Beyond Cantonese: Articulation, Narrative and Memory in Contemporary Sinophone Hong Kong, Singaporean and Malaysian Literature

by

Li Ling Ngan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of East Asian Studies
University of Alberta

© Li Ling Ngan, 2019

Abstract

This thesis examines Cantonese in Sinophone literature, and the time- and place- specific memories of Cantonese speaking communities in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia after the year 2000. Focusing on the literary works by Wong Bik-wan (1961-), Yeng Pway Ngon (1947-) and Li Zishu (1971-), this research demonstrates how these three writers use Cantonese as a conduit to evoke specific memories in order to reflect their current identity. Cantonese narratives generate uniquely Sinophone critique in and of their respective places.

This thesis begins by examining Cantonese literature through the methodological frameworks of Sinophone studies and memory studies. Chapter One focuses on Hong Kong writer Wong Bik-wan's work *Children of Darkness* and analyzes how vulgar Cantonese connects with involuntary autobiographical memory and the relocation of the lost self. Chapter Two looks at *Opera Costume* by Singaporean writer Yeng Pway Ngon and how losing connection with one's mother tongue can lose one's connection with their familial memories. Chapter Three analyzes Malaysian writer Li Zishu's short story *Snapshots of Chow Fu* and how quotidian Cantonese simultaneously engenders crisis of memory and the rejection of the duty to remember. These works demonstrate how Cantonese, memory, and identity, are transnationally linked in space and time. This thesis concludes with thinking about the future direction of Cantonese cultural production.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to my advisor Professor Clara Iwasaki, who supported and mentored me by devoting her time through patience and guidance. She has shown me how to be a professional scholar with great precision and logic. She has always had faith in me, encouraged me to think broadly and challenged my intellectual boundaries to continue to improve. Her rigorous and perceptive directions have shaped this project into a meaningful form. I am also deeply indebted to her for her personal support during the most difficult time of my life. This project would not have been possible without her.

I would also like to thank my committee members. Professor Christopher Lupke gave insightful feedback on my thesis and shared wonderful resources. In his seminar, he allowed me to read poems aloud in Cantonese, enthusiastically supporting my work inside and outside the classroom. Professor Lynn Penrod provided valuable suggestions to make my writing precise and clear. I especially appreciate her time and dedication to proofread my work. Beyond the thesis committee, I thank Professor Victoria Ruetalo for her course on critical theory, which inspired me to take on this project. I also enjoyed my conversations with Professor Daniel Fried about reading theoretical materials and improving presentation skills.

I would like to extend this thanks to my fellow classmates and friends – Stefana Vukadinovich, Shuyao Zhou, Shan Ren and Wai-mei Lui – have all made my graduate life pleasant and enjoyable. My thanks also goes to Langston Brasen and Lijie Dong for reading my draft and giving me constructive comments. And my greatest gratitude is to Langston Brasen, who helped editing my work.

I must express my gratitude to my dearest friends for their love and support. When I was struggling, Venus Ho, Joyce Yik, Sabrina Cho, Becky Ip and Suki Liu came to Edmonton/ Toronto

and spent time with me, which helped me overcome a lot. Their words of kindness, care and humor lightened my toughest times. They are always by my side to support me and believe in me without wavering. I am and will always be grateful for their friendship.

Finally, my family is at the heart of all of this. I thank my cousins, Jacky Ye and Peter Zeng, for their support while I was in the worst shape. Most importantly, I thank my mom and Uncle Ng for their unconditional love and care. Even though they have little idea of what my work is about, they have unconditionally supported me and allowed me to pursue my goal and passion thousand miles away from home. They love me more than themselves. Their understanding and support are beyond words. It is to my parents that this thesis is dedicated.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iii

Introduction 1
On the History of Cantonese Literature 2
Cantonese Literature and Sinophone Articulations 8
Memory at the Crossroads of Cantonese and Sinophone 13
Structure of the Chapters 15
Note on Romanization 18

Chapter One Reclaiming Self-identity: Involuntary Autobiographical Memory in Hong Kong 19
Introduction: Tracing Wong Bik-wan's Hybrid Cantonese Writing 20
The Interplay of Cantonese and Involuntary Autobiographical Memory 26
Wong Bik-wan's Sinophone Articulation in *Children of Darkness* 29
Mental Time Travel to Attain Self-identity 37
Conclusion: The Implications of Vulgarized Cantonese Writing 44

Chapter Two The Importance of the Mother Tongue: Absent Memory in Singapore 46
Introduction: Yeng Pway Ngon's Evolutionary Cantonese Writing 47
Yeng Pway Ngon's Sinophone Articulation in *Opera Costume* 52
The Interplay of Cantonese and Absent Memory in an Alternating Omniscient Narrative 56
Completing Narrative Inheritance Through Cantonese 63
Conclusion: The Imperative of Retaining the Mother Tongue 73

Chapter Three Everyday Life and Forgetfulness: Crisis of Memory in Malaysia 76
Introduction: Li Zishu's Quotidian Cantonese Writing in Malaysia 77
The Interplay of Cantonese, Crisis of Memory, and Heteroglossia 83
Li Zishu's Sinophone Articulation in *Snapshots of Chow Fu* 87

Self-representation: Mundaneness in Everyday Life 91
Self-reflexivity: Oblivion and Forgetfulness Toward the MCP 97
Conclusion: Farewell to the MCP 105

Conclusion 108

Bibliography 112

Introduction

This thesis focuses on contemporary Cantonese literature in order to explore how Cantonese narratives articulate specific memories in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia. Drawing on the Sinophone as a critical concept, this study represents how Cantonese, as a non-standard Sinitic language, challenges monolingualism and captures memories from specific times and places. The central argument of my thesis is that writers use Cantonese language to underline individual identity that is embedded within the narrative. Writing in Cantonese might not be considered an identity that distinguishes a writer from writing in a standard language per se, yet it is the interplay between Cantonese and the standard language that creates spaces of the uniquely Cantonese identity. Understanding Cantonese literature through Sinophone studies and memory studies, each chapter looks at distinct but inter-related representations of Cantonese where memory is part of articulating identity.

The scope of this thesis is an investigation of three fictional works from the 2000s that explore Cantonese, memory and individual identity formation – *Lit lo juen/ Lie lao zhuan* 烈佬傳 (Children of Darkness, 2012) by Hong Kong writer Wong Bik-wan/ Huang Biyun 黃碧雲 (1961-), *Hei fuk*/ *Xifu* 戲服 (Opera Costume, 2015) by Singaporean writer Yeng Pway Ngon/ Ying Pei'an 英培安 (1947-) and *Chow Fu gei leuk/ Zhoufu jilue* 州府紀略 (Snapshots of Chow Fu, 2000) by Malaysian writer Lai Tsz Shu/ Li Zishu 黎紫書 (1971-). This opening chapter will first serve to elaborate the definition of Cantonese literature and to introduce the methodological framework of Sinophone studies and memory studies, as well as to explain my choice of selecting three texts from contemporary Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia for comparison. I argue that each text

addresses its temporal- and geo- specific memories through the use of Cantonese, carving out a respective identity.

On the History of Cantonese Literature

To understand Cantonese literature, I borrow Robert S. Bauer's definition, who states that "written Cantonese is any text which contains at least one Cantonese lexical item and is intended by its writer to be read by a Cantonese-speaking reader."[1] Written Cantonese is identified differently from Mandarin as morphemes, its syntax and lexical items. If a text is written largely in Cantonese, it might present significant challenges to non-Cantonese readers (Bauer 1988, 255). Written Cantonese also looks to spoken Cantonese rather than written Standard Mandarin Chinese. Such a degree of autonomy and norms are considered as attributes of a standard language (Downes 1988). In comparison to other southern Chinese spoken languages, Cantonese has a relatively well-developed writing system and a more conventionalized writing tradition (Chen 1999, 115).

According to linguist Donald Snow, there were verses being composed in Cantonese and published as of the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644). At this time, Cantonese literature served mainly for the lower-class as entertainment, with limited amounts of marked Cantonese. In the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Cantonese literature became more mature, with *muk yu shu*/ *muyu shu* 木魚書 (wooden fish books) printed on woodblocks. As a kind of *suet cheung man hok/ shuochang wenxue* 說唱文學 (speak-and-sing literature), wooden fish books containing lyrics in long narrative songs enjoyed popularity along the Pearl Delta in Guangdong. The popularized entertainment *naam yum*/ *nan yin* 南音 (southern songs) and Cantonese opera further boosted the

[1] Robert S. Bauer, "Written Cantonese of Hong Kong," *Cahiers de Linguistique Asie Orientale* 17, no. 2 (1988): 254-255.

growth of Cantonese literature, which coincided with shorter and more lyrical Cantonese literary forms. Another important genre, *yuet au/ yue ou* 粵謳 (Cantonese love songs), adopted more colloquial Cantonese to depict relationships between courtesans and their clients. This brought the genre to new levels of public attention and popularity.[2] Critic Fanny Yuen-mei Li investigates Cantonese literature from the late Qing and early Republican period (1912-1949), identifying its role in spreading revolutionary ideologies. She argues that the development of written Cantonese is closely tied to the advancement of publishing and the transmission of political thought, concluding that late Qing political climate made Cantonese literature prevalent.[3]

Traditionally, Guangdong is considered the standard variety of Cantonese and the genuine regional standard and lingua franca (Liang 2015, 17). By the 1930s, Cantonese had developed as a written language in Cantonese opera scripts, popular stories, and even textbooks for women and children in Guangdong (Snow 2004, 98). The wide use of Cantonese gradually spread to Hong Kong with the political agenda "Hong Kong Dialect Literature Movement" (1947-1949). In order to attract support from the Cantonese-speaking masses of peasants and workers, left-wing and communist writers promoted their ideas in politics, literature and the arts in a series of Hong Kong newspapers with Cantonese writing.[4] The motion was supported by well-known national authors Mao Dun 茅盾 and Guo Moruo 郭沫若, who pointed out that Cantonese vernacular writing communicated directly to the Cantonese-speaking working classes of Guangdong and Hong

---

[2] See Donald Snow, "A Short History of Published Cantonese: What is a Dialect Literature?" *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 4, no. 3 (1994): 130-134.

[3] See Fanny Yuen-mei Li, *Qingmo minchu de yueyu shuxie* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2017).

[4] "Dialect Literature Movement Research Project," *MCLC Resource Center*, November 5, 2014. Accessed March 8, 2019. https://u.osu.edu/mclc/2014/11/05/dialect-literature-movement-research-project/.

Kong.[5] As a result, many theoretical articles and literary works using Cantonese were published in Hong Kong newspapers, such as *Wah Kiu Yat Bo*/ *Huaqiao Ribao* 華僑日報 (Overseas Chinese Daily News), *Sing Do Yat Bo*/ *Xingdao Ribao* 星島日報 (Sing Tao Daily) and *Dai Gung Bo*/ *Dagong Bao* 大公報 (Ta Kung Pao), etc. Although the movement ceased abruptly in late 1949 when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established, and the political influence of the movement was too short-lived to be assessed, it is proof of the historical political importance of Cantonese writing in Guangdong and Hong Kong. Newspapers in Hong Kong are still written in Cantonese today.

While Guangdong remains active in producing Cantonese media culture, and written Cantonese is used in daily life, such as texting and online chats, the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and the Cold War have significantly influenced the status of Cantonese in Guangdong and Hong Kong.[6] After the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), Hong Kong attracted a score of intellectuals from mainland China to travel southward to promote their ideas. Due to the positive noninterventionism of the colonial British Hong Kong government, as well as the tightened atmosphere of Cold War, Hong Kong "opened up a space for the national preservation and promotion of a national culture for exiled intellectuals."[7] The free cultural environment provided written Cantonese with fertile soil and made Hong Kong served as a stronghold for Cantonese publishing center. Unlike the previous stage where Cantonese appealed to a lower-class audience,

---

[5] See Donald Snow, *Cantonese as Written Language: The Growth of a Written Chinese Vernacular* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 106.

[6] For the development of Cantonese media culture and people's private lives in using written Cantonese in present-day Guangdong, see Sihua Liang, *Language Attitudes and Identities in Multilingual China: A Linguistic Ethnography* (New York: Springer, 2015), 18-20.

[7] Xiaojue Wang, *Modernity with a Cold War Face: Reimagining the Nation in Chinese Literature across the 1949 Divide* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 40.

more newspapers and popular literature that were written in Cantonese were targeted to middle-class readers. By the 1980s, colloquial Cantonese was found in advertising and magazines, and became a major feature of Hong Kong's publishing industry. In the 1990s, Hong Kong was a cultural leader in producing Cantonese-language literatures and films (Snow 2004, 125).

In regard to fiction, many Cantonese literary works can be traced from *naam loi zok ga/ nanlai zuojia* 南來作家 (south-coming writers). *Ging gei yat gei/ Jingji riji* 經紀日記 (The Diary of an Agent, 1947) by Sam So/ San Su 三蘇, also known as Ko Hung/ Gao Xiong 高雄 (1918-1981), is considered as satirical, combining classical Chinese, Cantonese, and Standard Chinese. This unique style is called *saam kap dai/ san jidi* 三及第. Joseph S.M. Lau comments that this novel is both realistic and satirical, using written Cantonese to reflect Hong Kong society.[8] Another novel by Wong Guk Lau/ Huang Guliu 黃谷柳 (1908-1977), *Ha kau juen/ Xiaqiu Zhuang* 蝦球傳 (The Story of Shrimp Ball, 1947) was created during the Hong Kong Dialect Literature Movement. It contained a mixture of Cantonese, standard Chinese, and transliterations of English to represent the colonial transformations of Hong Kong. Yet Leung Ping-kwan suggests that this criticism of colonialism is not effective.[9] Contemporary writers have continuously produced Cantonese literature after the year 2000, using a more substantial use of vernacular Cantonese in order to express their concerns. In *Kam do cha caan teng/ Jindu chacanting* 金都茶餐廳 (Cando Restaurant, 2003), Chan Koon-chung/ Chen Guangzhong 陳冠中 (1952-) uses Cantonese slang to

[8] See Joseph S.M. Lau, "Jingji la de shijie," in *Wuge fangwen*, ed. Lin Yiliang (Hong Kong: Wenyi shuwu, 1972), 187-196.

[9] See Leung Ping-kwan, "Two Discourses on Colonialism: Huang Guliu and Eileen Chang on Hong Kong of the Forties," in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in The Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 86-87.

represent the difficult time for Hong Kong people at the crossroads of postcolonialism and globalization. Chung Mung-ting considers that Chan's Cantonese usage serves as a rebellion against the binary opposition of colonialism.[10] David Der-wei Wang regards the Cantonese use of Ma Ka Fai/ Ma Jiahui 馬家輝 (1963-) in *Lung tau fung mei/ Longtou fengwei* 龍頭鳳尾 (Once Upon a Time in Hong Kong, 2016) as a rewriting of a history of pain of Hong Kong in the context of colonialism, betrayal and homosexuality.[11]

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Hong Kong is not the only site to produce Cantonese literature. Ethnic Chinese writers in Singapore and Malaysia also write in Cantonese. At the high peak of Chinese migration in the 1920s, nearly four million Chinese entered Southeast Asia.[12] Most of them were from Southern China, particularly, Fujian, Guangdong and Hainan province. The influx of the Chinese immigrants brought along with their diverse languages such as Cantonese. Additionally, the British colonial network cultivated a strong connection between Hong Kong and Malaya to facilitate trade and other commercial activities.[13] The development of Cantonese middleman trade enabled active Cantonese business communities in the South Seas.[14] The Cold War further reconfigured geopolitical and cultural relations among China, Hong Kong

---

[10] See Chung Mung-ting, "Xianggang wu gushi? Cong houzhimin lilun zaisi Chen Guangzhong jindu chacanting," *Journal of Chinese Literary Studies*, no. 18 & 19 (2011): N.p. Accessed March 30, 2019. http://www.huayuqiao.org/LLM/LLM-1819/LLM181909.htm.

[11] See David Der-wei Wang, "Lishi jiushi binzhou – lun Ma jiahui de Longtou fengwei," in *Longtou fengwei*, by Ma Ka Fai (Taipei: Xinjingdian wenhua, 2016), 8.

[12] See Brian Bernards, *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 43.

[13] I use the term "Malaya" to indicate the common history shared by Malaysia and Singapore, before their respective independence in 1957 and 1965.

[14] See Derek Heng and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, ed. *Singapore in Global History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 123-127.

and Southeast Asia. Benefitting from its specific strategic position in the Cold War, Hong Kong had a thriving Cantonese publishing and film industry, and was the major exporter of Cantonese movies in the 1950s to overseas communities in Southeast Asia.[15] Hong Kong-style Cantonese television shows and movies that were distinct from Guangdong became the main linguistic influence on Malaysia.[16] These business and cultural exchanges secured Southeast Asia as another hub for the production and the dissemination of Cantonese culture.

Part of the Cantonese literary transnational network, Sinophone Singaporean/ Malaysian writer Chiu Yung/ Zhao Rong 趙戎 (1920-1998) was born before the independence of Singapore and developed his writing career in Malaysia. His story, *Gu lo shek shan/ Gulao shishan* 古老石山 (An Ancient Mountain, 1948), is known for its heavy use of Cantonese as the dominant narration (Groppe 2013, 69). Miu Sau/ Miao Xiu 苗秀 (1920-1988), in the novel *Sun ga bo uk ding ha/ Xinjiapo wuding xia* 新加坡屋頂下 (Under the Roof of Singapore, 1951) borrowed Cantonese slang in order to refract the psychological state of the protagonist and 1950s Singapore.[17] More recent works, such as *Ching gaau to/ Qingjiao tu* 清教徒 (Puritans, 2006) and *Ng ji sau/ Wuzhi xiu* 唔知羞 (Not Knowing Shame, 2006) by Wan Kok Seng/ Wen Xiangying 溫

[15] See E.K. Tan "Hong Kong Cinema and the Portrayal of the Nanyang Chinese in the 1950s and 1960s," *Journal of Chinese Cinema* 4, no. 2 (2010): 156.

[16] See Shu-mei Shih, "Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production," in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai and Brian Bernards (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 32.

[17] See Wong Meng Voon and Xu naixiang, ed. *Xinjiapo huawen wenxueshi chugao* (Singapore: Bafang wenhua, 2002), 126.

祥英 (1940-), incorporate Cantonese, standard Chinese, Malay, and English in order to narrate the bildungsroman within the Malaysian context.[18]

As we can see, Cantonese literature is by no means a recent development. However, as Cantonese literature blossomed in the literary landscape, the existing academic commentaries categorize Cantonese literature region by region. There is currently a lack of scholarly research that draws Cantonese literature together within a Sinophone context and examines engagements and discrepancies across geographical boundaries. Sinophone critique, which concerns itself with Sinitic literary writings produced outside and on the margins of China, is a good intersecting point to bring divergent Cantonese works from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia together and probe into time- and place-specific local language experiences.

Cantonese Literature and Sinophone Articulations

In light of a Sinophone theoretical approach, I find that Cantonese literature is well-placed within the Sinophone framework to deliver an articulation of the Sinophone. Proposed by Shu-mei Shih, the concept of Sinophone is "a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness."[19] The aim of the critique is to reevaluate the cultural relationship of "Chinese," "Chinese literature," "Chinese diaspora," and "Chineseness" from Chinese communities around the world, such as those in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, Western Europe, and North America. Inspired in part by Francophone and Anglophone literary studies that attempt to detach literatures written in French/ English from national French/ English history, Sinophone literature shares the same goal, which is to carve out "literature in Chinese"

[18] See Ng Kim Chew, "Zihuaxiang: ping mahua zuojia Wen xiangying de liangbu jingzuo Zihuaxiang, Qingjiao tu," *Wen-hsun*, no. 265 (November 2007): 95.

[19] Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4.

from “Chinese literature” that presumes that literature is composed in and consumed by the PRC.[20] The concept of “Sinophone” is primarily to open a category that “views China and Chineseness at an oblique angle in light of place-specific experiences.”[21] This also aims to give marginalized works full attention.

Another emphasis of Sinophone studies is to resist the hegemonic linguistic center of Mandarin, also known as *Hon Yu/ Hanyu* 漢語, by recognizing the diversity of Sinitic languages in both sound and script. Since Mandarin is the official and standard language of the PRC, it is easily conflated with “Chinese language” without properly assessing how multilingual “Chinese language” is. According to Shih, Sino-Tibetan languages in China are subdivided into Tibeto-Burman languages and Sinitic languages. The latter includes Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien, Shanghainese, Shandongese, etc., which are living languages widely spoken in China by ethnic Han and other ethnic minorities.[22] The vast majority of Sinitic languages have various orthographical conventions that barely resemble each other.[23] They are vibrant, polyphonic, and polyscriptic. Accompanying the wave of settler colonialism and immigration, these Sinitic languages moved to new places of residence. The new diasporic sites also became multilingual, such as Sinophone Malaysian literature, where writers often combine English, Malay, Tamil, Cantonese, and Hokkien in their works.[24] Yet, just China is dominated by Mandarin, Sinophone

---

[20] Shu-mei Shih, “Introduction: What is Sinophone Studies?” In *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai and Brian Bernards (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 8.

[21] Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 34.

[22] See Shu-mei Shih, “The Concept of the Sinophone,” *PMLA* 126, no.3 (May 2011): 715.

[23] See Victor H. Mair, “What is a Chinese ‘Dialect/ Topolect’? Reflections on Some Key Sino-English Linguistic Terms,” *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 29 (September 1991): 7.

[24] Shih, “Introduction: What is Sinophone Studies?” 9.

sites are also preoccupied with their own official languages. For instance, Malaysia is dominated by Malay. Sinitic languages are inevitably placed on the margins and regarded as minor languages. As time goes by, whether to use a Sinitic language is a matter of choice for generations in transition. (Shih 2007, 185)

Because of its concern of minorities, the concept of Sinophone becomes effective in critiquing the centrism of China, Mandarin Chinese, and the dominant languages in the many countries that sinitic-language speakers inhabit. Jing Tsu surveys the different sinitic-language literatures in Chinese diasporic communities, offering the notion of "literary governance," a network that negotiates between "linguistic nativity" and "native speaker." To her, "linguistic nativity" involves politics in play, tending to support a range of linguistic allegiances to disregard margins. She debunks the common perceptions of "mother tongue" and "native language" in order to argue that language as a "medium of access" rather than a "right to identity." Sinophone writing is individualized depending on location and language.[25] Andrea Bachner takes the same effort to suggest that the national script is a carrier of national identity. By taking Sinograph as a case, Bachner argues that Sinograph is hybrid and dynamic in nature, dismantling cultural rigidity from scripts. She puts forward a new vision of Sinitic scripts in order to acknowledge its multiple positionalities and medialities.[26] Shu-mei Shih aligns herself with the idea that Sinophone language choices and practices are closely tied to a specific time and place, which generates a multi-directional critique. She terms the narratives that are composed in different Sinitic languages in the Sinophone context as "Sinophone articulations." They disrupt the totalized China and

[25] See Jing Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[26] See Andrea Bachner, *Beyond Sinology: Chinese Writing and the Scripts of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Chineseness, and possibly Malaysia and Malaysianess, America and Americaness, and so on.[27] These scholars all decenter the assumed identity of language with nation through considering time-specific and place-based Sinophone culture. The old map of nations becomes replaced with an intersecting network of nodes.

Taking this into account, Sinophone articulation becomes critical to Cantonese literature as it is a "constellation of languages specific to their locality, and their meaning and significance do not need to be gauged only in terms of the major language."[28] For its unofficial and non-standard Sinitic language, literature in Cantonese has long been relegated to a position of low-prestige (Snow 2004, 101). Such a conception not only ignores the presence of Cantonese literature, but also disregards Cantonese literature's Sinophone articulation and its particular locality hidden in the narrative. When writers use Cantonese in their writing, it activates linguistic heterogeneity and multiplicity that allows readers to hear a cacophony, which includes the Cantonese experience. By examining Cantonese literature in a Sinophone context, we can provide an alternative reading of Cantonese amid the narratives and contestations existing in different temporal and spatial locations.

To date, a wealth of scholarship has contributed to Sinophone linguistics communities by mapping out the exchange of literary works. E.K. Tan's "translational practices" considers that the concept of Sinophone is translational, moving through the network of multiple Sinitic languages.[29] Alison M. Groppe discusses Sinophone Malaysian literature in its exchange with China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia, probing into the issue of language, identity, and culture in multi-ethnic

---

[27] Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 35.

[28] Ibid., 31.

[29] See E.K. Tan, *Rethinking Chineseness: Translational Sinophone Identities in the Nanyang Literary World* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2013).

Malaysia.[30] Brian Bernards reinterprets the narratives of Nanyang and the South Seas in order to reimagine Southeast Asian literature by considering its historical and linguistic contextualization.[31]

Despite these robust scholarly endeavours, there are limiting works to discuss the engagement and the role of Cantonese, as a Sinitic language and its Sinophone articulation, across various Sinophone sites. Hence, I use the term "Sinophone" in referring to Cantonese-speaking subjects and authors outside and on the margins of China. I do this in order to highlight the literary Cantonese texts' entanglement with dominant domestic powers. It foregrounds the bifurcation of Sinitic scripts in standard Mandarin Chinese and vernacular Cantonese. In this context, "Sinophone" is less concerned with ethnic minority communities in China as it is with those in Tibet and Xinjiang, nor the confrontation between settler colonizers and indigenous peoples as it is in Taiwan, nor ethnic Han subjects dealing with Chineseness in America. Instead, I use "Sinophone" with full awareness to focus on Sinophone literary soundscape, namely, local Cantonese literature that is produced in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia to evince the diversity of Cantonese sound and script. I consider that these Cantonese texts identify themselves in opposition to dominant discourse, be it Chinese authorities, Singaporean assimilation or Malaysian ideologies.

Acknowledging the border-crossing Cantonese soundscape is the key entry point into Sinophone representations, it is my hope to investigate the function of Cantonese and highlight the productive ways in which it allows us to consider the Sinophone subject in accordance with time-

---

[30] See Alison M. Groppe, *Sinophone Malaysian Literature: Not Made in China* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2013).

[31] See Bernards, *Writing the South Seas*.

and place- based condition, vis-a-vis memory studies. In so doing, it can open up productive debates and dialogues regarding the mutual implication of Cantonese at different localities.

Memory at the Crossroads of Cantonese and Sinophone

Memory is a useful intervention when speaking of time- and place- based locality. In her essay discussing diaspora as a state of being, Lingchei Letty Chen introduces memory studies, arguing that the validity of diaspora in helping to understand spatial and temporal connotations of the Sinophone. She suggests that the diaspora bring along their home country memories when they migrate to a new place, despite home memories being specifically tied to the ground they come from and being sensitive to time. These memories will pass down from generation to generation. "Traces left by memory manifest themselves in longing and nostalgia, in searching for identity, in community building, and in reproduction of cultural and religious rituals and customs."[32] Thus the notion of diaspora is always a state of being that exists in generations. Chen concludes that the notion of diaspora should be understood through memory, place, and displacement, which is critical to the concept of Sinophone (Chen 2015, 13).

Notwithstanding that the aim of this thesis is not to explore the notion of diaspora, I find the time- and place-based feature of memory studies compelling to engage with Cantonese literature and the Sinophone critique. Obviously, memory gives a voice to the past and the memory that belongs to a certain time and place might not be consumed by the others. The characteristic of memory interacts well with the Sinophone in narrating distinct localities, encouraging us to look at specificity without conflating it with centrism. Yet despite the fact that memories capture the past event situated in a specific time and place, psychologists and historians have shown that the

[32] Lingchei Letty Chen, "When Does 'Diaspora' End And 'Sinophone' Begin?" *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no.1 (July 2015): 2.

memory of past events is not fixed but changed by one's present situation, either by individuals or groups.[33] Memory can be erased, disregarded and forgotten. Memory can also be ruptured and non-communicable during generational transition. After all, no one else can feel and share the exact same memories as others. But I would argue, memory studies is still useful in discussing the Sinophone because of its matter of choice. Akin to the Sinophone community's right to choose whether to speak Sinitic languages, it is "a historical formation that constantly undergoes transformation that reflect local needs and conditions."[34] The Sinophone cultural sphere is free to select which particular memories they want to remember and forget. Their full conscious choice of remembering and forgetting directly indicates the state of their current situation and identity in a designated place and era.

A similar assertion applies to Cantonese literature as well. As above, Cantonese literature is a minor literature specifically intended for Cantonese readers. The language and the audience compose a very clear picture that Cantonese literature is a time- and place-based practice. Connecting Cantonese articulation to memory is effective to reveal a full account of the current Sinophone community's concerns and representations in respective places.

Previous attempts have been made to do research on memory, trauma, and history through the lens of Chinese-language literature. To list several, Yomi Braester's *Witness Against History: Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-century China* (2003), David Der-wei Wang's *The Monster That is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (2004), Ban Wang's *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China*

[33] See Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 4.

[34] Shih, "Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production," 33.

(2004), and Michael Berry's *A History of Pain - Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (2011). These works have all responded to the way in which memory and historical trauma are reimagined by writers and filmmakers. Most recently, the edited volume *The Politics of Memory in Sinophone Cinemas and Image Culture: Altering Archives* (2018), brings Sinophone cinema and visual culture into the conversation in order to discuss how arts serve as a memory archive of aesthetic politics. This thesis continues with the investigation of memory as its locus. But it sets it apart with an emphasis on the function of Cantonese and its Sinophone articulation in order to retrieve memories under specific temporal and spatial contexts.

Structure of the Chapters

I believe that the role of Cantonese in addressing time-and place- specific memories will be thoroughly revealed if we juxtapose Cantonese literary works produced in different Sinophone cultural spheres. It will be helpful to discuss how the different uses of Cantonese generate possible engagements for understanding memory and Sinophone articulation. As such, I include three contemporary works of Cantonese literature – *Children of Darkness* by Hong Kong writer Wong Bik-wan, *Opera Costume* by Singaporean writer Yeng Pway Ngon and *Snapshots of Chow Fu* by Malaysian writer Li Zishu. They have been chosen for their similarities. First of all, the location where the three literary works were produced is outside or on the margins of China and Chineseness. This fits the paradigm of the Sinophone since we want to reconsider the relation with China and Chineseness, Singapore and Singaporeness, Malaysia and Malaysianess. Furthermore, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia are all former British colonies, and all three novels simultaneously touch upon the memories of communism in the colonial period. Although memories regarding communism may or may not be the focus in the novels, communism is collectively shared by the ex-colonies. Finally, all three fictions were written after 2000 and

narrated in retrospect. Since the year 2000 can be considered as a new century and a turning point, it is intriguing to put the three works together in order to see their engagements and mutual implications in recollection. Despite their similarities, these novels were chosen for their differences as well. Obviously, no equal usage of Cantonese is found in all three works. Their extent of using Cantonese varies, with *Children of Darkness* using the most Cantonese, followed by *Opera Costume*, and *Snapshots of Chow Fu* the least. The amount of mixing Cantonese within the texts clearly implies a different objective for bringing out distinct memories, which ties to time and place specificities. The geographical and generational differences further register a distinct locality. It is these different understandings that in turn help to underline the respective identity in each place.

The first chapter takes Wong Bik-wan's novel *Children of Darkness* as its main focus in order to understand how vulgarized Cantonese creates a familiarity and intersects with "involuntary autobiographical memory" (Berntsen, 2009) that can reshape a subject's identity. Written in 2012, fifteen years after the 1997 Handover, I read the novel in parallel to Hong Kong's history. I argue that the extreme vulgarity of Cantonese with its profanity, slang, and jargon, recaptures the primordial psychological state of the protagonist as he lives through his past memories. The recollection of involuntary autobiographical memory unexpectedly reveals the unbidden past, making Sinophone articulation possible so as to voice out Hong Kong's own identity.

The second chapter looks at Yeng Pway Ngon's novel *Opera Costume* with the notions of "mother tongue" (Tsu, 2010) and "absent memory" (Fine, 1988) in order to investigate how Cantonese, as a mother tongue, becomes imperative in retrieving lost memory. Analyzing the work in parallel with Singapore's state-imposed "Speak Mandarin Campaign" (1979), I contend that the

campaign arbitrarily assigns a mother tongue (Mandarin) that creates a damaging effect on the protagonist's own mother tongue (Cantonese), attempting to eradicate her access to ancestral roots. I suggest that in the post-Campaign era, the Sinophone Singaporean generation reconnect with their mother tongue by re-learning Cantonese and learning Cantonese opera in order to articulate their own identity and situate themselves.

The third chapter delves into Li Zishu's short story, *Snapshots of Chow Fu*, and traces how her limited use of Cantonese points toward mundaneness of life, and deliberate forgetting of Malayan communism. I borrow the concept of "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin, 1981) and "crisis of memory" (Suleiman, 2006), in order to examine how the multi-person narrative disrupts the imposed discourse of remembering. I suggest that the fragmented use of Cantonese exposes everyday life, indicating that the bygone era of communism is no longer important. Cantonese articulation here thus reflects the present priority among young Sinophone Malaysians to get on with life.

In the main, these three chapters touch upon the various memories of convergence and divergence that build Sinophone identity in their respective time and place through Cantonese writing. Together they attest to the configuration of local authorities in the "post-era" – post-Handover period in Hong Kong, post-Speak Mandarin Campaign in Singapore, and post-Malayan Communist Party in Malaysia. This constructs a special kind of present identity that distinguishes from the previous generation and other Sinophone regions. As this thesis demonstrates, Cantonese language manifests is never a mere literary tool, it carries through Sinophone articulation to reflect identities situated in time and place.

Note on Romanization

A brief note about Romanization. Since this thesis concentrates on Cantonese works as a heterogeneous force other than Mandarin in order to outline respective identity, I intend to offer readers a sense of oral and aural plurality in Cantonese. When discussing the three fictional works, Cantonese novels, and Cantonese authors, Cantonese Romanization are used throughout. The first time an individual is discussed, I will first give Cantonese transliteration and standard Chinese pinyin (based on Mandarin pronunciation), followed by traditional Chinese characters, and English translation in parentheses. Even though such transcriptions might be cumbersome, they demonstrate the diversity of Sinitic languages in the context of this thesis. For authors, places, historical figures and non-Cantonese literary works that are better known in Mandarin or other non-standard spellings, this thesis continues with pinyin and corresponding spellings. The only exception given is to Li Zishu, whose name I transcribe in pinyin. Although Li Zishu is one of the main Cantonese writers discuss in this thesis, and her work *Snapshots of Chow Fu* is written in Cantonese. Most existing scholarship and news in English language refer to her by "Li Zishu."[35] Thus, I adhere to the common practice of pinyin transcription to avoid confusion. Unless specified, all translations from Cantonese are my own.

[35] For Anglophone scholarship on using pinyin to refer to Li Zishu, see Brian Bernards, "Beyond Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Recuperating Creolization in Postcolonial Sinophone Malaysian Literature," *Postcolonial Studies* 15, no.3 (September 2012): 323-324; Groppe, *Sinophone Malaysian Literature*, 255-277; Shu-mei Shih, "Race and Relation: The Global Sixties in the South of the South," *Comparative Literature* 68, no.2 (June 2016): 148-149. For English news on using pinyin to refer to Li Zishu, see "HKBU welcomes renowned novelist Li Zishu as Writer-in-Residence," *Hong Kong Baptist University*, April 11, 2017. Accessed March 31, 2019. https://bunews.hkbu.edu.hk/news/people/hkbu-welcomes-renowned-novelist-li-zishu-as-writer-in-residence.

Chapter One

Reclaiming Self-identity: Involuntary Autobiographical Memory in Hong Kong

This chapter explores the vulgarized use of Cantonese in the novel *Children of Darkness* by Hong Kong writer Wong Bik-wan, in order to examine its dual function of attaining self-identity as well as cultivating a sense of place. Written fifteen years after the 1997 Handover, the novel depicts a former drug addict lurking in the underbelly of Hong Kong. It deploys a distinctive use of Cantonese writing that combines standard language, vernacular Cantonese, profanity, fragmented phrases, underworld slang, and jargon to reveal the protagonist's journey to find himself. With its stream-of-consciousness narrative structure, I argue that the combined use of Cantonese intersects with "involuntary autobiographical memory," which refers to the retrieval of personal experience without a conscious effort to do so (Berntsen, 2009). Recollection of unexpected memory provides the protagonist with a chance to re-experience past events. His extremely vulgar Cantonese represents the psychological condition of semi-illiterate person searching for his self concept. At the same time, I contend that the coarse Cantonese carves away from monolithic Mandarin, being that it is more uneasy than standard script. It unsettles hierarchies between national Chinese script and oral/ aural Cantonese. In this way, Cantonese writing underscores the language subjectivity of Hong Kong while registering a specific sense of place within it.

First in this chapter, I examine Wong Bik-wan's writing career and her background in Cantonese writing. Then, I move on to dissect the interplay of Cantonese and involuntary autobiographical memory and the search for self. In the third section, I analyze how the vulgarized Cantonese conveys Sinophone articulation and how this ties to the protagonist's psychology. In the fourth section, I discuss how this use of Cantonese is able to secure and accomplish the quest

for self-identity. Finally, the concluding remarks summarize the possible implications of vulgarized Cantonese in literature.

Introduction: Tracing Wong Bik-wan's Hybrid Cantonese Writing

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Wong Bik-wan worked first as a scriptwriter and reporter. She began her writing career in the mid-1980s and continues today. Her writing trajectory can be roughly divided into two phases, before 2004 that of "aesthetic of violence" (Dung 1996, Lau 1999, Wang 2004), and after 2011 that of silent reticence, signifying two distinctive writing style.

In her "aesthetic of violence" period, most of her short stories were characterized by "violent energy, exorbitant emotions, and sadistic excesses."[36] Joseph S.M. Lau compares Wong to mainland Chinese writer Yu Hua 余華, who is well-known for his avant-garde style of language and structure, and points out their similarly nightmarish writing. Lau acknowledges that the frequent violence in Wong's tales repelled him, yet he was irresistibly drawn to her "fragile beauty meshes with hard-core brutality."[37] David Der-wei Wang suggests that Wong's motivation for attempting violence is distinct from that of Yu Hua and Can Xue 殘雪, another mainland Chinese avant-garde writer. He argues that Wong believes in "more pain, more tender," that tenderness is the basis of Wong's violent writing. The seemingly paradoxical tenderness and violence are inseparable in her literary works.[38]

---

[36] Janet Ng, "Writing from the Obverse: Wong Bik-Wan's Fiction and Nostalgia in Hong Kong," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 20, no.1 (2008): 44.

[37] Joseph S.M. Lau, "The "Little Woman" as Exorcist: Notes on the Fiction of Huang Biyun," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, no.2.2 (1999): 161.

[38] David Der-wei Wang, "Baolie de wenrou: Huang Biyun de xiaoshuo," in *Shier nüse*, by Wong Bik-wan (Taipei: Maitian, 2000), 18-19.

Aside from her noteworthy "aesthetic of violence," Wong's early works mostly depict how Hong Kong people conceive of national identity amid major historical incidents, namely, the 1997 Handover. Her works have often been analysed in relation to Hong Kong's confused state of postcoloniality. Perhaps one of her most well-known short stories, *Sut sing/ Shicheng* 失城 (Lost City, 1994), depicts the emigratory route of Chan Lo Yuen/ Chen Luyuan 陳路遠 and his wife Chiu Mei/ Zhao Mei 趙眉, who escaped the Handover's fear. They emigrate to Calgary, Toronto, and San Francisco but the journey is filled with unhappiness and disappointment. Chiu is driven to the brink of mental illness, feeding her children with raw poultry innards. Unable to put up with his wife's insanity, Chan abandons his family and returns to Hong Kong. When his wife and children follow him to Hong Kong, Chan nonchalantly murders them. Michael Berry comments that this story is both a projection of the anticipatory trauma of 1997 and an internalization of violence, representing a transnational journey in the loss of home and identity.[39] Wong's propensity for narrating brutality reflected the haunting Handover fear and uncanny sense of postcolonialism. Wong's early stage of writing culminated in the short story collection *Chum mak, um ah, mei siu/ Chenmo, anya, weixiao* 沉默・暗啞・微小 (Silence, Dimness and Trivialness, 2004). Since then, she has been exploring the possibility of "minor writing" to turn self into the subject of writing.[40] She stopped writing for seven years, from 2005 to 2011.

In 2011, Wong's novel *Mut yat jau dim/ Mori jiudian* 末日酒店 (Doomsday Hotel) was published bilingually, with a Chinese-English edition. I consider from this point forward, Wong

---

[39] Michael Berry, *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 369.

[40] See Wong Bik-wan, "Xiaoxie zhi keneng," *Ming Pao*, D12, July 11, 2004.

begins her second stage of writing. First, unlike her previous stage that produced several short story collections, she turns intensively to novel-writing. The four books she published after 2011 have all been novels. They include: *Doomsday Hotel*, *Children of Darkness*, *Mei hei chung hang/ Weixi chongxing* 微喜重行 (The Re-walking of Mei-hei, 2014) and the most recent work *Lo Kei ji sei/ Luqi zhi si* 盧麒之死 (The Death of Lo Kei, 2018). Second, she leaves behind her signature "aesthetic of violence" and adopts a more restrained, rational and minimalist narrative style in her works. For instance, she leaves out emotive and subjective descriptors in *Children of Darkness*. She attempts "a non-fictional fiction," inserting journalistic reports, court records and scattered materials in *The Death of Lo Kei*. This intends to blur the line between personal fiction and unbiased news.[41] Wong's blood-drenched imagery and violent imagination disappear. More importantly, she seeks to carry out "minor writing." Still set against a background of Hong Kong, her latest novels no longer concern the fear of the disappearing city-state identity amid the 1997 Handover. She focuses rather on minor "self" and personal struggles in order to project a bigger picture. She hopes to use "the self of the writing subject, the self of the language, the self of the nation and the self of the centered discourse" in order to see greatness in trivialities.[42] It is fair to say that Wong is trying to approach her works in a different literary style from her early writing.

Among this corpus of works in her second writing stage, the novel *Children of Darkness*, which appeared in 2012 is peculiar for its substantial use of Cantonese and its portrayal of searching for one's self. It is considered a male counterpart to Wong's first full-length novel, *Lit lui to/ Lie nü tu* 烈女圖 (Portraits of Martyred Women, 1999), which both share the Chinese

[41] See Wong Bik-wan, *Luqi zhi si* (Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2018), back cover.

[42] Wong, "Xiaoxie zhi keneng."

character *Lit/ Lie* 烈 in the title and use Cantonese writing to different degrees.[43] Exhibiting women's bodies for the purpose of examining physical sacrifice and martyrdom from three generations, *Portraits of Martyred Women* captures female representation in a changing space.[44] Liou Liang-ya analyzes the novel from a postcolonial perspective and points out that the suppressed female bodies resemble Hong Kong's subjectivity.[45] The novel uses crude Cantonese to describe hunger, rape, virgins, menstrual blood, and deep cunts. In regards to this, Mirana May Szeto coins the term "CUNTonese" to illustrate its function of decomposing and scavenging the violence of patriarchal language (Szeto 2013, 199). Switching the gender role, *Children of Darkness* depicts a man lurking in marginal living conditions of contemporary Hong Kong. It exposes an individual journey through the passage of time. Dissimilar to its female counterpart, this novel in no way uses Cantonese to highlight bloody corporeality. The entire narrative has a restrained and minimalistic approach without revealing much of the protagonist's emotion. The vulgarized Cantonese is used to gain insight into that inner self left obscured by the author.

Constructed in a quasi stream-of-consciousness mode with a non-linear timeline, *Children of Darkness* is written as a first-person narrative. A sixty-year-old Shanghai-born former drug addict, Chow Mei Naan/ Zhou Weinan 周未難, thinks about his personal journey and underclass life in three sections: *chi chu/ cichu* 此處 (Here), *na chu/ nachu* 那處 (There) and *bei chu/ bichu*

---

[43] "Lit/ Lie" (烈) in Chinese character has a "fire" radical and is often connected with martyred heroes. For detailed meaning of "Lit" in Chinese, see Janet Ng, "Writing from the Obverse: Wong Bik-Wan's Fiction and Nostalgia in Hong Kong," 61.

[44] See Wong Nim Yan, "Huoci huobi – du Huang Biyun de Lie lao zhuan, lie nü tu huo geren de xuanze," in *The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Children of Darkness by Wong Bik-wan*, ed. Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts (Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016), 41.

[45] See Liou Liang-ya, *Qingse shiji mo* (Taipei: Jiuge, 2001), 166-196.

彼處 (Over there). Looking back, Chow remembers how after his arrival in Hong Kong in the 1960s, he was led astray to join the triad. He was involved in illegal drug-dealing and sent to prison, spending most of his life there. In a flashback, he thinks of his Shanghainese father and how they fled to Hong Kong escaping communist rule. His memory intermittently brings him back to encounters with other gang members and ordinary people. Time moves back and forth in a non-linear way. He suddenly reaches an epiphany that he has already lived past most of his life. Having been released from prison for the last time, he is determined to come clean and compromise to live with other discharged inmates. Eventually, he manages to quit drugs. He becomes a real "*Lit Lo*," a self-made hero.[46] He starts to reassume a sense of self.

First-time readers of *Children of Darkness* may find it difficult to get into the narrative, since the book uses substantial Cantonese. Vernacular Cantonese and written Chinese, colloquial expressions, vulgar and foul slang, incomplete phrases, as well as underworld jargon are all over the place. When asked about the reason for her extensive use of vernacular yet vulgarized Cantonese, Wong stated that, "because the narrator is a semi-illiterate, it is best to write as much vernacular as possible. I also think Hong Kong is becoming more and more unified [with China]. I wouldn't call out any slogan to support this or that. But I think that writing Hong Kong in vernacular [Cantonese] has a recognition to identity and an endowed dignity."[47] Here, I propose that Cantonese has dual literary and symbolic purposes. On the one hand, for the sake of literariness,

---

[46] While "Lit Lo/ Lie Lao" 烈佬 (martyred men) or "Lit Lui/ Lie Nü" 烈女 (martyred women) in Chinese relates to valor and loyalty through his/ her death, I see that overcoming drug addiction makes Lit Lo a true hero. For the definition of "Lit," see Janet Ng, "Writing from the Obverse: Wong Bik-Wan's Fiction and Nostalgia in Hong Kong," 61.

[47] See Yuen Siu-cheong, "Huang Biyun: Wan Zai lielao you hua shuo," in *The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Children of Darkness by Wong Bik-wan*, ed. Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts (Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016), 174.

the author deploys a first-person narrative to ensure that the voice of the low-educated protagonist is being heard. She merges the character and the narrator into one, letting the character speaks of his story from the perspective of "self."[48] The re-modeling of vernacular Cantonese helps to create an underclass world, a world of his own to utter his true thoughts. This process of writing proves that Cantonese is a literary tool to access the protagonist's thoughts without condescension. On the other hand, Cantonese has a symbolic function in restoring self-identity. By the time Wong wrote this novel in 2012, it had been fifteen years since the Handover. Cantonese cultural production in Hong Kong was and remains at risk.[49] To respond, Wong did not verbally advocate anything, but practically employed Cantonese writing as Sinophone writing in order to "register the living language of the local place."[50] Cantonese inflections demonstrate the linguistic specificity of Hong Kong and exhibit the heterogeneous and multilingual Sinophone practice other than Mandarin (Shih 2007, 4-5). Furthermore, Wong's vulgarized Cantonese unsettles hierarchies between local sound and national script. The inconsumable Cantonese creates a familiarity that points to Hong Kong, underscoring language subjectivity.

Nonetheless, in his discussion considering locality and marginality as ways to overcome postcolonialism in Hong Kong, Ackbar Abbas cautions us not to be easily tempted by the notions of "local" and "marginal." He suggests that adopting Cantonese does not mean being local, since "the colonialist mentality can find expression in Cantonese just as well as in English." As well,

[48] See Wong Bik-wan, *Lie lao zhuan* (Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2012), 198.

[49] See Chu Yiu-wai, "Who Speaks for Lion Rock? Pro-Cantonese Campaign (or Lack Thereof) in Hong Kong," in *Civil Unrest and Governance in Hong Kong: Law and Order from Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Michael H.K. Ng and John D. Wong (London: Routledge, 2017), 196-212.

[50] Shu-mei Shih, "Hong Kong Literature as Sinophone Literature," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, no. 8.2 & 9.1 (2008): 15.

"marginality merely exercises the center and in so doing strengthens it." [51] Simply consider Cantonese writing as a marginal reaction can easily become trapped by coloniality. To borrow his argument, we ought to think carefully which message is transmitted via Cantonese, and how it accomplishes a reclaiming of self-identity. It is the content of the words, not just the medium of language that is important.

To do so, I would like to introduce here the concept of "involuntary autobiographical memory," arguing that it intersects with the vulgarized use of Cantonese. Proposed by the psychologist Dorthe Berntsen, "involuntary autobiographical memory" refers to "memories that come to mind with no preceding conscious attempt at retrieval."[52] It allows us to mentally travel back and forth in time, providing a possibility to reevaluate past events (2009, 16). It also enables us to "involuntarily project oneself into the personal future to envision and pre-live possible events."[53] An overarching function of involuntary autobiographical memory is the provision of a sense of continuity and the activation of self, which is essential in forming a "self-concept." (Rasmussen and Berntsen, 2009). In other words, the involuntary autobiographical memory process relates to the formation of self through remembering, on purpose or otherwise. The protagonist grapples it to recapture his self-identity and create a sense of place.

The Interplay of Cantonese and Involuntary Autobiographical Memory

Several pieces of scholarship on *Children of Darkness* have touched on Cantonese writing and memory separately. Ng Mei Kwan suggests that Wong's Cantonese writing provided an

[51] Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 12.

[52] Dorthe Berntsen, *Involuntary Autobiographical Memories: An Introduction to the Unbidden Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

[53] Ibid., 18.

alternative space for aphasics who cannot represent themselves, signifying a paradigm shift in Sinophone writing (Ng, 2016). Heidi Yu Huang examines Wong's original language and narrative style, suggesting that her hybrid Cantonese texts opened up a space for *New Weltliteratur* by spotlighting Hong Kong literature on the stage of world literature (Huang, 2016). Li Mei Ting borrows Walter Benjamin's *mémoire involontaire* to argue that historizing is part of memory construction (Li, 2016). However, there is still no research investigating the interplay of Cantonese writing and recollection of involuntary autobiographical memory, which I find intricately correlated to make the completion of the character's journey for self possible.

According to Dorthe Berntsen, involuntary autobiographical memory is highly important for self-concept and planning for the future. In contrast to voluntary memories, Berntsen defines involuntary autobiographical memories as memories of personal events that come to mind with no conscious attempt to retrieve (2009, 3). These memories usually come up when the subject is not concentrating. Memories arriving involuntarily involve mental time travel, moving back and forth. It is similar to day-dreaming, a stream-of-consciousness. She argues that one of the main functions of involuntary autobiographical memory is to reevaluate past events in order to adjust future goals and behaviours (2009, 4). It is useful for planning ahead. Through revisiting past events and mental time travel, "the self-function provides knowledge of the self in the past."[54] This helps to predict what will happen in the future in order to avoid repetition of an erroneous past. Therefore, involuntary autobiographical memory ultimately aids in constituting a self-concept and becomes a fundamental premise of learning and defining the self.

---

[54] Anne S. Rasmussen and Dorthe Berntsen, "The Possible Functions of Involuntary Autobiographical Memories," *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 23, no. 8, (2009): 1146.

Seen in this light, the novel's quasi stream-of-consciousness mode can be read through "involuntary autobiographical memory." The protagonist's weak and loose recall of memory happen involuntarily and spontaneously without deliberate intention. In such involuntary recollection, we know that "the important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory."[55] Memory recollection relates to what Shu-mei Shih called "Sinophone articulations," the place-and-time-specific articulation where its historical character lies (Shih 2007, 35). By revisiting personal incidents, involuntary autobiographical memory reactivates the protagonist's long-forgotten memories that are situated in Hong Kong's past. Considering that the articulation is self-consciously carried in Cantonese, it further ties the novel to that place. And when the main character recollects his memories, readers also go through the same memories with him. Personal memories serve as an access to reflect Hong Kong's trajectory, which responds to Wong Bik-wan's "minor writing" strategy of seeing greatness in trivialities. The act of remembrance enables the protagonist to manage the time- and place-grounded memory and reclaim his self-identity.

I would argue as well that Cantonese performs as an auxiliary yet essential tool for the protagonist's weaving of his memories. Long living in the underclass without receiving a proper education, the protagonist's autobiographical memory would not be compelling if he conveys it in a smooth and standard written language. Instead, for his background, the state of his involuntary autobiographical memory can only be represented in a plain, vernacular and vulgar language – in his language. The combination of vernacular Cantonese and underworld jargon allow for involuntary autobiographical memory flow through. He must reclaim himself in his own words.

[55] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 202.

As well, Cantonese in its harshness registers a sense of place to challenge the homogeneity of Mandarin. Vulgar Cantonese is the language of the place of Hong Kong. Hence, it is in this interplay of Cantonese and involuntary autobiographical memory that makes it possible for us to hear the survival of the protagonist, and possibly Hong Kong.

Wong Bik-wan's Sinophone Articulation in *Children of Darkness*

In her account of Hong Kong literature as Sinophone literature, Shu-mei Shih touches on the importance of Cantonese in Hong Kong. "The Hong Kong consciousness that undergirded the rise of Hong Kong studies in late (British) colonial Hong Kong was linguistically specific to the prominent deployment of the local Cantonese language, which implicitly challenged Putonghua and China-centric disparagements of Hong Kong as a 'cultural desert'."[56] Cantonese has its role to delineate a distinctly local sensibility and embodies the Sinophone critique in esteem (Chu 2017, 202). Yet, despite the fact that Hong Kong is a place where more than ninety percent of population speak Cantonese, the status of Cantonese has seen a dramatic change after the 1997 Handover. The official language of the PRC, Mandarin, has been widely promoted to replace Cantonese in both cultural and educational sectors. The trend of "Mainlandization" of Hong Kong cinema has become more and more common.[57] There has been a significant drop in music, television and cinema using Cantonese.[58] Add this to the oppressive language policy to promote Mandarin instruction in schools, Cantonese is in danger.[59] Although the outlook seems unpromising, I argue

[56] Shih, "Hong Kong Literature as Sinophone Literature," 16.

[57] See Mirana May Szeto and Yun-chung Chen, "Mainlandization or Sinophone translocality? Challenges for Hong Kong SAR New Wave Cinema," *Journal of Chinese Cinema* 6, no.2 (2012): 115-134.

[58] See Chu Yiu-wai and Eve Leung, "Remapping Hong Kong Popular Music: Covers, Localisation and the Waning Hybridity of Cantopop," *Popular Music* 32, no. 1 (January 2013): 66-67.

[59] See Chu, "Who speaks for Lion Rock? Pro-Cantonese Campaign (or Lack Thereof) in Hong Kong," 196-212.

this is that waning point of Cantonese culture turns to be a constructive force, generating a new literary language and a new identity, within the Sinophone context.

By the time Wong Bik-wan wrote *Children of Darkness*, fifteen years had passed since the Handover. Similar to the main character's marginal situation, Wong admits that writing in Hong Kong, and in Cantonese, makes her destined to be placed on the margin. "We write in Hong Kong. We are bound to be placed on the margin, to be excluded from the center of writing authority [of China]. But marginality has its own freedom. Many people ask me why I am not publishing [my works] in China. I actually don't have any intense slogan. I treasure the freedom of operating a store. Don't force me to operate a chain store, a transnational department store." [60] While the monolithic nature of standard Chinese pushes Cantonese and its culture to the margins, and while most people are tempted by the center, Wong sees the situation otherwise. She thinks that marginality enables a freedom that cannot be obtained in the center. She enjoys the freedom of not publishing in China, of not appealing to Greater-China readers. Hence, she exercises her freedom to abandon the standard language by telling a Hong Kong story, in Cantonese, in its time and place. She conveys the Sinophone articulation via Cantonese by using the language specific to locality and its autonomy (Shih 2007, 31). The linguistic dissonance of vulgarized Cantonese makes it extremely frustrating to monolithic China and Chineseness in the post-Handover period. This linguistic dissonance exemplifies an opposing force against Mandarin that aligns with the Sinophone critique (Shih 2007, 5).

[60] Wong Bik-wan, "Yanyu wuyong, chenmo ke shang – Hongloumeng jiang dejiang ganyan," in *The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Children of Darkness by Wong Bik-wan*, ed. Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts. (Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016), 16.

Continually exploring the possibility of "minor writing" to bring out greatness from personal trivialities, Wong focuses on a former drug addict, shedding her mad bloody writing style. She instead adopts a restrained and minimalist narrative to represent the underclass character with vulgarized Cantonese. Fully aware of the protagonist's underworld background, Wong understands that standard language prevents him from telling a story of his own. She states that, most of the time, "They don't voice. They don't speak. It does not mean that they don't want. It's just that they *cannot*."[61] Noticing this, Wong desires to represent the community in their own words. She literarily abandons her role of author but offers the right of narration to the main character. She re-models and re-shapes the language style and goes beyond the concept of dialect writing, enhancing Cantonese "as a literary language in an original and imaginative manner."[62] Symbolically, the combination of Cantonese with slang, jargon, and profanity empowers the underclass protagonist. It makes him able to demonstrate his identity with dignity. Embedded in the narrative, Cantonese in its vulgarity also amplifies the author's stand to reject monolithic and homogeneous Mandarin. The offensive Cantonese disrupts the totality of Chinese and cultivates a sense of place, setting itself apart. And simultaneously, assuring the protagonist's identity, and Hong Kong's.

In the following textual analysis, I illustrate how the novel deploys Cantonese to articulate the main character's self-identity. This will exemplify how Wong's Sinophone articulation is incorporated within the main character's involuntary autobiographical memory, as well as his own manifestation in vulgarized Cantonese in aid of his search for self.

---

[61] Ibid., 15.

[62] Chu, "Who speaks for Lion Rock? Pro-Cantonese Campaign (or Lack Thereof) in Hong Kong," 202.

The novel begins in a disorienting manner with section "Here," where the protagonist has a vague conception of "self." Working on a sewing task in the prison, the protagonist is unexpectedly asked to have a meeting with Ah Yat/ Ah Yi 阿一 (the chief prison warden). Ah Yat reminds the character that he is going to be released tomorrow and he is already in his sixties. Ah Yat asks him to think about what he is planning to do. The protagonist looks up at the sky. All of a sudden, memories of the past appear in his mind. He falls into a recollection of involuntary autobiographical memory. He remembers the way he met Ah Seng/ Ah Sheng 阿生 and Ah Ngau/ Ah Niu 阿牛. Three of them joined the triad together. In just a few years, he became involved in gambling, assaults, drug-dealing and other criminal activities. He became addicted to drugs. Unconsciously, he remembers the background of Dai Lo/ Dalao 大佬 (the person-in-charge of the gang), who studied in Manchester. He did not know why Dai Lo would become a gang leader. The protagonist's involuntary memory then floats to another occasion, when he went to *Dai Pai Dong/ Da Paidang* 大排檔 (cooked-food stall). Both he and Ah Ngau were later arrested for assault. He recalls,

> I told him, how come pineapple pork ribs with rice only come with three little pieces of spare ribs. That mate saw me before, knowing I sold smack. He called me loud "white boy" – You get jacked on scag. Why would you need to eat rice! My ears turned red and hot…I pushed the dish to the ground, screwed him, "What the fuck is wrong with you, so what if I get scag. Who the hell do you think you are?" We fought.
>
> 我說他菠蘿排骨飯只得三塊排骨，那夥計見過我，知我賣白粉，居然叫我白粉*仔*，你食白粉就食飽，*使乜*食飯，聽到我兩耳發熱……我將一碟飯推下地，說我食白粉關你*乜撚乜*事，你是我*乜親*，就打起來。[63] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

[63] Wong, *Lie lao zhuan*, 19-20.

Although this section is titled "Here," the recollection goes far from "here." It becomes about the past. The protagonist's involuntary autobiographical memory arrives without conscious attempt. He and the readers are unable to confirm which surprising source – is it the conversation with Ah Yat or the sky – that brings back those memories. The upsurge of this involuntary autobiographical memory encompasses convoluted personal incidents within the non-linear narration. The sequence of the incidents is unclear. Personal encounters with Dai Lo and random things happen, a complete re-telling is avoided. He cannot even count how many times or how long he has served his sentence. However, what is identifiable is that his unstructured thoughts are unaware of himself and who he is. He remembers a waiter in *Dai Pai Dong* who gave him a small serving portion of pork spare ribs. He queried the waiter in a normal manner. Knowing that the protagonist is a drug addict, the waiter ignored his request and teased him as "white boy" (白粉仔). The waiter insulted him by inferring that his need to eat rice was related to his drug addiction (你食白粉就食飽，使乜食飯). Infuriated by the waiter's contempt, the protagonist pushed the dish to the ground. He used foul language to scold the waiter, questioning why the fuck did it matter to the waiter if he takes drugs (我食白粉關你乜撚七事). He screamed at the waiter, "Who the hell do you think you are?" (你是我乜親).

This spontaneous recall of involuntary memory enables the protagonist to re-experience the past, as well as to elucidate his loose and vague understanding of himself. While the memory brings him back to his teenage years having supper in *Dai Pai Dong*, the derogatory term "white boy" provokes an awakening of self. The protagonist does not understand why his complaint about food portion size would lead to the waiter's contempt and derision. Yet the essence is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory and the message conveyed by this weaving (Benjamin 1968, 202). In Cantonese curse words, we hear his eloquent reaction to defy the label "white boy."

His Cantonese strongly articulates that his identity is not succumbed to drugs or to those who negatively define him. He takes drugs, but it is entirely a choice of his own. It has nothing to do with other people, and no one should judge him. He firmly secures his identity.

I suggest that vulgarized Cantonese, on the one hand, performs an auxiliary yet essential function, representing the primordial psychological condition of the protagonist. Being a triad would imply that foul language is the daily language that represents his social class. He cannot speak "properly" or standardly. On the other hand, vernacular and vulgarized Cantonese writing also portrays the state of self in its primal unawareness. Even though the protagonist contends that his identity is not up to the waiter to dictate, he is still unsure what his identity is. His understanding of self is extremely vague. Memory here does not provide any resources to repair the lost self, yet the return of involuntary autobiographical memory, in Cantonese, is surely beginning evidence of trying to reform the self.

In the next section, "There," the protagonist gradually gains a solid conception of self. After eighteen-months in jail, the protagonist has lost touch with Ah Ngau. Through an anecdote from a mutual friend Ah Mik/ Ah Mi 阿覓, he came to learn that Ah Ngau is now married and has become a taxi driver. One day, he received a phone call to confirm a drug deal. He recognized that the caller was Ah Ngau and spoke with him on the phone, "Ah Ngau, you'd better not to take drugs as you are getting clean" (60). Ah Ngau hung up right away. At the end, Ah Ngau did not show up to purchase drugs. Unintentionally, the protagonist's memory moves to focus on the unfair treatment of the police.

> Once detained in the police station and thrown to the smelly retention room, handcuffed, [it means that we are in a lower position.] They have power and we are skeletons in the closet. We are shit. "Koon" [The official] spells in two Os. Two mouths. They are known to talk out of both sides of the mouth. Just don't argue with

them. If they call you a shitty junkie, a jerk, a scumbag, don’t talk back. Whether or not I am a jerk or a scumbag, is not decided by you guys [the cops] who wear a uniform. It is not judged by you guys who carry a gun, simply waiting for a pay check. I take this path, I also have my own sacrifice.

入得*差館*房*仔*，*抛*得入*臭格*，*孖葉*落得自己雙手，人有權我們身有屎，官字又兩個口，就不要和*差人嘈*，他罵你死*道友*，*賤格*，*人渣*，也不要*駁嘴*。我是不是*賤格*，我是不是*人渣*，不由你們這些穿制服或不穿制服，*袋支炮*就有*支嘢*，*個個*月等*出糧*的人來決定。我*行*這條路，我一樣有付出。[64] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

Once again, the inability to detect any connection between the unsuccessful transaction and the unjust treatment of the police allows involuntary autobiographical memory emerges. Recalling his detention at the police station (差館), the protagonist was thrown (抛) in a retention room filled with an unpleasant odor (臭格). When the police put handcuffs (孖葉) on him, it signifies a class divide. In contrast to the authority with power, he was degraded to a powerless position by the police. Although he is a semi-illiterate, he knows that “Koon” (The official, 官) in Chinese character is composed of two mouths (口). He uses the Chinese character figuratively to indicate the dark side of the police, who are known to talk out of both sides of their mouth. He understands that it would not be wise to argue with the police (就不要和差人嘈). If they call you a shitty junkie (死道友), a jerk (賤格), a scumbag (人渣), don’t talk back (駁嘴). Because he is deeply aware that his personal value is not and should not be determined by the police, who simply carry a gun and wait for their pay check (袋支炮就有支嘢，個個月等出糧的人來決定). He has also made a sacrifice by taking his path (我行這條路，我一樣有付出), which is not to be judged by others.

[64] Ibid., 60.

Notably, the protagonist defends his value and dignity in substantial vernacular Cantonese containing much jargon. Non-Cantonese speakers may perhaps find it difficult to understand the crude Cantonese. However, I argue that it is the intention of the narrator to use inconsumable Cantonese in order to provide a heterogeneous cacophony in face of Mandarin homogeneity, as well as to let readers hear how the main character views himself. Taking a step back to Wong Bik-wan's earlier interview, we notice that the author shares a similar perception as the protagonist, which is that one's value is not defined by "authority" but by oneself. "*Lit Lo* did not call out for help, it does not mean that he does not know injustice. He would react, 'Whether or not I am a jerk or a scumbag, is not decided by you guys [the cops] who wear a uniform. It is not judged by you guys who carry a gun, simply waiting for a pay check.'"[65] The powerless underclass may be suppressed by authority, but their silence does not justify such authoritative power. In fact, the protagonist resists in his own way by combining vernacular Cantonese, underclass slang, and underworld jargon to orally voice his presence. The inconsumable dissonance visualizes the opposition on the margins and foregrounds the value of difficulty and heterogeneity. It effectively restores the position of Cantonese. At the same time, involuntary memory facilitates the protagonist's awareness of self, allowing him to re-live the past and allowing readers to hear how he views himself. For whatever paths he takes, he has his own sacrifice as ordinary people do. At a critical moment when confronted by power, the distinct use of Cantonese intersects with involuntary autobiographical memory to convey his self-identity. His conception of self gradually becomes solid.

[65] Wong, "Yanyu wuyong, chenmo ke shang – Hongloumeng jiang dejiang ganyan," 15.

Apparently, an involuntary return to autobiographical memory fuels the desire of the main character to search for his self-concept. This arises when he is derogatively called a "white boy." By instinct, he defends himself using the most foul and explicit Cantonese expressions. His self reaches maturity vis-à-vis a confrontation with power. On the one hand, vulgarized Cantonese serves as a tool to represent the protagonist's original state-of-mind. It corresponds with the educational background of the protagonist, allowing him to tell his own story without intervention. On the other hand, incomprehensible Cantonese challenges the monolithic power of Mandarin. It dismantles the homogeneous discourse of China and Chineseness. Cantonese and involuntary autobiographical memories intersect in order to show the dual function of attaining self-identity – that of the main character, and that of Hong Kong.

Wong Bik-wan's use of Cantonese that debunks monolingual power may be difficult to consume because of it is so vulgar. But it eloquently forces us to notice the time- and place-bound specificity that echoes on the margins of China. Simultaneously, it draws out the concept of self, as embodied in the protagonist's convoluted and interweaving memory. It is in this way that Cantonese interrupts the homogeneity of Mandarin.

Mental Time Travel to Attain Self-identity

Another feature of involuntary autobiographical memory is its ability for mental time travel. This refers to the ability of one to mentally project oneself back and forth in time, providing an occasion to relieve the past and consciously "pre-live" possible future events (Berntsen 2009, 16). In other words, the notion of past and future are inter-related entities. In involuntary recollection, mental time travel bridges the past and the future to imagine how one wants to live in the future. The capability to travel between the past and the future thus becomes a central and necessary aspect for completion of the concept of self.

Following from the concept of mental time travel, I suggest that vernacular and vulgarized Cantonese helps in this process. Even though the protagonist has stressed that his identity is not defined by the others, the self-searching process has not yet been completed. Drug addiction remains his main issue. Inter-related mental time travel functions as a mirror and a buffer to allow the main character to adjust his present behaviour. Running into an old mate makes him revisit old memories. The man mirrors his fears and shows him the danger of continuing to use drugs. This involuntary time travel also projects him into future, where he meets his future self. In the process, involuntary autobiographical memory and Cantonese are intricately and inextricably linked in representing his changing mental state as he searches for self-identity.

The last section, "Over there," focuses mainly on the present life of the protagonist and how he slowly overcomes his drug addiction. Having been released from prison, the protagonist lives in a halfway house with other inmates. While he is trying to adapt to his present life, involuntary memory has him travelling to the childhood he spent with his father. His father was disappointed about his drug addiction and refused to take his money. A few months later, his father moved, and the protagonist never saw him again. Without any cognitive effort, this unexpected memory suddenly brings him back to the present, where he bumps into an old mate Ah Sheung/ Ah Shang 阿傷. Their encounter forces him to recognize the negative effects of drugs and how they affect one's perception of self.

> I got this drug addiction, because of a feeling. But the quality of drugs gets worse and worse, and even pricier. It costs $150 for each dose. When it is sold out, I got to look around for it – the anxiety was like my wife and kids got kidnapped! Someone would take smurfs for substitution… I saw Ah Sheung once. He mixed smurfs with Panadol. His belly was cracked, and his thighs were all scarred. What is the point of taking smurfs that only cause dizziness? Ah Sheung probably thought I picked up on him. He hurried to the upper deck [of the bus] after saying a sentence.

當初有這*鋪*白粉癮，是因為感覺。但貨愈來愈不*似*樣，又貴，每次百五，有時貨*緊*又要周圍撲，慘過老婆仔女被人*標參*，有人連藍*仔*都殺，我見過阿傷⋯⋯阿傷打藍*仔*溝必理痛，打到肚皮爛，大腿*開花*，*揩*藍*仔*，*得*個暈字，哪值得。阿傷不知是否怕我話他，*擒擒青*，講完一句就上了上層。[66] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

As pointed out earlier, mental time travel involves a self-reflective process that allows the person to re-experience the past, relieving a consciousness (Berntsen 2009, 16). The narration here demonstrates that recollection of past events helps to relieve and adjust present behaviours. Without any conscious attempt, the protagonist thinks about the past and why he became addicted to drugs, leaving him with a certain feeling (當初有這鋪白粉癮，是因為感覺). But the past spontaneously shifts to the present. He complains that the quality of drugs gets worse and worse (但貨愈來愈不似樣), yet the price increases. If drugs are sold out and he must search for them (貨緊又要周圍撲), his anxiety is compared to the pressure akin to his wife and kids being kidnapped (慘過老婆仔女被人標參). This complaint is interrupted by the unexpected encounter with Ah Sheung. Ah Sheung takes smurfs with Panadol, which causes a series of adverse effects – cracked belly and scars on his thighs (大腿開花). Seeing this, the protagonist questions why someone would consume smurfs that only cause dizziness (揩藍仔，得個暈字，哪值得). Ah Sheung suspects that the main character picks up on him and hurries to the upper deck of the bus after saying a sentence (擒擒青，講完一句就上了上層).

I argue that uncontrolled time travel gives the protagonist a chance to go back and forth between past and present. When he realizes the disadvantage of drugs and his lost-self, it is in vernacular Cantonese. Mental time travel enables the protagonist to remember his personal past

[66] Wong, *Lie lao zhuan*, 162.

drug habit and to trace the reason for his addiction. Very quickly, the narrative shifts to the present moment and the protagonist becomes aware of the adverse consequences brought on by drugs. He is not sure why he would risk his life and bear the anxiety of searching for drugs. The questioning of self indicates an interrogation of self. The encounter with Ah Sheung further provokes him to face the negativity of drugs, and the wounds of Ah Sheung function as a mirror of his own lost-self, making him aware that he will be only another Ah Sheung if he does not stop. At this particular moment, the re-experience of the past makes him realize his desire to quit drugs. And he relies on vernacular Cantonese to represent his current decision. The extensive use of vernacular and jargon helps to cultivate his identity by distinguishing it from Ah Sheung's. His queries about smurfs in Cantonese indicate his will to not repeat Ah Sheung's wrongdoings. As a result, Ah Sheung escapes to the upper deck and this evasion implies two different self-concepts. The coalescence of involuntary autobiographical memory and Cantonese emphasizes the current state of the protagonist, guiding him toward the reassurance of self-identity.

Yet, simple awareness by no mean guarantees the accomplishment of realizing one's self-identity. The protagonist must take actions in order to cure his drug addiction problem. He takes the initiative to receive methadone therapy, which can be used for the treatment of opiate addiction. But unintentionally, his involuntary time travel transports him back to childhood memories again, to a time where in the park he met three Portuguese brothers, Roberto, Jose, and Rio. All of a sudden, his memories move to 1950s Shanghai. His grandfather had a hobby of listening to the radio, but he was asked to keep it a secret. Not knowing the reason, nor the consequences, he took the radio out while his grandpa was away. When his grandfather came back, he was beaten severely. Involuntary memory then shifts again to the present moment without any sign. The protagonist is

diagnosed with depression, but he does not regard it as a serious problem. He keeps going for methadone therapy and states,

> It's not hard to quit. Every time in jail, I can quit. But it's much harder not taking drugs when I've got out. It's the cause. A guy came to me and asked for ten bucks. I told him, how shameful of you, asking around for ten bucks. I wouldn't give you even if I had. That guy cursed at me, "You motherfucker, you take drugs too, what the heck are you pretending." I was looking at that man, thought, having done drugs for decades, everyone looks the same. If the bros in Wan Chai had not died, they would have looked the same too.
>
> *摵甩唔*難，次次坐*監*都*摵甩*，出來以後，不食就好難，要斷。有個人問我，有沒十元，我說十元你都要。我有我也不會給你。那個人罵我，你個*仆街*，你不一樣食白粉，你*扮乜春嘢*。我看著那個人，食白粉幾十年，個個樣子一樣，灣仔那班兄弟，未死的話全都是這個樣。[67] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

Without any relevance between childhood memories and depression, mental time travel again takes place between the past and the future. Involuntary memory enables the protagonist to re-experience and pre-experience his struggles to quit drugs. His memory first sinks into the past, where he confesses that it is not difficult to quit drug addiction (摵甩唔難). Every time he is in jail, he can successfully quit drugs (次次坐監都摵甩). But it requires a great deal of effort to fully overcome addiction. He is unable to eradicate the cause (要斷). His memory then moves seamlessly to the present. A random guy comes up to him and asks for ten dollars to purchase drugs. He shames the drug addict for begging in public and refuses unsympathetically. In response to his rejection, the random guy condemns the protagonist as a "motherfucker" and a "hypocrite" in Cantonese curse words (你個仆街，你不一樣食白粉，你扮乜春嘢), renouncing him for his apathy. Reacting silently, the protagonist moves away from the random guy and looks at him,

[67] Ibid., 150.

projecting his imagination to the future. He figures that if his colleagues were still alive, they would have looked exactly the same as this random guy – desperately wandering around without dignity (食白粉幾十年，個個樣子一樣，灣仔那班兄弟，未死的話全都是這個樣).

Here, I argue that the unknown guy mirrors the protagonist's old self, or we may say, a different self of the protagonist. And I suggest that the vulgar Cantonese provokes him to reassume self-identity. It activates his memories. The quarrel with the random guy becomes a major turning point. With the most vulgar Cantonese utterance, the protagonist becomes aware that he is no different from the shameful drug addict who stands in front of him. The accusations of "motherfucker" and "hypocrite" hit him directly. Extreme Cantonese curse words connect to the future. He automatically imagines that every junkie is going to resemble his own lost-dignity if he continues to take drugs. Through all this, the protagonist arrives at an epiphany of self-restoration. Cantonese, in its very harshness, helps the protagonist to visualize his other self and his future self. He finally is able to quit his drug habit. Besides, as Jing Tsu notes, "How the ear could be the assaulted organ in an act of reading refocuses attention on the literary language as an uneasy union between aurality and script."[68] The offensive aurality of this Cantonese suggests its rejection of national Mandarin. The crude Cantonese doubly restores the self-identity of the protagonist and of Hong Kong.

After bumping into the random guy, the protagonist's memory shifts to the long-forgotten encounters he had with Dai Lo, Ah Seng, Ah Sheung, and other drug addicts such as Ka Ming/ Jiaming 家明 and Ah Mut/ Ah Wu 阿物. The memories of his dad, his grandpa, and his mentally-ill housemate, Ah Kai/ Ah Qi 阿啟, also appear unpredictably. In the eternal recurrence of

---

[68] Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, 146.

involuntary autobiographical memory, he gradually understands that he will always be the same person regardless of external circumstances. His dad would still come to Hong Kong, he would still meet Ah Ngau and Ah Seng, and he would still take drugs. This recollection forces him to realize that the bygones are bygones. What he can change are his present behaviours. As a result, he is determined to successfully quit drugs.

> For no reason, I've quit. Drugs are expensive and not giving any excitement. I finally realized that feeling is bygone and will never come back. Again and again, until many times after, my addiction to drugs slowly dies. Seduction ceased. I am no longer being strangled. I free myself.
>
> 我都不知我為何就戒了。*啲*粉好貴，又沒感覺，原來感覺過去了，就不會回來，一次一次，又一次一次，好多次好多次，我慢慢心就死了。對這*味嘢*心死了，沒被它縛著，就自由了。[69] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

The convoluted recollection of autobiographical memory helps the protagonist to travel back and forth. Without any legitimate reasons, he overcomes his addiction. He learns that drugs cost money (啲粉好貴) and that addiction is merely a feeling. If he is willing to let the feeling go, his addiction to drugs will slowly die. Once the addiction is dead (這味嘢心死了), he can eventually set himself free. He will no longer be strangled by drugs and his self-identity will be restored. And this self-identity is carried forward to future representations. At the end of the novel, we learn that the protagonist has volunteered to assist other drug addicts recover. With his triumph over drugs, the protagonist becomes a real *Lit Lo*.

Along with this unbidden autobiographical memory, vernacular and vulgarized Cantonese accompanies the protagonist in his attainment of self-identity. The protagonist speaks the most vulgar and the most ordinary Cantonese, illustrating his journey of self-searching. Underclass

[69] Wong, *Lie lao zhuan*, 194.

Cantonese not only represents his primordial psychological condition, but also explicitly resists the unity of local sound and national script. In its very coarse literary expression, vulgarized Cantonese deconstructs the unitary and monolingual China and Chineseness. It allows readers to hear the voice and contestation of both the protagonist and Hong Kong. This Sinophone Cantonese intervention captures the fierce survival of *Lit Lo*.

Overall, on a narrative level, convoluted involuntary autobiographical memory and Cantonese articulation intersect to guide the protagonist toward reassuming his subjectivity and his dignity. On a meta-textual level, *Children of Darkness* represents the current status of Hong Kong in facing the lost-identity of Cantonese. Wong Bik-wan's aestheticizing of memory and Cantonese suggest an approach to reclaim self-identity by challenging homogeneous linguistic hegemony.

Conclusion: The Implications of Vulgarized Cantonese Writing

Through investigating Wong Bik-wan's *Children of Darkness*, this chapter illustrates the idea that involuntary autobiographical memory and vulgarized Cantonese are intricately linked as the protagonist reassumes his self-identity. Without any conscious attempt, unintentional memory recollection provides an opportunity for the protagonist to re-experience the past and pre-experience the future. The return of involuntary memory reactivates long-forgotten memories, facilitating a cure of present behaviours. In this recall of convoluted memory, Cantonese also serves as an essential tool to access the primordial emotional condition of the protagonist. The protagonist uses a substantial amount of vernacular Cantonese to articulate his subjectivity. He contends that his self-concept is not defined by others, but by himself. Through the frequent mental time travel of his memories, the protagonist is able to envision his future. From the curse words of the random drug addict, the protagonist reimagines his future self. From the most vulgar to the

most ordinary Cantonese usage, he eventually manages to quit drug addiction and become a real *Lit Lo*. His self-identity is attained.

Apart from providing an essential tool to recover the protagonist's identity, this chapter also illuminates vulgarized Cantonese as a direct critique of the linguistic center. Not bound by conventional Cantonese writing, Wong Bik-wan employs "a Cantonese script to register the distinctness of Sinophone Hong Kong literature in contradiction to Chinese literature."[70] The combination of standard language, vernacular Cantonese, foul words, criminal phrases, and underclass jargon cultivates a heterogeneous soundscape. Non-Cantonese readers may find it hard to consume. But it is this distinctive vulgarity that makes us hear the protagonist's condemnation of the center. Fifteen years after 1997 and the relationship with China becoming more and more intense, Wong's conscious effort to incorporate vulgarized Cantonese into a stream-of-consciousness narrative can be understood as an "attention to dialect, minority, marginalized culture, and people who are suppressed."[71] Her Cantonese intervention undoubtedly is a reflection of the current lived experience of people in the post-1997 Hong Kong.

Finally, the unique narrative and language style of Wong Bik-wan's Sinophone discourse register a sense of place-specificity. It also forces us to reconsider its locality, to focus on Hong Kong literature. The disruption of Cantonese writing with its difficulty, difference, and heterogeneity will continue to challenge the homogeneity and reader's reception outside of Hong Kong. The implication of vulgarized Cantonese writing resides in this.

---

[70] Shih, "Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production," 35.

[71] Lo Kwai-cheung, "Bian zhe yan: Houloumeng jiang pinglun ji – Lie lao zhuan," in *The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Children of Darkness by Wong Bik-wan*, ed. Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts. (Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016), 12.

Chapter Two

The Importance of the Mother Tongue: Absent Memory in Singapore

Analyzing the latest novel *Opera Costume* (2015) written by Yeng Pway Ngon, I explore the notion of "mother tongue" in Sinophone Cantonese Singaporean literature. I investigate Yeng Pway Ngon's Sinophone articulation as a reaction against the state policy of the "Speak Mandarin Campaign" (1979), which eradicated the use of other Sinitic languages by promoting Mandarin as the official "mother tongue" among all Sinitic peoples in Singapore. Reflecting on *Opera Costume*, I argue that the "Speak Mandarin Campaign" was linguistically traumatic for a whole generation. This trauma creates "absent memory" (Fine, 1988), which is a phenomenon where parents can pass on their pain, but not their memories to the next generation. For their children, absent memory creates a disconnection with the family's past, and makes their identity formation difficult. The destruction of one's original mother tongue (in this case, Cantonese) immediately blocks one's contact with their ancestral roots and shakes one's self-position. As such, Yeng writes in Cantonese for the first time to contest Singapore-centrism and China-centrism. He also has the protagonist re-learn Cantonese as a way to retain the importance of a Cantonese mother tongue. In the process of evoking Cantonese, I suggest that the claim of absent memory, the completion of narrative inheritance, and the creation of making sense of life are restored again. I consider the mother tongue imperative in retrieving memory.

This chapter is organized into five sections. The first provides the background of Yeng Pway Ngon's writing trajectory, tracing his literary evolution towards Cantonese writing. The second examines the way in which Yeng's Sinophone articulation contests Singapore-centrism and China-centrism. The third presents an analysis of the interplay among the loss of the mother tongue, absent memory, and alternating omniscient narration, in order to unpack the entanglement between

mother tongue and memory. The fourth discusses the importance of reviving the mother tongue for the sake of narrative inheritance and memory resurrection. Finally, it outlines Yeng's depiction of the time-based (post-Speak Mandarin Campaign) and place-based (Singapore) commitment to the concept of Sinophone.

Introduction: Yeng Pway Ngon's Evolutionary Cantonese Writing

Born in the Bugis area of Singapore, Yeng Pway Ngon is a prolific poet, novelist, playwright, and critic on the Sinophone Singaporean literary scene. Having published over 25 volumes of poetry, essays, fiction, plays, and criticism, his works are noted for their examinations of the modern human condition that focus on isolation, withdrawal, and ennui (Bernards 2015, 143). Yeng first made his poetry debut in the 1960s and was drawn to modern Taiwanese poets, Ya Xian 痖弦 and Yang Mu 楊牧. They informed his modernist poetic voice that soon helped him become one of the significant modern poets in Singapore and Malaysia. He published a poetry collection, *Sau sut toi sheung/ Shoushutai shang* 手術台上 (On the Operating Table), in 1968. His second poetry collection, *Mo gun dik yin/ Wugen de xian* 無根的弦 (The Rootless Chord), came out in 1974. During this time, Yeng also established and edited literary magazines, including *Cha sut/ Chashi* 茶室 (Teahouse) and *Chin wai/ Qianwei* 前衛 (Vanguard Monthly).

Beginning in the 1980s, Yeng moved away from poetry in order to create short stories and novels. His concerns as a writer evolved from literal experimentation in poetry to being more socially conscious in his novels. Most of his works are set in Singapore and touch on local political and social issues. His first novel *Yat goh jeung ngo je yeung dik nam yan/ Yi ge xiang wo zheyang de nanren* 一個像我這樣的男人 (A Man Like Me) was published in 1986. He continued to work on another novel titled *Gu jik dik lim/ Guji de lian* 孤寂的臉 (Lonely Face, 1989) before taking a

long break from novel writing. In 1994, Yeng spent a year in Hong Kong as a freelance columnist and returned to Singapore a year later. He resumed writing in the 2000s and published *So dung/ Saodong* 騷動 (Unrest, 2002), *Ngo yu ngo ji gei dik yi sam si/ Wo yu wo ziji de er san shi* 我與我自己的二三事 (Trivialities About Me and Myself, 2006), *Wa sut/ Huashi* 畫室 (Art Studio, 2011) as well as *Opera Costume*. All six novels mentioned here have been translated into English, which make his work not only recognized among a Sinophone readership, but also available for Anglophone readers. Particular works, such as *Art Studio*, have been translated into Italian as *L'Atelier*. Some of his other works have also been translated into Malay and Dutch to capture readers of other languages.

Among these six novels, his latest novel, *Opera Costume*, is the first and only one to draw heavily on Cantonese language and Cantonese culture, namely, Cantonese opera. As the title indicates, the core focus of the novel is on a missing opera costume, which hides a family secret across three generations, from the 1930s to the present-day. The story begins with a Singaporean-born woman, Leung Yu Sau/ Liang Ruxiu 梁如秀, who is taking care of her Cantonese-speaking grandfather, Leung Bing Hung/ Liang Binghong 梁炳洪. In their daily lives, the grandfather recollects his past, including how he and his best friend Tak Chai/ De Zai 德仔 fled to Singapore from Guangdong in order to make a living in the 1930s. Both of them were obsessed with Cantonese opera, yet only Tak Chai succeeded in becoming a professional singer. Bing Hung tries to piece together how his grandson Leung Kam Chau/ Liang Jianqiu 梁劍秋 (Yu Sau's eldest brother), who is gay, developed an interest in Cantonese opera and became a singer. Bing Hung also tries to find out how the opera costume he gave to Kam Chau happened to be lost. Meanwhile, while Yu Sau looks after her grandfather at home, different challenges are thrown at her. Yu Sau

is betrayed by her boyfriend, and she gradually forgets her mother tongue, Cantonese. This makes her lack the confidence she needs to communicate with her grandfather. She is also confused by her family's past. Why did her eldest brother Kam Chau vanish without a trace? Where is the missing opera costume? She becomes aware that the confusion stems from the loss of her mother tongue. Then, the death of her grandfather triggers her desire to re-learn Cantonese and to learn about Cantonese opera in order to trace her family genealogy. In this process of re-learning, she reunites with Kam Chau and finally discovers that the costume was kept by a long-lost friend of Kam Chau, Lily Cheung/ Zhang Lili 張荔麗, who married Lam Mang Hung/ Lin Mengxiong 林孟雄. Yu Sau realizes that the decline in the appreciation of Cantonese opera in Singapore and his unattainable homosexual relationship with Mang Hung, are the main causes for Kam Chau's despair. Parallel to the familial backdrop, the story also depicts the vicissitude of Singapore from the 1930s to the present-day, providing historical riches from the anti-Japanese war (1942-1945), Singapore Independence (1965), the Speak Mandarin Campaign (1979), the demolition of National Theatre (1986), etc. The political and social landscape of contemporary Singapore is well represented in the novel. Singapore's past and present are interwoven with the family's history, connecting the family pain to the pain of the nation.

Unlike Yeng's other novels, a substantial amount of Cantonese dialogue is found in conversations between the characters. It is specifically bolded and quoted in the book in order to be distinguished from standard Mandarin Chinese. At the end of the book, a conversion table of Cantonese and Mandarin is provided to help non-Cantonese readers understand the meaning of the

words.[72] When asked about the reason for using Cantonese in *Opera Costume*, Yeng explained in an interview that, "This novel was about Cantonese people coming to Singapore in the 1930s to make a living. Of course, it is necessary to write their conversations in Cantonese."[73] Apparently, it is for the sake of realism that he employed Cantonese writing in the novel. He wanted to make the writing vivid, and to provide verisimilitude by representing characters' lives and backgrounds with full accuracy. After all, language is a direct component of local color. It is especially true for the grandfather who reminiscences about his young adulthood. He wistfully recounts how Cantonese nicely captured why he moved from Guangdong to Singapore. For this reason, Yeng went to Hong Kong in order to research 1930s Cantonese opera and trained in opera singing, so as to better understand the art form before writing the novel.[74]

Nevertheless, it is intriguing to ponder why Yeng stresses writing in Cantonese, and thematically centers the classical art form of Cantonese opera in contemporary Singapore. In the same interview, Yeng further expressed his worry about the decline of Chinese dialects, asserting that "the erosion of dialects is a loss to wider Chinese culture."[75] Yeng believes that Chinese culture is diverse in form, not only embodied in Mandarin but also represented in Cantonese and other Sinitic languages. Therefore, I contend that Cantonese writing does not simply embellish the novel out of aesthetic concerns. On the contrary, I suggest that Cantonese contains at least two

[72] A brief Cantonese-Mandarin translation of forty frequently-used Cantonese lexical items are listed in *Yueyu huayu duizhao biao* 粵語華語對照表 (Cantonese-Mandarin Converting Table). See Yeng Pway Ngon, *Xifu* (Taipei: Tonsan Publications, 2015), 315-320.

[73] Jo Tan, "Dialect Messaging," *Singapore's Essential Arts & Culture Guide*, February 28, 2018. Accessed October 13, 2018. https://a-list.sg/dialect-messaging/.

[74] See Olivia Ho, "Cultural Medallion Recipient Yeng Pway Ngon, 70, Writes on Despite Cancer," *The Strait Times*, July 4, 2017. Accessed October 11, 2018. https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/writing-on-in-spite-of-cancer.

[75] Jo Tan, "Dialect Messaging."

figurative meanings – the author's subtle critique of the "Speak Mandarin Campaign" put forward by the Singaporean government in 1979, as well as indicating "absent memory" (Fine, 1988) within the characters in order to describe their sense of loss. The "Speak Mandarin Campaign" arbitrarily poses Mandarin to be the official "mother tongue" among all Sinitic groups regardless of diverse Sinitic languages, which causes a destructive effect on the next generation. For characters like Yu Sau, who were born in post-Campaign Singapore and grew up in an environment dominated by English and Mandarin, Cantonese is no longer an innate and instinctive language, despite it being her native language. Deficiency in Yu Sau's mother tongue results directly in a disconnection from her family's past, which now exists only as a void, a gap, and as emptiness. The replacement of one's mother tongue is thus worrisome, since one lacks a critical nodal point to connect with one's family heritage. Awakened by the death of her grandfather, Yu Sau begins to pick up Cantonese and to participate in Cantonese opera. Through the evocation of mother tongue and Cantonese opera, she eventually reclaims her absent memories and completes the inherited narrative of her family's past. Lost memories are found. The attainment of narrative symbolizes a resurrection of what was lost in the "Speak Mandarin Campaign."

Because the loss of one's mother tongue obstructs one's access to ancestral heritage, the author's criticism of the government comes through the adoption of Cantonese writing. In the novel, Cantonese helps the character, Yu Sau, to retrieve her memories. While outside the text, Cantonese writing demonstrates the existence of a heterogeneous Sinophone linguistics community and shows the necessity to keep handing down the language in Singapore.[76] A

[76] For discussion on languages of the Sinophone, see Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," 715-716.

soundscape of Cantonese has been re-enacted in the rediscovery of one's mother tongue and its culture.

Yeng Pway Ngon's Sinophone Articulation in *Opera Costume*

Previous scholarship on Yeng Pway Ngon's novels mainly concentrate on his narrative writing and its critique of postcolonialism. They discuss his body of work in association with "late style" in order to argue that Yeng's modernist narratives subtly portray people's failure, loneliness, separation, illness, and death (Zhang, 2017). Some analyze Yeng's works by taking a Nietzschean approach, suggesting that his work is concerned with cultural renewal and existential challenges (Sim, 2014). Other scholars assert that Yeng's novels point to a complex structure of identity and internal colonialism (Zhu, 2014). This elaborates on the plot of Sinophone depoliticization, arguing that Yeng's effort is against the official Singaporean discourse of multiracialism (Bernards, 2015).

Attention has yet to be paid to his attempt at employing a double-structured narrative in Cantonese. Although in *Opera Costume*, Yeng partially continues his characteristic writing style in order to show his concern about Singaporean society, he also adds new elements that make it stand apart from his previous works. In terms of narrative, the novel is structured in two distinct parts, corresponding to two perspectives, that of the grandfather and that of the granddaughter: the first half of the book consists of thirteen sections narrated from the grandfather's perceptive, whereas the second half compiles sixteen sections that are written from the granddaughter's. Memory and reality are interwoven and presented in the form of conversations and flashbacks. The author adopts an alternating omniscient narrative to switch sections by adding other characters that cut off a linear narrative. For instance, in the grandfather's half, section three is titled *Yu Sau yu Ka On/ Ruxiu yu Jia'an* 如秀與家安 (Yu Sau and Ka On) and concerns the affair of Yu Sau and her boyfriend. Section eight is titled *Daat Yan/ Daren* 達仁 and introduces the grandfather's

brother-in-law. Sections twenty-four, twenty-six, and twenty-eight are titled *Kam Chau*, and are irregularly inserted in order to shed light on his thoughts. This alternating narration technique makes the whole structure jumpy, interrupted, and nonlinear. Readers may find it disorienting and complicated to follow the plot, but I would argue that such writing techniques aptly narrate multiple perspectives in order to create the effect of difference. It is intended to depart from the monolingual voice of the dominant government and to explain the possibility of heterogeneous and heteroglossic Sinophone voices.[77]

What is also worth noting is that Yeng's Cantonese writing is not only a literary and narratological experiment, but is also a sub-textual trope to the condemnation of Singapore's English-oriented and pro-Mandarin speaking policies. This literary trope is portrayed by Yu Sau's worrisome loss of her mother tongue, Cantonese. At a young age, Yu Sau was sent to English schools for her education and went to England for university. Her reading interests, music preferences, and entertainment ideas are all shaped by English culture. The advocacy of Mandarin-speaking in the country further exposed her to a bilingual environment where only English and Mandarin are heard. Cantonese gradually becomes absent in her life. Yu Sau finds it difficult to communicate with her grandfather and older generations. Absent memory exists between her and her family's past. It is clear that Yeng evokes Cantonese in the novel so as to resist the state's "Speak Mandarin Campaign." I will discuss the connection of the loss of Cantonese and absent memory further in the subsequent section.

As early as 1966, the Singaporean government introduced a bilingual educational policy to require students to study English as a working language. As well, each Singaporean was assigned

---

[77] For the concept of Sinophone as a heterogeneous practice of language and culture, see Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 33.

a "mother tongue" along racial lines: Mandarin for Chinese, Malay for Malays, Tamil for the Indians (Groppe 2014, 152). The policy clearly deconstructs a heterogeneous Singapore and collapses the diversity of spoken languages. Supplementing the educational policy was the "Speak Mandarin Campaign," designed to enforce the prominence of Mandarin in Singapore. Launched in 1979, the campaign was a state policy to unite heterogeneous Chinese communities comprised of Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, etc. into a monolingual linguistic circle of Mandarin. By assigning Mandarin to be the mother tongue of ethnic Chinese regardless of other Sinitic languages, the government desired to form a "social glue to unite the Chinese community."[78] The government claimed that Mandarin is rich in cultural and literary heritage and that it helps in disseminating Confucianism and avoiding westernization. Such a conflation of Chinese culture and Mandarin unquestionably construes "Mandarin as the repository of a timeless racial heritage that offers Chinese Singaporeans a seamless link to [their] 'cultural roots' in the ancestral homeland."[79] It misidentifies "Chinese language" with Mandarin and subsumes all Chinese elements under Mandarin. Since then, the slogans of "Speak More Mandarin and Less Dialect" and "Mandarin is Chinese" were advertised in public materials in an attempt to eradicate the use of other Sinitic languages.[80] All dialect programs on television and radio were banned. The campaign's value of Mandarin over Hokkien also coincided with Singapore's pro-PRC diplomatic relations in the post-Mao era. Since Mandarin is the official language of the PRC, it was purposefully assigned to be the "mother tongue" among Chinese Singaporeans in order to partake

---

[78] Peter Teo, "Mandarinising Singapore: A Critical Analysis of Slogans in Singapore's 'Speak Mandarin' Campaign," *Critical Discourse Studies* 2, no.2 (2005): 123.

[79] Bernards, *Writing the South Seas*, 155.

[80] Teo, "Mandarinising Singapore: A Critical Analysis of Slogans in Singapore's 'Speak Mandarin' Campaign," 142.

in the economic advantages of PRC's ascendency.[81] At the expense of other Sinitic languages, the campaign slips into Singapore-centrism and China-centrism hand in hand.

Jing Tsu puts it well: the mother tongue is unstable in nature. Its simplification becomes part of unifying the national language through a framework of "literary governance." This is determined by, and determines, the notion of "native speaker" and "mother tongue."[82] More specifically, she argues that the mother tongue is not necessarily associated with the national language, but is deployed for political interests and nativism, depending on the occasion (Tsu 2010, 153). To contextualize her argument, I assert that the term "mother tongue" is identified in an arbitrary way in Singapore in order to satisfy the need of the Singaporean government. The mother tongue is imposed by the government in the name of national interest. Sinitic languages that are not mutually intelligible are subsumed under a single category of Mandarin. Therefore, the nationalization of the mother tongue in Singapore not only impedes one's access to ancestral roots, but also deconstructs the heterogeneous Sinophone community by considering that speaking home languages other than Mandarin is damaging to the nation (Tan 2016, 527). As a result, multilingualism and language hybridity are forfeited (Chua 1998, 188-189).

Within the historical and political context of the "Speak Mandarin Campaign," I contend that Yeng's recent Cantonese writing is not accidental. As Shu-mei Shih has noted, Sinophone is "a constellation of local languages specific to their locality" to articulate "its autonomy into being."[83] Sinophone articulation intends to subvert fixed identities and disrupt totality by

---

[81] See Ibid., 125.

[82] See Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, 1-3.

[83] Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 31.

introducing difference (Shih 2007, 35). Linking the switching omniscient narrative and the literary trope of Cantonese together, I argue that Yeng Pway Ngon's Sinophone articulation powerfully counteracts China-centrism and Singapore-centrism, allowing a new subjectivity to be heard. On the one hand, the alternating narrator in Mandarin Chinese and the interjecting Cantonese dialogues exemplify that Sinophone is not a monolingual entity. It is formed by multiple linguistic and cultural communities, although they co-operate and collide with each other from time to time. On the other hand, the trope of Yu Sau demonstrates the author's articulation to retain non-Mandarin Sinitic mother tongues in Singapore. This is an attempt to resist the enforcement of an official mother tongue in Mandarin that eradicates one's ancestral roots and ethnic culture. By reviving the mother tongue of Cantonese in the novel, the author maintains the heterogeneous and heteroglossic Sinophone experience. China-centrism and Singapore-centrism are contested through writing in Cantonese.

In order to highlight the intersection between mother tongue and cultural roots, and to illustrate the importance of mother tongue, it is necessary here to introduce ideas from memory studies.

The Interplay of Cantonese and Absent Memory in an Alternating Omniscient Narrative

Ellen S. Fine first coined the term "absent memory" to denote the wounds of the Holocaust that pass on to the next generation even though they were born in its aftermath. The next generation inherits the anguish but also identifies with exclusion, as they can never find out what has truly happened. Their knowledge of the Holocaust is largely based on fragmented and circumscribed personal and family memories, which come only in absence. This shut out moment creates a sense of void for the second generation, who try to fill the gap with imagination, to reconstruct what they did not know (Fine 1988, 41). In essence, the absence of memory is "pointing to a general sense

of loss and emptiness."[84] Absent memory, as well as its sense of lack, void, gap, blank, and nothingness unavoidably shake the identity formation of the next generation. To better understand the past and themselves, future generations thus must seek out ways to fill the absence through the imaginary.

Drawing from Fine's idea of "absent memory," I propose that a similar assertion can be made in the context of *Opera Costume*. Of course, the story is obviously not about genocide, and the protagonists' trauma is not equivalent to that of the Holocaust. However, this absence does parallel the rupture between generations. It is a form of linguicide, which is the destruction of culture through the elimination of language. In this way, it is helpful to borrow "absent memory" for this discussion. In regards to the mother tongue, broken memories are where Yu Sau finds herself unable to reach her family's past. Yu Sau's memory is suffused with the sense of absence and gaps pertinent to her family, which constitutes the basis of the work. She feels herself distanced and at a loss to find the missing opera costume and to explain Kam Chau's disappearance. Driven by her absent memories, Yu Sau desires to fill the void in order to complete her genealogy. The concept of "absent memory" thus becomes particularly relevant to Yu Sau. In my opinion, absence can be divided into three layers.

The first layer of absence is embodied in Yu Sau's unfamiliarity with her family members. She is in her thirties and is required to take care of her sick grandfather, because she is literally the only person left in the family. All other family members have either died, been exiled or are missing. The absence of family members leaves a void in Yu Sau. The second layer of absence is the distant relationship between Yu Sau and her eldest brother Kam Chau. In tracing Kam Chau's

---

[84] Ellen S. Fine, "The Absent Memory: The Act of Writing in Post-Holocaust French Literature," in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 44.

disappearance from the family, she recognizes that her memory of Kam Chau is extremely vague. Their age difference and divergent up bringing leave an immense gap between them. The third layer of absence is the lack of her mother tongue. Yu Sau's gradual loss of Cantonese proficiency makes her aphasic in her attempts to communicate with her grandfather and access her family's past. There is a void between language proficiency and family memory. All three layers of absence combined contribute to destroying one's ability to form one's identity. The turning point of her grandfather's death made her realize that this emptiness derived from the loss of her mother tongue, which cut her off from her family's past. Thus, Yu Sau struggles to reconstruct her past and possesses a need to re-learn Cantonese in order to find Kam Chau. By taking up an interest in Cantonese opera, she joins her grandfather and Kam Chau. She dreams of being a great performer, just like Kam Chau does. The trope of Cantonese and Cantonese opera is therefore reimagined, retrieved, and reactivated in order to fill the gap of Yu Sau's absent memory.

Aside from being symbolic, Cantonese also functions on the narratological level to exaggerate absent memory. Since the book is written an omniscient narrative, the narrator's voice is largely written in standard Mandarin Chinese, while Cantonese is extensively used in conversations and in recollection of conversations. Cantonese dialogue is specially bolded by the author to highlight its existence. I suggest that the combination of omniscient point-of-view in standard Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese dialogue, on the one hand, collaboratively illuminate a heteroglossic Sinophone. On the other hand, the two conflict with each other in order to emphasize the unreconciled tension in accessing family memories. Although standard Mandarin Chinese is used to convey the facts of the text, it simultaneously contrasts with the text's Cantonese dialogue, which constructs a base for absent memory. Cantonese dialogue is always portrayed as distant, alienated, and absent, in relation to Yu Sau.

To review the complicated yet overlapping layers of absent memory and narrative intervention, I begin with a textual analysis in order to uncover the first layer of absent memory. Taking care of her grandfather, Yu Sau notices that he has a tendency to misidentify Yu Sau as his daughter Yeuk Lan/ Ruolan 若蘭, who is actually Yu Sau's aunt. As far as she knows, Yu Sau believes that Yeuk Lan lives in mainland China, and she reminds her grandfather several times that she is not Yeuk Lan. However, through a chat with her second elder brother Leung Kin Ming/ Liang Jianming 梁建明, who is a political exile now residing in Hong Kong, Yu Sau finds out that Yeuk Lan committed suicide in Hong Kong twenty years earlier. The ignorance of this fact represents a disconnection between Yu Sau and her family history, and the recollection of her mother's conversations in Cantonese exacerbates the existence of the first layer of absence in Yu Sau's memory.

> "If your grandfather were willing to let her continue her education, she would not have become like this. If she had received more education, she could have gotten a better job, found a good husband. She would not have to marry a communist who worked as a coolie." Yu Sau does not understand why her parents and grandfather are so afraid of the communist party, yet aunt, uncle and Kin Ming ardently hail the party.
>
> **「如果妳爺爺*嗰陣*肯*畀佢*繼續讀書，*佢*就*唔*會變成*咁*，*佢*讀多*啲*書，可能會*搵*到份好工作，*搵*到個好丈夫，不至於*喺*外面嫁*畀*個做*咕哩嘅*共產黨。」** 如秀不明白父母親與爺爺為何這麼懼怕與厭惡共產黨，姑姐、姑丈和二哥卻這麼熱愛共產黨。[85] (Bolded as original; Italics and underlined is Cantonese)

From Kin Ming, Yu Sau learns that Yeuk Lan and her husband joined the communist party together. However, Kin Ming's positive impression in Mandarin Chinese contradicts Yu Sau's deceased mother's opinion in Cantonese, making Yu Sau feels "ridiculous and confused" (90). Yu Sau remembers that her mother had a hatred for the communist party, and blamed her grandfather

[85] Yeng, *Xifu*, 92.

for not allowing Yeuk Lan to continue her education (嗰陣肯畀佢繼續讀書，佢就唔會變成咁). Her mother insisted that if Yeuk Lan had had the chance to be educated, she would not have had to marry a coolie-like communist (嫁畀個做咕哩嘅共產黨). The different voices signify divergent perception about family memory: Kin Ming's impression in Standard Mandarin Chinese is in favour of communism, yet their mother articulates her animosity in Cantonese. Two incompatible memories are contained within two language forms that compete. The omniscient narrator then carries on the story and confirms Yu Sau's feeling of emptiness when receiving the information about Yeuk Lan. Yu Sau finds it incomprehensible to rationalize the diverse understandings of communism by different members of her family. The two opposing voices of Kin Ming and her mother are conflicted in order to reflect opposing views about Yeuk Lan; however, they are unified by pointing in the same direction to Yu Sau's emptiness – she does not know anything about Yeuk Lan and her family's past. Here, Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese both collide and co-operate to bring out the first layer of absence in Yu Sau's memory.

There are other instances of absent memory featured in Yu Sau's recollections shared with her grandfather that synchronously speak to her second layer of absence regarding Kam Chau, as well as a third layer of absence in her lack of proficiency in Cantonese.

> Grandpa finished the song, sighed, "Your brother was lovelorn!" Then, he fell silent for a moment. Suddenly, he asked Yu Sau, "What's the name of that young guy?" "You didn't ask him." Yu Sau answered, in her amateur Cantonese.
>
> 爺爺把歌唱完，嘆了口氣：「**妳大哥*係*為情所累啊！**」然後，他若有所思沉默了一陣子，突然張口問如秀：「*嗰後生仔*叫*乜名話*？」

> 「**你<u>*冇*</u>問<u>*佢喎*</u>。**」如秀答他，她的廣東話有點生硬。[86] (Bolded as original; Italics and underlined is Cantonese)

The conversation between Yu Sau and her grandfather shows that her grandfather is reminiscing about Kam Chau, feeling upset about Kam Chau's love encounter. However, Yu Sau has no reaction to her grandpa's lament. After a moment of silence, her grandfather then moves on to another topic, asking Yu Sau the name of the stranger who sings Cantonese opera in the park (嗰後生仔叫乜名話). Yu Sau's response is clearly not a spontaneous one, rather she answers in coarse and rough Cantonese but without confidence. This conversation demonstrates Yu Sau's absent memory in two layers simultaneously – the lack of knowledge about her brother Kam Chau and her lack of proficiency in Cantonese communication. Even though Yu Sau responds in Cantonese, the omniscient narrator in standard Mandarin Chinese affirms her unfamiliarity with Cantonese that draws Yu Sau farther away from her family memory. Mandarin and Cantonese are again posed against each other to attest to disparate perceptions. Yu Sau's absent memory of Cantonese is subtly presented in her amateur Cantonese speech.

The third layer of absence in Cantonese receives additional emphasis by the omniscient narrator, elucidating Yu Sau's decreasing proficiency in Cantonese that resulted from the "Speak Mandarin Campaign." After the death of her grandfather, Yu Sau becomes gradually aware of her loss of Cantonese proficiency.

> After the abolishment of dialect programs on TV and radio in the mid-1980s, it can be said that she is no longer able to hear Cantonese…Yu Sau thinks it is absurd that no movies in Chinese dialects are being screened in the artistic film theatre, or on cultural TV channels. Films in French, German, Spanish and Italian are however frequently screened…She has almost forgotten her mother tongue Cantonese, until she has to take

[86] Ibid., 13.

care of mother and grandfather at home…She has no confidence in her Cantonese, worrying that she cannot convey her ideas clearly enough.

自從八十年代中電視與電臺停止一切方言節目後，她可以說是完全沒機會聽廣東話了……如秀覺得很荒謬，在本地放映藝術電影的戲院裡，在電視的藝術頻道裡，她常看到講法語、德語、西班牙語、意大利語的電影，就是沒看過講華人方言的電影……她自己的母語廣東話，卻幾乎忘卻了。直到她回家照顧母親與爺爺……她對自己的廣東話總是沒甚麼自信……說話的時候怯生生地，怕詞不達意。[87]

Here, the omniscient narrator in Mandarin does not go against Cantonese, but rather poignantly points out the adverse effect of the "Speak Mandarin Campaign." The narrator impartially illustrates the unreasonable ban of dialect programs on TV and radio, and the dubbing of Chinese movies that cut off social contact with Cantonese. It is certainly a bias to continue showing films in European languages while muting the voice of Chinese dialects. "When a native speaker cannot count on having access to his or her own mother tongue, all the experiences that are attached to knowing a language intimately – reading, writing, listening, and speaking – appear equally imperiled."[88] In other words, the replacement of the mother tongue by Mandarin deny ancestral roots of other Sinitic languages in every sense. Future generations are thus literally aphasic and illiterate to read and write, as reflected in Yu Sau's life. She is not even confident to communicate in her mother tongue even when she is at home, which constitutes her third layer of absent memory. By condemning the "Speak Mandarin Campaign" in Mandarin, it highlights the author's sarcastic writing technique and exposes Mandarin-centrism.

Despite the narrator's voice in Mandarin oscillating from collision to co-operation, the notion of mother tongue and absent memory are entangled within the omniscient narrator's voice.

[87] Ibid., 166-167.

[88] Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, 2.

Yu Sau's incompetence in her mother tongue blocks her access to knowledge of her family past, Kam Chau, as well as her mother tongue itself. These three different layers of absent memory make it hard for her to position herself. She therefore possesses a desire to retrieve her mother tongue in order to better situate herself and better understand her family.

Completing Narrative Inheritance Through Cantonese

What is also in question in regard to absent memory is its inseparable relationship with narrative inheritance. Narrative inheritance is "stories given to children by and about family members."[89] It is an important factor in the way that we experience things and the ways in which make sense of life (Adams 2008, 176). Margaret McNay further explains the concept of absent memory in relation to narrative inheritance by pointing out that when there is a disruption of the construction of narrative inheritance, there is also a disruption in the formation of identity in children growing up in those families."[90] Displaced and incomplete memory gradually becomes family secrets (McNay 2009, 1179). To cope with the uncertainty of identity formation and the danger of disconnection, the next generations therefore must complete narrative inheritance to have life make sense again "by imaginative investment, projection, and creation."[91] In the following passage, I attach the notions of "absent memory" and "narrative inheritance" to reveal how Yu Sau's life is restored by reviving Cantonese.

In *Opera Costume*, the theme of absence is the driving force behind the text's narrative inheritance. Not knowing the family past, the reason of Kam Chau's disappearance, and her

[89] Harold Goodall, "Narrative Inheritance: A Nuclear Family with Toxic Secrets," *Qualitative Inquiry* 11, no.4 (2005): 492.

[90] Margaret McNay, "Absent Memory, Family Secrets, Narrative Inheritance," *Qualitative Inquiry* 15, no.7 (September 2009): 1179.

[91] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 107.

incompetence in Cantonese have confused Yu Sau for a long period of time. Provoked by the death of her mother and grandfather, Yu Sau turns to her family's past in order to understand both her family and herself. Consequently, she picks up her forgotten mother tongue, Cantonese, to reconnect with her family. In discovering her narrative inheritance, Yu Sau discovers how the family's collective interest in Cantonese opera has deeply shaped her life, even if it was transmitted to her in absence. I suggest that through the revival of her mother tongue, and the cultural form of Cantonese opera, Yu Sau gradually fills in the gaps of her family's absent memory. The native language of Cantonese provides a medium for her to access the past and receive her narrative inheritance.

The primary narrative inheritance is first articulated by the imperative need to find Kam Chau. Looking after her dying mother, Yu Sau recalls her childhood and how her mother was strongly against Kam Chau devoting his life to Cantonese opera. Their mother throws away Kam Chau's opera costume in an attempt to discourage his interest. Despite her disapproval, the mother still loves her absent son and wants to see him again before she dies. Yu Sau then makes a promise to her in Cantonese.

> "Mom. I will help you find Kam Chau." Yu Sau recalled the promise she made when her mother was in a coma.
>
> **「媽，我同妳*搵*大哥*返嚟*。」**如秀想起她望著昏迷的母親，對她許下的諾言。[92] (Bolded as original; Italics and underlined is Cantonese)

The imperative need to see Kam Chau forces Yu Sau to communicate and interact with her mother in Cantonese. Cantonese becomes the medium for her to connect with her mother and her

[92] Yeng, *Xifu*, 86.

mother's desire to have Kam Chau return (搵大哥返嚟). Unfortunately, Yu Sau's mother cannot meet Kam Chau before she dies, since Yu Sau feels unable to fully act until after the death of her grandfather. It is simply a vain hope that she knows she must explore the disappearance of Kam Chau. After her grandfather has passed away, Yu Sau is finally determined to trace her genealogy by learning Cantonese and Cantonese opera. She returns to the source, thereby reinventing herself and her connection to her family.

At first, she thought Cantonese opera was just a nostalgic interest, yet she unwittingly becomes more indulgent about it and even dreams of herself anxiously preparing for an opera performance. Sorting through the relics of her deceased relatives, Yu Sau digs out past photos of Kam Chau and her grandfather's opera librettos. Looking at Kam Chau's photograph, Yu Sau finds she looks a lot like her brother. She begins to imagine herself wearing the same opera costume and performing on stage, believing she would look just like Kam Chau if she were to star as a *Siu Seng/ Xiaosheng* 小生 (the supporting male in Cantonese opera). The role of Kam Chau as an opera singer is deeply embedded in Yu Sau's memory. It is so compelling that it seems as if she has watched the performance before. The creative process enables her to achieve a certain mastery of opera. But no matter how real the memory describes this to be, it is still in the form of absence – Yu Sau has never watched a single opera performance starring Kam Chau. Instead, Yu Sau imaginatively projects herself by dreaming that she is playing in the opera. In her endeavour to resurrect the memory of Kam Chau, she identifies herself as akin to him to cover over the void. The effort of reconstituting narrative inheritance is therefore conveyed in imagining of Cantonese opera, rather than having true knowledge of it.

Yu Sau more or less acknowledges that she cannot rely solely on imagination to find Kam Chau. Therefore, she takes real action and attends Cantonese opera classes, where she attains

narrative inheritance by other means. In class, she meets Chan Siu Wah/ Chen Shaohua 陳劭華, an old friend of Kam Chau who is similarly interested in Cantonese opera (he is also the one who sings Cantonese opera in the park, the person who previously drew the grandfather's attention, and who later becomes Yu Sau's husband). During casual conversations with Siu Wah, Yu Sau gains a clearer understanding of Kam Chau's whereabouts in Hong Kong after the opera troupe was disbanded. In this light, Cantonese opera does not only tangibly improve Yu Sau's Cantonese proficiency. It also intangibly provides an opportunity for Yu Sau to meet with an old acquaintance of Kam Chau, who enables Yu Sau to achieve narrative inheritance.

A secondary yet equally crucial narrative inheritance is contained in the lost opera costume, which is a symbolic object representing the past of both Yu Sau and Kam Chau. Passed from the grandfather to Kam Chau, the costume signifies a genealogical transmission and represents a containment of Kam Chau's disappearance. Since Kam Chau and the costume have gone missing for years, there is a reason for Yu Sau to search for the object in order to discover Kam Chau's story. Finding the costume completes the inheritance.

Nearly twenty years after he left home, Kam Chau has secretly come back to Singapore. Due to his failure in opera, he is forced to live frugally and works in a coffee shop instead of performing. He isolates himself, cutting off contact with his family and his previous friends. No one really knows that he is back in town. Yu Sau unexpectedly runs into him in the coffee shop where he works, but they fail to recognize each other. Siu Wah then assists and mediates between the two and invites Kam Chau to a dinner at his home. When Kam Chau and Yu Sau are reunited, Yu Sau can no longer hold back. In Cantonese, she bluntly questions Kam Chau about the opera costume.

“When grandpa was still alive, he said that you had been keeping an opera costume. Is it true that the costume is at your place?” Yu Sau could not help but ask the question that she had for long.

“It was dumped by mom.” Kam Chau said, indifferently.

「**爺爺*在生嗰陣*，話你收藏*住*一件戲服，件戲服真*係喺*你*嗰度*？**」如秀終於忍不住把心裡存了很久的疑問說了出來。
「***畀*阿媽*扰左啦***」劍秋淡淡地說。[93] (Bolded as original; Italics and underlined is Cantonese)

To Yu Sau, the missing costume represents a genealogical connection from grandpa to Kam Chau, which is simultaneously related to Kam Chau’s disappearance. Since narrative inheritance is so imperative and since it “touches everything, one way or another, in our lives.”[94] Yu Sau cannot even think but asks about the costume in Cantonese. She must figure out whether the opera costume is still in existence as well as what made Kam Chau leave home, if she is to reconstruct her family story. Cantonese is no longer a distant object but a retrieved one and her once again mother tongue. She must rely on it to trace back her family’s past. Yu Sau asks Kam Chau whether he has kept the opera costume (喺你嗰度), a rumour that her grandfather enthusiastically insisted was true when he was still alive (在生嗰陣). Yet Kam Chau replies indifferently that the costume had been discarded by their mother a long time ago (畀阿媽扰左啦). He does not hold much emotion for the costume at all. In fact, Kam Chau really has no clue about the costume’s whereabouts. He believes the opera costume has long been gone, just like the heyday of his opera career. The lost costume remains a mystery for both of them. Nevertheless, reaching to Yu Sau’s question, the narrator suddenly switches to Kam Chau’s perspective in order to recollect the

[93] Ibid., 295.

[94] Goodall, “Narrative Inheritance: A Nuclear Family with Toxic Secrets,” 503.

remnants of the past. Kam Chau recalls his tough days in Hong Kong, where he was criticized and ridiculed by the audience for his unprofessional opera performance.

> "He does not even know how to make a move on stage, he moves like he's trying to kick a soccer ball, [how can he qualify] to be a *Man Mo Seng* (the principal male role)!"
> **「上臺連*行*步路都*唔*識，開步好*似*踢*波咁*，做文武生！」**[95] **(**Bolded as original; Italics and underlined is Cantonese)

Kam Chau recalls bitter days when he was taunted by the audience. People jeered that he did not even know how to move on stage (連行步路都唔識). He never believed that he would ever be derided for moving like a soccer player (好似踢波咁). Kam Chau mocks himself recalling a time when he was in Hong Kong watching a movie, *Hau Lui Chu Chu/ Xiaonü zhuzhu* 孝女珠珠 (The Dutiful Daughter Chu Chu).

> "Cantonese Opera is destroyed by the people of your kind – who were casted for a few plays and know so little, yet are so self-absorbed – how much do you actually know? ...You're so mediocre."
> **「粵劇就*係畀*你*呢*種人搞壞*嘅*，——做得幾臺戲，稍為有多少皮毛，自以為了不起——你實在有*幾*多功夫？……教出你*呢*種*半桶水嘅*人馬」**[96] (Bolded as original; Italics and underlined is Cantonese)

Not only Yu Sau, but also Kam Chau, is in need to reconstruct narrative inheritance but for a different purpose. Since his youth, Kam Chau was told a half-authentic, half-fabricated story by his grandfather that he had a talent for Cantonese opera. However, this was over exaggerated by Kam Chau's irresponsible coach in order to convince his grandfather to pay him more money. The boastful coach mistakenly made Kam Chau believe he could be successful without practising. Lacking adequate training in the field, his opera skills were actually not as good as he thought. He

---

[95] Yeng, *Xifu*, 296.

[96] Ibid., 299.

was not up to par to embark on a professional opera career. It was unfortunate that he only became aware of this after he left Singapore to go to Hong Kong. Kam Chau reactivates his mother tongue in order to confess to that seemingly forgotten reality and to revise his narrative inheritance. Appropriating the film dialogue, he concedes that his shallow opera technique is insufficient for Cantonese opera (畀你呢種人搞壞嘅). By posing the rhetorical question "how much do you actually know?" (實在有幾多功夫?), he casts doubt on himself by admitting that he is nothing but a mediocre opera singer (半桶水嘅人馬). The claim in Cantonese destabilizes the given story told by his grandfather and his coach, offering a position for him to reconstruct a new form of identity. The revision of narrative inheritance helps Kam Chau to bid farewell to past glamor/ shame assigned by the coach/grandfather and the audience. The identity of the opera singer is replaced by a renewed position of being an ordinary person.

While Kam Chau admits and accepts the fact that his opera career is in a bygone era, Yu Sau continues her Cantonese opera training shortly after her reunion with Kam Chau. Out of her anticipation, she meets Lily Cheung, who used to be a very close friend of Kam Chau but who broke up a "love triangle" after she married Meng Hung. Yu Sau remembers that Kam Chau, Meng Hung, and Lily, were very close friends and organized an opera troupe. Most of the time Kam Chau and Lily were paired to perform and everyone thought that they were a couple. Kam Chau's parents, and Yu Sau herself, even believed that Lily was going to become part of their family. But the news of Meng Hung and Lily getting married completely tore the trio apart. The opera troupe was disbanded. The newly-weds moved to Canada, and Kam Chau went to Hong Kong soon after. While everyone assumed it was two men competing for a woman, no one knew that the relationship was reversed: Kam Chau and Meng Hung were lovers, with Lily being the intruder. Yu Sau has

misunderstood their relationship. It is not surprising when Lily initiates a request to meet Kam Chau, Yu Sau replies reluctantly.

> "Why must you see Kam Chau?" Yu Sau asked, indifferently.
> "I have to hand Kam Chau the costume kept by Meng Hung." Said Lily Cheung.
>
> 「***點解***你一定要見大哥呢？」如秀冷冷地問。
> 「**我要將劍秋交*畀*孟雄保管*嘅*戲服親手交*返畀佢*。**」張荔麗說。[97] (Bolded as original; Italics and underlined is Cantonese)

Spontaneously and naturally responding in Cantonese, Yu Sau is defensive in front of Lily Cheung and interrogates her, asking why (點解) it is imperative to see Kam Chau. She is worried that a sudden visit by Lily would remind Kam Chau of his past. The mother tongue is instinctively evoked so as to protect her family and Kam Chau. It is only when Lily has explained her intention to return the costume to Kam Chau (交返畀佢) that Yu Sau softens and is willing to take her to Kam Chau's home. She is surprised that the costume is still in existence, and that Lily has it. Ready to complete narrative inheritance, the stories narration again switches to Kam Chau's perspective.

Caressing the lost and found opera costume that Lily returned, Kam Chau begins to dwell on the past: It was true that his mother threw away the opera costume. But Kam Chau picked it up from the trash bin and asked Meng Hung to keep the costume for him. Their intimacy and relationship sparked at that moment. There were few more intimate acts after that, but Meng Hung ended up marry Lily Cheung for unknown reasons. The depreciation of Cantonese opera in Singapore and the unattainable love of Meng Hung had left a double despair for Kam Chau, forcing him to leave for Hong Kong. He no longer knew where the opera costume was. On the other hand, Meng Hung heard that Kam Chau had gone to Hong Kong and decided to fly from Canada to pay

[97] Ibid., 304-305.

him a visit. Together they watched *Chun gwong ja sit/ Chunguang Zhaxie* 春光乍洩 (Happy Together*)*. Although Meng Hung wanted to begin their relationship again, Kam Chau infuriated by this impractical suggestion and refuses apathetically. He did not know that this would be the last meeting he would have with Meng Hung. Lily bears the bad news that Meng Hung has died of pancreatic cancer. Kam Chau unfolds his memories and asks Lily,

> "What did he say to you?"
> "Who? Hung Gor, you mean?"
> "I get it." "I have known this for a long time."
> "How did you lie to him, to have…"
> "A woman needs someone to take care of her and build a family eventually. At the time, I was not young anymore."
>
> 「*佢*同你講過*乜嘢*？」
> 「你*係*話雄哥*吖*？」
> 「我明白。」「我知道*咗*好*耐嘞*。」
> 「妳*係點呃佢*同妳——。」
> 「女人總*係*要有個歸宿*嘅*，*嗰陣*我年紀已經*唔*細*嘞*。」[98] (Bolded as original; Italics and underlined is Cantonese)

Although Lily seems to be a minor character in the novel, she turns out to play an important role since she is the one who has kept the costume. The recovery of the costume helps to bring out the broken narrative between Kam Chau and Meng Hung. Thus, Kam Chau initiates the conversation in his mother tongue to reactivate the past for himself. He asks Lily whether Meng Hung has told her anything (佢同你講過乜嘢). Lily's honesty in acknowledging the truth (我知道咗好耐嘞) proves that the clandestine homosexual relationship has come out into the open, and that it is no longer necessary to keep it a secret. Kam Chau then goes further by asking how Lily tricked Meng Hung into getting married (妳係點呃佢同你). The revelation of Lily's wish to build

---

[98] Ibid., 312-313.

a family (女人總係要有個歸宿嘅) explains the reason why she and Meng Hung got married, despite the subtle indication that Meng Hung was not entirely willing to do so. At this point in time, Lily can only return the opera costume and deliver her deepest apology to Kam Chau and Meng Hung.

In this sense, the significance of the symbolic opera costume exceeds Yu Sau's ability to understand. It is not only an object tied to familial transmission and Kam Chau's disappearance, but it also signifies the secret love between Kam Chau and Meng Hung. Notwithstanding that the opera costume has resurfaced, Kam Chau and Meng Hung now have missed each other forever. Cantonese dialogue allows for Kam Chau's understanding of Meng Hung's difficulties, and is the vessel that allowed him to know the reason why the two had stopped being lovers. At the same time, Cantonese allows Kam Chau's unspeakable history to be unpacked and enables Lily to make a confession. Narrative inheritance is thus successfully completed through the mediation of the mother tongue. Both Kam Chau and Lily are relieved.

In the novel, both Yu Sau and Kam Chau possess absent, partial, and incomplete memory that "kept erupting in flashes of imagery; in abrupt but broken refrains."[99] Out of different concerns, both need to fill in memory gaps and complete narrative inheritance in order to restore their lives and to position themselves anew. The mother tongue is therefore used in critical moments in order to help reclaim absent memory. All the gaps, voids and empty feelings are filled through the reconstruction of narrative inheritance. Now a clear picture is projected: Yu Sau has Kam Chau back with her improved Cantonese and Kam Chau moves on from his bygone opera career to

---

[99] Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 9.

accept the ordinary quality of his life. More importantly, he can now understand the hardship of Meng Hung. This restoration of life is attained and articulated through Cantonese.

Shu-mei Shih reminds us that the concept and context of Sinophone is forever in change and transition, "when the descendants of immigrants no longer speak their ancestors' languages, Hanyu and other Sinitic languages, they are no longer part of the Sinophone community."[100] Now the next generation in the novel is clearly in a transitional moment, facing the risk of fully losing their true mother tongue. Nonetheless, Yu Sau's choice of learning Cantonese to retrace her genealogy, as well as Kam Chau's confession in Cantonese illustrate the need to maintain their ancestor's mother tongue. This conscious choice remarks on Singapore after the "Speak Mandarin Campaign."

Conclusion: The Imperative of Retaining the Mother Tongue

In this chapter, I do not ask whether language is a right to identity but suggest that language is a medium of access (Tsu 2010, 13). Probing into Yeng Pway Ngon's *Opera Costume*, I discover that one's self-positioning is shaken by the nationalization of "mother tongue." I ascertain the effect of being deprived of access to one's ancestral roots and family past through language. Yu Sau's decline of her own mother tongue caught her in the web of absent memory in at least three ways: absent memory regarding her family's past, absent memory about Kam Chau's disappearance, and absent memory of the knowledge of Cantonese. The damage to her mother tongue cut her from contact with her family and left her aphasic, unable to communicate. Becoming aware of the problem, she possesses a desire to fill absent memory gaps. In so doing, Yu Sau decides to pick up Cantonese and Cantonese opera in order to retrieve her mother tongue and retrace her genealogy. She is able to reunite with Kam Chau and eventually, when asking

[100] Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 185.

about the lost costume, poses her question in Cantonese out of instinct. The claim of absent memory and completion of narrative inheritance are thus evoked in the revival of Cantonese. On the other hand, Kam Chau is also able to reconstitute his narrative inheritance by recognizing his weakness in Cantonese opera. During his Cantonese conversation with Lily Cheung, he reveals the truth of the past and finally understands the unspeakable difficulties of his deceased lover. Both Yu Sau and Kam Chau are relieved of the past through the trope of Cantonese.

By allowing the protagonist to reclaim absent memory and complete narrative inheritance in her mother tongue, the novel also exposes what a Sinophone concept seeks to counter – the homogenic and dominant monolingual power of "Chinese." The state-imposed "Speak Mandarin Campaign" assigns Mandarin Chinese as the "mother tongue" among all Sinophone Singaporeans, relegating other Sinitic languages as part of their support to Mandarin and concealing "difference among speakers of Chinese and of Chinese languages themselves."[101] Sinophone's linguistic nativity and heterogeneous diversity are simultaneously damaged by the campaign. The revival of Cantonese proficiency in the novel hence articulates the author's Sinophone contestation against China-centrism and Singapore-centrism. The opposing voice is empowered and heard through his Cantonese writing.

Yu Sau's story is strongly rooted in the post-Mandarin Speaking Campaign era. Her story is "rooted in a particular period in history, a particular political context, and a particular geography."[102] Affected by the campaign, the struggle to preserve one's mother tongue challenges

---

[101] Alison M. Groppe, "'Singlish' and the Sinophone: Nonstandard (Chinese/ English) Languages in Recent Singaporean Cinema," in *Sinophone Cinemas*, ed. Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 153.

[102] McNay, "Absent Memory, Family Secrets, Narrative Inheritance," 1185.

the entire generation as well as generations to come among Sinophone Singaporeans. It is well put by Hugo Schuchardt, "mother tongues are born in transits, recreated through interactions with other non-native tongues."[103] Mother tongue is no longer a consanguineous concept but infused with political ideologies. It is intervened and interfered by different languages at the same time. To speak or not to speak Sinitic languages is entirely "a matter of choice and other historical determinations."[104] Because it is a self-conscious decision, the author's intention to write in Cantonese and his literary trope of Cantonese is self-evident. It is imperative to retain the mother tongue in this transitory period. The language is not to be abandoned.

[103] Hugo Schuchardt, "Lingua Franca," in *Pidgin and Creole Languages: Selected Essays by Hugo Schuchardt*, ed. and trans Glenn G. Gilbert (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 68.

[104] Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 30.

Chapter Three

Everyday Life and Forgetfulness: Crisis of Memory in Malaysia

This chapter focuses on a short story, *Snapshots of Chow Fu* (2000), by Sinophone Malaysian writer Li Zishu and considers how Cantonese helps to reject the duty to remember the Malayan Communist Party (hereafter MCP, 1930-1989). Portrayed by the colonial discourse, the MCP is the cause of much of the ethnic conflict between local Malays and Chinese. Therefore, the MCP intangibly forces an obligation on the Sinophone Malaysians to remember this traumatic history.

Set against the MCP backdrop, *Snapshots of Chow Fu* uses a multi-person perspective to recall the life of a deceased former party member, Tam Yin Mui/ Tan Yanmei 譚燕梅. Even though it may seem that this is a reconstruction of the MCP's and Malaysia's historical narrative, I argue that the concern of this story is not to recreate the grand narrative of the MCP but rather to shake off the duty to memorialize the MCP. Through its use of multi-perspective, the story constitutes a heteroglossia that connects with the "crisis of memory," which refers to the choice to remember an event that is stipulated as important or not (Suleiman, 2006). I suggest that the MCP dissolves within a multitude of voices and different memories. I also contend that Cantonese is used specifically to expose mundaneness, everyday life, and ordinary matters that undermine the importance of remembering the MCP. Despite the characters' divergent memories of the MCP, they all speak in Cantonese to articulate their quotidian life, signalling a kind of forgetting. I argue, therefore, that Cantonese bridges the crisis of memory and multi-perspectivity in order to refute the duty to remember. By rejecting the duty to remember, the story reflects upon the current identity of young Sinophone Malaysians in a new era.

Introduction: Li Zishu's Quotidian Cantonese Writing in Malaysia

A Malaysian-born writer who speaks fluent Cantonese, Li Zishu (the pen name of Lim Pow Leng 林寶玲, 1971-), is the youngest of the writers I examine in this thesis. Despite this generational difference, Li follows a similar career trajectory to Wong Bik-wan, writing short stories while working as a reporter. She worked as a journalist for *Sing Chow Yat Bo/ Xingzhou Ribao* 星洲日報 (Sin Chew Daily) for twelve years. She began writing fiction in the mid-1990s, particularly focusing on *mei ying siu suet/ weixing xiaoshuo* 微型小說 (flash fiction). Her first flash fiction collection, *Mei ying Lai Tsz Shu/ Weixing Li Zishu* 微型黎紫書 (Mini Li Zishu), was published in Malaysia in 1999. The same year, she had her first collection of short stories *Tin gwok ji mun/ Tianguo zhi men* 天國之門 (The Gate of Heaven) published in Taiwan. She subsequently published several collections of flash fiction and short stories, volumes of essays, and a novel in both places. Unlike her Sinophone Malaysian contemporaries such as Chang Kuei-hsing (Zhang Guixing) 張貴興 and Ng Kim Chew (Huang Jinshu) 黃錦樹, who went to Taiwan for higher education and stayed, Li did not receive any university education. She lives in Malaysia and continues to write in Sinitic languages. In Malaysia, Sinophone Malaysian writers are doubly marginalized by the Malaysian government for producing non-national literature, and their literature is peripheral when compared to Chinese literature produced in mainland China and Taiwan. Therefore, as opposed to those who migrate to Taiwan, Li has often self-identified that her position is that of a local writer by foregrounding her works in Malaysia, despite facing challenges (Groppe 2013, 257).

In 1998, when she was working as a journalist, Li Zishu secretly interviewed Chin Ping (Chen Ping) 陳平 (1924-2013), the former leader of the MCP. The MCP was established in 1930

and was primarily formed by the Chinese in Malaya. They believed in anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. In order to sustain their colonial influence in Malaya, the British government spread the rumour that the MCP intended to take over Malaya by connecting it with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This colonial discourse successfully evoked fear among the local Malays about the local Chinese. From that point forward, the MCP are portrayed as the root cause of the ethnic conflict between the Chinese and the Malays even today. Despite the fact that the MCP laid down their arms in 1989, the complicated history intangibly imposed a "duty to remember" on Sinophone Malaysians. This provoked several Sinophone Malaysian authors to write with this as their background. Li Zishu is not an exception. Critics consider that her interview with Chin Ping triggered Li to work on a series of short stories thematically concerned with the MCP, also known as *Ma Gung/ Ma Gong* 馬共 (Lim 2009, Jin, 2010, Shih 2016). At the end of 1998, Li published *Ye Hang/ Ye Xing* 夜行 (*Night Journey*), depicting MCP history through stream-of-consciousness. Two years later, in 2000, she produced *Shan wan/ Shan wen* 山瘟 (*Mountain Plague*) and *Snapshots of Chow Fu*, which both touch on the MCP's history. Her interest in the MCP persisted until 2005, with *Cat yat sik wai/ Qiri shiyi* 七日食遺 (*History/ Hysteria*), which questions the authenticity of history surrounding the MCP.

Unlike other Sinophone Malaysian writers such as Xiao Hei 小黑, who reconstructs repressed MCP memories, or Ng Kim Chew, who deals with the concept of Chinese diaspora, root-searching and Chineseness by writing about the MCP, Li Zishu is notable for her unconcerned attitude about the history of the MCP.[105] Lim Choon Bee comments that Li's novels express

[105] For Xiao Hei's novels about the MCP, see Xiao Hei, *Jieshu de lücheng: Xiao Hei xiaoshuo zixuanji* (Taipei: Niang chuban, 2012), 21-24. For Ng Kim Chew's novels about the MCP, see Ng Kim Chew, *Huo xiao le* (Taipei: Maitian, 2015), 179-186. For Li Zishu's novel about the MCP, see Ng Kim Chew, *Huo xiao le*, 39-45.

historical nihilism in order to efface the MCP's history and memory. She critiques Li's complicity in the colonial discourse, arguing that Li simply manipulates the MCP motif to fit the context of national allegory as an appealing theme for garnering literary awards.[106] David Der-wei Wang suggests that Li's *Ma Gong* short stories depict the disappearance of heroism, the termination of national and familial saga, as well as the collapse of ethical memories, constituting a collective fin-de-siècle lament with her contemporaries.[107] On the contrary, Ng Kim Chew proposes that *Ma Gong* is merely a backdrop for Li Zishu's stories, where she tries to keep an aesthetic distance apart from the history of the MCP. Furthermore, historical interpretation and authenticity are not the main point here.[108]

Indeed, unlike the previous generation who perceive China as their homeland, Li Zishu is self-aware of her Sinophone Malaysian identity. She claims that, today, the members of the younger generation "do not think about identity, ethnicity, history and national citizenship."[109] "In our generation, we have no homeland nor cultural origin [in China]. We grow up here [Malaysia]. How do we face this place? How do we learn about ourselves?"[110] These quotes reflect Li's aspiration of seeking a new meaning of the Sinophone Malaysian in an alternative way. Thus, Li opens up her own writing by setting her stories in Malaysia and infusing them with local color in order to capture local experience (Groppe 2013, 257). As Jorge Luis Borges noted concerning local

---

[106] Lim Choon Bee, *Xingbie yu bentu: zaidi de mahua wenxue lunshu* (Selangor: Mentor Publishing, 2009), 180-181.

[107] David Der-wei Wang, "Hei'an zhi xin de tansuo zhe – shi lun Li Zishu," in *Shan Wen*, by Li Zishu (Taipei: Maitian, 2001), 6.

[108] Ng Kim Chew, "Mahua nüxing wenxue piping de bentu tansuo zhi lu," in *Xingbie yu bentu: zaidi de mahua wenxue lunshu*, by Lim Choon Bee (Selangor: Mentor Publishing, 2009), 11.

[109] Tee Kim Tong, "Li Zishu fangwen ji," *Chung-wai Literary Monthly* 29, no.4 (2000): 208.

[110] Tse Shuen, "Li Zishu de yueli rensheng," *Ming Pao*, July 3, 2017. Accessed December 6, 2018. http://mingpaomonthly.com/mpm/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/bookc000180.pdf.

color, Arab writers could reveal their national character without camels (2014, 395). Li also rejects local color, only depicting the Malaysian landscape of the tropical rainforest, *jiu fung ye yu/ jiaofeng yeyu* 蕉風椰雨 (banana wind, coconut rain), and *gaau lum/ jiaolin* 膠林 (rubber plantation). In contrast to the Malaysian writers in Taiwan who exhibit a longing for Malaysia via universalism, Li deeply situates her work in Malaysia, carving out the importance of everyday life for the current generation. Li also distinguishes herself from other Sinophone Malaysian writers by writing in Cantonese. Growing up in a Cantonese-speaking environment, Ipoh, Li uses her language to reconceptualize lineage and culture, resurrecting a multilingual Malaysia. As opposed to Li Yongping 李永平 and his obsession with canonical Chinese text, Li's writing privileges the vernacular and the multilingual. She moves between different Sinitic languages such as Mandarin and Cantonese in order to represent many local Sinophone voices (Groppe 2013, 257). Li's place-based Cantonese writing registers her "polyphonic and multilingual" Sinophone practice (Shih 2013, 10).

Among her four MCP-themed short stories, *Snapshots of Chow Fu* is the one that is set in Li Zishu's hometown, Ipoh, and is mixed with Cantonese writing. Inspired by Wong Bik-wan's Cantonese novel *Portraits of Martyred Women* (1999), Li Zishu appropriates Cantonese in writing *Snapshots of Chow Fu*.[111] As the title implies, this short story is set in the Malaysian town of Chow Fu, and provides a "snapshot" of the local's lives. Written as a pseudo reportage, a journalist conducts a round of interviews to inquire about a deceased and mysterious legendary woman, Tam Yin Mui, who was involved in the MCP. Eleven characters from different generations and backgrounds are "interviewed" about their own memories of Tam. These people include her lover

[111] See Ng Kim Chew, *Huo xiao le*, 44.

Lau Yuen Man/ Liu Yuanwen 劉遠聞, her husband Chiu Sik Yin/ Zhao Xixian 趙錫賢, her adopted son Chiu So Ha/ Zhao Suxia 趙蘇蝦, her childhood friend Law Ngan Seng/ Luo Yansheng 羅雁生 and his wife Choi Bik Yuk/ Cai Biyu 蔡碧玉, her MCP comrade Liu Siu Gwok/ Liao Zhaoguo 廖兆國 and his cousin Liu Sau Hing/ Liao Xiuqing 廖秀卿, her best friend's younger brother, Wong Kei Cheung/ Huang Qixiang 黃其祥 and his wife, Lee Ngan To/ Li Yintao 李銀桃, as well as a couple of acquaintances. Yet the journalist is invisible and entirely absent from the narrative. It is a multi-person narrative where interviewees' voices appear. This creates a Rashomon-like effect because each memory is different and contradictory. Through these divergent memories, readers are informed that in the 1930s, Tam was a Cantonese opera singer, who secretly joined the MCP. She falls in love with a party member, Lau Yuen Man. At the same time, Tam's best friend, Wong Choi Lin/ Huang Cailian 黃彩蓮, begins a relationship with Lau, forming a love triangle. Both women follow Lau to take part in the anti-Japanese campaigns, and both are impregnated by him. Wong gives birth but unfortunately later dies in an attack by the Japanese. While Tam survives, she loses her baby. Tam decides to take care of Wong's son, naming him as Chiu So Ha. Tam then returns to her hometown, Chow Fu. She continues to work as a Cantonese opera singer, living into her seventies. In 1957, Lau is arrested by the Malaysian government on Independence Day. He spends twenty years in prison and never sees Tam or his son again. The town Chow Fu has been renamed to Ipoh. On the surface, the story seems to rebuild Tam's communist trajectory with the MCP backdrop, but Tam's voice is muted. The multi-person narrative and its divergent recollections further blur Tam's contribution to the MCP, focusing instead on the minutia of her personal life. This overshadows the historical MCP discourse, making her role in the MCP questionable. Moreover, the "interviewees" are now immersed in everyday

life and are unwilling to cling to the past. For most of them, sustaining their daily life is far more important than recalling bygone history.

Based on this, I propose that the objective of *Snapshots of Chow Fu* is not so much to feature the MCP, but rather to represent how current Sinophone Malaysians shrug off the duty to remember, choosing to live their everyday lives in the post-MCP era. By 2000, when Li Zishu wrote this short story, the MCP had already been dissolved for eleven years. It is unreasonable that the new generation should bear responsibility for what they did not do. Besides, the year 2000 was also a new century year that marked a new decade, a new century, and a new millennium. Following the fin-de-siècle, young Sinophone Malaysians ought to be given a voice to articulate their identity and position. I suggest that the key message of this story is epitomized in the following three regards.

First of all, in terms of the format, I argue that Li intentionally designs an interview-like reportage in order to recreate daily life. Like many of us, we read newspapers and interviews every day, but we soon forget the content. The quotidian-like interview correlates to Li's observations of the MCP, which is remarkable for its historical meaning, yet paradoxically unimportant given its insignificance to current life. People know MCP history, but they no longer care about its events and its legacy. Second, Li adopts a multi-person narrative in order to complicate the grand narrative of the MCP. I suggest that such narrative illustrates the "crisis of memory," which is a tension about remembering the past that is deemed important (Suleiman 2006, 5). Conflicted and fragmentary memory discourses from multiple perspectives destroy the duty to remember. In these multiple perspectives, I also suggest the emergence of heteroglossia. According to Bakhtin, heteroglossia is formed by different voices in different contexts by different types of people. The coexistence of various types of speech generates multi-voiced texts, serving to express authorial

intentions but in a refracted way (1981, 324). Even when a character "speaks," it is also inherently the author speaking on some level. Therefore, we can see that the author's refracted thoughts about the MCP are expressed in the character's multi-narrative, forming a unitary agreement to undermine the perception of the MCP. By adding a limited amount of Cantonese in the novel, I further argue that it both registers a local sensibility and draws out the unnoticed fabric of everyday life, eloquently illustrating the current identity of Sinophone Malaysians. On the one hand, Cantonese helps reconceptualize Sinophone Malaysianness, recultivating the multilingual environment. On the other hand, the limited use of Cantonese specifically exposes the quotidian of the current generation. The characters use partial Cantonese to voice that they have chosen to forget. In this way, Cantonese ties closely with the crisis of memory and heteroglossia, and points toward the forgetting of the MCP, indicating a collective choice to forget.

By focusing on the quotidian elements in Cantonese writing, *Snapshots of Chow Fu* offers a refreshing understanding of the *Ma Gong* novel. It no longer reconstructs the memories of the MCP, lingering over its significance. Rather it provides another perspective to rethink what the MCP means to the current generation and how they situate the MCP in their lives. The time- and place-specific Malaysianness therefore enters into the discourse.

The Interplay of Cantonese, Crisis of Memory, and Heteroglossia

Susan Rubin Suleiman first proposed the notion of "crisis of memory" in relation to World War II. She describes it as "a moment of choice, and sometimes of predicament or conflict, about remembrance of the past, whether by individuals or by groups."[112] According to her, although the memory of the war and the Holocaust is nationally specific, it transcends national boundaries and

[112] Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*, 1.

religious frontiers to become a global site of memory. Yet every country involved in the war has its own crises of memory, which is not necessarily applicable to others. The experience of war differs, the post-war issues also vary from one another. Moreover, memory of past events is not fixed but constantly in flux. A past event that is deemed as important may disappear along with those who were alive during it. And it is highly "influenced by the individual's or the collective's present situation and the projections for the future."[113] In other words, memory can be changed, altered, and forgotten for individual or collective needs. "Crisis of memory" becomes a matter of self-representation and self-reflection, since how one views oneself and how one presents oneself to others are inseparable from the stories one tells about the past (Suleiman 2006, 2). It is sufficiently malleable to align with the present situation if needed. Susan Sontag shares a similar viewpoint, suggesting that "All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds."[114] What is regarded as important is merely a statement of what must be remembered. The choice of remembering and forgetting thus highlights one's perspective in perceiving history, the present situation, and one's identity.

Coincidentally, Cantonese in Malaysia relates to both self-representation and identity. Mainland Chinese writer Wang Anyi 王安憶 once made a comparison between mainland Chinese and Taiwan literary language, commenting that the biggest problem of Taiwan's writing is the lack of a writing medium. Despite the fact that southern spoken languages such as Hokkien and Hakka

[113] Ibid., 4.

[114] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 85-86.

are widely spoken in Taiwan, writers rely on northern language, i.e. standard Mandarin Chinese, when they write. The discrepancy between the two leads to a separation of speech and writing, which makes Taiwanese writing technical.[115] Although Ng Kim Chew does not agree with Wang's opinion that northern Chinese language is authentic, he agrees with her in valuing a colloquial and idiomatic style of writing. He addresses the predicament of Malaysia with the term *sut yu dik naam fong/ shiyu de nanfang* 失語的南方 (the south where language is lost). Sinophone Malaysian writers face the challenge of not having identical literary and written mediums, making them unable to vividly express the life and culture of the south. Therefore, the real problem of language "is not that it is too technical, but not technical enough."[116] He proposes to reinvent a southern language that features the multilingual, multiethnic and modernized Malaysia. He encourages writers to tame topolect differences in order to enrich their written language.[117]

Invoked by the call of "sut yu dik naam fong," Li Zishu adds to the riches of Cantonese in order to recreate the multilingual soundscape of Ipoh in her writing.[118] Unlike Ng's work of adding Hokkien in a playful and satirical way (Groppe 2013, 90), I argue that Li's Cantonese usage bridges the crisis of memory and everyday life in order to achieve local portrayals. Even though the memories of war in *Snapshots of Chow Fu* differs from that of World War II, and even though the MCP did not become to a global issue, "crisis of memory" is central to the story. Conflicting memory discourses demonstrate that the MCP memory is in crisis, their present concerns no longer

---

[115] See Wang Anyi, "Dalu taiwan xiaoshuo yuyan bijiao," *Shanghai wenxue*, no. 3 (1990): 66-72.

[116] Ng Kim Chew, "Huawen/ zhongwen: Shiyu de nanfang yu yuyan zaizao," in *Mahua wenxue yu zhongguo xing* (Taipei: Maitian, 2012), 44.

[117] See Ibid, 26-51.

[118] See Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, 204.

attach to the historical event. The current generation has switched to money-making activities and has become insensitive to MCP history. The obligation to remember MCP history as a memory has been subverted. In such a crisis, Li appropriates Cantonese to emphasize the tension of competing memory discourse and to narrate everyday life, deflating the seriousness of the MCP. In so doing, Cantonese goes beyond exterior local color and represents the interior and authentic lives of current Sinophone Malaysians. Quotidian Cantonese illuminates self-conscious representations and reflections regarding the MCP. To remember the MCP becomes difficult, if not impossible.

Meanwhile, the multi-person narrative in Cantonese generates "heteroglossia," which involves two or more voices or views appearing in a single text. According to Bakhtin, when an author writes a novel, the text is speaking both in the voices of its characters and the voice of the author, albeit indirectly. This seems to suggest that these voices are inter-related and are conversing with each other. The author's intention is refracted underneath the narrative. A double-voiced discourse occurs.[119] To apply Bakhtin's argument to *Snapshots of Chow Fu*, I find that a similar soundscape of heteroglossia exists. Individual and diverse dialogue, even though conflicted, form an inter-related and collective consensus in order to efface the MCP.

I also argue that the peculiar Cantonese writing performs a double-voiced act and highlights "the politics of the mundane" (Shih 2007, 155). In her discussion of Fruit Chan's film, *Hui nin yin fa dak bit do/ Qunian yanhua tebieduo* 去年煙花特別多 (The Longest Summer), Shu-mei Shih suggests that Chan's play of mundaneness rewrites national allegory. On the one hand, the film recognizes national allegory. On the other hand, the writing of mundaneness into the film exposes

[119] See M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 324.

the limitation of national allegory through irony. This produces a double-voiced act that responds to Hong Kong's situation with China and Chineseness. I find a similar observation of mundaneness can also be made in Li Zishu's novel. Throughout the novel, the main idea is to trace the personal trajectory of Tam Yin Mui, a former party member of the MCP. Despite the fact that the reconstruction of the MCP is well-fitted within national allegory, the multi-person narrative ridicules this effort. Irregular and random utterances in Cantonese point toward everyday life and passive forgetting, showing the disappearance of the MCP. The minimal use of Cantonese aligns with the current generation's level of self-reflection. In this case, the novel suggests that the MCP matters only because it is brought up to be forgotten. Worldly utterances in Cantonese undermine the importance of the MCP. This double-voicing is crucial in letting the readers hear the collective forgetting of Sinophone Malaysians.

Combining localized Cantonese speech, linguistic manipulation connects to the crisis of memory and heteroglossia by delineating collective forgetting about the MCP. Through the language play, Li Zishu has set herself apart from a generation of Sinophone Malaysian writers, whose texts display an inclination toward canonical literary texts. Among those who represent local speech in a playful manner, her Cantonese intervention is deeply associated with place, in order to ensure that the present generation's voice is spoken.

Li Zishu's Sinophone Articulation in *Snapshots of Chow Fu*

In order to explain Li Zishu's articulation and her intention to write Cantonese in *Snapshots of Chow Fu*, I find it necessary to offer a brief introduction of the historical background and significance of the MCP.

The MCP was first established in 1930 with an "anti-British imperialist" agenda (Cheah 1983, 57) and the colonial British government soon outlawed the party (Groppe 2013, 237).

However, the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945) became a turning point for the MCP's growth. The war made the colonial government unable to secure its Far East colonies, since Hong Kong and Malaya successively fell into the hands of the Japanese. During the Occupation (1941-1945), the MCP became guerrillas. They switched to being "anti-Japanese" and hid and fought from the mountain jungles. Many Malayan-Chinese joined the guerrillas to fight against the Japanese invaders. After the war, the guerrillas were regarded as war heroes and liberators of Malaya by the locals, which won them high prestige (Wong 2001, 225-228). When the British returned, they realized that the guerrillas were an immediate threat to their status in Malaya (Tan 2013, 64). Consequently, the British disseminated that "it is questionable whether many of the communist guerrillas ever did much fighting against the Japanese."[120] They portrayed the MCP as having a close link to the CCP, with the potential to take over Malaya. This intensified the ethnic conflict between Malays and Chinese. In addition, the British government proposed "Federal Citizenship" in 1948 in order to stigmatize Malayan-Chinese citizenship. Only those born in Malaya or who have lived in Malaya for fifteen years were eligible for citizenship. Applicants were also required to be proficient in English or Malay. This excluded many Malayan-Chinese as very few of them knew English, and most spoke only broken Malay. In 1948, this triggered the MCP members to initiate an armed struggle against the British government. In response, the Federation of Malaya declared a state of emergency, commonly known as the "Malayan Emergency," which lasted until 1960. The emergency had imposed restrictions on people's movements and food supplies. There were detentions of people suspected of being communists.[121]

---

[120] "Occupation Saga," *The Strait Times*, July 3, 1948, 6.

[121] For details of the Malayan Emergency and its significance, see *Cheah Boon Kheng: Malaysia: The Making of a Nation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), 15-22.

Even after Malaysian independence in 1957, the new government continued colonial discourse in order to suppress the MCP. The MCP officially surrendered and dissolved in 1989. In these various ways, the MCP is seen as the cause of an ethnic rift between Chinese and Malays, even today. Ng Kim Chew summarizes the complexity of the MCP's convoluted anti-colonial discourse, ambiguous lineage with the CCP, potential Chinese-centrism and pro-Bolshevik tendencies as well as a lack of revolutionary resources.[122] As such, communism is regarded as the "original sin" of the Chinese in Malaysia (Huang and Chen, 2000). Sinophone Malaysians are required to remember the politically incorrect MCP as a traumatic wound in their history.

E.K. Tan has noted, "because the conflict between the British and the guerrillas was not a history the British wanted to memorialize, they chose to demonize the agenda of the guerrillas and to downplay their contributions to fighting the Japanese during the war."[123] The absence of the MCP has inspired several Sinophone Malaysian writers to reconstruct the narratives in their literary works. The MCP as an attachment to *Ma Hua* (Sinophone Malaysian) novels has become so strong that it seems as if every writer has a responsibility to comply. However, to Li Zishu, the MCP is merely "a paint and a sign" attached to Sinophone Malaysian novels.[124] Eleven years after the fall of the MCP, she claims that, "I am not sensitive to the issues of home country, nation-state, gender, or even *Ma Hua*. I posit my works out of the contexts of identity, ethnicity, history and

---

[122] See Ng Kim Chew, *Huo, yu weixian shiwu—Huang Jinshu magong xiaoshuo xuan* (Petaling Jaya: Got One Publisher, 2014), 248.

[123] E.K. Tan, *Rethinking Chineseness*, 65-66.

[124] Ng Kim Chew, *Huo xiao le*, 41.

national citizenship."[125] She is obviously against the assigned responsibility, as well as the duty to remember.

At the outset, *Snapshots of Chow Fu* seemingly depicts a recollection and reconstruction of the history of the MCP. David Der-wei Wang suggests that it pays homage to the "grand narrative" of Sinophone Malaysian literature, representing the resistance against Japanese occupation with historical color (Wang 2001, 5). Alison M. Groppe holds a similar view, stating that the "grand narrative" of communist resistance in Malaysia was resurrected through the reconstruction of vernacular memory (Groppe 2013, 258). Yang Qiping asserts that the story exposes the female protagonist's struggles against imperialism, colonialism, and gender exploitation in national allegory (Yang 2012, 191).

Nevertheless, critics have neglected the function of a multi-faceted narrative in relation to the use of Cantonese. Multi-faceted narrative engenders a rupture and a dissonance that cultivates unreliable history. This leaves the contribution of the MCP an unanswered question. Meanwhile, the quotidian is specifically underscored in the partial use of Cantonese. I suggest that the narrative along with its language corresponds to the "crisis of memory." In recounting memories of Tam and the MCP, diverse memory discourses reach a breaking point that destroys MCP discourse. All these selected memory pieces – what to remember and what not – indicate individual self-representation and a desired way to be seen. The duty to remember is eliminated. However disparate the memory may be, the characters rely on Cantonese language to mediate self-representation in relation to a bygone history. It is used to emphasize the trivialities of daily life for generating collective forgetfulness and oblivion.

[125] Tee, "Li Zishu fangwen ji," 208.

The adoption of Cantonese writing also embodies Li Zishu's Sinophone discourse in contemporary Malaysia. Considering Cantonese as a double minor language in Malaysia, which is neither the official Malay nor the most commonly spoken Mandarin among Sinophone Malaysians, parallels Sinophone articulation. Literary attempts in Cantonese register a local sensibility and forms a minor literature "written in a minority language within a given nation state, bidding for linguistic or cultural heterogeneity within the presumed monolingual, Malay-dominant, national literature of Malaysia."[126] Here, Cantonese challenges Malay-nationalism and recreates a multilingual speaking environment. Li Zishu herself states, "There is no one language that applies to one hundred novels."[127] "Cantonese has a strong vitality and I want to put this characteristic into my work."[128] Cantonese carves out the time- and place-based locality that belongs to the current generation.[129]

Self-representation: Mundaneness in Everyday Life

Snapshot of Chow Fu is consistently written as a multi-person narrative in order to recollect various memories about Tam Yin Mui and the MCP. Nevertheless, Li Zishu's multi-person narrative – from Tam's neighbour to her opera admirer and friend – creates a crisis of memory in remembering the MCP. As Alison M. Groppe states, "the story reminds us that what will be remembered is not always predictable."[130] Ambivalent, contradicting, and differing memories are

---

[126] Shih, "Introduction: What is Sinophone Studies?" 8.

[127] Tse, "Li Zishu de yueli rensheng."

[128] Han Song, "Xiang gaobie de niandai gaobie," *Ming Pao*, July 17, 2017. Accessed December 13, 2018. http://mingpaomonthly.com/mpm/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/bookc000182.pdf.

[129] For discussion of time- and place-based Sinophone practice, see Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 34, and Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," 717.

[130] Groppe, *Sinophone Malaysian Literature*, 262.

delivered in the multi-faceted narrative at every turn. Multi-perspectivity also creates heteroglossia, creating a double-voiced discourse. It makes the various characters and the author connected, as if they had known each other, which serves to erase Tam's communist work collectively. It confuses readers and wavers Tam's image to oscillate between a picky boss lady, an opera singer, and a loyal friend, but not a communist. Competing memories and multiple-voiced discourses deliberately pick trivial pieces that play no role for Tam, implying that the MCP history is under erasure. At the same time, Cantonese utterances highlight everyday life and evoke self-representation. It reflects how each person is representing the self in the post-MCP era.

Written in a pseudo-reportage style, the characters are "interviewed" by the reporter to provide fragmented memories about Tam, despite the "interviewer" never appearing throughout the narrative.

> Lee Kin Chaw
>
> Three years and eight months under the Japs, I could scarcely make ends meet. After the war, my wifey babysat for Tam Yin Mui but got fired in less than few months. Tam Yin Mui was very picky, and turned away from my wifey's congee cooking. She complained the fishbone stuck in her son's throat. Meh, he didn't choke. She was noisy, shouting around, asking my wifey to go back home on the day.
>
> 李乾初
>
> 在日本*仔*的手，三年八個月，*餐搵餐食餐餐清*，光復後我女人幫過譚燕梅帶孩子，做幾個月就被炒了。譚燕梅好挑剔，嫌我女人煲粥沒功夫，魚骨鯁到她兒子。又沒鯁死，*巴巴閉閉*，當天就叫我女人回家。[131] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

> Cheung Miu Kwan
>
> I had a get-together with my mahjong friends in Han Chin Pet Soo and planned to leave halfway during the opera, using the old toilet break excuse. I didn't expect Tam

[131] Li Zishu, *Shan Wen* (Taipei: Maitian, 2001), 19.

Yin Mui to be so gorgeous. She starred in Wong Bo Chuen. Once she came out to the stage, my eyes fixated on her, leaving squeaking sounds echoed in my ears. I didn't hear anything Choi Lin said nor the *Duk Duk Chang* from the Cantonese opera – Oh heck, a goddess came down to Earth.

張淼坤

我約了牌友在閒真別墅等，打算戲演到一半就*借尿遁*。沒想到譚燕梅這麼美，她演王寶釧，一出場我就看得*眼定定*，耳朵嗡嗡響。彩蓮說甚麼沒聽到，大鑼大鼓*督督鏘*也沒聽到，心想死了死了仙女下凡。[132] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

Choi Bik Yuk

Fuck that bastard doctor. When I gave birth to my fifth girl, the doc was in a mess. I got postpartum bleeding and had one foot in the grave…Yin Mui is a loyal friend. She was working in the Kin Shing garment but had taken a half day off to donate two pints of blood.

蔡碧玉

我生五*妹頭*時，*丟那媽*那個死*龜公*醫生亂亂來，害我產後血崩，一雙腳*踩*進鬼門關……燕梅夠義氣，那時在建成製衣廠*車衫*，特地拿半天假，到醫院捐了兩大包血。[133] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

Belonging to the same generation, the three characters coincidentally recollect trivial memories about Tam Yin Mui, with the Cantonese used to point to ordinary lives. As the neighbour of Tam, Lee Kin Chaw lives through the MCP period. The three years and eight months of Japanese occupation made him scarcely able to make ends meet (餐搵餐食餐餐清). But he has no recollection of the MCP. After the war, his wife babysat for Tam. And Tam's picky behaviour left a strong impression on him – a noisy woman, who shouted a lot (巴巴閉閉), sending his wife home. There is no trace of the MCP and Tan's communist work. Another character, Cheung Miu

[132] Ibid., 20.

[133] Ibid., 31.

Kwan, the ex-husband of Wong Choi Lin, has a different perception of Tam. He was mesmerized by Tam's opera performance and became obsessive about Tam's beauty. In the beginning, he planned a get-together with his mahjong friends and was supposed to leave for a toilet break (借尿遁). But when Tam came out, his eyes were fixed on her (眼定定) because of her captivating appearance. Cheung completely ignored what Choi Lin had said to him and ignored the sound of the opera *Duk Duk Chang* (督督鏘). His mind could only relate to Tam's attractive performance, with no memory to be recalled about the MCP. Choi Bik Yuk's memory about Tam is undetachable with her giving birth to her fifth daughter (五妹頭). Because of the fucking bastard doctor (丟那媽那個死龜公醫生亂亂來), Cai almost died. Thanks to Tam's loyal friendship, Tam put her garment job (車衫) aside and took a half day off in order to donate two pints of blood. Other than that, Choi's memory does not contain any events connected to Tam's communist work. All individual remembering about Tam is ordinary and minimal and totally irrelevant to her involvement in the communist party.

The above multi-person narrative, on the one hand, demonstrates divergent and limiting memories by different characters. They recall various memories of Tam Yin Mui, ranging from an annoyed boss lady, an attractive opera singer, to a loyal friend. The multi-perspectivity confuses Tam's character and leaves her communist contribution basically absent. On the other hand, through Cantonese, the multi-person narrative jointly exposes trivial and insignificant memories in Tam's communist career. Memories are deliberately chosen to represent a quotidian that they consider to be important. As clear as it is, none of the recollections are associated with the MCP. The seemingly contradictory utterances among the participants turn inter-related and refract authorial intention, expressing that the MCP is not important. This speaks to the crisis of memory

no longer able to deliver a choice about the memory of the past. Remembering of the MCP proves to be invalid. Cantonese especially highlights the worldly aspects of daily lives in Malaysia, undermining the significance of Tam and the MCP. Recollection of livelihood, sensory pleasure, and cursing are articulated through Cantonese in order to gloss over the seriousness of the MCP. In this light, attention to the MCP is completely shifted by using Cantonese to underscore an ordinary everyday existence. Collective self-representation demonstrates a desire to separate from the MCP, which is projected in both the narrative and Cantonese.

This is not to say that the characters disapprove of or criticize the MCP. More accurately, the participants have simply become apathetic to the historical events deemed important. They believe that the MCP is a part of bygone era, where everyday lives are the solid things they should hold on to. This crisis of memory about how to remember the past passes to the next generation. The new generation shares a similar idea to reject the duty to remember, identifying the meaningless purpose involved in recollecting those memories.

> Lee Ngan To
>
> As a rule, [I go to] release burn incense and practise life release, sometimes release turtles, other times release captive birds. Customarily, [I] make donations, hang lanterns……The things happened in the past are so distant from me now. I don't even have a chance to meet my aunt-in-law Wong Choi Lin, how could I possibly know? Actually, what is the point of inquiring about the past? What I only know is Ipoh wasn't even named as Ipoh at that time. Some people call it Chow Fu until the day they die. You know?
>
> 李銀桃
>
> *照例*上香和放生，有時放龜有時放鳥，還有*例牌*添香油要掛祈福燈……以前的事那麼遠，我連我大姑黃彩蓮的*面*都沒見過，哪曉得那麼多。其實事情過去了

還問來幹甚麼，我只知道那時候怡保都不叫怡保，有些人到死那天都把這裡叫「州府」，你知不知道？[134] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

Spoken by Wong Choi Lin's niece-in-law, Lee Ngan To, readers notice that Wong was already dead before she marries Wong's nephew. Accustomed to a family tradition (照例、例牌), Lee practises a Buddhist ritual to release the lives of animals, make donations, and hang lanterns on behalf of Wong. Lee is annoyed by those who inquire about the past and feels no point in recalling what has happened. She says bluntly that she had never met Wong (面都沒見過), not to even think of she will know about the relations between Tam and Wong, and the historical significance of the MCP. The last rhetorical question further assures the readers that tracing the past is futile, since Chow Fu has long been renamed to Ipoh. This renaming signifies a temporal difference that is far from the past. Lingering on the past of Chow Fu does not help to understand the present Ipoh. It also does not help to understand the present identity and the choice of shaking off the duty to remember by young Sinophone Malaysians. The crisis of memory is so conspicuous that no MCP-related memory can be retained by the new generation.

Again, the crisis of memory exists throughout the multi-person narrative and Cantonese, thereby elucidating everyday life. The former generation's collective forgetting successfully moves forward to the next generation, allowing for a rupture and erasure of memory transmission. Failing to transmit memory, the quotidian and worldly matters becomes the norm. Despite the fact that Lee's recollection differs from the former three interviewees, who lack a personal encounter with Tam, her expression is evident – there is no point to query the past. At the same time, Cantonese illustrates Lee's everyday life as she busily prepares for the ritual. Tam Yin Mui and

[134] Ibid., 50.

Wong Choi Lin are semi-equivalent to a symbol of ritual ceremony that contains nothing otherwise. No MCP-related memories are evoked. The renaming of the town also suggests the passage of time. Grappling with the past is worthless. Through multi-person narrative and Cantonese language, it draws out the inter-generational self-representation of worldliness.

In this way, the crisis of memory registers in the multi-person narrative and heteroglossia, conveying generational dissonance yet coalescing in order to undermine the MCP. Even though each person's memory about Tam Yin Mui varies, they all point to a deflation of seriousness. Whether Tam is a picky mother, an opera singer, a good friend, or a ritual symbol plays no role in their current lives. The current Sinophone Malaysians are eager to shrug off the duty to remember, turning to their ordinary lives. The limited use of Cantonese especially underlines the quotidian that embodies and defines their self-representation. The worldly Cantonese articulation provides a terrain for generations to negotiate who they want to be in this era. It makes us hear the characters' apathy and ignorance, as well as the refracted authorial intention toward the MCP.

Self-reflexivity: Oblivion and Forgetfulness Toward the MCP

As discussed above, the crisis of memory relates to the question of self-representation. Notwithstanding that characters generate different memory discourses, they all point to the mutual indifference about the MCP. Their choice of separation is self-evident. What is equally at issue about memory crisis is self-reflexivity about past event. According to Suleiman, self-reflection is a veritable reexamination of a painful history, at once personal and collective (2006, 120). In other words, the key matter here is how to view the past from the situation of the present, as well as how to reexamine and reinterpret history. *Snapshots of Chow Fu* introduces self-reflection about historical representation through individual characters. In particular, the old generation who witnessed and took part in the MCP is extremely critical about the remembrance of the MCP. They

remember, but they think they would have been better off to forget. Therefore, they collectively place the MCP in a trivial place, making every historical moment of the MCP questionable. The MCP history is altered, erased, and forgotten in order to align with the new century. In this self-reflexive mode, Cantonese again diverges to everyday life in order to spell out oblivion and forgetfulness.

Living in the same generation as the MCP and Tam Yin Mui, Law Ngan Seng recollects the fragmented memories of the MCP yet switches the focus to current business activities.

> Law Ngan Seng
>
> Oh, the [Malayan] Communist Party. The Brits government treated the communists like rats, expelled them to the mountains after their fight with the Japs. These communists never get to settle down…They made their way to the mountains, consumed tree skins until they have become bags of bones, looking like neither humans nor ghosts. Being alive is considered lucky. How could they possibly win?
>
> [This] fat woman and I have had many kids since getting married. I fried chestnut in the day, roasted chicken wings at night. After suffering from many hardships, I finally had my own teahouse business. I am busy all day and night. I can never think about it anymore.
>
> 羅雁生
>
> 原來是共產黨。英政府當他們是過街老鼠，抗日之後就趕到上山。這種人一世都不得安定……要上山，要吃樹皮，吃到皮包骨，人不似人鬼不似鬼，不死已經算*好彩*，怎麼會贏？[135]
>
> 我和肥婆結婚之後，生了很多個，*日頭*炒栗子，夜晚燒雞翼，*捱*到開茶室，日忙夜忙，都不去想了。[136] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

[135] Ibid., 27.

[136] Ibid., 29.

A childhood friend of Tam, Law Ngan Seng witnessed the miserable time experienced by the MCP under British colonial rule and the Japanese occupation. Remnants of the MCP resistance are scattered through out his memories. He remembers the non-human condition (人不似人) of the communists, who had to "consume tree skins" (吃樹皮) and became "bags of bones" (皮包骨). His memories testify to this horrible moment endured by the communists. Yet he is not interested in the beliefs of Malayan communism, expressing skepticism, feeling that this would be a futile battle bound to be failed. Communists can never get settled (一世都不得安定). To barely remain alive is considered lucky (好彩), it is unrealistic to think of triumph. Such remembrance shows that most people like him were untouched by the MCP. Accordingly, he turns to family and personal life by stressing how occupied he is in the new era. Having fully devoted himself to his teahouse business day and night by frying chestnut and roasting chicken wings (日頭炒栗子，夜晚燒雞翼), he suffered a lot (捱) in order to maintain the business. Money-making activity ultimately deprives him of time to think about the past. Specifically, the Cantonese word "日頭" (day) and "捱" (to suffer) exposes the sacrifices he has made for his business. Cantonese exaggerates the daily routines in order to justify the forgetfulness. His thoughts and memories are now immersed in profit-making activity, which leaves no space for pondering the past. A thoughtful reexamination of history is articulated through Law's self-reflexivity.

Indeed, Law does not entirely erase the pieces of the MCP in his memory. He is able to recollect the predicament of the MCP in his fragmented memories. But he realizes that the MCP plays no role in his current life. Therefore, he soon switches to a reflection about rejecting the duty to remember. Law's self-reflexivity is clear in the limited use of Cantonese, which is used to concentrate on earning money. He has no interest in dwelling on the past. Cantonese emphasizes

the trivia and provides a legitimate excuse to dispel the MCP history. Mind-numbing daily routines take over the duty to remember. Cantonese bridges the crisis of memory and helps to justify ignorance and forgetfulness to put the MCP memory aside. A supposed importance disappears.

A greater ironic and critical self-reflexivity is exemplified in Lau Yuen Man, former MCP comrade. As one of the main characters in the novel, Lau is the only person whose voice can be heard in the love triangle among Tam Yin Mui, Wong Choi Lin, and himself. Both women followed him to the jungle and joined the MCP. While Wong unfortunately died during a guerrilla resistance battle against Japanese troops, he and Tam survived. However, on Malaysian Independence Day, Lau was sent to prison for twenty years. Being in prison for two decades, the ideology and belief of communism begin to fall apart in his mind. Memories start to fade.

> Lau Yuen Man
>
> Since my release from the prison, the world has completely changed. Who would still remember Malayan communism? And who cares about history?
>
> I recognized the man who sold chicken wings. He used to sell peanuts in the King's Trioplex. He is a friend of Yin Mui. Now he has become fat and bold, only caring of his chicken wings business. He couldn't recognize me…[I] married a Thai gal, collaborated with my former comrade to build a "Malayan Communism Village." We brought tourists to visit our former base…Many folks joined the gang for fun, pay tribute to the Malayan communism on the day they disarmed and left the forest. Our village was packed with crowds. We made a turnaround for more than twenty times a day. I completely had no time nor interest to see how they surrendered.
>
> 劉遠聞
>
> 我從*監*裡放出來，外面的世界已經變樣。誰還記得馬共呢，還有誰在乎歷史。[137]
>
> 我認得賣雞翼的男人以前在京都戲院賣花生，是燕梅的朋友。再見時又肥又禿頭，*顧著*賣雞翼，認不得我……娶泰國*妹*，和老戰友一起搞馬共村，帶遊客參

[137] Ibid., 44.

觀我們以前的基地……馬共繳械走出森林那一天，好多人*湊興*去緬懷歷史，我們村裡人山人海，一天*走*二十多*轉*，根本沒空，也不想去看人家投誠。[138] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

Narrated in retrospect, and without any sentimentality, Lau's memory of the MCP is unsympathetic. Despite the fact that the MCP had obviously played a role and taken away twenty years of his life, he chooses to repudiate the MCP. Prison (監) marks a temporal divide in the MCP memory – before the imprisonment, he identified with communism; upon release, he becomes anxious to immediately tear off the communist label. To him, this era is a hitherto unknown world, where the MCP and its history are of no use. There are no values to be memorialized in such a time. Interestingly enough, Lau's memories seem to correspond to Law Ngan Seng's, confirming that he works constantly in order to sustain the chicken-wing business (顧著賣雞翼). Immersed in worldliness, Law is unable to recognize Lau. Even poignant, the MCP memory is transformed into a tangible commodity. By marrying a Thai woman (泰國妹) and revitalizing the former base for the MCP, Lau cut off his life from the past. He serves as a tour guide to show tourists the former historical MCP site. The MCP merely serves as a backdrop and a tourist attraction. People join the gang for fun (湊興) to see how the MCP surrendered to the Malaysian government without acknowledging its significance. Commodity glosses over memory, history, and the ideology of communism. Even Lau himself was an active party member, but he is now busy showing tourists around more than twenty times a day (走二十多轉), which makes him unconcerned about residual memories. Whether the rest of his communist comrades are arrested or not is no longer his concern.

[138] Ibid., 49.

Everyday life is filled with a desire make money. Lau's expression shows his self-reflexivity to turn against the MCP and forget past events.

As a former party member, Lau's reaction is surprisingly unsympathetic, one that is contrary to what readers might assume. The new era has changed him into an outsider of the MCP and an ordinary person, one who pays no attention to the MCP. Although Lau does not know Law personally, he continues with and affirms the mundane discourse of Law in order to justify the forgetfulness. He witnesses the worldliness of Law and aligns with Law's view that it is reasonable to forget the past. The multi-person narrative undermines the significance of the MCP, as if the characters had known each other. The heteroglossia also generates a double-voicing which recognizes the MCP only because it is a commodified object. The MCP historical site is now a tool to make money, without carrying any significance. It ridicules the effort to trace back the MCP. At the same time, the quotidian that is conveyed via Cantonese deflects the seriousness of the MCP's history. The minimal use of Cantonese endorses Law's self-reflexively, a justification that the communist legacy is irrelevant and confirms the disappearance of the MCP. Oblivion is an inevitable outcome of serious consideration and reflection.

Due to the former generation's collective oblivion, the next generation inherits the same memory discourse, forgetting the MCP. A majority of the new generation does not appear to be interested in or in favour of the MCP. As for the others, most of them react with indifference. The most exemplary character in this generation is Chiu So Ha, the son of Lau Yuen Man and Wong Choi Lin, adopted by Tam Yin Mui. He unmistakably articulates his indifference to the MCP.

> Chiu So Ha
>
> [I was] forty something. Went to Thailand with mom to see the surrender of the MCP. She didn't sleep for a few days…When she woke up, she told me that my birth father was a communist. My [birth] mom followed him to the mountain and died after giving

birth to me. I didn’t feel anything at all. But I was heartbroken when my [foster] mom died. The parents from the communist party are no different than the MCP hiding in mountains: they barely existed in my life before dispersing in the smoked clouds. I don’t even want to know their name. Mom saw my growth, worked hard to raise me, stewed soup for me, washed my clothes and underwear. After her death, I cried.

趙蘇蝦

四十幾歲，同阿媽去泰國看共產黨投降，她幾天幾夜*闔*不著眼……醒來對我說，蘇蝦你的親生阿爸是共產黨，你阿媽跟他入山，你出生那天她就死了。我不覺得怎樣，阿媽死我才真的傷心，那個共產黨阿爸阿媽，就和隱入深山的共產黨一樣，還沒有在我的生命裡出現過，就煙消雲散了，我甚至不想知道他們的名字。阿媽看著我長大，做工養我，燉湯給我喝，死前幫我洗*衫*洗*底褲*，她死，我才哭。[139] (Emphasis is Cantonese)

Born to the communist parents, Chiu So Ha epitomizes the lineage of the MCP. However, this lineage is destroyed by Chiu’s self-reflection. When Tam explains to Chiu that he was adopted, he does not feel weird nor heartbroken. He has little interest in his birth parents and prefers not to trace them out. His communist parents are buried deeply in the mountain, resembling the trajectory of the MCP. The refusal to learn the name of his parents indicates his rejection of the duty to remember. The MCP is just a historical sign and an abstract object that has dispersed into smoked clouds long ago. If parental consanguinity resembles affinity with the MCP, such a metaphor shows an identification away from the MCP. And even if Tam was a communist member, Chiu’s memory does not recollect any of Tam’s communist works. Instead, Tam’s household tasks of washing his clothes and underwear (洗衫洗底褲) left him touched. In this regard, Chiu inherits Lau’s self-reflexivity in order to eradicate the past. Forgetting is a self-conscious decision for both generations.

[139] Ibid., 39.

Although the multi-person narrative exhibits divergent memory discourses on the MCP, which is in contrast with the former generation. The multi-voiced text brings out the same self-reflexivity, in order to undermine the MCP. Chiu's excerpt corresponds to Law and Lau, echoing that the MCP should be forgotten. This also is the author's refracted authorial intention to collectively oppose the duty to remember. Cantonese further put the significance of the MCP into question, highlighting mind-numbing daily trivialities. It diverts and takes over the seriousness of the MCP. The oblivion that characterizes the Sinophone Malaysians' self-reflexivity in the new century is hence brought out in the interplay of multi-person narrative, heteroglossia and Cantonese.

Throughout *Snapshots of Chow Fu*, the crisis of memory emerges and directly evokes the issue of self-representation and self-reflexivity. As Alison M. Groppe states, "the story itself raises a wider set of issues concerning how that history is remembered and what it means for later generations."[140] The survivor of the MCP and the post-MCP generation – that of Lau Yuen Man and that of Chiu So Ha – is collectively unconcerned about historicity, causing the MCP history to be put in question. In the narrative of the former generation such as Law Ngan Seng and Lau Yuen Man, it is obvious that they choose to dismiss the past. The MCP and its concomitant legacy have become a commodity. In order to justify forgetting, the characters use limited Cantonese to highlight everyday life and worldliness. A comparable self-reflexivity can also be found in the next generation. Since the older generation has bidden farewell to the past, it fails to transmit the MCP memory to the next generation. Chiu So Ha's disconnection with his birth parents and reluctance to trace the past evidently illustrates his oblivion. Forgetting is unavoidable.

[140] Groppe, *Sinophone Malaysian Literature*, 263.

The self-conscious choice by both generations shows their present identity in the post-MCP era. Eleven years after the downfall of the MCP, the duty to remember and the responsibility to bear the ethnic conflict is clearly unfair to current Sinophone Malaysians. And while everyone is preoccupied by their own daily life, there is no point to trace back the history of the MCP. The heteroglossic multi-person perspective and mundane Cantonese suggest unequivocally that the current generation is no longer concerned with the MCP. The MCP is remembered only because it is to be forgotten. The new generation determines to cut off the link between the Sinophone Malaysians and the MCP, in order to create their own identity in the new century.

Conclusion: Farewell to the MCP

The Malayan Communist Party, because of its incitement of ethnic conflict between Malays and Chinese, inscribed a duty to remember within the Sinophone Malaysian community. By borrowing the notion of "crisis of memory" in the discussion of *Snapshots of Chow Fu*, this chapter has shown that the current generation obviously rejects that duty through the interplay of multi-person narrative, heteroglossia, and quotidian Cantonese usage. According to Suleiman, the core concern of the crisis of memory relates to how individual and group memory perceive the past event that is deemed as important at a given time. What is equally at stake is the issue of self-representation and self-reflection. Selected memory of the past event involves negotiation of how one wants to be represented and viewed. Multi-person narrative elicits divergent memory discourses of Tam Yin Mui's trajectory, depicting her as a nitpicking boss lady, a gorgeous opera singer, a loyal friend, and to a ritualistic symbol. It confuses the readers as to who she really is. Yet despite its differing memories, the multi-perspectivity collectively disregards Tam's communist work. So many voices create a heteroglossia. The author's intention is refracted by the character's conversation, and the focus of the MCP is deflected in the multi-layered texts. The self-

reflection of Law Ngan Seng and Lau Yuen Man further creates a double-voicing that asserts that the MCP is remembered only because it is to be forgotten. They shift their attention to money-making activities, which directly affect the next generation's self-reflection. Resembling the lineage of the MCP, Chiu So Ha breaks off the relations by using a metaphor – the parents from the MCP and the MCP are identical, they both have long dispersed in clouds. Chiu can only retrieve the daily household tasks managed by Tam, which are not related to the MCP. Both generations' self-reflexivity shows us that they are determined to bid farewell to the MCP.

Cantonese is especially useful for exposing the quotidian in order to overshadow the duty to remember. As a daily language in Ipoh, Cantonese pervades with local color in everyday life. People live through their everyday lives without paying attention to the past. They focus on their own business to maintain their livelihoods. To capture the existing state of the Sinophone Malaysians, the limited mixing of Cantonese underlines the most ordinary, worldly, and everyday matters that play no role for the MCP. Narrated in retrospect, all characters simultaneously point toward everyday life and forgetting through Cantonese. The quotidian Cantonese bridges the crisis of memory in order to justify the act of forgetting and shaking off the duty to remember. In addition, by writing in a quasi-reportage style, the interview per se is also considered as part of daily activities. Interviews are similar to reading newspapers, something which we read everyday, but which we soon forget. It closely ties with the theme of the story that the MCP is mentioned only for the sake of forgetting. The literary and language styles are incorporated to represent oblivion for this generation.

As Li Zishu herself noted, "I am self-conscious of my *Ma Hua* identification. We don't discuss the Chinese motherland or the Taiwanese cultural homeland anymore. Does it mean that

Ma Hua will be assimilated and disappeared?"[141] To answer her question, I would argue that Li is suggesting an alternative through *Snapshots of Chow Fu* – prior to a new start, a farewell is necessary. The new generation of Sinophone Malaysians cannot be eternally identified with the MCP. As shown, witnesses of the MCP such as Law Ngan Seng and Lau Yuen Man, who try to overthrow the memory of the MCP and their duty to remember. They are against the given label. Accordingly, the passing of time gives memory a due date. It corresponds to the Sinophone critique, which emphasizes that diaspora has an end date (Shih 2007, 185). The generation that survived the MCP memories, as well as the next generation, opt to be given a chance to be who they want to be without intervention. After all, the year 2000 was the beginning of a new century. The new generation should have their own voice in articulating the past. The multi-voices and quotidian Cantonese show us the possibility for self-representation and encourage us to reconsider the reflexivity of the present Sinophone Malaysians. Whether the choice of forgetting is favourable or reprehensible, however, is not the concern of this chapter.

Finally, through its use of Cantonese within the narrative, *Snapshots of Chow Fu* opens up a new Sinophone Malaysian literary practice that is multilingual. This experimental writing in literary Cantonese, with its partial unfamiliarity, provides opportunities for writers to construct a new Malaysianess and to attempt alternative discourses for Sinophone Malaysians. As the novel demonstrates, the intervention of Cantonese creates a possibility for ongoing debates about Malayan communism, and Cantonese invites reconsideration of identity.

[141] Tse, "Li Zishu de yueli rensheng."

Conclusion

In her trailblazing research, Shu-mei Shih has noted, “Cantonese-language cinema from Hong Kong is the only non-standard sinitic-language cinema that can challenge the Mandarin-dominated cinema from China and elsewhere.”[142] In this study, I lean on her argument to assert that Cantonese literature not only from Hong Kong, but across the Sinophone cultural sphere, can challenge Mandarin-dominated discourses from China and elsewhere, by the intervention of time- and place-based memories. As shown in the thesis, Cantonese literature is not solely refined to a particular time and space. On the contrary, Cantonese transcends temporal and spatial boundaries and has been successfully used by three contemporary writers to simultaneously register locality and identity.

In Hong Kong, Wong Bik-wan inserts the most extreme vulgarized use of Cantonese, profanity and underworld jargon into *Children of Darkness* to represent the protagonist’s primordial emotional state. This creates familiarity to the novel’s setting. Using the background of 1960s to present-day Hong Kong, *Children of Darkness* depicts the marginalized life of a drug addict. Here Cantonese intersects with involuntary autobiographical memory, allowing the protagonist to re-live the past. In the unexpected time travel of memory, we hear the protagonist’s eloquent self-expression, in utterances of Cantonese – one’s identity, subjectivity, and dignity are decided by one’s own self, regardless of social status. Improper Cantonese articulation ridicules the legitimate linguistic power and reassures the identity of Hong Kong in the chaotic post-1997 period.

[142] Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 193.

In Singapore, Yeng Pway Ngon reactivates forgotten Cantonese and Cantonese opera by drawing on the notion of the mother tongue. *Opera Costume* is concerned with the state-promoted "Speak Mandarin Campaign" and its adverse effect that led to eradication of familial memory. By having a literary trope let the main character re-learn Cantonese and continue an interest in Cantonese opera, *Opera Costume* illustrates the critical imperative to retrieve the mother tongue by accessing absent memory. At the same time, Cantonese conversation used in a bolded font articulates a critique of Mandarin-centrism and Singapore-centrism, which represents the current Sinophone Singaporean's positioning in the post-Campaign era.

In Malaysia, Li Zishu mixes a limited amount of Cantonese into the text in order to represent the unnoticed fabric of everyday life. This infuses a rich local color. While Malayan communism is deemed as important at a given time, *Snapshots of Chow Fu* rejects the duty to remember by using fragmented Cantonese to point toward the quotidian. A multi-person narrative in heteroglossia works compatibly with Cantonese to erase the historicity of communism, reaching to the crisis of memory. Contemporary Sinophone Malaysian generation clearly share the same forgetting and worldly desire, bidding the MCP farewell. The identity of the present generation cannot be mistaken.

It is obviously a choice of these three Sinophone writers to decide on which language to write for representing their concerns. All three writers are strongly identified with a specific locality by their Cantonese usage. Hong Kong relates to a post-Handover marginality, Singapore to the crisis of losing non-standard Sinitic languages, and Malaysia to the dilemma of remembering and forgetting the MCP. But the distinct use of Cantonese in addressing regional memories demonstrates that Sinophone discourse has strong ties to respective times and places, which cannot be transcended. Considering the limited readership of Cantonese speakers, the three Sinophone

writer studied here may have taken a literary risk and their work may find problematic reception with readers. However, this is precisely the difficulty in consumption that collectively generates a dissonance with China and Chineseness, Singapore and Singaporeness, Malaysia and Malaysianess.

Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih coined the term "Minor Transnationalism" (2005), suggesting that transnational takes place in "national, local, or global spaces across different and multiple spatialities and temporalities."[143] They encourage minority groups not only focus on the connection between major and minor, but to look sideways to each other in order to allow room for mutual interaction.[144] This is a useful concept for taking Cantonese literature into a debatable and engaging discussion. Cantonese literature as minority culture in part of globalization develops practices and networks of communication that exceed the parameters of dominant-resistant transnational dichotomy. While Cantonese moves across Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia, each Cantonese community comes from a unique background. The specificity enables minor culture to negotiate national, ethnic and cultural boundaries, revealing its complexity and identity. We therefore must look at the Sinophone Cantonese communities individually, instead of grouping them together as a postcolonial entity to study its relation to a majority. And it is what this thesis aims to shed light on.

But I might add, although the idea of minor transnationalism concerns the relations of minority cultures, the uneven attention and distribution of minor transnationalism has yet been navigated. In a sense, Cantonese literature exemplifies such oblique transnationalism, an in-

[143] Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, ed. *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

[144] Ibid., 1-23.

between position in both regional and global aspects. As Cantonese occupies a comparatively discerning role in terms of numbers and power in Hong Kong, it does not obtain equal status in Singapore and Malaysia. By contrast, official languages and Hokkien overshadow the doubly marginalized Cantonese in the South Seas. Cantonese culture has no equilibrium in a regional setting. Nonetheless, resonating with Shih's statement that Cantonese-language cinema is the most useful perspective to challenge Mandarin-language cinema in a global sense, the in-betweenness of Cantonese that, in a way, is more minor than Mandarin but less minor than other Sinitic languages is worth our attention. Cantonese has a paradoxical play in exercising both the major and minor, which becomes even more complex and indeterminate for its meaning, complicating the notion of minor transnationalism. The conflicted state of Cantonese in-betweenness remains to be solved. It is my hope that this thesis can be seen as a point of departure for future new and exciting sinitic-language literary studies.

Bibliography

Abbas, Ackbar. *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Adams, Tony E. "A Review of Narrative Ethics." *Qualitative Inquiry* 14, no.2 (2008): 175-194.

Bachner, Andrea. *Beyond Sinology: Chinese Writing and the Scripts of Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Bauer, Robert S. "The Hong Kong Cantonese Speech Community." *Cahiers de Linguistique - Asie Orientale* 13, no.1 (1984): 57-90.

———. "Written Cantonese of Hong Kong." *Cahiers de Linguistique - Asie Orientale* 17, no.2 (1988): 245-293.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

Bernards, Brian. "Beyond Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Recuperating Creolization in Postcolonial Sinophone Malaysian Literature." *Postcolonial Studies* 15, no.3 (September 2012): 311-329.

———. *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015.

Berntsen, Dorthe. *Involuntary Autobiographical Memories: An Introduction to the Unbidden Past*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Berry, Michael. *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Argentine Writer and Tradition." In *World Literature in Theory*, edited by David Damrosch, 391-397. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.

Braester, Yomi. *Witness Against History Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Cheah, Boon Keung. *Malaysia: The Making of A Nation*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002.

———. *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-1946*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983.

Chen, Letty Lingchei. “When Does ‘Diaspora’ End And ‘Sinophone’ Begin?” *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no.1 (July 2015): 1-15.

Chen, Ping. *Modern Chinese: History and Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Chu, Yiu-wai. “Who Speaks for Lion Rock? Pro-Cantonese Campaign (or Lack Thereof) in Hong Kong.” In *Civil Unrest and Governance in Hong Kong: Law and Order from Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, edited by Michael H.K. Ng and John D. Wong, 196-212. London: Routledge, 2017.

Chu, Yiu-wai and Eve Leung. “Remapping Hong Kong Popular Music: Covers, Localisation and the Waning Hybridity of Cantopop.” *Popular Music* 32, no. 1 (January 2013): 65-78.

Chua, Beng Huat. “Culture, Multiracialism and National Identity in Singapore.” In *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, edited by Chen Kuan-hsing. 186-206. London: Routledge, 1998.

Chung, Mung-ting (Zhong Mengting) 鍾夢婷. “Xianggang wu gushi? Cong houzhimin lilun zaisi Chen Guangzhong jindu chacanting” 香港無故事？從後殖民理論再思陳冠中《金都茶餐廳》 [Hong Kong Has No Story? Rethinking Chan Koon-chung’s Cando Restaurant with Postcolonial Theory]. *Wenxue lunheng* 文學論衡 [Journal of Chinese Literary Studies] no.18 & 19, (June 2011): N.p. Accessed March 30, 2019. http://www.huayuqiao.org/LLM/LLM-1819/LLM181909.htm.

Downes, William. *Language and Society*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Dung, Kai-cheung (Dong Qizhang) 董啟章. *Shuo shu ren: yuedu yu pinglun heji* 說書人：閱讀與評論合集 [The Storyteller: The Anthology of Readings and Essays]. Hong Kong: Xiangjiang chuban, 1996.

Fine, Ellen S. "The Absent Memory: The Act of Writing in Post-Holocaust French Literature." In *Writing And The Holocaust*, edited by Berel Leng. 41-57. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988.

Goodall, Harold. "Narrative Inheritance: A Nuclear Family with Toxic Secrets." *Qualitative Inquiry* 11, no.4 (2005): 492-513.

Groppe, Alison M. "'Singlish' and the Sinophone: Nonstandard (Chinese/ English) Languages in Recent Singaporean Cinema." In *Sinophone Cinemas*, edited by Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo. 147-168. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

———. *Sinophone Malaysian Chinese: Not Made in China*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2013.

Han, Song 韓松. "Xiang gaobie de niandai gaobie – zhuanfang Li Zishu" 向告別的年代告別—專訪黎紫書 [Biding Farwell to An Age of Farewell: An Interview with Li Zishu]. *Ming Pao* 明報 [Ming Bao], July 17, 2017. Accessed December 6, 2018. http://mingpaomonthly.com/mpm/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/bookc000182.pdf.

Heng, Derek and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, eds. *Singapore in Global History*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011.

Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29, no.1 (Spring 2008): 103-128.

Ho, Olivia. "Cultural Medallion Recipient Yeng Pway Ngon, 70, Writes on Despite Cancer." *The Strait Times*, July 4, 2017. Accessed October 11, 2018. https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/writing-on-in-spite-of-cancer.

Hoffman, Eva. *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

Hong Kong Baptist Univesity. "HKBU Welcomes Renowned Novelist Li Zishu as Writer-in-Residence." April 11, 2017. Accessed March 31, 2019.

https://bunews.hkbu.edu.hk/news/people/hkbu-welcomes-renowned-novelist-li-zishu-as-writer-in-residence.

Huang, Heidi Yu 黃峪. "Wuhuo zhi lie, youyu zhi yan – lun Huang Biyun Lie lao zhuan" 無火之烈，有語之言—論黃碧雲《烈佬傳》[Flare without Flame, Speech within Language: A Review of Wong Bik-wan's Children of Darkness]. In *Di wu jie Hongloumeng jiang pinglun ji: Huang Biyun Lie lao zhuan* 第五屆紅樓夢獎評論集：黃碧雲《烈佬傳》 [The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Wong Bik-wan's Children of Darkness], edited by Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts, 62-78. Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016.

Huang, Yanqiu 黃燕秋 and Chen Yaozong 陳耀宗. "Chongxie mahua wenxue: fangwen Huang Jinshu" 重寫馬華文學—訪問黃錦樹 [Rewriting Sinophone Malaysian Literature: An Interview with Ng Kim Chew]. *Nanyang Shangbao* 南洋商報 [Nanyang Business Daily], May 30, 2000.

Jin, Jin 金進. "Ri dui mojing huanghua rensheng de yin'an nüwu – mahua dandai nüzuojia Li Zishu xiaoshuo lunxi" 日對魔鏡幻化人生的陰暗女巫—馬華當代女作家黎紫書小說論析 [A Witch Who Faces Mirror Everyday and Illusion the Life: The Study of Contemporary Sinophone Malaysian Female Writer Li Zishu's Novels]. *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue* 中國現代文學 [Modern Chinese Literature], no. 17 (June 2016): 225-242.

Lau, Joseph S.M. "The 'Little Woman' as Exorcist: Notes on the Fiction of Huang Biyun." *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, no. 2.2 (1999): 149-163.

Lau, Joseph S.M. (Liu Shaoming) 劉紹銘. "Jingji la de shijie" 經紀拉的世界 [The World of Agent La]. In *Wuge fangwen* 五個訪問 [Five Interviews], edited by Lin Yiliang (Stephen Soong) 林以亮, 187-196. Hong Kong: Wenyi shuwu, 1972.

Leung, Ping-kwan. "Two Discourses on Colonialism: Huang Guliu and Eileen Chang on Hong Kong of the Forties." In *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in The Age of*

Theory: Reimagining a Field, edited by Rey Chow. 77-96. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

Li, Mei Ting (Li Weiting) 李薇婷. "Huiyi li de cichu, nachu, bichu – cong benyaming huiyi gailian lun Lie lao zhuan de lishi shuxie" 回憶裡的此處、那處、彼處—從本雅明「回憶」概念論《烈佬傳》的歷史書寫 [Here, There, Overthere in Memory – On Walter Benjamin's Concept of Memory to Discuss The Historical Writing of Children of Darkness]. In *Di wu jie Hongloumeng jiang pinglun ji: Huang Biyun Lie lao zhuan* 第五屆紅樓夢獎評論集：黃碧雲《烈佬傳》 [The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Wong Bik-wan's Children of Darkness], edited by Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts, 96-110. Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016.

Li, Fanny Yuen-mei (Li Wanwei) 李婉薇. *Qingmo minchu de yueyu shuxie* 清末民初的粵語書寫 [Cantonese Writing in the Late Qing and Early Republican Era]. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2017.

Li, Zishu 黎紫書. *Shan Wen* 山瘟 [Mountain Plague]. Taipei: Maitian, 2001.

Liang, Sihua. *Language Attutudes and Identities in Multilingual China: A Linguistic Ethnography*. New York: Springer, 2015.

Lim, Choon Bee (Lin Chunmei) 林春美. *Xingbie yu bentu: zaidi de mahua wenxue lunshu* 性別與本土：在地的馬華文學論述 [Gender and Locality: The Discourse of Local Sinophone Malaysian Literature]. Selangor: Mentor Publishing, 2009.

Lionnet, Françoise and Shu-mei Shih, eds. *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

Liou, Liang-ya (Liu Liangya) 劉亮雅. *Qingse shiji mo* 情色世紀末 [The Fin-de-siecle Eroticism]. Taipei: Jiuge, 2001.

Lo, Kwai-cheung (Luo Guixiang) 羅桂祥. "Bianzhe yan: Hongloumeng jiang pinglunji – Lie lao zhuan" 編者言：紅樓夢獎評論集 — 烈佬傳 [Editor's Word: The Anthology of the Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Children of Darkness]. In *Di wu jie Hongloumeng*

jiang pinglun ji: Huang Biyun Lie lao zhuan 第五屆紅樓夢獎評論集：黃碧雲《烈佬傳》 [The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Wong Bik-wan's Children of Darkness], edited by Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts, 11-12. Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016.

Mair, Victor H. "What is a Chinese 'Dialect/ Topolect'? Reflections on Some Key Sino-English Linguistic Terms." *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no.29 (September 1991): 1-31.

MCLC Resource Center. "Dialect Literature Movement Research Project." November 5, 2014. Accessed March 8, 2019. https://u.osu.edu/mclc/2014/11/05/dialect-literature-movement-research-project/.

McNay, Margaret. "Absent Memory, Family Secrets, Narrative Inheritance." *Qualitative Inquiry* 15, no.7 (September 2009): 1178-1188.

Ng, Janet. "Writing from the Obverse: Wong Bik-Wan's Fiction and Nostalgia in Hong Kong." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 20, no. 1 (2008): 44-71.

Ng, Kim Chew (Huang Jinshu) 黃錦樹. *Huo xiao le* 火笑了 [The Fire Smiled]. Taipei: Maitian, 2015.

———. *Huo, yu weixian shiwu - Huang Jinshu magong xiaoshuo xuan* 火，與危險事物—黃錦樹馬共小說選 [Fire and Dangerous Things: Ng Kim Chew's Anthology of the Malayan Commnism Novels]. Petaling Jaya: Got One Publisher, 2014.

———. "Mahua nüxing wenxue piping de bentu tansuo zhi lu" 馬華女性文學批評的本土探索之路 [On Literary Critique of Sinophone Malaysian Female Writers' Locality]. In *Xingbie yu bentu: zaidi de mahua wenxue lunshu* 性別與本土：在地的馬華文學論述 [Gender and Locality: The Discourse of Local Sinophone Malaysian Literature], by Lim Choon Bee (Lin Chunmei) 林春美. 3-11. Selangor: Mentor Publishing, 2009.

———. *Mahua wenxue yu zhongguo xing* 馬華文學與中國性 [Sinophone Malaysian Literature and Chineseness]. Taipei: Maitian, 2012.

———. "Zihuaxiang: ping mahua zuojia Wen xiangying de liangbu jinzuo Zihuaxiang, Qingjiao tu" 自畫像：評馬華作家溫祥英的兩部近作《自畫像》、《清教徒》 [Self-portrait: On Critique of The Two Recent Works by Sinophone Malaysian Writer Wen Xiangying – Self-portrait and Puritans]. *Wenxun* 文訊 [Wen-hsun], no.265 (Novemeber 2007): 94-95.

Ng, Mei Kwan (Wu Meiyun) 吳美筠. "Wei shiyu ren jiangou linglei huawen shuxie" 為失語人建構另類華文書寫 [Construct an Alternative Sinophone Writing for Aphasics]. In *Di wu jie Hongloumeng jiang pinglun ji: Huang Biyun Lie lao zhuan* 第五屆紅樓夢獎評論集：黃碧雲《烈佬傳》 [The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Wong Bik-wan's Children of Darkness], edited by Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts, 50-61. Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016.

Peng, Hsiao-yen and Ella Raidel, eds. *The Politics of Memory in Sinophone Cinemas and Image Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Rasmussen, Anne S. and Dorthe Berntsen. "The Possible Functions of Involuntary Autobiographical Memories." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 23, no. 8 (2009): 1137-1152.

Schuchardt, Hugo. "Lingua Franca." In *Pidgin and Creole Languages: Selected Essays by Hugo Schuchardt*, edited and translated by Glenn G. Gilbert. 65-88. London: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Shih, Hsiao-feng (Shi Xiaofeng) 石曉楓. "Shuxie bentu yu mianxiang shijie: lun Li Zishu xiaoshuo" 書寫本土與面向世界：論黎紫書小說 [Writing Native Land and Facing the World: On Li Zishu's Novels]. *Guowen xuebao* 國文學報 [Bulletin of Chinese], no. 60 (December 2016): 103-128.

Shih, Shu-mei. "Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production." In *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai and Brian Bernards, 25-42. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

———. "The Concept of the Sinophone." *PMLA* 126, no.3 (May 2011): 709-718.

———. "Hong Kong Literature as Sinophone Literature." *Journal of Modern Literature in Chiniese*, no. 8.2 & 9.1 (2008): 12-18.

———. "Introduction: What Is Sinophone Studies?" In *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai and Brian Bernards, 1-16. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

———. "Race and Relation: The Global Sixties in the South of the South." *Comparative Literature* 68, no.2 (June 2016): 141-154.

———. *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Sim, Wai Chew (Shen Weijiu) 沈偉赳. "Ni Cai cunzai zhuyi yu Yeng Pei'an he Wu Baoxing de zuopin" 尼采存在主義與英培安和吳寶星的作品 [Nietzschean Existentialism in the Work of Yeng Pei'an and Goh Poh Seng]. *Huawen wenxue* 華文文學 [Literature in Chinese] 125, no.6 (2014): 98-105.

Snow, Donald. *Cantonese as Written Language: The Growth of a Written Chinese Vernacular*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004.

———. "A Short History of Published Cantonese: What is A Dialect Literature?" *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 4, no.3 (1994): 127-148.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

The Strait Times. "Occupation Saga." July 3, 1948.

Suleiman, Susan Rubin. *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Szeto, Mirana May. "Intra-Local and Inter-Local Sinophone: Rhizomatic Politics of Hong Kong Writers Saisai and Wong Bik-wan." In *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai and Brian Bernards, 191-206. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Szeto, Mirana May and Yun-chung Chen. "Mainlandization or Sinophone Translocality? Challenges for Hong Kong SAR New Wave Cinema." *Journal of Chinese Cinema* 6, no.2 (2012): 115-134.

Tan, E.K. "Hong Kong Cinema and the Portrayal of the Nanyang Chinese in the 1950s and 1960s." *Journal of Chinese Cinema* 4, no.2 (2010): 155-168.

———. "In Search of New Forms: The Impact of Bilingual Policy and the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' on Sinophone Singapore Poetry." *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 18, no.4 (2016): 526-542.

———. *Rethinking Chineseness: Translational Sinophone Identities in the Nanyang Literary World*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2013.

Tan, Jo, "Dialect Messaging." *Singapore's Essential Arts & Culture Guide*, February 28, 2018. Accessed October 13, 2018. https://a-list.sg/dialect-messaging.

Tee, Kim Tong (Zhang Jinzhong) 張錦忠. "Li Zishu fangwen ji" 黎紫書訪問記 [An Interview with Li Zishu]. *Zhongwai wenxue* 中外文學 [Chung-wai Literary Monthly] 29, no. 4 (September 2000): 204-211.

Teo, Peter. "Mandarinising Singapore: A Critical Analysis of Slogans in Singapore's 'Speak Mandarin' Campaign." *Critical Discourse Studies* 2, no.2 (2005): 121-142.

Tse, Shuen (Xie Xuan) 謝璇. "Li Zishu de yueli rensheng" 黎紫書的閱歷人生 [Li Zishu's Sophiscated Life]. *Ming Pao* 明報 [Ming Bao], July 3, 2017. Accessed December 6, 2018. http://mingpaomonthly.com/mpm/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/bookc000180.pdf.

Tsu, Jing. *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Wang, Anyi 王安憶. "Dalu Taiwan xiaoshuo yuyan bijiao" 大陸台灣小說語言比較 [The Comparison of Literary Language Between the Mainland China and Taiwan]. *Shanghai wenxue* 上海文學 [Shanghai Literature], no. 3 (1990): 66-72.

Wang, Ban. *Illuminations From The Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Wang, Der-wei. *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Wang, David Der-wei (Wang Dewei) 王德威. "Baolie de wenrou - Huang biyun de xiaoshuo" 暴烈的溫柔：黃碧雲的小說 [Violent Tenderness: The Fictions of Wong Bik-wan]. In *Shier nüse 十二女色* [Twelve Female Charms], by Wong Bik-wan (Huang Biyun) 黃碧雲. 9-36. Taipei: Rye Field, 2000.

———. "Hei'an zhi xin de tansuo zhe – shi lun Li Zishu" 黑暗之心的探索者—試論黎紫書 [The Explorer of Heart of Darkness – On Discussion of Li Zishu]. In *Shan Wen* 山瘟 [Mountain Plague], by Li Zishu 黎紫書. 3-8. Taipei: Maitian, 2001.

———. *Kua shiji fenghua: dangdai xiaoshuo ershi jia* 跨世紀風華：當代小說 20 家 [Into the New Millennium: Twenty Chinese Fiction Writers]. Taipei: Maitian, 2002.

———. "Lishi jiushi binzhou – lun Ma jiahui de Longtou fengwei" 歷史就是賓周—論馬家輝的《龍頭鳳尾》 [History as Penis – On Discussion of Once Upon a Time in Hong Kong by Ma Ka Fai]. In *Longtou fengwei* 龍頭鳳尾 [Once Upon a Time in Hong Kong], by Ma Ka Fai (Ma Jiahui) 馬家輝. 8-17. Taipei: Xinjingdian wenhua, 2016.

Wang, Xiaojue. *Modernity with a Cold War Face: Reimagining the Nation in Chinese Literature across the 1949 Divide*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013.

Wong, Bik-wan (Huang Biyun) 黃碧雲. *Lie lao zhuan* 烈佬傳 [Children of Darkness]. Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2012.

———. *Luqi zhi si* 盧麒之死 [The Death of Lo Kei]. Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2018.

———. "Yanyu wuyong, chenmo ke shang – Hongloumeng jiang dejiang ganyan" 言語無用 沉默可傷—紅樓夢獎得獎感言 [Dream of the Red Chamber Award Speech Acceptance: The Uselessness of Words, The Wound of Silence]. In *Di wu jie Hongloumeng jiang*

pinglun ji: Huang Biyun Lie lao zhuan 第五屆紅樓夢獎評論集：黃碧雲《烈佬傳》 [The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Wong Bik-wan's Children of Darkness], edited by Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts, 13-20. Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016.

———. "Xiaoxie zhi keneng" 小寫之可能 [The Possibility of Minor Writing]. *Ming Pao* 明報 [Ming Bao], D12, July 11, 2014.

Wong, Diana. "Memory Suppression and Memory Production: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore." In *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s),* edited by Takeshi Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White and Lisa Yoneyama. 218-238. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Wong, Meng Voon (Huang Mengwen) 黃孟文 and Xu Naixiang 徐迺翔, eds. *Xinjiapo huawen wenxueshi chugao* 新加坡華文文學史初稿 [A Preliminary Study of the Sinophone Singaporean Literary History]. Singapore: Bafang wenhua, 2002.

Wong, Nim Yan (Huang Nianxin) 黃念欣. "Huoci huobi – du Huang Biyun de Lie lao zhuan, lie nü tu huo geren de xuanze" 或此或彼—讀黃碧雲的《烈佬傳》、《烈女圖》或個人的選擇 [Either Here or There: Reading Wong Bik-wan's Children of Darkness, Portraits of Martyred Women, or the Personal Choice]. In *Di wu jie Hongloumeng jiang pinglun ji: Huang Biyun Lie lao zhuan* 第五屆紅樓夢獎評論集：黃碧雲《烈佬傳》 [The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Wong Bik-wan's Children of Darkness], edited by Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts, 41-49. Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016.

Xiao, Hei 小黑. *Jieshu de lücheng: Xiao Hei xiaoshuo zixuanji* 結束的旅程：小黑小說自選集 [The End of an Journey: The Anthology of Xiao Hei's Novels]. Taipei: Niang chuban, 2012.

Yang, Qiping 楊啟平. *Dangdai dalu yu mahua nüxing xiaoshuo lun* 當代大陸與馬華女性小說論 [On Contemporary Chinese and Sinophone Malaysian Female Writers' Novels]. Taipei: Xinrui wenchuan, 2012.

Yeng, Pway Ngon (Ying Pei'an) 英培安. *Xifu* 戲服 [Opera Costume]. Taipei: Tonsan Publications, 2015.

Yuen, Siu-cheong (Yuan Zhaochang) 袁兆昌. "Huang Biyun: Wan Zai lielao you hua shuo" 黃碧雲：灣仔烈佬有話說 [Wong Bik-wan: The Martyred Man in Wan Chai Has Something to Say]. In *Di wu jie Hongloumeng jiang pinglun ji: Huang Biyun Lie lao zhuan* 第五屆紅樓夢獎評論集：黃碧雲《烈佬傳》 [The Anthology of Commentaries on the Fifth Dream of the Red Chamber Award: Wong Bik-wan's Children of Darkness], edited by Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty of Arts, 172-174. Hong Kong: Cosmo Books, 2016.

Zhang, Songjian. "In Search of Modern Identity: Yeng Pway Ngon, Chiw Hwee Peng and Chinese Singaporean Poetry." *Asian and African Studies* 24, no.2 (2015): 131-155.

Zhang, Songjian 張松建. "Lun Ying Pei'an de shenti shuxie" 論英培安的身體書寫 [On Yeng Pway Ngon's Body Writing]. Huawen wenxue 華文文學 [Literature in Chinese] 138, no.1 (2017): 72-85.

Zhu, Chongke 朱崇科. "(Bei) lisan (shixue) yu Xinjiapo rentong de kunjing – Ying Pei'an Huashi de xushi chaungxin" (被)離散(詩學)與新加坡認同的困境 – 英培安《畫室》的敘事創新 [The Disperse(d) (Poetics) and the Difficulty in Singaporean Identification: Narrative Invention in The Studio by Yeng Pway Ngon]. *Huawen wenxue* 華文文學 [Literature in Chinese] 125, no.6 (2014): 91-97.