

the essence of Magical Realism (that the Third World viewpoint is as valid as that of the First):

Osoño narrowed her eyes on him. 'We can believe in Santería, Palo Monte, Abakua or Catholic. Or any combination. You think that's impossible?'

'No. It's amazing the things I believe in: evolution, gamma rays, vitamins, the poetry of Akhmatova, the speed of light. Most of which I take on faith.' (Cruz Smith, 1999, p. 109)

This is an emotionally pleasing position for the foreign detective and the Anglo-American implied reader to adopt, but hardly a sustainable one. It is another fantasy based on the collapsing of differential time and space. The implied reader is not expected to believe in *Santería*, and the mystery at the heart of the novel has an all too logical and human explanation. The implied narrator and reader may wish to transcend their Americanness or Eurocentricity but they are ultimately trapped within it. The attraction of investigating foreignness may be a well-meaning, sympathetic and welcome liberal urge, but the project will almost always founder against its own limitations. The specificity of human experience in time and place simply cannot be contained by the liberal imagination. Just as there is always some form of resolution even in the darkest mainstream detective fiction, so too will the pleasurable abstraction of emotional identification always win out over real understanding and engagement with the foreign.

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Chapter 4

Shanghai, Shanghai: Placing Qiu Xiaolong's Crime Fiction in the Landscape of Globalized Literature

Luo Hui

Qiu Xiaolong was an established literary translator in China, acclaimed for his Chinese translation of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, before moving to the United States in 1988. His pursuit of Eliot's work eventually led him to St Louis, Missouri, Eliot's home town, where he settled and now makes his living writing crime fiction in English. In a series of murder mysteries set in Shanghai, his own home town, Qiu created the character Chief Inspector Chen, a police chief at the Shanghai Police Bureau who is also a modernist poet. Inspector Chen, who frequently quotes and draws inspiration from classical Chinese poets such as Wang Wei, Li Bai, Du Fu and Li Shangyin, still manages to write poetry and attend writers' conferences in spite of his demanding police work. Qiu thus manages to keep his poetic passion alive, though vicariously, through the creation of his *alter ego*.

With six mystery titles to his name since his debut novel, *Death of a Red Heroine*, in 2000, Qiu joins the roster of emigrant Chinese writers who have successfully established literary careers in a non-native language. Where might we place Qiu as a writer in an era when literary traffic between the English- and Chinese-speaking worlds is increasing in volume, intensity and complexity? While critics such as Alan Velie praise Qiu's work as exemplary of a 'new globalized literary paradigm' (Velie, 2009, p. 55), the creative impulse behind Qiu's work, in my view, is not a celebratory new-millennium cosmopolitanism, but the persistent tension between the limitations and possibilities, both cultural and personal, that confronts a writer who works in a foreign language, and in this case, a writer of Chinese origin in a rapidly globalizing world. Despite an air of cosmopolitan suavity that accords with the current cultural climate of globalization, much of the success of Qiu's Inspector Chen series is still founded on the reconstruction of difference, foreignness and exoticism, through the trope of Shanghai and through the genre of the murder mystery.

Focusing on Qiu's literary lineage, his creative use of genres and the politics of 'translating' Chinese culture for different audiences, this essay will examine

some of the personal and cultural implications for a writer of Chinese origin who chooses to write crime fiction in English. Michael Cohen has observed that 'mystery fiction is very fond of cultural difference, and significantly, that difference is very often viewed from the outside' (Cohen, 1999, p. 150). While the genre's fascination with the foreign might have enabled Qiu's writing to cross national and linguistic borders, his unique ability to view cultural difference from both the outside and inside has posed new questions for the perception of foreignness in a given culture. Special attention will be given to Qiu's reworking of the trope of Shanghai as a way to launch a parody that both mimics and critiques the conventions of exoticism.¹ Equally illustrative of Qiu's paradoxical relationship with literary and cultural conventions is his portrayal of Chen, a character who walks a fine line between fictional fantasy and literary self-fashioning.

Shanghai to St Louis: Qiu's Literary Lineage

In the author's short biography found on the covers of his Inspector Chen books, Qiu describes himself first as a poet and translator, and only then as a writer of murder mysteries. When asked how he turned to the genre, Qiu replied:

I have always liked mystery and read a lot of them. But my choice of the genre came in an unexpected way. After my visit back home [China] in 1995, I tried to write a novel about Chinese society in transition, but I had never written fiction before, so I had a hard time putting my material together. So mystery came to my help. For it provided a ready-made structure, so to speak, a framework into which I put my social commentary. That's how *Death of a Red Heron* was written; however, my editor said it was a good mystery novel, and wanted me to write a second one. The series started just like that.² (Qiu, 2010)

It would not be inaccurate to call Qiu Xiaolong an accidental mystery writer, an aspiring writer of fiction who flirted with mystery and got hooked by forces beyond his control. It started out as a literary strategy, one that has proven to be highly successful.³

Yet one senses that Qiu is reluctant to be identified primarily as a mystery writer. There is no denying that the genre has provided him with a ready-made framework, and his literary success, at least initially, owes a great deal to the tried-and-tested market and readership that come with the genre. However, it is doubtful whether Qiu's success should be ascribed chiefly to the appeal of his books as murder mysteries. Reaction to the Inspector Chen series is mixed. Chinese critics tend to judge his work by Western conventions of the murder mystery, and consider the Inspector Chen books rather weak in suspense and

ratiocination (A, 2005; Ji, 2009). Western reviewers, intrigued by Qiu's portrayal of Chinese society in transition, are more accepting of his unusual approach to mystery. Peter Gordon writes 'one feels Qiu pushing the envelope of the detective series genre'. (Gordon, 2004)

Is Qiu pushing the boundaries of crime fiction or is he a writer who uses the genre merely as a strategy or a stepping-stone towards more 'serious' literature? Qiu seems to be ambiguous about his relationship with the genre. In an interview he said: 'For me as well as for Inspector Chen, "whodunit" in itself may not be enough; rather, in what social and political background the crimes occur. So it is fair to say my books are marked with a sociological approach' (Qiu, 2010). Here, Qiu suggests that he has indeed been trying to approach mystery from a different angle, shifting his focus from the familiar 'whodunit' to what one might call *whydunit*. Elsewhere, Qiu is more dismissive of the genre: 'Murder mystery is only a shell; contemporary China is the real protagonist of my novels' (Xiao, 2007). Even if Qiu uses the genre initially as a narrative framework, he does try to do something different with it. His attempts at pushing the boundaries might have been a moving away from the generic conventions of mystery, or a way of distancing himself from the run-of-the-mill 'whodunit', yet his success has, accidentally, opened up new possibilities for the genre. There is something else going on in Qiu's books.

For commercial reasons, the Inspector Chen series has been classified and marketed as murder mysteries, but Qiu's literary lineage is far more complex and not easily delineated. A poet and literary translator, with a PhD in Comparative Literature, Qiu would have drawn inspiration from a diverse range of literary traditions, from Chinese, English and American, to Chinese-American. One comparison that readily springs to mind is Earl Derr Biggers's wildly successful American cult classic featuring the Hawaiian Chinese detective, Charlie Chan. Those familiar with the Chan novels or movies from the 1920s to the 1950s would be quick to point out the apparent similarities and differences between the ponderous, conservative and wise Charlie Chan and the modern, suave and poetic Chen. However, it would be erroneous to presume that Qiu Xiaolong modelled his Inspector Chen with Chan in mind: 'I read Charlie Chan, thanks to a Canadian fan who sent me the complete works [of Biggers], but I did not read Charlie Chan until after I had already written three or four Inspector Chen books' (Qiu, 2010). While comparisons between the two are inevitable, Chan and Chen belong to two different worlds. To quote Yunte Huang, 'Charlie Chan is an American stereotype of the Chinaman' and is actually 'as American as Jack Kerouac' (Huang, 2010, p. xix). Inspector Chen, of course, is Chinese, but he is only as 'Chinese' as Qiu's books are Chinese.

Some of Qiu's cultural references, such as frequent quotations of Chinese sayings and folk wisdom, an obsession with Chinese food and the propensity to exoticize it, are reminiscent of an earlier generation of Chinese-American

writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. Qiu does acknowledge the influence of Chinese-American fiction, considering Tan 'wonderful in presenting details' (Qiu, 2010). Although Qiu's own life story is very much part of the Chinese-American experience, Qiu's books, judging by their plots and characters, do not belong to the same Chinese-American literary tradition as Kingston's and Tan's. Qiu's novels are distinctly Chinese stories set in China (more specifically, Shanghai), with almost all Chinese characters who would be speaking Mandarin or various Chinese dialects. Yet these are Chinese stories told in English, primarily for a non-Chinese, English-speaking audience. Through vigorous marketing, Qiu's novels have now been translated into more than 20 different languages, including Chinese, which dramatically complicates the notions of the foreign, the native, the exotic and the cosmopolitan.

Qiu is not the only writer of Chinese origin who has 'conquered' the literary world in a foreign language by telling stories from their native land. Ha Jin, and more recently, Yiyun Li, are two other examples of this emergent literary phenomenon.⁴ It is still debatable whether their writings should be considered a new development in overseas 'Chinese literature' that is reflective of the rise of China and its role in globalization, or whether they are indeed part of American literature. Unlike Ha Jin's and Yiyun Li's 'literary fiction', Qiu writes mainly murder mysteries, a long-established popular genre with a commercially reliable market. Yet working within a genre does not necessarily make Qiu's work more easily classifiable, for his writing has been equally complicated by the issues of language, home and displacement that confront all 'migrant writers'.⁵ Nor does the familiarity of the genre make his literary success any less conditioned by his foreignness.

There is no doubt that Qiu is aware of these various literary traditions – English and American crime fiction, modern and classical poetry, Asian-American writing, contemporary Chinese diasporic literature – and is capable of drawing from these literary modes and models to enrich his crime fiction, often to his advantage commercially and artistically. Yet this hybridity gives Qiu's writing a quality of in-betweenness that betrays more of a struggle than a reconciliation. However situated Qiu's work is within America, whether it is seen as an offshoot of Asian-American literature or as part of an evolving Chinese diasporic literature, there is yet another important source of his writing – Shanghai – which has enabled his identity as a Chinese writer in Middle America, while at the same time pulling him away from it.

Shanghai Exotica: Poetry, Confucianism and Parody

Shanghai is the setting of all of Qiu's murder mysteries as well as his latest non-crime fiction, *Years of Red Dust: Stories of Shanghai* (2010). And much of the impression of cosmopolitanism of Qiu's fiction is owed to his depiction of

Shanghai, evoking a long lineage of Shanghai-based writers responsible for the formation of a Shanghai modernity.⁶ Since the early twentieth century, several generations of Chinese writers – from the 'New Sensationists' of the 1930s such as Shi Zhicun and Mu Shiying, the legendary Eileen Chang of the 1940s, to the more recent literary sensation, Wei Hui of *Shanghai Baby* (2001 [1999]) fame – have used the colours, sounds, textures and moods of the great metropolis to create a unique Shanghai glamour that is at once alluring and unsettling. To Qiu as an individual and as a writer, Shanghai is alternately childhood memory, home, cultural capital and myth, and, as he himself put it, 'more than that' (Qiu, 2010). While Qiu acknowledges the importance of Shanghai to his writing and appreciates Shi Zhicun for his psychological depth, he considers many of the celebrated 'Shanghai writers' 'overrated in the city's collective nostalgia – or as a kitsch endorsement of the present by evoking such a non-existent tradition' (Qiu, 2010).

Yet nowhere is Qiu more self-conscious of the constructedness of exotic 'non-traditions' than in his own depiction of Shanghai, the setting of all his novels, and almost a fictional character in its own right. When Inspector Chen is approached to translate a business proposal for the New World project, a huge shopping, entertainment, office and residential complex that merges old colonial Shanghai architecture with the new and ultra-modern, the developer promises: 'It will be an attraction for foreigners – exotic, strange, colonial, post-colonial, what they do not have at home. It will attract Shanghaiese too' (Qiu, 2005, p. 11). Chen accepts the work, but is deeply aware that 'the success of the project would depend on a myth – a nostalgia for the glitter and glamour of the thirties, or to be exact, on the recreation of that myth' (Qiu, 2005, p. 43). Indeed, it is this idea of cultural myth that Qiu manages to convert into cultural capital in his fiction.

Qiu's novels are peppered with references to traditional and popular Chinese culture, especially food and proverbs, and often a combination of the two. For example, unbelievable good luck, in Qiu's language infused with folk wisdom, becomes 'a moon cake had fallen from the skies' (Qiu, 2005, p. 12). And in reverse, when a great opportunity is lost, 'It was as if a roasted Beijing duck had flown back into the sky' (Qiu, 2005, p. 2). The author makes sure that these folksy aphorisms do not come directly from Chen, but from an omniscient narrator. These carefully placed cultural references lend the novel an old-fashioned 'Oriental' flavour while allowing Inspector Chen to maintain his decidedly modern persona.

As different as his Inspector Chen is from Hollywood's Charlie Chan, Qiu cannot resist the temptation of adorning Chen with characteristics that are unmistakably 'Chinese', especially in the eyes of the non-Chinese reader. Yunte Huang describes Charlie Chan as a crafty Chinese detective with his trademark 'pseudo Confucian witicism' and 'fortune cookie aphorisms': 'Door of opportunity swing both ways', or 'Action speak louder than French' (Huang,

2010, p. 299). Inspector Chen exhibits a similar, though somewhat more highbrow, Chinese characteristic – the ability to quote poetry, mainly classical Chinese, but also Western and modern, to celebrate or reflect on almost every occasion. Poetry to Inspector Chen is what fortune cookie sayings are to Charlie Chan.

Qiu's ample use of poetry in his murder mysteries might seem exotic at first glance, but to those who are familiar with classical Chinese novels, this idiosyncrasy is not that unusual. As Qiu explains:

In classical Chinese novels, there is more poetry in the narrative. So you may say it is an attempt to incorporate the Chinese tradition into the English books I've been writing. I don't see poetry as necessarily 'foreign' or 'other' to fiction. [Lyrical] or emotional intensity justifies the introduction of poetry into the text, particularly with Chen himself being a poet. (Qiu, 2010)

The incorporation of poetry into narrative, seen from this perspective, is not gratuitous but grounded in Chinese literary tradition; this borrowing from Chinese literature may also enable the author to make an innovative contribution to English-language fiction. Unlike the world of classical Chinese fiction where poetry is admired and revered, Qiu's poet/detective lives in an environment that is not particularly hospitable to poetry. The dogged insistence on poetry, therefore, acquires poignancy as a reminder of the still-important function of poetry in today's increasingly materialistic society.

Yet a present-day Chinese police chief speaking fluent English and versed in various poetic traditions is still something of a novelty, exuding mystique and exoticism to both English and Chinese readers. Sometimes Chen, if not aware of the improbable nature of his frequent quoting of poetry in police work, is nonetheless cognizant of the ironic contrast between the literary allusions and the real-life situations to which the poetry is applied. After consenting to translate the business proposal referred to earlier for real-estate developer Mr Gu, Chen accepts the money that comes in an envelope and contemplates how he might spend it to fulfil his filial duty to his mother. He then drains a cup of liquor and says:

'Drinking with you, we talk to our hearts' content, my horse tied to a willow tree, by a high building.'

'What is the allusion? You have to enlighten me, my poetic chief inspector.'

'It's just a quote from Wang Wei,' Chen said without further explanation.

The couplet referred to a promise given by a gallant knight in the Tang dynasty, but he and Gu had merely concluded a business deal, which was anything but heroic. (Qiu, 2005, pp. 16–17)

This kind of self-irony permeates Qiu's writing and gives the poetic quotations a certain depth that goes beyond mere window-dressing. The gap between poetic ideal and socio-economic reality creates occasions for social commentary and personal reflection. When Inspector Chen is provided with a young female assistant to help with his translation project, he romanticizes the relationship, modelling it after the classic talent-and-beauty scenario from the Chinese literary tradition: *'The fragrance from her red sleeves accompanies your writing deep in the night ... a Tang dynasty line rose from the recess of his mind, but Chen pulled himself back to the present'* (Qiu, 2005, p. 16). The present, Chen realizes, offers only a very mundane version of the scene from the Tang poem – 'a free little secretary' – with all its connotations of monetary and sexual transactions in today's China.

While fantasizing about the life of a writer in a *tingzitan*, the Shanghai equivalent of an artist's garret, Chen catches himself and reflects: 'Not everything could have been glamorous in times past, but nostalgia made it so' (Qiu, 2005, p. 176). He then elaborates on this point by quoting poetry, this time Russian: *'Things are miraculously mellowed in memories'*. That was a line from a Russian poem he had read, but failed to understand, in his high-school years. A subtle transformation in comprehension had occurred with the lapse of years' (Qiu, 2005, p. 176). Qiu does something quite extraordinary here. On the one hand, he acknowledges that it is the passage of time that allows the things of the past to acquire a mellow and glamorous aura; on the other hand, the passage of time also allows him to comprehend this message from a Russian poem that he could not understand in his younger days. Wisdom is gained over the years, yet the same wisdom has made us distrustful of our own memory. When Qiu writes passages with such nuance and subtlety, his use of poetry stops being mere embellishment and becomes an integrated part of his prose.

Besides poetry, Chen's 'Chineseness' is also marked by his Confucian inclinations. He is a devoted son who is constantly worried about the welfare of his widowed mother. A liberal-minded single man in his thirties, he nevertheless feels the social pressure to marry and continue the family line. From his late father, a neo-Confucian scholar who suffered during the Cultural Revolution, he takes to heart the Confucian dictum: *'There are things a man can do, and things a man cannot do.'* This is a line that Chen quotes frequently in moments of crisis, serving as a kind of moral compass in a corrupt, decidedly non-Confucian world. Chen's moral ambiguity lies in the fact that, while this Confucian teaching provides him with moral guidelines, it also grants him the license to 'get the job done' by breaking the guidelines, including those of Confucianism itself.

Like his ironic poetic musings, Chen's application of Chinese traditions – whether Confucian, Daoist or Buddhist – is pragmatic and tinged with a note of irreverence. In *A Case of Two Cities* (2007), for example, Chen masquerades as a monk at a temple in Los Angeles in order to gain information from the

main suspect, Xing Xing. Recognizing a strong filial tie between Xing and his mother, Chen seeks to divine the future for Xing's mother and then for Xing himself, through 'glyphomancy', the process of interpreting written Chinese characters.

Sure, I'll read it for you. Chen responded with an air of utter confidence. When Chuangjie first created the system of Chinese written characters, every archetypal stroke of a character came out of the cosmos in miraculous correspondence to the omnipresent *qi*, and that in turn, in correspondence to the microcosmos of an individual human being. So that's called *tianrenheyi*—heaven and human in one. For a virtuous woman like you, whatever character you may write in a moment of faith, there will be elements recognizable from the mysterious correspondence. (Qiu, 2007, pp. 175–82)

What we witness in this scenario is a hodgepodge of Chinese philosophies, ethics and beliefs being evoked, appropriated and manipulated to serve the utilitarian purpose of solving the case and restoring justice. Like Chan's 'pseudo-Confucianism', Chen's Oriental wisdom is by no means 'authentic' or faithful to its origin. Chen's penchant for summoning knowledge of the poetic, the exotic and the arcane can easily be faulted as the manifestation of an inverted Orientalism, or the commodification of Chinese culture for global consumption.⁷ Yet Chen's poetic reflections are intelligent and self-aware, lending his character a certain intellectual depth and making him a complex, credible individual such as one might encounter in a sophisticated city like today's Shanghai. His eclectic mixture of the Chinese and the Western, the ancient and the modern gives him a cosmopolitan and contemporary quality, and his non-dogmatic, pragmatic approach to ancient Chinese culture (for example, appropriating arcane knowledge for his police work) makes him irreverently 'post-modern'.

In a similar spirit, Qiu freely employs familiar cultural references in his writing, such as witty Chinese proverbs and elaborate descriptions of exotic food, yet he spares no effort in trying to break out of the Charlie Chan stereotype of the old, wise but stodgy and asexual Chinese detective by creating a capable young police chief who is charismatic, romantic and sensitive – a poet at heart. Qiu's mixture of knowing parody and searching self-fashioning makes his portrayal of the poet/translator/gourmet/detective at once poignant and ambiguous. Inspector Chen seems to be able to take advantage of a system while keeping a critical distance from it. Qiu, while succeeding in both Western and Chinese literary worlds, keeps an equally guarded distance from the cultural politics between the East and the West.

I like the term inverted Orientalism, but I don't think it applies to my book. For that matter, nor does my paraphrase or parody of Western poets justify

the label of inverted Occidentalism (by the way, I would have quoted more of them, especially T. S. Eliot, but for the opposition of my editor who declared that it's too expensive to quote [Eliot]). In a global age like today, I'm simply writing about what comes up familiar and natural to myself. (Qiu, 2010)

Using crime fiction both as a career strategy to break into the English publishing world and as serious-minded literary self-fashioning, Qiu does not shy away from the constructs and artifices of difference, foreignness and exoticism while at the same time trying to overcome these cultural clichés, often with a dose of cynicism, through the mechanisms of deconstruction, simulation, parody and self-parody. Compared with earlier literary and cinematic representations of China that dwell on opium dens, pigtailed and bound feet, Qiu's exotic blend of modern and classical poetry, gourmet food and Confucian adages is no doubt more up-to-date, confident and sophisticated. It is, nonetheless, a type of exoticism that can easily be seen as catering to Western tastes and feeding into Western imaginations of China. Qiu's work does not break free from the strong hold of exoticism on the literary representation of Chinese culture, as exoticism is still the hallmark that helps to sell the books. However, it is an exoticism that re-maps the landscape of the foreign and the native, a landscape that will be constantly shifting as the books reach different audiences through marketing and translation, until the lines between myth, memory and reality become blurred in Qiu's Shanghai.

Returning to Shanghai: Translation, Reception, Audience

When Qiu decided to write his first Inspector Chen novel in English, he nevertheless considered it a 'China novel':

I started writing in English not so much because of a clear readership in mind, but because of the fact that I could not have my writing published in Chinese at the time. But once I started in English, I could not help thinking, technically, of the possible problems in a China novel for the English-speaking readers. And . . . the issue of readership becoming complicated when the books began to appear in other languages. (Qiu, 2010)

The issue of translation and readership becomes particularly intricate when the novels are translated into Chinese. Since 2003, the first three of the Chen series have been published in China: *Death of a Red Heroine*, *A Loyal Character Dancer* and *When Red is Black*.⁸

That Qiu's books, essentially Chinese stories written in English, should be translated back into Chinese is in itself an interesting cultural phenomenon. One Chinese reviewer defines this phenomenon by using a term from

international trade – *chukouzhuanxizao*, or ‘goods for export being imported back for domestic consumption’ (Sun, 2003). In Chinese trade practice, goods meant for export are usually produced with higher standards and are of higher quality than goods meant for the domestic market; therefore to the Chinese mind, *chukouzhuanxizao* has a ring of superiority or exclusivity. However, these products, though of good quality, are still Chinese-made and are generally not held in the same high regard as imports from Western countries. So *chukouzhuanxizao* has the connotation of being second-best, and, as a somewhat outmoded term from the more controlled economy of the 1980s and 1990s when Western imports were not readily available in China, it could be a tongue-in-cheek, slightly derogatory way to describe Qiu’s work.

Chinese reactions to Qiu’s work (reminiscent of domestic response to the international acclaim of Fifth Generation films)⁹ run the gamut from enthusiastic praise to defamatory criticism, while both responses are suggestive of a mixture of nationalistic pride and a Chinese inferiority complex. The positive reviews generally laud Qiu’s books as a great Chinese success story and as proof that ‘Chinese people too can write first-rate crime fiction’, while ignoring the fact that China has its own tradition of crime fiction in both classical and modern periods.¹⁰ On the negative side, Qiu’s books have been criticized for being ‘too eager to cater to the taste of Western readers and their ideological biases’ (Jin, 2009), and Qiu himself has been accused of being ‘a broker of Chinese culture’ (A, 2005).

One awkward feature of real-life exports-turned-imports, particularly clothing, is that they are originally designed to fit larger Western body types, and when imported back to China, may not fit Chinese people. Similarly, Qiu’s books will have to encounter such inevitable awkwardness when they are translated back into Chinese. His depiction of China, particularly the Qiu brand of Shanghai exoticism and cosmopolitanism, will have to pass the test of *chukouzhuanxizao*. Chinese readers are picky and quick to point out the defects in their eyes:

The character Party Secretary Li is entirely superfluous; his only function is to represent political interference in police work; his speech is full of political slogans and clichés, which might sound novel to readers in the West, but doesn’t do much to the narrative. Also out of consideration for the intended audience, Qiu . . . goes into great length to introduce Chinese food and delicacies. It occasionally works, but once it becomes formulaic, it detracts from the artistic merit of the novel. And these cultural references do not translate well into Chinese. (Jin, 2009)

Some are uncomfortable with the hybrid nature of Qiu’s work. After reading *A Loyal Character Dancer*, one reviewer writes, ‘I thought I was reading detective fiction, but then I realised that this book is also a poetry anthology, a tour guide, and a modern version of the folktale “The Ox-herd and the Weaver Girl”’.

Bewildered by Qiu Xiaolong’s genre blending and multiple cultural colours, I lost interest in all of his cultural goods. I felt angry’ (A, 2005).

Still others take issue with Qiu’s depiction of Shanghai, which seems, to many Shanghaiese today, slightly out of date. As one critic points out, Qiu’s Shanghai seems to be excavated from the 1980s or the early 1990s (Xiao, 2007). It was a time when eating crab was a great luxury, a ritual worthy of pages of elaborate description. Even Qiu admits that, in the gourmet department, ‘my Shanghai friends declare I’m outdated there’ (Qiu, 2010). Perhaps his Shanghai is bound to lose some of its appeal when brought back to China, especially in the eyes of the true Shanghaiese, that special breed of urbanites who take pride in their sophistication and style.

The fact that at least some of Qiu’s books have been translated into Chinese and published in China suggests that his representation of China met with the approval of the Chinese authorities. The creation of a young and talented Inspector Chen, a member and rising star of the Party, might seem to be in line with the government’s attempts to project a more dynamic, modern and forward-thinking image. Most of Qiu’s exposé of China’s problems is ‘historical’ – Mao, the Cultural Revolution – from an era from which the Chinese government is trying to distance itself. Qiu’s books are not necessarily anti-Communist or politically provocative; however, he can be biting in his social commentary and refreshingly candid when he describes rampant corruption in official circles and the shenanigans of the business world in contemporary China.

In a country where political sensitivity is high, Qiu had to make one major compromise as a result of his ‘sociological approach’ in those early books that managed to pass government censorship: Shanghai, in the Chinese translations, became ‘H City’, for apparently the censors declared that ‘the story could not have happened in today’s Shanghai’ (Qiu, 2010). The rationale sounds weak, and makes one think that this might be a token intervention that the censors had to make to cover themselves. However, the change of Shanghai to H City serves as a most ironic footnote on Qiu Xiaolong, a writer to whom the city is not just childhood memory, hometown, cultural capital, myth, but ‘more than that’.

David Geherin makes the distinction between geographical and literary space in detective fiction, arguing that popular perception of certain locations (think Conan Doyle’s London and Simenon’s Paris) have become permanently transformed by their literary representation (Geherin, 2008, p. 8). Paul French calls Qiu’s Shanghai ‘a hyper-real city’ comparable to Raymond Chandler’s Los Angeles (French, 2007). What Qiu portrays is not Shanghai, but the idea of Shanghai, with the associations of its glamorous past and its promise to be a cosmopolitan city of the future.¹¹ Like the Shanghai New World (as depicted in Qiu, 2005) and the 2010 Shanghai Expo, Shanghai itself has become, in Qiu’s writing, a product for domestic and global circulation, aspiring to be seductive

to both the Chinese and the non-Chinese. Even in the censored Chinese translations, unmistakably Shanghai references – the Bund, the New World, *shikumen* houses – still abound. Yet, floating in a ghostly H City, these names become symbols and signs of exoticism whose connotations have become unstable and difficult to maintain. Their meanings remain dormant, waiting to be re-articulated at the next cultural crossroads.

Notes

¹ See Denko.

² In October–November 2010, I conducted an email interview with Qiu Xiaolong, who graciously answered many of my questions. Unless otherwise noted, direct quotes from Qiu are based on this interview. I thank Qiu for his input.

³ Qiu's first novel, *Death of a Red Heroine*, was nominated for the Edgar Awards and the Barry Award, and won the Anthony Award in 2001. So far, the Inspector Chen books have been translated into 23 languages, including Chinese, and according to the author, over a million copies have been sold worldwide (Qiu, 2010).

⁴ Ha Jin and Yiyun Li, both born and raised in China, began writing in their adopted English after moving to the United States. Ha Jin, who counts Conrad and Nabokov as his literary predecessors, has won some of the highest literary honours in America with his novels and short stories about life in China. Yiyun Li's 2005 debut story collection, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, earned her comparisons with Chekhov and Alice Munro. Jin and Li, as well as Qiu, represent a new generation of overseas Chinese writers whose works put into question the definitions of 'Chinese-American literature' and American literature in general.

⁵ For a fascinating treatise on language, migration and the place of literature in a globalizing world, see Jin (2008).

⁶ For a comprehensive account of Shanghai literary modernism in the 1920s and 1930s, see Shih (2001).

⁷ While referencing Said's concept of Orientalism, particularly his critique of the 'internalised Orientalism' of the local elite, I use the term 'inverted Orientalism' to describe a more self-conscious, and perhaps cynical, form of self-representation of Eastern cultures in the context of a contemporary global cultural marketplace.

⁸ Qiu's Inspector Chen series seems to have reached an impasse in China after the translation and publication of the first three titles. Qiu grudgingly accepted censorship for his first three novels, but refused cuts for his fourth, *A Case of Two Cities* (Ransom, 2008). His recent work outside the Inspector Chen series, *Years of Red Dust: Stories of Shanghai*, adds another dimension to Qiu's engagement with 'globalized' literature: a series of linked stories originally written in English while Qiu was writer-in-residence at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2008, it was simultaneously translated into French and serialized in *Le Monde*. It was then translated into Chinese and published in Hong Kong in 2009; the original English version was not published until 2010 by St Martin's Press in the United States.

⁹ This term refers to a group of directors whose films represent a particularly creative period of Chinese cinema, the 1980s and early 1990s. Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou and Tian Zhuangzhuang won international acclaim for their reflections on Chinese history, spectacular visual imagery and cultural critique. In China, however, the 'Fifth Generation' has sometimes been accused of catering to Western appetites for exoticism. Their films had limited domestic distribution and a few more controversial works, such as Tian's *The Blue Kite*, were banned in China.

¹⁰ In several Chinese newspaper reports, Qiu has been quoted as saying, 'Who says that Chinese people cannot write murder mysteries?' (see You, 2005). The legal cases of famous Chinese magistrates such as Judge Bao (Blader, 1998) and Judge Dee (van Gulik, 1976) are among the world's most ancient tales of detection. For a discussion of Chinese crime fiction after the Cultural Revolution, see Kinkley (2000).

¹¹ Peter Gordon expresses a similar idea in his review of *Death of a Red Heroine*: 'Qiu's China doesn't really exist of course, but it is nevertheless revealing and interesting' (Gordon, 2001).

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