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Sounding Shanghai: Sinophone Intermediality in Jin Yucheng's *Blossoms*[*]

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Abstract

This paper examines the reconstruction of Shanghaineseness through intermedial experiments in Jin Yucheng's Mao Dun Literature Prize-winning story *Blossoms* (繁花 *Fan Hua*, 2013). The story, which originally featured a heavy use of idioms from Shanghainese, was initially serialized on *longdang.org* in 2011. It went through multiple revisions and took its current shape as a book-length novel one year after being published in *Harvest* in 2012. During the revisions, the author significantly altered the component of *fangyan* expressions in order to speak to a broader Sinophone readership. In the first section, I discuss the incorporation of features of Internet literature in the book by tracing the cross-media adaptation of the story with regard to the choice of languages and the use of aural elements. In the second section, I focus on Jin's integration of interactive storytelling strategies borrowed from the Wu *fangyan* literature and culture, and how the use of the online medium made it possible to disrupt the linear construction of history. Finally, I situate Jin's story within the network of Sinophone cultures to see how he re-enacts contemporary representations of Shanghai through cinematic aesthetics evident in Sinophone cinema from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In all three aspects, rendering sounds and voices in written forms plays a crucial role in the narrative. Through intermedial practices that reinvoke linguistic, literary, and cultural traditions in *fangyan* and Sinophone cinematic aesthetics, *Blossoms* challenges the linearization of history in the PRC's official history writing and reconstructs Shanghaineseness through a process of reshaping that involves sounds, voices, and lived experiences of the city of Shanghai.

Keywords

intermediality, Internet literature, cross-media adaptation, Wu *fangyan*, Sinophone cinema

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Introduction

Since its publication, Jin Yucheng's 金宇澄 *Fan Hua* 繁花 (*Blossoms*, 2013) has won many prestigious literary awards in China, including the Mao Dun Literature Prize (茅盾文學獎 *Mao Dun wenxue jiang*) in 2015.[1] Jin Yucheng was born Jin Shushu 金舒舒 in 1952 Shanghai. After eight years of living in Heilongjiang Province as a "sent-down youth" (知青 *zhiqing*) during the Cultural Revolution, Jin became an editor of and contributor to *Shanghai Literature* (上海文學 *Shanghai wenxue*) magazine in the late 1980s, and published novellas, short stories, and essays. In 1987, he was awarded the Shanghai Literature Prize, and joined the Chinese Writers Association (中國作家協會 *Zhongguo zuojia xiehui*) the following year. Since then, he has been better known for his role as an editor for *Shanghai Literature*, and less well-known for his creative writing.

In 2011, Jin started posting short passages on the predominantly Shanghainese-speaking website, *longdang.org*, using the screen name "Going Up to an Attic Alone" (獨上閣樓 *Dushang gelou*).[2] According to the author, there were between twenty to thirty readers who regularly commented on the thread ("Wo xie *Fan Hua*" ["I Write *Blossoms*"] 4). They made requests to the author to write more about particular districts in Shanghai, or to expand on specific historical periods. Jin would then tailor the story to cater to the requests of his readers. The daily posts continued for over six months under the thread titled, "It Is Best to Go Up to an Attic Alone at Night (獨上閣樓，最好是夜裡 *Dushang gelou, zuihao shi yeli*)" ("I Write Blossoms" 4). The serialization immediately caught the attention of mainstream literary critics. In 2012, *Shou Huo* 收穫 (*Harvest*) invited Jin to revise and publish the story in its fall and winter issue designed for novels.[3] The following year, Jin expanded the story into a

[1] Other literary prizes include: 2012 Chinese Fiction Institute First Prize in the category of Novel (中國小說學會中國小說排行榜長篇小說第一名 *Zhongguo xiaoshuo xuehui Zhongguo xiaoshuo paihangbang changpian xiaoshuo diyi ming*), 2013 Lu Xun Culture Prize Annual Book Prize (魯迅文化獎年度小說 *Lu Xun wenhua jiang niandu xiaoshuo*), and 2013 Sinophone Literature and Media Prize (華語文學傳媒大獎 *Huayu wenxue chuanmei dajiang*). A full list of prizes can be found at Shanghai Writers Website: <http://www.shzuojia.com/zhuanti/2015fanhua/index.html>.

[2] "Longdang" is the transliteration of the term 弄堂 in Shanghainese. It refers to interconnected lanes that form residential communities in Shanghai. The *longdang.org* website has been shut down multiple times due to censorship and financial and technical issues since 2011. On May 2, 2017, the owner of the website decided to move it to Wechat and Sina Microblog because of their relatively low cost of maintenance. See Duanduan.

[3] The transition from online serialization to the *Harvest* edition marks a critical move from online medium to print form. Based on the *Harvest* edition, the book edition further incorporated

one-volume novel, published by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House (上海文藝出版社 *Shanghai wenyi chubanshe*). While the basic plot remains unchanged, the story went through a dozen major revisions that involved the choice of languages, the shift of narrative voice, as well as the inclusion of visual supplements such as maps, illustrations, and sheet music.[4]

The general plot of the book revolves around a group of Shanghai urbanites, Husheng (滬生), Abao (阿寶), and Xiaomao (小毛), who were all born after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The protagonists dwell in the downtown area of Shanghai from the end of the 1950s to the end of the 1990s. Their stories are split into two streams of narratives, one following their childhood during the Cultural Revolution, and the other following their adulthood during the Reform and Opening Up period. The dual narratives appear in alternating chapters. Despite their different family and class backgrounds, the three characters form friendships because of their geographical proximity, shared childhood experiences, and a similar series of changes that occurred in their lives alongside historical events in and outside China. The life of each character branches out into various areas of Shanghai, forming an intricate network of people from all walks of life. Overall, the story, not unlike many cases of Internet literature in China, provides a linear experience of reading. However, as Michel Hockx observes, rather than featuring nonlinearity as its point of departure from printed books, Internet literature in China can "have innovative characteristics that pose unusual challenges . . . using conventional methods" without being nonlinear (7). In the case of Jin Yucheng's *Blossoms*, innovative characteristics are evident in his use of Sinophone intermediality to challenge the linearization of history in the PRC's official account of history.

Here, I define Sinophone intermediality as the integration of media such as Internet writing, oral performance, film, and so on in traditionally defined media such as print literature. The Sinophone refers to "a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness" (Shih, *Visuality and Identity* 4). Current Sinophone studies center on literature and culture outside Mainland China, or in non-Han cultures such as those of Tibet and Xinjiang. I find

literariness and visual supplements. For the purpose of this paper, I focus on the online and the book editions because of their distinctive methods of media appropriation. In terms of comparison of all three editions, see Zeng, "Locality Production," who points out that the author changed the name of the protagonist Mr. Ni (膩先生) to Husheng (滬生) (literally "born in Shanghai") first in the *Harvest* edition, indicating his attempt to tell a story of an average Shanghai citizen.

[4] According to the author, the online serialization amounts to approximately 380,000 words; the *Harvest* edition has approximately 290,000 words; and the book edition totals approximately 350,000 words ("I Write *Blossoms*" 4).

the model also useful in understanding the marginalized position of cultural practices in languages other than Mandarin Chinese within Mainland China. Drawing upon the specificity of each medium in Sinophone cultures, one is able to constitute a porous, flexible, and interactive cultural product that urges the audience to reconsider the concept of Chineseness from the perspective of the local. While traditional print culture tends to privilege the visual and semantic aspects of the Chinese language(s), intermedial practices enable the author to bring forth the sonic and phonetic aspects unique to the multifaceted, place-based, and often marginalized Sinophone cultures in conjunction with the former.

In this essay, I examine the role of Sinophone intermediality in Jin Yucheng's reconstruction of Shanghaineseness. In the first section, I discuss the incorporation of features of Internet literature in the book by tracing the cross-media adaptation of the story with regard to the choice of languages and the use of sonic elements. In the second section, I focus on Jin's integration of interactive storytelling strategies borrowed from Wu *fangyan* literature and culture in conjunction with the online medium's ability to disrupt the linearization of history in the PRC's official account of history. Finally, I situate Jin's story within the network of Sinophone cultures to see how he re-enacts contemporary representations of Shanghai through cinematic aesthetics evident in Sinophone cinema from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In all three aspects, rendering sounds and voices in written forms to the readers plays a crucial role in the storytelling and determines the narrative strategies Jin uses. I argue that, through intermedial practices that reinvoke literary and cultural traditions in *fangyan* and Sinophone cinematic aesthetics, *Blossoms* challenges the linearization of history in the PRC's official history writing and reconstructs Shanghaineseness shaped by the sounds, voices, and lived experiences of the city of Shanghai.

Sound and Script: Creating a Model for Writing in *Fangyan*

Announced by its author as having been written in a "Shanghainese mode of thinking" (上海話思維 *Shanghaihua siwei*), *Blossoms* is appealing to both general readers and literary critics primarily because of its distinct linguistic and narrative style ("Jin Yucheng zhuanfang" n. pag.). Although the plot and characters provide critical density and complexity worthy of critical acclaims, the use of Shanghainese components is what distinguishes the story from other contemporary novels about Shanghai, and consequently becomes the selling point of the book. In this section, I explore how the book offers one way of articulating the voices of Shanghai through the incorporation of features of Internet literature. In particular, online serialization

allowed Jin to highlight the aurality of Chinese characters through references to practices in *fangyan* literature (方言文學) as well as *fangyan* expressions, grammar, and syntax shared by online communities. In the book edition, the author completed a transformation from Shanghainese as a sound to Shanghainese as a mode of thinking.

The term *fangyan*, variously translated as dialect, topolect, or regional language,[5] is different from the definition of a dialect in the Indo-European language family. Dialects of the Chinese language are mutually unintelligible. The differences among dialects in China is similar to those among different European languages.[6] Many languages in Southern China, such as Shanghainese, Cantonese, and Hokkien, are categorized as dialects for political purposes in modern China. By positioning these languages as dialects of Mandarin Chinese, the state projects a seemingly coherent national identity to its citizens and the outside world. In this essay, I use *fangyan* to refer to regional languages in Chinese.

Writing in *fangyan* is not new to Shanghai literature. In the late Qing period (1850-1911), courtesan novels (狹邪小說 *xiaxie xiaoshuo*) such as *Haishanghua liezhuan* 海上花列傳 (*The Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai*, 1892) and *Jiuwei Gui* 九尾龜 (*The Nine-Tailed Turtle*, 1910) feature *fangyan* as the primary language used by courtesans in dialogues.[7] Han Bangqing (韓邦慶), the author of *Sing-Song Girls*, saw his use of the Wu language (吳語 *wuyu*) as equivalent to the use of the Beijing language (京語 *jingyu*) in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (See Hu 4). During the May Fourth Movement, *fangyan* and *fangyan* literature were viewed as a critical component of the Vernacular Movement (白話文運動 *baihuawen yundong*) against classical Chinese language. May Fourth writers such as Lu Xun (魯迅), Hu Shih (胡適), and Liu Fu (劉復) reintroduced novels written in Wu *fangyan* to the public and recognized their literary achievements.[8] However, as Wang Hui states, "the vernacular was proposed primarily as a written language and the issue of dialect

[5] For a discussion of Chinese dialects from a linguistic approach, see Mair.

[6] Major differences lie in the pronunciation, some vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Some dialects, such as Cantonese and Hokkien, have developed writing systems. However, the degree of standardization varies across region. For linguistic studies of Chinese dialects, see DeFrancis; Qian, *Shanghai fangyan*; Snow; Ding.

[7] For a discussion of late Qing courtesan novels, see David Der-wei Wang.

[8] Along with the Folk Song Campaign (五四歌謠運動 *Wusi geyao yundong*) in the 1910s and 1920s, Hu Shih wrote the foreword to the new edition of *The Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai* in 1926 and complimented the novel as the first masterpiece of the Wu *fangyan* literature. The same year, Lu Xun and Liu Fu annotated and wrote the foreword and the postscript to the new edition of Zhang Nanzhuang's 張南莊 *He Dian* (何典), written in Songjiang dialect of the Wu *fangyan* family.

pronunciation went basically untouched" during the New Culture Movement (117). *Fangyan* and *fangyan* literature were recognized as a resource for the vocabulary of the new modern language only under the premise that linguistic unity and national identity be prioritized. The mass language discussion in the 1930s and the national forms debate in the 1940s further linked regional languages with class identity and regional particularity as opposed to a national identity and laid the foundation for language policies since 1949.[9] "The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Use of Chinese Languages and Chinese Characters" that took effect January 1, 2001 further discouraged the uses of *fangyan* in mass media. Creative and artistic use of *fangyan* are mainly to be found in oral performances such as stand-up comedy, Shanghai opera, and film and television.

On the other hand, writers from Shanghai such as Zhang Ailing (張愛玲 Eileen Chang) and Wang Anyi (王安憶) tend to choose vernacular Chinese based on Mandarin as their narrative language.[10] Although elements of regional languages are widely adopted in speeches and dialogues to enhance local flavor, the use of *fangyan* for narrative language is rare in their writing.[11] Therefore, despite efforts to redeem the value of *fangyan* and *fangyan* literature, *fangyan* literature in Shanghai remained a limited circulation and marginal recognition due to the disadvantages of written Chinese in capturing sound and the lack of a standardized writing system for Shanghainese since the late Qing period. Given the socio-political background of writing in *fangyan*, writers inevitably face two challenges should they decide to use *fangyan* as the narrative language in traditional print media. One is the lack of standardization, and the other is limited readership.[12]

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[9] For a detailed account of language policies, literary movements, and intellectual debates over dialects and new national language, see Liu.

[10] Zhang Ailing highly praised *Sing-Song Girls* and translated it into Mandarin and English to global readers in the 1980s when she was in the United States. However, her own novels and short stories were primarily written in vernacular Chinese based on Mandarin, with sporadic phrases in Shanghainese. Wang Anyi refers to Shanghainese as "a crude language." See Wang Anyi.

[11] Besides Zhang and Wang, Shanghai writers such as Cheng Naishan (程乃珊) and Wang Xiaoying (王小鷹) frequently incorporate *fangyan* expressions in their writing. Looking beyond Shanghai literature, Mo Yan (莫言), Wang Shuo (王碩), Han Shaogong (韓少功), Yan Lianke (閻連科), to name just a few, also practice writing with significant *fangyan* elements.

[12] In 2008, Qian Nairong (錢乃榮), professor of Chinese linguistics at Shanghai University, compiled a dictionary of Shanghainese (*Shanghaihua da cidian* 上海話大詞典 [*Shanghainese Dictionary*]). His method combines transliteration and transcription. When the terms in *fangyan* lack a written form, he transliterates the terms into Mandarin. When the terms have corresponding written forms, he transcribes the term through the Chinese Pinyin system. Despite the academic and

In the new millennium, online forums are relatively free spaces for writers and artists to articulate themselves in *fangyan*.[13] Internet literature, rap songs, and short videos in Shanghainese surged on the Internet, opening up possibilities for a spontaneous, unsystematic writing system of Shanghainese to emerge. In the case of Jin Yucheng's online serialization and printed book, the choice of languages reflects the author's understanding of and engagement with both online participatory culture and print media. This strategy resolves the challenges to traditional print media regarding *fangyan*. Jin employed colloquial expressions and transliteration of terms in *fangyan* that appeared in literary works or were shared in online communities. He also created his own ways to transliterate uncommon Shanghainese phrases through Mandarin pronunciation of Chinese characters. The appropriation of Mandarin pronunciation for writing in Shanghainese marks a deterritorialization of the former from its conventional space (print media). In order to fully understand the meaning of each phrase, readers have to rely on the pronunciation of Mandarin in addition to their knowledge of Shanghainese. The bilingual prerequisite further narrows down the potential readership, forging an exclusive online community that is able to read and respond in a similarly coded language.

The emphasis on transliteration and the phonetic aspect of written Chinese among netizens is particularly successful in facilitating a new narrative voice. Online readers not only recognize common expressions of Shanghainese shared in *fangyan* literature and online, but they also understand the author's rules in creating new phrases through transliteration, turning the reading process into an acoustic experience—one that involves sounding out the words from the screen, and figuring out the exact meaning based on the sound. It is through this interactive practice that Jin gradually found his own rhythm and tempo in writing.

Once the online serialization migrated to printed form, the author did not simply reproduce the past online practices. A major shift from the online edition to the book version is a series of changes from the sound-based usage of written Chinese into a

historical value of this project, his writing system has had a limited influence on the mass media and everyday life of Shanghai people.

[13] The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China (SAPPRFT 國家廣播電影電視總局 *Guojia guangbo dianying dianshi zongju*) controls these media through supervision and censorship of the form and the content. While the use of *fangyan* is discouraged in mass media for the sake of reaching out to a nationwide audience and maintaining political and cultural unity, the Internet provides a low-cost forum where individuals are able to publish and respond to contents in *fangyan* as long as they do not concern two taboo topics: criticism of the censors and pornography. See Hockx 11.

written language that is highly influenced by grammar and syntax of Shanghainese tailored for readers without any knowledge of Shanghainese. The book version keeps the basic narrative style and sentence structure. Jin replaced many personal pronouns, question particles, and prepositions with those in vernacular Chinese that are more familiar to a general audience.[14] However, he kept certain verbs and nouns in Shanghainese that are less frequently used in vernacular Chinese.[15] He also replaced many previously transliterated terms with homonyms that have connotations closer to their meanings in Shanghainese.[16] Occasionally, when the same term refers to different things in Shanghainese and vernacular Chinese, he replaced the term with another mutually acceptable term.[17] These changes shifted the focus on the pronunciation of Shanghainese to the semantic and syntactic aspects of the language. As a result, any reader with literacy in Chinese would be able to understand the basic plot, while Shanghainese speakers would be able to spot the unconventional usage derived from Shanghainese. Nevertheless, since the narrative language cannot be easily categorized as either vernacular Chinese or Shanghainese, it draws readers' attention to the intentional use of the regional language.

Along with the shift from sound-based writing to grammar and sentence structure, the narrator also draws readers' attention to the languages spoken by the characters in the book version. For instance, in many conversations during dinner banquets, the narrator would meticulously record the languages of each character. In addition to conversations in Shanghainese, Jin also points out Northern language (北方話 *beifanghua*),[18] Taiwanese Mandarin (國語 *guoyu*), Subei language (蘇北話 *subeihua*), accented Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, and so on. While readers cannot

[14] For example, for personal pronouns, he used 你 *ni*, 他/她 *ta* and 我們 *women* instead of 儂 *nong*, 伊 *yi* and 阿拉 *ala* for you, he/she, and we; for question particle, he used 嗎 *ma* instead of 伐 *fa*; for prepositions, he used 在 *zai* instead of 了勒 *lele* for at.

[15] For example, for verbs, he used 吃 *chi* instead of 喝 *he* for drink; for nouns, he used 事體 *shiti* instead of 事情 *shiqing* for things. Both 吃 and 事體 are understandable to vernacular Chinese readers, although they are not conventional expressions.

[16] For instance, the term *xiaqi* (meaning: quite, very) has been transliterated as 邪氣 (*xieqi*, meaning: evil influence or evil force) since the 1930s. Jin replaced 邪 with 霞 (meaning: rosy cloud around the sun) to modify "beautiful" (霞氣漂亮 *xiaqi piaoliang*) because of "its colorful connotation" ("I Write *Blossoms*" 5).

[17] For example, the term 爺 is most commonly used to refer to one's father in Shanghainese. In the general context, however, it means one's grandfather. In this case, Jin used 爸, a less common term for father adopted in Shanghainese under the influence of Mandarin usage, to denote father.

[18] In place of *Putonghua* (普通話), Mandarin spoken in Mainland China, Jin uses Northern Language (北方話) as opposed to Shanghainese (a Southern language) and *Guoyu* (國語), Mandarin spoken in Taiwan, probably to avoid confusion, and also to position Mandarin on the same level as Shanghainese.

hear Shanghainese by reading the book version aloud as they did with the online version, nevertheless they can imagine the polyphonic conversations through verbal descriptions in the book. This change demonstrates the author's attempt to address a wider Sinophone readership who lack the knowledge of Shanghainese. The online serialization prepared the author for developing a narrative voice that is based on Shanghainese pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Without this early "exercise," Jin would not have been able to carry out his literary experiments in a 400-page novel. Meanwhile, the cross-media adaptation opens the possibility of representing voices that are not just in regional languages, providing a model for writing in *fangyan* in contemporary Chinese literature.

Retelling the (Hi)story: Oral Tradition and Fiction Writing

The online serialization not only laid the foundation for the creation of a model for writing in *fangyan*, but it also allowed an interactive type of storytelling. Oral storytelling performances are rooted in classical Chinese literature and culture. In *Blossoms*, oral tradition in the Wu *fangyan* culture forms the base narrative of the book. Invoking the Wu *fangyan* oral tradition, *Blossoms* probes the possibility of an alternative means of telling the (hi)story in contemporary Chinese literature.[19]

Literary modernity and urban cosmopolitanism in Shanghai have been perceptively studied by scholars such as Leo Ou-fan Lee and Shu-mei Shih (*The Lure*). Incorporating Western and Japanese modern influences, May Fourth writers heralded a new vernacular language in place of classical Chinese. Along with the linguistic changes, the genres of novel and new poetry were privileged over the storytelling scripts (話本小說 *huaben xiaoshuo*) and classical poetry (舊體詩 *jiutishi*) that were popular in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Liang Qichao, for instance, advocated for the political novel as the perfect genre for renewing the nation and its people because of the former's ability to "permeate," "immerse," "shock," and "transcend" (熏、浸、刺、提 *xun*, *jin*, *ci*, *ti*) (3-6). Like Liang, many May Fourth writers rejected classical Chinese writing because of its embedded patriarchal and outdated values. Nevertheless, against the grand narrative of enlightenment and nation-building, many female writers engaged in writing what Rey Chow calls "feminine details" (84). In a famous essay written by Eileen Chang in response to Fu Lei's 傅雷 criticism of her focus on the "petty" and the "passive" domestic lives and

[19] Jin refers to his probing of an alternative means as "finding what is in between the modern genre of novel and old texts." Here, old texts refer to story-telling scripts (話本小說 *huaben xiaoshuo*) originated in the Song Dynasty. See *Fan Hua* 443.

loves of largely female urbanites, she suggests that "the placid and static aspects of life have eternal significance" (15-16). Chang's effort of rescuing *Sing-Song Girls* through translations, together with her academic studies on *The Dream of the Red Chamber* demonstrate her investment in the classical literary tradition.

In a similar vein, Jin Yucheng's writing revisits the classical literary tradition associated with oral performance. In this section, I examine Jin's use of oral tradition from classical Chinese literature to challenge the writing of linear progressive history in the PRC's official account of history.

The online forum functioned as a stage for traditional oral performances and installment publishing during the late Qing period. Traditional oral performances include storytelling and ballad singing on stages. Suzhou *Pinghua* (評話) and *Tanci* (彈詞), for instance, remain popular as genres of folk culture in Shanghai. The storyteller narrates a segment of the story to the audience from a third-person perspective in the performance, and acts out the various characters by uttering their lines with different gestures and tones. It is important to adjust the flow of the story according to audiences' response each time the story is re-enacted. Likewise, the online forum allows Jin to incorporate readers' responses and requests into his storytelling and generally to experiment with different strategies in his attempts to appeal to his readers. The author and the readers could revisit previous segments to ensure the continuity of the plot, and anticipate the coming of the next segment. Similarly, online serialization is also reminiscent of installment publishing in the late Qing period (Des Forges). *Blossoms* did not have a formal ending before Jin started revising the story for publication. Even though the final book edition has a complete structure in the sense that it has a prologue and an epilogue, it could still be seen as one version of the multiple renditions of the story. Thus, the constant revision of the story challenges the credibility of the narrator and the authenticity and finality of the (hi)story.

While readers' online forum responses are not included in the story, two significant features of interactive oral performance and installment publishing are evident in the book, dialogue-driven narrative, and unreliable storytelling.

Dialogue is the major component advancing the plot and shaping the narratological style of *Blossoms*. Readers get to know the characters and the plot through the dialogues. The narrator offers minimal intervention in the storytelling, foregrounding the voices of each character in the narrative and allowing the conversation to flow smoothly. In place of silence, the term "does not make a sound" (不響 *buxiang*) frequently appears in a conversation, without any descriptions of the

person's inner thoughts and emotions, which are often seen in contemporary fiction.[20] Thus, an average paragraph generally runs over one or two pages, and usually ends with the end of the conversation. There is also no distinction between the dialogues and the narratives due to the absence of quotation marks, which blurs the boundary between subjective and objective storytelling.[21] In Shen Jiaxuan's 沈家煊 linguistic analysis of *Blossoms*, he underlines the frequent use of run-on sentences and clauses with few characters.[22] Run-on sentences with few characters in each clause distinguish the narrative from contemporary literature influenced by translated novels from Anglophone literature, creating a reading experience familiar from the classical storytelling tradition. Overall, the narratological style of the book reminds the readers of oral storytelling tradition, and dissolves the line between subjective and objective storytelling.

If the form of the storytelling challenges the credibility of the narrator, the content of the story further destabilizes the authority of history writing. Instead of providing a single narrative, the text immerses the readers in multiple narratives that threaten to contradict each other. For instance, Apo 阿婆, a nanny who came to Shanghai from Shaoxing City in Zhejiang Province, repeatedly tells Beidi 貝蒂, the daughter of her host family, the story of her grandmother who escaped from the Nanjing imperial palace during the Taiping Rebellion. Each time, she brags about the wealth of the Taiping Rebellion leaders, and the gold her grandmother managed to smuggle out of the palace before the fall of the regime. The gold was then stored in Apo's grandma's coffin. Beidi challenges Apo by asking her to clarify the details of the story, to which grandma always responds with even more exaggerated descriptions of the story. Together with Beidi, the readers are made aware of the discrepancies between Apo's various accounts of the story (40, 90). When Apo finally takes Beidi to visit the tomb of her grandma, to her disillusionment, the alleged gold is nowhere to be found in the coffin. This anticlimax prepares the readers for the mysterious ending of the lives of Apo and Beidi. Beidi's parents were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution due to their bourgeois background. After her parents

[20] "不響" means "does not reply" in Shanghainese. According to Yan Bin, this term appeared over 1500 times in the book. In the online version, the narrator would describe inner emotions or thoughts of the person instead of using "不響" when he/she is silent. See Jin and Yan, "Jin Yucheng" ("A Literary Interview").

[21] The dialogues can either be read as direct quotations from the speaker or indirect remarks retold by the narrator.

[22] See Shen, 21-24. Shen cited three paragraphs where one sentence contains more than 45 commas. On p. 55, Shen randomly selected 5 pages from the book. Altogether, there are 584 sentences containing 2,955 characters, averaging 5 characters per sentence.

had been taken away from the family, Beidi describes to others several times that Apo transfigured into a fish and jumped into a river (92-99). In one account, the story goes like this:

> The next morning, Beidi and Abao wake up and see a crucian carp in the goldfish pond. Beidi cries, Apo. The fish moves. Beidi reaches out to the fish, and it remains still. She reaches her hand down the belly of the fish, it remains still and finally swims away. Beidi says, Apo, are you happy? The fish swims around. Abao does not make a sound. The following morning, scales spread all over the pond . . . the crucian carp disappears . . . (99)[23]

Later, Abao, Beidi's best friend, explains Beidi's sudden disappearance in a similar way (166-67). In the context of the close-to-life storytelling found throughout the book, Beidi and Apo's story stands out as the only magical realist part. Through plain yet childlike language, the narrator transforms a traumatic experience into a fairytale-like memory. This account of Beidi's story alludes to the untold history of the Cultural Revolution. By providing personal accounts of history, Jin invites the readers to reflect on other personal accounts of history that were silenced in the face of the PRC's official account of Chinese history.

Drawing on traditions of the Wu *fangyan* literature and culture, *Blossoms* challenges the linearization of history. By interweaving the past and the present, the old and the new forms of storytelling, Jin urges readers to reconsider the process of writing history, and rediscover what has been lost during the process of official history writing.

Representing the Flavor of Shanghai: Sinophone Cultures and Cinematic Aesthetics

In his foreword to *Blossoms*, Jin makes the following allusion to a scene from Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild* (1990) cited as follows:

> It is best to go up to an attic alone at night. In the ending of *Days of Being Wild*, Tony Leung squanders his youth fooling around with women. He counts a stack of money under the electrical light, then puts

[23] Questions marks are not used in the original text. I replaced the period with a question mark to comply with English usage.

> it in the inner pocket of his suit, then counts another stack. He takes out a set of playing cards, fans them out, then takes out another set. Then, facing the mirror, he styles his hair, giving it a right-side parting. He is dressed up in a tailored suit, but acts indolently. At last, he turns the light off. What a positive note on which to end a tragic story. The last half minute shows *the flavor of Shanghai*. (1; emphasis added)[24]

Correspondingly, the novel ends with two Frenchmen discussing with Xiaomao their plan to make a Francophone movie about Shanghai. Xiaomao eagerly explains the historical context of Shanghai in the 1930s to help them correct historical mistakes in their script, only to find that they do not care about any fact or authentic representations (441). "Can they make movies like that in France?" asks Husheng. Abao answers, "French people do not understand Shanghai. That is why they can shoot whatever they want" (441-42).

Bookended by two films (one completed, another in the making) from outside the city, *Blossoms* situates the entire narrative within a global network of representations of Shanghai. What is the flavor of Shanghai? Can outsiders portray Shanghai authentically? Is the regional language of Shanghai a must when representing Shanghai? If so, what qualifies as the regional language? Mandarin? Shanghainese? Or else? In this section, I explore the use of Sinophone cinematic aesthetics regarding the aurality and externality in *Blossoms*. These two features help the author negotiate the authenticity of Shanghaineseness with representations of Shanghai from other Sinophone sites.

As discussed in the first section, marking the languages each character speaks could be understood as a shift from sound-based to semantic-based writing, which enables the representation of a polyphony of voices accessible to readers without the knowledge of regional languages. Meanwhile, it also corresponds with the diegesis of many Sinophone films. In her discussion of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), Shu-mei Shih points out that the jarring accents of Mandarin spoken by the actors "[break] down the fourth wall of illusion" and "foreground the differences and tensions among those geopolitical spaces the accents come from" (*Visuality* 2). While conventional Chinese-language cinema projects a seemingly coherent community in which characters with different accents are dubbed in standard Mandarin, Sinophone cinema stresses the "inauthenticity and incoherence" through the juxtaposition of languages, dialects, and accents (3).

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[24] I wish to acknowledge the copyeditor for polishing my translation.

Many Sinophone films feature Shanghainese displaced in a diasporic setting amongst Cantonese and Taiwanese speaking communities. Wong Kar-wai's representation of the diasporic Shanghai community in Hong Kong in *In the Mood for Love* (2000), and *2046* (2004), Stanley Kwan's *Everlasting Regret* (2005), Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* (2007), to name just a few, constitute a corpus of Sinophone representations of Shanghai. In Wong's *In the Mood for Love*, the Shanghainese spoken by the landlords and their neighbors seems perfectly understandable for Su Lizhen and Zhou Muyun while they keep on speaking Cantonese to other characters. In Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998), actors and actresses from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan speak Shanghainese and Soochownese with heavy accents, disrupting rather than restoring a sense of authenticity in the (re)creation of the pleasure quarters in late-Qing Shanghai.

Linguistic diversity, however, is not exclusive to Sinophone communities outside Mainland China. The cultural identity of Shanghai people has been constantly reshaped as a result of dramatic increases in the migrant population in the city since the 1980s. In 2001, Huang Ju (黃菊), then Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee of Shanghai, proposed the concept of "New Shanghai People" (新上海人 *xin shanghairen*) to include new residents as part of Shanghai (Lu n. pag.). In *Blossoms*, this trend is also reflected in an increasing appearance of characters from outside of Shanghai as the story progresses. These characters speak various languages. With the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity, the core group in the story also becomes more dynamic. Jin encourages readers to perceive Shanghai as an open space that embraces people from other places.

Adopting the use of dialogues with a linguistic diversity in Sinophone films mentioned above, the narrator of *Blossoms* attempts to capture the multiplicities of voices in the written form. In the beginning of Chapter 14, for instance, following the end of the lunch banquet, a conversation between several ladies takes place.

> Ms. Gu says in *Northern language*, where is Miss Wang from Shanghai, the wife of Mr. Hong. Ms. Kang says in *Northern language*, this woman, something is weird about her recently, I am badmouthing behind her back, Miss Wang is reluctant to accompany her husband in social occasions, she said she wanted to change her way to live. Ms. Lu says in *Northern language*, Shanghai women, so demanding (作 *zuo*). . . . Ms. Lin says in *Taiwan Mandarin*, a couple should certainly appear together in social occasions. . . . Miss Wang says, it's hard to be a woman, it's OK to dress up if your husband is with you, but if you

> go out alone like this, to use Shanghainese, it's called a vixen (狐狸精 *hulijing*). . . . Ms. Gu says, vixen is a term widely used in China. . . . (178-79)

Moving from one character to another, this narrative strategy appears almost every time in the 1980s Reform and Opening Up chapters, regardless of whether the character has appeared before or not. The narrator never assumes any character would speak the same language consistently with other people, or respond to one other in their mother language. Hence, each character's lines are introduced with the language they speak, mirroring the incoherence and distinctions among these characters.

The Sinophone aurality is further enhanced by using camera-like angles to focus on the external rather than the internal world. As in *Flowers of Shanghai*, conversations during banquets form the skeleton of the chapters set in the 1980s in *Blossoms*.[25] In Hou's movie, the camera floats from one side of the table to another, slowly and quietly, just like a silent observer sitting at the banquet, turning his head to where the conversation is going on, yet never lingers when it stops. Similarly, the narrator of *Blossoms* records the conversations without contemplating the inner emotions of the characters or the connotations of each sentence. Silence is captured with the word "does not make a sound" where a whole paragraph of speculation could have been written instead. The absence of subjective commentary and probing into the internal world of each character henceforth foregrounds the voices of each character as they are articulated. These voices jointly form the polyphony of Shanghai as a city, without labeling anyone as an insider or an outsider.

Through the incorporation of Sinophone cinematic aesthetics, Jin situates his literary rendition of a Shanghai story in the network of Sinophone sites, opening valuable dialogues with other locations that share similar issues such as identity politics, colonialism, and nationalism.[26] Borrowing cinematic representations of Shanghai from outside Mainland China, Jin creates a polyphonic Shanghai by negotiating with various Sinophone representations of the city.

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[25] The intertextual reference is clearly associated with Hou Hsiao-hsien's movie adaptation instead of the novel. The novel features various settings within the concession area of Shanghai. Yet due to the difficulty of shooting the film in Mainland China, Hou's movie relied heavily on indoor settings in studios in Taipei, with extremely long takes of banquets and slow camera movement as its trademark.

[26] According to a news report written by Wang Yin, Wong Kar-wai has purchased the copyright of *Blossoms* and may release the film around 2020. See Wang Yin.

Conclusion

Having examined the Sinophone intermediality of *Blossoms*, we have a picture of Jin Yucheng's efforts to incorporate the interactive online medium, oral storytelling, and cinematic aesthetics in traditional print culture. The online forum provides the author with a space to develop a narrative voice that is influenced by *fangyan* literature and culture in Shanghainese and oral storytelling tradition in classical Chinese. In the book edition, Jin revised the narrative to make it accessible to readers without the knowledge of the regional language while preserving the references to these cultural traditions. Moreover, Jin's use of Sinophone cinematic aesthetics situates his rendition of Shanghai in the network of Sinophone sites.

Through intermedial practices that reinvoke literary and cultural traditions in *fangyan* and Sinophone cinematic aesthetics, *Blossoms* challenges the linearization of history in the PRC's official history writing and reconstructs Shanghaineseness shaped by the sounds and voices and lived experiences in the city. Jin's intermedial practice powerfully reconstructs the Shanghai identity against the backdrop of mass migration and global integration in China and invites a reconsideration of literary modernity and (hi)story writing in China.

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