



Creative Writing in Asia: Places, Languages, Societies, and Cultures – Plural

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Review of

Disney, Dan, ed. *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing. Beyond Babel*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2014. Print.

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Whetter, Darryl, ed. *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*. London and New York: Routledge, 2022. Print.

Hemley, Robin, and Xu Xi. *The Art and Craft of Asian Stories*. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. Print.

For a long time, Creative Writing as an academic discipline was an American thing. Once upon a time in Iowa, the MFA was born, etc. Then, it became an Anglo-American thing, with the University of East Anglia launching their MA in the UK, and then everyone else in the anglophone world following suit.

While creative writing was being taught only by English-speaking writers to other English speakers, however, perhaps ‘place’ was not such a prominent theme in the scholarship, which was focusing on other strands: creative writing as an academic discipline and its affiliation, discussions on methods—e.g. the ‘workshop’: its predominance, controversies, alternatives, etc.—research and creativity, or issues of power and privilege in the creative writing classroom (which is a kind of ‘place’).

But recently, with creative writing programmes being established all over the world, new scholarship has emerged reflecting more or less directly on how ‘place’ affects writers, writing and its teaching. Last year, I reviewed Marshall Moore and Sam Meekings’s *The Place and the Writer*, which featured a variety of places: from Poland to Greece, from Brazil to British pubs.

For this review, I have decided to look at one continent, Asia, and at some of the research published between 2014 and now, to explore some recurring themes, major issues and approaches emerging from that side of the world.

It was Disney's *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing: Beyond Babel* which first attracted my attention. In some of its case studies, in particular those in Asian universities, creative writing was often first and foremost a tool for the purposes of second language acquisition, as English is fundamentally a language one learns 'in order to' (travel, work, move one step up on the social mobility ladder, etc.). Now, as it emerges from the other publications that have appeared in the last few years, with more and more creative writing degrees being established in Asia, the focus is shifting from learning to write creatively in English 'in order to...' to learning to write creatively, full stop.

The issue of language, however, far from disappears. If anything, it brings up more interesting questions. First of all: who's doing the teaching and in what language? In the case studies presented in these works, there are native English-speaking tutors teaching to non-native English-speaking students; and multilingual tutors and multilingual students.

Then, the 'how' question. There are tutors teaching writing in the local language, while applying craft theories and techniques that are easily ascribable to an Anglo-American tradition of creative writing pedagogy; tutors travelling the opposite direction, looking at what the East can teach to the West; and tutors who make extensive efforts to contextualize their teaching in a variety of ways, including reflecting on the students' own cultures and languages, and how they influence their writing.

In courses being taught in English, further language-related questions are being addressed: what is the role of English within a certain society, and how it is perceived by the student writers. This is a dominant theme reprised by a number of authors in *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing* and *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*, who seem to share the view that, in some Asian countries, it is important to distinguish between a 'functional' use of a language and its other uses ('poetic', 'emotional', 'creative', etc.), and to acknowledge potential bias affecting second-language writers' perception of English.

In an effort to further contextualize their teaching, tutors also show an interest towards the nature of the society of which their creative writing classroom is supposed to be a representative sample. Is it a collectivist society, prioritizing duty and community needs, like Brunei? Is it a multi-ethnic, multilingual society, like Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore? Is it a society which values virtue and conduct, like those of Confucian Heritage Culture? Is it a divided society in which a choice of language is also a choice of status, like the Philippines; or a competitive one, in which creative writing tends to be seen as the cultural capital of the elite, like in India? And so on.

Clearly, the way these questions are formulated oversimplify how societies can be understood – from within, but also from an outsider’s perspective. Nonetheless, it appears that tutors working in Asia have to become—if they are not already—very familiar with where their students come from, literally and metaphorically.

And that includes discourses of culture (or cultures, plural), which stands at the intersection of language and society, thus shaping teaching, learning and writing in equal measure.

Firstly, teaching approaches vary depending on whether the person who’s doing the teaching shares their cultural background with their students or not. Then, from the learner’s perspective, it’s interesting to see how any cultural differences are perceived and received: e.g. how students react or relate to Western principles of narrative such as character’s conflict and change; how, when writing from experience or writing autobiographically, they negotiate their fear of airing their “dirty laundry” in a highly judgemental society; or even how they see the role of the tutor in the class and how this impacts their engagement in the creative writing classroom.

Thirdly, as far as writing is concerned, culture is transferred from authors to characters and from characters to readers, and in these transactions a number of issues emerge: the weight of local culture and its significance in students’ narratives; how cultural representation is seen by tutors and by students; and, in the same vein, issues around the ‘right to write’.

While this collective review barely scratches the surface of a rich and complex strand of scholarship looking at creative writing in Asia, the patterns that have emerged are significant and worthy of further exploration. Now more than ever, interrogating place is relevant to an international scholarship beginning to open up to research about creative writing pedagogies in languages other than English. Questions about who does the teaching, in what language, and drawing from what literary traditions—complemented by the usual ‘how’ questions—will help identify and challenge the centre and margins of the discipline, distinguish the ‘local’ from the ‘universal’, and contextualise and negotiate the tensions between transnational creative writing teaching methods and efforts to preserve diversity in literary cultures.

Disney, Dan, ed. *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing. Beyond Babel*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2014. Print. (Selected chapters.)

- Disney, Dan. “‘Is This How It’s Supposed to Work?’: Poetry as a Radical Technology in L2 Creative Writing Classrooms.”
- Kelen, Christopher (Kit). “Process and Product, Means and Ends: Creative Writing in Macao.”
- Tay, Eddie. “Curriculum as Cultural Critique: Creative Writing Pedagogy in Hong Kong.”
- Chin, Grace V. S. “Co-Constructing a Community of Creative Writers: Exploring L2 Identity Formations through Bruneian Playwriting.”

The relationship between language, culture and creative writing is at the core of Dan Disney's *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing*, which advanced some of the themes now at the base of an international creative writing scholarship, while offering some of the first examples of how creative writing is taught in Asia.

In several of the essays included in Disney's volume, there seems to be a shared understanding of the shapeshifting nature of the English language in its use: in some Asian countries, English is still perceived as a language one must master for social mobility purposes, so it should not be surprising that Creative Writing in English as a second language at some point was mostly associated with English Language Training contexts (ELT), fulfilling the ultimate goal of teaching English to non-native students rather than teaching Creative Writing for its own sake.

As pointed out by Kelen, there are numerous outcomes creative writing helps achieve in an ELT context, including offering "a better reason to be interested in the literature [...] of the Western world and especially of the English language" and motivation for students who are encouraged to "live more of their lives in English" (76-77). This means that creative writing, when understood in the widest possible sense, including related activities such as publishing (Kelen, Tay and Chin) and performance (Kelen and Chin), is the ultimate realization of ELT's flagship pedagogy, the Direct Method.

Furthermore, reflecting on the "publication and performance-focused practice" implemented within his Creative Writing curriculum in Macao, Kelen poses that "provided the appropriate setting, stimuli and motivation, imaginative play in the target language will be the key to fostering proficiency," with cathartic self-expression playing a fundamental role in the process (82).

Kelen's approach is, fundamentally, "emancipatory," a critical orientation proposed in the introduction to this volume by Disney, who sees Creative Writing (SL) as a discipline that "mobilizes toward culturally situated zones of experimentation, exploration, and indeed creolization" (1).

This emancipatory movement, however, still needs to be understood alongside the opposing views of English seen as either a tool, an instrument with its purpose—reflecting the pragmatic mindset of a territory like Hong Kong, as pointed by Tay (107), for example— or something more akin to Disney's reframing of language as "a pliant material that encourages (and rewards) playfulness, experimentation, and innovation" (42). Tay makes the point that "the English language is regarded as instrumental to academic and career prospects rather than a language that is at the heart of one's identity," hence why students are attracted to English courses: "because they regard English as the lingua franca of the business world" (108). In a postcolonial nation like Brunei, however, this polarization takes a very different form due to "a cultural resistance or ambivalence in using English to express local identities" and due to a lingering perception of English "as the language of colonial domination and imperialism" (130).

Understanding the societal role and perception of the language in which the teaching of Creative Writing takes place can be considered one way to apply some of the fundamental principles of Freirean pedagogy. As Tay comments, Freirean approaches presume an “undercurrent of thought that asks questions about how the content and the way in which it is taught and valued by society works for or against inherent power structures and their prevalent ideological biases, alongside the potential for transformation and enfranchisement, whether personal or social” (111). In some of the cases seen in this volume, this element of self-reflexivity takes the form of an interrogation of one’s position and positionality as tutors operating in certain contexts, or places.

In the context of teaching creative writing, ‘place’ acquires a number of meanings, starting from the physical place in which such teaching takes place (the classroom, in whatever form), its metaphorical counterpart (the community of practice, that is the group of writers engaged), and the wider geographical, sociopolitical and cultural context. To this picture, we need to add a dimension of insiderness/outsiderness, which affects not only students’ social membership to their community of practice, but also the teacher, who can be an insider or an outsider depending on whether or not they share the same language and culture of their students.

As an outsider, Kelen looks at Confucian orthodoxy from the point of view of a Western tutor of creative writing in English in a non-native context. Kelen is keen on “dispell[ing] any suspicion of a universalist agenda,” yet, in light of the growth of Creative Writing (SL) in Western and non-Western countries, his approach has a lot to say about how an effort to “localize” one’s pedagogy can offer an antidote to the “dangers of cultural imperialism” (78-79). Kelen asks himself: “what will it entail to take sufficiently seriously the needs of the CHC learner” for the purposes of a creative writing pedagogy, and finds the answer in the value the Confucian tradition places on education and on ethical development, and how these are fundamentally dependent on one another.

While Kelen’s investigation takes a philosophical and pedagogical angle, Tay—a different kind of outsider, as someone of Chinese ethnicity born and raised in Singapore and teaching in Hong Kong—looks at Hong Kong as a “nation that exists in the mind of its people,” a “nation that has coalesced around the memory of June Fourth,” and a “nation without citizenship” whose culture is “located at the intersections of (usually first) world cultures” (105-106). His exploration of place leads to an understanding of the pragmatic, rather than poetic role of English, as pointed out previously, but also to an enhanced awareness of his own gaze, as “for the creative writer teacher who hails from another place, one sees culture wherever one looks” (115). His recommendation is to “draw upon the complexities of culture as a resource” (115), whereas Kelen, as an outsider-*outsider*, appears more cautious, warning of the clear dangers of “orientalism, [...] occidentalism, and of self-orientalizing – the production of ill-informed dreams of the other and of the self,” i.e., “the temptation to make oneself appear as exotic, as an object for someone’s voyeuristic pleasure” (91).

Finally, like Kelen in Macao and Tay in Hong Kong, Chin casts an inquisitive eye upon Bruneian society, which she describes as traditionally collectivist, in a way that “prioritize[s] duties or responsibilities to the community and larger society over the interest or rights of the individual, a concept conventionally viewed as a Western, and therefore foreign, import” (127). Since the ESL classroom is seen as a “representation of a social space and the larger society” and therefore “should be considered as a discursive site of contestations for it inherently carries the meanings and knowledges produced by learners as they negotiate their identities,” Chin also puts emphasis on the role of the English language within the society to understand her students’ perception of it, while at the same time reflecting on the ‘workshop’ and adapting it to “incorporate L2 local sensibilities and perceptions by simulating the ‘social’ environment in the classroom, thereby building a community of practice in the process” (125).

Exploring Second Language Creative Writing might be overlooked as a volume about a ‘niche’ strand of creative writing, but its contributions offer some valuable examples of approaches which can be applied to any pedagogy of creative writing. Some of these tutors are questioning their positionality not just by looking inward and behind (e.g. asking themselves: who am I, what shapes my identity, what is my story, etc.) but also looking *outward*, at the creative writing classroom as a place representative of societies having their own identity.

The auto- and non-auto-ethnographic efforts made by these tutors, however biased, however subjective or not scientific enough, are still valuable applications of the simple principle that neither teaching nor writing (and therefore, nor the teaching of writing) ever happen in a vacuum. This is the same principle that has led to creative writing scholars drawing upon cross-disciplinary frameworks like positionality and intersectionality, and to progressive practices like decolonizing the curriculum; and could lead to more practical applications of Freirean pedagogies in diverse, multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

One area where Disney’s volume could have been strengthened is in exploring the role of canon and exemplary literature. Exemplary literature is a pedagogical tool with many implications, particularly in post-colonial societies, and tutors should interrogate their choices in relation to the place where they operate and the relevance of specific literature to their students. It would have been useful to see more evidence of this type of investigation and how it was informed by the tutor’s process of learning about ‘place’.

Nonetheless, it has to be said that exemplary literature is being discussed more now than when Disney’s volume was published, and that *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing* was ahead of its time anticipating many of the themes and issues which are at the core of creative writing scholarship in Asia and in the wider international context.

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Chapters reviewed:

- Wang, Hongtu (tr. by Ms Ning Kamtung) “A Decade of MFA in Creative Writing at Fudan University: Retrospect and Prospect.”
- Dai, Fan (tr. by Zhang Xinyi) “Creative Writing in English as a Foreign Language: from the Classroom to the World.”
- Zhang, Yonglu (tr. by Ning Kamtung) “Shanghai University: The Iowa of China for the Teaching of Creative Writing.”
- Song, Shilei (tr. by Zhang Xinyi) “The Ranking List of Top Cited Papers on Creative Writing Research in Mainland China and Other Related Issues.”
- Yu, Wenhan (tr. by Zhang Xinyi) “The ‘Uncreative’ Pedagogy for Creative Writing Course.”
- She, Fei “Brief Introduction of the School of Creative Writing, Chongqing College of Mobile Communication.”
- Liu, Weidong “The Translation and Rewriting of Chinese Classical Poetry by Expressionist Poets: Taking Klabund and Ehrenstein as Examples.”

In March 2021, the Newsletter of Tin Ka Ping Centre of Chinese Culture (from now on, simply referred to as “the Newsletter”) published an issue focused on Creative Writing in China. While the issue features articles in both Chinese and English, this review essay will focus only on the English-language pieces. As such, the analysis presented here may not fully represent the range of perspectives and themes present in the Newsletter as a whole.

The selected articles featured in the Newsletter come from a variety of Chinese academic institutions, and can be divided into two distinct categories: those that present an overview of degrees in Creative Writing in specific institutions (Wang, Dai, Zhang, She) and those that do not (Liu, Song, and Yu).

In the first group, we are introduced to the history of Creative Writing programmes in China, and the rationale behind their approaches. There are striking commonalities in how two of these courses came to be in the first place, via Asian writers attending MFAs or shadowing workshops in the United States.

Wang writes, “[s]tarting from 2008, Fudan University, under the leadership of Chen Sihe and Wang Anyi, began to draw lessons from the management and teaching methods applied in MFA programmes in the United States” (30); in the same year, Dai was introduced to creative writing by

writer Xu Xi, who had been a visiting writer at the University of Iowa. Dai herself was then able to participate in the International Writing Programme at Iowa, and “exchanged thoughts with counterparts from the United States, the UK, Australia and other countries.” “These experiences,” she explains, “provided me with the ideas for the teaching of English-language creative writing that was hardly taught in China at the time” (38).

Following on the theme of Creative Writing as an ‘imported concept’, an article belonging to the second group, Yu’s “The ‘Uncreative’ Pedagogy for Creative Writing Course,” interestingly focuses almost entirely on a course conducted by Kenneth Goldsmith at University of Pennsylvania, advocating for similar “radical practices” to revitalize creative writing courses, an effort promoted by The Open University of Hong Kong with the introduction of Goldsmith’s “Uncreative Writing” via Chinese-language pioneering poets such as Hsia Yu, Chen Li and others (60-64).

Finally, the influence of North American programmes is further evidenced in Zhang’s article, titled “Shanghai University: *The Iowa of China* for the Teaching of Creative Writing” (42-46).

Despite the unambiguous legacy of the North American MFA, some authors evidence an effort to distance themselves—or simply move on—from it. Shanghai University, “the Iowa of China,” is reported to propose an education framework that “takes the introduction of creative writing as an academic discipline along with its Sinicization as the core” (44), a localized approach also adopted by the School of Creative Writing at Chongqing College of Mobile Communication (73).

This process of Sinicization and localization, unfortunately, is mentioned but not explained in detail and it can only be inferred that it must relate to the content of the curriculum and to the writing produced by students, rather than the teaching methods or tools employed to teach craft. These, conversely, sound very familiar: Dai, for examples, mentions close reading/reading as a writer, workshops, tutor’s and peer-to-peer feedback, revision and lectures as the main tools making up her proposed pedagogical framework, in addition to an undefined “creativity beyond the classroom” approach (38-39).

What could also be seen as an effort to localize Creative Writing is the discipline and pedagogy-related research that all universities seem to be advancing.

Shanghai University, on one hand, has “introduced and absorbed the basic theories and concept of creative writing in English-speaking countries” (45), leading on the translation and publishing of germinal works like McGurl’s *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*, Myer’s *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* and Donnelly’s *Establishing Creative Writing as an Academic Discipline*, among others. On the other hand, it is said to have “further developed its own localisation theories,” publishing “3 volumes and 15 theoretical books ascertaining the fundamental issues in theory” (45).

Shanghai University also founded the Chinese Creative Writing Centre, which has in turn produced more published works: *Creative Writing: Theory and Practice*, *Fiction Workshop*, *Developing Novel Writing Skills*, etc. Similarly, the School of Creative Writing at Chongqing College of Mobile Communication boasts the publication of “two textbooks, more than one hundred academic monographs and dozens of theses written by faculty members,” as well as an indie press project named Fishing Town Book Series (69).

One of the articles in the Newsletter which does not focus on a specific university as a case study, Song’s “The Ranking List of Top Cited Papers on Creative Writing Research in Mainland China and Other Related Issues” presents quantitative evidence of the most cited papers with ‘creative writing’ as the subject of the search term. Of the top 27 items being cited more than 10 times, only one is by a Western author (Mark McGurl): further evidence not only of the academic health of the discipline, but also of the interest received by local research as opposed to the overwhelmingly anglophone academic production in the field of Creative Writing Studies.

In the same article, Song makes an interesting point about best practice in academic research:

[...] researchers should have the awareness of the importance of citing references. When writing papers and engaging in research, one should pay attention to the comprehension and analysis of existing literature, then propose new research questions upon it. It is also necessary to take literature review as a precondition to put forward the problem and to cite the research findings generated by academics in the same field. (56)

It is quite interesting to notice that none of the contributors of the Newsletter cite references, not even Song themselves. One might argue that an academic newsletter is a very different publication from a monograph or a peer-reviewed article, for example, and that the informality of these contributions does not make for less informative reading. However, I share Song’s invitation to refer to existing literature when writing about one’s own Creative Writing programmes, as a way to engage with other scholars and present a more detailed picture. First of all, because different bibliographies tell different stories. And secondly, because creative writing scholarship could benefit greatly from being exposed to more international perspectives, which at the moment could be hiding behind the barriers of language.

Finally, as part of the second group of articles not looking at specific programmes, the Newsletter features an essay about the translation and rewriting of Chinese classical poetry in German in the early 20th century. Liu looks at expressionist poets Klabund and Albert Ehrenstein who, with their work, contributed to creating a “new style with a modern sense and Eastern aesthetics” (72). Liu argues that Klabund’s rewriting of Li Bai’s poems, for example, “allows us to re-understand ancient poetry from modernity,” giving us the opportunity to “see a new sense of beauty and receive

new enlightenment” (72). German poets, according to Liu, “did not tamper with Chinese classical poetry arbitrarily, but they continuously endowed ancient Chinese poems with modern aesthetic value in translation and rewriting” (73).

Liu’s article, like the others, is limited in its less academic and more informal approach, introducing very broad and relatively superficial descriptions of these rewritings and their impact on the 20th understanding of Chinese classical poetry. Liu argues for a “rich[ness] of meaning” that goes beyond the “cultural affinity” or “cultural colonisation” but does not delve into these complex concepts, nor into what it is exactly about Klabund and Ehrenstein’s aesthetics that “sublimates and extracts the beauty of Chinese classical poetry” (73). That is unfortunate, since his argument, if supported by more specific examples and related literature, could bring really interesting perspectives on the historical dimension of cultural representation and appropriation, topics which are more prominent in recent publications like *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia* and *The Art and Craft of Asian Stories*.

Considered collectively, the selected articles in the Newsletter suggest a very compelling story of how creative writing as an academic discipline is gathering momentum in China, leaving a lot of room for more comprehensive investigations to enrich the general picture. It is worth highlighting the articles that did not take the autoethnographic approach of the first group and delved into cross-disciplinary discourses on literary translation, research, and pedagogical approaches. While still providing interesting overviews, the articles about individual courses in creative writing skimmed over the ‘Sinicizing wave’ localizing Chinese Creative Writing pedagogy, missing the opportunity to provide more details about its specific approaches.

An adequate resource to fill some of these gaps would be Xiaojuan Gao’s “An Overview of the Development of Creative Writing Teaching and Research in Mainland China (2009-2020),” which covers many of the aspects touched upon in the Newsletter, including localization and the exponential growth of creative writing research. Xiaojuan’s article also covers some aspects that were virtually missing from the Newsletter: for example, creative writing as an ‘imported concept’, changes and challenges in mindset, and the cultural resistance to some aspects of creative writing pedagogy (e.g., workshop dynamics, reading aloud, the expected role of the tutor, etc.).

Whetter, Darryl, ed. *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*. London and New York: Routledge. 2022. Print.

Teaching Creative Writing in Asia is a collection which explores approaches to teaching creative writing in China, Hong Kong, India, the Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan. This volume documents the shift from monolingual to multilingual creative writing, and observes the empire writing back (“again,” 3), while tutors reflect on their own positionality and the role of Anglo-American traditions in countries in which English is only *one* of the many spoken languages.

In the thirteen chapters, multilingualism recurs over and over again, not just as a pedagogical strategy, but as a condition that is impossible to ignore “as we approach (or have already passed) the point at which the number of non-native speakers doubles the number of people who speak English as a mother tongue” (4). The choice of language for creative writing and self-expression has a wide range of implications which concern several of the authors, who address two issues similar to those raised in *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing*: how English is seen by the bilingual or second-language writer; and how English is seen by the society of a particular country.

In her essay “Compromised Tongues: that ‘Wrong’ Language for the Creative Writing We Teach in Asia,” Xu presents a critical argument claiming that one cannot talk about bilingualism without talking about biculturalism, too, albeit rejecting its implied duality: “[t]he problem is the prefix ‘bi’, because rarely is a colonial upbringing so easily split in two.” She argues that a more accurate description for the literary expression of postcolonial writers would be “a transnational or transcultural one, or, in some unfortunate cases, a deracinated one that ‘whitens’ the language, culture, and world of their stories” (45).

Dai and Li, on the other hand, talk about creative writing in a foreign language as “self-translation without the text of the original language,” creating an additional responsibility for writers who need to interpret culturally loaded expressions, “so that the international reader will have the background necessary to understand the story” (110). This approach suggests that the writer has to build a bridge between their native language and that of their writing, cross it, and then indicate and explain distant cultural landmarks to the occasional clueless tourist/reader passing by.

Shea, too, talks about self-translation in poetry, which seems to allow much more freedom of movement between the two sides of the metaphorical bridge, as “students become empowered to write in either language, sometimes at the same time, as they switch back and forth between two languages” (121).

On the subject of freedom to explore, Siegel argues that his non-native students enjoy the same benefits as his American students—e.g., trying something new, stretching their personal boundaries, testing their voices and discovering self-expression—with the additional bonus of “a chance to work on their English language skills in a new and interesting way, outside of the relatively confining boundaries of traditional language instruction” (162). Having experienced SL creative writing himself—in Japanese and Mandarin—Siegel argues that “telling a story in an adopted language offers a thrilling way to make that new language a part of you” (162).

What Siegel seems to reiterate is what teachers using creative writing in multilingual or ELT contexts have argued for a while, now: that creative writing enables students to engage with English as a second language in a more personal and direct way, contributing to a never-ending process of identity

formation and opening new channels of communication. However, as we gather from many contributions to this volume, in Asian countries this delicate process often does not occur in the most favourable environments, as it has to get the upper hand on the societal bias against the English language.

For example, Whetter points out that, since the '80s, the Singaporean government has openly run campaigns to eradicate or discredit English in favour of Mandarin, deeming it “emotionally unacceptable” and “crippling” (24). Now, the government’s attitude has been showing even more hostility towards Singapore’s creole, Singlish, to the point that it has “fined students for speaking it in schools.” Yet, with more and more Singlish words making the OED every year, Whetter argues that Singlish offers opportunities for “fusion and playfulness” which are “ideal for the creative writer” (21).

In other countries, the resistance to a more creative, personal, engaged use of the English language has to do with its perception as the language “of power and privilege,” as is the case in the Philippines, according to Dalisay (131). According to him, English as a literary language poses some problems, as “it remains the perceived language of the upper and middle class, so that—in a deeply stratified and class-conscious society like the Philippines—its use in creative writing by writers from that elite very often limits the material, mindset, and form of whatever is written to those familiar to that class” (138). There is, therefore, a crucial issue of lack of representation, with “the language itself acting as a distancing agent” between the elite and the realities of the poor masses (139).

For Dhar, similar circumstances have provoked an opposite movement *towards* the English language, which is seen as “the language of transnational aspiration” (73). That is why both creative writing and literature in English “become important sites of neoliberal self-fashioning, a site of cultural capital which can be purchased in the same way that education as a whole has become one of the most expensive commodities within India after liberalisation,” leading to creative writing flourishing “most significantly in India’s new private universities” (73).

Privilege, in fact, is unsurprisingly one of the other main themes of the volume, and its inherent presence is acknowledged as an ‘elephant in the classroom’ by many of this volume’s contributors. Whetter states: “Before I even opened my mouth, the first text in the room was, we all knew, the colour of my (privileged) skin. When I did speak, I doubled-down and created another Faulknerian conflict: could I teach writing and direct a new graduate writing programme in a country where I did not quite speak the language? [...] How could I teach these nimble, code-switching, multilingual writers when I could not crack their code?” (17).

One wonders whether these questions around positionality are ever raised *before* stepping into the classroom. For some of the contributors, they seem to appear *a posteriori*, like in Siegel’s experience, who admits: “I am [...] a little mystified by how little I thought about the cultural context in planning my course readings,” giving the example of how he assigned Hemingway’s “Hills Like

White Elephants” “without knowing anything about Taiwanese attitudes towards premarital sex and abortion.” While Siegel does appreciate the thoughtful and fascinating conversations sparked by some of his assignments, ultimately, he “cannot help but wondering if more carefully chosen, culturally aware readings might have created more consistently engaging classroom discussions” (161).

Siegel’s example proves what is also acknowledged by Xu, which is that the MFA in creative writing has “bias in favour of the Anglo-American canon,” and that the basic principles traditionally accepted as foundational (for example, a Western narrative structure built on action-climax-epiphany-denouement) could be seen as foreign or not applicable to non-Western literature (51).

Richards adds more context to “this legacy of emotional expectations in genre for fiction in English, borne widely from early Catholic journeying towards salvation and Protestant layering of individual negotiation of the social world,” which “tautologically offers emotional resonance of pattern for any reader or writer steeped in the innumerable stories of transformation, and often metabolised, starting in infancy” (93). In Richards’s view, tutors need to “query ongoing emotional frameworks of legacies and futures of languages” and question what constitutes “a ‘story’, or ‘poem’ or ‘play’ in the first instance, in any language and given culture of expectations” (91). While deeply anchoring her ideas in the context of multilingual writing, Richards encourages to not neglect “foundational concerns” at the heart of a comparative study of genre for creative writing, by addressing even more genre-defining questions:

Why are English-language readers deeply drawn in the first instance to the individual, then, to obstacles, and ultimately to the potential for individual change, or transformation? What makes the moved individual moving to English-language readers? What assumptions do we make when we attribute such emotional attachment to the generic “story”? What moves writers from other histories of genre instead, if not the moved and individual character? How can a multilingual creative writer stage a bridge and redirect expectations of genre alternative perspectives of what constitutes a story, or any generic expectation? (95)

The centrality of these questions seems to suggest that canon and canonicity do not only apply to literature, but to theories of craft, genre expectations and emotional frameworks. Therefore, if there is a centre and a periphery for theories of craft, there must be a centre and periphery for creative writing pedagogy in general, leading to the question of inescapability of politics posited by Dhar:

Feedback in a creative writing workshop as such tends to be about an objective “craft” which supposedly lacks any politics or ideology. While remaining by and large unarticulated, this default notion of an “objective,” “apolitical” craft has been the foundational assumption that has guided Creative writing Workshops in the US. Notwithstanding the overwhelming whiteness and masculinity of the Creative Writing workshop in America which has come across much discussion in

the recent years, my own practice, whether it is as a writer, curator/editor, or teacher, is inherently bound up with the understanding that craft is unavoidably political and possesses its own social history. What I am committed to as an instructor of Creative Writing, therefore, is a form of what many commentators have termed the “social turn” in creative writing [...] and requires, first of all, an open engagement with our own structures of privilege. (76)

As we transfer the ‘centre-periphery’ spatial metaphor across issues and themes, we must finally consider it within the wider context of Asia as a ‘place’, as foregrounded in the title of this volume itself.

Tensions around different perceptions of ‘place’ are evident in students’ writing and in tutors’ efforts to invite them to cautiously approach “unfamiliar settings,” as mentioned by Sherwood. He acknowledges a common tendency among his students from Singapore who “are loathe to set their short stories in Singapore” (165), perhaps due to a contemporary “temptation to improve the perception of self,” which finds its manifestation in fiction, where “the author can present characters who are handsome and tall and brilliant and impulsive, where every gesture is pregnant with meaning, and the setting is always California” (172).

Similarly, Xu relates of a colleague complaining of “his Asian students writing stories [...] with white characters named Dick and Jane in imitation of English fiction they’ve read,” and frequently set “in a suburban America,” where, apparently, the grass is not only greener but also, narratively speaking, just a lot more interesting.

Perhaps as a strategy to prevent these manifestations of, for lack of a better word, ‘angloamericanophilia,’ Dai and Li insist on a proper use of “Chinese-specific elements” to “add flavour to the story” and, in the case of idioms and daily expressions, even “reveal [cultural] facts and/or ancestral wisdom,” provided the author makes a special effort to work as a cultural mediator for readers from other cultures (107-108).

As well as informing content, in this volume conscious investigations around ‘place’ and ‘culture’ (with a particular emphasis on ‘local’ culture) affect and inspire pedagogical approaches and philosophies, reminding of Kelen’s, Tay’s and Chin’s (auto)ethnographic explorations in Disney’s *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing*.

Iyer reframes a foundational notion of craft—an author’s choice of narrator and point of view—from the perspective of the “collective nature of Hong Kong society.” Offering a practical example of what is theorized by Richards, Iyer argues that “the use of point of view in the Western canon primarily supposes, and derives from, philosophies of existentialism and the notion of individual rights prevailing over collective rights” (189), whereas the use of the first-person plural narrator (FFP) is a “more accurate aesthetic” and “reflection of Hong Kong’s socio-cultural realities” (190-193), which

has its manifestation in the Cantonese common pronoun *ngo5dei6* ('we/us'). Iyer argues that this effort of "joint consciousness," if complemented by other craft elements, has the potential to "becom[e] a legitimate narrative mode, as opposed to something gimmicky and experimental" (196).

She concludes:

Teaching FPP in the Hong Kong context is in a sense an odd phenomenon — it is introducing the experimental in the English language to learners who are already familiar with the concept in Cantonese. In a sense, it is akin to driving right around a roundabout only to turn into the opposite lane from where you are travelling from. Extending FPP as something out of the existing Western canon might seem like an exercise in universality. And, yet, in practice, the learners are not modelling their narratives or relying on these English-writing predecessors — they are harkening back to FPP use in Cantonese and transliterating it to English. (196)

As 'place' and 'culture' ultimately dictate choices—student writers' choices of content and style, teachers' choices of pedagogical approaches—an inevitable discussion around the 'right' to these choices emerges in the last two chapters of this volume, adding some interesting perspectives to the topical and delicate issue of cultural representation and cultural appropriation.

In her chapter "Writing Dance: Mentoring the Writing of Dance Artists across the Asia-Pacific," Stephanie Burridge presents the eclecticism of Asian-Pacific dance forms while negotiating with the consequences of "a palpable history in performance and other arts [whereby] there was much to be enjoyed in 'exotic'-based performances" when "current concerns of regarding authenticity, cultural protocols, and respect for cultural ownership were not issues" (179). Burridge invites artists and scholars to "recognise the margins and centres of their own discourse and narratives" (182) and to consider that "contextualizing, as well as describing, analysing, and evaluating a dance work might add to our appreciation and understanding of its meaning moving beyond aesthetic enjoyment" (178).

In Burridge's contribution, the "social turn" mentioned by Dhar in this volume (76) seems to take the form of "an understanding and commitment to the rights of the traditional owners of the cultural material" and "such a process for an artist involves research, negotiation, knowledge, empathy, and permission where any 'traditional' material is used" (179).

The other chapter dedicated to negotiating similar tensions is the second part of Iyer's "Cosmopolitan Creative Writing Pedagogies," titled "Cosmopolitanism in the age of offence." In this section, Iyer reflects on the consequences of censorship applied to authors whose identity is perceived as conflating with their literary works and vice versa. She reflects on the idea of cultural preservation, responding to the argument that "culture cannot, should not, be appropriated by those who do not belong to it, and especially by those considered to have privilege over the 'oppressed'

cultures, as it then causes erasure, or at best a *dilution* of the culture, and thereby propagates homogeneity and lack of diversity” (202). Her approach views cosmopolitanism as a remedy to “neutralise offence, and deweaponise identity policing, in so far that it advocates not an idealistic, universal harmony with no conflict, but merely in adjusting and adapting the familiar with the unfamiliar—something human beings have been doing for generations” (203).

Burridge and Iyer’s approaches do not necessarily contradict one another, as both of them seem to disqualify a monolithic view of culture in favour of a more complex (and, in Iyer’s case’s, challenging) investigation of the concept of authenticity by those who wish to engage with any form of otherness, while recommending thorough research of content and context. Burridge’s approach, however, seems to tend more towards sensitivity, whereas Iyer defends the student writers’ right to “explore and seek and play with ideas, concepts, characters, mythologies outside their immediate experience—and to do so in an unpoliced environment,” one where they “can make mistakes, small or large, where they can then decide if they want to change their minds about those mistakes or continue on with more research and nuance” (204).

To conclude, compared to Disney’s volume, one of the most striking general aspects of *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia* is that most of the creative writing programmes featured in the latter are focused on creative writing as its own practice and academic discipline, rather than as a tool for ELT. Yet, since almost all of the featured courses are delivered in English, the language dimension of teaching creative writing once again presents some very interesting issues, which I have attempted to identify and link to other themes and issues around society, place and culture.

What appears to be missing from this volume and from the wider field is more research into how creative writing is taught in Asian languages, rather than in English. As I mentioned in the opening of this review, creative writing as an academic discipline was, for a long time, an Anglo-American thing. But it is clear now that, with the discipline establishing itself internationally, teaching creative writing in other languages is an area which deserves to be explored, as it will provide further perspectives onto the universal, transnational, cosmopolitan or place/culture-bound nature of creative writing theory.

Further to the comment about the role of exemplary literature I raised as a gap in *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing*, in this volume more tutors appear to interrogate their choices, but once again it is an area that could be expanded more, particularly if one considers ‘local’ literature, too.

Examining this volume alongside *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing* and the Newsletter, a pattern emerges pointing to a one-directional movement of creative writing theory being ‘imported’ into Asian countries via native English-speaking expatriate tutors or via Asian tutors who have studied abroad. However, as some of these tutors engage with local cultures and societies and

encourage their students to do the same, I am surprised to see how rarely they refer to Asian literature and literary theory in general. Even if courses are taught in English, I would still argue that making an effort to include Asian authors in English translation would be consistent with a creative writing pedagogy which is mindful of ‘place’ and of diverging perspectives on craft, form and storytelling.

Hemley, Robin, and Xu Xi. *The Art and Craft of Asian Stories*. London: Bloomsbury. 2021. Print.

The last work considered for this review essay is quite different in format and purpose from the volumes and articles considered so far. Robin Hemley’s and Xu Xi’s *The Art and Craft of Asian Stories* is an anthology of short stories analysed from the point of view of craft techniques and aimed at writers and students, featuring lists of creative prompts at the end of each thematic chapter.

By choosing to present Asian stories, the authors of this volume aim to “widen the field of models for students of any background from any country,” setting to demonstrate that “the short story is a global phenomenon, and that North American writers, writers in the UK, Australia, and elsewhere could glean as much from Asian stories as writers in Asia could glean from North American models” (1).

The way the short stories are presented also makes this volume different from similar resources, as craft techniques are not isolated chapter by chapter (e.g. a chapter on ‘plot’, one on ‘narrators and point of view’, one on ‘characterization’, etc.); instead, they are integrated in the analysis of each story. Chapters collect two or three short stories having in common some big theme, like ‘diasporas’, ‘taboos’, ‘routines’, etc., followed by discussions about how these themes are approached and how the authors achieve certain narrative or stylistic effects.

The craft techniques mentioned range from general differences between novels and short stories (5), characterization and character’s motivation (131, 217), narrators and point-of-view (45, 69, 80, 195), to more sophisticated stylistic aspects of fiction, such as symbolism and motifs (29, 57), repetition (43) and tone (97).

Like similar works intending to demystify craft techniques, the authors provide direct advice, for example: “When you have such a motif in your story, just make sure to keep track of it. Don’t introduce it, mention it a couple of times, and then drop it” (57).

Some of this advice, however, seems to derive from notions of craft belonging to a Western tradition of creative writing scholarship, which here seem to be presented as universal.

For example, the question of character’s conflict driving the narrative, a concept which other scholars (including Richards and Siegel in *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*) ascribe to a Western

tradition for historical and cultural reasons, is raised as a norm: “Conflict is one of the building blocks of fiction, but sometimes writers will make the mistake of creating protagonists who are passive rather than active” (26).

By contrast, other aspects of crafts are highlighted as deviations from the norm, like the first-person plural narrator in “We That Summer,” by Han Yujoo (45), or the omniscient point-of-view in general: “The omniscient POV is one that fell somewhat out of favour for the Anglo-American short story over the last century, but is used more readily in stories from Asia” (69).

This approach is in line with the aim set out by the authors in their introduction, but, like in *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*, one wonders whether the authors could have made a bigger effort to integrate discussions on craft notions that are specific or ascribable to an Asian tradition, similarly to what proposed by Matthew Salesses in his chapter “An Example from East Asian and Asian American Literature” in *Craft in the Real World*.

Instead, Hemley and Xu explain that the only real aspect that makes the stories included “Asian” is their content, “in the sense that the setting is in Asia and most of the characters are Asian” (3). They also offer a reflection onto another content-related characteristic of these stories, which is that most of them “address political or historical issues—both country-specific and global—as well issues of intercultural conflict,” something that is in part “due to the landscape many Asian writers must negotiate—colonialism, military or authoritarian rule, cultural traditions that still dominate contemporary life, specific historical or racial or religious issues” (3).

Following on more commonalities, in the introduction, the authors briefly mention the “additional linguistic issue of writing a literature that is not necessarily the country’s ‘native language’” (3), a theme which will be reprised often in the analyses of some of these stories. In this collection, language is not only a ‘vehicle’, concerning the style of a short story, but often plays a narrative and/or a dramatic role (as it happens in the short stories “Dreams in English” by Noelle Q. de Jesus, “Farangs” by Rattawut Lapcharoensap, “Boondocks” by Robin Hemley).

In terms of how linguistic varieties are manifested, there seems to be a strong emphasis on interrogating the purpose and effect of specific choices. For example, reflecting on Ploi Pirapokin’s “Prayer in Training,” Hemley and Xu invite the reader to interrogate the author’s “counter-intuitive” choices:

Why does she include the Thai prayer, interspersed in italics throughout the story? What is the effect of this? If you know Thai, perhaps the answer will be different, but if you don’t know Thai, what does the Thai do, technically speaking, to enhance the reader’s experience of the story? These are the kinds of questions a writer asks—what can I borrow or steal from this person’s technique to use in my own story? If you’re at least as concerned with these technical questions as you are with content, then congratulations. (220-221)

In the analysis of “An Errand,” by Angelo Lacuesta, the authors comment: “[...] if we want to tell the story of a non-mainstream or specific culture, using the language of that world can add color and meaning to your story. [...] But just as it’s important not to alienate the reader, it’s equally as important not to over-explain or over-translate, but instead to guide the reader’s understanding of what is implied.” Lacuesta is praised for his skilful introduction of lines of dialogue in Tagalog with enough hints so that the reader can infer their meaning, allowing the author “to lighten the heavy-handedness inherent in both techniques of an omniscient POV and in the use of ‘local color’” (95).

The authors’ assumption that certain, less mainstream narrative or stylistic choices (such as symbolism, omniscient narrators, multilingualism, etc.) would feel “heavy-handed” and “alienate the reader” if not handled with extreme care (67, 69, 70, 94-95) sometimes comes across as unnecessarily patronizing: “We mortals don’t have much practice with omniscience, and in our amateur hands, it can feel heavy-handed. If used well, the omniscient POV can inject meaning into your fiction beyond what individual characters in the story know to be true” (69).

In addition, the expression “local color” does not seem to do justice to the manifestations of multilingualism in these texts, where language is integral to the character’s identity and carries the weight of cultural complexity where multiple languages clash (like in Lapcharoensap’s “Farangs”). Nor to the other “extremely local references, whether cultural, geographical or linguistic”—all falling under the umbrella of “local color” (70)—which emerge in all the stories featured in this collection.

On the topic of cultural references, these are often highlighted and contextualised by the authors either before or after the short story is presented, with introductions along the lines of this one preceding “Birds” by Deepak Unnikrishnan:

To fully appreciate the story, it’s helpful to understand that migrant workers from all over Asia are contracted to work for the wealthy Gulf states, as for example in the United Arab Emirates or UAE, of which the city of Abu Dhabi is the capital. Workers leave behind families in their home countries, as the protagonist Anna does. Although they are well paid compared to what they can make back home, they effectively become second-class citizens, generally with no rights to citizenship no matter how long they live in their countries of employment. As depicted in “Birds”, work at construction sites is dangerous and difficult, and living conditions are cramped and uncomfortable. (57)

Thus we are introduced to or reminded of a variety of geographical, cultural and historical circumstances, e.g. the 1976 Argentine coup d’état, the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, the geography of Manila, etc. These interventions are welcome, as they provide very useful insight into the stories. Less welcome is the occasional assumption about the reader’s ignorance on any

given topic: “Before you read this story, how much did you know about Singapore or Lee Kuan Yew? Chances are, unless you happen to be from Southeast Asia or have lived in Singapore, you probably know very little.” (236)

In this volume, history is interpreted and reinterpreted despite its “dauntingly impossible” character, with the authors emphasizing that its real meaning is “how it affects the lives of ordinary people” (223): “[Yoshimoto Banana’s] ‘Bee Honey’ is not about the historical coup, or even Buenos Aires which is where the protagonist is, but is instead about the sorrow that hasn’t healed for her, unlike the comfort she recalls when her mother would make her bee honey, a honey and lemon drink to alleviate a cold. When you try and break down this story, ask yourself what the story is really about? The answer is not history” (228-229).

It is interesting that, while stories that are set in the past are considered from the point of view of what personal conflict makes their characters “memorable,” stories that are set in the future are praised for their capacity to speak to their readers about the present, while not necessarily revealing a political agenda. In fact, the authors comment: “Stories uphold or subvert the societal norms of their times, but not in the same way as editorials. They do so ambiguously, or at least the successful ones do. That’s not to say that one can’t glean a moral, political, and/or ethical stand from a story, but heavy-handed moral lessons are the stuff of propaganda, not of fiction” (239).

This appraisal of subtlety also applies to stories about the present, as shown by this comment on “Birds” by Deepak Unnikrishnan and “We That Summer” by Han Yujoo: “Both stories are critical of the worlds their characters live in for the existential despair caused by the demands of a globalized economy. But it’s important to note that they don’t criticize these worlds explicitly—they do so implicitly, allowing readers to discern for themselves what’s wrong with this picture” (67).

The notion that the degree of subtlety used by authors to make any type of social commentary would make a short story more or less successful seems to perpetuate a specific Western aesthetic which strikes as odd in a volume about Asian short stories. Like with recommendations about characters and conflict, the impression is that we are reading Asian short stories using a pair of Western glasses.

On the other hand, what also emerges from discussions around the ‘history’ and ‘future’ themes is their role in creating an understanding of what a specific culture or society was, is, or is likely to be like in the future. The representation of a particular culture or society frequently comes up in the discussions, as the authors invite the reader to “examine what [they] think the stories say about the cultures in which they’re set” (44).

Unsurprisingly, when representation of culture is concerned, so are the issues of misrepresentation and appropriation. Hemley and Xu do not shy away from offering their perspective on writers’ “right to write” and do so in several instances:

Fiction and nonfiction are different in terms of representation, though this subject can be a divisive one. A nonfiction writer who writes a fake memoir of his time as a migrant construction laborer in Singapore is either delusional or unethical. There are those who would say that fiction writers should stay in their lanes, too, and while the reasons for these feelings are myriad, complex, and not easily dismissed, we believe that straying from one's lane is not in and of itself irresponsible or unethical. Fiction derives from the Latin *fingere* , to contrive, and it shares its root with figment and feign. The characters of these stories are figments. They are contrived. And at best, we feign to have entered the consciousness of anyone but ourselves. (95)

An aspect related to the issue of conflating characters with real-life authors is explored further in chapter 6, in which Hemley's short story "Boondocks" is used as a starting point for more questions about "writing the 'other'": "As fiction writers, should we attempt to write about someone whose experiences and background are completely unlike our own? We believe that fiction is about imagination, and that writers should be able to cross borders of culture, language, gender, religion, and so forth if they wish, but that it's important to do so *responsibly* " (128).

Hemley and Xu's advice is not only to "do [one's] homework" (128) but also to consider showing a different culture from "a POV that clearly does not understand or only half understands the other's experience" as a way to "own it" (129). Finally, reminding of Burridge's and Iyer's views in *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia* , they recognise that: "It is very important that writers exercise their right to imagine and try on the skin of the 'other' in their stories. However, it's also equally important to do your homework and search for empathy for even the less sympathetic 'other' if you wish to write good fiction that illuminates the human condition, instead of merely presenting stereotypes and exotica" (130).

As a resource for writers (students and teachers alike), *The Art and Craft of Asian Stories* has several merits. Its holistic approach allows for craft and stylistic techniques to be considered alongside reflections on the historical, geographical, social, linguistic and cultural contexts in which the stories are written, while also making room for wider reflections on writing in general which are often missing from volumes focusing only on craft.

The anthology showcases a very diverse range of short stories and presents them under "maxi-themes" which highlight universal aspects of the human experience while also emphasizing Asian stories and identities. The exercise sections at the end of each chapter—each proposing four or five different prompts—pick up on these themes and challenge the reader-writer to investigate their meaning based on their own experience. Some of these prompts are quite direct and to-the-point ("Come up with a mystery that needs to be solved. Write a story that prevents it being solved," 196), whereas others offer thought-provoking material along with detailed advice:

Write a story in which a character or characters transform into something impossible. Don't worry about how absurd it is—you could write a perfectly wicked story about someone who turns into a vending machine, for instance, or a cell phone. Try not to pick ones that are too close to ones that you know have already been used. Part of the fun in this is how clever you can be in choosing an object that carries some kind of inherent cultural currency, like the dragon in “Dragon Menu.” Of course, you don't want to be too heavyhanded, so if you're American, you might want to take a pass on everyone turning into a bald eagle. On the other hand, who are we to say? Maybe the next great American novel will simply be titled, *Eagle*. *Note: please remember we gave you the idea and a finder's fee would be greatly appreciated.* (114)

As it is evident in this specific example, the tone of the volume can read very informal, humorous and personal, but as I have pointed out before, sometimes the authors' attitude can come across as patronizing by making generalized assumptions about the reader's knowledge or their cultural background.

As far as the overall aim of this volume is concerned, on one hand, an anthology like this does “widen the field of models for students of any background from any country” (1), and I would add that its literature-based teaching approach is a welcome remedy to a strand of scholarship which has a tendency to overlook literature, let alone ‘local’ literature, as I have argued multiple times in this review essay.

On the other hand, the authors' argument of a short story as a “global phenomenon” and their critical analyses appear skewed to reflect an Anglo-American perspective. When aspects which could be symptomatic of an ‘Asian craft’—take, for example, the use of first-person plural narrator, also studied by Iyer in *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*—are presented as a deviation, rather than a norm, we are constantly being reminded of the centre and margins of a very specific creative writing tradition, the Anglo-American/Western one, here presented as universal.

I wonder whether, in this case, a polysystemic approach would not have been more appropriate, interrogating these short stories from the point of view of Asian craft and style expectations, thus introducing readers-writers to the perceived characteristics of an Asian literary centre and margin. After all, in *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*, Xu herself wrote:

As one of my Chinese students from Beijing recently noted about the English short story, she could not understand why a protagonist must undergo a “change” since people do not fundamentally change. This is one of the most basic writing craft issues taught to students in fiction workshops. Her observation arises, in part, from the nature of Chinese short fiction, which does not always demand what the typical American story demands in order to be considered “good” fiction. (53)

Therefore, the question is: what is it that Chinese or, more widely, Asian short fiction demands? Or, to reprise Richards's interrogation of genre, "What moves writers from other histories of genre instead, if not the moved and individual character?" (95). Answering these questions would really "widen the field of models," meaning not just models as 'exemplary literature', but also 'craft models,' reflecting on both sides of theory and pedagogy, the universal *and* the local, and how they are affected by places, languages, societies and cultures — plural.

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