegemony by advancing a decolonial Chinese perspective. His analysis of Nigerian Anglophone literature in the West demonstrates how Western scholarship has historically marginalized African literary autonomy through three interpretive phases: first, exoticizing African "otherness" through ethnographic lenses; second, instrumentalizing national identity narratives under postcolonial theory; and third, appropriating hybridized texts to validate Western theoretical frameworks. This trajectory reveals a persistent epistemic violence where Nigerian literatures are reduced to mere case studies for Euro-American critical apparatuses. Central to Zhu's critique is the assertion that Chinese scholars must develop alternative paradigms rooted in non-Western epistemologies (Zhu and Liu). He argues that even the progressive shifts in Western scholarship, from cultural exoticism to postcolonial hybridity, remain complicit in neocolonial power structures, as they continue to subordinate African literary expressions to preexisting Western theoretical grids. For instance, the selective adoption of Nigerian texts in feminist or trauma studies often occludes their specific sociopolitical contexts and indigenous knowledge systems. Zhu posits that a truly decolonial approach requires decentering Eurocentric methodologies. This involves prioritizing dialogical engagement over hierarchical interpretations. By advocating for Chinese scholars

to contribute localized critical frameworks, Zhu asserts that non-Western voices can disrupt the "center-periphery" binary, fostering equitable global literary discourses.

Diasporic Literature: Negotiating Balance Between Hegemony and Marginality

Zhu's scholarship on diasporic literature, particularly his groundbreaking analysis of African English writing, constitutes a significant contribution to postcolonial literary studies. His theory of Four Major Diasporas, developed through extensive research on African English literature, identifies four distinct modes of diasporic experience: Foreign Diaspora (异邦流散), Native Diaspora (本土流散), Colonial Diaspora (殖民流散), and Been-to Diaspora/Foreign-native Diaspora (宾土流散，或异邦本土流散). This framework redefines diaspora beyond geographical migration to encompass cultural, historical, and psychological dimensions.

Zhu's "Four Major Diasporas" theory advances theoretical precision by defining diasporic experiences through cultural rupture rather than physical displacement alone. Central to Zhu's conceptualization of foreign diaspora is the geographically transgressive cultural schism experienced by African subjects displaced to Global North metropoles, where migratory mobility paradoxically enforces racialized subalternization. At its core, this framework dissects how geographic migration, often framed as aspirational mobility, paradoxically entrenches structural marginalization through mechanisms of racial capitalism. For instance, in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), protagonist Ifemelu's pursuit of academic success in the U.S. collides with immutable racial hierarchies: her epiphany that "There's a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. ... and American Black is always on the bottom" underscores the futility of assimilation. Similarly, Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* (2015) employs a corporeal metaphor to critique the inescapable grip of racial essentialism through the protagonist Furo Wariboko's paradoxical transformation. The novel allegorizes diasporic identity conflicts by depicting Furo's externally whitened body retaining a black buttock that "would spread into sight, creep outward to engulf everything, and expose him as an impostor." This bodily contradiction serves as a visceral metaphor for the irreconcilable tensions between performative assimilation and inherent racialized identity in transnational contexts.

Zhu's integration of literary case studies fortifies the model's theoretical rigor. By centering Adichie's *Americanah*, Zhu counterbalances South Asia-centric diaspora paradigms, such as Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity as a "third space" of ambivalence and subversion (Bhabha 36-37), to reveal Afro-specific racialized precarity: African migrants endure hypervisibility as "Black bodies" yet invisibility

as intellectuals, a duality unaddressed in Spivak's subalternity framework, which focuses on the epistemic silencing of colonized subjects (Spivak 296). Zhu's innovation lies in theorizing strategic performativity, exemplified by Ifemelu's code-switching through her satirical blog persona to navigate racialized labor markets, as neither mere mimicry (Bhabha) nor passive resistance but as a conscious negotiation of diasporic agency ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 117-118). This approach diverges from Spivak's assertion that "the subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak 288) by demonstrating how African migrants reclaim discursive power through hybridized self-representation.

Crucially, Zhu's emphasis on return migration (e.g., Ifemelu's disillusioned repatriation to Nigeria) expands Safran's unidirectional diaspora schema (Safran 83-84), which privileges the myth of an idealized homeland, by exposing post-diasporic alienation: the homeland, transformed by Western cultural hegemony, no longer offers ontological grounding. Whereas Bhabha's hybridity theory celebrates fragmentation as inherently subversive, Zhu critiques its neglect of diasporic subjects' material struggles, arguing that Adichie's protagonist embodies a "dialectical consciousness" that synthesizes African communal ethics with diasporic pragmatism ("The Africanness of African Literatures"). This synthesis aligns with Zhu's Marxist-inflected critique of postcolonial theory's overreliance on textual deconstruction, asserting instead that strategic performativity must be rooted in historical materialism to address systemic inequities ("Mutual Appreciation" 57). By foregrounding the intersection of racial capitalism and cultural hybridity, Zhu's analysis transcends Bhabha's and Spivak's frameworks, offering a materialist reorientation of diaspora studies that bridge the gap between symbolic resistance and socio-economic praxis.

Zhu's model is further distinguished by its intersectional granularity, as seen in analyzing gender dynamics. While male protagonists like Furo confront racial absurdity, female figures like Emecheta's heroines (e.g., *Second-Class Citizen*) face compounded subjugation through patriarchal labor exploitation in diasporic households. Such analyses rectify omissions in Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, which marginalizes continental African migrant subjectivities (Gilroy 1993; Schramm 26). By centering texts rooted in Nigeria's postcolonial migratory patterns, Zhu reterritorializes diaspora theory within Africa's geopolitical agency, demonstrating how endogenous cultural ruptures (e.g., colonial education) precondition exogenous diasporic trauma, a dialectic neglected in Euro-American scholarship. This framework not only redefines diaspora's spatial parameters but recalibrates its temporal axis, positioning African English literature as both witness and archivist of

displacement's epistemic violence.

Zhu's conceptualization of native diaspora reframes diasporic alienation as culturally enforced displacement without geographic migration, wherein colonial epistemic violence fractures African subjects' ontological coherence. Unlike conventional transnational diasporas marked by physical migration, this unique phenomenon arises from systematic colonial policies, including imposition of European languages, proselytization of Christianity, land appropriation, and racial segregation, that trap native populations in a state of cultural exile within their own territories (Zhu and Yuan 144). As Zhu argues, these policies create profound existential dilemmas: Africans are compelled to adopt colonial languages while forbidden from practicing their mother tongues, yet remain culturally rooted in their tribal heritages. This produces a paradoxical state of "double alienation," where individuals are neither fully integrated into the imposed Western value systems nor able to disentangle themselves from traditional identities. (Zhu and Yuan 145).

A central tenet of Zhu's theory is the formation of "interstitial cultural identities" shaped by the collision of colonizer and colonized cultures. African English literature, he observes, often portrays protagonists educated in Western systems, either through overseas study or local missionary schools, who internalize foreign ideologies while retaining residual ties to indigenous traditions. These hybrid subjects exist in a liminal space, experiencing a kind of "ontological homelessness", estranged from both dominant white cultures and their own communities (Zhu and Yuan 144). Their linguistic practices reflect this duality: the English employed is neither purely metropolitan nor authentically vernacular, but rather a creolized form infused with local idioms and grammatical structures. The tragic trajectories of such characters, stem directly from this interstitial existence. Their partial acculturation to colonial norms creates irreconcilable tensions with traditional social orders, while their racialized Otherness precludes full acceptance by the colonial elite. This structural liminality, Zhu emphasizes, is not a voluntary condition of cosmopolitan hybridity but a violent imposition of cultural schizophrenia, resulting from the systematic erasure of indigenous epistemologies through linguistic and religious domination.

As illustrated in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*, colonizers' influence triggered internal splits: conflicting consciousnesses of "piety and betrayal" battled without one gaining dominance. Post-colonization, Africa's culture, language, and religion existed in a liminal state, "wandering in a middle state that is neither entirely Western nor pre-colonial," a quintessential diasporic symptom. Additionally, Africans experienced "native marginalization," forced into marginal positions on

their own land by colonizers (Zhu and Yuan 146). Some returnees from foreign lands even faced double marginalization. Fundamentally, colonial aggression and rule were the core causes of this native diaspora, which uniquely shaped the diasporic representation in African English literature. Similarly, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) depicts Eugene, a devout Catholic Nigerian patriarch whose self-loathing mimicry of colonial piety ("European consciousness usurping African identity," per Ben Okri) epitomizes cultural schizophrenia: an endogenous subject torn between imposed Western modernity and unresolved indigeneity. Crucially, such texts reveal how colonial education systems, as Mahmood Mamdani notes, sought to "shape the subjectivities of the colonized population and not simply of their elites" (Mamdani 8), rendering African identities palimpsests of competing epistemologies.

Zhu's native diaspora model disrupts Safran's geographic essentialism by demonstrating how cultural occupation generates diasporic consciousness. This reframing challenges Bhabha's hybridity theory, which presupposes voluntary cultural negotiation, by highlighting the coercive violence underpinning endogenous displacement. By centering on Africa's historical specificity, where cultural deracination precedes physical displacement, turning the homeland into a site of unbelonging, Zhu's theory propels diaspora studies toward epistemic decolonization. The dual diasporic characteristics and phased division enrich theoretical dimensions, offering a new paradigm to understand complex identity constructions under colonial legacies. By treating African literary testimonies as both archives and antidotes to colonial hauntings, this framework reorients diaspora research toward deconstructing colonial epistemologies.

Zhu's theorization of colonial diaspora, as articulated in his analysis of African English literature, delineates a biphasic model that captures the shifting dynamics of settler-colonial identities. In its first phase, marked by colonial expansion and occupation, colonial diaspora manifests as a project of epistemic and territorial domination, exemplified by the narratives of European settlers who weaponized cultural hegemony to subjugate African societies. J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* (1974) epitomizes this stage through the character of Jacobus Coetzee, a Dutch colonizer whose self-mythologizing accounts of "taming the wilderness" (Zhu and Yuan 150) reflect the violent imposition of European modernity, achieved through the dehumanization of Indigenous populations and the fetishization of colonial "civilizing" violence. These early colonial texts, as Zhu observes, serve as literary monuments to epistemic erasure, encoding the settlers' supremacist ideologies and their systematic effacement of African agency.

The second phase, emerging in post-independence Africa, reveals a profound inversion: descendants of colonial settlers confront their existential precarity as marginalized minorities, albeit ones whose identities remain irreconcilably distinct from Indigenous communities. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) illustrates this dissonance through David Lurie, a disgraced academic whose loss of social privilege mirrors the atrophy of white hegemony. Zhu notes that such characters inhabit a liminal non-belonging, sympathetic to Black struggles yet ontologically severed from them, as seen in Lurie's inability to comprehend his daughter's pragmatic alliance with her Black assailant-turned-protector. Similarly, Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) portrays white South Africans displaced by anti-apartheid uprisings, their reliance on Black subordinates underscoring the asymmetrical interdependence that defines postcolonial racial hierarchies (Zhu and Yuan 151).

Zhu's phased model transcends conventional diaspora studies by foregrounding the dialectic of perpetration and victimhood unique to colonial actors. Unlike Safran's victim-centric diasporic criteria, Zhu's framework acknowledges the colonizer's paradoxical trajectory: from agent of domination to fractured subject of historical reckoning. By anchoring this analysis in literary case studies, such as the contrast between Jacobus Coetzee's colonial bravado and David Lurie's impotent introspection, Zhu demonstrates how African anglophone literature archives the unmooring of colonial certainty. Zhu's intervention recalibrates diaspora discourse to accommodate perpetratorhood, offering a lens to analyze settler-colonial legacies beyond geographic dislocation. By emphasizing literature's role in exposing the colonial psyche's unraveling, from triumphalist *Dusklands* to the existential *Disgrace*, he positions African anglophone writing as both witness and corrective to globalized narratives of migration. This model not only historicizes colonial diaspora but also illuminates its enduring relevance in an era of decolonial reckoning.

Zhu further develops his three major diaspora literary theories and, on this basis, proposes a fourth major diaspora theory, namely the "been-to diaspora" or "foreign-native diaspora", thereby pushing African literary studies to greater depths. This theory represents a significant innovation in diaspora studies by addressing the unique experiences of African elites educated abroad who return home with hybrid identities. This concept, further elaborated in his 2023 interview (Cheng and Zhu 4), challenges conventional definitions of diaspora by emphasizing cultural hybridity and ideological agency over spatial displacement. In "Mutual Appreciation in Dissemination and Domestication-Foreignization Balance in Chinese and Foreign Literatures: Centered on the Construction Logic of 'Chinese

African Literaturology'" (2025), Zhu furthur elaborates this "transnational-local" model (i.e., Been-to), emphasizing its transcendance of mere physical displacement by engaging in a dialogic process between native traditions and global modernity. For instance, Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels, such as *Paradise* (1994), deploy Swahili-inflected English to interrogate refugee identities while resurrecting precolonial East African history, illustrating Zhu's assertion that diasporicity enables the restoration of African subjectivity through the subversion of colonial linguistic impositions (Zhu and Li, "African Literatures" 163). Similarly, Achebe's works, despite their use of English, reconstruct Igbo oral traditions, embodying the Been-to ethos of cultural reclamation. These four types of diaspora share similarities and overlaps, all facing conflicts and integrations between different cultures, especially heterogeneous ones. The key foundation of this theory is that diaspora literature is primarily cultural in nature; the translocation and conflict of cultures are at the core of diaspora. Therefore, diaspora literature does not necessarily involve international boundaries. Works published by some African authors before their diaspora, as well as those completed after their diaspora that are closely related to their homeland and unrelated to their host country, can also be classified as diaspora literature. This understanding of literature deepens the concept and comprehension of diaspora and diaspora literature, and it contributes positively to the construction of diaspora poetics. It also offers benefits and insights for the redefinition and understanding of new phenomena and forms in world literature.

Zhu's theoretical innovation lies in redefining diasporicity not as a peripheral condition but as a generative force fostering "global-local negotiation" ("African Literatures" 167). His emphasis on "Been-to" literature underscores its academic significance: it challenges static binaries of "exile versus rootedness" prevalent in classical diaspora studies, instead positioning African writers as agents of transcultural synthesis. By highlighting how texts like Paulina Chiziane's *Niketche* (2002), which blends Mozambican oral traditions with Portuguese syntax, perform a "latent civilizational dialogue" (178), Zhu illuminates how diasporic hybridity engenders "world literature with African particularity" (180). This framework not only enriches postcolonial theory but also advances UNESCO's vision of civilizational diversity, illustrating how African literature transcends its "marginalized" status to become a catalyst for global humanistic exchange. Zhu's work thus marks a paradigm shift, repositioning African diasporic writing as central to understanding the dialectics of cultural survival and renewal in an interconnected world.

Zhu's work stands out by reconceptualizing Africanness as a fluid, dialogic construct instead of an essentialized identity. This approach serves to resist Western

homogenization and actively build transcultural communities. His analysis of Abdulrazak Gurnah's refugee narratives, for instance, demonstrates how memory and displacement function as epistemological tools to reconstruct subaltern histories, thereby countering Edward Said's Orientalist critique through centering African agency in cultural production. While aligning with Paul Gilroy's (1993) Black Atlantic framework, Zhu extends its scope by reframing postcolonial hybridity as a generative force for creative synthesis rather than a symptom of cultural loss. Furthermore, this approach deepens Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" by grounding diasporic subjectivity in both material realities, such as linguistic hybridity and transnational mobility, and affective registers of collective memory and cultural longing. By systematically delineating the genre's conceptual boundaries through its demonstrated literary achievements, Zhu's framework positions diasporic literature not merely as a counter-discourse but as a dynamic site for reimagining global cultural citizenship, where localized sociohistorical specificities intersect with universal humanistic aspirations.

Methodologically, Zhu's scholarship bridges Chinese and African perspectives, advocating for "equitable thinking" in cross-cultural dialogue ("Mutual Appreciation"). His analysis underscores the embodied contradictions of racial performance, echoing Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) while adding a transnational dimension through gendered migration experiences. This synthesis of postcolonial theory with empirical textual analysis positions Zhu as a critical interlocutor in global literary studies, particularly in his emphasis on "assimilation-divergence balance" in translation and cultural exchange ("Mutual Appreciation" 54). Overall, Zhu's contributions lie in his redefinition of diaspora beyond physical migration, his theorization of Africanness as a decolonial praxis, and his development of China-centered analytical frameworks for engaging African literature. By foregrounding indigenous epistemologies and challenging Western-centric paradigms, his work enriches diaspora studies with much-needed cultural specificity while maintaining global relevance.

Chinese African Literaturology and International Vision

Zhu's formulation of Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea represents a transformative intervention in global literary scholarship, systematically challenging Western epistemological hegemony while fostering equitable cross-cultural dialogue. This framework, rooted in Marxist dialectics and Confucian humanism, repositions African literature as a dynamic force of civilizational innovation rather than a passive subject of Western critique. By synthesizing

indigenous African cultural sovereignty with Chinese theoretical paradigms, Zhu's work not only decentralizes Eurocentric literary canons but also institutionalizes a heterarchical model of knowledge production that prioritizes mutual learning over hierarchical competition.

Zhu's scholarship on Chinese African literaturology revolves around three interconnected pillars: the Africanness of African literatures, the construction of Chinese African Literaturology, and the dialectical balance between cultural autonomy and global dialogue. Central to his theoretical framework is the concept of Africanness, defined as the "deep identification of African and Afro-descended people with the history and culture of the African continent" ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 114). This Africanness, he argues, manifests through decoloniality, diasporicity, and hybridity, which collectively challenge Western-centric literary paradigms and foster civilizational diversity (113-115). Decoloniality entails "the diachronic meditations of African writers who have carried forward their cultural traditions, kept their colonial past in mind, broken the shackles of Western discourse and restored the original diversity of Africa in the course of decolonization" (114), exemplified in Zhu's analysis of Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels, which confront colonial trauma while envisioning postcolonial futures.

Diasporicity in African literatures, "which focuses on the tensions between heterogeneous cultures," stands as a potent attribute, embodying both "a cultural syndrome left by Western colonists" and "a realistic demand for the decolonization of African writing." ("Africanness" 117). Transcending traditional geographical migration, it unfolds through forms like the "native diaspora" of indigenous Africans, the "colonial diaspora" of white settlers' descendants, and the "foreign-native diaspora" from transnational mobility. These manifestations delve into global issues via African languages, arts, and homeland temporal politics, crafting pluralist narratives on humanity, self, nature, and society. For example, Nadine Gordimer, a South African writer of white immigrant lineage, shifted from standard English to integrating localized expressions such as Afrikaans and Zulu into South African English, subverting Western literary traditions. Abdulrazak Gurnah, part of the "foreign diaspora," blended Arabic, Swahili, and East African indigenous languages, practicing linguistic decolonization even in exile. Lídia Jorge Chiziane, exemplifying the "native diaspora," interweaves Bantu/Mozambican dialects with African oral narrative styles, embracing the identity of a "storyteller" (griot). Critically, this diasporicity enriches world literature by embedding African historical specificity and cultural resilience. Functioning as both a record of colonial legacies

and a tool for decolonization, it drives linguistic innovation and engagement with global themes like gender equality and racial discrimination. Aligned with the decolonization pursuit of "liberating mankind," African writers connect local sentiments to global consciousness, redefining literary decolonization. As underscored in their works, they strive for "the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, between man and man," providing both an "archive" of colonial hauntings and an "antidote" through narratives that foster conflict resolution ("Africanness" 118-119), thereby anchoring Africa's distinctive contribution to global literary discourses.

Zhu's scholarship illuminates the dialogic and hybrid essence of African literatures, emphasizing their "cultural hybridity that integrates tradition and modernity, the local region and the world, and past and future." ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 120) Conceived as a "cultural bazaar," African culture within these literatures embraces diverse civilizations, serving as a cornerstone for decolonial writing and historical identity reconstruction. Crucially, Zhu highlights how African literatures, as an organic aggregate of national literatures, foster dialogue and cultural diversity through a communal ethos. This aligns with the stance of "many African scholars 'calling for a more positive articulation of 'Africanness'" to dismantle "theories of race and cultural homogeneity," thereby estoring "the true plurality of African literatures" (120). Zhu further contextualizes this hybridity within a Marxist-inspired framework of world literature, noting the shift from "old local and national seclusion" toward "universal inter-dependence of nations." The "poetic positive-sum game of oscillation between African and Western cultures" (121) in works by Nobel laureates, such as Soyinka, Gordimer, and Gurnah, epitomizes this dialogic tension. While acknowledging Western evaluative biases, like the Swedish Academy's emphasis on "the consequences of apartheid" in Gordimer's critique or "exploring weakness and defeat" in Coetzee's heritage, Zhu underscores African literatures' resistance to homogenization (121). Writers actively construct multicultural expressions, "breaking down the rigid single discourse of the other" (115) to showcase the vibrant diversity of African literary culture. Ultimately, Zhu's perspective affirms that African literatures, through its hybrid and dialogic nature, advance decolonization by striving to "restore the colonized to their humanity." (117) They redefine world literature beyond West-centric paradigms, embodying a dynamic interplay between local specificity and global consciousness. This not only challenges hegemonic literary norms but also enriches global literary discourses with Africa's unique cultural resilience and historical depth.

Crucially, Zhu positions Chinese African-literaturology as a counter-

discourse to Western hegemony. He advocates for "Domestication-Foreignization Balance" (归异平衡) in literary translation and research, rejecting both uncritical Westernization and insular nationalism ("Mutual Appreciation" 51-53). This approach aligns with his "equilibrium absorption theory", which calls for integrating global literary traditions while maintaining cultural specificity. By grounding his analysis in Marxist philosophy, Zhu further underscores the role of African literatures in addressing social inequities and fostering "human liberation" (Cheng and Zhu 8), exemplified by Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, whose works intertwine anti-colonial resistance with Marxist-humanist ideals.

Zhu's theorization of Africanness resonates with but diverges from postcolonial frameworks like Edward Said's Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's hybridity. While Bhabha emphasizes the subversive potential of cultural hybridity, Zhu extends this by foregrounding Africanness as a proactive force that bridges gaps between heterogeneous cultures ("Africanness" 170). Unlike Said's critique of Western representations, Zhu shifts focus to African agency, arguing that African literatures "participate effectively in the dialogue of world literature" through their inherent diversity (113).

Zhu's emphasis on "Coexistence and symbiosis of cultures" also challenges Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. By advocating for mutual learning and symbiosis, Zhu posits African literatures as catalysts for a "new form of human civilization" ("Africanness" 125). This vision extends beyond Kwame Appiah's cosmopolitanism by integrating Marxist dialectics to analyze the material and historical conditions shaping literary exchanges. In contrast to Appiah's emphasis on individual moral obligations, Zhu situates literary exchange within broader socioeconomic structures. His analysis reveals how African literatures serve as both "archives" of colonial violence and "antidotes" for imagining alternative futures, echoing Walter Benjamin's concept of historical materialism. This theoretical framework also addresses the limitations of postcolonial theories that prioritize binary power dynamics. Zhu's use of Marxist dialectics allows him to recognize both the oppressive legacies of colonialism and the emancipatory potential of cultural hybridity. As he asserts, "African literatures achieve decolonization not through rejection of the global, but through strategic engagement that redefines the terms of cultural exchange" (121). This approach aligns with Frederic Jameson's call for a dialectical criticism that accounts for both local specificity and global interconnectedness. Ultimately, Zhu's synthesis of Marxist analysis and cosmopolitan ethics offers a novel paradigm for understanding literary globalization. By positioning African literatures as active agents in shaping world literary

landscapes, his work challenges Eurocentrism while avoiding essentialist claims about cultural authenticity. In doing so, it contributes to what David Damrosch terms world literature as "a mode of circulation and of reading" (Damrosch 5), where texts circulate across borders and transform both source and target cultures through dialogic engagement.

Zhu's Chinese African Literaturology transcends disciplinary and geopolitical boundaries, establishing a transformative paradigm for equitable global literary studies. By decentralizing Eurocentric epistemologies and recentering African intellectual traditions within transnational dialogues, his work constructs a tripartite theoretical framework: (1) redefining diasporic literatures as generative sites of "global-local negotiation" that resist binary oppositions between exile and rootedness; (2) systematizing the study of African orature and postcolonial écriture as complementary modes of knowledge production; and (3) advancing transcultural hermeneutics that prioritize African agencies in reimagining world literature's cartographies. This framework fundamentally challenges the ontological colonialism embedded in Western postcolonial theory, which often reduces African texts to case studies validating Euro-American critical paradigms. As evidenced in Zhu's analysis of Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels, contemporary African literatures demonstrate "endurance and forgiveness for the colonial past" while envisioning "a community of literature, of culture and of eco-friendliness" (Zhu and Li, "Africanness" 125). Such dual emphasis, historical reckoning through narrative memory and future-building through cultural synthesis, exemplifies Zhu's groundbreaking proposition: African literary practices operate as epistemic palimpsests, simultaneously documenting colonial trauma and scripting civilizational renewal. Crucially, his methodology bridges the analytical divide between African oral traditions (e.g., griot storytelling) and modernist textual experimentation, revealing their shared decolonial potential. By institutionalizing Chinese African Literaturology as a discrete discipline with distinct theoretical vocabularies, such as "diasporic hybridity as creative force" and "textual sovereignty", Zhu's scholarship not only emancipates African literary studies from Western epistemological hegemony but also provides a replicable model for Global South scholars to reclaim interpretive authority over their cultural productions.

In an era of geopolitical fragmentation, Zhu's vision underscores the urgency of replacing "ideological confrontation with ideological dialogue" and "a unipolar culture with a multipolar and diversified one" ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 125). His collaboration with Kenya Literature Bureau and UNESCO initiatives exemplifies this ethos, enabling African and Chinese scholars to co-author

research without Western mediation. As Zhu asserts, "True world literature arises from the mutual learning of diverse civilizations, not the dominance of a single cultural axis" (125). Through its synthesis of Marxist theory, diaspora studies, and postcolonial critique, Chinese African Literaturology redefines global humanities, positioning literature as a bridge between civilizations and Chinese scholarship as a vital interlocutor in reshaping intellectual equity.

Zhu advances a compelling vision for literature's role in fostering cross-cultural harmony. It asserts that in the new era, there is an urgent need "to construct a true world literature, one that includes the diversified literatures of different countries and regions, including Africa and China." ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 125) This statement underscores literature's potential to transcend "national boundaries, eliminate barriers, and overcome stereotypes and prejudices," positioning it as a bridge for "mutual learning among civilizations." (125) Directly echoing this ideal, the text declares, "the cultural implication of Africanness tells us that we must build a cultural community to achieve true mutual learning among civilizations," ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 125; "Diasporic Literature and Cultural Community") reinforcing literature's capacity to redefine intercultural dynamics.

He further leverages the essence of African literatures to advocate transformative change: replacing "ideological confrontation with ideological dialogue" and "a unipolar, single and unidirectional culture with a multipolar and diversified culture." ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 125) These declarations, anchored in analyses of African literary expressions, highlight literature's power to model civilizational coexistence. Notably, the conclusion praises contemporary African literatures, exemplified by Gurnah's novels, for demonstrating "endurance and forgiveness for the colonial past" while envisioning "a community of literature, of culture and of eco-friendliness." (125) This dual emphasis on reckoning with history and projecting future hope underscores literature's dual role as both a historical recorder and a blueprint for progress.

Zhu's study enriches literary and cultural scholarship by redefining world literature as an inclusive, boundary-transcending project. By grounding its arguments in African literature's cultural, literary, and ecological expressions, it offers a compelling theoretical framework for reimagining global literary and civilizational dynamics. The call to replace confrontational paradigms with dialogic, collaborative models resonates profoundly with contemporary societal needs, bridging literary theory and real-world civilizational development. It effectively distills African literature's transformative potential, urging academia and societies

to embrace diversity and dialogue. This enriches conversations on world literature and paves the way for discussions on civilizational co-prosperity, solidifying its contribution to interdisciplinary discourse.

Conclusion

Zhu's literary research philosophy represents a seminal reconfiguration of global literary studies, systematically dismantling the hierarchical binaries that have long privileged Western paradigms while recentering marginalized traditions as vital contributors to world literature. His scholarship transcends mere critique of Eurocentrism, instead constructing a pluralistic framework where mainstream and non-mainstream discourses coexist in dynamic equilibrium. At the core of this vision lies Zhu's commitment to cultural symbiosis, a theoretical and methodological principle that posits literary exchange as a reciprocal process of mutual enrichment rather than unilateral assimilation. By foregrounding non-Western epistemologies, particularly through his pioneering Chinese African Literaturology, Zhu challenges the Global North's hegemony over postcolonial discourse, advocating instead for "horizontal comparativism" that positions Chinese, African, and other marginalized traditions as equal interlocutors. This approach not only decolonizes literary analysis but also redefines diaspora as a generative space where cultural hybridity catalyzes innovation, as exemplified in his studies of Chinese-African diasporic writers who fuse narrative techniques from multiple traditions to forge transcultural aesthetics.

Zhu's paradigm-shifting contributions are most evident in his institutional and theoretical interventions. Through projects like *History of African Literatures Written in English*, he operationalizes decolonized historiography, replacing Western-authored meta-narratives with polyphonic accounts that amplify African voices while integrating Chinese scholarly perspectives. This tripartite methodology, decentering colonial canons, recentering indigenous narratives, and synthesizing global insights, exemplifies his heterarchical model of literary studies. Furthermore, his editorial leadership in platforms such as Studies in African Literature fosters South-South intellectual cooperation, creating alliances between Chinese and African academics that bypass Western epistemological gatekeeping. These efforts collectively establish a blueprint for equitable academic exchange, wherein marginalized traditions are neither exoticized nor subsumed but engaged as co-equal partners in knowledge production. Zhu's work thus reimagines global literary studies as a networked ecosystem, where balance is not static harmony but an ongoing dialectic, a space where hegemony is perpetually contested, and plurality becomes the foundation for transformative scholarship.

Zhu's impact extends beyond academia into cultural diplomacy. He has orchestrated landmark collaborations, such as the 2024 partnership with Kenya Literature Bureau to promote Sino-African literary exchanges. His advocacy for "Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures" has influenced policy dialogues, notably during the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which designated 2026 as "the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges". Internationally, Zhu's analysis of Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah's works, highlighting Marxist-inflected critiques of colonialism, has positioned him as a key interpreter of African literature's global resonance. Domestically, his leadership in national projects like "History of African Literature Written in English" and "Contemporary Sinologists' Translation Strategies" has redefined China's foreign literature curriculum, integrating non-Western perspectives into mainstream pedagogy.

Zhu's research philosophy, rooted in cultural autonomy, theoretical innovation, and global equity, has established a blueprint for Chinese scholars to engage with world literature without subservience to Western paradigms. By foregrounding African and Chinese literatures as equal partners in re-drawing the world literary map, he challenges the Global North's intellectual monopoly. As AI and digital media transform literary consumption, Zhu's recent interventions at forums like the 2025 Conference on Fiction Studies underscore the enduring relevance of humanistic values in an automated age. In sum, Zhu's oeuvre exemplifies a paradigm shift in global literary studies, one that prioritizes diversity, dialogue, and decolonization. His legacy lies not only in his scholarly output but in fostering a generation of researchers committed to "equilibrium" in cultural exchange, a vision where no literature remains "non-mainstream."

Funding: This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China under Major National Program "History of African Literature Written in English" [19ZDA296].

Works Cited

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Brathwaite, Kamau. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*. Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005.

程雅乐、朱振武：“中国非洲文学学的构建理路——朱振武教授访谈录”，《山东外语教学》，2023(05): 1-9。

[Cheng, Yale and Zhenwu Zhu. "The Rationale for the Construction of Chinese African-literaturology: An Interview with Professor Zhu Zhenwu." *Shandong Foreign Language*

Teaching, no. 5, 2023, pp.1-9.]

Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature*? Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2003.

Dash, J. Michael. *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context*. Charlottesville and London: UP of Virginia, 1998.

冯德河、朱振武：“尼日利亚奥尼查市场文学的去殖民思想”，《当代外国文学》，2021(01): 89-96。

[Feng, Dehe and Zhenwu Zhu.“De-colonization and Onitsha Market Literature in Nigeria.” *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, no. 1, 2021, pp.89-96.]

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London and New York: Verso Books, 1993.

Mikics, David. “Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, History, and the Caribbean Writer.” *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, pp.371-404.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*. London: Harvard UP, 2012.

Safran, William. “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return.” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, no. 1, 1991, pp.83-99.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Schramm, Katharina. *African Homecoming: Pan-African Ideology and Contested Heritage*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2010.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, London: U of Illinois P, 1988, pp.271-313.

朱振武编：《非洲英语文学研究》，上海：华东理工大学出版社，2019。

[Zhu, Zhenwu, editor. *Study of African English Literature*. Shanghai: East China University of Science and Technology Press, 2019.]

朱振武：《非洲英语文学的源与流》，上海：上海人民出版社，2019。

[Zhu, Zhenwu. *Root and flower of African English literature*. Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 2019.]

——：“揭示世界文学多样性，构建中国非洲文学学——从坦桑尼亚作家古尔纳获诺贝尔奖说起”，《中国社会科学报》，2021.10.22, 第四版。

[—. “Revealing the Diversity of World Literature and Constructing Chinese African Literaturology: From Tanzanian Writer Gurnah’s Nobel Prize Win.” *Social Sciences in China Press*, 22 Oct. 2021, p. 4.]

——：“马克思主义与尼日利亚本土流散作家”，《外国文学》，2023(03): 43-54。

[—. “Marxism and Indigenous Diasporic Writers in Nigeria.” *Foreign Literature*, no. 3, 2023, pp. 43-54.]

——：“流散文学与文化共同体——《流散诗学研究》引发的思考”，《中国比较文学》，

2023(04): 273-79。

[—. "Diasporic Literature and Cultural Community: Reflections Inspired by *A Study of Diasporic Poetics*." *Comparative Literature in China*, no. 4, 2023, pp. 273-79.]

——："中外文学的传播互鉴与归异平衡——以'中国非洲文学学'的建构理路为中心"，《外国文学研究》，2025(01): 51-58。

[—. "Mutual Appreciation in Dissemination and Domestication-Foreignization Balance in Chinese and Foreign Literatures: Centered on the Construction Logic of 'Chinese African Literaturology'." *Foreign Literature Studies*, no. 1, 2025, pp. 51-58.]

朱振武、冯德河："尼日利亚奥尼查市场文学的肇兴与影响"，《外语教学》，2019(04): 99-103。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Dehe Feng. "The Emergence and Impact of Onitsha Market Literature in Nigeria." *Foreign Language Teaching*, no. 4, 2019, pp. 99-103.]

朱振武、韩文婷："文学路的探索与非洲梦的构建——尼日利亚英语文学源流考论"，《外语教学》，2017(04): 97-102。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Wenting Han. "Exploration of the Literary Path and Construction of the African Dream: An Examination of the Origins and Development of Nigerian English Literature." *Foreign Language Education*, no. 4, 2017, pp. 97-102.]

朱振武、蓝云春："津巴布韦英语文学的新拓展与新范式"，《上海师范大学学报（哲学社会科学版）》，2019(05): 58-67。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Yunchun Lan. "The Rising and Paradigm of Zimbabwean Literature in English in the New Millennium." *Journal of East China Normal University(Humanities and Social Sciences)*, no. 5, 2019, pp. 58-67.]

朱振武、李丹："尼日利亚英语文学在西方：解读范式与研究热点"，《关东学刊》，2019(05): 55-65。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li. "Nigerian English Literature in the West: Interpretive Paradigms and Research Focuses." *Guandongxuekan*, no. 5, 2019, pp. 55-65.]

—. "The Africanness of African Literatures and New Patterns in Human Civilization." *Social Sciences in China*, no. 3, 2022a, pp.113-27.

——："非洲文学与文明多样性"，《中国社会科学》, 2022b(08): 163-84, 208。

[—. "African Literatures and the Diversity of Civilizations." *Social Sciences in China*, no. 8, 2022b, pp. 163-84, 208.

朱振武、刘略昌："'非主流'英语文学的历史嬗变及其在中国的译介与影响"，《东吴学术》，2015(02): 140-54。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Luechang Liu." The Historical Change and Development of Pan-English Literature and Its Translation and Influence in China." *Soochow Academic,* no. 2, 2015, pp. 140-54.]

朱振武、蒋楚婷：《朱振武：均衡吸纳各国文学文化的精神》，《文汇读书周报》，2011

年 12 月 30 日。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Chuting Jiang. “Zhu Zhenwu: Balancing and Absorbing the Spirit of Global Literary Cultures.” *Wenhui Reading Weekly*, 30 Dec. 2011.]

朱振武、周博佳：“加勒比英语文学在英美的研究热点与诗学构建”，《当代外国文学》，2015(03)：167-73。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Bojia Zhou. “Caribbean English Literature in the UK and US: Research Focuses and the Making of Caribbean Poetics”. *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, no. 3, 2015, pp. 167-73.]

朱振武、袁俊卿：“流散文学的时代表征及其世界意义——以非洲文学为例”，《中国社会科学》，2019(07): 135-58。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Junqing Yuan. “Diasporic Literature as a Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance: A Case Study of African Literature in English.” *Social Sciences in China* (Chinese Edition), no. 7, 2019, pp. 135-58.]

朱振武、薛丹岩：“本土化的抗争与求索——加纳英语文学的缘起与流变”，《燕山大学学报（哲学社会科学版）》，2020(03): 62-69。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Danyan Xue. “Indigenization Struggling: Origin and Development of Ghanaian English Literature.” *Journal of Yanshan University (Philosophy and Social Science)*, no. 3, 2020, pp. 62-69.]

From "Seeking Aesthetic Similarity" to "Striking a Balance Between Domestication and Foreignization": A Probe into Zhu Zhenwu's Translation Philosophy

Qian Pingyun
College of Foreign Languages, Shanghai University of Electric Power
Shanghai 201306, China
Email: champion615@163.com

Abstract As a leading scholar in contemporary Chinese translation practice and theoretical research, Prof. Zhu Zhenwu is distinguished by his profound erudition that bridges Chinese and Western scholarship. A prolific translator with mature theoretical insights, he has forged a unique academic paradigm through synthesizing ancient and modern wisdom while transcending disciplinary boundaries. His scholarly endeavors, based on a strong sense of cultural confidence and cultural consciousness, are nourished by traditional Chinese learning. This intellectual foundation enables his translation research to embody both deep-rooted indigenous convictions and profound humanistic concerns for world culture. A probe into his academic trajectory from translation practice to theoretical construction, the present paper aims at exploring his translation philosophy unique of its own. It is believed that his distinctive conceptual frameworks of translation studies can also reveal the developmental trends of contemporary translation studies.

Keywords Zhu Zhenwu; translation philosophy; aesthetic similarity; a balance between domestication and foreignization

Author **Qian Pingyun** is Associate Professor at the College of Foreign Languages, Shanghai University of Electric Power (Shanghai 201306, China). Her primary research interests include literary translation and comparative Literature.

Introduction

As a cross-temporal and cross-spatial mechanism of dialogue, translation has always played an indispensable role in the history of human development, serving as a vital pathway for the symbiosis of world civilizations. In today's world where literary

and cultural exchanges between China and the West are increasingly interconnected, it is imperative for us to consider how to redefine the translation of foreign works into our own culture and the export of our native culture to the world, as well as how to respond to the call of our times by exploring new interdisciplinary avenues in translation studies. These issues are, so to speak, critical for every translator and researcher. In this regard, Prof. Zhu Zhenwu [朱振武], a distinguished translator and researcher, has set an exemplary model worth emulating for the academia.

A Road Map of Zhu's Translation Philosophy: Interplay of Practice and Research

Zhu has been adept in integrating translation practice with scholarly research, producing a prolific body of translated works and monographs. What merits special attention is, unlike the long-standing tendency in Chinese translation academia to prioritize theory over practice, Zhu's approach has always exhibited a distinct "belt-and-braces" characteristic: he not only applies profound theoretical insights to guide his translation practice but also draws from rich practical experience to enrich theoretical innovation. His long-term commitment to translation practice has allowed him to develop unique conceptual understandings and therefore theoretical frameworks, ensuring that his translations both remain faithful to the original and bear a distinctive personal style. The self-contained translation philosophy developed through hard practice is a hallmark of a truly qualified and mature translator. It can be said that the very cyclical interaction between theory and practice forms the core axis of Zhu's academic trajectory. In a broader sense, this approach not only enables Chinese literature to absorb the essence of English literature, thus revitalizing the expressive power of the Chinese language, but also provides an illuminating methodological model for the translation of Chinese literature and cultural dissemination.

"Into-Chinese" Translation Practice: Wisdom Distilled Through Experience

As a prominent figure in China's translation and literary circles, Zhu is widely known and highly regarded among domestic readers for his translations of American popular fiction writer Dan Brown's series, such as *The Da Vinci Code, Angels & Demons, Deception Point, Digital Fortress, and The Lost Symbol*. Being celebrated for their encyclopedic knowledge, multi-perspective narration, gripping and captivating plots as well as entertainment appeal, Brown's works place high demands on translators as could be expected. When dealing with a versatile author like him, Zhu did not merely approach the original text with rigidity at the linguistic level, which would possibly undermine the artistry of language transfer. Instead,

the translator tried every means possible to avoid dry and literal translations, counterbalancing the linguistic charm of English with that of Chinese. He knows to the core that the significant differences between Chinese and English mean that ignoring the characteristics of the target language and the reading habits of its audience would undoubtedly diminish the aesthetic, poetic, and intellectual value of the original text.

In light of this, Zhu the translator has, from extensive practical experience, gradually distilled a unique "aesthetic similarity" principle. He believes: "Translation is not merely the conversion of languages but also the re-creation of aesthetics. Especially in literary translation, the ideal translation should provide target readers with an aesthetic experience similar to that of the original readers...Literary translation as a translation form of art reflects the translator's aesthetic grasp of the original work's ideological content and artistic style. It is not about formal equivalence at the word or sentence level but about the holistic absorption and reconstruction of linguistic information and aesthetic elements" ("Similarity" 2).

In other words, translators should not mechanically pursue equivalence in "dictionary meanings" but instead breaking free from the cage of superficial word-by-word correspondence. They must contemplate and grasp the deeper and implied meanings of texts, focusing on whether the translated versions can achieve aesthetic functions and associations in specific contexts that are analogous to the original. This pursuit represents a "high-level means of aesthetic reproduction" or "aesthetic reconstruction" which entails "the aesthetic subject leveraging their aesthetic faculties to eliminate temporal, spatial, and intellectual gaps, before fully entering a state of sublimation... and reshaping the beauty of the original text" (Liu 519-20).

In practice, Zhu has, through long-term exploration, consistently considered how to employ comprehensive translation strategies and methods such as adaptation, compensation, and recreation to reposition and reinterpret the aesthetic value of the original. His approach aims to preserve the beauty brought by those "heterogeneous elements" in the source language and then reproduce and reconstruct it in the target, striving for the greatest possible aesthetic similarity and resonance between SL and TL. By maintaining similarity in such factors as aesthetic imagery, conceptual recognition, thinking perspective...between the translation and the original, he creates translation versions that are on one hand, faithful to the content and style of the source text while on the other, conforming to Chinese reading habits. It is his unremitting endeavor that allows the translated works to attain a "second life" in the target culture, ultimately achieving profound alignment with the original at various levels. This pursuit of aesthetic functional similarity reflects the translator's artistic

self-consciousness and cultural wisdom. As shown below in the table, translations that adhere to Zhu's principle of "aesthetic similarity" are particularly evident at three levels, namely, basic similarity, in-depth similarity, and creative similarity.

The Application of "Aesthetic Similarity" Principle in Zhu's Translation Practice

Different levels of Aesthetic Similarity	Aesthetic forms and functions	Examples (original version)	Examples (translated version)
Basic similarity	Transference of cultural images	It is your **circus**.(*The Da Vinci Code*)	得自己来唱这出戏了。（《达·芬奇密码》）
	Rebuilding of rhyming	Publish or perish. (*Angels and Demons*)	不出版就出局。(《天使与魔鬼》)
	Addition of rhetorical devices	But each time he gave them a translation, the crypographers **shook their heads in despair.** (*Digital Fortress*)	但每次他把译文交给密码破译员，他们的头都摇得像拨浪鼓。（《数字城堡》）
	Tendency toward the application of four-character idioms/phrases	He squinted out at the **lush green** valley rising to **snowcapped** peaks all around them. (*Angels and Demons*)	他望了一眼四周，近处是苍翠葱茏的山谷，远处是白雪皑皑的峰峦。（《天使与魔鬼》）
In-depth similarity	Cultivating emotional resonance in TL readers	"what in the world is a **Yale blue blood** doing on the Crimson campus before dawn?" (*The lost symbol*)	"什么风大清早就把一个耶鲁蓝血刮到深红校园来了？"（《失落的秘符》）
Creative similarity	Achieving holistic correspondence in sound and sense	These lethal men became known by a single word-**Hassassin**—literally "the followers of hashish." (*Angels and Demons*)	这些杀手逐渐被人们称为"黑煞星"——字面意思即"嗜黑煞者"（《天使与魔鬼》）

It could be observed from the table that the "aesthetic similarity" tenet proposed by Zhu falls roughly into three categories: basic similarity, in-depth similarity, and creative similarity, each growing in significance. To begin with, basic similarity refers to the similarity in languages and cultures, including transference of cultural images, rebuilding of rhyming, addition of rhetorical devices and tendency toward the application of four-character idioms/phrases.etc. Next, in-depth similarity means cultivating emotional resonance between SL and TL readers, and last but the most important, creative similarity as the ultimate art of literary translation, aims at achieving holistic correspondence in both sound and sense, which is prized as a

stroke of genius.

To explore the underlying mechanism and principles of "aesthetic similarity," it is of great necessity to make an analysis of the above examples. Above all, basic similarity finds its presence in the adaptive choice or transference of cultural images. As is shown in the example, Zhu's translation succeeds in bridging cultural differences by replacing the English metaphor of a "circus" with the Chinese theatrical expression " 唱 这 出 戏 [act in this opera]". It remains faithful to the original meaning—conveying both the sense of personal responsibility and the slightly humorous tone—while ensuring natural fluency in Chinese.

In the second example, publish or perish employs "alliteration" (p-) and near rhyme (-ish), creating a tightly knit rhythmic effect. The Chinese translation " 不 出 版 就 出 局 [If you don't publish, you're out.]", while not replicating the exact alliteration or rhyming, achieves a similar phonetic compactness through consonant repetition (bù-chū-chū). The translation, as a result, compensates for linguistic differences by balancing consonant echoes, vowel patterns, and tonal dynamics, delivering similar rhythmic effect as the original.

The original phrase in the third example simply states that the cryptographers "shook their heads in despair," using literal language without any figurative elements. However, the Chinese translation creatively employs the vivid metaphor of " 拨 浪 鼓 [toy rattle drum]" to bring the scene to life. This culturally familiar image of a child's shaking toy-drum makes the cryptographers' repeated and frustrated motion of head-shaking far more visual and forceful for Chinese readers than a literal translation would achieve. By incorporating this everyday object into the description, the translation transforms a straightforward statement into a lively and engaging moment that resonates deeply with the local audience. The added metaphor not only enhances the text's vividness and emotional expressiveness but also demonstrates how skillful localization can elevate a passage beyond mere word-for-word accuracy while remaining faithful to the original meaning, a solid proof of the effectiveness of Zhu's aesthetic similarity.

The translation in the fourth example demonstrates a masterful use of four-character phrases/idioms (a quintessential Chinese rhetorical device) to elevate the original text into poetic expression. The paired phrases " 苍 翠 葱 茏 [verdant and luxuriant]" and " 白 雪 皑 皑 [brilliant white snow]" not only accurately convey the scenic elements of "lush green"and "snowcapped," but construct, through reduplicated words and radical imagery, a layered landscape with lyrical cadence. Here, the four-character structure transcends mere rhetorical choice to become a cultural re-imagination of the original imagery—maintaining semantic fidelity while

attaining a depth of artistic conception, exemplifying the perfect marriage of form and content in literary translation. As a matter of fact, Zhu's E-C translation shows an evident tendency toward the use of four-character idioms, which originates from his profound understanding of traits of both Chinese and English. As pointed by professor Gu Zhengkun: "Chinese is an exceptionally descriptive language, while English is highly logical. As a result, Chinese tends to employ far more ornate modifiers than Indo-European languages. In other words, the Chinese language is inherently more expressive and aesthetically richer in artistic representation" (Gu 181). It is precisely because of Zhu's in-depth understanding of the advantages of Chinese over Western languages that he applies extensively aesthetically pleasing idioms and phrases, which strike the cords of the target readers.

Example five sees a remark made by Professor Langdon to his old friend Solomon, who had arrived unexpectedly. Dan Brown's purpose here is to highlight Langdon's character—a man of profound erudition, quick wit, and subtle humor. The translator here retains the expressions of "blue blood" and "crimson" as " 蓝血 [blue blood]" and " 深 红 [crimson]" in the target, without changing them into " 高贵 [noble]" and " 哈佛 [Harvard]" simply because he intends to keep the exotic cultural flavor and the author's unique humor so as to convey to the TL readers the same emotion. As could be seen, the translation recreates the original's blend of incredulity and humor, bridging the emotional and cultural resonances of elite identity markers, and achieving remarkable cross-cultural equivalence in conveying a sense of institutional pride. Moreover, the metaphor " 刮 风 [The wind blows]" amplifies the emotional tension by suggesting sudden intrusion, making the speaker's astonishment more physically palpable than the original's static "doing." This multi-dimensional approach achieves perfect emotional resonance, ultimately creating a translation version that surpasses the emotional impact of the source text. As Zhu himself remarked: "Aesthetic standards vary across cultures, requiring translators to adapt flexibly. Such adaptation is not a compromise, but rather a means to evoke similar emotional resonance of aesthetic functions in different cultural contexts" ("Similarity" 2).

To crown it all, the last example stands as a classic case. The translation achieves a remarkable cultural transposition through its ingenious phonetic-semantic fusion in rendering "Hassassin" as" 黑煞星 [black evil star]" where the character " 黑 [black]," in the first place, not only phonetically mirrors the Arabic "Ha-"prefix but also establishes a foreboding tone with its connotations of darkness and mystery. Additionally, " 煞 星 [evil star]"—a concept deeply rooted in Chinese astrology referring to baleful stars that portend violence and death, perfectly encapsulates

both the lethal nature of these assassins and the mystical aura surrounding their legend. By combining the phonetic hint with this culturally potent metaphor, the translator embeds the foreign concept into China's rich lexicon of mythological terror, creating a term that resonates with the same ominous weight as the original. This linguistic alchemy results in a powerfully localized expression that feels simultaneously exotic and native, transforming historical assassins into figures of almost supernatural dread within the Chinese cultural imagination.

Judging from the examples aforementioned, we can arrive at a safe conclusion that extensive practice serves as the essential foundation for Zhu's mature and profound translation philosophy. And throughout this process, the pursuit of aesthetic excellence remains the driving force behind his translation work. As he himself said: "Under the enduring influence of traditional Chinese cultural cognition and aesthetic sensibilities, the Chinese language has developed a unique artistic charm characterized by meaning-dominant form, flexible conciseness, semantic richness within brevity, and harmonious phonology. These intrinsically interconnected features permeate all linguistic levels of Chinese and are deeply embedded in the nation's aesthetic consciousness" ("Similarity" 3). That is to say, only when translators can thoroughly convey the original author's thoughts, emotions, tonal nuances, and even rhythmic cadence can the textual beauty be fully manifested and genuinely resonate with readers. It is precisely with this approach that he has yielded numerous exceptional translations cherished by the public.

But Rome was not built in a day. Zhu's final adoption of "aesthetic similarity"as his core translation strategy is developed over a long time primarily driven by three key factors:

First, the translator's profound familiarity with the interplay between Chinese and Western languages and cultures underlies his masterful performance. Zhu's translations exude what we might call "the aroma of scholarly ink and paper" — a fragrance brewed through bilingual mastery and profound grounding in Chinese classics. Consequently, he advocates in literary translation to leverage the target language's advantages: employing idioms, proverbs, and colloquialisms with natural ease; incorporating rhetorical devices and rhymes wherever apt. In the meantime, as a specialist in English literature, he possesses an intimate mastery of the linguistic artistry, narrative techniques, and aesthetic particularities characteristic of English-language novels, which makes it possible for him to quickly grasp the heterogeneous SL elements and know well when and where to make adaptions in the TL. It is precisely his in-depth understanding of both Chinese and Western literary traditions that shapes his translation philosophy, which embodies critical

reflections on literary translation—not as fragmentary insights, but as a coherent, self-consistent theoretical system that guides himself in making deliberate choices in practice.

Second, the translator's anticipation of the target readers' aesthetic taste steers his direction. On the work of translation that spans languages and cultures, Zhu is not merely a conveyor of words, but a visionary who accurately predicts aesthetic expectations. An informative researcher and specialist as he could transcend temporal and spatial hurdles to gauge how target readers will receive the translated text. This foresight is no mere guesswork—it is an artistic act rooted in his profound understanding of both cultures' aesthetic traditions. As an accomplished scholar of English literature, his academic expertise grants him deep insight into the domestic book market, particularly the tastes of Chinese readers for translated Western works. Thus, his translations—through cultural transposition, rhythmic adaptation, and heightened literary sensibility—ensure the seamless transmission of aesthetic experiences, all finely attuned to contemporary readers' preferences. This insight stems not only from his scholarly rigor as a literary researcher but also from his comprehensive grasp of publishing trends, reader preferences (both domestic and foreign), patronage systems, and international distribution channels. It manifests in every stage: text selection, translation strategy, post-translation promotion, and critics' engagement. In translating Dan Brown, for example, Zhu's incisive analysis of the author's narrative style and aesthetic appeal play a pivotal role in sustaining Brown's popularity in China. His multifaceted identity as scholar, translator, cultural ambassador has been instrumental in the enduring success of these translations. To some extent, when Zhu recreates Brown's novels—whether with lyrical elegance, witty humor, or philosophical depth—he is, in essence, conducting masterful aesthetic expectation management.

Last but not the least, the translator's cultural consciousness in pursuing personal translation philosophies guarantees his success. A distinctive translation philosophy emerges when a translator moves beyond convention and develops a personalized approach that balances innovation with respect for tradition. This uniqueness may manifest itself in linguistic experimentation, narrative reconfiguration, emotional reinforcement and spiritual reconstruction as mentioned before in the examples, which requires a translator's persistent pursuit of "finding himself culturally, ideologically and aesthetically." This self-consciousness marks the evolution of Zhu's translation philosophy from mere techniques to true artistry, which not only reflects his cultural stance and aesthetic ideals but also elevates his translation into an autonomous intellectual endeavor with intrinsic value. Step

by step such a systematic translation philosophy inevitably crystallizes into a recognizable "Zhu-style" signature which on one hand, remains rooted in traditional notions of semantic fidelity, yet on the other transcends them, achieving a higher-order synthesis of aesthetic sensibilities. Through meticulous deconstruction of the source text's artistic elements, he penetrates the linguistic surface to unlock the textual core—transforming translation itself into an act of literary innovation and at the same time developing his own methodology.

German functionalist scholar Christiane Nord once remarked that: "A translation should enable target-language readers to perceive the original's style, artistic merit, and linguistic beauty, while enriching the expressive capacity of the receptor language. It must make readers understand why the source text deserves translation in the first place" (Nord 89). He therefore proposed the "loyalty principle," arguing that a translation's fidelity extends not only to the source text but equally to its recipients. In other words, a translation should never be a distorted shadow or echo of the original, but rather an autonomous artwork of equal stature—"a reincarnation of the source where the body has changed, yet the soul remains intact (Qian 77). Zhu's translation manages, in this sense, to establish target-language expressions that optimally reconstruct the source text's aesthetic functions and more importantly, become an independent aesthetic entity. His approach of "seeking aesthetic similarity" infinitely extends the original's vitality, inspires future generations to re-engage with it, and opens new interpretive possibilities—profoundly embodying the notion that "translation is a miraculous encounter across history" (Xu 82).

"Out of Chinese" Translation Research: Theory Elevated from Studies

In addition to his translations and introductions of English literature, Zhu has also conducted a series of studies on the English translation of Chinese literature. This time, however, he does not focus on the translated works themselves but instead directs his attention to a unique and significant group of translators—sinologists—using them as the foundation for his research. It is because, over the past century of the westward transmission of Chinese texts, Western translators—from missionaries to diplomats to sinologists—have consistently been the backbone of this historical narrative. Although the group is not large in number, it has long occupied the center of translation discourse, exerting a profound influence. Zhu astutely identifies both the advantages of this translator group and the importance of this phenomenon to his translation research. He raises several key questions in this respect: what distinguishes the form and style of sinologists' translations? What

motivates them to translate Chinese culture? What are the fundamental differences in translation strategies between sinologists and native Chinese translators? What deeper reasons underlie these differences? What kinds of misinterpretations and biases have emerged in their translations of Chinese texts? Are these mistranslations truly without merit? What is the ultimate purpose of studying sinologists' English translations of Chinese literature? And how can we fairly and justly evaluate the contributions of sinologists to the translation and introduction of Chinese literature (*Between Domestication and Foreignization* 3) ?

Driven by these questions, he embarked on a decade-long research journey, culminating in the publication of his sinological trilogy: *Sinologists and Contemporary Chinese Literature to the West, Sinologists and Ancient Chinese Literature to the West, and Between Domestication and Foreignization: How Sinologists Retell Chinese Stories.* The trilogy focuses on prominent sinologists from the English-speaking world who are actively engaged in translating Chinese literature, along with their translation works. By systematically examining their life tracks and academic development, it delves into the translation philosophies, strategies, styles, and errors in their renditions of both classical and modern Chinese literature. Framed within the interdisciplinary nature and socio-cultural functions of contemporary translation studies, the trilogy critically assesses the "out of Chinese" practices of Western sinologists. It offers a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and systematic analysis of such core elements as the background, motivations, strategies, and deviations in sinologists' English translations of Chinese literature.

These three monumental works epitomize Zhu's translation philosophy, which is a crystallization of years of scholarly reflection and intellectual rigor. They serve not only as the definitive texts for understanding his translation theories but also as an exceptional lens through which the English translation of Chinese literature could be viewed in a clearer light. In the trilogy Zhu offers incisive discussions on core issues in translation studies—such as the relationship between form and spirit, the choice between literal and free translation, misreading and reconstruction, adaptation and retranslation, and creative treason—demonstrating the author's masterful command of translation theory while philosophically uncovering the cultural, historical, social, and creative dimensions inherent in sinologists' translations. By pushing the boundaries of the translation field further, Zhu establishes his own theoretical framework, ultimately revealing the fundamental truth of translation: No matter how painstakingly translators maneuver, adapt, or make compromises, they can never truly escape the dialectical interplay of "domestication and foreignization."

Zhu's theory of "striking a balance between domestication and foreignization refers to keeping an equilibrium between the two translation strategies of domestication and foreignization. On one hand, it requires fidelity to the source text, preserving its essence and spirit; on the other, it demands judicious adaptation of culturally loaded elements to convey core ideas in a reader-friendly manner, minimizing barriers of understanding. It is an inherently dialectical process, with countless variations and no one-size-fits-all solution—precisely why it calls for the nuanced judgment of translators who possess both extensive practical experience and mature theoretical insight. The theory proposed shows Zhu's understanding of translation is particularly profound and insightful since his notion of "domestication"does not imply capitulating to readers' expectations but rather ensuring that the foreign elements of the source culture are effectively communicated while moderately lowering comprehension barriers. Likewise, the concept of "foreignization" in his mindset does not mean rigidly preserving source-text features but instead gradually infusing the target language with fresh expressions—renewing its literary fabric while consciously retaining the original's authentic flavor.

When chewing Zhu's theory in practice over and again, translators will find it does hold water. The translation process witnesses, in fact, an eternal balance between "authenticity" and "aesthetic appeal." That is, translators must retain the source text's distinctive qualities while catering to readers' engagement, ultimately conveying the most admirable and thought-provoking aesthetic qualities of the original. Though achieving this balance is no easy feat, "authenticity" and "aesthetic appeal" should never be seen as mutually exclusive but rather as a dynamic unity that guides translation strategies. Preserving the "truth" of the source does not necessitate convoluted, unreadable translations, just as reconstructing beauty does not justify arbitrary liberties. To effectively disseminate the unique charm of Chinese literature among Western readers, translators must constantly navigate between these two poles, as Zhu recommends, and making context-and audience-sensitive decisions that harmonize "truth" and "beauty" in their renditions of poetic language. Judging from this, we can safely say that Zhu's academic vision of "striking a balance between domestication and foreignization" transcends traditional textual concerns, ascending to interdisciplinary levels encompassing culture, aesthetics, society, history, and communication. It reveals how translators can negotiate multiple constraints and contexts—bridging linguistic gaps while conveying cultural distinctions.

Though his research is highly academic, Zhu doesn't forget to elucidate

his viewpoints with an abundance of vivid examples from the sinologists' translation works. Take, for instance, the sections on "*The Divergence in Form but Convergence in Spirit in Hawkes' the story of stone* and *"Behind the Paradoxical 'Mistranslation'—A Study on Moss Roberts' Translation Strategies in the English Rendition of Three Kingdoms*." The former illustrates how Hawkes elevates domestication beyond mere readability by "interpreting classics through classics" (e.g., invoking Greek mythology and Biblical stories to create multi-layered resonance for English readers), thus achieving the sphere of "cultural dialogue." The latter, on the other hand, showcases how Roberts transcends superficial foreignization, transforming it into a literary "defamiliarization" that revitalizes the target language—breaking conventions and infusing it with new vigor. Such balance of domestication and foreignization represents a hard-won epiphany, a state of natural harmony akin to the Daoist ideal of "unity between heaven and man."

Zhu's academic road map demonstrates that groundbreaking advances in translation studies often emerge from the perfect combination of theory and practice. The ceaseless interplay between the two not only charts the growth of an individual scholar's intellectual journey, but also embodies the intrinsic logic behind the maturation of translation studies as a discipline in China.

Anders-streben in Translation: Cross-Disciplinary Vision

For any discipline to achieve self-renewal and long-term development, it need borrow strengths from other disciplines, thereby breaking down barriers and facilitating interconnections. It is true of literary translation, in which a cross-artistic interpretive approach is highly recommended to guide researchers deeper into Chinese and Western artistic theories before employing "Anders-streben" (out-of-the-box thinking) in their work. In so doing can they expect to reread the complex and intriguing psychological cognition, emotional appeals, and aesthetic expressions in literary works, make novel interpretations of them from multiple dimensions and perspectives, and better still, effect a special resonance with readers as well as extend the horizon of translation studies.

As an eminent scholar in contemporary Chinese literary translation and research, Zhu sets great stores by this cross-disciplinary vision. In fact, his translation research represents, from the very beginning, a significant departure from conventional approaches through its profound engagement with cross-disciplinary activities. That is, his translation philosophy demonstrates distinct interdisciplinary characteristics as shown in his intellectual exploration in the study of American and British literature, African English literature, aesthetics, narratology, cultural-

sociology, and intellectual history, etc. His translations of Dan Brown's novels, for instance, go beyond the literary value of suspense fiction, to the exploration of religious semiotics and historical-cultural codes embedded in the texts. Likewise, in his trilogy of translation research on sinologists' works, his analysis, arguments and judgments not only incorporate modern Western translation theories and the essence of traditional Chinese translation discourse, but also draw insights from reception aesthetics, reader-response theory, sociology, communication studies, and other disciplines. This synthesis approach transcends the limitations of genre literature, infusing popular fiction translation with the depth of cultural studies and showcasing translation's interdisciplinary nature as a form of knowledge production. Step by step, it forms a holistic framework for his translation research—not as a mere layering of concepts but as a genuine cross-disciplinary proliferation of knowledge and as a result, elevation of minds on the part of recipients. This feature is manifested not only in his selection of translation texts but also in his multi-dimensional methodological application and theoretical construction, which form a unique academic paradigm.

Zhu's translation research is, first and foremost, persistently echoed by his long-time study of mainstream English literature, with American and British literature sitting at the core. As is commonly acknowledged in the translation academia "Translate what you research, and research what you translate," Zhu's translation work has been closely intertwined with his research focus of English literature, each informing and elevating the other. This complementary relationship can be strong felt in his choice of texts, his interpretative methods, and the theoretical frameworks he applies to both translation and literary analysis. For him, translation work remains an extension of scholarly engagement with literature and vice versa.

In translating English literature, he attaches great importance to the act of close reading, which entails a thorough inquiry into the text from its literary, historical, and cultural perspectives. In this sense, he actually takes translation as an effective means of critical interpretations of literature he studies, not just translating for the sake of itself. For instance, when translating Browns' novels, Zhu is at the same time an acute observer and critic of the stylistic innovations, thematic concerns, and philosophical underpinnings of the work, leading to his later publication of such monographs as *decoding Dan Brown* and *At-Home Code of Dan Brown and Others.* The abundant knowledge, insightful revelations, and witty comments that permeate his monographs and academic articles, together with his translation of Browns, all combine to present a panoramic vista of his mature thinking, marking his translation activities into a broader literary and cultural movement which in turn,

nourishes and enriches his mind in proposing unique translation skills and strategies that are distinctly Zhu. This approach aligns with the idea that a translator must first be a meticulous reader and critic. Zhu's scholarly essays on English literature often reveal the same depth of analysis that characterizes his translations. His research on the aesthetic creation techniques of Earnest Hemingway, John Grisham and Pu Songlin, for example, greatly influences his translation strategy of "aesthetic similarity" in later years, and his study of William Faulkner's narrative style of stream of consciousness innovates how he handles elusive, complex sentence structures and keeps a balance between domestication and foreignization to foster readability in his translations. In this manner, his academic work provides the theoretical foundation for his practical translation choices.

The relationship between Zhu's translation and research is reciprocal. Just as his literary studies guide his translations, the act of translating deepens his research as well. When asked about his view about translation and literature, he pertinently commented: " Foreign literature, much like translation, offers us a profound way to see the world from a different perspective. It broadens our horizons, liberates our minds, breaks down rigid conventions, and dismantles barriers. Close reading and deep absorption in the beauty of texts remain the foundational pursuit of literary and translation scholars. Therefore, as learners of foreign languages and translation, we should read voraciously, think critically, and strive to become insightful scholars of both—while remaining firmly rooted in our own cultural soil" (Qian and Zhu 22-23).

Indeed he has been doing what he said. In recent years, in particular, he has extended his academic horizon to the study of African English literature—a formerly virgin land of world literature. In this way, he serves as a pioneer, a path-finder, through his sweat, toil and blood, revolutionizing and redrawing the map of English literature research, at the same time absorbing, as a translator, nutrition from the large treasure trove of African English language and literature. For Zhu, translation is never a mere means of communication between two languages. Instead, when he makes a decision to plunge himself into the exploration of an undiscovered realm of African English literature, he as a matter of fact is challenging to expand the boundary of language recognition and explore the linguistic diversity long eclipsed by mainstream English literature. It is not a hunt for novelty, but academic adventure which involves trials and tribulations. More importantly, the research of African English literature, breaking loose from the so-called standard English, provides a translator like him with a different perspective to look at the cultural truth and power logic hidden behind the surface of language since the history and development of African English literature itself is a record

of rebellion against imperialism and colonization. In this sense, Zhu's research of African English literature as a translator is actually challenging the western centrism and hegemony, expanding the frontier of translation aesthetics and, in the final analysis, participating in the redefinition of global culture and politics. As he himself said: "Literary dissemination should never be a one-way or unilateral process, but rather a two-way flow involving mutual appreciation and reciprocal learning. It should not distinguish between mainstream and non-mainstream but should instead respect and reflect diversity. Consequently, literary research should neither take the form of blind veneration of one side nor uncritical adoption or trend-following of theories from certain countries, but should be grounded in their own local contexts, respecting cultural differences and national characteristics, and fully demonstrating an autonomous model of interactive mutual learning. Similarly, related translation activities should not be condescending or submissive, but should seek an optimal balance between domestication and foreignization, fully respecting the literary cultures of both the source and target languages" ("Mutual Appreciation" 50).

By combining a myriad of knowledge and disciplines in his research such as English literature, both Anglo-American and African, Zhu's translation philosophy reflects an interdisciplinary vision in theoretical construction. His translation practice and research display to us that groundbreaking theoretical advances in contemporary translation studies require one's courage and vision to break down disciplinary obstacles. Translation is, in his view, not merely a technical act of linguistic conversion but an intellectual exercise in cultural dialogue, one that must be understood within a broader scholarly horizon to fully appreciate its value and significance. This interdisciplinary quality is exactly what keeps his translation studies dynamically innovative and intellectually vital.

The Foundation of Zhu's Translation Studies: Cultural Confidence and Cultural Consciousness

The remarkable achievements Zhu has made in translation field are deeply rooted in his cultural philosophy. On numerous occasions, he has emphasized that his scholarly ethos is fundamentally grounded in "cultural confidence" and "cultural consciousness"—a conviction that has guided him in his academic pursuit. In his dictionary, cultural confidence is a strong belief in the value of one's own culture, the ability to engage with foreign cultures without losing cultural identity, and the rejection of blind Westernization. While cultural consciousness involves a deep awareness of one's cultural heritage, a critical reflection on how culture shapes translation choices, and an active effort to promote intercultural dialogue.

Being steeped in the scholarly atmosphere of traditional Chinese learning, Zhu holds dear Chinese language, literature and identity, which explains his staunch support for a "Chinese voice" in his translation research. In his view, his translation is not just about linguistic transfer but a witness to a balanced cultural exchange, which asserts the richness of Chinese culture while remaining open to global influences. Indeed, a profound love for Chinese literature, coupled with the pursuit of fostering discursive consensus and civilization sharing between Chinese and Western cultures, have always been the fundamental concerns driving the translator's translation research.

Yet he is, from year-old rich experience, wise enough to realize that the dominant paradigms of world literary criticism today, whether in the West or elsewhere, still largely adhere to Western modes of thinking and theoretical frameworks, lacking independent perspectives. Therefore, it is imperative to anchor our scholarship in the standpoint of Chinese literature and culture, dismantle Western discursive hegemony, break free from conventional critical molds, and transcend cognitive boundaries. Only by doing so can Chinese scholars construct their own theories and discourse, repainting the map of world culture, and establishing a new system of world literature—one that fosters genuine civilization exchange amid diversity. This endeavor is expected to create China's own critical discourse and theoretical frameworks, contributing to the realization of authentic global cultural diversity and the formation of a shared literary and cultural community. As early as 2011 in an interview, Zhu expressed his viewpoints: "Scholarly discourses from the Anglo-American world cannot substitute for Chinese voices. Our academics must ground their research in native cultural soil, strengthen cultural autonomy, and construct independent theoretical frameworks. While assimilating exemplary elements of global cultural heritage, we must recognize that the excellence of civilization is not the exclusive attribute of industrialized nations" (Zhu and Jiang 1).

His deep commitment to cultural confidence and cultural consciousness finds its presence in all aspects of his scholarship, particularly discernible in his research on translating Chinese culture abroad. Although his research focuses on English translations produced primarily by sinologists, his scholarly inquiry remains firmly rooted in Chinese literature. It is by adhering to the communication principle of "affirming one's own cultural identity" that his research fundamentally addresses how to facilitate the global dissemination and development of Chinese culture, by means of critical reflection, proposed strategies, and practical approaches.

In his monographs and articles of Chinese literature "going global," he

examines how sinologists have gradually absorbed and internalized the values, way of thinking, and life wisdom embedded in Chinese literature, while presenting China's charm to the world in their own distinctive ways. In addition, he exercises profound erudition and unique insights to reveal how sinologists reconstruct, reinterpret, and even elevate Chinese literary classics in ways distinct from Chinese native translators—particularly in capturing their spiritual essence, stylistic nuances, and poetic features. These "otherness" perspectives and expressive choices allow readers and researchers to grasp the philosophical depth, national character, and aesthetic value intrinsic to Chinese literature itself, rather than forcing its phenomena into Western literary traditions or theoretical frameworks. Through their translations, according to Zhu, sinologists open windows for the West to understand Chinese civilization, striving to rectify long-held misconceptions. This is exactly what Zhu truly hopes to tell the world.

"A core principle guiding my research on sinologists' translation of Chinese literature is," as he soberly points out: "While sinologists' translation work is subjectively driven by the enrichment and development of their own literary traditions, it objectively facilitates the global circulation of Chinese literature and culture. Therefore, to truly bring Chinese literature and culture to the world, relying solely on sinologists is insufficient—greater participation from Chinese scholars proficient in foreign languages is essential, and collaborative Sino-foreign translation initiatives remain a viable approach. It necessitates a coordinated effort to consolidate and optimize translation resources, coupled with a paradigm shift in our conceptual understanding—recognizing the fundamental distinctions between 'into-Chinese' and 'out-of-Chinese' translation. Indeed, whether as writers or translators, only with strong cultural self-consciousness and a sense of social responsibility can we propel Chinese literature and culture further onto the world stage, generating academic contributions of lasting value" (Qian and Zhu 17).

His strong conviction in cultural confidence and consciousness also finds its compelling expression in his research of African English literature: "In the current landscape of world literature, both Chinese literature and African literature belong to Third World literature and face opportunities and challenges in their dialogue with the global literary sphere. During this dialogue, Chinese literature inevitably encounters the same processes of discursive and cultural transformation experienced by African literature. When Western countries award prizes to Chinese literature, their justifications often carry undertones of Western ideology and values, sometimes even leading to alternative interpretations that diverge from the works themselves. To construct a global expression for our national literature, practice

proactive cultural dialogue in Chinese literature, and enrich the diversity of world literature, we may glean insights from the developmental track of African literature" (Zhu and Li 182).

That is how he conducts his research on African English culture. When he deals with Africa through the lens of Chinese rather than Cambridge or Oxford, Columbia or any other western institutions ("Communication Mistakes" 147), the researcher actually builds direct and autonomous bond with Africa, casting off the shackles of the West and its postcolonial framework. It is in itself a vivid embodiment of cultural confidence against Western cultural hegemony. Meanwhile, African English literature offers him and his group a crucial mirror—an insight into African people's resistance against cultural imperialism. The knowledge gained from the experience can, in turn, enlighten China's own literary and cultural exchanges with the outside world. A new paradigm of cultural exchange—one that transcends Western centric literary standard is thus established. Such equitable cultural decoding not only diversifies the aesthetics of global literature but also offers alternative frameworks for interpreting China's own culture.

What inspires us most is: when Zhu independently articulates the value of African English literature without Western mediation, he himself becomes a definer of cultural worth. That is, by engaging deeply with African English literature, Zhu the translator and scholar becomes a designer of a more pluralistic and equitable world literature.

Conclusion

From "seeking aesthetic similarity" to "striking a balance between domestication and foreignization," Zhu's translation philosophy has evolved from micro-level techniques to a macro-level theoretical system. His personal academic trajectory is also a mirror to translation studies: theory should not remain abstract dogma but must serve as a "navigator" for practitioners, while practice should pave the way for theoretical innovation. In promoting the Chinese edition of *The Da Vinci Code*, for instance, he went beyond textual translation to organize cross-media activities such as author dialogues and reader discussions. By integrating the author, translator, readers, and publishers into a dynamically interconnected network, he transformed Dan Brown's novels into a cultural phenomenon in China, generating new modes of cross-cultural engagement. This expansion from "translating texts" to "translating cultural ecosystems"represents an advanced form of theory-practice integration.

What's more, Zhu's translation studies are deeply entrenched in his cultural confidence and cultural consciousness, offering a counterbalance to Western-centric

theories. His work affirms the value of Chinese translation traditions and promotes intercultural exchange on an equal basis, providing a model for translation practice that is culturally aware. By grounding translation in cultural self-awareness, Zhu's work ensures that China's voice is heard, but not just translated, in the global conversation.

We may find with ease that it is Zhu's profound understanding of this translation philosophy that bears significant implications for the global dissemination of Chinese literature. When Chinese literature encounters "cultural discount" in its overseas journey, translators and researchers must transcend textual consciousness and emphasize the crucial role of more paratextual elements, adopting a dynamic, adaptive, and mutually activating approach to translation. Such a perspective shared by Zhu offers a Chinese solution for constructing a global cultural ecosystem based on equal dialogue.

In a nutshell, Zhu's career exemplifies the inseparable bond among translation, literary scholarship, a variety of disciplines and above all, his research work. His translations are not isolated acts but extensions of his academic inquiries, just as his research is often inspired by the challenges he faces in translation. This interdependence highlights the intellectual rigor required of literary translators, who must be both artists and scholars. By viewing translation as a form of research and research as a foundation for translation, Zhu bridges the gap between theory and practice, setting his eyes afar, demonstrating that the two are not just connected but mutually constitutive.

Funding: This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China under Major National Program "History of African Literature Written in English" [19ZDA296].

Works Cited

Brown, Dan. *Angels and Demons*. London: Random House, 2001.

—. *Digital Fortress*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

—. *The Da Vinci Code*. London: Corgi Books, 2003.

—. *The Lost Symbol*. New York: Anchor Books, 2010.

丹·布朗：《天使与魔鬼》。朱振武等译。北京：人民文学出版社，2005。

[Brown, Dan. *Angels & Demons*, translated by Zhu Zhenwu, et al. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2005.]

——.《达·芬奇密码》。朱振武，吴晟，周元晓，等译。上海：上海人民出版社，2004。

[—. *The Da Vinci Code*, translated by Zhu, Zhenwu, Sheng Wu, Yuanxiao Zhou, et al. Shanghai:

Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2004.]

——.《数字城堡》。朱振武等译。北京：人民文学出版社，2004。

[—. *Digital Fortress*, translated by Zhu, Zhenwu, et al. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2004.]

——.《失落的秘符》。朱振武，文敏，于是，译。北京：人民文学出版社，2010。

[—. *The Lost Symbol*, translated by Zhu, Zhenwu, Min Wen , and Shi Yu. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2010.]

辜正坤：《译学津原》。郑州：文心出版社，2005。

[Gu, Zhengkun. *The Origin of Translation Theories*. Zhengzhou: Wenxin Publishing House, 2005.]

刘宓庆：《翻译美学导论》。北京：中国对外翻译出版公司，2005。

[Liu, Miqing. *An Introduction to Translational Aesthetics*. Beijing: China Translation and Publishing Corporation, 2005.]

钱屏匀，朱振武：“自信自觉潜心华典外译，思辨思政教研外国文学——朱振武教授访谈录”，《广东外语外贸大学学报》，2022(05)：16-23。

[Qian, Pingyun and Zhenwu Zhu. "On English Translations of Chinese Classics and Foreign Literature Teaching and Studying: An—Interview with Professor Zhu Zhenwu." *Journal of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies,* no. 5, 2022, pp.16-23.]

钱钟书：《七缀集》。北京：三联书店，2002。

[Qian, Zhongshu. *Patchwork: Seven Essays on Art and Literature*. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2002.]

许钧：《翻译论》。南京：译林出版社，2014。

[Xu, Jun. *On Translation*. Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2014.]

朱振武：《归异平衡：英语世界汉学家的中国故事书写》。上海：上海交通大学出版社，2023。

[Zhu, Zhenwu. *Between Domestication and Foreignization: How Sinologists Retell Chinese Stories.* Shanghai: Shanghai JiaoTong University Press, 2023.]

——：“文学翻译的良心与操守—朱振武教授在北京大学的演讲”，《解放日报》，2012.4.22, 第 008 版。

[—. "The Conscience and Ethics in Literary Translation: A Lecture by Professor Zhu Zhenwu at Peking University." *Liberation Daily*, 22 Apr. 2012, p.008]

——：“中非文学的交流误区与发展愿景——关于《雷雨》在尼日利亚的归化改编”，《文史哲》 2022(06)： 138-49。

[—. "Communication Mistakes and Development Visions between China and Africa in Literature: On the Domestication and Adaptation of Thunderstorm in Nigeria." *Literature, History and Philosophy*, no. 6, 2022, pp.138-49.]

——：“中外文学的传播互鉴与归异平衡 ——以‘中国非洲文学学’的建构理路为中心”，

《外国文学研究》，2025(01)：51-58。

[—. "Mutual Appreciation in Dissemination and Domestication-Foreignization Balance in Chinese and Foreign Literatures: Centered on the Construction Logic of 'Chinese African Literaturology'." *Foreign Literature Studies*, no. 1, 2025, pp.51-58.]

——："相似性：文学翻译的审美旨归——从丹·布朗小说的翻译实践看美学理念与翻译思维的互动"，《中国翻译》，2006。

[—. "Similarity as the Aesthetic Objective of Literary Translation: With the Rendition of Dan Brown's Novels as an Exemplar," *China Translator Journal*, 2006.]

朱振武、蒋楚婷："朱振武：均衡吸纳各国文学文化的精神"，《文汇读书周报》，2011.12.30。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Chuting Jiang. "Zhu Zhenwu: Balancing and Absorbing the Spirit of Global Literary Cultures." *Wenhui Reading Weekly,* 30 Dec. 2011.]

朱振武、李丹："非洲文学与文明多样性"，《中国社会科学》，2022(08)：163-84。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li. "African Literatures and the Diversity of Civilizations." *China Social Sciences*, no. 8, 2022, pp.163-84.]

Doris Lessing as an African Diasporic Writer and the "Africanness" in *The Grass Is Singing*: Based on Chinese African Literaturology

Gao Jing
School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Shandong University
Jinan 250100, China
Email: j_gao@163.com

Abstract From the perspective of Chinese African literature, with the core concepts of the "Four Major Diasporas" and theories related to "Africanness," the famous writer Doris Lessing is more of an African writer than a British writer. The characterisation, narrative setting and thematic implications of novels such as her masterpiece *The Grass Is Singing* are closely focused on Africa, making them typical African literary works. The multiple literary imaginations of Africa in the work reflect the spiritual sustenance and meaning of life of African colonisers, and the characteristics of the era and regional characteristics are reflected in the novel's author, characters and value identification. This typical African and diasporic nature is an important reason why Lessing's novels are among the classics of world literature.

Keywords Doris Lessing; *The Grass Is Singing*; Chinese African Literaturology; colonial diaspora; Africanness

Author **Gao Jing**, Ph.D. , is Lecturer of English teaching at the School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Shandong University (Jinan 250100, China). Her research interests include modern and contemporary English literature and cultural studies.

Introduction

Doris Lessing (1919-2013), winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature, is an outstanding African disasporic writer, although she can also be considered as a British writer. Her novel *The Grass Is Singing* is a story about colonialism as well as the loss and degradation of human emotions, but more essentially it is an exposé on the disintegrated and crumbling mentality of white colonists in the context of

colonization. Lessing took the title of the novel from *The Waste Land* (1922) by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) with a clear intent to reinforce her message with the metaphorical implication of "the Waste Land," namely, the spiritual world of both the colonized people in Africa and the white colonists moved, step by step, towards a suffocating spiritual wasteland during the Western colonization. Needless to say, Lessing's selection of the title inculcated more significance into the theme of her writings about colonial diasporas.

Doris Lessing: As an African Diasporic Writer

In recent years, with the migration waves surging around the world, more and more scholars have defined and described the concept of "diaspora" from different perspectives. The connotation and extension of the concept have been deepening and expanding to the extent that now it may mean "any group of migrants and their descendants who maintain ties with their original homeland" (Bakewell 5). As for the term "diaspora literature," it in the usual sense refers to "all kinds of literary works that are created by diasporic writers with personal experience of diasporic living and that reflect artistically the phenomenon of diasporic culture and the facts of its formation and change, expressing the lives of individuals or groups in diasporic communities" (Yang 168).

While the term "diaspora" can be used to refer to such groups scattering across the globe, little attention has been paid to the diasporas on the African continent. Africa has been represented as a continent that produces diasporas, rather than a place where diasporas can be found. Then, how should we identify diasporas? How can they be distinguished from other migrant groups or other groups engaged in transnational activities? William Safran (1930-), a professor of Political Science at the University of Colorado Boulder, Robin Cohen (1944-), a social scientist at Oxford University working in the field of globalization, migration and diaspora studies, and Dr. Oliver Bakewell at Manchester University have provided their input, defining the relationship between diasporas and homeland, i.e., homeland orientation, as one of the representations of diaspora. Born in Persia (now Iran) in 1919, Lessing moved with her family, at the age of five, to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), a British colony, and spent her childhood and adolescence in Africa before settling down in England in 1949. Having spent 25 yeas of her life and formed her values in southern Africa, Lessing had a strong sense of belonging to African culture. She writes in "The Old Chief Mshlanga," "this is my heritage, too; I was bred here; it is my country as well as the black man's country" (Lessing, *This Was the Old Chief's Country* 17). Unlike Camus, Lessing did not come to the

Third World from a First-World country as an adult, instead she was born and raised right here in Africa with a deep identification with African culture. In this sense, though Lessing is commonly regarded as one of the most important contemporary writers of England, judging from the theories of Africanness[1] and the four major diasporas[2] proposed by Prof. Zhu Zhenwu [朱振武], however, Lessing is, first of all, an African writer because one may find so much evidence of her novels focusing on Africa in the characterisation, narrative setting and thematic implications. Her masterpiece *The Grass Is Singing* is one of case which makes it typical African literary work.

Set in South Rhodesia, a former British colony, it is Lessing's debut novel completed right before her move from Africa to England. Also, it is the novel that made her famous and fully demonstrated the "Africanness" of African literature by sharing her observations on the diasporic mentality of the colonizers and the colonized in the context of colonial culture and prompting her readers to reflect on the history of colonization.

In fact, Lessing has been listed among African writers for decades. In 1973, Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* was included in *The Heinemann African Writers Series* (AWS)[3], a book series published by the famous publishing company, Heinemann. In 1987, Lessing was selected as one of the Zimbabwean writers in *Tabex Encyclopedia Zimbabwe*[4]. Indeed, it seems to make more sense to study Lessing as an African writer because it will help us better understand the complexity and uniqueness of her novels. What is so unique about her novel writing, then? Why did her novels win the Nobel Prize for Literature and other prestigious awards? A major reason is their representations of colonial diaspora. The term "colonial diaspora" refers mainly to the white settlers' and their descendants' culture and mindset, which are paradoxically comparable to the Third-World

1 See Zhu Zhenwu and Li Dan, "The Africanness of African Literatures and New Patterns in Human Civilization." *Social Sciences in China*, 2022, no.3, pp.113-27. The authors point out that the Africanness of African literature refers to the deep identification of African and Afro-descendant people with the history and culture of the African continent and their deep attachment to their homeland, that is, their cultural commitment to upholding selfhood, bridging the gaps, and remembering history but always looking to the future.

2 See Zhu Zhenwu and Yuan Junqing, "Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance: A Case Study of African Literature in English." *Social Sciences in China* (Chinese Edition) 2019, no. 7, pp.135-58.

3 See Doris Lessing, *The grass is singing*. London: Heinemann, 1973.

4 See Anthony Chennells, "Reading Doris Lessing's Rhodesian Stories in Zimbabwe." *In Pursuit of Doris Lessing: Nine Nations Reading*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990, pp. 17-40.

diasporas, due to their mixed feelings toward the imperial past during, and after the collapse of, the colonization (Zhu and Yuan 144). Lessing, who lived in Africa, mostly in Zimbabwe, for 25 years, clearly knew such an experience well. Her novels, especially, *The Grass Is Singing*, have all the distinctive features normally associated with the representation of colonial diaspora.

Lessing once said in an interview that her mother was not a fan of stories like *The Grass Is Singing*. As a matter of fact, white people did not like her stories, either. They even called Lessing "a traitor to the white cause and a nigger lover" (Wachtel 146). This is because in her writings Lessing addresses themes that are different from those of other diasporic writers. Usually, traditional European colonial novelists portray Africa as a primitive continent and a place of adventures. Fellow colonial diaspora writer, J. M. Coetzee (1940-), portrays the images of early colonists with a pioneering colonial mentality in *Dusk Lands* (1974); another colonial diaspora writer from South Africa, Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014), was a staunch anti-apartheid activist whose novels profoundly expose the harm that apartheid caused to blacks and to whites themselves. Lessing, on the other hand, is more of a writer struggling with a dual identity as an insider and an outsider and being torn between colonial and noncolonial cultures. Judging by her life and writing career, Lessing's cultural psyche and spiritual quest did not completely transcend the tradition of Western values. Unlike Gordimer, who maintained her citizenship of South Africa and dedicated herself to writing and activism there, Lessing never intended to stay in Rhodesia forever. As a descendant of white settlers living in the colony, Lessing was both an outsider in African culture and an insider on the outside. Her dual identity offered her a double perspective looking at the gains and losses of one culture from the standpoint of another, but it also forced her into an intense psychological conflict and identity crisis between the two different cultural worldviews. As she admitted once, she had "a particular perspective, a kind of double-vision as the daughter of British settlers in Southern Rhodesia," and she had a sense of "asolutely belonging and absolutely not belonging," which "is extremely valuable for a writer" (Wachtel 143). The sense of absolute belonging and absolute not belonging is what drives Lessing's African-themed novels and embodies the most distinctive feature of her writings about colonial diasporas.

The Grass Is Singing: The African Imagination of a Diasporic Writer

In Lessing's African-themed novels, people, events and scenes from Africa are depicted. More often than not, Lessing's works depict the white colonial diasporas' pursuit and disillusionment between their imagination of their homeland and

their fantasies of life in the colonies. According to Safran, diasporas "regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate" (Safran 83). For this reason, they clung to the British way of life, recreational activities, and eating habits, and tried to turn the colony into their hometown by replicating their British habitat in Africa. They "built prim little houses with hedged gardens full of English flowers for preference" (Lessing 44) or created an English garden on an isolated African farm, just like Mrs. Gale in "The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange," with "her flowering African shrubs, her vivid English lawns, her water-garden with the goldfish and water lilies" (Lessing, *This Was the Old Chief's Country* 80). In "A Home for the Highland Cattle," the whites built their houses in Africa with the same architectural style in London. Their adherence to the English way of life emulates the white South Africans' diasporic sense of a yearning for England and an alienation from Africa. More importantly, it is their way of coping with and dissolving the loneliness, isolation, hostility, and all the other imperfect conditions of life that they faced in the country of their settlement.

In *The Grass Is Singing*, most of the white colonists portrayed by Lessing have an anxious yearning for a return to England and live in a temporary residence in South Africa with a sojourner mentality since in their belief their home is still located in the distant Europe. As we see in a revealing scene after Mary's death, Tony looks at her room feeling complete baffled: "How those two, Mary and Dick Turner, could have borne to live in such a place, year in and year out, for so long … Why did they go on without even so much as putting in ceilings?" (Lessing 23). In "A Home for the Highland Cattle," Mrs. Bond paints the walls in the house, fixes the broken places, and spends some money on a beautiful cupboard, only to disappoint everyone else and become ostracized by other housewives for, in their opinion, they can't fix things, even door handles, because "If I start doing the place up, it means I'm here forever" (Lessing, *This Was the Old Chief's Country* 252). The white settlers' inattention to their houses symbolizes their desire for a return and their predicament of having to constantly go through the sorrow of parting from their home.

As Oliver Bakewell points out, diasporas retain in their minds "a collective myth of an ideal ancestral home" (Bakewell 11), which makes them often idealize their so-called initial home and tend to reconstruct or write about imaginary homes from a nostalgic perspective. Mary, the heroine in *The Grass Is Singing*, is a perfect example. Although her parents are South Africans and have never been to England, "For Mary, the word 'Home', spoken nostalgically, meant England" (Lessing 28). Whenever she goes to the shop to pick up the mail, she always sees some trucks

loaded with goods, letters, and magazines from overseas. Just as the Jews' "Promised Land" must be flowing with milk and honey, Mary's ideal image of her motherland is a place with a wide array of goods and a life of elegance and abundance.

Diaspora members, as Robin Cohen suggests, "demonstrate an affinity with other members of the group dispersed to other place" (Cohen 1). Apart from mailing goods and magazines, writing letters is the best way to get connected emotionally. When ranchers arrive at the grocery store from miles away to read letters sent from their homeland, they would be:

> Momentarily oblivious to the sun, the square of red dust where the dogs lay scattered like flies on meat and the groups of starting natives—momentarily transported back to the country for which they were so bitterly homesick, but where they would not choose to live again: "South Africa gets into you," these self-exiled people would say, ruefully. (Lessing 28)

Here we see that, like the Third-World diaspora groups, colonial diasporas share the same sense of rootlessness and nostalgic sadness when they think of their home countries. But unlike the Third-World diasporas, who were often forced into dispersion, wandering, or even exile, many colonial diasporas went to colonies voluntarily to participate in colonial expansion activities. Among the types of diasporas listed by Cohen, such as victim diaspora, labor diaspora, imperial diaspora, and trade diaspora, imperial diaspora refers to those settlers who were "sent abroad to protect trade, exploit resources and local labor, and consolidate the power of an expanding empire" (Cohen 13). In fact, some 22 million settlers left the British Isles between 1815 and 1914. Most of them were sent to the United States and a few to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, and South Africa. Some of these people became colonists and willingly collaborated with the imperial colonial expansion for a better livelihood, while others were exiled vagrants, criminals, and idlers. Those diasporas who voluntarily joined the hegemonic expansion in colonies for their own better livelihood became both the colonists and wanderers of the Empire the moment they set foot on the African continent. The African continent in front of them was nothing more than a place of self-exile. Therefore, the nostalgia for a home to which they cannot return and the feeling of being exiled in the country of their settlement are the lingering nightmares of colonial diasporas. That is why we often come across various contradictory mindsets and entangled emotions delineated by writers with diasporic experiences, like Lessing, while reading through their novels.

Despite her poor family background, Mary, the heroine in *The Grass Is Singing*, has always longed to free herself from material poverty and spiritual repression. In her belief, she has achieved real freedom after the death of her parents. She enjoys the city life as she can watch movies, go to dances, swim, and make friends. It is evident that Mary used to be a confident, active, and independent woman with a decent immersion in humanism and many good expectations for the future, but at the same time Mary is naive and the freedom she appreciates is not the same thing as feminist freedom. Ultimately, she is forced into marriage by conventions. The dull life on the farm confines her in solitude, unable to integrate herself into the local white community, or make friends with anyone, or even find a dance party, which used to be a her favorite activity, anywhere. Besides, her wimpish husband makes her feel so helpless and the embarrassing living condition derived from their poverty drives her into hysteria all the time. When she was first married, Mary was angry with anyone who was not treating blacks as human beings. Later, however, she changed into a person who cannot help but feel a deep hatred and disgust in her heart at the thought of meeting them face to face. She enjoys the thrill of self-satisfaction by ordering black servants around but suffers a devastating psychological torture due to her perverse emotional attachment to Moses. As she succumbs herself to all the concepts regarding class affiliation and skin color, the concepts that she has embraced over the years, Mary is filled with hatred and fear simply because Moses is black and, eventually, left teetering on the verge of nervous breakdown and personality disorder.

Just as Mary imagines when she reflects on her life, in a moment of terminal lucidity, before her death, her feelings have always been "propelled by something she did not understand – cracked the wholeness of her vision" (Lessing 224). Through this novel, Lessing not only writes, with a touch of sensitivity, about Mary's psychological journey from an innocent and simple woman to a melancholy and frustrated wife, but also reveals how the spiritual world of South African white women evolves from its ideal to a distortion and a disillusionment at the end under the unbearable pressure from Western colonialism and racial discrimination. The freedom, as defined by Mary, is quite unfeasible. In a way, her murder might be a blessing in disguise.

As white women gradually drift toward a spiritual disillusionment while searching for their lost homes and pursuing misplaced relationships, the white men in Lessing's novel are just as likely becoming disenchanted with the evaporation of their ideals under harsh circumstances. Charlie Slatter, a seemingly successful farmer, is rude and brutal, hard-hearted, and dictatorial. He is harsh on his wife, his

children, and even harsher on the laborers at the farm. He uses a sjambok as a magic tool for suppression. When Dick started to run the farm, Charlie once told him to buy a sjambok first, and then a plow or a harrow. He has made a fortune through harsh suppression, hence becoming a model of success. Even though what he does represents the concept of pursuing money and material gains above everything else in colonial expansion and symbolizes the triumph of colonialist expansion overseas, he sees the pursuit of wealth as the sole purpose in his life, for which he pays the hefty price by alienating himself from a young man simply dreaming about being rich to an emotionless money-making machine and, worse, a victim of colonialism.

Tony Marston, a neighbor of Mary, is a 20-year-old daydreamer with traditional, progressive ideas about racial issues in Africa. He appears to have the same traits as an idealist does. After Mary's murder by Moses, Tony bows to his dreams in the face of realities and becomes a worker in a foreign country by taking up an office clerical job, the same job that he has tried to avoid by coming to Africa in the first place. Most of the colonial settlers who are chasing their dream of making a fortune in the colonies end up being impecunious farmers like Dick, who devotes himself to his farm completely. "He worked as only a man possessed by a vision can work, from six in the morning till seven at night, taking his meals on the lands, his whole being concentrated on the farm" (Lessing 46). However, due to his poor management, incompetence, and stubbornness, his farm is on the verge of bankruptcy, and eventually he himself has to endure the breakup and insanity in the family after being torn by the constant tussle between material greed and emotional desire.

Since the prevalence of postcolonial criticism, people have mostly focused on the living conditions and spiritual plight of the indigenous people in colonies and criticized the brutal imperialist and colonialist invasion on the political, economic, ecological, and cultural fronts, but they have totally overlooked a big group of marginalized settlers who are colonists or groups with colonial characteristics who went to Africa and their descendants. "Due to their colonial writing and complex complex about the empire's past after the collapse of the colony, they exhibit a culture and psychology similar to but also different from the diaspora in the third world," which defined by Prof. Zhu as "Colonial diaspora" (Zhu and Yuan 148). They answered the call of the Empire, believed in the propaganda of the government, and moved from their homeland to foreign countries in hope of living a peaceful life in a comfortable environment along with friendly neighbors. As a matter of fact, what they discovered in the colonies was the repetitive pattern of life and poverty as in the past. The life here failed to deliver the wealth they desired, but instead it obstructed their steps, inhibited their minds, and shattered their

fantasies. Lessing presented a credible account of the survival dilemma and mental depression behind their glamorous appearance so as to construct a complete and authentic view of the colonial world. Colonialism not only brought so much harm to the colonized people, but also devastated the colonists, most of whom were white settlers, or ordinary people, constantly chasing their illusion or succumbing to their disillusionment, but hardly achieving any spiritual breakthrough or sustenance.

The "Africanness" in *The Grass Is Singing*

According to Prof. Zhu, "Africanness" refers to the deep-rooted identity of Africa and people of African descent with the history and culture that originated from the African continent, as well as their deep attachment to that homeland (Zhu and Li 163). It is a cultural trait that upholds self-identity, bridges divides, remembers history, but also looks to the future. Africanness has a variety of cultural connotations in contemporary African writing, and decolonisation, diaspora and hybridity are all cultural representations. In Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, this representation is highlighted by the work's portrayal of diaspora, and this diaspora is "not just 'geographical migration' or changes in occupation, identity, or intention. More significantly, it is the conflict of heterogeneous cultures and its impact on the body and soul of diasporas" (Zhu and Yuan 153). Throughout her writing career, Lessing consistently dedicated her novel writing to exploring the domain of spirituality. As a person who had experienced spiritual crisis and disillusioned with her ideals, Lessing knew better that while critiquing the realities in the world, she ought to pay close attention to the spiritual world of the marginalized individuals who were struggling between overcoming their despair and seeking a new hope, and she proved her special expertise in depicting women's inner workings of mind in terms of gender, race, and class stratification.

The phenomenon of diaspora goes hand in hand with the crisis of diasporas' cultural identity. For diasporas, they often have a dual cultural identity, which is prone to change. The British cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1932-2014) argues that there are at least two different positions on "cultural identity" among diasporas: The first position defines "cultural identity" in terms of "one shared culture, hiding inside the heart of the other" (Hall 223), the second is "a sort of collective one true self, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall 223). Other scholars, however, recognized that, "as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'" (Hall 225). As a writer with a cross-cultural background, Lessing's work describes the clash between

civilizations and her own anxiety of being caught in the midst of it.

She did an amazing job of incorporating her personal experiences into the portrayal of the little white girl in the short story *The Old Chief Mshlanga*. Unlike the colonists who did not understand Africa but looked down at African culture with a condescending attitude, the little girl in the novel loved the natural landscape of Africa and celebrated the enchanting grasslands and animals. She respected African cultural traditions and appreciated the traditional architecture of the indigenous people. She was anxious to make friends with the people there, so when the Chief greeted her, she would respond politely. As someone born in Africa, she could see the sparsely wooded grasslands of southern Africa whenever she opened her eyes. What is amazing is that she could name the small creatures in the streams back in England, but she didn't know much about the word "veld," and she couldn't distinguish the msasa trees from the thorn trees in the grasslands. To her, "the sun was a foreign sun, and the wind spoke a strange language" (Lessing, *This Was the Old Chief's Country* 14). Colonial diasporas remained "outsiders" to African culture because they were unable to reach its core all along.

While moving from one country to another, colonial migrants sought to settle down in their new land, but they were still unable to see the place of their sojourn as their native place. With their native place on one side and the land of their survival on the other, they were dangling between two cultures searching arduously for their self-identity. Most of the time, they believed that "they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it" (Safran 83). If such kind of psychological anxiety or disconnection induced in the face of a heterogeneous culture is also a common experience for foreign diasporas, then colonial diasporas in Africa might encounter two other specific situations.

While living in Africa, Lessing joined a small white left-wing group participating actively in local politics and coming into contact with Marxism, for which she was ostracized by the local mainstream white society and, after her move to England, was banned by its government from entering Rhodesia for 25 years. But, as Lu Jing put it well, the group's "activities did not gain the trust of the blacks, nor did they integrate with the local blacks. They continued to act within the small group of white leftists and therefore were 'rootless'" (Lu 151). Later, Lessing joined the British Communist Party, but dropped out of it shortly afterwards. Beset by the racist mindset, whites and blacks are always divided by an unbridgeable gap. Such a multiple identity, which made Lessing feel not only so perplexed about being shunned by the mainstream white society and misunderstood by the blacks

simultaneously, but also so distressed about the contradiction between her affiliation with the colonists and her resentment toward their evil and immorality, deeply affected her novel writing.

In addition, there was a special group of white settlers, like Mary and Dick from *The Grass Is Singing*, living in southern Africa. Ostensibly, the novel writes about a failed marriage, hidden relationships, and the racial conflict between whites and blacks, but it also shows how white settlers in Africa struggle to integrate into the British society through multigenerational effort. The novel is set in Southern Rhodesia between the two world wars during the 1920s and 1940s, where the gap between the rich and the poor was relative narrow because there were not many businesses that could make a huge fortune overnight like the tobacco barons. Within the African colonial society at that time, the consciousness of class stratification was generally abated among the colonists who saw the black-white tension as the only division they faced. On the farm where Mary lives, white families live far from each other, a preference that is quite different from the middle-class way of life in England. So, they rarely have the opportunity to meet and are "hungry for contact with their own kind" (Lessing 2). Mary and Dick live in poverty and shabby conditions. As colonial masters, they have their own black servants, yet in the eyes of other white settlers, they are just "poor whites." The so-called "poor whites" originally refers to the white South Africans, an ethnic group descended from predominantly Dutch settlers who first arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, but not the British. What is a poor white? It was mainly determined by the way one lived. "The small community of Afrikaners had their own lives, and the Britishers ignored them. 'Poor whites' were Afrikaners, never British" (Lessing 3). For poor whites like Mary, what is awkward is that they have grown up in a foreign country, but they have imbibed their parents' memories of their home country, read a lot of books ordered from England, and developed a strong conviction that they are still purely civilized British subjects with an inseparable identity from their home country. However, in the eyes of their wealthy compatriots in the colony, they have already been excluded from the British circle as outsiders or the marginalized members of the colonial community without a sense of belonging. This kind of colonial diaspora has become a unique cultural landscape, and has contributed to the cultural representation and unique aesthetic implications that are characteristic of African English-language literature.

Conclusion

In Lessing's novels, white colonists retain not only a deep sense of attachment

to their homeland, but also the unspeakable pain from being exiled. They come to a foreign country with dreams, and then fade away in disillusionment and helplessness.They have to deal with the alienation from the colonized on the one hand and, on the other, find it hard to abandon their identification with the culture of the country they live in. Lessing's works illustrate colonial diasporas' predicament of rootless existence, in which, technically, they are not "exiles" but face more hardships than real "exiles" do, and they have a place to live but have no one to rely on. Lessing is not the only writer who produced narratives about colonial diasporas. As the connotation of postcolonialism continues to expand, colonial diaspora writing has become a common phenomenon in global diaspora literature, and Lessing is just a typical representative. Like Lessing, the diasporic writers who have cross-cultural experiences and strong identification with colonial culture, and have been using colonial life as an important source of creative material, all have more or less similar tactics in their representation of colonial diasporas. Leading African diasporic writers, such as Camus, Gordimer, and Coetzee, need no introduction, but there are more colonial diaspora writers in North America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, and the Caribbean. Australian writers, such as Patrick White (1912-1990) and Gail Jones (1955-), and Canadian writer Alice Munro (1931-2024) have exerted a major impact on literature around the world by expressing the feelings of nostalgia and exile based on their deep cultural recollection, depicting the quest for cultural roots, tracing the cause of spiritual wandering, and discovering the sense of belonging in the memory of history.

As a unique shining spot in diasporic literature, the writers of colonial diaspora in African literature differ from both white British and black African native writers in terms of value identification and cultural identity, but they are definitely commensurable to their counterparts elsewhere in terms of high aesthetic standard and artistic sophistication. The writing of African colonial diaspora has created a special aesthetic paradigm and atmosphere, enriched world literature with more diversities, and thereby provided greater potential for the mutual appreciation between civilizations.For many years, African literature has not truly been presented to us in its entirety. Most of the time, it is "first and foremost the African literature seen by the West, and in particular the British and American world" (Zhu 54). As Chinese scholars, our foreign literature research must "get out of a state of unconsciousness" (Zhu 53) and "have its own knowledge structure and system of judgment" (Zhu 53). Only in this way can we absorb the outstanding cultural traditions of various countries in a balanced way and achieve a truly equal dialogue in world literature.

Funding: This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China under Major National Program "History of African Literature Written in English" [19ZDA296].

Works Cited

Bakewell, Oliver. "In Search of the Diasporas within Africa." *African Diaspora,* no. 1, 2008, pp. 5-27.

Cohen, Robin. *Global Diaspora: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2022.

Hall, Stuart, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference,* edited by Jonathan Rutherford. Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, pp. 222-237.

Lessing, Doris. *The Grass Is Singing*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008.

—. *This Was the Old Chief's Country: Collected African Stories Volume one*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003.

卢婧："多丽丝·莱辛的文化身份与小说创作"，《南京社会科学》，2010 (05): 150-56。

[Lu, Jing. "Doris Lessing: The Cultural Identity and Her Novels." *Nan Jing Social Sciences,* no. 5, 2010, pp.150-56.]

Safran, William. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland Return." *Diaspora,* no.1, 1991, pp. 83-99.

Wachtel, Eleanor. *The Best of Writers & Company*. Windsor, Ontario: Biblioasis, 2016.

杨中举："流散文学的内涵、流变及'流散性'主题表现"，《江苏社会科学》，2020（03）：167-76。

[Yang, Zhongju. "The Connotation, Change and Diasporic Theme of Diaspora Literature — Centering on Jewish Diaspora Literature." *Jiangsu Social Sciences*, no. 3, 2020, pp.167-76.]

Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li. "The Africanness of African Literatures and New Patterns in Human Civilization." *Social Sciences in China* [English Edition] , no. 3, 2022, pp.113-27.

朱振武、袁俊卿："流散文学的时代表征及其世界意义——以非洲英语文学为例"，《中国社会科学》2019 (07): 135-58。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Junqing Yuan. "Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance: A Case Study of African Literature in English." *Social Sciences in China* [Chinese Edition], no. 7, 2019, pp.135-58.]

朱振武："中外文学的传播互鉴与归异平衡——以'中国非洲文学学'的建构理路为中心"，《外国文学研究》2025 (01): 50-58。

[Zhu, Zhenwu. "Mutual Appreciation in Dissemination and Domestication-Foreignization Balance in Chinese and Foreign Literatures: Centered on the Construction logic of "Chinese African Literaturology." *Foreign Literature Studies*, no.1, 2025, pp.50-58.]

朱振武，李丹："非洲文学与文明多样性"，《中国社会科学》，2022 (08): 163-84。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li. "African Literatures and the Diversity of Civilizations." Social Sciences in China, no. 8, 2022, pp.163-84.]

Remapping the Landscape of World Literature: Discourse Innovation and Critical Practice of "Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea" : Focused on *African Literature Studies* (Ten-Volume Series)

Quan Wei
College of Humanities, Shanghai Normal University
Shanghai 200234, China
Email: quanwei0404@126.com

Abstract *African Literature Studies* (Ten-Volume Series) represents a significant achievement in the discourse innovation and critical practices of Chinese African Literaturology. With an expansive scope, large scale, and novel perspectives, it stands as a pioneering work in China's comprehensive exploration of African literature. Rooted in the theoretical foundation of Chinese African Literaturology and viewed through the lens of Chinese scholars, this series redefines African writers and their literary creations and significantly broadens and deepens the horizons of African literary studies, filling a substantial gap in global research. By doing so, it contributes Chinese wisdom and strength to the construction of a more open, inclusive, and diverse world literary landscape.

Keywords Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea; *African Literature Studies* (Ten-Volume Series); discourse innovation; critical practice

Author **Quan Wei** is a Ph.D. Student at the College of Humanities, Shanghai Normal University (Shanghai 200234, China). Her main research interest is African literature and culture.

Introduction

In an era of profound integration of globalization, the multi-faceted exchange and mutual learning among civilizations and cultures have become the main theme of the times. For decades, the literary research paradigm dominated by Western-centrism has impeded a comprehensive understanding of the rich and diverse depths

of world literature. A great variety of distinctive and valuable literary treasures, including Asian and African literatures, have been marginalized, overshadowed, and relegated to the "non-mainstream" literatures.[1] Recognizing the pressing need to reconstruct the world literary order, Chinese scholars have undertaken the responsibility of breaking free from outdated academic structures and reshaping the framework for world literary studies. As the leading expert of China's first major national program on African literature — "History of African Literature Written in English", supported by National Social Science Fund of China—Prof. Zhu Zhenwu [朱振武] has pioneered Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea [中国非洲文学学] with acute academic insight, solid scholarly foundation, and spirit of bold innovation. This theory has created a distinctive theoretical pathway for African literary studies in China and made a significant contribution to the evolution of global literary discourse. Shaped by years of meticulous research and rigorous refinement, the *African Literary Studies* (Ten-Volume Series) edited by Prof. Zhu represents a significant contribution to the discourse innovation and critical practices of Chinese African Literaturology, filling a crucial gap in the field of African literary studies. Grounded in Chinese literary and cultural perspectives while engaging with world literature as its framework, this series breaks through the constraints of Western discourse and remaps the intellectual terrain of African literature, and indeed, global literature, thereby providing robust scholarly support for the academic dialogue between Chinese African Literaturology and global African literary studies.

Innovative Discourse: A New Summit in Chinese African Literaturology

Amidst the waves of globalization, the pluralism and complexity of literary studies have become increasingly prominent, and the landscape of world literature is undergoing profound transformations. In June 2024, Prof. Zhu and his research team published *African Literature Studies* (Ten-Volume Series) as a milestone achievement of the major national program on the study of African literature in China titled "History of African Literature Written in English" supported by National Social Science Fund of China. With its monumental scale of 3.7 million Chinese characters and groundbreaking perspectives, this "Ten-Volume Series" has infused this ongoing transformation of literary studies with distinctive Chinese scholarly voices.

For decades, Western scholars dominated the discourse of global literary studies,

1 See the book by Zhu, Zhenwu *Root and Flower of African English Literature*, Shanghai, Academia Press, 2019.

while Chinese academics largely participated as "annotators" or "transmitters" of Western theoretical frameworks.[1] Yet in recent years, the limitations of this Western-centric paradigm have become apparent——particularly when engaging with African, Asian, and other "non-mainstream" or "Third World" literatures, where singular Western perspective fails to fully illuminate their unique cultural values and textual richness. It is against this backdrop that Chinese scholars, represented by Prof. Zhu, have pioneered innovative approaches to African literary studies, actively constructing a distinctive theory of African literature with Chinese characteristics. Thus, "Chinese African Literaturology: A New Quality Idea" has emerged as a new and dynamic force within global literary studies.

Chinese African Literaturology is a theoretical framework for the study of African literature from a Chinese perspective. With its unique theoretical lens and critical practices, this theory redefines the essence and scope of African literature, subverting Western-centric paradigms and offering new approaches to the mutual learning within world literature. As a highly distinctive theoretical system of African literary discourse with Chinese characteristics, Chinese African Literaturology has forged a unique path in the field of African literary studies, marking a significant breakthrough for Chinese scholarship in global literary research.

The theoretical emergence of Chinese African Literaturology stems fundamentally from Chinese scholars' cultural consciousness and sense of responsibility, while also benefiting from the global momentum of African literature's ascendance to the center stage of world literature. As early as 2011, Prof. Zhu proposed the theory of "Balanced Absorption" ("均衡吸纳说"),[2] foresightedly asserting that Chinese scholars should not equate the perspectives of Anglophone researchers with their own, but instead root their work in the soil of native literary and cultural traditions, and develop authentically Chinese theories. As Prof. Zhu stated, "In the midst of unprecedented global changes, we must be even more aware of the responsibility of foreign literature scholars. Recognizing the situation and clarifying the direction are crucial" ("Mutual Appreciation" 53). Today, foreign literary scholars face unprecedented opportunities and challenges. The once uncritical, expansive research model is no longer adequate for the demands of the times. Chinese scholars must, therefore, adopt a perspective rooted in China, offering their own theoretical discourse to reconstruct the global order of world

1 See in the article by Zhu, Zhenwu, "Revealing World Literature's Diversity and Constructing Chinese African Literaturology." Chinese Social Sciences Today, October 22, 2021.

2 See in the article by Zhu, Zhenwu, and Chuting Jiang. "Zhu Zhenwu: Balancing and Absorbing the Spirit of Global Literary Cultures." *Wenhui Reading Weekly*, 30 Dec. 2011.

literature.

The year 2021 witnessed a watershed moment for African literature when Abdulrazak Gurnah, the Tanzanian-born writer from East Africa, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. This breakthrough was swiftly followed by African authors claiming other prestigious international literary honors including the Booker Prize, Prix Goncourt, Camões Prize, and Neustadt International Prize. This remarkable series of achievements propelled African literature to unprecedented global prominence, with the phenomenon being widely celebrated as "The Year of African Literature." This literary renaissance not only signifies the vigorous development of African literature and reflects emerging trends in world literature, but also presents a golden opportunity for advancing African literary studies in China. The global recognition has created particularly favorable conditions for Chinese scholars to deepen their engagement with this flourishing field. It was also in 2021 that Prof. Zhu formally proposed the theoretical framework of "Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea" in his seminal article "Revealing the Diversity of World Literature and Constructing Chinese African Literaturology" published in *Social Sciences in China*. The article systematically outlined the academic approach and four foundational principles for this new theory: (1) developing independent aesthetic judgment, (2) achieving genuine mutual learning of civilizations, (3) clarifying the relationships among three types of literature , and (4) especting the diversity of world literature.[1]

Building upon this theoretical foundation, Prof. Zhu subsequently published a series of interconnected articles including: "The Current State and Trends of 'Non-Mainstream' English Literature Research in China," "The Contemporary Representation of Diaspora Literature and Its World Significance," "African Literature and the Diversity of Civilizations," "Communication Mistakes and Development Visions between China and Africa in Literature: On the Domestication and Adaptation of *Thunderstorm* in Nigeria," "Mutual Appreciation in Dissemination and Domestication-Foreignization Balance in Chinese and Foreign Literatures: Centered on the Construction Logic of 'Chinese African Literaturology'." These works collectively established the intrinsic academic framework of Chinese African Literaturology with the theories of Four Major Diasporas ["四大流散理论"] and Africanness ["非洲性理论"] serving as its conceptual pillars. These foundational frameworks dynamically interact with other original concepts such as "Non-mainstream English Literature" ["非主流

1 For more details, see the article by Zhu Zhenwu, "Revealing the Diversity of World Literature and Constructing Chinese African Literaturology." *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, 22 Oct., 2021.

英语文学说”], “Three-worlds Literature” [“三个世界文学说”], “Literary and Cultural Community” [“文学文化共同体”], “Balanced Absorption” [“均衡吸纳说”], “Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures” [“文化共栖共生说”] and “Recognition by Way of Others” [“辗转体认说”], together constituting the comprehensive theoretical architecture of Chinese African Literaturology. This systematic theoretical construction marked a paradigm shift in China’s African literary research—transforming from a “non-mainstream” pursuit to an established academic mainstream, and evolving from a state of “being-in-itself” to one of “being-for-itself” in terms of disciplinary consciousness and methodological sophistication.

The discourse innovation of Chinese African Literaturology has generated significant scholarly attention, with particular focus on how to ground critical practice in Chinese perspectives and theoretical frameworks. Addressing this central concern, Prof. Zhu advocates an immersive research methodology: “Chinese scholars of African literature must conduct fieldwork, examine primary sources, engage directly with African communities, collaborate with local scholars and writers, and deeply internalize African cultural paradigms. Only by rooting our scholarship in authentic African literary texts can we establish new research paradigms and aesthetic criteria, construct a proper coordinate system for African literature, illuminate its world literary value, and ultimately demonstrate Chinese scholarship’s unique critical insights and discoveries” (“Revealing World Literature’s Diversity” 4). Guided by these principles, Prof. Zhu and the team of the major national program “History of African Literature Written in English” conducted extensive fieldwork across Africa, immersing themselves in local cultures while translating and systematically analyzing numerous literary texts. After rigorous evaluation and selection, they successfully published *African Literature Studies* (Ten-Volume Series).

African Literary Studies meticulously constructs a panoramic view of African literature. The expansive scope, ambitious scale, and innovative perspectives position it as a pioneering endeavor that significantly broadens the landscape of African English literary studies. Prof. Zhu and his team, with remarkable insight into the complexities of the African continent, have divided the continent’s literary output into four zones: Southern, Western, Central, and Eastern and Northern Africa based on geographical distribution, colonial history, cultural origins, and linguistic traditions.

The series focuses primarily on African English literature, yet it also incorporates literary works in French, Portuguese, Arabic, and other widely spoken

African languages, covering the main linguistic systems involved in African literary creation. It brings together over 130 works by more than 90 African authors, spanning genres such as novels, poetry, drama, biography, literary theory, essays, memoirs, and documentary literature. Grounded in theoretical frameworks like "Africanness" and "Four Major Diasporas," the series redefines the parameters of African literature through a distinct Chinese scholarly lens. This monumental work not only fills critical gaps in China's African literary studies but also pioneers new methodological pathways for future studies in the field.

Pioneering Critique: Multidimensional Approaches to African Literature Studies

As the first comprehensive and multidimensional study of African literature in China, *African Literature Studies* distinctly showcases the Chinese stance, perspective, and approach to African literature studies. It presents an academic landscape that stands in stark contrast to traditional Western African literary studies. The series highlights the dual commitment of Chinese scholars to cultural self-consciousness and cultural confidence, balancing macro considerations with micro research, while integrating theoretical innovation with critical discourse. Through this framework, it advances African literature research from case studies to broader literary phenomena and theoretical systematization, and from literary analysis to cultural and civilizational exploration, achieving a profound progression in African literary scholarship .

In terms of research stance, *African Literature Studies* clearly embodies the dual awareness of cultural self-consciousness and cultural confidence, reflecting a distinctively Chinese perspective in African literature studies. For a long time, Western academia, leveraging its dominant position in the international scholarly realm, has defined African literature through a Eurocentric lens that inevitably fails to capture its full richness and authenticity. As Prof. Zhu asserts: "Our studies on African literature should not be mere replicas of Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard or Columbia studies, nor should it parrot colonial discourses, summarize existing Western achievements, or serve as annotations or commentaries on Western scholarship" ("Revealing World Literature's Diversity" 4). Chinese research on African literature should root its methodology in Chinese literary and cultural traditions, engage world literature as dialogic reference, and conduct trans-cultural, trans-disciplinary, trans-spatial and trans-perspectival analysis, actively fostering global academic dialogue.

African Literature Studies transcends Western discourse's entrenched perceptions of African literary canons, redefining African writers and literary

production to present a multidimensional, dynamic new vision. Its innovative structure—particularly in the first seven volumes (*Studies in Select Southern Africa Literature*, *Studies in Classic South African Literature*, *Studies in Select Western African Literature*, *Studies in Classic Western African Literature*, *Studies in Select Eastern and Northern African Literature*, *Studies in Classic Eastern African Literature*, and *Studies in Select Central African Literature*)—breaks from Western academic conventions by employing Chinese scholarly criteria and aesthetic judgments to curate and analyze outstanding works through dual interpretive lenses: "Classic" and "Select."

The "Classic" section features works recognized by Western literary establishment (Nobel, Booker, Goncourt prize-winners etc.) to demonstrate how African literature operates within international mainstream discourse. The "Select" section represents original Chinese scholarly discernment developed through extensive fieldwork across Africa, systematic translation of overlooked text and deep cultural contextualization. It reflects the independent judgments and interpretations of Chinese scholars, uncovering the neglected literary value by applying indigenous African aesthetic criteria, emphasizing local cultural specificities, and recovering authentic African narrative traditions. The dialectic between these two sections creates a stereoscopic view of African literature's pluralistic nature, critical tension between global and local valuation systems, and space for cross-civilizational literary dialogue. This innovative structure achieves what Western-centric scholarship has consistently failed to do—it simultaneously acknowledges the transnational circulation of African letters while recentering the continent's own literary epistemologies, ultimately restoring African literature's full complexity and agency.

In terms of research vision, *African Literature Studies* demonstrates exceptional foresight and methodological rigor, illuminating the dialectical unity of universality and particularity in African literature through its dual focus on macro-level consideration and micro-level analysis. In one respect, it upholds a macro-cosmopolitan perspective, placing African literature on the grand stage of world literature, examining its position and development within the global literary landscape, and exploring the connections and interactions between African literature and world literature. In another respect, its micro analysis is highly adaptable and precise, delving into the unique characteristics of the literature of different African regions and countries. It uncovers the nuanced layers of African literature, providing a comprehensive and in-depth model for African literary studies.

African Literature Studies also adopts an exceptionally inclusive approach

that encompasses both the broader literary landscapes across various regions of Africa and the often-overlooked literary histories of individual nations. Its scope extends from established iconic African authors to emerging literary talents, incorporating authors from world-renowned masters to debut writers, from Nobel laureates to "non-mainstream" authors who have remained invisible in Western discourses. While the celebrated literary giants represent African literature's most visible achievements on the global stage—embodying profound cultural heritage and mainstream aesthetic values—the rising literary stars demonstrate remarkable potential through their distinctive creative styles and insightful perspectives, taking root and flourishing in Africa's fertile literary soil. Particularly significant are those "non-mainstream" writers who have long been marginalized by Western canons. Though their works may deviate from established Western literary standards, they are deeply rooted in Africa's unique and authentic cultural traditions, offering genuine reflections of the continent's social diversity and providing alternative dimensions for African literary studies.

In terms of research paradigm, *African Literature Studies* exemplifies the academic awareness of both theoretical independence and discourse innovation among Chinese scholars. Utilizing the foundational framework of Chinese African Literaturology, the series adopts a multidimensional approach: tracing historical continuities, connecting broader contexts through specific case studies, and conducting dialectical analysis between theoretical frameworks and textual evidence. This provides an alternative research paradigm and intellectual path, distinct from traditional African literature studies.

By grounding its approach in Chinese literary and cultural perspectives, the series transcends Western discursive models and research paradigms, innovating Chinese scholarly discourse on African literature, and establishes robust theoretical support for multilateral dialogue in Chinese African Literaturology. The final three volumes of the series pioneer three unprecedented contributions to African literary studies in China:

A Study of the Progress of Botswana Literature in English is the first specialized literary history of Botswana in China. Focusing on the development and evolution of Botswana literature following colonial rule in 1885, it adopts a text-centered approach with "modernization" as the analytical framework. The volume selects over ten authors who have had a significant impact on the history of Botswana English literature, and interweaves individual author studies with historical contextualization. By following a chronological framework, it clarifies the internal development of Botswana's literary history, offering a holistic view of the

modernization process of Botswana literature. In doing so, it outlines the trajectory of a century of English literature in Botswana, simultaneously reflecting the editor's awareness of the interrelationship between literary history writing and literary criticism.

A Study of Abdulrazak Gurnah's Diasporic Writing stands as the first scholarly monograph in China dedicated to Abdulrazak Gurnah, employing the "Four Major Diasporas" theoretical framework from Chinese African Literaturology to comprehensively examine the Nobel laureate's literary oeuvre through his identity as a diasporic writer. This volume conducts systematic, multidimensional analyses of ten of Gurnah's major novels through four specialized lenses: Diasporic Themes, Diasporic Narratives, Diasporic Visions, and Diasporic Communities, meticulously investigating their creative genesis, artistic development, narrative techniques, thematic depth, and cultural significance—ultimately revealing their unique value in the evolving landscape of African and world literature. Gurnah's novels works engage with diasporic refugee communities, exploring multifaceted issues of identity construction, psychological trauma, and cultural consciousness. They vividly capture the interplay and tension between traditional African roots and modern influences, while reflecting crucial social phenomena and national imaginaries of the African experience. Representing contemporary African literature, Gurnah's works demonstrate a remarkable understanding of the colonial history and its enduring psychological scars. Simultaneously, through their richly layered Africanness, these works articulates profound hope for a shared future—envisioning interconnected literary, cultural, and ecological communities that speak to humanity's highest aspirations.

A Study of African Writers' Creation is the first collective critical biography of prominent African authors in China. Grounded in the "Africanness" theory of Chinese African Literaturology , this volume redefines both African writers and their literary productions through its examination of 31 representative authors, including Nobel laureates, Booker Prize winners, and Goncourt Prize winners, alongside writers honored with regional African literary awards, and emerging contemporary voices. Employing Chinese biographical tradition, the book adopts a writer-centered approach that meticulously explores each author's life, creative output, social interactions, and literary influence through the analysis of cultural conflicts, thematic concerns, aesthetic values, artistic innovations, and literary impact. This multidimensional analysis reveals the spiritual essence, collective identity, and stylistic characteristics that define African literature as a whole. Notably, the inclusion of Western literary figures like Doris Lessing and Albert Camus within

the African literary canon represents an innovative Third World perspective that facilitates genuine literary dialogue between China and Africa.

Remapping the Landscape of World Literature: Pluralistic Value of Mutual Learning of Literatures and Cultures

African Literature Studies serves as a panoramic window into the diverse landscape of African literary traditions and its unique significance within world literature. By reassessing Africa's literary influence in the global literary landscape, this work carries transformative historical weight in reshaping the landscape of world literature. Grounded in the theory of civilizational diversity, the series facilitates mutual learning, symbiosis, and coexistence between Chinese, African, and global civilizations. Moreover, by anchoring its perspective in Chinese literary and cultural traditions, the "Ten-Volume Series" disrupts long-standing Western discourse paradigms, critical conventions, and epistemological boundaries. Employing indigenous Chinese critical frameworks and theoretical systems, it offers the aesthetic expressions and spiritual depth of African literary works. In doing so, it not only contributes to establishing a new world literary order but also advances genuine civilizational dialogue and the construction of a transcultural literary community—one that embraces pluralism and fosters equitable global literary exchange.

First and foremost, the publication of *African Literature Studies* marks a pivotal moment for academia to re-examine the position and significance of African literature within global literary landscape, offering a more comprehensive and profound perspective on the global understanding of literary studies. By closely engaging with contemporary literary theory while skillfully integrating both globalized and localized perspectives, the series presents scholars with a meticulously detailed panorama of African literary development. Furthermore, through objective analysis of African literature's intrinsic literary qualities, it introduces diverse cultural elements into the realm of world literature, establishing a compelling new paradigm that enriches and expands our conception of global literary diversity.

Prof. Zhu keenly observes that contemporary world literature lacks the diversity it ought to possess. Since Goethe's seminal articulation of the concept of Weltliteratur, the understanding of world literature—still largely shaped by Western dominance—has failed to capture its full scope with precision and completeness. As Jerome McGann remarks, "in such a world, this myth [of literature as an aesthetically autonomous system] resembles less a map than a

kind of equilibrium device, a cultural gyroscope for maintaining cultural status quo" (651–52). Literature, by its very nature, should encompass the multifaceted political, economic, and cultural elements that reflect the social realities and cultural particularities of diverse nations, regions, and historical periods. However, the current configuration of "world literature" struggles to fully manifest this rich plurality. Non-Western literatures, despite their distinctive artistic merit and cultural significance, continue to navigate a precarious existence in the shadow of Western dominance. Many outstanding literary traditions from non-Western societies remain overlooked, marginalized, and excluded from the global literary discourse. In *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Gayatri Spivak critiques the homogenizing effects of translating contemporary world literature uniformly into English, challenging the monolingual perspective as the exclusive gateway to understanding world literature.[1] D'hean Theo also puts forward that the literary anthologies written only in English serve as a hegemonic map of world literature. "They do so linguistically, presenting, and hence reducing all the world's literatures to, in essence, 'in English'"(414) .[2]

African literature exemplifies such predicament through its complex manifestations: indigenous African writing remains deeply rooted in the continent's soil, directly mirroring the spiritual world of African people; Western-constructed African literature bears the imprint of colonial history, presenting a rewritten and reshaped narrative; while African literary studies in other regions, including China, due to historical discourse limitations and constrained understandings of world literature, have failed to develop comprehensive definitions and interpretations of African literature, making genuine cross-cultural, transnational, and transregional civilizational dialogue extraordinarily difficult to achieve. Against this backdrop, *African Literature Studies* delves deeply into the unique cultural representations embedded in African literatures, offering a profound analysis of their aesthetic value and unveiling their significant position and far-reaching implications in world literature. By challenging the existing limitations of world literary frameworks, this series serves as a powerful force in advancing world literature toward a more diverse and inclusive paradigm.

From a global literary perspective, African literature, with its distinctive cultural connotations and aesthetic expressions, has injected a continuous stream of

1 See the book by Spivak, G. *Death of a Discipline*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

2 For more details, see D'hean, T's "Mapping World Literature," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*,ed.by D'Haen, Theo, Damrosch David, and Kadir Djelal, London:Routledge, 2012, pp.413-22.

vitality into global literary traditions. The vast and enigmatic African continent—with its diverse terrains ranging from the boundless expanse of the Sahara Desert to the majestic depths of the Great Rift Valley, from the lush coastlines of the Gulf of Guinea to the rugged grandeur of the South African plateau—has nurtured an extraordinarily complex and multifaceted literary ecosystem shaped by these varied geographical environments. Equally significant is Africa's colonial history: "Since the 15th century, European colonizers set foot on the African continent, initiating centuries of brutal colonial history"(Nie 54). Centuries of domination under different colonial powers, durations, and systems across regions have profoundly influenced literature. Culturally, Africa possesses a brilliant and unique heritage—tribal beliefs, traditional customs, art forms, and oral narratives form the deep roots of its literature. The evolution of African literature reflects both the struggles of colonial oppression and the vibrant resistance post-independence, embodying distinct historical and regional characteristics. Traditional tribal cultures, religious rituals, and rich folk customs all come alive in literary works. Aesthetically, African literature inherits its strong oral traditions, often marked by rhythmic and lyrical language that seamlessly extends into written forms. Narratively, it frequently breaks conventions through nonlinear storytelling and multiperspectival techniques, offering readers an unprecedented literary experience. *African Literature Studies* meticulously uncovers the deeper cultural connotations, historical contexts, and aesthetic innovations behind these elements, serving as a key to unlocking African literature's unique charm. In doing so, it illuminates Africa's irreplaceable contributions to world literature and global aesthetics—not merely as an alternative voice but as a transformative force redefining literary and artistic paradigms.

In addition, *African Literary Studies* engages deeply with the theory of diversity of civilizations in its critical examination of African literature, exploring how the "Africanness" of African literature demonstrates remarkable vitality through its poetic positive-sum game with Western cultural forces. This approach has injected dynamic energy into the mutual learning and coexistence of global civilizations. "The symbiosis and coexistence, mutual learning, and collaborative development of diverse cultures represent the guiding philosophy for the development of world literature and culture today" (Zhu, "Revealing the Diversity" 4). The theory of diversity of civilizations encapsulates China's century-long modernization journey, particularly crystallizing the new patterns in human civilization forged through reform and opening-up. As fellow literatures of Third World literatures, both African and Chinese literatures face similar opportunities and challenges in their dialogue with world literature. In this context, the series plays a pivotal role by identifying

cultural resonances between African and Chinese civilizations, and uncovering profound affinities between African and Chinese civilizations. This African experience also offers invaluable insights for China in the dialogue with the West, guiding the construction of literary, cultural, and ecological communities, as well as a shared human destiny. It contributes to the promotion of peaceful development, cooperative progress, and the emergence of a new form of civilization. In this sense, the "Ten-Volume Series" provides a unique perspective for China within the global cultural exchange, fostering a more confident and inclusive stance in its cultural interactions with the world. It encourages the harmonious coexistence and joint development of different civilizations and strengthens the deep cultural exchange between Chinese and African literatures, further advancing the mutual appreciation of civilizations.

Furthermore, *African Literary Studies* holds particular significance for re-examining contemporary Chinese literary culture and promoting its flourishing development. It prompts Chinese literary community to reconsider its own developmental trajectory, drawing inspiration from African literature's perseverance and innovation amidst adversity, thereby injecting new vitality into the advancement of Chinese literary and cultural prosperity. Simultaneously, the series has profoundly enriched Chinese readers' aesthetic experiences and broadened their literary horizons, enabling a wide audience to appreciate the distinctive artistic styles and aesthetic values of African literature.

As the largest developing country in the world, China bears both the responsibility and the obligation to promote fairness and justice within the global literary order. "The meteoric rise of China is bound to 're-orient' the world, and hence also world maps, including the map of world literature, within the already foreseeable future" (D'hean 420). *African Literary Studies* embodies the proactive attempts of Chinese scholars to participate in reconstructing a new world literary order—one grounded in enriching cultural diversity and advancing civilizational mutual learning. This critical practice of Chinese African Literaturology establishes a distinctly Chinese scholarly worldview of literature and culture, and provides both robust theoretical foundations and practical exemplars for achieving genuine civilizational exchange, while contributing Chinese wisdom and solutions to global African literary studies. From the perspective of Third World literatures, Chinese scholars are re-examining the complexity and plurality of world literature, thereby injecting renewed vitality into global literary research.

Conclusion

The emergence of Chinese African Literaturology and the publication of the *African Literature Studies* (Ten-Volume Series) undoubtedly represent a significant breakthrough for Chinese academia in African literary studies and the global literary landscape. Through pioneering theoretical construction, multidimensional critical practice, and active promotion of a new world literary order, Chinese scholars have—with unwavering determination and innovative thinking—injected vital energy into literary diversity and cross-cultural exchange. Looking ahead, Chinese African Literaturology will undoubtedly play an increasingly vital role in global literary research, develop inclusive frameworks beyond Western paradigms, and contribute Chinese wisdom and strength to the construction of a global literary and cultural community with a shared future. In this way, it heralds a new era for world literature—one defined by unprecedented vibrancy, pluralism, and inclusivity, where all civilizations can thrive in harmonious exchange.

Funding: This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China under Major National Program "History of African Literature Written in English" [19ZDA296].

Works Cited

程雅乐、朱振武："中国非洲文学学的构建理路——朱振武教授访谈录"，《山东外语教学》，2023(05): 1-9。

[Cheng, Yale and Zhenwu Zhu. "The Rationale for the Construction of Chinese African-literaturology: An interview with Professor Zhu Zhenwu." *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, no. 5, 2023, pp.1-9.]

D'Haen, Theo. "Mapping World Literature." in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. by D'Haen,Theo, Damrosch, David, and Kadir, Djelal, London: Routledge, 2012, pp.413-22.

Irele, F. Abiola and Gikandi, Simon. *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Lambert, José. "In Quest of Literary World Maps." in H. Kittel and A.P. Frank (eds.) *Interculturality and the Historical Study of Literary Translations.* Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1991, pp.133-44.

McGann, Jerome. "Pseudodoxia Academica." *New Literary History*, no.3, 2008, pp.645-56.

聂珍钊："黑人精神：非洲文学的伦理"，《华中科技大学学报（社会科学版）》，2018(01): 51-58。

[Nie, Zhenzhao. "Négritude: The Ethics of African Literatures." *Journal of Huazhong University of Science and Technology*, vol. 1, no.1, 2018, pp.51-58.]

Spivak, G. *Death of a Discipline*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

朱振武：“中外文学的传播互鉴与归异平衡——以‘中国非洲文学学’的建构理路为中心”，《外国文学研究》，2025(01): 50-58。

[Zhu, Zhenwu. “ Mutual Appreciation in Dissemination and Domestication-Foreignization Balance in Chinese and Foreign Literatures: Centered on the Construction Logic of ‘Chinese African Literaturology’.” *Foreign Literature Studies*, vol.1, 2025, pp.50-58.]

朱振武：“揭示世界文学多样性，构建中国非洲文学学”，《中国社会科学报》，2021.10.22，第 4 版。

[Zhu, Zhenwu, “Revealing the Diversity of World Literature and Constructing Chinese African Literaturology.” *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, 22 Oct. 2021, p.4.]

朱振武主编：“非洲文学研究丛书”十卷本，重庆：西南大学出版社，2024。

[Zhu, Zhenwu. *African Literature Studies* (Ten-Volume Series). Chongqing: Southwest University Press, 2024.]

Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li. “The Africanness of African Literatures and New Patterns in Human Civilization.” *Social Sciences in China*, vol. 43, 2022, no. 3, pp.113-27.

朱振武、蒋楚婷：“朱振武：均衡吸纳各国文学文化的精神”，《文汇读书周报》，2011.12.30。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Chuting Jiang. “Zhu Zhenwu: Balancing and Absorbing the Spirit of Global Literary Cultures.” *Wenhui Reading Weekly*, 30 Dec. 2011.]

朱振武、袁俊卿：“流散文学的时代表征及其世界意义——以非洲英语文学为例”，《中国社会科学》，2019(07): 135-58。

[Zhu, Zhenwu and Junqing Yuan. “Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance: A Case Study of African Literature in English.” *Social Sciences in China* [Chinese Edition], no. 7, 2019, pp.135-58.]

Alī al-Shaʿalī's *The Living, the Living* as a Postcolonial Science Fiction: Neo-Imperial Reincarnation and (De)colonizing the Mind in Emirati Literature

Wael J. Salam
School of Languages, the University of Jordan/Aqaba, Aqaba 77111 Jordan
The Department of English Language and Literature, Kuwait University
Sabah Al Salem University City, Kuwait, PO Box 17140 Khaldiyah 74252
Email: s.wael@ju.edu.jo

Nizar QBilat
College of Arts & Languages, Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanity
Sheikh Maktoum Bin Rashid Street, Mailbox 26262, Ajman, UAE
College of Arts, the University of Jordan
Queen Rania Al-Abdullah Street, Amman, with a P.O. Box of 13046
Email: nizar.qpilat@mbzuh.ac.ae

Abstract This article examines the poetics of reincarnation and identity erasure in the Emirati al-Shaʿalī's 2020 novel *The Living, the Living*. It argues that new forms of colonization reappear in the twenty-first century, including the transfer of the protagonist Yaḥyā's memory by a British center into the body of Joseph, a British veteran. The center claims to promote "peace" and prevent "terrorism," but Yaḥyā's role is revealed to be that of a spy reporting on Arab students and other immigrants in the UK. The protagonist repeatedly rebels against the roles assigned by the center by returning to his identity as an Emirati, a decolonial act demonstrating his determination to cling to his roots, memories, and history. Al-Shaʿalī's novel thus challenges neo-imperialist strategies of recolonizing the Other by featuring a diverse protagonist who rewrites, redefines, and ultimately deconstructs Western forms of power embodied by the British center and the emergence of highly advanced technology that may violate the human body. Therefore, the center's goal to "copy" the memories of an Arab and "paste" them onto the body of a British veteran is an unethical practice that exposes the dangers of science. Nevertheless, al-Shaʿalī's novel, as a piece of postcolonial science fiction, subverts scientific and technological

discourses to reveal the horrific reality of neo-imperialism that targets the minds in the Global South.

Keywords reincarnation; neo-imperialism; the Emirati identity; decolonizing the mind; the Emirati novel

Authors **Wael J. Salam** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Jordan & the University of Kuwait. He specializes in English literature, Arab American literature, Comparative literature, and trauma theory. **Nizar Qbilat** is Professor of Arabic at Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanity & the University of Jordan. He specializes in modern Arabic literature and contemporary literary theory.

Introduction

The Emirati Alī al-Shaʿalī's 2020 novel *The Living, the Living* falls under the category of postcolonial science fiction, since it reevaluates the British legacy of colonization and reimagines the future of the UAE regarding science and economic boom. [1] The novel weaves a futuristic story of a British center, directed by Mark, who aims to transfer the memories of the protagonist Yaḥyā to the body of a British veteran named Joseph for espionage and secret services. Decoloniality here figures in Yaḥyā's rebellious streak in refusing to adhere to the center's demands despite the center's success in transferring the protagonist's memories to Joseph. Since science fiction, as Patricia Kerslake explains, is traditionally a byproduct of empire, al-Shaʿalī's novel subverts such a discourse by reimagining the future from the perspective of the Other. Kerslake argues that "the theme of empire, with the complexity and ramifications that postcolonial and other recent criticisms have brought to our attention (treatment of the other, of the exotic, of matters of power),

1 Alī Al-Shaʿalī, الحي الحي [*The Living, the Living*] (Dubai: Alloha Publishing, 2020). Al-Shaʿalī is an Emirati poet, novelist and writer, born in 1978. He got his Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering and Master of Business Administration in Project Management from the United Arab Emirates University. He was the director of the Knowledge Production Department at Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Institute from 2008 to 2014 and the Executive Officer for Dubai International Festival for Poetry in 2009. He is also a member of the Emirati Writers and Literati League and Vice President of Emirati Publishers' Association. He founded Dar al-Hudhud for Publishing and Distribution, which mainly focuses on children's literature. He published three collections of poetry: *A Bee and Rababah* (نحلة و ربابة) (2000), *The Earth Has One Soul* (للأرض روح واحدة) (2013) and *Faces and Others Are Tired* (وجوه وأخرى متعبة) (2016). He has recently published his novel *The Living, the Living*, which has been longlisted in Sheikh Zayed Book Award in 2020.

is so ingrained in SF that to discuss the empire in SF is also to investigate the fundamental purposes and attributes of the genre itself" (191). Claire Chambers also posits that while science is supposed to be neutral and objective, "colonial scientific practitioners elevated their brand of science, presenting it as proof of their superior reasoning powers, and the cause of the West's material domination of the world" (58). Al-Shaʿalī's novel decolonizes science fiction by illustrating how science and technology may serve as tools for manipulation and neo-imperialist domination. Analyzing *The Living, the Living* as a postcolonial science fiction is thus timely and urgent to locate the perspective of the Other and consequently undermine the hegemonic discourses of science, technology and objective "truth."

The name of the protagonist and the title of the novel are derived from the same Arabic root: life and survival. The name "Yaḥyā," for instance, is related to life and is derived from the Arabic word *ḥayya*, which means life. Yaḥyā means "to make alive" or "to quicken" (Çoruh 3). Since al-Shaʿalī's plot revolves around the notion of death, life and memory transference, the protagonist's name, then, is linked to the main idea of reincarnation or life after death. The word "living" is repeated twice in the title to emphasize Yaḥyā's resistance and will to relate to his identity, language and history (Abḥmanī and al-Kurdī 116). The manipulation of Yaḥyā's life and death and the transference of his memories to another body point out the Western neo-imperialist power dynamics.

Al-Shaʿalī's *The Living, the Living* unfolds as a multilayered narrative composed of interwoven subplots, all tied to a central theme: the transference of memory. At first glance, the plot appears disjointed, with fragmented episodes that make it challenging to follow. Yet this seeming disorder is deliberate by the author. Al-Shaʿalī adopts a non-linear, shifting structure because the story moves fluidly between past and present, and from one narrative thread to another to capture the workings of the human mind. Through these fragmented yet thematically connected episodes, Al-Shaʿalī constructs a complex narrative that resists straightforward chronology while addressing such important themes as modern reincarnation and neo-imperialism. The novel's shifting structure mirrors the fragmented nature of memory and trauma, blending personal and historical narratives to explore the blurred boundaries between life, identity, and the persistence of consciousness across time.

The narrative opens in the twenty-first century, introducing the protagonist, Yaḥyā Saʿīd al-Ṣayād, an Emirati dentist who resigns from his job to open a clinic and beauty center. He lives with his three children—his daughter Sarah and his two sons, Rashid and Saʿīd—following the death of his wife from cancer. Struggling with grief and mental illness, Yaḥyā repeatedly refuses his daughter's pleas to seek

therapy. His emotional distress, compounded by financial failure, eventually drives him to leave his family and travel to London to end his life. From here, the story takes unexpected turns. One subplot transports the reader to nineteenth-century British colonial India, where Winston Churchill and a British soldier engage in a conversation about the Indic concept of reincarnation. This moment sets the stage for the novel's speculative exploration of memory and consciousness. Joseph repeatedly visits an Indian philosopher to learn about the Indic concept of soul transmigration. When Joseph tells Churchill of what he has learned, Churchill laughs it off and disregards reincarnation as a myth. However, in the same conversation, Churchill tells Joseph that reincarnation can benefit the British Empire by protecting British veterans in new human bodies. Churchill's proposal distorts and ultimately violates the Indic belief in reincarnation because it is fundamentally tied to the moral principle of karma. However, he is not concerned about such sacrilege, as he aims to serve the interests of the British Empire. Though set in the nineteenth century, this subplot foreshadows Churchill's vision materializing in the twenty-first century through the center's neo-imperialist project of mind control.

The narrative then shifts back to the present, and his planned trip to London, where he commits suicide, becomes a pivotal moment. It is at this juncture that the British center, a mysterious institution, intervenes to transfer Yaḥyā's memories into the body of a British war veteran. This revelation recontextualizes much of what the reader has encountered since, at this moment, there is no indication of the British center's intervention to transplant Yaḥyā's memories. His family thought his death was voluntary. But after the suicide scene, the novel flashes back to the 1970s when he was young, describing Yaḥyā's visit to London with his family and his fall into the River Thames, causing him brain damage. This event is later revealed to be the British center's first step in initiating memory transference and a form of modern reincarnation. Mark, the director of the British center, tells Yaḥyā's father that his son has undergone a successful brain surgery. The novel then transitions to old Yaḥyā waking up in an unknown center in London and meeting the director Mark, who tells him the center transplants his memory into the body of Joseph, recently killed in a car accident. This memory transference aims to assign Yaḥyā confidential missions, including spying on Arab students in Britain. In an act of defiance, Yaḥyā (in Joseph's body) resists the center's colonial project, refusing to falsify the reports about Arab students in London since his reports are all positive and never mention any harm by Arab students. Additionally, the British center warns Yaḥyā not to visit his family back home, yet he never abides and meets his daughter Sarah and his son Rashid. Although Yaḥyā cannot return to his previous life with his children, he fails

as an experiment, a decolonial act that thwarts the center's neo-colonial project and upholds his Emirati identity.

Emirati Literature

Emirati literature is relatively new, and poetry was the most prominent genre (Tijani 121).[1] In terms of prose, a number of short story collections appeared in the 1970s, but the late 1970s witnessed a surge in literary production, particularly short story collections.[2] Barbara Michalak-Pikulska states that Abd-Allah Saqr Aḥmad published his short story "Merciless Hearts" in the late 1960s and followed by *A Piece of Wood*, "The first collection of short stories in the history of Emirate literature" (145). This collection, according to Michalak-Pikulska, was banned and burned, for it vehemently criticized British colonialism (145). Overall, the Emirati novel depicts the transformation of the Emirati society and played a major role Emirati literary scene.[3] It introduces new themes, experiments with Arabic language and reflects the rapid changes in society, influenced by globalization and modernization.[4]

The Emirati novel varies in topics and themes, ranging from the long history of fishing and pearl hunting to the discovery of crude oil and the transformation of the Emirates into a modernized place (Michalak-Pikulska 145). These new realities have posed a threat to the cultural and traditional aspects of the Emirati society.[5] In the 1970s, three novels were published, including Rāshid ʿAbdallah al-Nua'imī's

1 Nabaṭī poetry, common among Bedouin tribes in the Arabian Peninsula and the Levantine areas of Jordan, Syria and Palestine, was and is still the most prominent genre in Emirati literature (Michalak-Pikulska 146). There were many prominent Emirati poets in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, Ousha Bint Khalifa Al-Suwaidī, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Mānʿa Al-Otaiba, Khalid Al-Budūr and others (See Aḥmad).

2 Major short story collections include, including Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Ḥarbī's *Revolting Against the Tribal Tradition*, Abed al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad's *Swimming in the Eyes of the Wild Gulf*, *That Time*, Abed al-Rida al-Sajwanī's *The Virgins' Mistake* and Muḥammad al-Murr's *A Different Kind of Love*, *The Last Chance*, *Friendship*, and *The Soft Voice.*

3 Sheikhah Mubārak al-Nakhī, Salmah Maṭar Seif, Layla Aḥmad and Maryam Jam'a Faraj were among the Emirati women who contributed to the publication and dissemination of Emirati literature. For example, Sheikhah Mubārak al-Nakhī wrote three collections of short stories: *Winds of the North* and *Ash* and *Departure*. Maryam Jam'a Faraj wrote *Turquoise*, *Faces* and *Water*, and Salmah Maṭar Seif [Maryam Abu Shibab] wrote *Herb*, *The Wedding* and *Anthem*.

4 See Ṣalḥah Ghabish, Sarah al-Jarwān, Nūrah al-Nomān, Ṣalḥah Obeid, Manʿa Al-Otaiba, Maisūn Ṣaqir and Emān al-Yūsuf.

5 According to the United Arab Emirates' Government portal: The official guide to living, working, visiting and investing in the UAE, the UAE population is estimated to be ten million by the end of 2021. The number of UAE citizens is around one million<https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/social-affairs/preserving-the-emirati-national-identity/population-and-demographic-mix>.

1971 *Shahindā*, Abdallah al-Nawirī's 1976 *A Neck Searching for A Necklace* and Muḥammad Ghubāsh's 1979 *Always Happening at Night.* Al-Nua'imī's *Shahindā* was the first Emirati novel, dealing with the topic of slavery in the nineteenth century, a social issue popular at that time. Thābit Malkāwī describes the novel's narrative as simple and categorizes it as a popular story (34). Additionally, al-Nawirī's *A Neck Searching for A Necklace* is the first Emirati detective fiction, relating the story of murdering Salwā who puzzlingly disappears (Al-Kilanī 475). Finally, Ghubāsh's 1979*Always Happening at Night* centers on the alienation of the Emirati individual, causing social issues such as attempted rapes and murders, incarceration and fugitives of law. In *Narrative Point of View: Critical Studies in Modern Emirati Novels*, Dhiab al-Ṭaʿī explores five recently published Emirati novels: ʿAlī Aḥmad al-Ḥimyrī's 2014 *The Princess of the Mountain's Quarter*, Alī Abū ar-Rīsh's 2014 *Exceptional Woman*, Bāsimah Yūnis's 2010 *Perhaps You*, Lamīi Fāris al-Marzūqī's 2013 *Every Now and Then (Mīrah Told Us*) and Maysūn Ṣaqir's 2003 *Rayḥānah* (Al-Ṭa'ī). Influence by modernization, recent Emirati novels, al-Ṭaʿī explains, experiment with narration and point of view, challenging the chronological sequence of the events and offering polyphonic voices and various perspectives.[1] Although these novels, al-Ṭaʿī argues, shed light on the Emirati history of fishing, pearl hunting and the notorious British colonization, the country's transformation is evident, carrying both negative and positive implications.

Al-Shaʿalī's *The Living, the Living* is an experimental novel, venturing into the perils of science and depicting the human mind as a mere device that can be used to transfer a person's memories. The novel pictures the UAE's transformation by juxtaposing the country before the economic boom with the present industrial reality, highlighting the complex relationship between the past and the present and between the fast-paced technological advancement and the human body (Michalak-Pikulska 145). Additionally, the theme of reincarnation and erasure of the Emirati identity are surreal in al-Shaʿalī's novel, in which technology and scientific advancement serve as dangerous tools for emergent forms of neo-imperialism. Yet the novel as a postcolonial science fiction offers a decolonial critique that questions the ethics of science regarding neutrality, authority and objective truth, especially when science functions as a means for the West to manipulate other peoples and nations in the Global South.

Postcolonial Science Fiction

Western science fiction participates in promoting racial hierarchies and entangles

1 Michalak-Pikulska, "Modern Emirati Literature."

historically with "the nineteenth-century Euro-American preoccupation with imperial expansion and utopian speculation" (Kilgore 1). De Witt Douglas Kilgore argues that it often appropriates indigenous knowledge, justifies colonial oppression and practices in colonized regions to reinforce racial stereotypes and justify colonial rule over distant lands. Patrick Sharp elaborates on the misuse of Darwinism to rationalize the colonization of foreign places and states: "Scholar of SF have long been recognized the importance of evolution for the scientific extrapolation of authors such as H. G. Wells, whose revolutionary parables about class and technology dependence provided a touchstone for twentieth-century science fictioneers" (1). It started with the doctrine of discovery and exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries, venturing into Asia, Africa and the Americans and bringing back the colonized resources and knowledge about geography, plants, animals and human beings. For example, *The Voyages of Captain James Cook Around the World* (1768-1779) relates the expedition of Captain James Cook to the Pacific for scientific endeavors of studying botany, geography and astronomy. These expeditions result in the British Empire's colonization of such places as Australia and New Zealand and in the dispossession of the Māori and other Aboriginal Australians. In the nineteenth century, scientific advancement, colonial expansion along with the influence of Darwinism contributed to science fiction as a literary genre. Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* offers the reader a mesmerizing, horrifying and thrilling story of a monster created by science. Although a gothic novel, it stands as science fiction due to the interference of science in developing a terrifying monster. Science fiction often depicts the link between humans and science/technology (Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot*) or serves as a social commentary (Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*).

In examining the European novels mainly from France and England in the nineteenth century, Edward Said explains that the novel as a cultural artifact cannot be separated from the European colonization of distant land. Said writes, "Imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible, I would argue, to read one without in some way dealing with the other" (71). Science fiction as a genre became prevalent in the late nineteenth century when colonial expansions and European encounters with non-European nations reached an apex. John Rieder states, "Scholars largely (though not universally) agree that the period of the most fervid imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth century is also a crucial period for the emergence of the genre" (2-3). Science fiction is thus a cultural product that must be read and analyzed with reference to the European colonial project, especially when the topic of science fiction is on conquering

faraway lands and colonizing the alien natives. To respond to Western genre of science fiction, Eric smith also argues that science fiction be decolonized in order to "detect and decipher the ideological mystifications of global capital, the unique manifestations of globalization in particular national cultures, the emergence of technology as a cognitive mode of awareness, and the processes whereby individual national cultures exist alongside and engage the polymorphous bad infinity of the new global habitus" (2). Decolonization also entails responding to these epistemic forms of knowledge, which perpetuate the superiority of the West.

Postcolonial science fiction provides imaginative narratives that disrupt traditional science fiction aligning with colonization and other power dynamics (Chambers 2003). It is an evolving paradigm that reconstructs the structure of oppression and domination under the guise of globalization, international capitalism and scientific advancement. Postcolonial science fiction creates a platform in which non-Western writers can approach a plethora of themes and topics, including the horror of colonization and Western expansion through futuristic imaginings. Jessica Langer expounds the silence surrounding the topic of postcolonial science fiction, suggesting that the association between colonization and science fiction leads to "real or perceived silence" (1). Lack of translation of science fiction from other languages, coupled with "intense politics of selection and exclusion," Langer argues, marginalizes postcolonial science fiction written in non-English languages. Finally, Langer argues that the publishing industry has contributed to the diminishing number of postcolonial science fiction writers, creating "an elephant-shaped hole" (2). Hence, many writers have shifted towards the Internet: "The elephant-shaped hole here is being filled, not by traditional publishing channels, but through the Internet, new media and other novel methods of idea transmission" (2). It is through postcolonial science fiction that new territories, themes and ideas come to light, rewriting and reconstructing the European scientific fiction that often perpetuates the inferiority of the Other.

Al-Shaʿalī's *The Living, the Living* employs science fiction to imagine and reimagine the colonial legacy in the UAE and subvert the discourse of science as being neutral and objective. In al-Shaʿalī's novel, science serves as a neo-imperialist means to recruit the protagonist Yaḥyā against his will to serve the British center in spying on Arab students and immigrants and to engage in foreign espionage. In *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*, the coeditor Uppinder Mehan suggests that "If we do not imagine our futures, postcolonial peoples risk being condemned to be spoken about and for again" (463). Hence, Al-Shaʿalī speaks for the Emiratis by creatively mixing the past with the present and

linking it with the future to illustrate the risk of science and technology.

History, Identity and the Transformation of the Emirati Society

Al-Shaʿalī's novel sheds light on the legacy of British colonization and wars while it addresses the negative side of science, especially when misused and abused to serve colonial foreign powers. The turning point in the novel, therefore, is when twelve-year-old Yaḥyā visits London with his family. While chasing a butterfly, he falls into the River Thames and suffers from brain injury. A person named Mark tells Yaḥyā's father that his son has undergone a successful brain surgery. Yet unbeknownst to his father, Mark, in his capacity as the director of the center, decides to prepare Yaḥyā for his future mission, a clear violation of medical ethics. The process of memory transference starts when Yaḥyā is young. However, what is disturbing is the center's unethical practice of performing brain surgery on a child without his parents' consent, not to save him, but rather to use him when he becomes an adult as a spy and secret agent. After Yaḥyā's return to London, he suffers from a mental disturbance and is thought to be possessed by a ghost. For example, young Yaḥyā recites one of Churchill's [the British center is part of Churchill's project of immortalizing the British heroes] speeches in English despite his young age. Although his parents review the VHS to see if their son has learned Churchill's speech from these cassettes, they find no traces of the specific speech delivered by their son. On several occasions, Yaḥyā wakes up and acts like a soldier on the front line, shouting, saluting other soldiers, carrying a stick as a gun and shooting at imaginary enemies. While the family believes that their son is possessed by an evil spirit, it is the memory transference that causes Yaḥyā to hallucinate and act like a British soldier.

The reference to the empire and British colonization paves the road for the theme of memory transference. Since *The Living, the Living* is a postcolonial science fiction, it writes back against the empire and fictionalizes the underbelly of British colonization, which evolves and takes different forms and shapes after the UAE's independence. Specifically, the topic of souls moving from one being into another in a conversation between Churchill and Joseph in India—both are on a British colonial mission in 1896—lies at the heart of British emergent neo-imperialism. Al-Shaʿalī employs these characters to address the notion of reincarnation, showing how British soldiers like Churchill belittle other cultures and

beliefs.[1] Ironically, when it comes to the service of the British Empire, Churchill believes that the great minds and bodies of British soldiers should be preserved and immortalized. When Churchill asks Joseph about his repeated meetings with an Indian philosopher and what he has learned, Joseph says, "I don't know death has a plethora of interpretations. It is said that the soul does not perish, but rather regenerates in different forms, and those who die from our families and friends may come as a butterfly flapping around us or become a bird checking on us every morning through the windows and pecking on windows to say hello or converse with us" (79-80). For Joseph, the beauty of reincarnation is that the soul of those loved ones may appear in other beings, including a bird or a butterfly. It is this Indic eschatological understanding of death and rebirth in different forms and shapes, which Joseph embraces. Yet Churchill finds this idea silly: "Umm, it may appear, to many people, nonsensical but very interesting. I read about it before and thought it was a speculation of books or a record of human beliefs that have disappeared!" (80). Churchill disregards the Indic tradition as nonsense, promoting Western forms of knowledge as superior to other epistemologies and forms of knowledge. As a person who thinks Indians are less civilized when compared to British people, it becomes easy for Churchill to downplay the Indic beliefs and traditions, a position justifying the presence of the British Empire on a foreign soil. Therefore, the dichotomy between the colonized's "inferiority" and the colonizer's "superiority" makes Churchill arrive at this racist conclusion.

Al-Shaʿalī thus contrasts the mentality of the colonizer with that of the colonized. Churchill, embodying the British colonial history of oppression and dominance, dismisses reincarnation as a myth. Yet he thinks that the notion of reincarnation is a great idea when a soul moves from one human to another human. Hence, "the heroes" of the British Empire, he thinks, must be reincarnated. Churchill thus violates the Indic concept of ethical causation, for he believes in the superiority of the British people. While talking to Joseph, he says, "You know, the heroes of the empire deserve, yes, they deserve, and their families deserve, that they return in another body" (82). For Churchill, those who die fighting for their country deserve respect for their service. Consequently, their souls must be preserved in other human bodies. In the Indic tradition of reincarnation, *karma* is

1 Reincarnation refers to the transmigration of the soul into another being (Obeyesekere 1). Reincarnation figures in different South Asian and East Asian traditions along with the Middle East, yet the deep-seated belief in reincarnation and rebirth of the soul can be traced in Indic religions, including Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism (Obeyesekere 3). In the Hindu understanding of reincarnation, soul transmigration is an ethical causation of *karma—karman* means act.

often considered a sort of after-life judgment in which those with good actions are turned into something good while those with bad actions are turned into something bad. Churchill celebrates soldiers' service to the British Empire. But for Indians, that service often causes terror, fear and violence to indigenous peoples. Al-Shaʿalī, therefore, unmasks the abominable reality of colonialism to point out Churchill's contradiction in rejecting reincarnation as nonsensical. Yet he seemingly embraces it in a twisted way, envisioning British soldiers (the colonizers) being reborn, body and soul, which Al-Shaʿalī exposes as a violation against the colonized bodies.

Churchill's subscription to the notion of reincarnation does not reflect the Indic belief in *karma*. After fighting two wars (World War I and II) and becoming a Prime Minister, he wants to invest in human minds and pay tribute to British soldiers who have died for their country, a project he calls "immortalizing the heroes":

> I see that keeping them (soldiers' experiences) in books and thesauri, though important, is not enough. This approach aims to benefit the researcher and the learner, but we are not released from our obligation towards our military, which does not accept delay. If we are content with the white and the black (i.e., books and thesauri), we certainly fail to achieve the goal of preserving the information (soldiers' experiences). We must preserve it in the minds of new heroes and transfer it to new minds et cetera. It is an indisputable duty that we instantly start the process of immortalization …." (86)

Again, Churchill's address highlights the colonial mindset, which credits British colonial achievements while eclipsing the horrors brought by empires in distant lands. The British Empire brought violence, destruction and war. As Edward Said explains in *Culture and Imperialism,* the businesses abroad that many British families brag about are built on the corpses and bones of indigenous peoples. Not satisfied with material acquisition and land occupation, Churchill seeks to conquer the Indic belief in reincarnation and exploits the concept of soul transmigration to serve the British Empire. In depicting the British colonization of India in the late nineteenth century, al-Shaʿalī suggests that colonization means material acquisition. Yet this territorial acquisition shifts from conquering lands to conquering minds, a violation justified by the belief in the West's superiority. By exposing these horrible realities regarding colonization and abuse of science, al-Shaʿalī illustrates the importance of postcolonial science fiction in speaking for and about the other and in subverting other discourses of science and technology that may legitimize the West's structure of oppression.

These historical allusions and references are illuminating and link the history of the UAE with its current modernized status. The constant shift from the past to the present and going back to the past is a stylistic feature of the novel, disrupting the chronology of the story. However, this shift is important to trace the protagonist's development as a character and the center's implementation of its neo-imperialist plan. In the twenty-first century, almost four decades after Yaḥyā's first visit to London, Yaḥyā becomes a successful Emirati who establishes his beauty center after working for years as a dentist. Yet the brain injury sustained in London never heals and continues to bother him as a child and as an adult. Yaḥyā's daughter Sarah "recalled what she had heard many times of her father being haunted by evil spirits in another world of distant history and geography. When he was young, he was treated for hallucinations by sheiks, nearly sorcerers and energy specialists" (22-23). His daughter also notices her father's strange behavior, forsaking the Emirati traditional dress of wearing *thūb* (a long, often white dress) and *ʿaiqal* (a black circular object put over the head) and a suit for formal meetings and jeans at other times. One time, Sarah enters his room to find his *thūb* and *ʿaiqal* thrown in the trash can, a clear indication of Yaḥyā's parting away from his culture and identity. Maya, his psychotherapist, explains, "The action of taking off clothes would never have happened had he not been so sad. He wanted to change everything, starting with the closest things to him. I am afraid that the action of getting rid of things would set him apart from his responsibilities and his closest people" (24). Neither Sarah nor Maya do not knows that Yaḥyā's transformation starts when he is a child. Therefore, Yaḥyā's act of throwing his traditional clothes in a trash can and wearing new clothes suggests a mental transformation, but this mental transformation is not recent and is certainly caused by human intervention. While Yaḥyā embodies the UAE's transformation to a country known for a thriving economy, Mark's surgery on Yaḥyā's brain is the main reason for the physical ailment.

Yaḥyā's clinic represents the danger of science when compared to the past life of fishing and pearl hunting. It erases the core values of the Emiratis and replaces them with artificial, cosmetic surgeries. Although the country looks beautiful from the outside due to economic upturn and scientific progress, behind these cosmetic surgeries lies a frail body: "He saw his clinic without retouches, Botox, firming, refilling, or augmenting. He saw his clinic in different situations, droopy, wrinkly, flaccid and atrophied. Perhaps, he did not have a long experience in calculations, though he knew from the beginning that numbers do not lie, and that his medical team at its utmost power could not give her (his clinic) a fake injection. His clinic stripped naked" (124). Although al-Shaʿalī acknowledges science and

celebrates his country's thriving economy, he critiques the malpractice of science in facilitating such neo-imperialist endeavors embodied by the British center.

Since Yaḥyā's clinic is on the verge of collapse, he decides to leave his family and move to London to commit suicide. His decision to commit suicide comes after a series of setbacks that have troubled his life, including his wife's death and the inability of his clinic to compete with other beauty centers in the area. But beyond these debacles, the British center's plan to violate Yaḥyā's body lies at the heart of his psychological problem. Conducting a surgery on Yaḥyā's mind underscores the center's racist ideology rooted in the belief of the West's superiority. Though Yaḥyā's suicide seems to be inadvertent, as the narrative unfolds, the reader gradually becomes aware of the center's role in orchestrating Yaḥyā's death. For example, his friend Walīd—Yaḥyā belatedly finds out about Walīd's position as an Executive Secretary for the center—encourages him to commit suicide, telling Yaḥyā not to fear death since death is a transitional period into another life. Walīd says, "Do I need to remind you?! Behind this mountain of concerns and troubles exists another world, an uncharted territory. All you need to do is push the door out to be overwhelmed by the light. Push it hard and remember that your ticket was booked when you signed the contract for donating your organs. You only decide the time of crossing. But as for the place, where else should you do it but here in the land of the brave!" (139). When Yaḥyā discovers Walīd's complicity, he concludes, "Your friend has engineered your death and witnessed it clapping like a dirty chimpanzee" (143). Walīd's characterization of London as the land of the braves points out his involvement in the project of reincarnation, reminiscent of Churchill's project of "immortalizing the heroes." But immortalizing the British heroes comes at the expense of innocent individuals like Yaḥyā, violating his body and reinforcing Western forms of knowledge. Al-Shaʿalī is a postcolonial science fiction *par excellence* in representing futuristic modes of Western domination from a postcolonial perspective.

Al-Shaʿalī elaborates on the misuse and abuse of words to justify Yaḥyā's suicide. One of these words is "voluntarily," referring to Yaḥyā's consent to donate his organs after his death. But "voluntarily" does not align with the center's systematic targeting of innocent people, including children— Yaḥyā was a child when the center started the process of transmigration. After committing suicide, he finds himself in a room with a blond man: "My name is Mark. I am responsible for hosting you in this building. You are now in London, and you voluntarily entered this well-reputed research center to cooperate. I and all other team members will do the very best to help you fulfill the requirements of the contract. The success

of this cooperation requires patience, deeper understanding of the nature of the relationships …" (182-183). The problem is that Yaḥyā donates his organs for medical research, not for serving the imperial project of immortalizing the British heroes. Therefore, Mark manipulates the word "voluntarily" to justify the unethical act of using Yaḥyā's memory, soul and language for the service of the center. Between Mark and Yaḥyā, there is a war of words in which Yaḥyā is deceived into being part of that neo-imperialist project. Hence, the project lacks ethical causation as conceptualized by the Indic *karma*. Additionally, the center's decision to implant Yaḥyā's heart and transfer his memories to the body of a dead British soldier goes beyond saving a human life. The aim of immortalizing the British soldiers is to create individuals with British bodies but Arab minds, to surveil immigrants and students from other countries, particularly those hailing from the Arab world. Nonetheless, Yaḥyā's challenge to the authority of the center and its director, Mark, reveals his growing distance from their ideals and his act of rejecting the Center's hidden neo-imperialist agenda.

Although the center successfully transfers Yaḥyā's memories to Joseph's body, his soul is rebellious and nonconforming, disrupting this center's project through relating to Islamic and Emirati traditions and practices. He disturbs Mark by asking him about the *qibla* (the direction towards Mecca, which Muslims use for their prayers). It is one of the initial, shocking signs that destabilizes and hence decolonizes the British project: "Mark gets confused and then spins around himself twice with random pauses, his palms in the form of a sword pointing forward. He then turns towards the window: I think it's like this, yes... yes, in that direction" (190). While it is early for Mark to decide if Yaḥyā's case is a failure, the request for the *qibla* surprises Mark and suggests that the center does not completely control Yaḥyā. The ellipses reflect Mark's surprise and confusion since the center has been working on this specific project since Yaḥyā was a child.

Additionally, Yaḥyā performs *wudu'* in his new home (Joseph's home)—*wudu'* is an Islamic act of cleansing the body before performing the prayer. Like the *qibla*, al-Shaʿalī mobilizes *wudu'* as a sign of Yaḥyā's rebellion. Consequently, the act of *wudu'* constitutes a subversion of the center's objective to exert control over Yaḥyā's cognitive faculties. In addition to these two warning signs of Yaḥyā's deviation, he continues to rebel against the center in his daily practices at Joseph's house. For instance, after being trained on how to deal with Joseph's wife, Yaḥyā does not fit well in the new house, refusing to sleep in the bedroom with his (Joseph's) wife Juana and preferring to sleep on a couch. Juana suspects her husband's strange behavior: "This is not Joseph, who was full of energy. He used to get excited about

a new adventure. But what is strange about the new Joseph is that after he goes to the bathroom to take a shower, he gets the bathroom floor wet. He then goes to a room for a few minutes and comes back" (246-247). Although Al-Shaʿalī leaves it to the reader to interpret Yaḥyā's behavior of taking a shower and going for a few minutes to his room, it seems that Yaḥyā here performs *wudu'*. It is notable that despite Yaḥyā's lack of religiosity in the UAE, al-Shaʿalī deploys these religious signifiers as forms of decolonization. By doing so, al-Shaʿalī disrupts the British center's objective of colonizing the protagonist's mind.

The dialectical relationship between Yaḥyā and the center pivots on the notion of the West versus the East, in which those who come from the East are often viewed as potential enemies, or as Edward Said puts it in *Orientalism*, "the mysterious East" (ix). The center assumes that some Arab students who come to the United Kingdom are mysterious and can be potential "terrorists." The center's plan proves counterproductive because Arabic serves a dual purpose: it reconnects Yaḥyā to his Emirati identity, fostering a sense of self-awareness and cultural grounding; it also facilitates communication and fosters a sense of community with fellow Arab students and immigrants. In reclaiming his linguistic and cultural heritage, Yaḥyā transcends the racist generalizations that align Arabs and Muslims with terrorism. Yaḥyā, recruited as "an anthropologist" to write reports on immigrant students in the UK, finds these students normal and describes them as "harmless sheep" (259). He keeps sending his reports to the center and calls his targets, namely, the Arab students, "the very humans," but his reports are all shredded and end up in a trash can: "Thank you so much for your eagerness. We are not concerned with your feelings! Please, keep it to yourself. We want a complete report on the movement of every group to help us anticipate their next step. In short: Do you think they are terrorists?" (259). Mark's racist remarks concerning immigrants unveil the abominable reality of the British center and draw a demarcation line between the center's mission and Yaḥyā. Mark tells Yaḥyā: "In the past years, but rather the past decades, there were catastrophic events that no one can deny. Those people were the main suspects. I do not want to call them your people as you did recently. Ever since you followed the butterfly near the river, you have become one of us. We only want to make sure that anyone who sits with us on a metro or a morning bus will not detonate himself in the evening. We want to be certain that those who stay with us come to live or die! Isn't this our right?!" (273). Mark's racist remarks in considering those who come from Yaḥyā's region potential "terrorists" perpetuates the clash of civilizations, highlighting his xenophobia and pointing out the colonialist mindset of labeling a group as a terrorist just because they come from

a certain region, speak a different language or believe in a different religion.

The failure to complete all missions assigned by the center points out the novel's decolonial act of presenting Yaḥyā as a dissenter who refuses to succumb to Mark's dictates. It is Yaḥyā's insurgency that renders al-Shaʿalī's *The Living, the Living* postcolonial science fiction, for it imagines the political and cultural reality in the UAE, whereby a British center mobilizes science and technology to colonize and manipulate the other. The novel, therefore, is a mimicry of science fiction, not to credit Western expansion in alien lands, but rather to show how a person's identity, language and history serve as protective shields against neo-imperialist projects such as the one promoted by the center.

Conclusion

Al-Shaʿalī's *The Living, the Living* contrasts between the modernized UAE and the old UAE, which prides itself in its long tradition of fishing and pearl hunting. Yet modernization and economic growth are not always positive and may appear dangerous, as is the case with the British center. Although Yaḥyā is forced to believe his service to the center is voluntary and based on a contract, where he agrees to donate his organs for medical research, the contract is misused by the center to recruit Yaḥyā for espionage. Yet as the story unfolds, it becomes evident that the project of transplanting Yaḥyā's memory does not start after his suicide. Instead, transference was initiated years earlier when Yaḥyā was a child. Therefore, the center uses science to violate human bodies by distorting the protagonist's contract of organ donation. This violation discloses the abominable reality of the British center in its neo-imperialist, unethical mission. Despite the center's efforts, the protagonist's roots, whether familial, historical, linguistic or religious, disrupt and hence decolonize the center's attempt to manipulate the protagonist's mind. To a large extent, the novel, too, challenges and extends science fiction as a genre by offering postcolonial, resistant strategies to neo-imperialist endeavors to control people in the Global South.

Al-Shaʿalī's novel is a futuristic and imaginative story, exploring urgent concepts of reincarnation and memory transplant through abuse of science. Despite the attempts to manipulate Yaḥyā's memories to colonize his mind, he proves that such a project can be thwarted and challenged. Al-Shaʿalī's novel stresses the degeneracy of the center's neo-imperialist project in mobilizing science for the service of the center. The novel also shows that the soul, memory and language of a person cannot be easily transferred to another body because one's identity and cultural background can overpower external and foreign interventions.

Works Cited

Abdel Haleem, Muhammad. *The Qur'an*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.

Al-Kilani, Rehab. "The United Arab Emirates." In *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*, edited by Wail Hassan. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017.

Al-Shaʿalī, Alī. *The Living, the Living*. Alloha for Publication and Distribution, 2020.

Al-Ṭaʿī, Dhiab. *Ayqūnat al-Sard: Dirasat Naqdiyyah fī al-Riwāiah al-Ḥadīthah*. Amman: Maktabat al-Ṭalīʿah al-ʿAlmiyyah, 2018.

Abḥmanī, Omar and al-Kurdī, Rima. "The Aesthetic of an Imagined Space in al-Shaʿalī's Novel الحي الحي (*the Living, the Living*)." *Al-Alamah Journal*, vol. 6, no 1, 2021, pp. 116-131.

Aḥmad, Fātima Khalīfah. *The Beginning of the Novel and its Development in UAE from 1971 until 2012*. Abu Dhabi, the Cultural Center, 2003.

Asimov, Isaac. *I, Robot*. New York: Bantam Spectra, 1991.

Chambers, Claire. "Postcolonial Science Fiction: Amitav Ghosh's the Calcutta Chromosome." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature,* vol. 38, no. 1, 2003, pp. 58–72.

Cook, James. *The Voyages of Captain James Cook Round the World*. London: Printed for Richard Phillips, 1809.

Çoruh, Hakan. "A New Hermeneutical Approach to the Qur'an with Special Reference to the Narrative of Prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) in the Qur'an and the Bible." *Religions*, vol. 13, no. 10, 2022, pp. 1-10.

Kerslake, Patricia. *Science Fiction and Empire*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007.

Kilgore, De W. D. *Astrofuturism: Science, Race, and Visions of Utopia in Space*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2010.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. New York: Ace Books, 1987.

Malkāwī, Thābit. *The Novel and Short Story in the United Arab Emirates: Beginning and Development.* Dubai: the Cultural Center, 1995.

Mehan, Uppinder, and Nalo Hopkinson. *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004.

Michalak-Pikulska, Barbara. "Modern Emirati Literature written by Woman Writers." *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis*, vol 8, no. 4, 2013, pp. 145-157.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. *Imagining Karma: Ethical Transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek Rebirth*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2002.

Rieder, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Connecticut: Wesleyan UP, 2008.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Random House, 1993.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Sharp, Patrick. *Darwinian Feminism and Early Science Fiction: Angels, Amazons and Women*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2018.

Smith, Eric. *Globalization, Utopia and Postcolonial Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012.

Smith, Jane, and Haddad, Yvonne. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002.

Tijani, Olatunbosun. "Contemporary Emirati Literature: Its Historical Development and Forms." *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, vol. 14, 2014, pp. 121-136.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Publishing House (Pvt) Ltd., 1994.

Racialization, Emotion, and the Material Life of Migration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

Ali Salami
Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Tehran
North Kargar St., between 15th and 16th St, Tehran, Iran.
Email: salami.a@ut.ac.ir

Abstract This essay reconceives Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* through the lens of affective infrastructure theory—defined as the assemblages of material and immaterial systems that generate, channel, and regulate emotional intensities. Departing from identity-based and postcolonial readings, it argues that the novel's portrayal of migration, belonging, and racialization is shaped by everyday infrastructures—hair salons, internet cafés, public transit, immigration offices—that scaffold diasporic life and mediate embodied feeling. Grounded in close textual analysis and infrastructural humanities, the essay traces Ifemelu's encounters with these sites: how salon rituals encode Black hair politics and self-valuation; how digital platforms forge diasporic intimacy amid precarity; how bureaucratic delays inscribe slow, cumulative racialization. These case studies reveal how logistical systems generate affective economies of hope, estrangement, and endurance. Further, the essay contends that *Americanah*'s formal structure—letters, blog entries, internal monologues, visa delays—functions as narrative infrastructure, dramatizing the contingencies of global Black mobility while critiquing the systems that produce racialized precarity. By defining affective infrastructure and tracing its operation in *Americanah*, this study reframes the novel as an anatomy of the material, emotional, and bureaucratic undercurrents that shape transnational Black life, offering new directions for migration studies, Black Atlantic scholarship, and the cultural politics of infrastructure.

Keywords Affective infrastructure; material culture; infrastructural studies; Black Atlantic; global mobility

Author **Ali Salami**, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Tehran and the editor-in-chief of *Research in Contemporary World Literature*. His research spans gender studies, discourse analysis, Shakespeare, and

postcolonial literature. Salami has also earned acclaim for his English translations of classical Persian poets including Hafez, Rumi, Attar, Ferdowsi, and Khayyam, bridging Persian and Western literary traditions. His academic work has been published by leading international publishers such as Springer, Emerald, and Taylor & Francis. In 2018, he received the prestigious Bess and Philip Rosenblum Award from the Folger Shakespeare Library. He is the author of *Shakespeare and the Reader: Revisiting Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, and Othello* (2013, Illinois, USA), and coauthor of *Political Discourse in Chinua Achebe's Tetralogy* (2019, Chicago) and *Translating Hafiz: Challenges and Strategies* (2019, New York).

I. Introduction: Rethinking Diaspora through Infrastructure

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* has become a keystone in contemporary inquiry into diaspora, identity, and race—not merely inhabited by transnational movement but insistently restructured by it. Spanning Nigeria, the United States, and the United Kingdom, the narrative orbits Ifemelu's recursive crossings, recalibrations, refusals. Scholarship has interrogated the novel's representational politics: the legibility of identity (Gilroy, 1993), the sedimentations of race and racialization (Sharpe, 2016), and the gendered contradictions of postcolonial becoming. Critics rightly note that Adichie crafts a belonging that is neither stable nor resolved, where "race"—encountered with a particular force in the U.S.—emerges not as ontology but as weather: ambient, sudden, ongoing. George (2019) identifies the novel's critical locus as identity's unstable signification in the migratory circuit.

But this reading, though essential, rests on a threshold. What if we move not away from identity, but from identity as event or resolution? What if *Americanah* is less a narrative of race and migration than an unfolding exposure to the infrastructures that render diasporic life both possible and provisional? The internet café with its glitching rhythms; the hair salon with its choreographies of intimacy; the apartment lease, job interview, daily commute—all that undergirds, sustains, interrupts, or collapses. This essay traces these systems—material and affective—not as backdrop but as generative matrices, what we might call affective infrastructure: the dense weave of logistical, spatial, atmospheric, and emotional practices shaping the lived texture of diaspora.

These are not simply "settings" but relational grids—zones of anticipation and fatigue, of desire circulated and deferred. Salons, visa lines, train stations, blog comment sections: sites where identity is not represented but routed, stalled,

refigured. To read through affective infrastructure is to resist the consolations of legibility; it is to register how diasporic life pulses within—and against—the logistical architectures that scaffold empire's afterlife. What emerges is a different genre of diasporic narration: recursive, dispersed, infrastructural, wayward.

From Representation to Infrastructure: Core Questions

The animating question is not simply what diaspora is, but what it feels like—and more precisely, how such feeling is produced, routed, and interrupted through infrastructure. What happens to our understanding of Black diasporic subjectivity when we shift from symbolic representation to the logistical and affective scaffolds of migratory life? How do infrastructures—unseen or hyper-visible, oppressive or enabling—both delimit and incite circuits of attachment, endurance, and becoming? How might diaspora emerge not as identity or location, but as an affective condition: atmosphere, rhythm, spacing, residue?

Defining Affective Infrastructure

This reframing draws on affect theory and the infrastructural humanities. Lauren Berlant (2011), in *Cruel Optimism*, argues that infrastructure is not merely material apparatus—pipes, wires, roads—but also the distribution of fantasy, the environment where desire forms and falters. "All attachment is optimistic," Berlant writes, "if we describe optimism as the force that moves you out of yourself... toward something you cannot generate on your own but sense" (p. 2). The infrastructural is thus aspirational and cruel: it conditions desire and suspends its fulfillment.

Brian Larkin (2008) defines infrastructures as "the physical and organizational structures that allow for the circulation of goods, people, or ideas... and that enable, sustain, or restrict different kinds of flows" (p. 5). But circulation is never neutral. Kathleen Stewart (2007) shows how "ordinary affects"—unnoticed surges of sensation, interruption, or drift—are integral to infrastructure. They are "the varied, surging capacities to affect and be affected... that catch people up in something that feels like something" (p. 2). Sianne Ngai (2005) adds that aesthetic and affective categories like "cute," "zany," or "interesting" register the intensities of late-capitalist infrastructure, revealing not just mood but structure.

Affective infrastructure thus names a double logic: the logistical and atmospheric systems that organize diasporic life and make it felt. It includes the conditions that regulate migration and the intensities—monotony, anticipation, resignation, fleeting joy—that saturate it. If *The Black Atlantic* (Gilroy, 1993) offered a schema of cultural circulation, affective infrastructure foregrounds the frictions of lived life: the visa queue, the recursive labor of salon intimacy, the uncertain click of Wi-Fi. Here, diaspora does not resolve—it hums, clogs, recedes,

accumulates. It is not only what one is, but what one moves through—or cannot.

Americanah and the Infrastructure of Diasporic Life

Adichie's novel is thick with infrastructure. From its opening movement—Ifemelu's braided return across train lines, in the hush of Princeton's heat—diasporic life appears as infrastructural encounter. The journey to Trenton is not mere exposition, but a choreography of raced and gendered motion, bodily attunement, delay. "Sticky heat sat on her skin. There were people thrice her size on the Trenton platform... Her decision to move back was similar; whenever she felt besieged by doubts, she would think of herself as standing valiantly alone..." (Adichie, 2013, p. 4). Here, desire, doubt, and sweat are not metaphors but affective emissions—where trains, salons, and migrant breath crosshatch.

Following Ahmad (2018), who highlights how Black women's urban mobility is configured by ordinary systems, *Americanah* reveals how transit stations and salons are not narrative backdrops but conditions of possibility. The infrastructural is not atmospheric residue but formative terrain—where logistics and feeling share flesh. If, as Stewart (2007) suggests, affects animate institutions and bodies alike, then *Americanah* asks us to read infrastructure as both system and wound.

This essay contends that *Americanah* reframes diasporic life not as representational identity but as infrastructural condition. Through salons, internet cafés, immigration lines, train routes, and spatial grammars of postcolonial cities, Adichie shows how feeling is routed through logistics. These sites do not merely stage diasporic becoming; they produce it. Infrastructure scaffolds what diasporic life costs, yields, and feels like. The novel asks: What emotions circulate through infrastructures of belonging? What desires stall in queues? What forms of exhaustion, anticipation, and deferral become ordinary?

Rather than treating these spaces as background, this reading foregrounds them as generative infrastructures—sites of friction where Black subjectivity is composed, delayed, reoriented. *Americanah* does not merely represent migration—it theorizes the systems that render its affective plausibility: its breath, its interruptions.

This reading draws on affect theory and infrastructural humanities. Berlant's (2011) "cruel optimism" reframes desire as attachment to the logistical scene promising fulfillment. Larkin (2008) sees infrastructure as the political grammar of flow and stoppage. Stewart (2007) maps the "ordinary affects" that animate institutions. Ngai (2005) teaches us to read moods like frustration, stuckness, or minor exhilaration as structural.

Combining close literary analysis with these frameworks, the essay traces *Americanah*'s infrastructural sensibilities across material (transit, salons,

bureaucracy) and immaterial (waiting, anxiety, negotiation) domains. It reads where plot thickens into traffic, and character becomes queue.

II. Theoretical Framework: What Is Affective Infrastructure?

To apprehend *Americanah* as a novel of infrastructure rather than merely identity, we must reorient our analytic lens toward what I call affective infrastructure: not a category, but an ongoing composition—entangled assemblages of systems, objects, habits, rhythms, and attachments through which diasporic life becomes not only livable but sensible. These are not mere tools or backdrops of movement, but mediating scaffolds through which feeling circulates and solidifies—through which hope stalls, agency erodes, and life's ordinary labor becomes atmospherically dense. Affective infrastructure is thus neither purely material nor merely atmospheric. It is where circulation meets saturation, where endurance becomes form.

Affective Infrastructure as Assemblage

The term draws from Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism"—a structure of attachment to things that promise relief or transformation but often reinforce impasse. "All attachment is optimistic," Berlant writes, if optimism means moving toward something one cannot achieve alone, sensing a proximity that promises transformation (2). But this proximity may deepen stuckness. "The object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility," Berlant warns, may also render its realization structurally impossible (2). This is not simply disappointed expectation but a reorganization of life around deferred potential. Infrastructure includes both hard systems—roads, networks—and soft scaffolds of longing and routine: what binds a subject to an exhausted world in the name of staying attached.

In "Slow Death," Berlant shows how infrastructures of health and habit produce not rupture but attrition: a "rhythm of being" in which slowness is depletion, not stillness (102). What matters is not just bodily exhaustion, but how endurance becomes life's orientation. In *Americanah*, the rhythms of waiting—on platforms, in salons, in immigration offices—are not narrative pauses but affective condensations. They configure diaspora not as leap or crossing, but as attritional continuity.

Brian Larkin (2008) refines this view by defining infrastructure as "matter that enables the movement of other matter" (5)—but also as "semiotic," shaping affective atmospheres and symbolic imaginaries. Roads, servers, passport queues do not simply facilitate action; they shape what can be imagined, what counts as delay, what registers as progress. Ifemelu's journey, digital migrations, and stalled return are less about physical motion than how infrastructural grids produce sensation,

nostalgia, frustration, suspension.

Kathleen Stewart's theory of "ordinary affects" amplifies this. For Stewart (2007), the ordinary is not inert—it hums. It accumulates mood, registers drift, pulses with residues that don't settle into plot. These are "public feelings" that circulate and coagulate, informing how life is lived in the now (2). Infrastructure here is not only a system but a pressure, a drift—"the way things are tending" (5), an ecology of subtle saturations and misalignments. *Americanah* is dense with such scenes—not detours but expressions of infrastructure doing world-making work.

Pine et al. (2015) extend this: "Affect is always already organized through infrastructures of feeling, care, and control" (7). It is not that we feel and then move through infrastructure, but that we feel as we are moved—through lines, delays, spatial systems generating atmospheres of aspiration and attrition.

Americanah operates in this terrain. It is not merely a novel of migration, but of infrastructural attunement. It asks how diaspora is sensed, routed, deferred—how the logics of salons, immigration offices, digital networks, and transit systems generate moods of stuckness, hesitation, endurance, fragile hope. These are not narrative detours. They are the novel's infrastructural core: the systems through which diasporic subjectivity is produced not as identity, but as a living through friction, saturation, delay.

Black Diasporic Contexts: Lower Frequencies and Wake Work

To read *Americanah* through affective infrastructure is to trace not only systems of movement and mediation, but the racialized temporalities constituting Black diasporic life. If, as Berlant and Stewart argue, the ordinary is never neutral, then for Black subjects, the everyday is already ruptured—weathered by slavery's afterlife, structural abandonment, ongoing endurance. Infrastructure here is historical, injurious, recalibrated through survival.

Tina Campt (2017) reframes affective life through "lower frequencies"—barely perceptible registers of refusal, delay, endurance that mark Black life as continuous and creative. Listening becomes attunement: a method for detecting "the quiet, daily practices that produce new forms of Black futurity" (13). Not grand arcs, but haptic pulses, fugitive sounds, deferred anticipations. They emerge in *Americanah* in Ifemelu's hesitations, the cadence of her blog, and the temporal drag of bureaucracy. These tonalities mark diasporic life as out of sync with liberal progression, but alive to another beat.

Christina Sharpe's (2016) concept of wake work offers a corollary frame: infrastructure as inheritance—as afterlife. "The wake," she writes, is both the trace of the slave ship and the weather of the present: anti-Blackness as atmosphere and

structure (18). Living in the wake means navigating institutions and atmospheres of risk, delay, and erasure. Wake work is the recursive labor of surviving scrutiny, of explaining oneself again. In *Americanah*, this manifests in waiting rooms, border crossings, the endless labor of presentation. Infrastructure is not merely passage—it is harm.

Thus, affective infrastructure must be read as a racialized ecology of time and sensation. The ordinary is not banal; it is where the broken world registers most sharply—where history bleeds into the logistics of now.

The Ordinary as Political and Affective Field

Affective infrastructure becomes a theory of the ordinary—not as background, but as battleground. The ordinary is where infrastructure becomes intimate, where circulation thickens into delay, and delay becomes the structure of Black temporality. As Larkin (2008) argues, infrastructure is the "condition of possibility" (5), but possibility is unequally distributed: some attachments enabled, others sabotaged; some rhythms sustained, others disfigured.

Stewart (2007) describes the ordinary as "a shifting assemblage of practices, things, imaginaries, and moods"—a zone where power adheres not as command but tendency, glitch, repetition (14). In diasporic contexts, the ordinary is also where invention emerges—in minor keys of care, refusal, and survival. Campt (2017) calls this *Black futurity*: a fugitive horizon assembled from everyday excess. For Berlant (2011), the ordinary is the landfill of exhausted attachments, the space where "adjustment seems like an accomplishment" (3). It is the scene of non-redemptive endurance: holding on, askew, to what is not yet lost or won.

Americanah renders these scenes in granular detail: in Princeton's ambient smells, Trenton's salons, the recursive negotiations of border bureaucracy. It does not resolve them. It dwells in them. It listens. The novel offers no escape from infrastructure—but a poetics of adjustment, refusal, saturated waiting—a diagram of what the ordinary does, and what it demands when lived from the wake.

Toward an Infrastructural Reading of *Americanah*

Foregrounding the systems that mediate sensation, temporality, and becoming, this reading reorients *Americanah* away from representational identity politics toward an infrastructural poetics of the ordinary. The novel is not merely about race, gender, or migration; it meditates on the atmospheres, attachments, and frictions through which diasporic life is composed, delayed, or undone. Infrastructures—material and affective—are not backdrop but texture and tempo. They don't just frame migration; they produce its conditions and costs.

This is not a reading of *Americanah* as a story *about* diaspora, but a novel

structured by diasporic infrastructures: the salon as a site of embodied intimacy; the transit system as choreography of racialized delay; the bureaucratic office as archive of suspended becoming; the digital blog as speculative space of self-fashioning. These sites—mundane, recursive, affectively dense—compose the infrastructures of diasporic life, vibrating with aspiration, exhaustion, adjustment, and refusal.

To read for infrastructure is to attend to the politics of the ordinary—not its exception, but its weather. It is to ask how power moves through small gestures, how belonging is brokered by spatial protocols and temporal lags, how the marginal becomes the site of the most intimate dramas of migration, racialization, and hope.

III. Hair Salons and the Affective Politics of Black Beauty

Few spaces in *Americanah* are as affectively and infrastructurally dense as the Black hair salon. Not a decorative backdrop or commercial interlude, it is a thick node in the novel's infrastructural map—a site where diaspora touches the scalp, where Black femininity is calibrated through gesture, routine, and delay. In Adichie's rendering, the salon is disciplinary and improvisational, atmospheric and pedagogical: a space where affect circulates, bodies are repositioned, and the rhythms of diasporic life hum in low frequencies of touch, tension, and wait.

The novel opens with movement toward this space. Ifemelu's journey from Princeton to Trenton is not simple transit—it traverses racial geographies and affective thresholds, exposing the infrastructural violence of having nowhere close to belong. "She did not like that she had to go to Trenton to braid her hair," the narrator notes. "It was unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Princeton… and yet as she waited… she wondered why there was no place where she could braid her hair" (Adichie 3). The wait is racial and temporal; the irritation cumulative. This is what Sianne Ngai (2005) terms an "ugly feeling"—ambient, diagnostic, minor, registering social contradiction (2).

Ifemelu's journey is thus a study in logistical delay: not just an errand, but a spatial confession that her care must commute—that her self-maintenance lies outside the normative grid. The scene unfolds slowly, insistently. She waits in Princeton. On the train. In the salon.

Inside, time bends again. The room hums with "clicking beads, the pull of hair, and the low buzz of gossip" (Adichie 7). She is seen but not yet acknowledged—present but structurally delayed. "She sat on a ripped, duct-taped chair, waiting… Ifemelu watched, unaccounted for, ignored" (p. 7). The salon's social architecture asserts itself—not just as space, but as queue, as hierarchy, as affective sorting mechanism.

This is what Berlant (2011) and Stewart (2007) call the infrastructure of feeling: the ordinary arrangement of affects, delays, and gestures through which power circulates and becomes atmosphere. Waiting becomes formative. One learns how to endure friction, how to be braided not only in hair but in mood—in repetition, in adjustment, in provisional belonging.

Banks (2000) reminds us that Black hair salons are social institutions—pedagogical spaces where community and conformity are negotiated strand by strand. In *Americanah*, this function is layered with ambivalence. The salon disciplines as much as it shelters. It teaches beauty, but also deferral. It shelters community, yet renders Ifemelu—despite her appointment—an interruption to be managed. This is infrastructural: the salon absorbs bodies, redistributes attention, and recalibrates feeling.

To be in the salon is to wait, to learn patience, to decode the semiotics of proximity and delay. It teaches that diasporic life is not only movement, but being moved—repositioned, made to wait for access to one's own appearance. This is pedagogy through atmosphere, repetition, and saturation. And it is here, in this braided scene of suspension, that *Americanah* begins—not with departure or arrival, but with wait time. With friction. With adjustment.

Rituals of Grooming: Pedagogies of Self-Worth, Assimilation, and Resistance

Grooming in *Americanah* is not merely aesthetic—it is pedagogical, infrastructural, political. Braiding becomes a site of instruction, a classroom without curriculum, where diasporic femininity is shaped through touch, commentary, repetition. Ifemelu, seated and still, is both subject and student—her scalp tugged into form, her presence shaped by assimilation's imperatives and the low murmur of unsolicited advice. As Johnson (2016) notes, Adichie uses hair not merely as symbol but as active site of inscription—where belonging is taught and resistance negotiated.

The stylists, often migrants themselves, speak the grammar of adaptation. "You should relax your hair... it will look nicer, more professional," one tells her. "You want to get a job? You have to look like them, not like bush girl" (Adichie 9). The scalp becomes a site of labor and soft violence. Beauty is not pleasure—it is alignment. It is the visible mark of employability, of propriety, of having learned the lesson. The stylists operate as affective intermediaries, translating the coercive optimism of neoliberal belonging into bodily instruction.

This is cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011): the fantasy that submission to normative beauty will yield legibility and protection. But the promise is partial, always receding. Ifemelu resists. She does not relax her hair. Her refusal is saturated

with ambivalence but remains an act of disobedience—rejecting the infrastructural fantasy that smoothness equals safety. Her natural hair becomes an insistence on being seen—not as palatable, but as herself. "An insistence on being seen as oneself rather than as a pale imitation of whiteness" (Adichie 12).

Yet this refusal is not triumphant. It is steeped in shame, irritation, defensiveness, pride. Ngai (2005) identifies such dysphoric affects as the psychic fuel of capitalist modernity (3). In the salon, they accumulate, churn, provoke rupture. Ifemelu's blog post—"To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby"—emerges not as detached commentary, but forged in salon friction. It carries the residual heat of advice, conformity, and fatigue.

The salon, then, is a site of frictive pedagogy—where affective dissonance grounds critique. Subject formation is recursive: stylists' words linger even as they're resisted. Their hands braid discourse. The atmosphere thickens with the shared knowledge that grooming the self means negotiating visibility in a world that rarely reciprocates. The salon doesn't promise transformation—it produces the conditions under which transformation must be negotiated, resisted, or endured.

The Salon as Infrastructural Apparatus: Affect and Racial Calibration

The salon is not incidental architecture—it is an infrastructural apparatus for racial and affective calibration. Bodies are adorned and made—ideologically and cosmetically. Its rituals—washing, braiding, relaxing, commenting—generate what Sara Ahmed (2004) calls affective economies: circulations where emotion becomes instructive, transferable, measurable. Beauty becomes currency; self-worth modulated by glances, advice, the imagined gaze of employers. The scalp becomes a ledger.

Even in Lagos salons, the logic persists. "She liked the Lagos salons… yet the women there, too, measured and appraised, pressing her to spend more, to become more, to be less 'bush' and more modern" (Adichie 421). Diasporic infrastructure travels, adapts, reasserts. The Lagos salon is warmer, yet it too whispers imperatives of global modernity and cosmetic futurity. As Abodunrin (2020) notes, such spaces localize transnational infrastructures—where hair politics intersect with capital, gender, and mobility.

The salon is not purely disciplinary or redemptive. It is recursive, ambient, contradictory. It stages cruel optimism as daily routine: attachments that promise respectability but demand submission. Tight braids. Unwanted advice. The irritation of being seen—only through calibration. These are infrastructural affects: patterned, sedimented. The salon is their archive—a scene where oppression and aspiration converge.

Berlant reminds us: cruel optimism sustains itself by confirming the relation that harms. "The very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining… even when that relation is a threat" (2). The salon is both threat and confirmation. It disciplines Ifemelu's difference—but also renders it visible, even if only in adjacency.

Pedagogies of Feeling: Shame, Boredom, and Communal Care

The salon teaches affect. Shame—too natural, too nappy, not professional—is constant. But shame, as Ngai (2005) notes, is not pathology but predicament (2). It exposes value's structure. It marks one as out of sync with normative time and space.

Boredom and irritation, too, are not distractions—they are infrastructural byproducts. The waiting room becomes a chamber of suspended time, training resignation and subtle refusal. Ifemelu, in her duct-taped chair, wonders "how much of her life will be spent in these suspended states—waiting to be noticed, to be made up, to be admitted into the fantasy of belonging" (Adichie 8). This is pedagogy by delay: teaching her what it means to earn surface, to endure aesthetic thresholds.

And yet, there is care—gossip, laughter, shared pain. There are survival tips, migration confessions. As Stewart (2007) might say, there is "the way things are tending" (5): not toward justice, perhaps, but toward connection. "She felt a sudden kinship with the woman beside her… both enduring this ritual for reasons that were never only about beauty" (Adichie 11). That *never only* marks the threshold: co-suffering re-signified as intimacy.

The salon is not a fixed symbol. It is an atmospheric machine—disciplining, leaking, improvising. It circulates harmful norms and holds fugitive solidarities. It is cruel. It is intimate. It is ordinary. It is infrastructural. In *Americanah*, it is a crucible where the aesthetics and politics of diasporic life are braided together, strand by recursive strand.

To read the salon as affective infrastructure is to see Ifemelu's time there as central—not peripheral—to *Americanah*'s meditation on diasporic becoming. The salon is not passive—it is apparatus. It calibrates sensation, disciplines aspiration, generates ugly feelings and stages their transformation. The ordinary becomes struggle, pedagogy, invention.

The salon is where Black women are made to feel—unevenly, relationally. It is not just where the novel begins, but where diasporic subjectivity is felt before it is spoken. The body is read, trained, made intelligible in a world structured by racialized visibility. As Osinubi (2018) notes, Adichie frames the salon as a site of self-making where beauty and belonging are enacted at the level of scalp and

speech.

But infrastructure doesn't end at the salon door. Its logics persist—into blogs, comment threads, digital enclosures. What was intimate becomes archived. What was affective becomes data. The next section traces these mutations—how infrastructural politics of diaspora resurface in the digital sphere, where connection once again carries the echo of refusal.

V. Transit, Bureaucracy, and Slow Racialization

Diaspora in *Americanah* is not configured through dramatic dislocations alone. It is rendered in the slow sedimentation of the ordinary: in repeated contact with infrastructural systems that stall, displace, and reorient the subject. Transit routes, visa queues, bureaucratic offices—these are not peripheral to diasporic life; they are its texture. They are where Black subjectivity is not only represented but produced: inscribed through the tedium of waiting, the friction of mobility, the recursive exposure to administrative vision. Migration unfolds here not in rupture, but in repetition.

Ifemelu's journey, like others in the novel, is lived less in crisis than in what Berlant (2011) calls the *impasse*—a durational suspension "where adjustment seems like an accomplishment" (3), and exhaustion becomes the very condition of possibility. Racialization in these spaces is not eventual—it is incremental, processual. It attaches itself to routine: the missed bus, the stalled train, the long silence of visa adjudication. As Mboukou (2021) notes, Adichie's attentiveness to bureaucratic infrastructures shows how they not only regulate diasporic life but shape its very terms—of mobility, identity, and emotional orientation.

Embodied Waiting: Public Transit and the Affective Economy of Delay

Ifemelu's encounters with transit—whether aboard a Lagos danfo or in U.S. commuter zones—are shaped not by arrival but by delay. Her trip to Trenton to find a salon is rendered as an errand, yet pulses with the tension of infrastructural failure: the discomfort of white space, the ambient heat, the temporality of suspension. "She liked taking deep breaths here… But she did not like that she had to go to Trenton to braid her hair" (Adichie 3–4). What appears logistical is deeply racialized—an absence made felt through sighs, sweat, spatial displacement.

This is the politics of mundane delay. Of absence-as-presence. Of needing to leave in order to maintain the self.

Berlant's theory of the ordinary as a "landfill of crises" resonates: minor impasses accumulate until life itself becomes a scene of attrition (3). Seamless passage—between cities, identities, or modes of care—is unavailable. The commute

becomes recalibration. Survival is adjustment. Habit becomes tolerance.

Brian Larkin (2008) defines infrastructure not only as what enables flow, but as what patterns its interruption. It is "matter that enables the movement of other matter," but also the architecture through which failure becomes normalized (5). Ifemelu's transit experience is shaped not just by space, but by the affective economy of delay: train stalls, Lagos gridlock, immigration limbo. These are not passive lulls—they are metabolized, internalized. They become mood. They become diasporic time.

As Kathleen Stewart (2007) writes, the ordinary moves "through bodies, dreams, and institutions" (2). Infrastructure produces a rhythm: recursive, dense, affectively charged. It inscribes diaspora not only in motion, but in suspension—where anticipation, resignation, and fatigue coincide.

Thus emerges a theory of diasporic time as infrastructural: not linear, not heroic, but durational, burdened. In *Americanah*, the bureaucracy of the everyday doesn't pause life—it becomes it.

Bureaucracy and the Temporalities of Racialization

Nowhere is infrastructural violence more condensed than in the consulates, embassies, and visa offices that populate *Americanah*—sites where the fantasy of mobility collides with the mechanics of suspicion. These are not thresholds but containment chambers, where bodies are weighed against paperwork, possibilities filtered through administrative opacity. Ifemelu's passage through these spaces is marked by durational violence—not rupture but slow suspense.

"The American embassy in Lagos was a place of queues, of sweating bodies pressed together, of nervous anticipation and barely disguised fear... She watched as a woman in a bright yellow dress left the counter crying... Another man emerged with a wide smile, and everyone leaned forward, as if his success might rub off on them" (Adichie 109).

This is affective infrastructure. Racialization is enacted not through declaration but delay, through withheld glances and unsaid verdicts. The consulate becomes an atmosphere—anxieties condensing in air, hopes leaking through posture. As Sharpe (2016) notes, "living in the wake" means inhabiting the afterlife of systems designed to capture and deny Black life (18). The embassy is a contemporary hold—sterile, surveilled, climate-controlled—where mobility is indefinitely deferred.

This is not melodrama but choreography. Recursion. Preparation. The rehearsals of worthiness. The affective toll inscribes itself on the body: anticipation, vigilance, flattened shoulders. As Berlant (2011) writes, the impasse is where life-building becomes crisis itself (3). The wait becomes epistemological—teaching

what it means to be seen, judged, rendered illegible by the very systems that adjudicate legitimacy.

Obinze's repeated rejections by the American embassy exemplify this: "He went three more times… Each time he was told, without a glance, 'Sorry, you don't qualify,' and each time he emerged into the harsh sunlight, stunned and unbelieving. 'It's the terrorism fears,' his mother said" (Adichie 312).

There is no explanation, no appeal. Rejection is protocol. Denial is built-in. Obinze's stunned emergence becomes an echo of Sharpe's "weather"—not the storm, but the climate of anti-Blackness. Visa denial is not an event but a pedagogy: it teaches exhaustion as the norm.

Racialization as Temporal and Infrastructural Process

Americanah reveals that racialization is not a fixed identity, nor a singular realization. It is an infrastructural process—incremental, recursive, accumulating across checkpoints, forms, and silences. One becomes racialized over time: through logistics, delays, suspicion.

Sharpe (2016) reminds us that the "weather" of anti-Blackness is not just the catastrophe—it's the drizzle (104). Ifemelu's encounters don't shock; they wear. They recur:

- On the bus: the shift in posture from white passengers.
- At the border: the extra question, the pause before the stamp.
- In immigration: the rehearsed plausibility of presence.

These are not outliers. They are the infrastructure of racialization. They shape a subject who waits in advance, adjusts breath and posture before arrival. Racialization here is logistical: embedded in protocols, surveillance, even in the design of waiting rooms.

As Berlant writes, life must be built within the impasse—"breath by strained breath." *Americanah* renders this pedagogy of delay and disposability as central to diasporic temporality.

Affective Flattening and the Suspension of Drama

Strikingly, *Americanah* resists melodrama. Migration is not spectacular, exclusion not monumentalized. Instead, the novel offers the flat texture of the everyday: paperwork, queueing, ambient dread. As Nair (2017) observes, Adichie privileges accumulation over crisis. The result is not catharsis but attrition.

"Each time Ifemelu went to the post office or the bank… she practiced patience… It was, in its way, a kind of theatre—one she was learning not to feel too much about" (Adichie 222).

This is the dramaturgy of infrastructural life. Boredom, irritation,

dissociation—these saturate the choreography of compliance. Berlant (2011) calls this "crisis ordinariness" (10); Ngai (2005) calls it "stuplimity"—where the subject is "overwhelmed and underwhelmed at once" (272). Ifemelu does not cry. She sighs. She waits. She learns not to feel too much.

Mobility, Dislocation, and Racialized Embodiment

Movement across cities or continents does not free Ifemelu—it multiplies the modalities of racialization. In Lagos, her body is classed and gendered; in the U.S., it becomes Black, foreign, hypervisible. In visa lines, she becomes suspect—processed, evaluated.

Olabisi (2017) argues *Americanah* captures how racializing technologies follow migrants across borders. Each geography issues new instructions:

- On the danfo: a leer, a clutch of the bag.
- At the DMV: a micro-interrogation masked as small talk.
- At customs: the studied inspection of documents.

Racialization is infrastructural. It is coded into space, pace, rhythm. As Larkin (2008) argues, infrastructures don't merely enable—they constitute subjects (14). Ifemelu's posture, tone, silence are shaped by systems she must pass through.

These are not anecdotes. They are inscriptions. The cartography of micro-violences. The drizzle Sharpe describes. *Americanah* teaches us to feel race not as rupture but as repetition. As sediment. As slow violence.

As Okuyade (2013) writes, Adichie shows how "minor" humiliations enact violence that accrues. This is not subplot—it is infrastructure. The DMV, bus line, passport queue are the novel's analytic core. Here, *Americanah* theorizes most powerfully—not by naming violence, but by accumulating it. It refuses to lift the reader out of the queue. It asks us to wait. To feel its weight.

Transit and bureaucracy are not backdrop—they are the scene. They are where race is lived, repeated, reconstituted—one delay at a time.

VI. Narrative Form as Infrastructure

To fully apprehend *Americanah* as a novel of infrastructures, one must look beyond its content—beyond salons, subways, and consulates—and attend to its form: the grammar of its assembly. The novel's architecture is resolutely non-linear, unfolding through digression, repetition, and interruption. Time folds, slips, returns. Ifemelu's and Obinze's lives are not plotted as arcs but as entangled sequences, stitched from affective fragments and bureaucratic stalls. Narrative becomes infrastructure—a structure that routes emotion, organizes delay, and absorbs the messiness of diasporic temporality.

At first glance, *Americanah* appears digressive. Flashbacks disrupt forward motion. Blog posts punctuate the story with tonal shifts and metacommentary. Chapters loop around a single conversation or drift sideways through anecdote. Ifemelu's trajectory—Nigeria to the U.S. to return—is not linear. The novel aggregates: salon gossip, visa queues, blog entries, appointments, remembered intimacies.

The blog *Raceteenth* is not a stylistic flourish—it is formal infrastructure. Its posts hold, leak, reroute the affective overflow of Ifemelu's encounters. They are not digressions but condensations:

"Ifemelu had written the final post only days ago, trailed by two hundred and seventy-four comments so far. All those readers… frightened and exhilarated her" (6).

The blog is expressive and infrastructural: a system that parses and suspends feeling. It enables visibility while echoing the fragmentation it cannot fully resolve. As Berlant (2011) notes, "genre is an affective event"—a scaffolding that organizes experience (6). In *Americanah*, the blog genre becomes an infrastructural node: iterative, partial, distributed—mirroring the conditions of diasporic mediation.

Narrative as Infrastructural Code: Delay, Detour, and Affect

Adichie's form is not decorative. It performs infrastructural labor. Interruptions, temporal slippages, and detours are not stylistic gestures but mimetic of diasporic life. Pine et al. (2015) theorize form as "infrastructural code"—a patterned structure that "organizes affective flows… enabling some connections and disabling others" (8). *Americanah* disables closure, enables recurrence. Its pacing stutters, loops, skips—echoing the temporal machinery of visa queues, border stalls, salon waitlists.

Visa scenes recur like protocol:

"She had her folder of documents ready… the same way she had it ready for every interview… She waited in line… as a woman was turned away, as a man was approved, as her own number finally flashed on the screen" (Adichie 112).

This is not suspense—it is procedural fatigue. An aesthetics of affective bureaucracy, where tone becomes the vehicle of meaning.

Ngai (2005) calls tone "the feeling of feeling"—a sensorial register of stalled agency and exhausted desire (p. 29). In *Americanah*, tone is infrastructural: a medium of delay. Ifemelu's voice adopts a weary irony—not liberation but adaptation. There is laughter, but it arrives late. There is critique, but it is laced with resignation.

Ogunyemi (2016) argues that *Americanah*'s episodic structure mirrors the

stalled temporality of diaspora. But more than mirroring, the form enacts it. The reader, too, must wait, return, hold affect in suspension. Adichie orchestrates narrative as infrastructure: not smooth, but recursive.

The novel's form enacts what Stewart (2007) calls "the way things are tending"—a sensibility attuned to stasis, drift, and impasse (5). *Americanah* is built not on events but atmospheres, not on plot but accumulation. Its affective architecture registers diasporic life as frictional, recursive, infrastructural.

This is not incoherence—it is method. Fragmentation becomes rhythm. Delay becomes structure. Blogs become constellations. Narrative becomes a soft infrastructure of feeling—threading race, gender, migration, and longing through the recursive corridors of form.

Absorbing Fragmentation: The Work of Genre and Affect

Adichie's narrative does not resolve fragmentation—it absorbs it. Not to transcend rupture, but to render it habitable. *Americanah* oscillates between the intimate and impersonal: touch, memory, salons; forms, queues, blog metrics. This mimics the diasporic pulse: a life lived in calibrations, impasses, oscillations.

Nwankwo (2015) notes that the novel's episodic form captures diaspora's simultaneity—fracture and coherence, structure and affect. Fragmentation is not a thematic residue but the novel's infrastructural mode of movement and constraint.

Berlant (2011) names this the "infrastructure of feeling": genres, gestures, and attachments that make the ordinary livable, even when it forecloses flourishing. "All attachment is optimistic… a force that moves you… toward the satisfying something you cannot generate on your own…" (2).

In *Americanah*, optimism is compromised—delayed, rerouted, deferred. The novel's genre—part migration narrative, part satire, part romance, part blog—is itself an infrastructure: a circuit that routes longing without resolving it. The ending is not closure but return. The romance resurfaces, not redemptively. The fragments remain. The delay holds.

Reading narrative as infrastructure means attending to form as atmosphere: the mode through which delay, hope, and impasse circulate. The novel's rhythm—its stalls, hesitations, missed encounters—mirrors the lived temporality of the migrant subject: recursive, fractured, slow.

Delays—visa queues, emails, silences, unfinished posts—are not incidents but conditions. They index tone, what Ngai (2005) calls "an affective atmosphere… through which one feels the shape of an agency stalled or looping" (29). Ifemelu's voice—melancholic, ironic—is not stylistic flourish but tonal pedagogy. It teaches

the reader how to dwell in suspension.

Ndinda (2018) notes Adichie's tonal precision: irony laced with quiet despair. The novel offers no catharsis. It offers structure. Delay as form.

Form is political. It is infrastructural. Pine et al. (2015) insist that narrative is not just a vehicle for plot, but "an infrastructure through which affect, power, and possibility circulate" (8). In *Americanah*, narrative is a soft architecture: recursive, discontinuous, affectively charged.

This is *Americanah*'s formal politics: not to transcend fragmentation, but to dwell in its rhythms—to affirm incompletion, repetition, rerouting. Adichie's novel insists that fragmentation is not failure. It is the condition of diasporic life. It is the form.

By tracing the entanglement of genre, tone, and delay, *Americanah* invites a method that listens not only to what the novel says, but to how it moves—how it hesitates, loops, withholds. The novel offers no promise of coherence. Its wager is different: that fragmentation, held with care, may still be lived.

VII. Conclusion: Toward an Infrastructural Reading of Diasporic Literature

This essay has argued that *Americanah* is not merely a novel about diasporic subjectivity, migration, or identity in the abstract, but a recursive meditation on the infrastructures—material, affective, narrative—that contour the ordinary life of the Black diaspora. Through close readings of the spaces and systems shaping Ifemelu's world—salons, transit, visa offices, digital platforms—we have seen how *Americanah* stages the entanglement of feeling, logistics, and formation. These are not peripheral textures or narrative backgrounds. They are scaffolds of mediation, constraint, and affective calibration.

While much of diaspora criticism emphasizes visibility, identity, and the semiotics of race, this reading reorients attention to the infrastructural surround—those atmospheric and logistical arrangements that shape what can be felt, endured, or deferred. In *Americanah*, the salon is not merely a grooming site, but a node of calibration: where beauty, racial legibility, and aspiration are choreographed and contested. Transit and bureaucracy serve as "waiting rooms" of subjectivity, where racialization accrues not through spectacle, but as sediment—durational exposure to the erosions and impasses of migratory life.

Drawing on Berlant's concept of the impasse (2011), Larkin's theory of infrastructural delay (2008), Stewart's ecologies of the ordinary (2007), and Sharpe's "weather" of anti-Blackness (2016), we have traced how diasporic life is routed through infrastructural forms of violence and contingency. These systems do

not simply reflect conditions; they modulate rhythm, reroute feeling, and saturate everyday scenes with atmospheres of exhaustion, risk, care, and provisional belonging.

Crucially, this essay has proposed that *Americanah* does not merely depict infrastructure—it inhabits it formally. Its episodic, recursive, and non-linear structure functions as infrastructural code. Through digressions, loops, and blog insertions, the novel feels like what it narrates: delay, redirection, suspended climax. Drawing on Pine et al. (2015), narrative emerges not as container but as affective pacing—a system mediating between blockage and flow, anticipation and flattening. Ifemelu's life unfolds not as upward mobility or tragic descent, but as recursive return, deferred intimacy, minor refusal.

Ngai's (2005) "ugly feelings"—irritation, stuplimity, boredom—define the tonal register of these forms. Berlant's notion of genre as "infrastructure of feeling" (2011) clarifies how narrative scaffolds the repetition of impasse, the attrition of hope, and the rituals of adjustment under racial capitalism. *Americanah* is not narratively optimistic. It is narratively suspended—gesturing toward coherence while dwelling in delay.

Toward a New Reading of Postcolonial Form

This infrastructural approach expands the interpretive frameworks of postcolonial and Black Atlantic studies by shifting focus from representation to mediation, from signification to logistics, from plot to rhythm. *Americanah* is not only about the coordinates of race; it is about the architectures—temporal, spatial, affective—that make racialized life dwellable, circulatory, and precarious.

In this way, the novel speaks to the politics of form itself. The migration narrative, the embedded blog, the episodic loop—these are infrastructural genres. They hold and reroute the overflow of diasporic feeling. As Ogunyemi (2016) and Nwankwo (2015) observe, *Americanah*'s disjunctive form mirrors the lived discontinuities of transnational life—not only in content, but in pacing, tone, and structure.

Where Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" mapped fluidity and exchange, an infrastructural reading introduces pressure points: delay, blocked circulation, forced stasis. Sharpe's "wake," Campt's "lower frequencies," and Stewart's "ordinary affects" offer attunement to the slow, recursive, and saturated experience of diaspora. These frameworks illuminate not just migration, but the textures of life that migration produces—and wears down.

Ultimately, this essay contributes to an affective and infrastructural humanities—one that reads emotion not as interior state, but as atmospherically

conditioned, systemically routed, and politically shaped. The salon, the queue, the train ride, the visa interview, the unfinished blog post—each becomes a site where feeling is patterned, delayed, or dissipated. In *Americanah*, affect is not what the subject carries within; it is what the subject must endure through inhabitation of systems.

To read *Americanah* for infrastructure is to see space, system, and form not as narrative backdrops, but as sites of struggle, calibration, and—at times—care. The novel models how to dwell in impasse without capitulating to it. It shows that diasporic life under racial capitalism is shaped not only by visible violence, but by rhythmic interruption, quiet exhaustion, and infrastructural attunement.

Americanah does not offer closure. It offers circulation. Return without resolution. The ordinary, held open. A form that waits with us.

Works Cited

Abodunrin, F. "Sites of negotiation: Hair, beauty, and diasporic subjectivity in Adichie's Americanah." *Journal of African Diaspora and Development*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2020, pp. 25-39. https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2020.1763715

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

Ahmad, S. "Mapping Mobilities: Race, Infrastructure, and Belonging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 41, no. 11, 2018, pp. 1985-2002. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1344275

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Routledge, 2004.

Banks, I. "Hair matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness." *Gender & Society*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2000, pp. 26-45. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124300014001003

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel optimism*. Duke UP, 2011.

Campt, Tina M. *Listening to Images*. Duke UP, 2017.

George, A. "Diasporic Negotiations: Identity and Belonging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah." *European Review*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2019, pp. 87-97. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798719000038

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.

Johnson, L. "Diasporic Subjectivity and the Politics of Hair in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah." *Black Camera*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2016, pp. 12-27. https://doi.org/10.2979/blackcamera.7.2.12

Larkin, Brian. *Signal and noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Duke UP, 2008.

Mboukou, V. "Bureaucratic Encounters and the Everyday in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah." *Transition*, vol. 131, no. 1, 2021, pp. 13-26. https://doi.org/10.2979/

transition.131.1.13

Nair, S. “The Migrant as ‘Other’: Negotiating Race and Affect in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah.” *African Studies Review*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2017, pp. 170-181. https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.40

Ndinda, C. “Irony and the Poetics of Migration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah.” *Journal of African Cinemas*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2018, pp. 129-143. https://doi.org/10.1080/17528631.2018.1500053

Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard UP, 2005.

Nwankwo, I. E. “Fragmentation and diasporic subjectivity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah.” *African Identities*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2015, pp. 225-239. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2015.1047472

Ogunyemi, C. O. “Diaspora, Displacement, and Discontinuities in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah.” *African Identities*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2016, pp. 132-146. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2016.1150239

Okuyade, O. “Narrating the New African diaspora: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah.” *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2013, pp. 196-210. https://doi.org/10.1080/1013929X.2013.857496

Olabisi, O. “Negotiating Identity and Transnational Mobility in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah.” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2017, pp. 189-203. https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2017.1332655

Osinubi, T. “Americanah and the Reinvention of African Identity.” *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2018, pp. 91-110. https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.49.1.06

Pine, J., V. Das, and K. Ho. “Affect and Infrastructure: Some Preliminary Notes.” *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2015, pp. 173-186. https://doi.org/10.14506/ca30.2.01

Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke UP, 2016.

Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Duke UP, 2007.

Walter Scott's Legal Expertise and Law Narrative in His Novels

Yang Haiying
School of Network Communication, Zhejiang Yuexiu University
2801 M. Qunxian Rd., Shaoxing 312000, P. R. China
Email: hzhaiying@ yeah.net

Abstract Walter Scott was a renowned writer with a strong legal background. This paper aims to explore the legal expertise evident in his literary works and the unique value of his narrative regarding law in his series of novels. The author argues that Scott demonstrates exceptional artistic talent in his depiction of historical events and legal concepts, clearly indicating that he is a literary genius influenced by the field of law. Scott's historical novels are closely intertwined with legal themes, using a legal perspective to examine history while also scrutinizing legal matters through the lens of historical accuracy. The depiction of legal events in Scott's works serves not only as a crucial structural element but also enhances the portrayal of characters. By examining Scott's literary works through the framework of legal literary criticism, readers can gain a deeper understanding of his creative tendencies and the rich legal ideas embedded within his writings.
Keywords Walter Scott; legal expertise; law narrative; legal literary criticism
Author **Yang Haiying**, Professor at the School of Network Communication, Zhejiang Yuexiu University. Her research interests include English literature studies and the dissemination of literary classics.

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) was a writer with profound legal expertise. As a unique writer with a legal background, it is essential to understand how his legal expertise influenced his literary creation and shaped the style of his novels. It is also the root of the distinctive characteristics of his works in terms of artistic structure, characterization, and creative philosophy. As some scholar aptly noted: "It is safe to say that had not Scott been a lawyer, his writings would have lost much of their characteristic flavor" (Gest 3). Of course, the legal elements in Scott's literary works are not merely a display of his legal expertise, but rather an artistic presentation of his legal ideals that were difficult to achieve in judicial practice, through the unique form of literary genres.

I. The Literary Genius Nurtured in the Legal Field

Scott's legal narrative is closely tied to his birth and upbringing. He was born into an ancient Scottish family in Edinburgh. His family background alone signifies a fascinating blend of law and literature. His father, John Scott, was a legal professional and a highly respected lawyer, while his mother, Anne Rutherford, had received a solid literary education. His father provided guidance for Scott's legal career, while his mother provided the cultural foundation and creative inspiration for his literary works. It is clear that throughout Scott's professional and literary career, his parents' legal and literary backgrounds exerted a subtle yet profound influence on him.

In 1786, he followed in his father's footsteps and entered the legal profession. In 1789, he enrolled at the University of Edinburgh to study law, where he diligently researched and studied the subject, attending numerous academic lectures held at the university. While pursuing his legal studies, he enthusiastically engaged in literary activities and actively participated in discussions on issues of widespread interest, including law and society, literature and history, and philosophy. After completing his legal studies, he became a lawyer in 1792, directly engaging in judicial work and achieving considerable success. In 1806, he was appointed as clerk to the Court of Session in Edinburgh, where he was given significant responsibility in the judicial field.

While pursuing a long career in law, Scott dedicated immense passion to literary creation. Thus, this outstanding legal professional, who specialized in law and worked in the legal field after graduation, blossomed into a literary genius nurtured in the legal field, achieving remarkable accomplishments in historical fiction and poetry. For Scott, who was just beginning his legal career, spending long periods on foot in the remote corners of Scotland, listening to and recording half-forgotten folk songs and medieval legends, were far more fulfilling than the monotonous study of law in his father's office. "Scott began systematically collecting Scottish folk songs and later launched his professional literary career by publishing them. At the same time, he gained an understanding of the diverse and unique characters of the Scottish people, which was of great importance to Scott's literary creation as a novelist" (Gorky Institute 188). Meanwhile, he also studied Scotland's legislative and litigation systems in detail. Whether it was the collection of folk songs and ballads or the extensive understanding of Scotland's legal system and litigation procedures, both had a subtle yet profound influence on his literary creation.

It was precisely his dual expertise in literature and law, coupled with his unwavering dedication to literary pursuits, that enabled Scott to produce 27 historical novels, several short stories, and numerous poetic works throughout his lifetime. Among these are *Ivanhoe* (1820), *Rob Roy* (1817), *Old Mortality* (1816), *Kenilworth* (1821), *Tales of the Crusaders* (1825), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), and other historical novels, as well as the epic poems *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). His poetic works were based on his research into Scottish ballads and were imbued with a strong sense of legend. His novels, on the other hand, were based on his research into Scottish and British history. "His novels were to allow fuller scope for his natural gifts and acquirements, and for his wholesome humour as well as his comprehensive sympathies" (Sampson 516).

Most of Scott's novels are grouped under the "Waverley Novels," a name derived from his 1814 novel *Waverley*, which recounts the Jacobite uprising of 1745. Since Scott did not acknowledge his authorship until 1827, for a considerable period after the publication of *Waverley*, he was typically credited as "the author of *Waverley*" or "the author of the Waverley Novels" on the covers of his books.

Thus, the "Waverley Novels" became the collective term for most of Scott's novels. Although these novels are primarily known as historical fiction, a significant portion of their content delves into various aspects of legal issues. To the extent that some Western scholars have argued: "In all of Sir Walter Scott's novels the difference between the modern world and the world of the past is defined by the difference between the rule of law and the rule of violence" (Cottom, 65). In Scott's novels, the conflict between legal rules and rules of violence is frequently examined, and at times, the interplay between the two is revealed, as he strives to explore an ideal balance. In specific novels, Scott often uses the voices of characters in his works, particularly the fictional legal professionals, to make numerous interesting comments on the law, thereby elucidating his legal philosophy.

In his novel *Guy Mannering,* Scott uses the voice of his character Mr. Pleydell to systematically explain the social functions of law and employs literary irony to reveal some of the flaws in the legal system of the time. Mr. Pleydell said, "In civilised society, law is the chimney through which all that smoke discharges itself that used to circulate through the whole house, and put every one's eyes out—no wonder, therefore, that the vent itself should sometimes get a little sooty" (Scott, *Guy Mannering* 71). In this novel, Scott uses the words of his characters to provide a vivid explanation of the functions and characteristics of law. By comparing law to a chimney, he not only vividly illustrates the unique role of law as a social regulator but also defends certain imperfections within the legal system.

In the novel *Rob Roy*, the story is told in the first person by Frank Osbaldistone, set against the backdrop of the Scottish uprising of 1715. It explores the complex ethnic, religious, and social conflicts of that time, as well as the psychological states of characters from all walks of life. Frank is falsely accused by villains and nearly imprisoned, but is saved by the Scottish outlaw Rob Roy.

In the novel *The Heart of Midlothian*, Scott's characters engage in more in-depth discussions about the law. To a considerable extent, this novel is a successful example of "combining writing with a career in the law" (Dolin 45). It demonstrates outstanding artistic talent in terms of historical events and legal writing, fully revealing that he was a literary genius nurtured by the field of law.

II. The Ingenious Combination of Historical Novels and Legal Themes and Its Influences

As in the aforementioned *The Heart of Midlothian*, Scott's historical novels skillfully blend legal themes with historical narratives, using legal themes to illuminate history while also scrutinizing the law through the lens of historical truth. Though his works draw inspiration from historical events, he employs these events to reflect on the present. "He did not merely attempt to write historical fiction, and by using material from histories, represent the past; he re-created the past" (Fisher 99). His purpose in re-creating the past is not purely to use history as a mirror, but rather to use history to examine reality, achieving the effect of using the past to illustrate the present.

In his novel *Redgauntlet*, Scott references the famous case of Peebles vs. Planestanes, thereby adding legal elements to this literary work. As a result, some scholars have argued: "There is probably none of Scott's novels which contains more legal terms and allusions than *Redgauntlet*" (Gest 32).

During the early 19th century, when Scott was primarily engaged in novel writing, the contradictions within British society were distinctly pronounced. In particular, due to the accelerated pace of industrialization, both labor-management conflicts and tensions between the general populace and the ruling class reached an unprecedented level of sharpness. In such circumstances, as a legal professional working for the government, if Scott had directly depicted the true state of society in his novels, his works would inevitably have been unable to be published. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why Scott was so passionate about historical themes in his literary creation. "Scott's historical novels are mostly based on real historical events. The author uses the description of these historical events as the central content of his works, around which he shapes characters, arranges

plot structures, sets scenes, and depicts environments" (Yang 84). By using similar historical events as his subject matter, he avoids sensitive issues and sensitive discourse, while achieving the purpose of using the past to comment on the present. Therefore, Scott's historical fiction, especially the legal issues addressed in his historical novels, aims to draw attention to and examine contemporary legal issues. His portrayal of historical legal issues and criticism of legal systems in his novels essentially reflect his questioning and criticism of the legal systems and judicial injustices of his own time. As Karl Kroeber pointed out, in the "Waverley Novels," there is not only a wealth of legal procedural case references, but also "an implicit questioning of the whole concept of civilized law" (Kroeber 185).

Novels such as *The Heart of Midlothian* use literary narrative as a vehicle to question the law. The questions raised are not only about the irrationality of the legal system, but also about the redundancy of legal provisions. As Daniel Cottom has noted: "Moreover, this questioning not only suggests that law may lead to violence rather than enlightenment, but further suggests that the violence which law was invented to curb may not have been entirely undesirable" (Cottom 67). Such questioning in Scott's novels constitutes a strong condemnation of the legal system of his time and an aspiration for an ideal legal system.

It is precisely because of the ingenious combination of historical events and legal themes that Scott's literary works have had a profound influence on later writers. His literary achievements have been widely recognized by society. He was "an author to whom Marx again and again returned, whom he admired and knew as well as he did Balzac and Fielding" (Prawer 386).

The renowned Russian writer Alexander Pushkin demonstrated his respect for Scott's literary achievements and artistic techniques in several essays, including "On Walter Scott's Novels," and regarded Scott as a model for historical fiction. "In Europe, Pushkin is one of the greatest successors to Scott in the field of historical novels. His lineage in this regard has long aroused people's interest" (Hu 62). Scott's literary works not only influenced Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*, but some scholars even believe it influenced *The Tales of Belkin*: "Certainly there are similarities between Pushkin's Preface to *The Tales of Belkin* and Scott's mystifications. Closer examination reveals, however, that Pushkin plays with Scott's conventions, cleverly undermining Belkin at the same time that he introduces him to the reader" (Hoisington 357). The renowned French writer Victor Hugo summarized Scott's novels, writing: "Walter Scott has been able to draw from the springs of nature and truth an unknown species. It is new to us, because he makes himself as ancient as he wills. He unites to the minute exactness of the chronicles

the majestic grandeur of history and the all-compelling interest of romance. His potent and curious genius divines the past; his true pencil traces a faithful portrait after a confused shadow, and forces us to recognize even what we have not seen; his flexible and solid mind takes the peculiar impress of every age and of every country, like soft wax, and preserves this impress for posterity like imperishable bronze" (Hugo 310).

Not only Pushkin and Hugo, but many other writers have benefited from Scott's literary works. His monumental achievements in historical fiction exerted a profound influence on numerous subsequent writers of diverse styles across Europe and America. "His writing influenced Balzac, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Dumas, Pushkin and many others; and Scott's interpretation of history was seized on by Romantic nationalists, particularly in Eastern Europe" (Pittock). All of them drew inspiration and guidance from Scott's novels in their creative endeavors. Charles Dickens, another British writer who also focused on legal issues in his literary works, held Scott in the highest regard: "He was well-versed in Shakespeare... He also admired Fielding and expressed great admiration for Scott" (Pearson 36). It is clear that Scott achieved remarkable success in the creative writing of historical novels and novels with legal themes, and has garnered significant attention.

III. The Artistic Function of Legal Elements in Scott's Novels

In Scott's novels, not only are legal events described, but they also play an important role in the artistic structure of the plot and in enhancing the characterization.

The plot of *The Antiquary* revolves around the legality of the marriage between the Earl of Glenallan and Eveline Neville, but the lawyer is most interested in the conversation with the antiquarian Jonathan Oldbuck. This antiquarian had studied law and was well-versed in feudal legal knowledge, but since there was no need for him to practice law, he naturally cultivated his interest in old books and ancient scholarship. He spent days "pondering over an old black-letter copy of the acts of parliament" (*The Antiquary* 15) instead of playing golf; he would seek out the ruins of ancient Roman camps; he also discovered a strange stone engraved with some initials, which the antique dealer wrote down in an erudite manner, while Edie Ochiltree wrote them down in a trivial manner, reminding us of the similar story of the stone discovered by the Pickwick Club, though it is possible that Charles Dickens borrowed the idea from Scott.

In the novel *Ivanhoe*, the protagonist, Wilfred of Ivanhoe, is also strengthened through legal events. After being kidnapped by Bois-Guilbert, Rebecca was taken to a building belonging to the Knights Templar, which was half palace and half church.

Rebecca's father was worried and anxious. The letter he wrote to Bois-Guilbert fell into the hands of the ruthless knight commander, who accused Rebecca of using witchcraft against Bois-Guilbert. Rebecca was thus found guilty and sentenced to be burned at the stake, unless someone would duel for her and defeat Bois-Guilbert. Just as Rebecca was about to be taken to the execution ground, the young knight Ivanhoe finally arrived, engaged in a life-and-death duel with enraged Bois-Guilbert, and defeated the latter. Thus, Rebecca was declared innocent and released.

In the novel *Rob Roy*, the work begins with an appendix that discusses legal issues, including litigation. The first chapter of the main text opens with the lines: "How have I sinn'd, that this affliction / Should light so heavy on me?" (Scott, *Rob Roy* 5). The author incorporates these legal elements at the beginning to serve a structural function in the narrative.

In the novel *The Betrothed*, the author combines real historical events with a fictional love story, using legal events as the backdrop to tell the tale of star-crossed lovers who ultimately find happiness together. In the novel, the male protagonist, Sir Hugo, is the savior of the female protagonist, Eveline. Out of gratitude, Eveline decides to marry Hugo. However, since Hugo had already joined the Crusaders and was about to set off, he entrusted his nephew, Damian, to protect Eveline after their engagement. But after Hugo left, his fiancée Eveline developed feelings for Damian. Their romance was met with criticism from others and was also targeted by Hugo's cousin Randal. As a result, Damian was falsely accused of sympathizing with a peasant uprising and imprisoned for treason. After gaining the king's trust, Randal falsely claimed that Hugo had died on his way back, and Randal was thus appointed as the new leader. On the day of the celebration, Hugo made a dramatic return. At the celebration, Randal was mistakenly killed. During the interrogation of the murderer, the king learned the truth. Meanwhile, Hugo disguised himself as a mendicant monk and investigated the prison. Moved by Damian's loyalty, he pleaded with the king to pardon him and dissolved his engagement to Eveline, thereby fulfilling the young couple's love.

In the novel *The Heart of Midlothian*, the structural and functional role of legal elements is particularly prominent. The historical backdrop of this novel is the early 18th century, specifically the period immediately following the formal union of Scotland and England. The novel's main plot is constructed from a combination of real historical events and a fictional love story. The real historical event is the sensational "Porteous Riots" that took place in Edinburgh, while the fictional love story is the romance between Effie and George Stanton (i.e., George Robertson). Both the historical event and the love story are closely related to legal matters.

Both involve court trials and the enforcement of case judgments. The former concerns the riots and the illegal actions taken to suppress the riots, while the latter involves a wrongful conviction based on a lack of direct evidence. Legal events play a crucial role in the artistic structure of this novel. "The plot of *The Heart of Midlothian* employs this law to begin the Porteous case and to end the case of Effie Deans" (Dolin 56). Moreover, there is a character who plays a connecting role in both of the main plots, namely George Stanton. In the "Porteous Riots," he is an accomplice to the riot leader Wilson, while in Effie's wrongful imprisonment, he is Effie's lover, both a catalyst for her wrongful imprisonment and a victim in the legal sense. It is George Stanton's unique role that enables the two main plotlines to form independent yet interdependent whole in the legal realm.

In Scott's novels, legal elements not only play an important role in the artistic structure but also serve a supporting function to the characterization. Take the two main female characters in *The Heart of Midlothian* as an example. In terms of characterization, the author fully utilized his expertise as a legal scholar, using legal elements to highlight the unique personality traits of the characters.

The main plot of this novel is based on an anonymous letter that the author, Walter Scott, claimed to have received. In the letter, the writer recounts an extraordinary experience: a woman named Helen Walker, undeterred by hardship, set out from Edinburgh and walked all the way to London to appeal to the court on behalf of her sister, who had been sentenced to death. The woman's extraordinary appeal ultimately succeeded. The queen of the court in London, for political reasons — particularly the need to maintain relations between England and Scotland — commuted the sister's death sentence to exile. Walter Scott, in his novel *The Heart of Midlothian*, drew inspiration from Walker to create the main character Jeanie Deans, a young woman who, with remarkable determination, traveled to London to appeal for her sister Effie's wrongful conviction.

In developing the character of Jennie, the author uses the concept of petitioning in legal proceedings as a foundation. The experiences Jennie undergoes during the legal petitioning process showcase her decisiveness, bravery, and unwavering determination to clear her sister Effie's wrongful conviction. Scott employs this petitioning form to shape Jennie's character. Additionally, the portrayal of Jennie has influenced the depiction of Martha in Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*.

Effie Deans was no different from other characters in the story. Scott primarily develops Effie's unique character from a legal perspective. She kept her relationship with George Robertson a secret from her father, sister, and those around her. Additionally, she chose not to disclose her pregnancy, primarily due to her lack of

legal knowledge, her shy personality, and her desire to protect her lover. George Robertson had already become a suspect and was on the run, so any evidence could lead to his arrest. As a result, Effie preferred to face the consequences herself rather than risk harm coming to him. This illustrates that Effie's character—innocent, pure, yet slightly rebellious—is influenced by legal elements within the novel.

As the ideal model that Scott strived to create, Jennie's character, as depicted in the petition process, demonstrates unwavering resolve and deep affection for her sister, qualities evident from the novel's title. The title of this novel carries significant symbolic meaning. The "heart" is the "engine" of human survival, but the "heart" of Midlothian refers to the imposing "prison" of Edinburgh. Viewing the "prison" as the "heart" symbolizes Edinburgh as the key to the functioning of the political system. If the "heart" of the body malfunctions, the health of the body cannot be maintained. Every beat of the heart reflects the health of the body. In the opening of *The Heart of Midlothian*, several lawyers discuss the symbolic meaning of this prison in the capital city of Edinburgh. One says, "The metropolitan county may, in that case, be said to have a sad heart" (14). Another adds, "And a close heart, and a hard heart" (14). Others believed, "And a wicked heart, and a poor heart" (14). But still others argued, "And yet it may be called in some sort a strong heart, and a high heart" (14). It is clear that the symbolic meaning of the "heart" is extremely rich. If the "prison" symbolizes the "wicked heart," then Jennie, the protagonist of the novel, represents "a strong heart, and a high heart."

Conclusion

As a writer with profound legal expertise, Scott inevitably expressed his legal views in his literary works. Therefore, only by conducting an in-depth study of Scott's works from the perspective of legal literary criticism can we gain a deeper understanding of his unique creative tendencies and the essence of the legal ideas contained in his works. In a sense, literary creation serves as a platform to convey dissatisfaction with existing legal systems, to articulate legal ideals that are difficult to realize within the judicial sphere, and to express aspirations for the improvement of Scottish and British law and the pursuit of judicial justice. "Scott, himself, describes Scottish law as a fabric formed originally under the strictest influence of feudal principles, but renovated and altered by the change of times, habits and manners, until it resembles some ancient castle, partly entire, partly ruinous, partly dilapidated, patched and altered during the succession of ages, by a thousand additions and circumstances—" (Gest 4). The pursuit of legal fairness and perfection is the essence of Scott's legal writings. Through literary form, he disseminates the

ideals of law and issues a rational call for judicial justice.

Funding: "A Study of Legal Writing and Poetic Justice in Walter Scott's Novels" (22YJA752023) sponsored by Humanities and Social Science Fund, Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.

Works Cited

Gest, John. *The Law and Lawyers of Sir Walter Scott.* Philadelphia: American Law Register, 1906.

Cottom, Daniel. "Violence and Law in the Waverley Novels." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring, 1981): 65-84.

Dolin, Kieran. *Fiction and the Law: Legal Discourse in Victorian and Modernist Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

Fisher, P. F. "Providence, Fate, and the Historical Imagination in Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian.*" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Sep., 1955): 99-114.

胡日佳：《普希金与司各特：普希金在历史小说领域的师承与创新》，《贵州大学学报》1990 年第 2 期：62-69。

[Hu, Rijia. "Pushkin and Scott: Pushkin's Inheritance and Innovation in the Field of Historical Fiction." *Journal of the Guizhou University*, no. 2, 1990, pp. 62-69.]

Hoisington, Sona Stephan. "Pushkin's Belkin and the Mystifications of Sir Walter Scott." *Comparative Literature*. vol. 33. no. 4, Autumn, 1981, pp. 342-357.

Hugo, Victor. *Things Seen: Essays.* Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1898.

Kroeber, Karl. *Romantic Narrative Art.* Madison: The University of Wisconsin, Press 1960.

皮尔逊：《狄更斯传》，谢天振等译。杭州：浙江文艺出版社 1985 年。

[Pearson, Hesketh. *Dickens, His Character, Comedy and Career,* translated by Xie Tianzhen et al. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 1985.]

Pittock, Murray. "Description to *Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe.*" https://www.librarything.com/work/4470931. Accessed 5 Aug. 2025.

Prawer, S. S. *Karl Marx and World Literature.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

Sampson, George. *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP,1975.

Scott, Walter. *Guy Mannering* (Dryburgh Edition of Scott's Novels). Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1892.

—. *The Antiquary* (Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels). Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995.

—. *Rob Roy* (Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels). Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008.

—. *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels). Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004.

苏联科学院高尔基世界文学研究所编：《英国文学史》（1789—1832）。北京：人民文学

出版社，1984年。

[Gorky Institute of World Literature, Academy of Sciences of USSR. *History of English Literature* (1789-1832). Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1984.]

杨思聪：《论司各特的历史小说》，《西南师范大学学报》（哲学社会科学版），1998 年第 6 期：81-85。

[Yang, Sicon. "On Scott's Historical Novels." *Journal of Southwest Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), no. 6, 1998, pp. 81-85.]

Modelling Yerevan in Latvian Printed Media (the 1940s–1990s)

Ilze Kačāne & Oksana Kovzele
Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University
Vienības 13, Daugavpils LV 5401, Latvia
Email: ilze.kacane@du.lv; oksana.kovzele@du.lv

Abstract This paper examines how, through specific categories of experience, memory and imagination, people interpret and mentally visualise physical environments. It brings together depictions of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, as found in Latvian periodicals printed from the 1940s to the 1990s by Latvian visitors. The study explores perceptions and representations of the city associated with an unfamiliar urban area by an observer who consciously or unconsciously selects, prioritises, and interprets the significance of the observed. By employing thematic analysis as a methodology, the research identifies patterns and themes that uncover a multi-layered image of the city showcasing its unique architecture, historical landmarks, and vibrant cultural scene within its cultural and historical context.

The portrayal of Yerevan in Latvian printed media during the Soviet era, influenced by censorship and propaganda, was characterised by stereotypes and framed through monumentalism and advancement, making it somewhat monolithic. Although visitors' experiences and perceptions were seemingly subjective and individualised, in reality, being so-called "socialist experiences", they were meant to represent the interests of the Soviet power and a unified Soviet worldview. However, the homogeneous model of Yerevan gradually transformed as a greater number of articles highlighted previously overlooked or fragmented aspects and cultural markers related to the most important archetypes of national identity, including its spiritual heritage and sacred architecture. Thus, the "foreign" (communist) metatext was gradually deconstructed and replaced by "one's own" (national) metatext which testifies to the city's capacity for introspection and renewal through intellectual experience. The sensory experiences of the city (colours, shapes, sounds, smells, etc.) have consistently been vividly depicted, showcasing it as a distinctive and multifaceted cultural environment.

Keywords city; cultural model; mental map; perceptions; periodicals; tangible and intangible culture

Authors **Ilze Kačāne**, Dr. philol., is Senior Researcher at the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University (Latvia). She has participated in several national and international research projects, including the FP7 *Measuring Youth Well-being* (MYWEB); she was also engaged in two Horizon2020 projects: *European Cohort Development Project* (ECDP) and *Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future* (CHIEF). Her main field of research is comparative studies, focusing on major paradigms of Western culture and literature, cultural anthropology, and identity. She is the author of more than 100 research articles and the monograph *Oskars Vailds. Latvijas 'oskariāna'/* [Oscar Wilde. Latvian 'Oscariana'] (2015). She is the editor of the *Journal of Comparative Studies*. Currently she is engaged in the Horizon Europe programme project *Promoting Understanding and Lifelong learning Successful Education through the ARTs and culture – PULSE-ART*, 2024–2027 (Grant Agreement ID 101178988; pulseartproject.eu) coordinated by Science for Change (Spain). **Oksana Kovzele**, Dr. philol., is Senior Researcher at the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University (Latvia). Her main research interests are comparative literature, comparative linguistics, and cultural studies. She has implemented a postdoctoral project *Transformations of Festive Culture in the Borderland: The Case of Latgale and Pskov Regions* supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and published her monograph *Svētku kultūras transformācijas pierobežā: Latgales un Pleskavas apgabala piemērs* [Transformations of Festive Culture in the Borderland: The Case of the Latgale and Pskov Region] (2020). Currently, O. Kovzele is engaged in Horizon Europe programme projects *Promoting Understanding and Lifelong learning Successful Education through the ARTs and culture* (PULSE-ART) (Grant Agreement ID 101178988) and *Cultural Literacies' Value in Europe* (CLiViE) (Grant Agreement ID 101132285).

I. Introduction

The diversity of definitions and approaches to the concept of "city" testifies to the versatility and multifacetedness of the phenomenon and its perception. The city (from Latin—*cīvitās*[1]) is one of the most impressive and significant inventions and creations of the human mind (Mumford) that needs to be considered by its value-semantic aspect (Remm). As an absorbing object of study of various disciplines, the city manifests itself as not only an area with defined boundaries and a structural unit of an administrative-territorial division but also as a representation of urban lifestyle

1 From *cīvis*—a citizen, native.

and an entity with specific socio-cultural features that exists in time (temporality) and space (spatiality) and is subject to change (dynamics) (Fedorenko and Kolos; Remm). Although the city is typically seen as "unnatural" (Palmer 130), it may be perceived as an expression of creativity, since it is the people who, through their participation (and by the diversity of subjective experiences, perceptions, reflections and associations), model its socio-cultural reality. "In terms of modelling capacity, urban space is the model, its own object, its own material and a creative application of (partial) self-models in the society. Therefore, the city together with its spatiality and agentive capacity could be regarded as a self-sustaining modelling phenomenon" (Remm 125). Being semiotic (having attributed meanings and created spatial forms to signify or be a sign of something), the city becomes a mechanism "forever recreating its past, which then can be synchronically juxtaposed with the present" (Lotman "Universe of the Mind…" 195).

Among the modellers of city's socio-cultural reality are reporters and journalists who may present objective or subjective perceptions of its geographic space. In addition, cities' coverage pattern in periodicals and other mass media channels is influenced by a range of diverse factors, including socio-political, economic, cultural, and others. Portrayals of a city affect the perceptions of its inhabitants, visitors and non-visitors on the local, national and international levels; however, "the 'reality' that the media transfers from distant places is conceptualised as the places' 'objective' or 'true' reality by those who do not live there" (Avraham). The impact of information on the opinion of non-visitors is the most powerful, as they experience a city and construct place images without travelling there; therefore, the more accurate the information, the more precise people's perceptions will be.

Presentations of place as not merely a matter of geographical/physical boundaries but a spatial matrix consisting of different time layers, city codes (primal significations within the frame of the phenomenology of perception (Merleau-Ponty)), and impressions form the public opinion and view. The primary knowledge of the world around us is obtained through images, senses, and sensations which help structure and identify the environment (Sepe). One's own and others' visual, sound, smell, taste, and tactile perceptions of the spatial dimension of the city impact the development of mental maps of the spaces (Lynch) or cognitive maps (Kaplan). Mental mapping—defined as the "outcome of conceptualisation of space, places, buildings and other features and their interrelations through specific categories of memory and imagination achieved through sensorimotor and emotional experiences" (Błahut 48)—is a process of combining perceptions and associations characterised by specific meanings. Encountering the city and

modelling its image on the basis of mental maps "allows us to determine urban landmarks" that are viewed as most typical by its visitors, as well as "places that have been ignored in their notion of the city" (Osóch and Czaplińska 112).

This paper synthesises images of Yerevan as depicted in Latvian Soviet periodicals in the 1940s–1990s. Representations of the city space modelled by its Latvian visitors are approached as views on the city "from the outside" or from "others" (i.e. non-Armenians), presenting observations and experiences that create, broadcast and replicate the image of the little-known city for Latvian readers (mostly non-visitors). These representations include reporters' and journalists' own experiences as well as those presented in interviews with factory workers, sportsmen, musicians, students, and other "Soviet people" (*homo sovieticus* who, through their attitudes and perceptions, responded to the rules of the system they were forced to navigate) after their visit to Yerevan. The study examines perceptions of the city in the frame of the formal ideology of the Communist Party and Soviet-era writing standards to determine the dynamic changes in the urban landscape and the most positively perceived signs[1] of the city that constitute the model of it constructed by outsiders.

The portrayal of one country in the press of the other was impacted by the fact that both Armenia and Latvia were Soviet Socialist Republics at the time and were a part of the "union of peoples"—a multinational community defined by the concept of "friendship of peoples" and presented as a happy Soviet family (Hornsby 236). After Latvia's Soviet occupation (1940), a change of political power, and the formation of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (1940–1941; 1944/5–1990), the country was deliberately exposed to Soviet ideology and propaganda until the middle of the 1980s, when a significant series of economic and political reforms known as *perestroika* [restructuring] and *glasnost* [transparency] policy commenced (Nollendorfs and Ščerbinskis) evoking also the Third Awakening[2] in Latvia.

After the end of World War II and for decades to come, especially with the onset of the Cold War and the descent of the Iron Curtain, the communist regime

1 Signs act as modelling systems shaping our perception and understanding of reality. According to Juri Lotman's semiotic theory, a sign is more than just a representation; it's a dynamic entity embedded within culture and history, constantly interacting with other signs and shaping meaning (Lotman "Ljudi i znaki").

2 The First National Awakening is the period in the second half of the nineteenth century when Latvian ethno-cultural awareness (Latvianness) and national identity were forged. The Second National Awakening refers to the establishment of the independent statehood in 1918. The Third National Awakening resulted in the restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia after 50 years of Soviet occupation.

limited not only freedom of movement but also freedom of speech. Official periodicals were controlled by the authorities of the Soviet power; they were strictly censored and did not permit any plurality of opinion. They were oriented towards suppressing national identity and the unification of ethnic groups and their culture to develop the Soviet Socialist nation: "To propagate the socialist ideas all social and cultural activities were subordinated to Communist ideology and the control of the Communist Party. Local authorities followed the patterns and schemes and employed the methods and strategies which were approved by the regime officials in the metropolis of the USSR—Moscow" (Badina et al. 122).

Under Soviet power, relations between Latvia (then the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR), 1940–1941; 1944/5–1990) and Armenia (then the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), 1920–1991) were based on value-normative regulators of social behaviour established by the regime and tools for sovietisation, including those in relation to representation of everyday Soviet life and Soviet-style cities.

II. The Soviet Image of Yerevan in Latvia

In most of the Latvian periodicals published in the 1940s–1990s, Yerevan is presented as both ancient and a modern city whose history dates back to the seventh century BCE ("Armenijas Mākslas darbinieku nams"; Nadirjans)—a city that is around 2000 years older than Riga[1] (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2750–750"). Although the year Yerevan was founded is often given inaccurately in the studied accounts and differs from one article to the next, mentions of an ancient Erebuni fortress[2] as the beginning of the city in 782 BCE can be found (Gūtmane). Characterised by such metaphors and epithets as "a giant quickly growing out of the old skirt" and "a rosy youthful city" (Nadirjans 2), Yerevan is mainly presented within the binary opposition of "past" vs. "present" where the past, taking into consideration the specificity of the epoch, is related to stagnation ("smallness", "darkness", "dirtiness", "poverty", "suffering", and "decay") or partially rejected (Emins "Mūsu Erevāna"), whereas the present is associated with dynamics and growth ("monumentalism", "light", "beauty", and "joy") and everything "new": "'Nor' [ŭnŋ]—'new'; this word in the contemporary Armenian dictionary of frequency could be one of the most often used. Nor Nork […], Nor Marasha, Nor Butania, Nor Aresh, […] Nor Arabkir, Nor Sebastia […]" (Gordons "No Erevānas

1 Riga, the capital of Latvia, was founded in 1201.

2 Latvian periodicals share impressions after attending the Erebuni Museum, as mentioned in the articles, established for the city's 2,750th anniversary (Ziediņš).

piezīmju bloka. 2750–750" 4).

Based on ideology of the political system a turning point is defined by some authors in the development of the city described as being "20 years older than ancient Rome" (Zommers 2) and older than Babylon (Igitjans). This turning point is given as 1920, the year Soviet rule was established, leaving a huge imprint on Yerevan's urban landscape and contributing to its grand Soviet-era architecture. To centralise authority in Moscow and emblematise it as the top of the socio-political and geographical hierarchy, a new homogenous structure was imposed on other cities of the USSR under Stalin which, on the one hand, mimicked the "icon" city (Moscow) and, on the other hand, ensured that the cities of satellite states remained in a subordinate position to the "centre", thus representing sameness and spatial unity of the Soviet Union (DeHann).

According to Grigor Hasratyan (1919–2001), introduced to Latvian readers as the mayor of Yerevan (1962–1975) and architect in a conversation on the Yerevan of tomorrow, "the architects often say that the beginning of a house is a dream. People who plan an entire city have many dreams, but they must come together in a monolithic, rational formation" (Jaunzeme and Lazda 20). Latvian readers encounter Yerevan as "the city of pink travertine" (Dozorcevs and Moriss 3); they find a city that has gone through major transformations and experienced "its second birth" ("Ararata ielejā" 2) thanks to the grand reconstruction work undertaken in accordance with the conceptual urban plan of the modern city by Alexander Tamanian (1878–1936), approved in 1924. These reforms broke the "accidental" structure of the city (Čaklais 15). As a result of the search for urban unity "from the city with chaotic and centuries-ago-built constructions, and crooked streets" Yerevan has been transformed into "a comfortable city with wide green main roads, large squares and interesting architectural ensembles" ("Ararata ielejā" 2). In order to emphasise the "greatness" of the Soviet system, Latvian periodicals abundantly express the opinion that during the Soviet period Armenia, "the land of mountains" and "a former tsarist colony" (Grigorjevs 2), was reshaped into "a country with a highly developed national culture, modern industry and extensive socialistic agriculture" (ibid.). In this context, newspaper articles present Yerevan as a real metropolis, a truly modern city with magnificent architecture, a highly developed multi-branch industry, and famous research institutions, universities, theatres, and museums. Thus, contrary to Armenia being presented as a huge natural museum under the open sky, Yerevan is "daringly beautiful" in its manmade transformations (Čaklais 15).

Since the 1940s, the Lenin Monument (1940[1]) by sculptor Sergey Merkurov and Lenin Square—"the core of the radial ring of the city centre" (Papēdis 2) have been consistently presented in Latvian periodicals as the central and most symbolic sights of Yerevan that manifest the Soviet power (TASS fotohronika "Ļeņina laukums Erevānā"; "Armēnijas PSR galvaspilsēta Erevana"; "Erevāna. V. I. Ļeņina laukums"; TASS fotohronika "Erevāna…", etc.). Scrupulous descriptions of the monument present it as the most recognisable hallmark of Yerevan's architecture: "The almost eight-meter-high bronze figure of the great leader rests on a polished granite pedestal based on a dark-grey Armenian marble platform. […] The whole balustrade seems to be woven from a bright Armenian national ornament which twists into peculiar stone lace" (Nadrijans 2). Since the 1950s, Latvian readers have been provided with a more complete view of Lenin Square, as it is presented as a complex of buildings—a "museum of building materials of the republic" (ibid.) that includes, as the periodicals state, the first Government House (built in 1941), the Second Government House (built in 1955), Museum of Armenian History (built in 1957), the hotel "Armenia" (1958), and the Council of Trade Unions and Communication Centre (1958). When presenting the rhythm of Yerevan, Lenin Square is immortalised as the heart whose veins—avenues and streets "with the green plane trees planted in their rows, along the edges"—carry blood "towards the city centre—Lenin Square" (Emins "Erevana. Stāsti par galvaspilsētām" 2).

Although symbols of Armenian cultural heritage and prominent streets from the central Kentron district such as Abovyan Street[2] and Tamanian Avenue (named after the main architect of Yerevan) are mentioned alongside so-called "correct" place-names and typical expressions of Communist power and ideology (e.g. Stalin Avenue and Lenin Square,[3] known respectively as Mashtots Avenue and Republic Square since 1990) (Demirčjans 4), no detailed characterisation or context necessary for readers are provided. Visual images such as Mount Ararat—a symbol of nationhood known as the Holy Mountain of Armenians which can be seen from the capital city—as well as images of Yerevan's urban landscape alongside the

1 The articles provide the year 1920 as the year Lenin monument was erected, e.g. Papēdis.

2 The first planned street of Yerevan that runs from the central Republic Square to the statue of famous Armenian writer Khachatur Abovyan (1809–1848).

3 The street renaming policy in the Armenian SSR was mainly implemented in several stages—in the 1920–1930s, 1946–1950, the second half of the 1960s, and the end of the 1970s. It was based on the "four level system of adopting decisions on place-name renamings, allowing Moscow control of the entire place-naming process" (Saparov 185-186). Soviet toponyms originated with or were derived from figures and concepts important to the Communist regime, e.g., Lenin, Stalin, October, May (ibid.).

symbols of socialism (e.g., Shahumyan Square and a 1931 monument devoted to a Communist party figure) are presented in the periodicals with little or no commentary, mainly emphasising the changes to the city landscape initiated under the Soviet rule and their successful outcomes. In the publications of the 1950s aimed at marketing Stalin's personality cult[1] and providing an iconographic perspective, a special place is allotted to the bronze statue of Stalin on the pedestal (1950)—one of the biggest monuments to Stalin on the territory of the USSR (sculptor Sergey Merkurov and architect Rafayel Israyelian) erected on top of the hill at the end of Stalin Avenue (now—Mesrop Mashtots Avenue) overlooking the city and its suburbs.

The mental cartography of the Latvian reader was gradually enriched with architectural monuments manifesting Soviet collective memory, among them the Park of the Communards and the monument to the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution (1967), which is consistently mentioned in the articles praising the achievements of the Soviet power. A series of publications mention Yerevan's 2,750th anniversary, celebrated in October 1968, while others provide readers with Latvian students' impressions of and memories from visiting Yerevan, especially in the 1970s. In this connection, the symbols of Yerevan most frequently written about are "Mother-Yerevan"—the statue of Mother Armenia (designed by Ara Harutyunyan), erected in 1967 in place of a dismantled 1962 Stalin monument; the Eternal Fire in front of the statue; and Victory Park—a park of 2,750 fountains on Khachatur Abovyan Street, created "in memory of the fighters who fell while bringing about Soviet rule in Armenia" (Davtjans 3; Kleinberga; Lapuķe; Lejstrauta; Ziediņš). The Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex (completed in 1967) at the top of Tsitsernakaberd Hill, honouring the victims of Ottoman Turkey's 1915 massacre of ethnic Armenians, is typically characterised as a pilgrimage site that provokes remembrance and reflection rather than a sight to be viewed among the other elements of Yerevan's architecture (Lapuķe; Papēdis), thus putting collective memory to the fore.

These writings offer testimony that periodicals were a major tool of the Communist Party aimed at educating the New Soviet Man, or *homo sovieticus*, and at suppressing democratic, civic-minded expression throughout the territory of the USSR (Soboleva). When educating the Latvian SSR's younger generation,

1 In the context of Stalin's personality cult, Latvian periodicals mention achievements of Armenian painting and textile industry and the portrait of Joseph Stalin by the Yerevan master and carpet weaver Dovlat Karanfilyan—"an outstanding work of art" representing a new portrait-carpet genre in the Soviet textile art (V. K. 11).

Yerevan is presented both programmatically and emotionally; in one textbook, as well as positioning it on a map of the USSR and Armenia, the author attempts to trigger the reader's imagination: "And suddenly the city opens up in front of you, suddenly, like a fairy tale, everything opens up like on the palm of your hand. The city is located in a hollow, with mountain ranges rising on three sides. But from the south, the flat valley of Ararat rises" (Emins "Erevana. Stāsti par galvaspilsētām" 2). Similarly, young readers are addressed in different issues of the newspapers *Pionieris* [Pioneer], issued from 1940 to 1990, and *Bērnība* [Childhood], issued from 1945 to 1964, where the focus usually shifts from the past and ancient cultural relics to present-day developments, such as a discussion on Yerevan industrial mines as a part of thematic meetings "Journey through the Soviet Union" (Mežs).

In Latvian Soviet periodicals, Yerevan is depicted in the context of persistent urban growth and striving to reach its economic goals, all in accordance with the rapid and large-scale industrialisation initiated in Soviet cities. To measure the city's progress and to exemplify urban growth, statistical information often overshadows the narratives on monuments of cultural significance. The essence of urban elements is presented in terms of the increasing number of industrial, scientific and cultural objects in the city—multistorey apartment blocks, road networks, industrial enterprises, and educational establishments—as well as in the reconstruction of the infrastructure system.[1] It is also exemplified by mentioning a number of factories that were renovated or built after WWII, such as Yerevan Factory of Synthetic Rubber (Vilkāre), Yerevan Electro-Machine Building Factory, Yerevan Glass Electro-Machine Building Factory, Yerevan Glass Packing Factory ("Staļina premiju piešķiršana…"; TASS "Padomju Savienībā"), and a cognac factory (Grigorjevs). These are accompanied by images in periodicals aimed at revealing grandiosity of these industrial buildings (Vilkāre). Perception of modern Yerevan is broadened with information about the cascade of a hydroelectric station, Yerevan

1 For example, periodicals published in the 1940s mention eight Yerevan higher education establishments, among them the Marxism-Leninist evening university and other universities ("Armenijas Mākslas darbinieku nams"), 27 vocational schools (placing special emphasis on "Yerevan Vocational School of Energy" (TASS "Jauni enerģetikas technikumi"), and fifteen scientific research institutes (Vilkāre). Among the presented information, in 1958 the press mentions 85 secondary schools; 11 higher education institutions; a national university; and polytechnic, agricultural, medical, zoo-veterinary, pedagogical and other institutes, as well as more than 20 scientific research institutes at the ASSR Academy of Sciences (Nadirjans). The mention of a clinical hospital with a capacity of 800 beds in Achapnyak (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2700+50") aims to evidence the impressiveness of the Soviet healthcare system; however the focus is laid on measures of inputs (quantitative indicators/ sums) rather than measures of outputs (effectiveness).

TES, the city's gas main ("Ararata ielejā"), and other essential industrial sights and engineering achievements.

Experiences of "meeting Rainis in Armenia" (Varlamovs 2) are also presented in the context of industrialisation and Latvian workers' visits to a car manufacturing association located in the area of Rainis Street in Yerevan. Within the factory walls, the words of Latvia's most prominent poet, Rainis' (1895–1929), are encountered, cited in Latvian. Numerous identical reprints were systematically disseminated in the Latvian press on this theme, oriented towards the depiction of industrial development of Soviet Yerevan, socialist competitiveness, and cooperation between Armenian enterprises and the Latvian bus factory (RAF) by means of familiar cultural icons.

The city's growth is also emphasised by articles discussing the appearance of new "luxury" neighbourhoods—blocks of living houses "meeting world standards" in Cheromushki ("Ararata ielejā"; Vītola), Shaumyana and Nork (Zarjans) and in the area of Amiryan Street and Teryan Street (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2700+50"). Statistics are also given for structures representing the sphere of culture (Vilkāre), many of which come into focus upon their opening, for example, the new Armenian National Philharmonic Concert Hall (TASS "Erevanā atklāta Armenijas…"), Razdan Cinema ("Kinoteatru celtnieciba Erevanā"), the Open Air Cinema in Tumanyan Street, a funicular station building, a twin building in Sayat-Nova Street (Zarjans), Aragacs Cinema in Achapnyak district, the Gallery of Children's Drawings on Tumanyan Street, the House of Chess, and a 14-storey Ani Hotel (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2700+50").

Another important object representing the capital city's architecture is the tower of Yerevan's Youth Palace (1979), descriptions and photos of which are actively published in newspapers (e.g., "Erevānā"; "Jauniešu pils Erevānā"; "Arhitekti Arturs Tarhanjans…" etc.). Yerevan's Youth Palace, also known as *Kukuruznik* [Corncob], is described in the Latvian periodicals as a cylindrical structure that is "[n]ot some youth house or centre, but a castle" built "according to the principle: if you build once, then [build] thoroughly, ambitiously and in a unique manner" (Prape 30). A sharp contrast between the modern building and numerous old houses on both slopes near the palace is perceived by authors as a sign of progress and recognised as a benefit for the city's modernisation; no sense of loss is expressed concerning the expected destruction of the old dwellings even by their dwellers (ibid.). This construction represents a general paradigm of depicting Yerevan as a city for youth and the future—a view actively circulated since the end of the 1940s, emphasising that the younger generation may pursue a variety of activities in the

field of education and culture (e.g., in the new building of the Gabriel Sundukyan State Academic Drama Theatre or the science centre), as well as in sport, with textual images regularly disseminated of subjects such as the university stadium and sports centre, the Spartak Stadium, and many others (TASS "Sporta jaunceltnes Armenijā"; TASS "Zinātniskais centrs Erevānā"; TASS fotohronika "Erevāna[a]").

In the 1980s, descriptions of buildings seldom mentioned until now—such as the Konda block ("Erevānas vecais kvartāls"), Achalyak Supermarket (TASS fotohronika "Erevāna[b]"), Rossiya Cinema, Zvartnotsa Airport, and the city metro (Papēdis)—begin to reach Latvian readers. The new constructions are considered from the point of view of their design, thus, again, praising not only the Soviet system in general, but its creator—in this case, the mastery of Armenian architects and their innovative approach to building. For example: "Both the plain and the nearby mount [Ararat] determined the shape of the airport. The airport could not be high, because then it would contrast with the nearby mountain and could not be included in the construction of the Ararat valley" (ibid. 3). The airport is vividly presented as "a new interesting architectural creation", "an original arch structure with a mushroom-shaped tower in the centre", and "a unique air harbour" (Černišovs 5). To better illustrate the achievements, periodicals often offer schematic pictures of buildings (e.g., for a complex of living houses in Kafan, the Classical and Chamber Music House, the Sport Palace, the building of the Council of Ministers, and the school of Young Gymnasts) (Zarjans).

III. "Genius Loci" of Yerevan

As an integral part of the city's identity, a meta-concept—*genius loci* or the spirit of the place—imparts uniqueness and originality to it. Being "the intangible quality of a material place, perceived both physically and spiritually" (Vecco 225), *genius loci* is a signifier of a process happening unintentionally. The past, present and future are not only categories of time in an individual's life but also in a constantly changing city's life. Like non-derivable units, they merge into each other—the physical place, the spirit of that place, and the ways in which both have evolved (and will continue to evolve) over time. Being perceived and experienced by humans, *genius loci* reveal themselves through tangible and intangible features and may be considered "the most important archetypes of national identity" (Stepanjan and Simjan 9) or "semanticised cultural markers" (Simjan 13).

Yerevan's "iconography" manifests itself through complex and multidimensional structures, the essence of which was not fully and openly elaborated upon during the Soviet period. For decades, Yerevan was presented as a city of rich cul-

tural-historical heritage; however, its religious heritage and sacral architecture were underrepresented. During the Soviet era, the secularisation policy enforced by the Soviet authorities contributed to the destruction or transformation of sacred spatial structures and churches into places mostly used for the purpose of education and entertainment. By presenting the city as secular, visitors' pilgrimages became educational excursions within the framework of work or study mobilities. Thus, Yerevan's religious code (especially that related to the life and work of saints) was actually muted and presented in the Latvian Soviet periodicals by mentioning the places located outside the city borders to emphasise the bygone past and history. Among them are the ruins of Zvartnots Cathedral (a vivid landmark of medieval Armenian architecture), St Hripsime Church, St Gayane Church, Echmiadzin Cathedral, and Geghard Cave Monastery, among others (Apsītis; Jēkabsone; Jēruma; Ķepiņa; ZA kora kolektīvs). However, in the context of the category of the present, these testimonies of the past are often neglected: "if we want to be fair, we must say that in years past, this ancient strange style hinders the architecture. New times, new building materials, and new construction methods force us to search for a new expression of national form in architecture" (Emins "Mūsu Erevāna" 2).

One expression of Yerevan's *genius loci* is a "mighty and as-yet unfinished sculpture" of Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian script (405), made from a massive basalt rock by sculptor Ghukas Chubaryan in 1962. It "expresses a proud spirit and wise mind" (Jaunzeme and Lazda 19). As an embodiment of the thousand-year-old culture and Armenian Christian literature, the statue is admired on the way to Matenadaran—the Museum of Ancient Manuscripts, which "seems to have grown out of the grey stone of the mountain", the same as Mashtots—out of the Armenian nation (ibid). Both manifestations of Armenian identity share an aura of majesty, eternity, silence and gratitude that stands in opposition to temporal haste, noise and voices.

The impact of Matenadaran on the city's landscape is exemplified by proving its development stages: "In 1921, on the basis of Echmiadzin Matenadaran, the Institute of Culture and History was established. In 1939, Matenadaran was transferred to the capital, where it became a part of the new building of the State Public Library named after A. Myasnikyan[1]. But two decades later, Matenadaran moved to a special building and was transformed into a scientific research institute for ancient manuscripts. Since 1962, it has been named after Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian script" (Sarma 23). Brief notes in Latvian periodicals

1 Now known as National Library of Armenia, founded in 1832. Between 1925 and 1990 it was named after Aleksandr Myasnikyan, a military leader of Soviet Armenia.

mention the fact that visitors to Yerevan are always introduced to the depository of ancient parchments Matenadaran, as, for example, in the case of choral singers from the Latvian Academy of Sciences and representatives of other Latvia's delegations (Lečinskis; ZA kora kolektīvs). Although the significance of the mentioned "cultural artefacts" (Simjan 10) to Armenian national and cultural identity is revealed in very general terms, the very fact that they are mentioned shows the authors' attempts to instil these ancient codes of Armenian architecture and culture in the mental map of Latvian readers.

The monument to David of Sassoun by Yervand Kochar (1959)—the main hero of Armenia's national epic poem, *Daredevils of Sassoun*[1] "who cuts the air with a gold sword" (Lielmeža 2)—is given tremendous significance. The legendary hero, also referred to as the "Armenian Lāčplēsis"[2] (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2750–750" 4; Kartenbeka and Siliņa 2-3; Hofmane 3) and related to literary characters by Rainis (Hofmane 3), is continuously described and visualised in publications dating from the 1960s onwards (Mežvēvers; Igitjans etc.). Being another "peculiar symbol of the city" (Noskovs 4), the monument meets visitors arriving to the city by train (ibid). It is described as the pride of the Armenian people, kept in their hearts in the home country and in exile: "The eyes of one and a half million ordinary Armenians scattered around the world are also focused on it" (Pīlādzis 23). The Latvian authors focus on details of the monument and its symbolic meaning: "Water flows from a bowl under the horse's hooves. Symbolically, it represents that the measure of the patience of the oppressed people is full, and, for this reason, David has pulled out his sword to go against the conquerors" (Mežvēvers 3); "the horse has overturned the vessel of patience and the vessel of tears of the oppressed people […] The symbol is subject to invincibility" (Prome 3). The monument is so organically connected with the image of Yerevan (and Armenia) that "it seems to have been standing in the square of the station for centuries", but still manifests dynamism and action (Igitjans 18).

Another mythological symbol mentioned in the Latvian SSR press is the so-

1 The Armenian national epic poem is masterpiece of oral history dating back to the eighth century. It was first set down in written form in 1873 by Garegin Srvandzediants and describes the struggle of the Armenian people against Arab invaders (see more: Khatchadourian).

2 Lāčplēsis [from Latvian "the bear-slayer"] is a mythological hero, a spiritual force, and national symbol of Latvia symbolizing the fight against Latvia's invaders. The story was written by Andrejs Pumpurs (1841–1902), a representative of the New Latvians movement of intellectuals during the First Latvian National Awakening, and was published in 1888. Under Soviet occupation, Lāčplēsis was attributed "a pioneering role" and his image was employed when emphasising the economic achievements of the Soviet Republic (Lāms 134).

called southern gate to Yerevan, described as three 15 m high tuff masses raised with an image of an eagle with spread wings on the gate's concrete pillar made by sculptor Ara Ha and architect Rafayel Israyelian. "The bird has a small stonecutter's hammer in its claws—a symbol of creation. An arch has been created at the base of the arrows, from which there is a wonderful view of the valley—at the foot of the mountain" (TASS "Erevānas dienvidu vārti" 4).

In general, the analysed data testify to the fragmentary representation of Yerevan's *genius loci* in the Latvian SSR periodicals and rarely depict their memorial sites. For example, lengthy descriptions of Tamanian are provided, but only a brief mention is encountered of a statue of Tamanian standing in front of Yerevan's iconic landmark, the Cascade complex: "We see the monument to the architect Tamanian, [...] [and] many other notable and historically significant places. Unfortunately, only driving by […]" (Pļaviņš 2).

IV. Yerevan's Aesthetic Perception

Despite relatively unified representations, Latvian visitors and readers perceive Yerevan as a romanticised urban space on the foot of Mount Ararat, that is, as a city that welcomes its visitors by triggering all their senses.

For decades, the city was mainly characterised by uniformity and sameness, but gradually the sensory world of Yerevan came to be emphasised by its diversity of both colour and form. For example, "one house is not like another. Wide foundations, semi-arches, beautiful balcony lines, high open expanses of courtyards with unexpected views of the city" (Varlamovs 2). The bulk of all descriptions of Yerevan provided in Latvian periodicals speak about Armenia's local riches and represent Yerevan as a consolidated volcanic mass—tuff. The capital is enthusiastically immortalised as a city in red due to the notable buildings and structures made of red tuff, as seen in Baghramyan Avenue, Lenin Avenue, Stalin Avenue, Teryan Street, Rainis Street and elsewhere (Emins "Erevana. Stāsti par galvaspilsētām"; Nardijans). The colourfulness contributes to the sensual perception of the city: "This majestic stone that can be of different colours—pink, white, black—determines architectural forms which are organically related to the creativity of the Armenian people" (Varlamovs 2).

The greatness of the city is emphasised by not only Soviet monumentalism but also the aesthetic perception of its architecture and decorative ornaments, including national ones, and bas-reliefs: "all houses have been decorated by rich ornaments, flowers, vines and leaves cut into the stone—from that alone, it seems it is always spring in the city" (Emins "Erevana. Stāsti par galvaspilsētām" 2). Periodicals also

present specific Yerevan sights (houses, shops, pedestrianised streets, garages etc.) which underline the city's vertical dimension, as well as its brightness, lightness, and feeling of elation (water features, flying birds, silhouettes of people in motion) ("Gaisma pār Hajastanu"; Flaums; Pooks; Kipere).

The original lighting in Yerevan's streets—neon "tubes", mercury bulbs, street crossings illuminated in an innovative way, and bulbs like "small suns" decorating the city centre (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 'LAV'…")—creates an imaginative aesthetic-romantic urban landscape. In addition, the sunlit city with the two peaks of Mount Ararat in the distance combines both overwhelming industrial noise—"the noise of engines fills the city" (Varlamovs 2)—and complete silence, allowing the visitor to experience romantic dreaminess: "The city, emerging from the pre-dawn fog, gradually turns pink, orange, golden. The sun has already risen, but the colours do not disappear" (Nadirjans 2). Thus, Yerevan—"the capital of the land of Ararat" (Pīlādzis 22) located between "the sun and the stones" (Papēdis 2)—is described as not only a quintessence of the achievements of modern architecture but also as a space bathed in light and surrounded by tranquillity. In Latvian periodicals, we can also see Latvian translations of Armenian authors' works, such as, e.g., Mikayel Harutyunyan's poem "Yerevan" translated by Valdis Roja:

Tu kā pulksteni uz rokas sauli nes,
Datumu nevienu ēnai neatļauj.
Staru bultas stundām skaita minūtes.
Ciparnīca dūrē gadusimtus kļauj.

Erevāna, vaigs tavs saulē kveldināts,
Dzīva pastāvēji visās ugunīs.
Prati nesadegt, kad viss bij liesmām klāts,
Mums no tevis sirdīs dzirkstis līs.

Erevāna, vētrās ceļvedis un sargs,
Saules kompass tev uz mūžiem dots.
Tavu dzīvību laiks pārbaudījis bargs,
Tā kā dārgu balvu to mums saņemt gods.

Nosargāji debesis, kur zilgmo rīts,
Asinis tu atdod, sauli—velti cer!
Viss, par ko es sapņoju, ir piepildīts,

Bet vēl jaunai dziesmai apvāršņus tu ver.

Atdzejojis Valdis Roja

(Arutjunjans 4).

The sensory world is also provoked by different smells and tastes. Yerevan's gastronomic code is displayed and made popular in descriptions of eateries of various types (e.g., "Araksa" coffee bar in Abovyan Street, "Ekjat" [a Fairytale] on the corner of Tumanyan Street, "Vahagan" bar, "Anahit" café in Nalbandyan Street, and "Sasuna" restaurant (the name of the street is not mentioned) (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2700+50"; Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2750–750")). Although Yerevan is compared with the capital of Latvia—Riga, whose population was as large as that of Yerevan at that time, the catering sphere in Yerevan is claimed to be far more progressive (with longer working days, much fresh green garnish, mutton, etc.) than that in Latvia (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 'LAV'…").

V. Yerevan in Latvian Press at the End of the Twentieth Century

A dramatic shift in the content of newspaper articles on Yerevan can be observed from the middle of the 1980s. This change can be attributed to the new political situation in the USSR, including Soviet Latvia and Soviet Armenia, where a battle for independence in the general context of the conflict between Western pluralism and Eastern authoritarianism was taking place (Loth and Knight). In the context of a complicated geopolitical and armed conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Lenin Square in Yerevan came to embody transformation and an arena for the demonstration of political power and civic will. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Latvian readers' perceptions of Yerevan were based on news of Armenians' protests and their struggle for independence, as well as changes brought by new conditions that signalled an approaching transformation in the city's landscape.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the European Union and Armenia on August 22, 1992, and the initiation of cooperation and visa-free entry procedures for EU citizens entering Armenia (2013) provided opportunities for more tourists from Latvia to explore Yerevan and create their own individual mental maps of the city. Perceived as exotic, sun-drenched and colourful (an opinion largely based on Yerevan's representation in Latvian literature, mass media, tour operator offers and so on) the city in the mountainous Caucasus region became a great attraction for Latvians.

The main tendency in depicting Yerevan after the restoration of independence involved substituting the paradigm of Soviet heritage with that of Armenian national cultural and religious heritage, which symbolised a complex post-Socialist transformation. Yerevan was modelled using the category of historical memory, emphasising the sights and events associated with tragic events in the distant or recent past. One example provided in the Latvian periodical *Diena* [Day] in 1993 was a failed attempt to blow up the Lenin Monument in Republic Square (LETA). Although no detailed information was included, the news apparently referred to the pedestal (removed in 1996) rather than the monument itself, which was pulled down from its former centrally displayed site in the early 1990s. While "deconstructing the communist metatext", a new metatext was created, purposefully replacing "foreign" cultural codes with those of "one's own" (Stepanjan and Simjan 9). Having been presented as the "Caucasian prisoner", Yerevan's text shifted to representing the nation's sufferings and struggle for freedom under diverse political powers, including Stalin's regime, and in relation to the Great Purge (1936) and June 14—the Day of Remembrance for the thousands of oppressed and deported Armenians in 1949. This day coincides with the day commemorating mass deportations of Latvians by the Soviet power in 1941 occupied Latvia. Thus, the "new metatext" brought the Latvian reader closer to grasping their own national history and reconsidering it in a wider context. However, more detailed articles in Latvian periodicals on the transformation of Yerevan and the appearance of new spatial elements in the city, including the inclusion of monuments to the victims of Soviet power, can be found only at the beginning of the new millennium; this topic requires separate research.

VI. Conclusion

The research conducted for this article allows us to conclude that modelling the image of Yerevan in the Latvian press in the 1940s–1990s is a multidimensional process that reveals complex relationships between power and cultural manifestations. The data from the thematically relevant articles reveal a gradual change of emphasis in the narrative dedicated to the city of Yerevan in the Latvian press.

For decades, during the height of the era of propaganda, publications on Yerevan in the Latvian press were used as a tool to craft a strong and singular narrative that glorified Soviet power and "friendships between the people". Being employed by the Soviet system as a means of expression and manifestation of political ideas, culture promoted ideology and became a kind of power itself,

not only in the city it represented but far beyond its borders. Although human perceptions of a city are affected by multiple factors—available knowledge and experience, presented and perceived information, social behaviour patterns, and cultural background and mentalities, as well as external stimuli, ideologies, and beliefs (Osóch and Czaplińska)—the cultural model of Yerevan in Soviet Latvia, taking into consideration the specificity of the era, was created by roughly identical descriptions.

By consistently reporting on spatial and social modernisation achievements, in the frame of Soviet secularisation policy, Yerevan's sacral architecture was paid little attention. Aimed at meeting ideological objectives and conveying the message of "successful" Soviet economic reforms, textual and visual images of Yerevan's industrialisation and growing affluence were presented to the Latvian readership, becoming a mirror of social, economic, and cultural change that reflected on the most emblematic urban signs as testimonies of social order and development. In the process of transforming the Armenian capital into a modern socialist city, emphasis was laid on the creation of new institutions for diverse socio-cultural practices. Thus, although Latvian readers gradually got to know Yerevan as a large industrial, educational, art and sports hub, newspaper articles failed to present a full-bodied physiognomy of the city, instead focusing on its most visible Soviet-era symbols.

Over time, content inconsistent with Soviet ideological positions (Yerevan's spirituality, creativity, freedom, etc.) was increasingly included in Latvian media. As the influence of censorship decreased, it became possible to avoid a homogeneous presentation of Yerevan and depict the authenticity and integrity of the city. A tendency emerged to include the monuments of the nation's culture, memory, identity and sense of place (i.e., earlier forms and images of the city's memory traces). This reminds us that the "demands and pressures of social reality constantly affect the material order of the city, yet it remains the theatre of our memory. Its collective forms and private realms tell us of the changes that are taking place; they remind us as well of the traditions that set this city apart from others" (Boyer 31). The city provokes identification and interaction with all elements of the urban space, "whereas the observer subjectively, often subconsciously, chooses, hierarchises and assigns meanings to what he/she sees" (Osóch and Czaplińska 111). From the second half of the 1980s, Yerevan was presented as a unique and multidimensional cultural space in the freedom-seeking discourse, and therefore spiritually close and understandable to a Latvian reader.

The study has also revealed that the stereotyped images of Yerevan by Latvian visitors were largely determined by the perspective of the traveller—usually Soviet

workers or representatives of the elite loyal to the Soviet power—often guided by a local host as a representative of a corresponding sphere. Therefore, the choice of sites was based on the specificity of the field one represented, and through their depiction these sites were obligatorily included in the general framework of the Soviet ideology. Although such experiences and perceptions were seemingly subjective and individualised, in reality, being "socialist experiences", they were meant to represent the interests of the Soviet power and a unified Soviet worldview, i.e., to convey "'the Soviet way of life'—the slogan of the era" (Roth-Ey and Zakharova). In this way, they were applied as a powerful tool of propaganda in the frame of official paradigms used to form a public opinion. This, however, did not exclude a diversity of views and experiences on a private level, which means that Yerevan, like other cities, is capable of self-reflection and self-renewal through intellectual experience (Stepanjan and Simjan 2012). Its urban codes (cultural artefacts, images, sculptures, buildings or their parts), as presented in Latvian periodicals of the analysed period, are markers of social and cultural memory that, at a different level, reveal the most significant layers of culture.

Works cited

Apsītis, Vaidelotis. "Matenadarāna gaismā." *Literatūra un Māksla*, no. 37 (14.09.1968), pp. 6-7.

"Ararata ielejā." *Liesma* (Valmiera), no. 206 (28.12.1965), p. 2.

"Arhitekti Arturs Tarhanjans, Račja Pogosjans un Spartaks Hačikjans pie Jaunatnes pils Erevānā." *Padomju Jaunatne*, no. 109 (04.06.1982), p. 2.

"Armenijas Mākslas darbinieku nams." *Komunists* (Liepāja), no. 248 (19.10.1948), p. 3.

"Armēnijas PSR galvaspilsēta Erevana. Ļeņina laukums." *Padomju Karogs* (Talsi), no. 69 (08.06.1972), p. 2.

Arutjunjans, Mikaels. "Erevānai." *Cīņa*, no. 114 (18.05.1969), p. 4.

Avraham, Eli. "Cities and Their News Media Images." *Cities*, vol. 17, no. 5 (October), 2000, 363-370. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0264-2751(00)00032-9. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264275100000329?via%3Dihub> [Accessed September 2023].

Badina, Evita, Badins, Žans and Kovzele, Oksana. "The Soviet Image of the USA in Latvian Satirical Journalism of the 1960s: Textual and Visual Code." *Journal of Comparative Studies*, vol. 14, no. 43, 2021, 118-145. https://doi.org/10.59893/jcs.14(43).006

Błahut, Grzegorz. "Mapy mentalne jako wyobrażenia miejskichobszarów kulturowych." *Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne*, vol. 13, 2013, pp. 47-56.

Boyer, M. Christine. *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994.

Čaklais, Māris. “Armēnija – ogle, grafīts, dimants.” *Literatūra un Māksla*, no. 4 (28.01.1983), p. 15.

Černišovs, M. “Unikāla gaisa osta.” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 124 (31.05.1982), p. 5.

Davtjans, Armens. “Postenis Nr. 1. Pie mums viesojas Armēņu pionieru laikraksts (Pionieru sauksme).” *Pionieris*, no. 98 (10.12.1982), p. 3.

DeHaan, Heather D. *Stalinist City Planning. Professionals, Performance, and Power.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

Demirčjans, Dereniks. “Erevana.” *Taisneiba*, no. 102 (29.11.1940), p. 4.

Dozorcevs, V. and Moriss, G. “Kad cilvēkam pāri četrdesmit.” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 180 (02.08.1965), p. 3.

Emins, Gevorks. “Erevana. Stāsti par galvaspilsētām.” *Pionieris*, no. 27 (02.07.1953), p. 2.

—. “Mūsu Erevāna.” *Cīņa*, no. 200 (26.08.1967), p. 2.

“Erevāna. V. I. Ļeņina laukums.” *Liesma* (Valmiera), no. 110 (14.07.1972), p. 1.

“Erevānas vecais kvartāls.” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 177 (02.08.1989), p. 4.

“Erevānā.” *Zvaigzne*, no. 18 (20.09.1975), p. 10.

Fedorenko, Yuliia and Kolos, Yuliia. “Definition of Concept ‘City’: Multidisciplinary Approach.” *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Building Innovations: ICBI* 2022. Eds. Volodymyr Onyshchenko, Gulchohra Mammadova, Svitlana Sivitska and Akif Gasimov, vol. 299 of Lecture Notes in Civil Engineering. Springer Nature, 2023, 663-670. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-17385-1_54

Flaums, L. “Jauni materiāli par Šaumjanu.” *Rīgas Balss* no. 106 (06.05.1961), p. 3.

“Gaisma pār Hajastanu.” *Zvaigzne*, no. 11 (05.06.1961), p. 14.

Gordons, F. “No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2750–750.” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 213 (11.09.1970), p. 4.

—. “No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. ‘LAV’ nozīmē ‘LABI’.” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 214 (12.09.1970), p. 4.

—. “No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2700+50.” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 215 (14.09.1970), p. 6.

Grigorjevs, I. “Padomju Armenija.” *Liesma* (Valmiera), no. 142 (08.12.1946), p. 2.

Gūtmane, Diāna. “Viesos pie senatnes.” *Liesma*, no. 4 (01.04.1986), pp. 26-27.

Ģērmanis, Andrejs. “Armēņu zemē.” *Literatūra un Māksla*, no. 28 (15.07.1972), pp. 8-9.

Hofmane, I. “Vai tas būs Rīgā vai Erevānā…” *Cīņa*, no. 231 (06.10.1982), p. 3.

Hornsby, Robert. *The Soviet Sixties*. United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 2023.

Igitjans, Henrihs. “Gleznotāji—arī tā ir Erevāna.” *Māksla*, no. 3 (01.07.1968), pp. 18-22.

“Jauniešu pils Erevānā.” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 295 (25.12.1980), p. 5.

Jaunzeme, Z. and Lazda, S. “‘Akmens zemē’ zied aprikozes.” *Zvaigzne*, no. 12 (20.06.1963), pp. 19-20.

Jēkabsone, V. “Brīvlaiks Erevānā.” *Padomju Dzimtene* (Kuldīga), no. 138 (22.11.1983), p. 3.

Jēruma, I. “Savai zemei. Savai tautai. Sev.” *Progress* (Limbaži), no. 66 (03.06.1982), p. 3.

Kaplan, Stephen. “Cognitive Maps, Human Needs and the Designed Environment.” *Environ-*

mental Design Research. Ed. Wolfgang Preiser. Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, 1973, pp. 275-283.

Kartenbeka, S. and Siliņa, I. "Tuvās un tālās takās. Saulainajā Armēnijā." *Komunisma Uzvara* (Aizkraukle), no. 8 (02.07.1981), pp. 2-3.

Khatchadourian, Arpine. *David of Sassoun. An Introduction to the Study of the Armenian Epic.* Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016.

"Kinoteatru celtnieciba Erevanā." *Literatūra un Māksla*, no. 33 (11.08.1956), p. 1.

Kipere, Z. "10 dienas, kas satricināja priekšstatus." *Padomju Jaunatne*, no. 21 (31.01.1968), p. 2.

Kleinberga, A. "Aiastan—Karastan." *Jaunais Inženieris*, no. 34 (24.05.1973), p. 3.

Ķepiņa, B. "Pirmais sniegs—pie Ricas ezera." *Progress* (Limbaži), no. 141 (28.11.1981), p. 3.

Lapuķe, O. "Dzer avotu, ceļiniek!" *Komunists* (Liepāja), no. 91 (11.05.1972), p. 2.

Lāms, Ojars. "The Interaction of Power and Culture in Perceptions of the Latvian Epic 'Lāčplēsis'." *Power and Culture. Identity, Ideology, Representation.* Eds. Jonathan Osmond and Ausma Cimdina. Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2007, pp. 127-138.

Lečinskis, Imants. "Starp rietumiem un austrumiem. Apcere par Latvijas tagadni un nākotni." *Latvija Šodien*, no. 12 (01.12.1984), pp. 1-6.

Lejstrauta, V. "'Juventus' saules un viesmīlības zemē." *Padomju Students*, no. 15 (19.12.1977), p. 3.

LETA. "Īsziņas." *Diena*, no. 217 (11.10.1993), p. 4.

Lielmeža, B. "Erevanai 2750." *Pionieris*, no. 89 (05.11.1968), p. 2.

Loth, Wilfried and Knight, M. R. "The East-West Conflict in Historical Perspective: An Attempt at a Balanced View." *Contemporary European History*, vol. 3, no. 2 (July), 1994, 193-202. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20081513 [Accessed July 2025].

Lotman, Juri M. "Ljudi i znaki." *Semiosfera*. Sankt-Peterburg: "Iskusstvo—SPB", 2000, pp. 5-10.

—. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000 [1990].

Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. London and New York: Routledge, 2005. Available at: <https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Phenomenology-of-Perception-by-Maurice-Merleau-Ponty.pdf> [Accessed July 2025].

Mežs, Mārtiņš. "Ceļojums pa Padomju Savienību." *Bērnība*, no. 1 (01.01.1950), pp. 28-29.

Mežvēvers, V. "Ararata ielejā." *Padomju Druva* (Cēsis), no. 154 (28.12.1965), pp. 2-3.

Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History*. Harcourt: Brace and World, 1961.

Nadirjans, V. "Armēnijas PSR galvaspilsēta EREVĀNA." *Padomju Kuldīga*, no. 105 (10.09.1958), p. 2.

Nollendorfs, Valters and Ščerbinskis, Valters. "The Impossible Resistance: Latvia between Two

Totalitarian Regimes 1940–1991." *Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia*, vol. 29. Rīga: Zinātne, 2021.

Noskovs, M. "Kalnu zemē Armēnijā." *Ļeņina Karogs* (Preiļi), no. 130 (01.11.1984), p. 4.

Osóch, Barbara and Czaplińska, Anna. "City Image Based on Mental Maps—the Case Study of Szczecin (Poland)." *Miscellanea Geographica*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2019, pp. 111-119. https://doi.org/10.2478/mgrsd-2019-0016

Palmer, Michael. *Masters and Slaves: Revisioned Essays in Political Philosophy*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001.

Papēdis, Māris. "Starp sauli un akmeņiem. Pilsēta." *Padomju Jaunatne*, no. 109 (04.06.1982), pp. 2-3.

Pīlādzis, J. "Sasunas Dāvida zemē." *Zvaigzne*, no. 3 (05.02.1971), pp. 22-23.

Pļaviņš, Jānis. "Pie mainīgā Sevana." *Stars* (Madona), no. 66 (03.06.1982), p. 2.

Pooks, P. "Skaitļi un fakti par Armēniju." *Zinātne un Tehnika*, no. 6 (01.06.1963), pp. 24-25.

Prape, Gunta. "Kukurūzas vālītē." *Liesma*, no. 1 (01.01.1982), p. 30.

Prome, I. "Balva—pavasaris janvārī." *Padomju Ceļš* (Ogre), no. 15 (03.02.1981), p. 3.

Remm, Tiit. "Understanding the City through its Semiotic Spatialities." *Sign Systems Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2/4, 2011, pp. 124-144. DOI: https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2011.39.2-4.06

—. Kristin and Zakharova, Larissa. "Foreword. Communications and Media in the USSR and Eastern Europe." *Cahiers du monde russe. Communiquer en URSS et en Europe socialiste. Techniques, politiques, cultures et pratiques sociales*, vol. 56, no. 2-3, 2015, pp. 273-289. https://doi.org/10.4000/monderusse.8182

Saparov, Arseny. "The Alteration of Place Names and Construction of National Identity in Soviet Armenia." *Cahiers du monde russe*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2003, pp. 179-198. https://doi.org/10.4000/monderusse.8604

Sarma, Ojārs. "Gadsimtu bagātības pārskatot." *Zinātne un Tehnika*, no. 12 (01.12.1981), pp. 22-24.

Sepe, Marichela. "Places and Perceptions in Contemporary City." *Urban Design International*, vol. 18, 2013, pp. 111-113. https://doi.org/10.1057/udi.2013.1

Simjan, Tigran. *Erevanskij gosudarstvennyj universitet: semiotika prostranstva, intellektual'nyj landshaft, social'naja pamjat'*. Erevan: Izdatel'stvo EGU, 2021.

Soboleva, Maja. "The Concept of the "New Soviet Man" and its Short History." *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2017, 64-85. https://doi.org/10.1163/22102396-05101012

"Staļina premiju piešķiršana par izciliem izgudrojumiem un darba metožu radikaliem uzlabojumiem 1947. gadā." *Cīņa*, no. 131 (04.06.1948), p. 1.

Stepanjan, A. A. and Simjan, T. S. "Erevan kak semioticheskij tekst (opyt rekonstrukcii 'nachala' i 'konca' prospekta Mashtoca)." *Kritika i semiotika*, vol. 16, 2012, 6-16.

TASS. "Padomju Savienībā." *Komunists* (Liepāja), no. 122 (27.05.1941), p. 3.

—. “Armenijas PSR Valdības nams Erevanā.” *Liesma*, no. 137 (24.11.1946), p. 1.

—. “Erevānas dienvidu vārti.” *Stars* (Madona), no. 45 (12.04.1966), p. 4.

—. “Erevanā atklāta Armenijas valsts filharmonijas jaunā koncertzāle.” *Liesma* (Valmiera), no. 104 (02.09.1953), p. 4.

—. “Jauni enerģetikas technikumi.” *Mūsu Zeme* (Valka), no. 60 (20.05.1947), p. 2.

—. “Monuments—J. V. Staļina skulptura Erevanā. I. Rubenčika foto.” *Pionieris*, no. 15 (12.04.1951), p. 2.

—. “Sporta jaunceltnes Armenijā.” *Cīņa*, no. 39 (17.02.1949), p. 6.

—. “Zinātniskais centrs Erevānā”. *Padomju Jaunatne*, no. 158 (21.09.1966), p. 4.

TASS fotohronika “Erevāna[a].” *Ļeņina ceļs* (Liepājas raj.), no. 52 (30.04.1966), p. 3.

—. “Erevāna[b].” *Jūrmala*, no. 21 (10.02.1981), p. 3.

—. “Erevāna. V. I. Ļeņina laukums.” *Padomju Daugava* (Jēkabpils), no. 117 (28.09.1972), p. 2.

—. “Ļeņina laukums Erevānā.” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 279 (28.11.1970), p. 4.

Varlamovs, V. “Erevānā, Raiņa ielā.” *Jūrmala* (1980–1998), no. 34 (01.03.1983), p. 2.

Vecco, Marilena. “Genius Loci as a Meta-concept.” *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, vol. 41 (January–February), 2020, pp. 225-231. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2019.07.001

Vilkāre, E. “Armēnijas PSR.” *Atpūta*, no. 832 (11.10.1940), pp. 28-29.

Vītola, I. “Pa Armēnijas ceļiem.” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 282 (28.11.1960), p. 6.

V. K. “Veltījumi biedram Staļinam.” *Atpūta*, no. 839 (29.11.1940), p. 11.

ZA kora kolektīvs. “Tālajos ciemos pie armēņu draugiem.” *Latvijas Zinātnieks*, no. 23 (18.11.1959), pp. 1, 4.

Zarjans, Armens. “Pagātnes un nākotnes krustpunktā.” *Māksla*, no. 3 (01.07.1968), pp. 23-26.

Ziediņš, E. “2750 strūklaku pilsētā.” *Liesma* (Valmiera), no. 125 (09.08.1969), p. 4.

Zommers, J. “Saulainajā Armēnijā.” *Plēsums*, no. 2 (15.02.1973), p. 2.

Spectacle, Stomach and Specter: Consumption and Body Politics in Sharlene Teo's *Ponti*

Gema Charmaine Gonzales
Centre d'Études et de Recherches Comparatistes, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle
Maison de la Recherche, 4, rue des irlandais, 75005 Paris, France
Email: gema.gonzales@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr

Abstract Set in Singapore and weaving together the lives of three women, Sharlene Teo's debut novel *Ponti* (2021) critiques the patriarchal construction of female bodies within the frameworks of beauty and consumption. Drawing from concepts in *l'écriture du corps* (writing the body) and revisionist mythmaking, this article explores the novel's sustained criticism of gendered body policing through three metaphorical elements: the spectacle, referring to the embedded filmic text within the novel that serves as metafictional commentary on the myth of femalehood ; the specter, embodying the hyperliteral erasure of women in the public sphere; and the stomach, symbolizing the regulation of women's eating habits and the perpetuation of an ideal physicality which result in disordered consumption. This analysis reveals how the body as a locus of power is subjected to control and, albeit not without complications, functions simultaneously as a vehicle for resistance. In seeking to unpack modes of resistance writing achieved through representations of consumption and the female body, this study positions three metaphorical constructs as categories of analysis for reading contemporary writings of the body in feminist literature.

Keywords resistance writing; migrant literature; critical food studies; revisionist mythmaking; feminist literary studies

Author **Gema Charmaine Gonzales** holds a PhD in French and Comparative Literature from the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. She has taught Philippine literature at the *Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales* in Paris and French literature and critical theory at the University of the Philippines Diliman. Her research focuses on Southeast Asian literatures, critical food studies and *l'écriture du corps* in the diasporic context.

Introduction

Eating is a corporeal activity, a duty that the body accomplishes for its own

preservation. To eat is to introduce sustenance into the body and to divest it with energy and power. This power, not simply referring to the energy source of the organic machine, also connotes self-gratification, the power to temper one's hunger. An eating body is one that exemplifies the power to desire and to satiate this desire. At the same time, it is one that transforms, not simply in terms of the digestive process but also in terms of one's relationship to the individual body and the other bodies surrounding it. What one eats, or if one eats at all, if one eats for pleasure or if one does not eat for *others'* pleasure, transforms the eaters' body, in their own eyes and in the perspective of other eating bodies. The question of power reasserts once again its significance: the power to shape one's body through consumption and the power to require bodies to be shaped through consumption. If eating is a required activity for survival, a means to become a body—to "embody" so to speak—to prevent or manipulate one's consumption practices can symbolically amount to the curbing of one's power, to dispossession or disembodiment. Alternatively, if to eat is to allow the external the external to affect the internal, inasmuch as foreign substances are absorbed by the body, then choosing not to eat can also mean resisting the oppressive influence of an environment over one's physicality and regaining control over it.

Sharlene Teo, a Singapore-born author based in the United Kingdom, navigates the questions and issues that lie at the convergence of power, consumption and female embodiment in her debut novel *Ponti* (2018). Published originally in English, the multi-temporal novel takes place in Singapore and alternates the stories of three women: Szu, a 16-year-old misfit; Amisa, her mother and once actress of a fictional horror trilogy *Ponti!*; and Circe, a school outcast who befriends Szu. The novel begins in 2003 as Szu relates her descent into existential crisis and her struggles with anorexia, prompted by social alienation and the death of her mother. Circe's narration is set in 2020, nearly two decades after her fallout with Szu. Recently divorced and struggling to connect with the world despite her job as a social media specialist, Circe is tasked with a marketing project involving a remake of *Ponti!*. Amisa's story takes readers back into 1990 as she embarks on her first acting endeavor, only to confront subsequent disappointments and unfulfilled aspirations. Threading through all three narratives is a nuanced criticism of how patriarchy discursively constructs female bodies, and how this normative construction impends women's path to subjectivity, agency and autonomy.

The inscription of meanings on the body has been recurrently theorized and problematized through the concept of the body-as-text, i.e., the body as a text upon which discourses and ideologies are written, disseminated and perpetuated. The

theorizations of Foucault on corporeality, though not heavily focused on the question of gender or women's experience, have been adopted as the conceptual basis for many feminist writings on female body discipline (McLaren 81-82). The modern form of power focused on life (as opposed to death), what Foucault denominates as *bio-power*, is wielded through an anatomo- and biopolitics that produce docile, disciplined bodies (*The History* 139-140). Building on this concept, feminists like Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky have argued that the body can be read as a site of social control and as a text upon which ideals about femininity are written. A system of regulatory regimes anchored into temporal and spatial elements, "disciplines and punishes" bodies (to borrow Foucault's titular words) to eventually render them docile. For Bordo, the shaping of bodies, through the perpetuation of dominant models of corporeality create and sustain ideals of femalehood (166).

Bodies in many forms populate Teo's fiction, and always in an attempt to lodge a broader feminist criticism: Szu thinks of herself as "Miss Frankenstein," "the bottom of the bell curve" (13), and of her body as a source of disgust, her "bad face" blemished by "acne," "disgusting hair" and "blood" (1). The depiction of her anorexic body is set against her negative body image and non-belongingness at home and in school. Circe's body is invaded by a tapeworm, her parasitic infection exemplifying her existential decay as she struggles to belong in a world where beauty is valued above else. Amisa faces death and disease as her body, once of "terrifying" beauty (64), undergoes the inevitable transformations of aging and succumbs to illness. Amidst this diverse array of bodies portrayed in the novel, Teo highlights patterns of consumption, focusing on the characters' aversion to food and refusal to eat.

If gastronomic narratives are characterized by an abundance of food references that whet the appetite, Ponti is an anti-food narrative, juxtaposing prolific foodspeak against the pervasive portrayal of repulsion associated with consumption. Food, almost always depicted as unpalatable or inedible, is emblematic of the societal discontents and anxieties plaguing the three women. In this article, I examine how Teo problematizes femininity ideals, female body policing, beauty and consumption in the context of consumer capitalism culture. As my analysis will show, Teo leverages a number of tools in her writing arsenal, from revisionist mythmaking to *foodspeak* to metatextual architectures, to illustrate the gendered dynamics of body regulation within patriarchal systems. In the next sections, I will draw focus on the novel's sustained criticism of modern patriarchal power's production of (non) acceptable physicality, particularly through three elements: the spectacle, i.e., the eponymous film trilogy embedded in the novel; the specters or the transfiguration

of the characters as ghosts that evoke metaphorical disembodiment and erasure; and the stomachs or the representations of the consumed/consuming body.

Spectacle of Femininity

In Southeast Asian folkloristic tradition, a woman whose death occurs during childbirth or is caused by male-inflicted violence transforms into a pontianak, a flesh-eating ghost seeking vengeance for her unjust demise. The many Malay horror films featuring the pontianak, more than ten to date, have cemented a mythos: always female, the pontianak has a deceitful appearance, manifesting as a beautiful and seductive woman but having as her true form a mangled, decaying face. Driving a nail onto her nape subdues her and suppresses her grotesque form, turning her back into the beautiful, "good" woman and wife. Though largely known for targeting men, the pontianak is depicted in some stories as also attacking expectant mothers and children. Narratives about her; however, are sometimes ambiguous. In certain films for instance, the pontianak is portrayed in a heroic light, exacting revenge on those who caused her death or those who threaten the *kampung* community. The modern remake *Revenge of the Pontianak* (2019) tells the story from the perspective of the ghost, a woman who returns from the dead to take revenge against a lover who forced her into abortion and death.

For many critics, the retellings of the pontianak's story can be read as an allegory of the battle between women and patriarchy. She embodies the antithesis of the ideal Malay woman who is first defined by her ability to reproduce and become a mother. At the same time, her origin story as a victim of abuse or rape manifests as a criticism of female-targeted violence in contemporary society (Kreems). That the pontianak transforms to a "normal" and "ideal" woman when nailed—the nail evoking the phallus—is evocative of patriarchy's attempt to control, disempower and silence the women (Nicholas and Kline). But while many reimaginations of her legend in both film and literature do carry feminist meanings, they are nevertheless underpinned by patriarchy's misogynistic conception of female monstrosity. Indeed, the earliest historical reference to the pontianak, dating back to 1618, describes the ghost as "enemies of men" (Galt 2). Writings during the colonial era attest to the androcentric anxieties around female seduction and desire. An avatar of what is considered as extreme evil in patriarchal mythopoeisis, the pontianak must be eradicated in order to produce the other end of the extreme: the good woman, kind and submissive, emblem of ideal femininity. The potential female agency that empowers the modern pontianak in the films is nevertheless constricted by the patriarchal script, and by the fact that she can display agency only because she is

technically dead (Kreems).

Through repetition, mythic discourse perpetuates female archetypes that operate within a dualistic frame. Women are typecast as either a figure of Good, where goodness is equated to submissiveness, passivity, silence and obedience, or as a figure of Evil, the root of disorder and destruction—the legend of the sisters Bawang Merah and Bawang Putih, i.e. the story of a "good" woman, Bawang Merah, who suffers abuse at the hands of her "evil" sister, Bawang Putih and her evil mother-in-law, come to mind. Such "angel/monster" female imaginary do not reside simply in fiction, but extends well into reality (Gilbert and Gubar 17). Myths so potently repeated soak the very society and culture within which they were created; and in turn, become themselves "mythifying" in that they too construct discursive notions and ideals within these sites. Indeed, mythic images of women reinforce a universal imaginary of femininity, i.e., what it means to be an ideal or non-ideal woman, and renders it a given. This in turn not only promotes sexism and gender hegemony in society, it also instigates concrete violence upon female bodies. The witch killings in modern Indonesian and Nepalese societies are magnified cases in point of the potency of Myth and its role in gender-based violence (Shrestha; Sims).

By typologizing ideal femininity and promoting the demonization of female bodies, myths dictate what it means to be a "good" or a "bad" woman, and justifies body regulation and compliance as necessary tools for social order. "Myth deals in false universals," as Angela Carter writes, "to dull the pain of particular circumstances" (*Sadeian* 5). Unsurprisingly, the long history of misogynistic and androcentric mythmaking has been a point of contention in feminist circles. Many authors undertake what is now known as revisionist mythmaking, expanding upon Adrienne Rich's concept of re-vision, "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (18). For Alicia Ostriker and Carter, best known in such endeavor, revisionist mythmaking is filling an "old vessel" with "new wine" to then "make the old bottles explode" (Ostriker 213; Carter, *Notes* 69). The revisionist process entails rewriting old myths to produce new meanings, to challenge their legitimacy and promote female subjectivity and empowerment.

In *Ponti*, Teo uses the cinematic spectacle to satirize the creation of female monsters in patriarchal mythmaking and problematize notions of normality and deviance. The fictional trilogy embedded in the text includes the eponymous *Ponti!* (1978) and two sequels, *Ponti 2* (1979) and *Ponti 3: Curse of the Bomoh* (1980). In the first film, a hunchbacked, disfigured girl named Ponti seeks the help of a *bomoh*

(a Malay shaman) to become beautiful. Unbeknownst to her, the cure comes with a curse. In order to remain beautiful, she must feed regularly of men's blood. In *Pontianak*, the original 1957 film by Cathay-Keris studios, the protagonist turns into a pontianak in an attempt to save her husband's life. In Teo's rewriting, she chooses to become a monster in order to sustain her beauty. The emphasis is thus placed on Ponti's need to become beautiful in order to fit in, because as she reasons, "a lifetime of ugliness is unbearable" (7). This revised element clues us in right away on some of the main issues that the author seeks to explore: the creation of "deviant" identities, the embedment of beauty as the paragon of ideal femininity, the marginalization of women who do not conform to this ideal, and the internalized shame engendered by such marginalization. Ponti is emblematic of the outsider status of the characters—all three, Amisa, Szu and Circe, are in their own way pariahs in the society—but also of women who do not correspond to dominant standards of femalehood.

The metareferential *mise-en-abyme* of the films in the novel, which puts emphasis on the production process of the film and on the technicalities of cinematography, points to the artificiality of the female-as-temptress and female-as-monster archetypes. The stage curtains are drawn back as the characters reveal how gore scenes are produced off-screen. Watermelons are stabbed to produce the sound of a knife stuck into the stomach, or otherwise dropped from a certain height to mimic the cracking of a skull. For blood, corn syrup is used, producing a color a tad too pink to be realistic (173). The characters recount the scenes by emphasizing the movements of the camera, for instance in Circe's account:

> The screen flickers on and the title credits appear; *PONTI 2*, unsteady white words across a canopy of brown and green. The sound of strings gives me a sense of rising dread. The camera pans out from a quiet dirt road into wet green paddy fields flanked by traveler's palms with their parched, fanlike leaves. The shot keeps broadening until it takes in the entire landscape of sparse houses with thatched orange roofs, sheds of rusty corrugated steel, and the odd silo, joined together by thin, snaking roads.…When one of the men starts to talk, he is dubbed over in a gravelly American voice.
>
> […] Once she's invited inside, the camera pans out and we see her face. Amisa smirks. The hero's good wife gasps. The Pontianak reveals her true, hideous nature, and thunder claps. She looks garish, deranged, red lipped, with monster makeup caked on like papier-mache. With a flutter like a sheet being aired out, the Pontianak flies away. The body of a plantation worker is revealed under

> the fronds of a nearby tree, bloodied and bruised. The camera zooms in on his face with one eyeball sucked out, the socket a gelatinous prosthetic pulp, like splattered raspberries. She's torn his stomach open. Blood everywhere, slightly too pink to be fully convincing, but it's sickening to look at. (170)

Szu's retelling of the film also underscores metafictional aspects:

> My mother was nineteen when she filmed it, close to my age. *Please, Datuk, I beg you,* she says to the camera–and the voice that comes out is a total stranger's: and American dub, sweet and small and foreign. […] Blood splatters. And then the camera pans to the tops of palm trees. You can see the leaves shaking. The sound of hungry slurping offscreen. They didn't have the budget for more gore, so we are spared the actual defilement. (7-8)

The readers are not simply "watching" the film but are also witnesses to its production circumstances. The flickering of the screen, the rolling of the credits, the dubbing, the fixation on camera movement, the shots, and the panning all contribute to highlighting the fictionality of the film.

Film apparatus theory hypothesizes the effects of the layout of the cinematic/theatrical space where the camera is placed behind the spectators. Because the apparatus, material but also ideological, is out of view—that is to say that the process of film-making is hidden—the spectators identify with the subjects on the screen, unaware of its ideological control. Here, it is the contrary: the cinematographic apparatus is rendered visible and the spectators are obsessively aware of the labor process. Insisting on the film's status as an artifact, Teo questions the very process that fabricates mythic female monsters, while illustrating a grander fiction in the social fabric, that of femininity. Female specters are not born, but rather produced, just as female standards—what it means to be "normal"—are created inorganically. The film symbolizes thus patriarchy's production of female monsters, i.e., women demonized in patriarchal mythopoesis as sources of temptation and corruption, but also women who become "monsters" for deviating from standards of ideal femininity.

The film's artificiality is best emphasized in Amisa's preparation to immerse into the pontianak character. In the beginning, Amisa is unable to successfully act the monster figure and show the expressions demanded of her. To remedy this, the director who scouted her, Iskandar Wiryanto, sets up sessions in his home to transform her into "[his] Pontianak, [his] murderous ghost, inside and out" (213).

Through these acting sessions, where Iskandar degraded her, verbally abused her and broke her "spirit" (217), Amisa creates the mask of Ponti. Cracks in this artificial mask reveal themselves, however, as Amisa's acting leads to disruptions in the film. Her emotions are often incongruent with the scenes. After eating a prey, Amisa looks "defeated" with her shoulders "uncharacteristically slouched" (8). In Ponti 2, while chasing a potential victim, she is smiling, "bright" and "happy" (171-172). This symbolism of masks is recurrent in the novel and is an important element in Teo's metafictional enterprise. For instance, as a child, Amisa mistakes a couple for Orang Minyuk (a monster covered in grease who abducts young women) only to realize they were workers in a charcoal factory. Mythic characters haunt the imagination of the three women in the novel, but ultimately reveal themselves as figments of their imagination. This fracturing of masks metaphorizes the disruption of the illusionary norms instituted in male-centric mythmaking.

Through the acting lessons given by Iskandar, Teo draws a two-fold caricature in this novel: that of patriarchy's production of docile female bodies, and that of the demonization of female bodies through the creation of "monster-masks". Iskandar represents the voice of patriarchy, the voice that insists on women as objects, instead of Subjects allowed to exhibit their own desires. He tells Amisa that "her beauty meant nothing in a murderous world where men just wanted to fuck and kill her and nobody cared what she thought"; and that sleeping with "many men", or acting on her desires, is a cause for disgust. In a revelatory scene, Iskandar makes her "repeat lines of the script to him over and over until the words stopped making sense" and after a while, she started to "expect the degradation", as though it was something she "deserved" (216). By way of disciplinary regimes, represented here by Iskandar's teachings which Amisa herself calls "myths", not only are traditional female archetypes internalized by women, a sense of shame and subordination are also incorporated into their bodies. The cracks in Amisa's mask as Ponti, i.e., the incongruence between her acting and the narrative scenes, reveal themselves as ruptures in female subjectivity. The pervasiveness of the myth of femininity which establishes women's bodies in dissonant prototypes, as both objects of desire and sources of fear, causes women to question their identities and bodies.

Beautiful Specters and Consumed Bodies

If the film *Ponti!* and its production circumstances exemplify the fabrication of the patriarchal mythos of femalehood, its titular main character is representative of othered women who diverge from normative corporeal ideals promoted by this mythos. Ponti's obsession with attaining physical beauty, with changing her body

and undergoing a supernatural cosmetic surgery, echoes Szu's own insecurity and her belief that not being beautiful is a curse. The pontianak figure serves as a doppelgänger of Szu who herself is plagued by "ugliness" and an obsession to be beautiful. She looks at the mirror, her body "too long and too wide" (26) to fit into small clothes, and concludes that there's something wrong with her. Szu's existential crisis is rooted in her disgust towards her physical self, which does not align with dominant norms of female body acceptability.

Contemporary society establishes beauty as the paragon of ideal femininity, encouraging women to strive to attain this ideal through bodily transformation/mutilation and producing within them a sense of shame when the ideal is not achieved. Like Ponti, Szu wishes to "morph" into someone beautiful, and is constantly tormented by her self-avowed "hideousness" (42). Szu incessantly analyzes the difference between her and the popular girls, concluding that she is not good enough or that something is wrong with her, because she does not have porcelain skin, long legs or a defined nose. This "pervasive sense of bodily deficiency" results from the disciplinary regimes institutionalized in patriarchal culture (Bartky 33). Women are not only urged to look for "signs of imperfections", a form of self-discipline which in turn engenders insecurity and internalized shame, they are also taught precisely how to "see" bodies the patriarchal way (Bordo 57). It is then with this normalized, but skewered, perspective that they perceive their own bodies, in a panoptic cycle of "gaze and interiorization" (Foucault, "The Eye"). Bourdieusian theory reminds us that masculine domination is buttressed precisely by this cosmos of psychosomatic self-discipline, a kind of corporeal loyalty to the "natural" or *naturalized* order of things ("La Domination"). Inundated with pervasive patriarchal discourses surrounding normative physicality, Szu stops eating and develops anorexia. Her condition worsens after Amisa is diagnosed with cancer and passes away. Szu examines her altered body, convinced that her thin, frail body is a sign of physical, aesthetic improvement.

The cult of thinness essentially relies on the patriarchal discourse of social mobility: to be thin is to be beautiful, and to be beautiful means to be able to accomplish things "unfit" bodies cannot. Beauty, in mediatic patriarchal model, is the ultimate form of empowerment. Szu and Circe believe that upward mobility is in direct correlation to one's beauty. Szu's classmates are "invincible" (4) because they look like models while Circe's colleague Jeanette can have any man he wants because "she is so good-looking". For Szu, being punished in school for being eccentric is avoidable were she as beautiful as her mother. Circe goes as far as considering to buy an expensive bag, thinking it would "improve [her] existence"

and turn her into a "better person" (75). Conditioned from a young age to conform to normative discourses on the ideal woman, Szu and Circe come to believe that "beauty is an armor"—as long as one is beautiful, one can have it all (Bordo 184). The body, in Foucauldian concept of discipline, is only useful when they become "subjected" or "improved" bodies—i.e. "docile" (Foucault, *Discipline* 136). This "intelligible" body, which implies a culture's standards of beauty, well-being, or health becomes a "useful" body only after being reproduced through rigorous training to conform to this first (Bordo 181-182). A beautiful body once achieved is thus a useful body, now ready to be an effective member of the society; while Other(ed) bodies become specters, mere shadows to the ideal.

The myth of femininity insists that beauty is empowerment; and it is a kind of empowerment that women can and *should* buy. Like Ponti who seeks the help of the bomoh to buy beauty—the price to pay is her hunger for blood—Szu and Circe also start to believe that beauty can be bought in today's consumer culture. If one is not "blessed" with an aesthetic body, there is still a remedy, for one can acquire le "*capital-beauté*" in today's globalized consumer world (Apfeldorfer 73). Szu and Circe both try on Japanese skincare, following the advice of women's magazines, and idolizing and emulating European models as figures of acceptable physicality.

Teo explores how modern forms of surveillance encourage both the panoptical disciplining of the body and the remediation of outsiderness through consumerism. Szu notes that in the bus she takes to go to school, there is a camera, and passengers are able to view themselves in the footage. For Szu, it is torture to see her reflection and be reminded of her "hideousness" (42). This scene illustrates and parodies the format of biopower in the Digital Age. The criticism of influencer culture is indeed omnipresent in Ponti. Circe sees fashion bloggers and models posing for photos, noting they can put themselves out there because they are beautiful. Images of femininity are now inscribed in digital bodies, and it is these digital intelligible bodies that become samplers of the useful body that one can achieve just by clicking on the link! The useful body, i.e. thin and beautiful, is the ultimate persona of empowerment, able to showcase herself in the public sphere and is recognized in her capacity to "influence" the society. The globalized homogenization of aesthetic corporeal standards, seems to be fueled by this new form of influencer media, where to be beautiful is now equated to resembling a European, a Japanese or a Korean model (once again, thin but also white).

Beauty-as-empowerment is now promoted under the pretext of self-care, self-love, personal development and determination. Mass culture, within which the beauty myth perseveres, promotes the self-affirming mantra that women should

love themselves by taking care of their bodies. They should strive for the end goal, that thin body emblematized by female models, because it represents their capacity to persevere, to not let anything get in their way, and reach the summum of self-emancipation. But what become of bodies that are beautiful? Is striving for beauty an empowering way for women to take control of their bodies? If patriarchal cultures dictate that the acceptance and survival of women in the public arena rely on achieving beauty, does beauty then represent a currency of visibility and agency?

The story of Amisa, ethereally beautiful but nevertheless fails to have it all, manifests as a criticism of the beauty-as-empowerment myth. Amisa's attempt to become "Full Time Actress and Most Beautiful Woman in Asia" (210), to be in the cinematic limelight, functions as a hyperbolic illustration of the promise of inclusion and visibility in the public spheres by means of ideal physical appearance. Teo's *Ponti* shows the contradictions in this promise by depicting the realities lived by Amisa, who incessantly becomes an object of consumption and whose integration in the public arena hinges on becoming no more than a physical body.

In *Ponti*, indeed, beauty is shown not so much as empowering than it is commodifying. Throughout the text, Amisa's beautiful body is depicted as consumable flesh. Men look at her as though they want to "gobble" her up, out of desperate "hunger" (69). Iskandar likens her to a "chilli padi" (bird's eye chili) (218). Her father compares her pink mouth to an ang ku kueh, a red tortoise cake. Her husband, who calls her "mei nu" (beautiful girl) like those men who leer at her, kisses her "hungrily", "maul[s]" her (137), confessing a "groping, incessant hunger" for her body (254). Amisa is incessantly depicted as food. For Naomi Wolf, the "beauty myth" does not only encourage women to "embody" beauty, it also prompts men "to possess women who embody it" (12). By way of satirical gastronomic discourse, i.e., Amisa's body as edible, Teo shows how beauty ultimately serves as a tool of objectification. Patriarchal discourse produces and perpetuates a specific economy of consumption where women, much like Ponti whose hunger is monstrous and too illicit to show on screen, cannot be Subjects of desire, cannot be the ones to feed. Instead, they are relegated to Objects of desire, the ones to be fed on, like the beautiful Amisa consumed by the men around her. In this economy of gender-based consumption, feasting is reserved for men, and fasting for women; while beauty becomes a criterion through which the palatability of the consumable flesh is gauged.

If beauty is currency, what then is its value? The modern world which institutes beauty-as-capital projects the promise of a successful, healthy life, and owing to the reification of influencer culture, the promise of social acceptance and recognition.

When the three films fail to take off, Amisa auditions for a Hongkong telemovie, and a Chinese agent proposes a quid pro quo. She sleeps with the Chinese agent, in an attempt to use her body as payment for social advancement, but is never offered the role. Amisa's selling of her body, and her realization of its "true" value or the value accorded to it by patriarchy, highlights the contradictions in masculinist constructions of the female body. The patriarchal, capitalist "meat market" promotes the accumulation and development of beauty as capital, but nevertheless confers little to no value to these beautiful bodies.

Unlike Circe and Szu's narratives, that of Amisa is told in the third person. On one hand, this specificity in her narrative perspective enacts the consumption of female bodies: the act of looking in from the third person perspective symbolizing the male gaze and the voyeuristic tendencies that accompanies female objectification. At the same time, it presents a cautionary tale, that markedly delineates the universal patriarchal script imposed on women (Szu and Circe's) and the realities of women who live in patriarchy. By confronting the stories of Circe and Szu, both outsiders and firmly influenced by society's ideal femininity, with that of Amisa, one who fits this ideal but nevertheless fails to acquire social power, Teo demonstrates the illusions and fallacies of society's images of femalehood. To be beautiful is ideal, but to be ideal is to be an object, a body that is no longer one's own (*I* is replaced by *She*, in an attempt to show how Amisa does not own her body). The third person narrative of Amisa questions the value of beauty and complicates the expectations from women promoted by society. In a telling reversal, this cautionary tale warns its readers that it is beauty, not ugliness as the monster Ponti believed, that is the curse.

Unruly Stomachs and Self-erasure as Resistance

In *Ponti*, women's bodies are systematically entangled with structures and discourses of social control, inscribed as sites of objectification and commodification. Teo demonstrates how the enforcement of beauty ideals shapes both female consumption (women's eating habits) and the consumption of female bodies (women's bodies as consumables). These pressures, in turn, predispose the characters in the narrative to psychological and physiological distress. Central to the text is the portrayal of anorexia as both a symptom of the violence embedded in constructs of femininity and simultaneously, a complex response to this very violence.

As Szu's existential crisis deepen, so too does the progression of her anorexia. She becomes as thin as "chopsticks" (68), and, like their garden that "stank of rotting vegetation" (267), begins to wither. Though the emaciation of her body

becomes more and more pronounced, Szu proclaims being happy in this new body, even wondering if her classmates and Circe would notice how much her body has "improved" (180). For Bordo, one of the most pervasive and nefarious requirements of ideal female beauty is thinness. Cultures that promote thinness as an important parameter of femininity does not only participate in the spread of eating disorders, but in fact produces it:

> Most women in our culture then are disordered when it comes to issues of self-worth, self-entitlement, self-nourishment, and comfort with their own bodies; eating disorders far from being bizarre and anomalous are utterly continuous with the dominant element of the experience of being female in this culture. (57)

Bordo's project of analyzing eating disorders espouses a feminist cultural paradigm, emphasizing the role of culture in the production of eating disorders, while veering away from defining them as "psychopathologies" or as resulting from "individual dysfunction" (54). The perpetuation of an ideal body size in cultural discourse leads women to see their bodies through the dominant, oppressive lens of patriarchy. To achieve a slender body, cultural discourse dictates, is to be accepted in the public arena, and to be able to show the capacity to regulate one's desires, overcome gross corporeality and become a "perfectly regulated self" (68). In Szu's eyes, indeed, the anorexic body, closer to the perfect female body, is the exemplification of body success.

It is important to note that Bordo's seminal work presents an analysis of beauty ideals in the context of Western, mainly American, culture. Notwithstanding, globalization and colonial legacies have contributed to the perpetuation of similar beauty standards in Southeast Asian metropoles. I am not attempting to homogenize the imaginaries of femininity in these spaces and their impact on the female bodies inhabiting them. Indeed, in certain cultures, obesity is equated with beauty, and women suffer from concomitant oppressive practices, for instance, force-feeding (leblouh) in Moorish and Tuareg societies in Mauritania (Fortier). Rather, I seek to highlight here how the universalization of beauty standards is an important aspect to be included in the analysis of the concept of the *modern beautiful woman*. Exploring this universalization means taking into account the Westernization of femininity and the effects of colonial influence on gender ideology. In 1993, Bordo asserted that "there is a strong likelihood that by the end of the twentieth century, men of different ethnicities will find thin women beautiful" (102). Today, the myth of thinness remains omnipresent in many Southeast Asian countries. A case in point

is the Trim and Fit program implemented in schools in Teo's native Singapore from the early 1990s until 2007. The program, shortened to TAF (a heteropalindromic play on the word *fat*), required children deemed overweight to follow rigorous exercise programs. Even after its abolition, the program continued to generate controversy, often associated with fat-shaming behaviors in the country.

That the incarnation of an ideal woman is the hyperthin woman speaks volumes about the expectations on women but also the social spaces that they live in. The consummate hyperthin woman should not eat because she must demonstrate a complete control of her appetite (i.e. her desires), and because being fleshy, having "too much body" is a source of disgust (Sykes 132). This homogenizing mechanism of body management entails thus the ascetic repression of desire in women, but also the refusal of excess corporeality. In the Ponti trilogy films—which as I have argued earlier represent a microcosm of patriarchal metanarratives about the feminine myth—one does not show how the pontianak devours her victims. Instead, like Victorian novels where eating only "happens offstage" (Bordo 183), such scenes are left to the imagination of the viewers. This omission is metaphoric of the relegation of female consumption and indulgence, i.e. female desire, to a furtive and illicit act, one that must necessarily be hidden. Women, according to patriarchal mythos, cannot be Subjects of desire, cannot be consumers, cannot be hungry. This underscores the social worth accorded to them in the public social order: in Wolf's words, "[w] hom a society values, it feeds well.…We think you're worth this much of the tribe's resources" (189).

Alongside this effacement of female bodies as Subjects in the macroeconomy of desire and consumption, the hyperthin woman also exemplifies the space that women occupy in society. Their thinness is symbolic of their "limited 'place' in the world" (Bordo 68). In *Ponti*, years after their friendship falls apart, Szu becomes a ghost in Circe's imagination. She sees her at night at the foot of her bed, or sometimes in the streets, now in the form of a specter. Like Szu's anorexic body, her spectral form becomes a "hyperliteral" (Bordo 175) text that shows the emaciation of the female body, and its ultimate disappearance in the social arena. The specter is a caricature of how patriarchal society transforms women into ghosts: ghosts lose their bodies as women loses possession of theirs; ghosts represent the hyperbolic effacement and obliteration of the female body in an attempt to achieve extreme thinness; and finally ghosts have no place in the living world, like women who become outsiders according to society's concept of physicality.

Toward the end of *Ponti*, Szu, now in her thirties, admit to suffering an eating

> disorder:
> I can name it plainly with a developing detachment, now that I'm well: my eating disorder, the way I tried to use the numbness I felt from denying myself to blanch and stymie the gushing, greedy chaos of everything else. (288)

Teo depicts anorexia nervosa from a perspective that is deliberately non-scientific, eschewing its classification as an individual pathology and favoring instead an emphasis on its social dimensions. Eating disorders are thought to be influenced by the society and culture a patient inhabits. Feminists have suggested that ideals of femininity, particularly what Kim Chernin describes as the "tyranny of slenderness" in the West, may play a role in contributing to the development of these disorders (Chernin ; Nasser). Teo's choice to deviate from a more medical-oriented approach is clear, for while she makes extensive use of scientific descriptions in the novel—among others in describing Circe's tapeworm infection or in detailing how the hundred-year-old egg served during Szu's birthday is made—Szu's eating disorder is only announced as such at the last chapter and is not diagnosed as anorexia.

The narrative highlights that anorexia cannot be fully understood solely as a medical condition, insofar as it operates within and is complicated by the societal context of consumption. Szu's disorder is rooted in a complex circuit of emotional and social factors. Her outsider status in society linked to body image norms, her longing for love and kinship, the death of her mother and the dissolution of her friendship with Circe all contribute to her existential crisis, which culminates in her disordered eating. Szu's self-imposed deprivation is portrayed as intricately intertwined with her identity crisis and self-shaming. At the same time her emaciated anorexic body, which takes up little space and manifests in spectral form multiple times throughout the novel, becomes a text through which to read societal alienation.

Szu's spectrality, i.e. her gradual development from being barely present to being ghost-like, evokes a body disappearing from the material plane and the real world (read: the public arena). Teo uses this imagery to highlight a broader pattern of women's disappearance, specifically their erasure in public life on account of non-conformity to prescribed ideals. In fact, *Ponti* is ultimately a story about the erasure of three women—Szu who becomes ghostly due to alienation, Amisa who fades from public memory, and Circe who remains unseen despite being entrenched in the social media world.

While the polarity between starvation and self-indulgence might suggest counterintuitively different objectives, scholars agree that to not eat can also

represent a political choice. Abstaining from food can also be a means of reclaiming the body. Bordo points to the possibility of resistance through the corporeal production of meaning, what she terms "labor on the body":

> From this perspective, anorexia, for example, is never merely regressive, never merely a fall into illness and chaos. Nor is it facilitated simply by bedazzlement by cultural images, "indoctrination" by what happens, arbitrarily, to be in fashion at this time. Rather, the relentless pursuit of excessive thinness is an attempt to embody certain values, to create a body that will speak for the self in a meaningful and powerful way. (67)

For Bordo, the anorexic body can be a speaking body. The body is not only a surface upon which femininity is inscribed, but can be interpreted as a caricatural and hyperbolic text about gender. The hyperthin body thus "speaks for the self" and fashion "meaningful" counter-texts to dominant discourses (169). Postcolonial feminist Ketu H. Katrak shares a similar point of view in her interpretation of Nyasha's bulimia in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* as an "expression" (once again the rhetoric of voice and language is used) of oppressive identity markers and colonial education (122, 136). Disordered bodies are "aggressively graphic text[s]" that relate the oppression of the female body and materialize a protest against the circumstances that bring about this oppression (Bordo 169, 175-176).

Considering this, the specter figure serves as a metaphorical doubling or mirroring of the anorexic body of Szu. Szu's corporeality, alongside the many suggestions in the narrative on how femininity is inscribed in female bodies in contemporary Singapore, can thus be interpreted as a "demonstration" against the destructive logic of hegemonic femininity—*demonstration* here is a pertinent term to employ, in that it is a protest that focuses on "demonstrating" through the corporeal body visible signs of rebellion. Certainly, this is not without contradictions. This mode of resistance can be perceived as problematic, in that anorexic bodies in both symbolical and literal planes, self-efface as they enact rebellion. But while both Bordo and Katrak recognize the negative consequences of this revolt, they nevertheless argue that for some women, such "embodied protest" is the only means through which to resist (Bordo 175-177; Katrak 3).

Conclusion

The three elements that have informed our close reading of the novel—spectacle, stomach and specter—function not only as subversive narrative elements that allow

for the exploration of feminist themes, but also as categories of analyses through which to read the novel *Ponti* as organically feminist. The spectacle represents the enforcement of, as we have shown, artificial myth of femininity; the stomach evokes the regulation of women's consumption and by extension, their bodies; while the specter textualizes the nefarious effects of beauty ideals and their erasure in the public sphere. Together, these elements map the intersections between beauty standards, objectification, and their effects on women's physical and mental well-being, particularly in the manifestation of anorexia. The significance of *Ponti* extends beyond its triadic metaphorical architecture to its broader engagement with contemporary issues, such as social media-driven body dysmorphia and the global commodification of beauty. By embracing fragmented, (dis)embodied, and haunting imagery, the novel offers a distinctly feminist aesthetic that disrupts mythical/normative structures and reimagines the potential of narrative as a tool for confronting and dismantling patriarchal ideals of femininity.

Works Cited

Apfeldorfer, Gérard. "Le Corps comme icône en souffrance." *Corps*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2008, pp. 71-78.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. "Foucault, Femininity and the Modern Patriarchal Power." *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 63-82.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. Berkeley : U of California P, 1993.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "La domination masculine." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, vol. 84, no. 1, 1990, pp. 2-31.

Carter, Angela. "Notes from the Front Line." *On Gender and Writing*, edited by Michelene Wandor, London: Pandora Press, 1983, pp. 69-77.

—. *The Sadeian Woman*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

Chernin, Kim. *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009.

Fortier, Corinne. "Corps féminin, gavage et male gaze dans la société maure de Mauritanie." *L'Ouest Saharien*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2022, pp. 73-93.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

—. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

—. "The Eye of Power." *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, New York: Pantheon Books,

1978, pp. 146-165.

Galt, Rosalind. “Introduction: On the Trail of the Pontianak.” *Alluring Monsters: The Pontianak and Cinemas of Decolonization*, New York: Columbia UP, 2021, pp. 1-38.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. “The Queen’s Looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity.” *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2000, pp. 3-44.

Katrak, Ketu H. *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2006.

Kreems, Nisa. “Southeast Asia’s Vengeful Man-Eating Spirit Is a Feminist Icon.” *Vice*, 14 Sept. 2018. Accessed September 9, 2023.

McLaren, Margaret A. *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*. New York: SUNY Press, 2012.

Nicholas, Cheryl, and Kimberly Kline. “Cerita Pontianak: Cultural Contradictions and Patriarchy in a Malay Ghost Story.” *Storytelling, Self, Society*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2010, pp. 194-211.

Nasser, Mervat. *Culture and Weight Consciousness*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003.

Ostriker, Alicia. *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America*. London: Beacon Press, 1986.

Rich, Adrienne. “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision.” *College English*, vol. 34, no. 1, Oct. 1972, p. 18.

Shrestha, Deepesh. "Witch-Hunts of Low-Caste Women in Nepal." *The Telegraph*, 15 Feb. 2010, www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/expatnews/7241937/Witch-hunts-of-low-caste-women-in-Nepal.html. Accessed November 27, 2024.

Sims, Calvin. “Witch Hunts in Java Called a Cover for Murders.” *The New York Times*, 2 Jan. 2001. Accessed 26 Nov. 2024.

Sykes, Heather Jane. “Fatness: Unbearable Lessons.” *Queer Bodies: Sexualities, Genders, & Fatness in Physical Education*, New York: Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 49-74.

世界文学研究论坛

聂珍钊 / 浙江大学（中国）
查尔斯·罗斯 / 普渡大学（美国）

Editors in Chief
Nie Zhenzhao, Zhejiang University, China
Charles Ross, Purdue University, U.S.A

ISSN 1949-8519