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Mo Yan in Context

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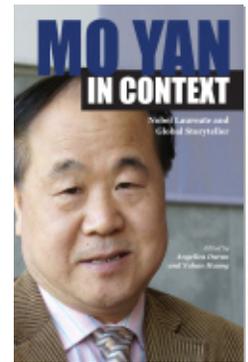
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A Textbook Case of Comparative Cultural Studies

Donald Mitchell and Angelica Duran

Abstract

In "A Textbook Case of Comparative Cultural Studies" Donald Mitchell and Angelica Duran posit that the cultural basis from which all literary works emerge includes a religious component given the historical perseverance of religious traditions. Hence, a basic understanding of the religious heritage and contemporary mix in Chinese culture is exigent to develop valid interpretations about literary works. Mitchell and Duran describe the changes made to the most widely used Anglophone introductory textbook on Buddhism, the third edition of Mitchell's *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*, based on the globalization of Buddhism in today's world. Religious interaction and influence is dynamic, no longer a one-way flow of Buddhism from Asia to non-Asian countries but rather a multidirectional flow between countries in all continents. Close readings of two religious figures demonstrate this dynamic with Mo Yan's Wise Monk Lan in *POW!* and the Swedish Pastor Malory in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*.

We start with the argument that the cultural bases from which all literary works emerge includes a religious component given the historical perseverance of religious traditions. Hence, a basic understanding of the religious heritage and its contemporary expressions in Chinese culture is exigent to develop valid interpretations about literary works. In his 1982 *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, Northrop Frye demonstrated how strongly the sacred text of Judaism and Christianity, the Bible, pervades Western art and literature. Frye went to great lengths to emphasize that his study was "from the point of view of a literary critic" and was not a work of "theology," and to locate literary criticism as cultural and social criticism (xi). His emphasis was warranted because general readers and scholars at the time were still reluctant to engage with any talk of religion, wary that discussions merely doubled for evangelical attempts at conversion into a particular religion or equally untethered vendettas against religiosity. Such a response is understandable given the relatively

recent development of the field of religious studies. While theology is a centuries-old field and presupposes that its scholars are believers, religious studies finds its beginnings in the nineteenth century when the Bible began to be analyzed historically and when Hindu and Buddhist texts were first translated into major European languages. Religions as cultural components recorded in literature significantly reduced the anxiety that discussions of religions tend to prompt since, as Donald Soetaert and Kris Rutten observe, "the concept of culture is often combined with literacy" (63). Literacy is based on written texts of all sorts and in turn, as Soetaert and Rutten note, extends to E. D. Hirsch's use of "cultural literacy to describe the level and breadth of knowledge citizens need to navigate in society," which is precisely our claim about what the knowledge of religious studies can provide to readers of literary works (63). This perspective is interdisciplinary in its best sense, or, as Rik Pinxten notes of his own work in anthropology, "comparative cultural studies adds a critical approach by contextualizing literature" (121). Indeed the major scholars who helped institutionalize religious studies in Western institutions employed phenomenological descriptions and interpretations emphasizing systematic and cross-cultural perspectives. For example, Mircea Eliade applied a historical perspective in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, William James philosophical and psychological ones in *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature*, and Emile Durkheim a sociological one in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

We find T. Patrick Burke articulating this aim at objectivity in his *The Major Religions*, a popular textbook used in introduction to religious studies courses which cover both Western and Eastern religions. Burke distills the contentious history of the field of religious studies in his description of the field: "This book does not assume that the study of religions necessarily presupposes commitment to their truth or value. Our aim is simply to enable the student to become familiar with the basic information about the main religious traditions ... As a general rule it is wise to suspend judgment until we are certain we understand the matter sufficiently. This applies to the theological beliefs, of course, but also to such matters as the Hindu caste system, or the fact that the major religions traditionally favor the male gender. The initial approach of the student should be to try to understand the reasons that may have led to the features he finds difficult to accept" (9). Even in his careful outline—in the textbook's second edition no less, when some corrections had been made—Burke provides readers with an unintentional instance of how fully religions participate in culture more generally: while Burke cites the favoring of "the male gender," he lapses into designating his imagined readers as a unified whole and as male in using "he," the unified male entity regularly positioned as the only or leading divine agent. This is not to nay-say Burke: his and other introductory textbooks on major religions are vital to procuring the promises of the "religious turn" in critical studies since the beginning of the twentieth century. Leaders in a variety of the fields participating in religious studies are bent on creating a basis and language upon

which and with which global scholars can develop trenchant abstract theories as well as seek new modes for the real-world applications of their studies. In sympathizing with the dangers yet importance of Burke's project, we are also empathizing with it.

In 2002 Oxford University Press published its first major textbook on Buddhism: Donald Mitchell's *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*. The textbook covers the life and teachings of the historical Buddha, Buddhism in Southeast Asia that preserves the original forms of early Indian Buddhism, the development of the Mahayana Buddhist traditions of thought and practice in India, as well as the spread and development of Buddhism into Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, and the West. Over the years, the content of the textbook has evolved based on recent scholarship, as well as developments in Buddhist communities around the world. The changes in the textbook track the globalization of Chinese Buddhism that provide readers outside and inside of China the religious context for some elements in contemporary Chinese fiction. While Mo Yan is not a religious writer, his fiction does at times present cultural views, ideas, and values that have traditional Chinese Buddhist roots. It would be surprising if it didn't, given the broad reading he demonstrates in his works. Chinese literature can be traced back to ancient times, and in ancient times literature was infused with the religious foundations that marked all known civilizations. Sabina Knight's *Chinese Literature: A Very Short Introduction* does right by her Anglophone readers—mostly college students and general, educated readers—in repeatedly drawing attention to Chinese religious traditions in her impressive review of poetry, drama, historical narrative, and fiction.

A little closer at hand and more to the point, in this volume Chi-ying Alice Wang's "Mo Yan's *The Garlic Ballads* and *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* in the Context of Religious and Chinese Literary Conventions" demonstrates some of the rich relationship between Mo Yan's use of Chinese and non-Chinese religious traditions (see also Jinghui Wang). Understanding this relationship requires that readers and scholars possess the kind of basic knowledge to recognize when Mo Yan is swerving from traditional beliefs and thus being particularly playful or controversial, or when he is blending major global religions with native Chinese folk religions, or when he is introducing or reintroducing so-called religious texts into contemporary Chinese literary culture. For example, in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, Lord Yama figures as the wrathful and enigmatic leader of the underworld. Mo Yan seems to call attention to the Hindu, which is to say Indian, origin and usual depiction of Lord Yama later adopted by Buddhism in its popular forms in China by describing his attendants as "totally human in appearance, except, that is, for their skin, whose color was iridescent blue, as if treated with a magical dye" (6). The blue skin color tends to be more characteristic of Indian deities. Elsewhere, Mo Yan mentions in passing ancient literary texts that can be categorized with equal accuracy as religious texts, as when narrator Shangquan Jintong mentions "Laozi, the founder of Taoism himself" (325).

With just these compelling examples of the literary subtlety with which Mo Yan inscribes Chinese religions, we move to our next task of describing the updates of one particular branch of Chinese religion, Chinese Buddhism, in the three editions of the textbook, before we return in greater depth to two of Mo Yan's novels. We review the chapters on "The Chinese Buddhist Experience" and "Buddhism in the West" that the third edition of *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* retitles "The Globalization of Buddhism." We then align how global religions factor into two of Mo Yan's novels.

The first edition of *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*

In the first edition of the China chapter in the textbook, Mitchell followed the common practice of beginning with the introduction of Buddhism from India by way of the Silk Road in the first century CE, the early efforts to translate Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Chinese, the influence of Taoism on these translations, and the later efforts in the fourth century to produce new translations that more closely followed the Indian textual tradition. The next section of the chapter presented how the schools of Indian Buddhism from the Abhidharma traditions to the Madhyamika and Yogacara traditions of Mahayana were formed in China. These schools are commonly referred to as "Indian Buddhism in China." While the development of these schools reflected certain values and assumptions of Chinese culture and thought, these elements were only hints of the more fully Chinese forms of Buddhism that would develop later. The chapter then turns to the actual schools of uniquely Chinese Buddhism. These schools define the Chinese experiences of Buddhism and would later spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Here we find the heart of East Asian Buddhism. The four schools covered in some depth in the chapter are Tiantai, Huayan, Chan, and Jingtu. They express the diversity of Chinese Buddhism from the scholarship and multiple practices of Tiantai and the extraordinarily complex philosophy of Huayan, to the meditative tradition of Chan and the devotional tradition of Jingtu. From the lens of the school approach to Buddhism, this section is the highlight of the chapter. It presents fully developed Chinese Buddhist thoughts and practices that contribute to Chinese culture. Therefore, numerous translations of original texts were presented in order to give readers direct access to the masters who formed these traditions through philosophy, metaphor, story, and example.

Although Mitchell had been trained as a philosopher and had taught Eastern religion courses for decades, he found himself entering into literary and linguistics terrain. These translations were difficult since many of the Chinese characters represent Sanskrit terms that had been presented in previous chapters on Indian Buddhism. But in China, they carried certain implications that were not found in India, meanings that give readers a better understanding of the Chinese experiences of Buddhism based on the values and assumptions of Chinese civilization. Even scant

writings provide readers with the ability to see both the links with Indian Buddhism and the changes in perspective given how certain terms were used in Chinese Buddhism. It became clear over the six years between the first and second edition of the textbook that while the school approach to the story of Buddhism in China was helpful in giving readers a clear picture of the major formal schools of Chinese Buddhism, it was not so helpful in providing them with an understanding of how Buddhism exists today in Chinese culture. This was becoming more and more important given the growing prevalence in the mission statements of U.S. universities, particularly land-grant or public universities, about their aim to help foster global citizenship. Mitchell's own teaching experience dovetailed with that larger pedagogical development, since he was seeing more and more international, particularly Chinese, students in his classrooms and since he knew of the increased push for study abroad for native U.S. students.

The second edition of *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*

Given the need to help readers understand the more recent developments in Chinese Buddhism and their place in the culture of China today, the second edition expanded the China chapter. It included a discussion on the Qin Dynasty patriarch Zhuhong (祜宏) (1535-1615), who blended the Jingtu practice of devotion to Amitabha Buddha, the Chan practice of meditation, and the study of sutras as taught in Tiantai and Huayan. He also reached out to the laity, describing their strong devotional piety, lay activities outside the temple or monastery, and the study and distribution of Buddhist texts. These changes have helped to describe Buddhism in the daily life of Chinese Buddhists over the centuries and are thus responsive to cultural movements in China that stress the circulation of texts among all strata of the populous, not just the elite. But more important in understanding Buddhism in Chinese culture as a background for appreciating its literature, poetry, and the arts is Taixu (太虛) (1890-1947). He inspired a reform movement that had wide-ranging consequences and founded schools where modern secular subjects were taught along with traditional Buddhist scholarship in Western-style classes. Taixu supported lay study of Buddhist texts and doctrines and the publication of Buddhist books and periodicals. He founded new institutes or seminaries to train Buddhist monks and nuns as well as lay leaders and created new Buddhist structures to aid the needy in society. Finally, Taixu developed contacts with Buddhists in other countries and supported a kind of Buddhist ecumenism, one of the earliest global fellowships. The blending of the earlier reform of Zhuhong and the more recent reform of Taixu lay the groundwork for a new and broader understanding of Chinese Buddhism outside China. These innovations in the second edition of the textbook provide a truer contextual understanding of modern Chinese literature than the traditional schools of Chinese Buddhism.

Of signal importance in the second edition is the added essay "The Cultural Experience of Chinese Buddhism Today" by Wei Dedong from the Institute of Buddhism and Religious Theory at Renmin University in Beijing (see also his *The Essence of Buddhist Yogacara Philosophy*). Wei discusses how the heritage of Indian Buddhist customs, like the belief in rebirth, and China's own particular culture are carried forward in modernization movements in contemporary China. Wei's discussion gives readers of Chinese literature the context needed to understand the authors' descriptions of aspects of Chinese culture and daily life that have religious roots. For example, Wei presents temple rituals intended for liberating deceased loved ones called "worshiping all Buddhas for the attainment of rebirth" (267). Today, it is not uncommon for Chinese writers to refer to persons who have died but remain as ghosts or spirits needing to turn from this world and enter the Pure Land. Mo Yan does so, of course, in 蛙 (Frog). Mo Yan's title gains yet another resonance, to add to those provided by Lanlan Du's discussion "Abortion in Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* and Mo Yan's 蛙 (Frog)," if we know that the frog is a symbol of reincarnation as memorialized by the Japanese Zen poet Basho in his best-known *haiku*: "Old pond / frog jumps in – / Plop!" (215). Other examples include the tradition of pilgrimage to holy places in connection with the need for confession and forgiveness, the celebration of holidays, and actions that free people from evil karma or rescue persons from becoming hungry ghosts and enabling them to be reborn in the realms of humans or gods: all these activities can be found in Mo Yan's work.

In the concluding section of Wei's essay, he turns to the new forms of Buddhism in China due to modernization and globalization. These new forms pursue "Humanistic Buddhism" that follow the inspirations of Taixu and seek the peaceful development of Chinese society and the furthering of the public good through charitable activities such as disaster relief and provision of good education for youth living in poverty. These Buddhist organizations also have websites to introduce their work to the broader public. It is estimated that in 2012 there were 538 Buddhist websites in China. Wei points out that this renewal of Buddhism in China today has contributed to Chinese culture. For example, Buddhist themes are now pursued in Chinese art and literature. One example is the award-winning "Dance of the Thousand-Armed Guanyin" performed by the China Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe at the 2004 Athens Olympics and Paralympics. Another is the film 天下無賊 (*A World without Thieves*), released in 2004, which sold over one hundred million tickets in China (see Mitchell, *Buddhism* [2008] 272). It is about a pair of lovers who were thieves but changed their lives for the better because, as the female lover said, "I am pregnant and want to improve my child's karma." This film reminds one of the tragic relationships that conclude Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, especially given the provocative title to chapter 55, "Lovemaking Positions," with its evocation of Tantric Buddhism's sexual ethics. Again, we see how knowing about these beliefs—about Guanyin Bodhisattva and karma—can provide a neces-

sary context for persons, both in China and elsewhere, to understand, appreciate, or even know what questions to ask about contemporary works of Chinese art and literature, such as the fiction of Mo Yan.

The third edition of *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*

In the third edition of the textbook, Mitchell added a new section to the China chapter on modern Chinese Buddhist movements and the book is co-authored with Sarah Jacoby (Northwestern University). This third edition has a number of firsts in textbooks on Buddhism: the textbook is the first on the topic to have a woman author, and it uses Pinyin rather than Wade-Giles for translating the sounds of Chinese characters into Latin script (while the latter matter may seem of little significance to some, it makes a social statement, much as does the use of US-American English in the Anglophone translations of Mo Yan's works by U.S. translator Howard Goldblatt).

For fully developed global and modern Chinese Buddhist movements, one has to look to Taiwan. The textbook used Wade-Giles and the name order popular globally only in this section in order for readers to find more information on these movements on the internet. Therefore, we do so in the following discussion. There are four major Buddhist movements in Taiwan sometimes called the "Four Kings of Taiwanese Buddhism." They include 1) Tzu Chi Compassion Relief Society (for these organizations, we follow their use of Wade-Giles), 2) Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order, 3) Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Organization, and 4) Chung Tai Shan Monastery. The latter is a more traditional form of Chan monasticism that has numerous Chan meditation centers around the world, including eight in the U.S. The other three are more influenced by Taixu's Humanistic Buddhism. They have centers all over the world, too, and have played a role in the revival of Buddhism in China today. This is a kind of reverse flow in the movement of Buddhism. The Three Kings of Buddhism in Taiwan have roots in China and spread to other countries where they developed their social engagement, and then brought that experience back to the source of their own roots, namely, to China. These kinds of multidirectional flows of Buddhism are key components of the new Global Buddhism. They also parallel the multidirectional literary influence so rightly noted about Mo Yan's work.

The Chinese chapter of the textbook presents in some depth the three humanist Buddhist organizations. Cheng Yen (證嚴) is sometimes called the Mother Teresa of Buddhism, in reference to the Roman Catholic nun who won the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize. Cheng leads the Tzu Chi Compassion Relief Association that includes a network of hospitals, free mobile clinics, schools and a university, and an international relief network. The latter has carried out relief efforts in many countries, including China. Its first activity in China was in 1991 after the terrible flooding in central and eastern China. More recently, it provided food, blankets, and medical

aid to survivors of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Tzu Chi now has over four million members and numerous centers throughout the world. Equally significant, they also have a publishing house that publishes books, magazines, and newspapers that share their values and cultural religious views with a broader audience. It is through this activity that persons in non-Asian countries can learn about the religious background of Chinese culture that is often expressed in contemporary Chinese literature. Literary scholars, especially those specializing in rhetoric and composition, are well aware that it is more accurate to say that online reading is replacing "reading," rather than the former lament that "reading" is diminishing among the younger generation. Hence, this mode of communicating Buddhism deserves attention.

The founder of Dharma Drum Mountain was Dongchu (東初), one of Taizu's disciples. When Dongchu moved to Taiwan, he founded the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture. Again, the focus was on teaching not only Buddhist doctrine but also culture and the arts. His Dharma heir was Sheng Yen (聖嚴), who built Dharma Drum Mountain, which includes a complex of monasteries, devotional temples, and educational centers. Dharma Drum has developed "six ethics of the mind," which present the traditional values of China in a modern and universal form: ethics for the family, school, environment, workplace, daily life, and a pluralistic society. Dharma Drum also has centers around the world where they express their values in different cultural settings while giving non-Chinese participants a better understanding of the Buddhist roots of Chinese culture.

Finally, we come to Fo Guang Shan to exemplify the recent developments of the ancient cultural component of religion. Leaving China for Taiwan, the founder Hsing Yun (星雲) decided not to propagate traditional Buddhism. Rather, given his experience of war and poverty and his study under Taizu, he wanted to revitalize Buddhism. He wanted to make it more responsive to the needs of the modern world. He created a modern form of Buddhism that teaches religious practice in ethical daily living while working for social change—building the Pure Land here on earth. He once wrote, "Master Taixu said that we can achieve Buddhahood only by fulfilling our humanity" (263). The globalization of this modernized form of Buddhism is carried out by its Buddha's Light International Society (BLIS). Here again the Buddhist roots of Chinese culture are emphasized. For example, next to the Fo Guang Shan complex is a massive new Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center. Besides the 108-meter-high statue of the Buddha, the eight multistory pagodas, and all the rich cultural artifacts within the buildings, there are murals on the walls of the complex. On the inside of the walls are murals of events in the life of the Buddha as understood in Chinese Buddhism. These murals are educational in that the stories they portray entail beliefs that are conveyed in Chinese literature and the arts. Also, on the outside of the walls are murals of stories and events in the history of Buddhism in China that also convey beliefs and values that are expressed in Chinese literature and the arts. As we shall see, this cultural educational style is also used in Fo Guang Shan centers around the world, thus providing a global vehicle for contextualizing the kind of fiction written by Mo Yan.

The globalization of Chinese Buddhist culture

Globalization is the result of a new interdependence of the cultures of the world owing to a number of factors such as global transportation, communication, and markets resulting in technological, economic, and social networks which transcend national and regional boundaries. The Internet and mass media have strongly influenced these networks as they penetrate the cultures of the world. In the past, cultures with their religions had geographical borders. Chinese Buddhist culture, for example, was primarily limited to China, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Globalization has allowed cultural boundaries to be penetrated by other cultures, creating global flows and interpenetration of religious ideas, practices, lineages, customs, literatures, and arts. In the past, there may have been different religions in a given society, but their relationships were fairly stable. Globalization has brought about new religious phenomena in all parts of the world. A new global pluralism of religions is now commonplace, and in it we find the globalization of Buddhism in general and Chinese Buddhism in particular.

This brief synopsis alone can go far in helping readers assess Mo Yan's depiction of specific characters correctly. For example, during a particularly violent scene in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, Shangguan Jintong hears his mother, Shangguan Lu, "utter loud prayers: Old Man in Heaven, Dear Lord, Blessed Virgin Mary, Guanyin Bodhisattva of the Southern Sea, please protect [my daughter] Niandi and all the children" (281). Readers are cautioned against reading this prayer as characterizing Lu as befuddled by the incredible trauma of the moment or as uneducated. Such blendings of various religious beliefs are part and parcel of all religions, especially so during the age of globalization. Indeed, Lu's knowledge of the major figures of folk religions, Christianity, and Buddhism attest to her transcultural awareness of various traditions that have made their way into even her small town in the Shandong Province.

In terms of Chinese Buddhism, the textbook presents how the different Buddhist traditions from India entered new cultural settings in China over a period of centuries, blending with concepts and values of Chinese culture. However, the globalization of Buddhism during the past half-century or so has been rapid and worldwide, with international and interregional flows producing Buddhist networks through which influence and change happens in all directions. What happens in Chinese Buddhist communities in one country can influence and shape what develops in Chinese Buddhist communities in other parts of the world; and these latter developments can in turn flow back to the country that originated them in the first place. This fact is in part due to how globalization enables any Buddhist group to become internationalized, to found temples, Dharma centers, and local communities in countries far from the group's place of origin. In doing so, Buddhist groups adapt by tailoring teachings to multiple cultures at the same time. This kind of globalization is something new in the history of the world (for an overview of this phenomenon, see Csordas).

When scholars of Buddhism first wrote about the flows of Buddhism outside Asia, they often used the term "West." They spoke about the "Westernization of Buddhism," the "Western transformation of Buddhism," "Buddhism in the West," or just "Western Buddhism." However, the "West" is not just a geographical term. It is used to refer to the "First World," namely, Western Europe, North America, and Australia, to the exclusion of not only Asia in the East but also Africa and South America in the South. In a broader sense, "West" refers to countries that are developed, urbanized, secular, and capitalist. The Second World and Third World are left out. Scholars today note that the globalization of Buddhism actually includes a diversity of non-Asian countries from "first" to "third" with the result being Global Buddhism. Further, the notion of "Buddhism in the West" implied one-directional flows of Asian Buddhism to the West, where it was modified to fit Western cultures. However, today scholars have shown that many modern forms of Asian Buddhism have developed due to colonialist incursions into Asia, or later non-Asian influences in Asia. This phenomenon produced a kind of "modern Buddhism" that has been exported to non-Asian countries only to be repackaged and returned to Asia and to other regions of the non-Asian world. For example, books written by Asian intellectuals influenced by the West, like D. T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series*, present a spiritualized, universalized, and purified Buddhism focusing on meditation and enlightenment, not on specific cultural beliefs, practices, devotions, rituals, rites, and ancestor worship stressed by traditional Asian Buddhism. This modern Buddhism in turn has had influence in parts of Asia and has become popular in many countries outside Asia. It was also easier to modify to fit different cultural situations since it left the original Asian cultures behind. Outside of Asia, this kind of sterilized modern Buddhism became known as "convert Buddhism" since it was not practiced by Asian communities. The latter kind of Buddhism became known as "immigrant Buddhism." What is interesting about the globalization of Chinese Buddhism from Taiwan is that, unlike reified "modern Buddhism," it does bring Chinese culture with it, and it is taken up by not just Chinese persons living in non-Asian countries but also by persons indigenous to those countries, too. The concluding chapter of the third edition of the textbook presents how Chinese Buddhism has spread to other countries and has educated non-Asian practitioners from those countries in the cultural aspects of China that are rooted in Buddhism. These involve inclusive cultural events that possess a particularly artistic bent.

Fo Guang Shan's Greater Boston Buddhist Cultural Center (GBBCC), for example, opened in 1999: today about half of their members are Euro-Americans. Their mission is to "express Buddhist teachings through cultural activities." This is the mission of almost all of the Fo Guang Shan centers around the world. They have educational courses and cultural events including Chinese art exhibitions, classes in the Chinese language, literature, crafts, painting, calligraphy, and flower arranging. In these cultural events and classes, the centers present the Buddhist ideas and prac-

tices that are behind different kinds of Chinese cultural expressions. The GBCC has cultural outreach programs to public schools and student tours of their Center. Outreach to schools includes talks about Buddhism and Chinese culture. When students visit the center, they are taught calligraphy and shown the cultural artifacts and worship areas in the center. They have a regional summer camp for older youth. It is through these kinds of cultural activities that Fo Guang Shan brings to the U.S. and other countries an understanding and appreciation for the Buddhist heritage of China expressed in its present-day literature.

Another example is from Africa—a place that one does not think of as a site for Buddhist missions outside of Asia. In 1992, when Fo Guang Shan decided that the best activity they could do in Africa was to work with orphans, they founded the Amitofo Care Center organization, with a base in South Africa for this work. The first orphanage was established in Malawi with living quarters, a pre-school, an elementary school, a medical center, an activity center, and a vocational training center. The children live in "family units" with sixteen to twenty children, a caregiver, cook, and teacher. New orphanages are now in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, and Lesotho. Fo Guang Shan expects to open orphanages in all countries in Africa. In order to support this effort, Fo Guang Shan has opened an African Buddhist Seminary in South Africa. It has around three hundred Africans from different counties in training for two to three years at no cost. When they complete their training, they can choose to return home to work with centers there, or they can work at the orphanages. This seminary project has enabled Fo Guang Shan to staff its existing orphanages and to open ones in countries of its newer seminarians. The cultural training of the seminarians is central. While Fo Guang Shan inculturates itself in the African cultures, it also teaches Chinese Buddhism and its cultural expressions.

We can see in these two examples how global flows of traditional Chinese Buddhism into other countries bring about an adaption of ancient lineages to the conditions of contemporary non-Asian cultures. Innovations by Chinese Buddhist communities repackage Chinese cultural expressions in ways that speak to non-Asian cultures and provide more global understanding and appreciation for contemporary Chinese culture. The global spread of Chinese Buddhism today presents us with a fascinating story of the global weaving of new intercultural threads.

"The Cultural Experience of Buddhism in America Today"

At the end of the final chapter in the textbook is an essay entitled "A Cultural Experience of Buddhism in America Today" by Heng Sure (恆實) from the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery (410-15). Heng Sure points out that elements of Chinese Buddhist culture are replicated by immigrant communities in the U.S. *O-Bon* festivals that are celebrated in Japantowns. Chinese Buddhist organizations and temples like the ones mentioned previously celebrate the Buddha's birthday and other festivals, hold

classes on Chinese Buddhist culture, and provide cultural sites, events, and activities for the general public. He then speaks about how a typical U.S. resident is affected by these popular cultural elements of Chinese Buddhism. Heng Sure grew up in the Midwest as a Methodist named Christopher R. Clowery (his birth name). He not only came to understand and appreciate Chinese culture but also converted to Buddhism and joined a Chinese order of monks. The present discussion is not interested in this kind of religious journey but in the ways in which the globalization of Chinese Buddhism has given persons around the world a context in which they can better understand contemporary Chinese literature. Heng Sure goes a bit further: he presents in his essay a connection between both his heritage culture (the U.S. culture of his birth) and his adopted culture (the Chinese culture of his choice), neither of which is forfeited. Some of his insights may be valuable to U.S. readers who not only want to understand what a Chinese author is saying about certain Buddhist beliefs and values but also compare them to the beliefs and values of U.S. culture. Such comparative religious exploration parallels with comparative literature in ways that can intersect and thereby engage in a deep level of comparative cultural studies.

We take two examples that often appear in Mo Yan's works: bowing or kowtowing and holding out a food bowl. Bowing is a pervasive practice in Chinese Buddhist culture. This is not part of U.S. culture and at first feels forced and uncomfortable. But the value here is a humble respect for others and for cultivating a nature that creates relatedness and care. It eliminates pride and makes room for connection and fellowship. Heng points out that for him this resonated with values that are part of U.S. culture informed not by Buddhism but by Christianity. Without advocating religiosity, many of Mo Yan's literary representations of bowing demonstrate the compulsion rather than joyous willingness to which this originally enlightening practice has degenerated at particular historical moments in twentieth-century China. Mo Yan's organization of material is often stunning by the ease with which he reflects the seamlessness of the religious and political under the umbrella of the cultural or literary. In *Sandalwood Death*, the fictional but verisimilar ritual of the executioners starts with lighting sandalwood incense, asking for the blessing of the "Patriarch" spirit, then kowtowing: he "went on down on his knees ... banged his head loudly against the brick floor." Then, after sacrificing a rooster, the narrator explains that he joins in and "[we] fell to our knees, and kowtowed three times" (38). Hours later, at the announcement of the entry of "His Majesty the Emperor!" the myriads of assembled women, eunuchs, and officials "sank to the ground" to kowtow (40). The mirrored enactment evinces and reinforces the hierarchical organization of both the spiritual and political system.

Another aspect is monks walking with alms-bowls through the streets. At first this might look like begging, but the deeper meaning is what is called being "fields of blessings." That is, the monks provide the laypeople the opportunity to practice generosity to a person in need of food. Such an act of loving care for those in need

brings that person blessings. Heng Sure saw in this Buddhist custom a value that also resonates with the U.S. religious-based cultural value of helping those in need. Mo Yan provides numerous images of a character holding out a bowl, assuming at least a Chinese readership that will understand how the image reverberates with this common sight. At times, the image is used for comic effect, as when children are overly but charmingly greedy; at other times, however, it is used for tragic effect, as in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, when the already-paltry food rationing of six ounces is reduced to four ounces, and a number of starving females are reduced to trading sex for food from officials. The juxtaposition of the origins of the begging bowl and this image is indeed part of Mo Yan's artistic acumen that might go unnoticed by those unaware of the practices of Chinese Buddhism.

One could argue that the breadth of outreach of Chinese Buddhism on a global scale is narrow, providing only a few readers of contemporary Chinese fiction with a Buddhist contextual understanding of contemporary Chinese literature. However, the demographics tell a different story. Besides the Taiwan Buddhist movements described earlier, two large modern movements from Japan, the Rissho Kosei-kai and Soka Gakkai International, have a strong presence around the world today. Much of their beliefs and cultural forms relate to the Chinese Tiantai tradition. From Korea has come a new movement called Won Buddhism. And from Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing has become popular, with 160 centers in Europe alone. Admitting and analytically exploring cultural overlap among countries that have fought violently over erstwhile geographical overlaps is a much more difficult pursuit in real life than it reads on the page. Scholars and citizens are invited to be humble about the influence they believe they can wield through their endeavors. Yet, with such humility, coupled with some knowledge of cultural and religious traditions, they may at least chronicle these developments and silently applaud positive ones wherever they crop up. Besides these newer movements, the more traditional forms of Chinese Buddhism or other national or regional forms of Buddhism influenced by China have developed a global presence. Chinese Buddhists arrived in Canada in the 1850s and were followed by Japanese Buddhists in the 1880s. Chinese immigrants have been in Australia and New Zealand since the mid-1800s, followed by Japanese and later by Koreans. Today, almost 7% of the New Zealand population is Buddhist and of these, 20% is Euro-New Zealanders. In Latin America, Buddhism goes back to the 1920s when Japanese immigrants arrived. At the start of the twenty-first century, Buddhism is the second largest religion in Brazil, with a strong cultural influence in the country. Sri Lankan Buddhists immigrated to Africa in the early twentieth century. They were followed later by Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese forms of Buddhism. While influence there is still small, it is growing owing to connections to East Asian Buddhist communities in Europe, especially France and Germany.

In the U.S., the first Chinese Buddhist temple was built in San Francisco in 1853. Twenty years later, there were hundreds of such temples in the West.

With changes to the immigration laws in the 1960s, traditional Chinese Buddhist communities experienced a large influx from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. By 2000 there were over two hundred Chinese Buddhist communities in the U.S. We have seen the same kind of growth with Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese Buddhism. Most of these communities have outreach programs presenting East Asian Buddhist culture to Euro-Americans. As it turns out, then, the thousands of students who have read the China chapter in *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*, mostly U.S. natives, have in fact been learning about some threads of their own heritage no matter where in the world they have come from. They have also inadvertently been gaining the methodologies and knowledge base that can aid them in appreciating their own literature and Chinese literature in a more capacious way than they would have otherwise. One can see that as more modern Chinese literature is being translated and read by non-Asian readers, there are also more Chinese or Chinese-related resources available to provide firsthand experience of the religious contexts of what is being presented in this growing literature. As more university students take courses in religious studies and Asian studies, they gain the knowledge needed to understand better contemporary novels written by Chinese authors such as Mo Yan.

Mo Yan's Wise Monk Lan and Pastor Malory

Our analysis of two of Mo Yan's characters shows how some knowledge of global religions yields richer interpretations of contemporary literary works: Wise Monk Lan in *POW!* and the Swedish Pastor Malory in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*. In *POW!* Wise Monk Lan possesses the major characteristics associated with Buddhism: serenity, silence, and physical austerity. The monk is introduced as "wearing a cassock that looks like it's made of rain-soaked toilet paper, which will crumble at the slightest touch, he fingers a string of purple prayer beads. Flies have settled on the Wise Monk's earlobes, but on his shaved head or oily face" (2) and is described often in such phrases as sitting "in a repose greater than the Horse Spirit behind him" (100). But the introduction is also infused with accurate references to the monk's wide-ranging experiences in the mundane world. He is someone "who has roamed the four corners of the earth, his whereabouts always a mystery, but who is, for the moment, living in an abandoned little temple" (2). Nonetheless, the amazon.com description of Wise Monk Lan as a "benign old monk" ignores his unusual form of "qigong breathing exercise" ("*POW!*" <<http://www.amazon.com/Pow-Mo-Yan/dp/0857420763>>). Qigong is a Chinese practice found in both Daoism and Buddhism, especially in the martial arts associated with Buddhism, and today some Chinese Buddhist groups outside Asia present it in their cultural classes having to do with health. In Qigong, breath, movement, and awareness align to cultivate and balance qi, or life energy, but the Wise Monk practices it in

"a unique way" (75): "Folding up his body, he takes his *penis* in his *mouth* and rolls round on his wide bed like a wind-up toy with a taut spring. Steam rises from his shaved head in seven distinct colors. At first, I didn't think much of his trifling exercise regimen, but when I tried it I realized that rolling round on the bed is no big deal, nor is folding up my body that way, but taking my penis in my mouth—now that's a challenge" (75).

One wonders if Mo Yan is responding here to the new interest in Tantric Buddhism in China as presented in Mitchell's textbook. While this is not a Buddhist practice by any means, the sexual element reminds one of Buddhist Tantra. Wise Monk Lan's combination of his worldly travels and this practice aligns with the Buddhist temple god featured in the novel, the Wutong Spirit, the Meat God. The god of Wise Monk's temple is also highly sexualized. The narrator describes the large idol of the Wutong Spirit as follows: "First the face—a captivating face—then the neck—the spot where the human and horse necks ingeniously meet evokes seductive eroticism—and then lower, stopping at the unnaturally large genitals—testicles the size of papayas and a half-exposed penis that looks like a laundry paddle emerging from a red sheath" (173). The sexuality of Mo Yan's monk and Meat God is consistent with the earliest representations of divine beings. T. Patrick Burke notes that one of the earliest stone carvings of a pre-Vedic god has "buffalo horns rising out of his head, a fierce look on his face, sitting nude in what can only be the posture of a yogi, with a prominent phallus, the symbol of sexual potency, and surrounded by wild animals" (18). That sexuality represents potency and promise for the future and thus figures for religion itself.

This characteristic retains and develops with the character of Pastor Malory in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*. With Lu, Pastor Malory fathers twins: son Jingtong and daughter Yunu. With the Muslim woman, he also fathers another son, who grows up to be a pastor as well. The main narrator Jingtong meets his half-brother at the very conclusion of the novel, described in a way that speaks to great characteristics of religion: "introductions were unnecessary, because even before she spoke our names, God had already revealed our origins to one another. This bastard son of Pastor Malory and a Muslim woman, my half brother, wrapped his hairy arms around me and held me tight. With tears filling his eyes, he said: 'I have been waiting for you for a very long time, my brother!'" (532). Religious studies scholars will recognize the novel's surprise ending as integrating the foundational, mythic ideal of human brotherhood found in the texts of many traditions. It coordinates in the Judeo-Christian tradition with the story of Joseph, who embraces his brother despite the brothers having left him for dead years ago, crying "*I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt*" (Genesis 45.5). This mythic moment is as numbing for readers as it is for Jingtong. Pastor Malory had strongly embraced China, learning the language and fighting for citizens, both those who were members of his congregation and those who were not. Yet, he departs from practicing regulations for Christian clergy in engaging in sex

with the Muslim woman and Lu, and for all Christians, in committing suicide. His transgressions, however, are assuaged narratively by the overwhelmingly positive nature of the concluding reunion, so welcome after the devastation of the Lu family and of the rural township. In *Jingtong* and the younger Pastor Malory is the expression of past romantic relationships and of the physical and mental strength of both sons to survive: this is the promise of a future that combines the two major Western-founded religions of Islam and Christianity into the East.

Similarly, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* also presents the coming of Western religions into Asia and their new growth in China, especially Christianity. The background provided by that textbook as well as other nonfiction books under the keywords "religious studies" and "Asian studies" would at least enable readers of Mo Yan's novels to understand the religious roots of all major writings. This is not the case with just Mo Yan or just Buddhism. What Joanna Brooks writes of Christianity can be said of Buddhism and all other major religions: "Remembering the worldliness of religion is especially important" (951). The contextualization of contemporary Chinese literature for non-Chinese readers is certainly being expanded by scholarly textbooks as well as by cultural courses, expositions, lectures, and exhibits in Chinese Buddhist centers around the world. Looking at comparative literature in general, we can see that Frye was correct in saying that sacred texts and the traditions that express those texts pervade art and literature. In the globalization of the modern world, a global vision of world religions is important to contextualize our understanding of world literatures.

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