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## Mo Yan in Context

Duran, Angelica, Huang, Yuhan

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# **Introduction to *Mo Yan in Context: Nobel Laureate and Global Storyteller***

*Angelica Duran and Yuhan Huang*

In *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* James F. English chronicles the enduring cultural entity of artistic prizes in terms of global economies, or systems, in which prizes act as cultural capital to be exchanged. While noting that prizes date "back at least to the Greek drama and arts competitions in the sixth century B.C.," English concentrates on "the modern ascendancy of cultural prizes," which he notes can "conveniently be said to have started in 1901 with the Nobel Prize for Literature, perhaps the oldest prize that strikes us as fully contemporary, as being less a historical artifact than a part of our own moment" (1, 28). The attention and prestige that a Nobel Prize endows, as well as the cultural authority that it has accumulated over more than a century, ensures attention and curiosity in each of its six categories: chemistry, economic sciences, literature, medicine, peace, and physics. The life's work and works of Nobel laureates have inevitably come to be seen as forming a kind of canon, which would surprise its creators: "the Academy members who commenced work in that first Nobel Committee of 1901 would have been terrified had they realized what they were about to set in train" (Engdahl 317). John Guillory's definition of cultural capital is especially helpful in its clear-eyed delineation of the elements which come into play, especially for literary forms of cultural capital, in order to circulate in today's global culture under construction such as access and authority and in its demonstration of the ambivalence—the simultaneous attraction and repulsion—surrounding ideologically, politically, and financially freighted cultural exchanges.

Ambivalence well describes the response to the Swedish Academy's announcement in October 2012 that it had awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature to Mo Yan (莫言). Issues of access, authority, politics, and literary merit emerged on various fronts. Usually, the media publishes a few articles about the new laureate with a pleasant exposition of the author's writing style and such. For example, the political involvement in Turkey of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature Laureate Orhan Pamuk was deemphasized. The comments in *The New York Times* centered mostly on his writ-

ing style: "Mr. Pamuk's prize is richly deserved. It was awarded for a body of work, fiction and nonfiction, that is driven by the conscience of imagination, as well as the conscience of memory" ("Orhan Pamuk's" <[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/opinion/16mon4.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/opinion/16mon4.html?_r=0)>). Certainly, the media had plenty of praise when Seamus Heaney was awarded the Nobel in 1995, which perhaps helps to account for the few complaints that he did not write enough about the "maimed music" and "cold/Raw silence" that came from the Irish-British clashes of the 1960s (see Heaney, "Station Island," "Casualty").

The political commentary that followed Mo Yan's 2012 Nobel is a rare but not isolated case. In a few cases, like that of Chinese-born but naturalized French citizen Gao Xingjian's Nobel in 2000 and Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész's Nobel in 2002, the award has been fraught with objections. Western media made much of the pseudonym "Mo Yan" (莫言)—which means "Don't Talk"—the writer originally named Guan Moye (管谟业) uses. Mo Yan addressed the matter of his pseudonym at the award ceremony of the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature in March 2009 at the University of Oklahoma (see "Six Lives"). Using hyperbole and referring to himself in the third person, as he has done in some of his fictional works, he stated that "back then he was thinking that he should have a pen name, since all major writers had one. As he stared at the new name that meant 'don't talk,' he was reminded of his mother's admonition from way back. At that time, people in China were living in an unusual political climate; political struggles came in waves, one more severe than the one before, and people in general lost their sense of security. There was no loyalty or trust among people ... many people got into trouble because of things they said; a single carelessly uttered word could bring disaster to one's life and reputation as well as ruination to one's family ... Whenever he [Mo Yan] felt like showing off his eloquence, his mother would remind him, 'Don't talk too much'" ("Six Lives" 26). Mo Yan was asked again to address the topic in relation to the imprisoned 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo. Media curiosity is understandable given that Mo Yan and Liu are the only two Chinese-born Nobel Prize awardees in any category who have retained their Chinese citizenship. Notwithstanding, Mo Yan commented only briefly, providing additional political responses regarding his works' merits. *The New York Times* focused nearly a third of the article "After Fury Over 2010 Peace Prize, China Embraces Nobel Selection" on similar comments Mo Yan made at the University of California–Berkeley in 2011 (see Jacobs and Lyall <[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/books/nobel-literature-prize.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/books/nobel-literature-prize.html?_r=0)>). A couple of months later, *world.time.com* keyed in on the pen name in terms of political activism and censorship, rather than literature (see Ramzy <<http://world.time.com/2012/12/07/chinas-nobel-laureate-mo-yan-defends-censorship>>; for a discussion on silence in literature, see Damrosch; Summit). Chinese media never dedicated as much attention to the Nobel Prize in Literature as it did following the October 2012 announcement. It is for this reason that Jing Tsu's and David Der-wei Wang's

*Global Chinese Literature: Critical Essays* pays attention to China's quest for the Nobel Prize at a time when Gao was the only Chinese-born writer to earn the Prize.

*People's Daily*, the official mouthpiece of the Chinese government, acknowledged Mo Yan as "the Chinese Mo Yan," emphasizing that the Prize "will take Chinese literature to readers worldwide. China has many excellent authors and literary works. They are insufficiently read due to the barriers of language and ideological differences. Many foreign readers know little about Chinese literature, and Chinese literature has very limited influence in the world. Awarding the Nobel Prize in Literature to Mo Yan will bring attention to Chinese writers and works, and it will also evoke interest by Sinologists, who will be able to translate and introduce Chinese literature to the world" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by Yuhan Huang) ("一方面，拉近了中国文学和世界各国读者之间的距离。中国有一批优秀的作家和优秀的作品，因为语言障碍、价值观差异，中国文学在国际上的传播还不够广泛，一些外国读者对中国文学知之甚少。诺贝尔文学奖颁给中国作家莫言，会使外国读者更加关注中国文学和中国作家，激起他们对中国文学的兴趣，而这种兴趣又会激发国外汉学家下功夫把更多的中国文学作品翻译介绍到世界上去" (Dong 3). *People's Daily* listed the three reasons for the pen name which Mo Yan provided in a press conference at Stockholm: "First, the first character in my given name, 'mo' 谟 is a combination of the two characters 'mo yan'; second, when I was young, I was very talkative and brought troubles to my family, thus my parents often taught me of the virtue of silence; third, when one speaks too much one loses one's energy in writing. Now that I have made writing my career, I will write down all that I would like to talk in words" ("关于自己的笔名，莫言介绍自己的本名叫'管谟业'，改名莫言有三个原因，一是'谟'字拆开就是'莫言'；二是小时候因为乱说话，给父母带来很多麻烦，所以他们教育我要少说话；三是人如果多说话就没精力写作了，既然选择作家这个职业，就把用嘴说出的话全都写出来" (Liu, 4). This may be the most opportune moment to note that *Mo Yan in Context* refers to the author by the Chinese phrase and pen name "Mo Yan." Our intent in this editorial choice, as with other choices, is to be as sensitive as possible to the texts and human agents that comprise this volume and to imply a rigorous concentration on the textual and cultural expressions of a specific author, not on a historical individual.

Western and Eastern readers are exposed to different motives about the Prize and about literature based on the amount and type of press attributed just to a pen name. Contributors to *Mo Yan in Context* seek to include both sets and to jostle with them in order to further global conciliation through comparative cultural studies, an emerging field whose framework and methodology have been percolating in many fields, as noted previously, and have been developed by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek since the late 1990s (e.g., "From Comparative"). They are able to engage in such an ambitious, worthwhile aim in large part because of another aspect of modernity that has paralleled the new prize culture that English notes: globalization. Like the

foundations of prize culture, this volume is fully dependent on the increased communication, access, and travel that are the hallmarks of globalization: ten of the sixteen contributors to this volume are Chinese born, with three claiming the U.S. as their long-term home. This background about the human agents behind this volume leads us to yet another caveat about another editorial choice. We co-editors have sought to lend guidance primarily in terms of overall direction and content, but not to homogenize individual voices or personas. The contributors' author profiles at the end of each article speak to the variety of the contributors' national, linguistic, and disciplinary identities.

Insofar as the benefits of the circulation of artistic production and distribution, Mo Yan's works are indeed more accessible than those of other contemporary Chinese writers with the exception of those of Gao. As such, his works had greater chances of being nominated by the "600–700 individuals and organizations qualified to nominate for the Nobel Prize in Literature" and enabling "the members of the Academy to read and assess the work of the final [15–20] candidates" ("Process" <<http://www.nobelprize.org/nomination/literature/process.html>>). The list of the 109 awardees of the Nobel Prize in Literature since 1901 reflects the predominant language facilities of the Academy members and their access, including the prevalence of English and regional (in this case Western) restrictions in the past century before globalization ripened: English (26), French (13), German (13), and Spanish (11) works have garnered the lion's share of the Prizes ("Facts" <[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/facts/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/facts/)>). Insofar as the repercussions of Mo Yan's Prize, his works will gain further access and authority. There is also another "insofar" for cultural and literary scholars and cosmopolitanites (see Wang, Ning), to which this textual gathering around a prized literary artist is a testament. Insofar as this group is concerned, Mo Yan's Prize serves as a ripe opportunity to circulate more broadly the critical conversations in which they have been engaged for quite some time.

This critical conversation is perhaps best characterized, rather than in the terms of cultural capital, in terms of "ripeness," which in turn pays homage to the roots or root-seeking movement in Chinese literature and culture associated with Mo Yan. The term seeks to reflect an ideological imperative that arose in the 1980s and that is articulated primarily in artistic productions that are self-consciously rooted in traditional, nonstandard culture and which fixate on specific locales to gain insights into contemporary Chinese culture. Although many root-seeking authors refer to popular language and rural settings in their writings, as does Mo Yan, the search for roots is not nostalgic for customs and languages of the past or of the rural. It is instead a re-discovery of the nation's past and rethinking of its place in the contemporary context, facilitating present productivity. Han Shaogong's article "文学的根" ("The Root of Literature") defined the root-seeking movement and articulated the commonly felt sense of the importance of not forgetting, quoting the contemporary Chinese novelist Acheng (阿城): "a nation seems to be forgetful of its own past, yet it is not easy to

forget" ("一个民族自己的过去，是很容易被忘记的，也是不那么容易被忘记的。") (84). Root-seeking literature seeks to ground remembrance and memory in the soil of national and folklore culture. If the root is not deep enough, the "leaves won't grow thick" (Han 77). In growing the "leaves," or the resulting expressions of strong roots, Chinese writers since the second half of the twentieth century have developed a critical body of work toward the past as well as individualistic limbs that value personal experience and independent growth.

The 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature is the well-deserved recognition of the life's work of one individual, fully matured yet still growing. Contributors to *Mo Yan in Context* attend in Part One: Leaves carefully and closely to the shimmering shadow his works have cast as world literature and in world literature; Part Two: Trunk to its nativist core; and Part Three: Roots to its cultural foundations. In Part One contributors discuss a selection of Mo Yan's short stories and novels in terms of their translation to English and the unique nature of the literary conversation Mo Yan engages in world literature. The trajectory of Parts One and Two is neither an unintentional reflection of a Western hegemonic interest nor the outcome of a too precious preservation of the logic of the vegetative metaphor that governs this volume. Rather, it is driven by the internal logic of Mo Yan's works, first shaded by the leaves of world-renown writers then blossoming into its own. In a short article on writing novels in the Chinese tradition, Mo Yan discussed his trajectory in coping with the influence of foreign world literature:

I wrote an article for the first issue of 世界文学 / *World Literature* in 1987, entitled "Avoiding the Two Burning Furnaces." I meant that Márquez and Faulkner were two burning furnaces, while I was ice. If I came too close to them, I would melt and vaporize. Yet my avoidance was by no means complete. It was like lovers with tumultuous passion who broke up yet still thought about one another. Their [Márquez's and Faulkner's] techniques are simply too convenient to use, and I have accumulated too many stories that are similar to theirs. The momentum was great, and it takes time to divert. In the following decade, I wrote with rebellion. I wrote *The Garlic Ballads*, *The Republic of Wine*, *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, and many other novels. . . . It was not until 2000 when I was writing *Sandalwood Death* that I felt the ability to produce writings equal to my Western counterparts. In my creation of the three novels *Sandalwood Death*, *POW!*, and *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*, I have retreated from Western influence and learned from Chinese folk literature and traditional writings. . . . In the history of literature, there are two things that can save a declining art form: one is the folk, the other is the foreign. ("The Tradition" 153)

In Part Two: Trunk contributors read Mo Yan's works in terms of its most immediate Chinese literary, cultural, and social context linking the "leaves" of its literary presentations to the main body of its creation. Some of those nativist elements are near the surface, nearly raw in their presentation, such as China's controversial and difficult national family planning (计划生育) or One-child policy. Others are

equally provocative, although they extend much further into the rich soil of China's religious heritage. Given government policies and current religious demographics, the religious elements of folk religion and Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu religions which are explored in this Part may seem counterintuitive to some readers. But they should not be, given that the author himself sites "Chinese folk literature and traditional writings," redolent with such elements, as so influential.

It is the contention of this volume that the readily visible signs of Mo Yan's artistic works, towering within the literatures of the world, are rooted in cultural, literary, and critical systems, which it is the function of Part Three: Roots to demonstrate. We might here invoke the image from Mo Yan's *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* of a poplar tree which, when "yanked" out of the ground, reveals roots "half a block long" (36). This volume proposes that rooting the cultural narratives within and about Mo Yan's works in its native China and in the West, primarily the U.S., enriches our appreciation of the variety and specificity of the discourses generated through these encounters, and may yield more generally applicable paradigms that illuminate the workings and foundations of transcultural as well as distinctly nationally and linguistically bound zones in other times and places.

The only English-language critical study of Mo Yan's works to date is *A Subversive Voice in China: The Fictional World of Mo Yan* by Shelley W. Chan. Chan's single-author book is "a thematic study of Mo Yan's fictional works within the framework of his continuity with and innovations on Lu Xun's work against the background of post-Mao China" (6). *Mo Yan in Context* is distinct from Chan's book in its multiauthorship and degree of interdisciplinarity, thus ensuring that (specialist) depth is brought to bear on its cultural and critical breadth. Extended Anglophone scholarship about Mo Yan's work appeared with articles by Howard Goldblatt, Hongtao Liu and Haiyan Lee, and Alexa Huang in the journal *World Literature Today*, shortly following his 2009 Newman Prize for Chinese Literature. As one would imagine, Mo Yan's works have received more critical attention in China: Zhang Zhizhong's single-authored volume 莫言论 (On Mo Yan) is the first volume of criticism devoted entirely to Mo Yan's work. Zhang presents detailed and incisive readings of Mo Yan's earlier stories and novels, yet covers no work later than *The Garlic Ballads*. The collected volume 莫言研究资料 (Materials for the Study of Mo Yan) remains one of the most important resources for the study of Mo Yan's work in Chinese (see Kong, Shi, Li). Instead of giving a coherent reading of a specific set of historical and cultural contexts, Materials focuses on comprehensiveness and materials for further research with its content ranging from letters of and interviews with Mo Yan in the 1980s to literary reviews published in newspapers and magazines in the 2000s. In 莫言的小说世界 (Mo Yan's Fictional World), Fu Yanxia looks closely at Mo Yan's literary style and use of literary forms. Well based on critical theories and supported by close textual readings, Fu nonetheless gives little attention to other aspects of Mo Yan's work. Chen Xiaoming's edited volume 莫言研究: 2004-2012



(The Study of Mo Yan: 2004-2012) includes more recent interviews and reviews of Mo Yan and his work. As the title implies, the volume includes material up to the time of Mo Yan winning the Nobel Prize and thus avoids any post-Prize criticism. As Chen expounds in the preface to the volume: "The time range is strictly defined in order to avoid any conscious or unconscious afterthoughts" ("而本书的下限设定, 恰恰是希望避开有意无意的后见之明") (13). Chen has good reason to distance himself from the book craze for Mo Yan-related books in China since his laureateship. Besides the republishing of Mo Yan's writings with two sets of Mo Yan collections by two of the most prestigious Chinese publishing houses in literature—eleven volumes by Shanghai Wenyi Publishing House (上海文艺出版社) and twenty volumes by Zuoqia Publishing House (作家出版社)—numerous Mo Yan-related books came out in China in late 2012 and early 2013. Just to list a few: 大哥说莫言 (Big Brother on Mo Yan) penned by Mo Yan's elder brother Guan Moxian; a collection of interviews and accounts of Mo Yan's experience of receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature entitled 盛典: 诺奖之行 (Grand Ceremony: The Journey to the Nobel Prize) (see Mo Yan); Ye Kai's literary exposition 莫言的文学共和国 (Mo Yan's Republic of Letters); and 看莫言: 朋友、专家、同行眼中的诺奖得主 (Seeing Mo Yan: The Nobel Laureate in the Eyes of Friends, Experts, and Counterparts), a volume by a colleague of Mo Yan at Beijing Normal University Zhang Qinghua, co-edited with Cao Xia.

Careful afterthoughts and reflective contemplations on Mo Yan in the context of the Prize's cultural and social implications are as, if not more, important than prior criticisms. Thus *Mo Yan in Context* provides a multiauthored volume that situates Mo Yan's work in its literary, cultural, and social context, as well as within a broader view of reading and studying world literature. Natural growth—from leaves, to trunk, to roots—is opportunistic, as is this volume, in its focus on the Sino-Anglophone branches (under and above ground), more particularly the Chinese-U.S. offshoot of this literary flowering. The 2008 *Translation, Globalization and Localization: A Chinese Perspective* edited by Ning Wang and Yifeng Sun is a major contribution to the approach this volume takes. It takes to heart the practical realities and critical tendencies of current Chinese scholarship, especially in terms of the globalization in which this volume participates. Thus *Mo Yan in Context* uses a global voice both to extend its readership and to fulfill a capacious model of scholarship. Our ambitions are high: to be part of the first major wave of studies of the intersections of globalized Chinese and U.S. cultures, which is of wide interest to many scholars but difficult to transform into a resource like this one given the newness of the historical, cultural, and linguistic conditions that enable such work. This volume is responsive to the global interest in all aspects of the relationships between these two great global powers. *The Economist* made much of the similarities and differences between the long-standing term "the American Dream" of the U.S. and "the Chinese Dream" that the newly appointed Chinese general secretary and military



commander-in-chief Xi Jinping used in November 2012 to describe the cultural path for "the Chinese nation" that he envisioned ("China's Future" <<http://www.economist.com/printedition/2013-05-04>>). Moreover, this volume is the result of the long-standing, deliberate, and successful attempts by educational institutions in the U.S. and China to foster joint research in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, as well as in the humanities.

*Mo Yan in Context* is tethered relentlessly to Mo Yan yet extends broadly in its contexts of the interface of literature and Chinese and Western, primarily U.S., societies. Yet it in no way aspires to be comprehensive. The distinctive features of this collection of Western (primarily Anglophone) and Eastern (primarily Chinese) cultural studies are its historical breadth and inclusion of major critical scholars based in both the West (exclusively U.S. institutions) and the East (exclusively Chinese institutions). The division can be thought of as addressing the two main notions Tötösy de Zepetnek and Louise O. Vasvári define in the *Companion to Comparative Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies*: "Comparative cultural studies is a combination of tenets of comparative literature and cultural studies—minus the former's Eurocentrism and the national approach—and including the ideological orientation of cultural studies" (4).

As noted, then, *Mo Yan in Context* does indeed fixate on China and the U.S. Each Part, however, provides a trenchant corrective for the potential of a nationalistic fixation: for example, in Part One alone with Chengzhou He's emphasis on the transnational nature of Mo Yan's authorial role and works and Lanlan Du's comparative study of reproductive rights in a novel by Mo Yan and another by another Nobel laureate, William Faulkner; and in Part Three with Donald Mitchell's and Angelica Duran's delineation of the globalization of religions. Additionally, the volume extends comparative literature's recent innovations in its "national approach," developed through its disciplinary conversations with world literature, which requires a specialist's sensitivity to the texts themselves. Our volume is one that reacts to rather than rejects Roland Greene's articulation of "an almost superstitious obeisance to the category of the national" (26) and that heeds Eric Griffin's caution that, "like a number of scholars who came into the profession in [the wake of the New Historicist movement of the 1980s and 1990s], I began to sense that as much as some New Historicist criticism spoke of crossing borders and committed as many of its practitioners were to unmasking the apparatuses of ideology, New Historicist critical methodologies—like those of the older historicisms they claimed to be interrogating and displacing—often failed to envision a time when the boundaries between national were substantially different from what they were in modernity" (21).

It is in part this awareness that precipitated our attention to the limiting and delimiting identities inscribed in Mo Yan's works, especially since his works emerged from a specific locale but also within an increasingly borderless world. The contributors of this volume, thus, do not eschew but rather put their specialist knowledge in

careful conversation with other specialists' knowledge in the hopes of fulfilling David Damrosch's belief that "the specialist's knowledge is the major safeguard against the generalist's own will to power over texts that otherwise too easily become grist for the mill of a preferred historical argument or theoretical system" (287). Such considerations and others account for the comparative cultural studies approach that can be witnessed in this volume's value of the scholarly analogue of the popular and populist characters in Mo Yan's fictions. After the first decade of the twenty-first century, as Haun Saussy defined, "the concept of world literature" consists "chiefly of a canon, a body of works and their presence as models of literary quality in the minds of scholars and writers. But the phrase 'world literature' is not used exclusively" (291). Saussy refers to a "global literary history" that necessarily has incorporated popular and high-culture reader receptions, as well as the economic matters which Damrosch outlines in his exposition of Goethe's "newly minted [in 1827] term *Weltliteratur*" (1). Horace Engdahl suggests that Alfred Nobel, too, with business interests in many countries, was a cosmopolitanite in creating the literary prize and bequeathing to the Swedish Academy the daunting task of choosing prizewinners from the literatures of the entire world, following the intellectual tradition of "Weltliteratur" (317). This is another theoretical foundation of *Mo Yan in Context*.

Part One: Leaves leads off with Howard Goldblatt's "A Mutually Rewarding yet Uneasy and Sometimes Fragile Relationship between Author and Translator." Goldblatt elucidates with candor the uneasiness owing to internal and external reasons as well as to the successes, from personal satisfaction to wide readership, in translating from Chinese to English generally and Mo Yan's works in particular. Goldblatt's article doubles as a spirited defense of Mo Yan's selection as the 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature Laureate as based on the right reasons. The defense is text based, a task done with significant knowledge since Goldblatt is Mo Yan's English translator. Text based means understanding the process of translation, respecting reader reception and authorial intent, and referring to the work, primarily but not limited to his latest novels published in English, establishing his bona fides as a master storyteller and contemporary China's finest writer. This method contrasts with some media responses directly following Mo Yan's selection and reviews, some of which Goldblatt, in turn, reviews.

In "The Censorship of Mo Yan's 天堂蒜薹之歌 (*The Garlic Ballads*)" Thomas Chen considers reader reception, literary production and circulation, and other matters of translation on a macro-scale and from a comparative literature and comparative cultural studies perspective. Chen examines literary censorship in the case of Mo Yan's *The Garlic Ballads*, a novel formerly banned in China. He gives insights into issues concerning writing and translation in contemporary China, as well as the function of Chinese news media, which have monopolized current discourse on Chinese censorship. This exposition problematizes the facile binary of a powerless writer pitted against an all-powerful state, because such categories mask the

complexity of the issue. By comparing various editions of *The Garlic Ballads*, including a Chinese-language edition published in Taiwan and an English-language edition published in the U.S., Chen challenges the traditional definition of censorship, questioning the boundaries of where editing ends and where censoring begins, and the legitimacy of the titillating phrase "Banned in China."

With "Representations of 'China' and 'Japan' in Mo Yan's, Hayashi's, and Naruse's Texts" Noriko J. Horiguchi also focuses within and just beyond China's current borders. She discusses the narration of displacements and memory in the context of subjectivity and Japanese imperialism in Mainland China through her analysis of Mo Yan's, Fumiko Hayashi's, and Mikio Naruse's texts. Horiguchi demonstrates the paradox of the stories of individuals who construct subjectivities that simultaneously resist and recreate perspectives of empire and its doings. Haraguchi's analysis provides a regional (Asian) contextualization of Mo Yan's, Hayashi's, and Naruse's texts with a perspective that may help us consider literary settings more sensitively and gain particular regional context as well. Moreover, Asians and others around the globe, thus, may gain a deeper appreciation and perhaps better tools for dealing with the continuing battles—verbal and physical—over disputed Asian territories and cultural imperatives.

In "Abortion in Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* and Mo Yan's 蛙 (Frog)" Lanlan Du focuses on the operation of geo-historical settings in the hands of two Nobel Prize in Literature laureates. With the methodologies of cultural criticism, Du pairs Faulkner's novel *The Wild Palms* (also known as *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*) and Mo Yan's *Frog*, giving thematic attention to the burdens of social and governmental controls on citizens' reproductive rights. In 1939 *The Wild Palms* was revolutionary and sophisticated in its frank representation of adultery and abortion. It remains so, as *Frog* (2011) promises to remain in its treatment of the One-child policy. Du analyzes the two novelists' moving representations of three sets of characters: the female protagonists, the male protagonists, and the performers of abortion. Readers are guided through how these novels represent daily lives and daily communities responding to ever-changing and ever-powerful cultural forces.

While Du's study invokes Faulkner's and Mo Yan's likely authorial intentions in electing to handle such a difficult topic as reproductive rights, in "Rural Chineseness, Mo Yan's Work, and World Literature" Chengzhou He keys in on how the persona Mo Yan contributes to the current concept of Chineseness, particularly rural Chineseness. While some authors reject prize culture—or at least attempt to do so—Mo Yan has participated in ways that have been perceived as constructing the rural and the Chinese to a global reading community interested in both. He's article lends a critical eye to one branch of cultural studies focalized in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards. *Sinophone Studies* attends primarily to "Chineseness" and to literary works written in Chinese, from Mainland China, Taiwan, Tibet, and Japan. The collection offers important frameworks and methods to apply in Sinophone studies, a field that has

experienced an upsurge since the start of the twenty-first century. Yet, while *Sino-phone Studies* applies comparative methodologies and critical tools on Chinese cultural and literary elements, it does not extend to interactions between China and the West. He demonstrates the productive work that can be achieved by extending the critical perspective. He touches upon and ties together various elements in contemporary scholarship and in each of the preceding articles in Part One, thus providing a coherent path to Part Two, with its focus on key facets of China's vast cultural heritage inherent in Mo Yan's works.

Part Two: Trunk aligns Mo Yan's works with major political and religious movements in China, from ancient eras to recent times. In "The Realpolitik of Mo Yan's Fiction" Sabina Knight echoes Goldblatt when she posits that "Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize for his writing, not for political engagement" (94). Knight supports her claim by explicating the ways in which Mo Yan's art does not eschew but rather captures and transforms China's recent political movements. Knight's analyses of a variety of Mo Yan's works, including the short stories "Abandoned Child" and "White Dog and the Swing," jolt readers into remembering that all writers of world literature emerged from the crucible of personal and social struggles and joys. Mo Yan's literary *Realpolitik*—an informed and informing integration of the practical and material, rather than the explicitly ideological—becomes especially clear in Knight's deft pairing of *Red Sorghum* and *Sandalwood Death*, which press on different areas of China's collective trauma. These areas, and Mo Yan's art, are not black and white. Thus this chapter extrapolates what Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom calls in his *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know* the gray zone, "a subtly negotiated space where the government suffers heterodoxy as long as writers camouflage their dissent in literary metaphor" (Knight 95).

In "Mo Yan's *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* in Cultural and Visual Context" Yuhan Huang dedicates attention to Mo Yan's novel alongside an important set of Chinese cultural artifacts: political posters. Huang reads Mo Yan's novel with a strong sense of historicity and Chinese art, examining the visual experience of the Cultural Revolution. Poster art complements the novel's description of the era's facts and aura, and demonstrates the story's cultural and historical mooring. Huang's reading of Mo Yan's personal and stylized version of history alongside the public and collective records of propaganda posters shows the ways in which propaganda has been carried out through visual experience and sheds light on the novel's seemingly idiosyncratic narrative and metaphors. This juxtaposition of one author's contemporary verbal presentation and an era's visual presentation provides an alternative access to understanding a time and space that has become distant to contemporary readers.

Contributors in the next two articles evince how Mo Yan's works can be more readily appreciated when their rich religious meanings are recognized and addressed, no easy feat for contemporary readers from either the East or West. Indeed, religious studies as an interdisciplinary field of secular study distinct from divinity, theology,

or philosophy came into its own only in the second half of the twentieth century. In "*Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* and *The Garlic Ballads* in the Context of Chinese Literary and Religious Conventions" Chi-ying Alice Wang makes a signal contribution in comparative cultural studies by merging religious studies and Sino-phone studies, in this case incorporating especially linguistics and literary studies. Exploring Mo Yan's novel in the context of traditional Chinese literature and religion is responsive to the overt Buddhist characters and structural overlay of the protagonist's six reincarnations in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*. Wang's attention to *The Garlic Ballads* is an astute choice in that it shows other religious undercurrents to be found in a work by Mo Yan not often thought of as resting on religious foundations. A lack of religious influence in Mo Yan's works would indeed strike religious studies scholars as surprising given that Mo Yan's home county of Gaomi in Shandong Province is where the first local literary works appeared, in the eleventh to eighth century BCE, in the form of the "Airs of Qi" in the earliest collection of Chinese poetry *The Book of Songs*, a major literary masterpiece and a major chronicle of religious belief. The bulk of Wang's study exposes how a three-thousand-year-old work is in conversation with these two distinct novels by Mo Yan.

We move from the context of China's ancient religious texts to that of China's current religious and popular writings with Jinghui Wang's "Religious Elements in Mo Yan's and Yan Lianke's Works." Wang explores the concepts of incarnation and atonement, and demonstrates how Chinese folk versions of these concepts are represented in two contemporary Chinese novels, Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* and Yan Lianke's *Dream of Ding Village*. Wang describes the intratextual and extratextual parallels of these novels. After demonstrating the primary religious elements in both works, Wang opens the purview to Chinese reception of the writers of these two important works and provides an informed account of Yan's more limited reception in China and globally. Combined, Chi-ying Alice Wang's and Jinghui Wang's studies present readers with models for discussing sets of religious and social elements which inform Mo Yan's works and that are not often discussed or even considered, but that are pervasive, eloquent, and meaningful.

Part Two ends with Alexa Huang's and Angelica Duran's "Mo Yan's Work and the Politics of Literary Humor" and involves yet another topic often ignored in the few scholarly studies of Mo Yan's works and that can be lost on Mo Yan's readers whether accessing the original or translations. After providing an overview of the unique characteristics of Chinese textual humor since ancient times, Huang and Duran tease out a few kinds of humor that can be found in Mo Yan's novels. Close readings of word plays, comic scenes, and humorous elements in such works as *The Republic of Wine* and *The Garlic Ballads* demonstrate Mo Yan's keen sense of humor and his use of comic tools. The article also demonstrates how Mo Yan innovates and thereby extends a long-standing feature of Chinese writing, as is the case also with his use of politics and religion as discussed in the other articles of this Part.

Part Three: Roots complements Parts One and Two by illuminating the critical, cultural, and global theories and practices at the root of the production, reception, and circulation of Mo Yan's works as well as their themes, settings, and characters. In "Cosmopolitanism and the Internationalization of Chinese Literature" Ning Wang considers how the globalization of Chinese literature resituates the concept of world literature within the wider cultural purview of cosmopolitanism. Noting that cosmopolitanism was introduced into China much later than it was in the West and that it is still seldom discussed in Chinese literary and critical circles, Wang offers a theoretical framework from a literary and cultural perspective. In doing so, he attempts to grapple even-handedly with the internationalizing process of modern Chinese literature with regard to cosmopolitanism. This approach is exigent given the advent of globalization, the rapid development of the Chinese economy, and relevance with regard to Mo Yan's work. Wang ends with a scholarly meditation founded on decades of scholarship on the success of Mo Yan as lying in the author's appropriate and productive handling of the fundamental problems that confront contemporary China within a broad cosmopolitan context with regard to human concerns at large.

Next, in "Variation Study in Western and Chinese Comparative Literature" Shunqing Cao and Miaomiao Wang outline contemporary Chinese literary and critical scholarship, addressing the practical past, present, and likely future obstacles for enacting truly multidirectional comparative cultural studies. They do this from a Chinese scholarly context and in the service of providing provisional and promising methodologies. Cao and Wang provide an overview of the introduction and development of comparative literature in China showing that, following a course of integrative processes, Chinese scholars are reconstructing existing subjects and addressing the phenomenon of variation between literatures. They apply the critical methodology that the article's lead author, Cao, has developed in recent decades in order to assess heterogeneity and variability between literatures rather than assume a literary universalism. They outline how this direction of the research can contribute to the ongoing development of comparative literature. The final section focuses on ancient Chinese traditional literary classics and the works of Mo Yan with special attention to the Sinicization of Buddhism, thus leading to the concluding article of Part Three.

In "A Textbook Case of Comparative Cultural Studies" Donald Mitchell and Angelica Duran discuss one of the most controversial and certainly one of the most important foundations of Mo Yan's works: religion. The chief focus is on the permutations of how religious studies is understood and practiced, based on Mitchell's experience as the author of the most widely used Eastern religions textbook in the U.S., *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*. Mitchell and Duran contend that as Chinese literature takes its rightful place on the global stage, a singularly important factor in its reception outside of Asia is educating non-Asians about the cultural context that plays such a crucial role in Chinese fiction, including Mo Yan's. Buddhism is deeply seeded in Chinese culture, with the suppression of religious practice

during part of the twentieth century comprising only a small period in China's long and rich religious heritage. Mitchell and Duran describe the development of Global Buddhism and provide examples of how it has spread knowledge about Chinese culture to indeed a global audience. Close readings of two of Mo Yan's religious figures demonstrate just some of the dynamism of reading with a religious studies eye: the Swedish, Christian Pastor Malory in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* and "Wise Monk Yan" in *POW!*

The volume concludes with two sections distinct in form but in close conversation with the preceding articles. First is the Epilogue by Fenggang Yang titled "Soul Searching in Contemporary Chinese Literature and Society." Yang's epilogue is not an afterthought but in many ways the flowering of the explicit and implicit sociological and literary arguments that precede it. Second and finally is Angelica Duran's and Yuhan Huang's "Selected Bibliography of and about Mo Yan's Work in Chinese and English," which is also available in the series' affiliate *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access humanities and social sciences quarterly at <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/moyanbibliography>>. Yang's Epilogue lends a personal perspective on the social and cultural revolutions in China and globally that have engaged the scholars whose works are recorded in Duran's and Huang's "Selected Bibliography." The year of publication of *Mo Yan in Context* marks the anniversaries of major cultural events in China and the U.S. which had global impact. A number of articles in the volume refer to riveting historical events in China including the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident that marked the end of its Era of Restructuring (1976-89). In the U.S., 2014 marks the tenth anniversary of the founding of Facebook (February 2004), the social network that transformed human connectivity first in the U.S. then worldwide; the quarter-century anniversary of numerous events in 1989 which speak to the global impact of U.S. culture especially in technology and the start of the presidency of George H.W. Bush when the Berlin Wall fell and when strained relationships led to U.S. military action in the Persian Gulf and Panama; and of the proposal by Tim Berners-Lee for what he described as "a large hypertext database with typed links" and what would eventually become the world wide web. The transformative and often-incendiary cultural matters that literary works at once record and contribute to are communicated in these articles perhaps because the major twenty-first-century powerhouses of China and the U.S. foregrounded in this volume have been leaders in these cultural arenas. Yang's Epilogue casts a personal and sociologist's gaze on such changes and provides an intimate record of how "Chinese souls" have responded to these dramatic social changes and to the most recent instantiation of a great spiritual awakening and thereby literary blossoming with Mo Yan's as a key example. In their Selected Bibliography, Duran and Huang focus on Mo Yan's work in order to foster future critical blossomings.



*Mo Yan in Context* showcases the sustained crosscultural and transcultural gazes that catapulted Mo Yan's works onto the global landscape and promise to keep them in central and peripheral view. Such vistas are difficult to maintain and must always be adjusted, so that we may give equal attention to the forest and its trees, so to speak. We end by shifting century, country, and genre to a quotation that is apt on a number of levels, from John Milton's Renaissance British epic *Paradise Lost* (1667), based on the biblical story of human creation and the human movement from a peaceful Eden to the world as we know it:

[Adam's] Eye might there command wherever stood  
 City of old or modern Fame, the Seat  
 Of mightiest Empire, from the destined Walls  
 Of Cambalu [capital city of Mongolian Cathay], seat of Cathaian Can  
 And Samarchand by Oxus [in Uzbekistan], Temirs Throne  
 To Paquin [Peking/Beijing, China] of Sinaean Kings  
 ...  
 In spirit perhaps he also saw  
 Rich Mexico the seat of Motezume,  
 And Cusco in Peru, the richer seat  
 Of Atabalipa, and yet unspoil'd  
 Guiana, whose great Citie Geryons Sons  
 Call El Dorado (11.385-90, 406-11)

Unlike Mo Yan, Milton never won an award in his lifetime, yet today his works reside in some of the same anthologies where we now find Mo Yan's. Like Mo Yan, Milton commented on his beloved homeland throughout his literary works, which he, again like Mo Yan, often represented in artistic language that made it through governmental controls. The epigraph also personalizes the human agents invested in this volume, since Duran's work is primarily on Milton, which we note here in large part to argue for the accessibility and importance of Mo Yan, an author whose time, space, style, language, and biography are so distinct from Milton's: even a Miltonist can appreciate Mo Yan's works. The epigraph is most apt because it describes a panorama that starts in China and extends to the Americas: "Cambalu" refers the capital city of Mongolian Cathay, "Oxus" to Uzbekistan, "Paquin" to Peking, and "Geryons sons" to Walter Raleigh, who founded the Roanoke Colony in present-day North Carolina. Milton's innovation with the literary convention of the epic vista is to extend the Eastern starting point to China and the Western end point to the Americas rather than limiting the purview to Western Europe or just one's hometown. The directionality of the passage evokes hope as much of the end of *Paradise Lost* does with the East to West movement mirroring the promising dawning of a new age for humankind. The East to West movement also mirrors the directionality that Renaissance scholars termed *translatio studii* to describe the transfer of knowledge with the traditional Eastern starting point of Greece and traditional Western end points of England and Spain. Then, too, there are the

details of the passage: each of these places is associated with a leader: for example, Cambalu with its Khan, Oxus with Tamir, Paquin with its kings. Thus Milton's innovation in extending the Eastern starting point to China and the Western end point to the Americas couples with his repeated association of peoples to places therefore articulating a distinctly modern, global hope for the improvement of the human condition. The point of the passage, then, is emblematic of one of the main points of this volume, an instantiation of a brave, significant, critical, communally constructed connection of East and West in which we invite readers to participate as global citizens.

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### Author's profile

Angelica Duran teaches English, comparative literature, and religious studies at Purdue University. Her interests in scholarship include comparative literature, disability studies, and Renaissance British literature. In addition to numerous articles and chapters, Duran's single-authored book publications include *The Age of Milton and the Scientific Revolution* (2007) and her edited volumes include *A Concise Companion to Milton* (2007) and *The King James Bible across Borders and Centuries* (2014).

### Author's profile

Yuhan Huang is working toward her PhD in comparative literature at Purdue University with a project on literature and art during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Her interests in scholarship include documentary film and photography, word and image, and art history.

