Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition

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RECENT INTEREST IN GLOBALIZING LITERARY STUDIES HAS largely involved attempts to locate conjunctures between contemporary literature and the economic formation of global capitalism and thereby to name a new literary structure of feeling—*structure* in terms of the organization of various literatures into a world system and *feeling* in terms of the literary production of new affects in new forms, styles, and genres.[1] Its precedent is the idea of "world literature," first articulated by Goethe in 1827 and recently recuperated. While many scholars resuscitating this concept offer a nominal apology for its Eurocentric origins, this Eurocentrism's constitutive hierarchies and asymmetries are seldom analyzed. Twenty-five years after Edward Said's *Orientalism* and the book's specific criticism of Goethe, it appears that the critique of Eurocentrism in general has exhausted itself, that one only needs to show awareness of it because it is predictable.[2] Instead of working through the problem, one gives recognition to it, which serves as an expedient and efficient strategy of displacement, a tropological caveat, able to push aside obstacles on the path to globalist literary studies of global literature.

Fatigue with postcolonial critique and a fear of repetition are partly symptoms of academia's incessant search for new theories, paradigms, and ideas, but this ennui cannot dispense with the gnawing evidence that Eurocentrism, or, more accurately, Westerncentrism, still exists in old and new forms. Charges of repetition and yawns of familiarity, then, may be hazards one must anticipate in insisting on continuous dissections of Eurocentrism. As deepening economic and cultural globalization prompts new notions of global literature, it is as much in order to critique their politics as that of *Weltliteratur*. Crucial here are what may be called technologies of recognition that selectively and often arbitrarily confer world

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membership on literatures, whether national, local, diasporic, or minority. These technologies have largely operated alongside and within national, political, cultural, economic, and linguistic hierarchies. I would like to resituate the notion of technology, which Teresa de Lauretis wrested away from Foucault with a forceful feminist reinvention (1–30), in the transnational terrain of cross-cultural politics of power and in the national terrain of interethnic and intercultural politics of power so that it denotes the constellation of discourses, institutional practices, academic productions, popular media, and other forms of representation that create and sanction concepts. "Technologies of recognition," then, refers to the mechanisms in the discursive (un)conscious—with bearings on social and cultural (mis)understandings—that produce "the West" as the agent of recognition and "the rest" as the object of recognition, in representation.

In this essay I focus on two specific technologies of recognition, that of academic discourse and that of the literary market. They are not independent of other technologies, but they are exemplary in their seeming complexity and astonishing consistency. I identify five discrete yet intersecting procedures these technologies use. The first two modes of recognition I analyze below, despite their obvious limitations, are among the very few instances of engagement with non-Western and minority literatures outside area studies and ethnic studies scholarship, when all manner of other theorists continue to produce Eurocentric universalistic theories without taking responsibility for that which is seemingly distant. The seemingly distant is undeniably constitutive of Eurocentric universalism as we know it; hence, nonengagement with the non-West and with the minority is in actuality a "fantasy of distance," as Sara Ahmed terms it (167). To make an obvious and often displaced statement: what precedes recognition, and is more devastating than the politics of recognition, is sheer negligence or feigned ignorance. Negligence and ignorance of the other(s) are fundamental to the neocolonial production of knowledge and the global division of intellectual labor. They are masked by powerful silences that refuse to recognize the multiplex others by way of a simple disavowal whose mechanism has not been fully analyzed and that maintains and produces hierarchical knowledges across West-non-West, First World–Third World, and majority-minority divides. Silence and ignorance exacerbate these divides even before the Westerncentric politics of representation and recognition comes into play. On the margins of this centripetal production of knowledge and on the lower rungs of the hierarchy, a scholar working in non-Western and minority literatures often has to contend with scholars whose engagement—despite "good" intentions—falls short of the level they would exercise with their "own" areas of expertise. Their generosity is circumscribed by an uneven attention, a compulsion to apply less rigorous critical judgment to non-Western and minority materials than to canonical materials.

This essay posits, furthermore, an understanding of the Hegelian notion of recognition as but one mechanism for subjectivization among many, as opposed to seeing the notion as a primary dialectical process of subjectivity. Much scholarship on recognition assumes a Hegelian master-slave dialectic as the model for the relation between the self and the other, a model that limits subjectivity to a binary model of intersubjectivity of subjects and objects. But the subjectivity of the objects, if I may speak oxymoronically, is not defined in totality by their subjection to one master alone, even if we agree that subjection is a primary basis of subjectivity. Intersubjectivity is a field of relations not just to one subject or to one object but to multiple subjects and objects. The non-West is never singularly defined vis-à-vis the West, since many other factors come into play in the non-West's self-definitions. Similarly, the minor is never exclusively defined in terms of its recognition or lack thereof by the major, since the minor is related to many subjects and objects

and, importantly, to other minority formations.[3] Something always exceeds recognition, whose technologies bind those awaiting recognition to the "pathology of oppression" (Oliver) and in turn undermine efforts to gain subjectivity in a chain of negativity. In other words, the mutuality that undergirds recognition is never total, for there are more than two players at any point. Dialogic intersubjectivity is also always among more than two. Although the West contributes to the non-West's sense of self and the major contributes to the minor's sense of self, however grave and definitive the contribution, there is always room for other relational identifications and identities and even for disidentifications.[4]

The five modes of recognition I identify here as belonging to academic discourse and the literary market—the return of the systematic, the time lag of allegory, global multiculturalism, the exceptional particular, and postdifference ethics—are not meant to be exhaustive but are intended to expose the fault lines of the variations of the world literature paradigm in late capitalist globalization.

The Return of the Systematic

How antisystematic poststructuralist thought successfully guarded the territory of its discourse at the boundary of the West perhaps makes an ironic story. Poststructuralist theory has served chiefly as an internal critique of Western thought and has not attempted to seriously confront the non-West. What implications poststructuralist thinking may have had for non-Western knowledges and other subjugated knowledges are beyond its range, and the history of the imperialisms and colonialisms that have made the seeming coherence of Eurocentric thought possible has also been largely absent from its field of vision. Poststructuralist theory exercised and strengthened the muscles of Western thought, rendering that thought even more able to reproduce itself through discursive self-criticism. Such theoretical self-criticism discovered aporias, contradictions, and instabilities of meaning in Western discourse, but these discoveries have been reinvested in Western discourse, proving its infinite complexity, which warrants even more scholarly attention. Self-criticism in this mode cannot be equated with the self-reflexivity that is critical of its own politico-economic condition of possibility, its Eurocentrism, and the limits of its representation (Spivak). Rather, self-criticism seems to have functioned as a form of narcissism.

Contrary to the antisystematic move of poststructuralist theory, where meanings in perpetual deferral are posited against totalizing narratives, various poststructuralist-inflected Marxist and other academic scholarship has striven to understand the non-West systematically. With a clear hint of exasperation, Said asked decades ago, "What was this operation, by which whenever you discussed the Orient a formidable mechanism of omnipotent definitions would present itself as the only one having suitable validity for your discussion?" (*Orientalism* 156). If we replace "Orient" with "the rest of the West," the question still stands for those who cannot be so simply dismissed as "Orientalists," and it allows us to see the extent of this strange procedure whereby antisystematic analysis is reserved for the West but "omnipotent definitions," broad generalizations, and the imposition of systems and structures are reserved for the non-West. If the West is modernist in the sense that it is critical of modern society, then the non-West is realist in the sense that it is reflectionist and cannot transcend its rootedness in society; if the West is postmodernist in the sense that it is fragmentary, complex, and indeterminable, then the non-West is modernist in the sense that it still retains a belated sense of purpose. Forever caught in the fallacy of temporal hierarchy and spatial distancing rather than the postmodern logic of simultaneity of time and compression of space, the non-West is mired in structuralism through such methods as taxonomies, culturalisms, Third-Worldisms, and, in short, "omnipotent definitions."

The recent debate surrounding Franco Moretti's essay "Conjectures on World Literature" is one such site where we see the return of the systemic as the return of the repressed. Like a Benjaminian flash of history, the symptomatic reemergence of the world literature paradigm illuminates some underlying logics of representation and the discursive management of non-Western literatures. Or, to rearticulate this question by creatively applying Moretti's sociological methodology in the study of literature, world literature is operative as a concept today because it is an abstract of contemporary social relations in late capitalism, globalization, and the consolidation of the American empire. Indeed, Moretti begins his essay with an evocation of Goethe followed by Marx and Engels's famous statement about the necessity of world literature to overstep "[n]ational one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness," calling them ideals that comparative literature "has not lived up to" (54). Contrary to the cosmopolitan beginnings of Goethe, Marx, and Engels, comparative literature has remained largely centered on Western Europe, or, in Moretti's vivid description, on the river Rhine. Moretti's positing of the cosmopolitan ideal of Goethe, Marx, and Engels is immediately suspect, however: although the charge of Eurocentrism does not completely undermine what they had to say about world literature, it qualifies the presumed universality of their concept. The concept can be recuperated from them only after its Eurocentric roots are dealt with as constitutive failures. This simple oversight, I think, structures the many other oversights in the essay, where, good intentions aside, there is a tendency toward generalization and "omnipotent definitions" even as the author frequently admits his limited knowledge about literatures outside Western Europe. What is most curious is how these caveats become not so much obstacles as enabling mechanisms for sweeping generalizations.

As Moretti notes, the impulse to generalize a "literary world system"—Moretti's main argument is that the modern novel in the periphery rose between circa 1750 and 1950 as a "compromise" between Western form and local reality—is motivated by the desire to bring the concept of world literature to the level of "theory." In this theory, the novel is the privileged genre and a site of compromise among foreign form, local reality, and local form, which he specifically designates as "foreign *plot*, local *characters*, and then, local *narrative voice*" (65). If this can be called a theory, it is an astoundingly neat theory. Efrain Kristal's rebuttal to Moretti has shown how the novel was not the dominant genre in Spanish American literature during the period examined and how the cross-cultural fertilization was not limited to one-way traffic from the center to the periphery. A cursory look at Chinese literature would also have led Moretti away from taking one scholar's work in English as the authoritative last word on the Chinese novel and from taking the Chinese novel at the turn of the nineteenth century as representative of the entire period from 1750 to 1950. Any genealogy of the modern Chinese novel has to examine its relation with the classics of the genre, which include (if we limit the list to Moretti's period) *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (1791), *The Scholars* (1803), and *Flowers in the Mirror* (1828), as well as the late-nineteenth-century novels that Moretti refers to. *Xiaoshuo* (fiction) has been called by the same name from time immemorial to the present day in Chinese and "sinophone" literatures.[5] The modern classification of *xiaoshuo* distinguished its long form (the novel, *changpian xiaoshuo*) from its short form (the short story, *duanpian xiaoshuo*). This distinction marks the uniquely modern moment for Chinese literature in the early twentieth century, because at this point the short story became the dominant genre, and it remained so up to the 1940s. The short story was also more obviously "Westernized" than the novel in early modern Chinese literature. For the Chinese case, then, the short story would have worked better as a genre to support Moretti's theory and, by extension,

Fredric Jameson's, on whose invocation of the novel as the modern global form Moretti bases his argument ("Third-World Literature").

Even if one agreed with Moretti that modern literature in the non-Western world in general (not the modern novel per se) is a site of cultural hybridization, it would be difficult to see how this hybridization could be so neatly categorized as Western plot, local characters, and local narrative voice. There are many objections to this mechanistic division of labor. Problematic too is the impact-response model of active Western progenitors and passive non-Western recipients, as Kristal has also shown, as if literary agency were always one-sided. Furthermore, literary historians trace the genesis of *xiaoshuo* to the tradition of Buddhist stories that originate in India and central Asia as early as the seventh century. If only literary mixing involving a response to European literature deserves to be categorized as world literature, then we are again not far from Goethe's and Marx's Eurocentrism.

This critique of Moretti is meant to be not a nativist rebuttal of a general, comparative piece of work (which has its place in the study of literature) but a reflection on the persistence of the tendency to provide "omnipotent definitions," or more modest-sounding "conjectures," about non-Western literatures and to give them the status of theory. Even Immanuel Wallerstein (from whom Moretti borrows) has called his work on the world system a "perspective and not a theory" (129). Among the questions to be asked, then, are who is allowed to produce theory, who is allowed to call it theory, in which language is theory written, and what amount of work on a literature is necessary before one can generalize about it? Silence or withdrawal ("I cannot speak of you, or to you, because you are different") is not the answer. Silence assumes a cultural relativism where the West, still the primary referent, indulges in a "fantasy of distance" and refuses to "take *responsibility* for that distance and difference" (Ahmed 166–67). In other words, responding to otherness is not a zero-sum game of relativistic silence and problematic recognition but a matter of responsible attentiveness that works hard to give the non-Western reality, however hybridized, as much due as one can, surely beyond citing a couple of secondary sources as final words on a national literature and beyond citing secondary works on the late nineteenth century as valid for a two-hundred-year period. Perhaps the era of close reading is over, as Moretti announces in this essay and its companion, since close reading championed a small canon of Western texts, but we still need to attend carefully to the texts we study. Although situated in a structure or a system, a literary text also always exceeds its structure or system in the power of its effect and affect, which may be transhistorical and transspatial. If we take this power of a literary text as a given for the best of Western literature, as Wai Chee Dimock has done in a recent essay, then we should do no less for non-Western literatures. "Literature for the planet" (Dimock), "world literature" (Moretti), or "globalit" or "global literary studies" (Baucom)—whatever it is called—should be as complex and rich as all that constitute it.

The possibility of constructing a global literature today does not hinge on exercising a "maximum of methodological boldness," as Moretti calls for ("Slaughterhouse" 227). Rather, it requires a lot more hard work, work that is necessary, not optional.

The Time Lag of Allegory

Perhaps no other megastatement about non-Western literatures struck a nerve of scholars working in those literatures as did Fredric Jameson's remark that all Third World narratives are "necessarily . . . national allegories" ("Third-World Literature" 69). Many criticisms and defenses ensued,[6] and in the meantime this "omnipotent definition" gradually became its own prophecy as select Third World writers and artists either found the definition applicable or, worse,

produced national allegories to sell in the global marketplace. Some of the sensational trauma narratives about China's Cultural Revolution written in English by first-generation immigrants living in the United States, Britain, and France,[7] for instance, may be categorized as deliberate national allegorical narratives with an eye to the market, and so may the works of the much-criticized fifth-generation cinema from China, in which allegory was supposed to be the chief mode of representation. When the signified is predetermined, allegories are easier to write or create and to understand and consume. A predetermined signified is produced by a consensus between the audience in the West and the Third World writer or director. It is a contractual relation of mutual benefit and favor that works first to confirm the stereotyped knowledge of the audience and second to bring financial rewards to the makers of those cultural products. In other words, allegory works and sells because it makes the non-Western text manageable, decipherable, and thus answerable to Western sensibilities and expectations (sometimes even by way of the non-Western text's inscrutability). In the context of uneven cultural and economic development across the First and Third World terrains, allegorical representation may thus collude with the production and reproduction of global capitalism.

In a brief response to Aijaz Ahmad's criticism, Jameson explained that he wanted to point out "the loss of certain literary functions and intellectual commitments in the contemporary American scene," such as the capacity to link a personal story with the "tale of the tribe" and with the "political role of the cultural intellectual" ("Brief Response" 26). The loss of such functions and commitments prompted Jameson to look to the Third World, where he finds them in plentitude. Unwittingly identifying the Third World as an embodiment of the self's past is a form of nostalgia, even though Jameson intended a critique of the First World. Indeed, one kind of allegory places in the past the paragon of virtue or that which has been lost in the present. This, for instance, was a primary mode of allegory in classical Chinese literature—namely, using the past to satirize or comment on the present (*yigu fengjin* or *yigu yujin*). The backward-looking of allegory, in this instance, parallels the backward-looking of nostalgia: in both, the referent or object is no longer. In a different context, Madhu Dubey has aptly described such First World nostalgia as the "romance of the residual."

Allegory is only one kind of meaning-producing form, and it is also but one of the hermeneutical codes we can bring to the reading of texts. Clever readers can, I would suggest, interpret any text as an allegory, as long as they labor to do so. The temporal gap between the literal and the allegorical meaning of a text is then the designated field of interpretive labor. In the end, it is in the politics of allegorical interpretation as value-producing labor—who has the privilege of doing it, who is forced to do it, who has the luxury not to do it—that the nostalgia of the First World theorist becomes legible and can be fruitfully critiqued. The time lag of allegorical meaning production in the movement from the literal to the figural evokes the belated temporality of Third World culture in modernity.

A central contradiction in Jameson's essay that has not been pointed out relates to the issue of interiority. Since Max Weber, scholars working in Chinese and sinophone literatures have been beset by the charge that the Chinese lacked interior lives because they did not have the concepts of sin and guilt, did not experience dynamic motivation, and passively adhered to exterior ethical codes of conduct and ritual. Hence, when they read Jameson praising Chinese literature for overcoming psychology—that is, sublimating psychology to national politics and history to the extent that the private is superceded by the public, the individual by the collective—they cannot help but feel a sense of déjà vu. Granted that Jameson intends to criticize what he calls "placeless individuality" and alienated psychologism in Western literature (85), constructing Chinese literature in terms

opposite to them returns it to the old stereotype, albeit with a twist. The implication is that psychology and the libido in Chinese literature are to be read politically, since the individual as such does not exist. Scholars would argue, however, that modern Chinese literature was created by authors *after* Lu Xun, who serves as Jameson's archetypal Third World writer, as much as by Lu Xun himself. The early-twentieth-century Chinese romantics and modernists after Lu Xun dug deeply into the space of interiority, thanks partly to Freud. The split between Freud and Marx that Jameson proposes as characteristic of First World literature was an influential formula in Chinese literature after Lu Xun and, for the most part, contemporary with him. The formula applies to Chinese as well as Western literature because, unfortunately, cultural colonization and hybridization had already taken place in Lu Xun's China and the danger of essentialism was already operative there, even then.

It is also instructive to remember Gayatri Spivak's critique of the national-allegory model in her analysis of Mahasweta Devi's work—there are spaces and practices that cannot be interpreted by the nexus of colonialism, nationalism, capitalism, and their interrelations or reversals. Perhaps Devi intended her stories to be national allegories, but an attentive critic would be well advised to ignore her intention. Perhaps Lu Xun meant to write national allegories, as Jameson's ready equation of Lu Xun's character Ah Q with China suggests, but are we not supposed to be looking for polysemia, discontinuity, and heterogeneity rather than equivalence? The gap between the ideal of polysemia and the practice of monosemia is, perhaps, an allegory of the relation between the First World theorist and the Third World text.

All representations are representations; all interpretations are interpretations. I understand the limits of representation and interpretation in the radical split between the signifier and the signified and their dissociation from the referent. But the other side of the stereotype is not an anarchic proliferation of unanchored and irrelevant meanings and representations. If stereotyping is inevitable in cross-cultural representations (Chow 73), then we might ask for whom it is inevitable, why it is inevitable, and what are its consequences for Third World texts. Most important, we need to ask how it is implicated in the global division and hierarchy of intellectual labor, in which the First World theorist is situated and in which Third World diasporic scholars triangulate and mediate First World "theory" and Third World "reality" by variously and vicariously exercising options of complicity, ambivalence, and resistance. As diasporic scholars become more and more "American," the continuum of identities and identifications shifts gradually—for some, dramatically—in emphasis and tenor. The diasporic has been "Westernized" to the extent of "becoming Western" (because not assuming to be so is irresponsible), so that the ethical imperative here is situated in a continuum from a critique of the First World from a Third World perspective to an internal critique: Third World diasporic scholars are themselves part of the problem, since the Western tradition is also their own.

The ethics of the becoming-minority of diasporic intellectuals from the Third World lies in destabilizing the binary relation between the West and the non-West by dereifying and complicating it, which involves overcoming stereotypes without falling into a sea of anarchic differences.

Global Multiculturalism

One of the more devastating forms of stereotyping has been the culturalization of ethnicity, history, politics, and nation. Culturalism is the procedure by which everything melts into culture, so that politics of power can be usefully restricted to the realm of representation (or to a politics of recognition) without having to account for social, economic, and political consequences of power (or confront a politics of redistribution, in Nancy Fraser's terms) and without transforming objects into subjects (Oliver). A global multi-

culturalism is thus engendered, an extension of the American national model of multiculturalism. What is national in the Third World is turned into ethnic culture during minoritization after immigration, and, similarly, even those who are outside Western metropoles are metaphorically and oftentimes practically minoritized (Shih). In the new rainbowlike globe, each nation is supposed to represent one reified culture, with a set of recognizable traits, just as each ethnic minority community in the metropole constitutes one reified culture in an official multiculturalism. A certain color scheme on fabric, a certain style of clothing, a certain food item, a certain practice of everyday life, and a certain work ethic become the definitive traits of one nation and one culture, as nation and culture are equated with an agreed-on repertory of images and styles. Identity politics has unwittingly played into such reification of culture, as did Third World nationalisms with their passionate focus on constructing bounded national cultures and an identifiable set of national characteristics.

Arif Dirlik has usefully critiqued culturalism as not so much a cultural privilege as a "cultural prison-house," which effectively suffocates everyday transformative practices of culture and politics for ethnic minorities in the metropole and for Third World peoples. Culturalization now substitutes for racialization, so that the trauma of race and racism can be sidestepped and the political potential of rupture based on a clear delineation of racial oppression is disenabled. Race becomes culturalized to such an extent that it all but disappears, even though it continues to structure hierarchies of power. Similarly, Third World nationalisms become cultures to the extent that they are complicit with the global marketplace by selling culture as commodity, even when there are dramatic racial and economic inequities between the First and Third Worlds. Commenting on this phenomenon, Slavoj Žižek called multiculturalism the "cultural logic of multinational capitalism." By incorporating a "series of crucial motifs and aspirations of the oppressed" and "rearticulating them in such a way that they became compatible with the existing relations of domination," (global) multiculturalism transfers politics to the realm of the apolitical so that the economic ends of global capitalism are achieved (30). I will analyze this "postdifference" position in the next section, and suffice it to say here that many have seen the limits to culturalisms underlying the politics of recognition. It is also important to caution that in many previously colonized and semicolonized nations, culture was one of the primary categories in which colonial epistemology organized native knowledge for domination and management, through missionary and other colonial apparatuses of dissemination.

When literature crosses national boundaries, culturalism comes into full play. Particularly in the popular market, global and domestic multiculturalisms have dominated the ways in which the work of a non-Western or minority writer is read and sold. In Asian American communities, condemning writers who use self-orientalizing strategies to cater to the mainstream taste as "selling out" is an issue of, on the one hand, the burden of collective representation imposed on the individual writer,[8] and, on the other hand, the individual writer's complicity with the market, often through a use of stereotypes. The new subgenre of Chinese immigrant memoirs written in English about traumatic experiences during the Cultural Revolution in China, as mentioned above, is a less complicated and more direct expression of *ressentiment* with an important difference. Unlike much Asian American writing dealing with racialized existence in the United States, this subgenre deals with oppression in—and directs its *ressentiment* toward—China. The popularity of this subgenre is not unlike that of postcolonial studies, whose *ressentiment* was directed at a British colonialism far away in time and space from the United States.[9] In both cases, spectacles are safely enjoyed from a distance.

A ten-year political struggle in which culture was largely reduced to ideological correctness or

incorrectness, the Cultural Revolution was as much about the misrecognition of culture as about the codification and management of social practices. For example, gender difference was seen as a culture of signs (clothing, manner, makeup, hairdo, etc.) and the basis of gender inequality; therefore, eliminating gender inequality required discarding, even repressing, all feminine signs. The failure of the Cultural Revolution as an ideal and the era's human consequences show the futility of imposing a reified and essentialized definition of culture.

The popularity of Cultural Revolution trauma narratives in the United States and increasingly in Europe reproduces this reification in a reverse, bourgeois mode. This reversal plays into the reification of culture as commodity (packaged as history and trauma, hence national allegory), transforming harrowing human experience into literary spectacle waiting to be turned into film. The thin generic division between literature and film dissolves before the desire to maximize market potential, but this desire is masked cleverly by a moralism that upholds Western liberal democratic humanism in opposition to the Chinese Cultural Revolution's dehumanizations. In the end, in the self-ethnographies of the diasporic, the political and the ideological melt into culture. This is a new form of exoticism, or trauma-ism, which culturalizes wherever it goes.

There is a risk of collapsing the distinct meanings of the political for United States and global multiculturalisms. The political does not translate easily across boundaries, since what is political in one context is not necessarily political in another. One can discern the United States–centric agenda in domestic and global arenas, and in typical colonial fashion, the metropole's mode of managing its others is transported to the peripheries. However, the struggles of minoritized peoples in the United States have fashioned a critical multiculturalism that challenges not only assumed monoculturalisms but also various managed multiculturalisms. When the word *multicultural* is hijacked by the mainstream society, its political valence needs to be redefined to resist the displacement of political economy. So even in domestic multicultural discourses, the content and accent of the political shift in time and space. The political is meaningful and productive when it can shift alongside the maneuvers of power by the dominant, not only to respond to new forms of domination but also to engage in transformation. The political, in other words, is constituted by time.

For non-Westerners managed under the banner of global multiculturalism through international film festivals, book awards, art exhibitions, and so on (not to mention the corporate version of managed multiculturalism), critical articulations are more difficult, for at least three reasons: the discourse of nationalism has been the primary mode of resistance to Western domination, and this discourse unwittingly reinforces the culturalization of a nation; critical awareness of the global management and reification of cultures is consequently lacking; and the ascendancy of the market has proved the selling power of culture as commodity. To the extent that self-culturalization has become a chief mode of self-identity in the global context, the tasks left uncompleted by nationalisms are finished by capitalism without boundaries. Given the fluidity of geographic and electronic boundaries, what distinguishes one person from another may be the distinctions between one culture and another, which then displace the differences in racial and historical experience. In the zone of the global multicultural, at least we can all be color-blind and origin-blind and congratulate ourselves on our liberal notions of the world as we head toward becoming neoliberal.

The point of criticism here is not that the cultural is inherently devoid of the political or is divorced from the material but that the deployment of the cultural in managed domestic and global multiculturalisms systematically purges it of its political potentialities. The divorce of the cultural from the political was largely orchestrated to rechannel the social discontent of do-

mestic minorities and to expand global markets. When the cultural is separated from the political and, for that matter, from the material (except in its market variety), it is denuded of its transformative power. This is another oppressive division of labor that severs what is relational into separate spheres (Butler 42). The devaluation of the humanities as irrelevant these days is the direct consequence of such a division of labor. It therefore comes as no surprise that minority studies in academia has been seen as largely a phenomenon of the humanities, even though much is being done in the social sciences, policy studies, health sciences, education, and economics.

The Exceptional Particular

If global multiculturalism fetishizes reified cultures as embodiments of difference, its opposite fetishizes mimicry, model minority, and belated sameness. Belated sameness is seen as proof of the universal validity of the self, the precedent, or the majority: for example, the rise of modernism in Third World literatures and First World minority literatures supposedly proves the universal validity of metropolitan modernism. When texts from these literatures are granted an au courant designation such as postmodernism, the assumption is either that the Third World has finally arrived or that postmodernism is a universal advanced category. Reacting to the withholding of such designations, Third World and minority critics and scholars resort either to nationalism (claiming that their literatures are unduly ignored) or to masochistic self-orientalism (viewing their literatures as not good or advanced enough). These familiar reactions are dictated ineluctably by the prison house of recognition.

For decades the Nobel Prize in Literature obsessed Chinese critics and scholars, who publicly lamented that no Chinese writer had been awarded it. The issue came to be regarded as a national insult, the result of exclusion and prejudice. When Gao Xingjian, an exile living in France, received the award in 2000, there was a general outcry from official and unofficial Chinese sources that the selection was politically motivated and meant to vilify China. Gao had been the target of official criticism during the "anti–spiritual corruption" campaign of the mid-1980s before his exile, had been blacklisted in China for his avant-garde literary views and practices, which defied Maoist doctrines of literature (Tam 3–4), and had, since his exile, written forcefully against Maoism's ideological domination of literature. The nationalistic Chinese responses were thus predictable. Indignation mixed with a desire for recognition can be glimpsed in such postprize publications as *Flexing Muscles with the Nobel Prize in Literature* (2002), in which Kenzaburō Ōe (the Japanese Nobel Prize winner of 1994) was recruited to confirm that the neglect of Chinese literature by the Nobel committee is an "injustice" (qtd. in Xie Huadong 202), and in the series *Walking toward the Nobel Prize*, distributed by a prominent Shanghai publisher showcasing the best of contemporary Chinese fiction for broader recognition.

What are not predictable are the new ways in which the politics of recognition is played out by the international literary prize, as well as the complications arising from Gao's status as an author who writes in Chinese while living in France. His major novels, *Soul Mountain* (*Lingshan* [1990]) and *One Man's Bible* (*Yige ren de shengjing* [1999]), were published in Taiwan while Gao was living in France, although the first novel was partly written before he emigrated from China. These works have been ignored by literary histories in China but are important examples of sinophone literature. There are two compelling issues here: the Nobel Prize's politics of recognition and the need to understand the sinophone as a productive, important, and historically specific category for literature.

The politics of recognition involves the granting of universality to the exceptional particular—that is, Gao's works are exceptional in that they, in their particularity, transcend the

particular and approach the universal. This logic suggests that particular works cannot be universal unless they are exceptional. The granting of universality to exceptional cases is selective and has to be analyzed in terms of how the universal is defined and how a particular is selected for the granting. The exceptional escapes the logic of the particular and does not set a precedent because it is singular and nonrepetitive and hence does not open a path for other particulars. Granting universality to the exceptional particular—the singular—thus in no way compromises standards of the universal, nor does it threaten the guardians of the universal.

According to the official citation, Gao was awarded the prize "for an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama."[10] The presentation speech by the Nobel Prize committee member Göran Malmqvist explains the four items mentioned in the prize citation—universal validity, bitter insights, linguistic ingenuity, and new paths for Chinese literature. The second and fourth terms are spatially and temporally specific, hinging on Gao's experience in Maoist and post-Maoist China (the story of the persecution and suppression of his creative genius), which produced "bitter insights" as well as Gao's contribution to Chinese literature as a national literature. Gao's persecution during the Cultural Revolution is mentioned in the third sentence of the speech, establishing that Gao's story is one of escape from oppression, whether the shackles of Chinese tradition ("Confucian orthodoxy") or of politics ("Marxist ideology"). The speech elaborates the first term of the description, "universal validity," by foregrounding Gao's relentless exploration of the "existential dilemma" and the "meaning of human existence," as well as "the nature of literature, the conditions of authorship and, first and foremost, . . . the importance of remembering and imagination for the author's view of reality." The third term, "linguistic ingenuity," receives only one mention, however, in connection with Gao's creative use of pronouns to represent subjectivity in multiplicity.

This simple summary shows a tension between the particular (what is historically and politically specific) and the universal (what is human or literary). There is a causal relation between the particular and the universal, because the particular leads to the incessant search for the meaning of existence and the meaning of literature. But the universal is so widely assumed that it is nearly a banal cliché—one could argue that all serious literature is a search for the meaning of existence and the meaning of literature. The major value-producing criterion here, then, is apparently not the universal but the particular: the exceptional, singular case of one particular with universal resonances. In the end, the national is alive and well as a category in the selection of the Nobel Prize in Literature, just as the national produced in China the negative reactions to Gao's award. The harness of the national binds the Nobel Prize and the negative reactions from China in a binary duel of wills.

Gao's diasporic life in France and his fluency in French, prepared by a degree in French literature, make no difference to the two parties' unwitting collusion in fetishizing the national. Nor are Gao's numerous writings (such as his Nobel Lecture ["Case"]) that reject all forms of domination, including the Maoist and post-Maoist political and ideological varieties from China as well as the consumerist variety in Western metropoles, properly registered. When would Gao be considered a French writer who happens to write in Chinese? Or a writer who happens to write in Chinese and may live anywhere in the world? The sinophone as an organizing category allows for an alternative theorization of such a writer because it transcends national boundaries; its raison d'être is a condition of exile, diaspora, minoritization, and hybridity that resists incorporation both into China and into the place of residence.

Sinophone writers from Indonesia and Malaysia have carried on this double resistance for a long time—on the one hand, writing in Chinese in hostile local conditions and, on the other, writing in a unique kind of Chinese hybridized by local experience and thus circumventing Sinocentrism. Many of these aspiring writers immigrated to Taiwan, a sinophone country lacking nation-state status and under the threat of China's containment, for college education and began theorizing this relation to their places of origin and to China and Chineseness. For the generations of Taiwan intellectuals, writers, and scholars mystified by what was until recently the Kuomintang's Sinocentrism (the decolonization of consciousness from Sinocentrism in Taiwan began in earnest in the late 1980s with the lifting of martial law), these theorizations by Malaysian- and Indonesian-born sinophone writers are instructive.[11]

Gao's male protagonist in *One Man's Bible* tells a German Jewish woman that he has no "ancestral land" (a Chinese expression for "nation"), that "China is very far away," and that he is "tired of writing about the trauma" of China (16, 286; my trans.). Addressing the protagonist as "you," the narrator later says, "[Y]ou do not need this national label, it is just that you are still writing in Chinese, that is all" (300; my trans.). If we thus justifiably suspend the battle of the national for the sinophone, so that the national and the linguistic are no longer metonymies and mutually determining, then we can move on to critically engage the novels themselves, noting, to start, their singular achievements in form and language as well as their problematic representations of women and of ethnic minorities in China. The granting of universality to the exceptional particular by the Nobel Prize committee then will require closer readings of Gao's novels and plays, readings that draw on all critical categories rather than selected ones. The affirmation of Gao by the Nobel committee should be an affirmation of sinophone, not Chinese, literature.

Postdifference Ethics

The four preceding sections on the politics and technologies of recognition critiqued the fetishization of difference (national allegory, multiculturalism, the national) and the return to sameness (the systematic and the universal) as determined by the logic of "re-cognition," the cognition of that which is already known and predetermined by political economy in mostly predictable ways.[12] I introduced a new category, the sinophone, inspired by the francophone and lusophone, though they have different histories, to shift the politics of recognition from that which is assumed to be known to that which needs to be learned by effort. The ethical here is therefore embodied in a dual critical perspective on the uses of difference and sameness as reified, re-cognizable categories under the regime of recognition and as value-producing constructs serviceable to dominant universals. This section will caution, however, that not all differences are the same, not all critiques of difference can be collapsed, and a blanket rejection of difference is not called for.

A recent consequence of critiques of multiculturalism gone wrong or postcolonial theory gone mainstream is the development of what I would call postdifference ethics or ethics after difference. The more Marxian proponents of postdifference ethics reject difference because of its perceived problems, such as identity politics and culturalisms, and dismiss it as an obstacle to collective resistance to capital. In reaction to what is seen as the late-twentieth-century celebration of difference (or *différance*) in Derridian deconstruction as well as in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, a simultaneous resistance to difference and desire to transcend difference have developed in philosophy. This interesting convergence between a Marxian perspective and a new philosophy of ethics is echoed in some discourses emerging after postcolonial theory, declaring the exhaustion of difference and hybridity and urging a postdifference ethics.

For Alan Badiou, difference is a fact of every situation, since multiplicity and infinity are the

law of being, simply, "what there is" (Hallward xxxvi). Otherness has "neither force nor truth" as an ethical category because it has produced identitarianisms and displaced class struggles, thereby serving conquering civilizations. Levinasian ethics is to be "purely and simply abandoned" as a "pious discourse" like religion and hence can no longer be considered philosophy. The ethical lies, instead, in being "indifferent to differences" (Hallward xxxvi) and in "recognizing the Same" (Badiou 25); then one can approach "truths," which are "the coming-to-be of that which is not yet." "The Same," in this scheme, is what comes to be, since difference is what there is already. A futuristic notion of truth therefore should dispense with difference as belonging to the order of the banal present and should search for four truths of the Same, which are science, love, politics, and art (Badiou 18–28).

Badiou's rejection of difference is premised on the assumption that no one is more or less different from another person than is anyone else, so he argues that there are "as many differences, say, between a Chinese peasant and a young Norwegian professional as between myself and anybody at all, including myself" (26). By thus flattening all differences as universal and qualitatively similar, he rejects the conditions of difference, which are undergirded by the political economy of race, gender, class, nationality, sexual choice, and so forth—that is, the coimplication of difference and inequality in a politics of recognition and redistribution. Abuses of difference are seen as fundamental to difference as a discursive concept and social fact; thus, difference is rejected in favor of returning to the Same and to the search for truths.

There are strong resonances here with postidentitarian discourses that seek to show that minority and Third World peoples are not "otherness machines" to be used to produce difference for exoticist consumption or managed multiculturalism. Recent Asian American literature, for instance, concerns overcoming ethnicity as difference (Asian Americans are Americans too), and recent prominent Asian films are also less exotic spectacles than they are gritty urban portraits (globalization has made us all more and more alike). There is widespread disenchantment with difference-producing stereotypes of all kinds and fatigue with the orientalism analytic. But this disenchantment among the minority or the marginalized is qualitatively different from the rejection of difference by the majority and the center. Not all articulation and rejection of difference is the same, as not all difference is the same. Some differences carry more cultural capital than others; some differences are less universal than others; some differences are more disempowering and hurtful than others. The minority's and the Third World's desire to overcome reified differences does not mean that there are no more differences or that history, culture, and all other categories of human understanding are universal.

The center's rejection of difference amounts to rejecting the political and other gains of critical multiculturalisms. The timing of the emergence of a postdifference ethics in France (where minority issues are becoming more and more visible) is suspicious. Nancy Hartsock once questioned, "Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes 'problematic'?" (26). One can adapt Hartsock's query to ask, why is it that, exactly when so many of us have begun to mobilize productive and nonreified forms of difference for political struggle, just then the concept of difference becomes problematic?

Judith Butler has usefully analyzed the disparagement of difference as "merely cultural" by contemporary Marxist thinkers and reasserts the importance of difference as a constituent of struggle, noting that the "refusal to become resubordinated to a unity that caricatures, demeans, and domesticates difference becomes the basis of a more expansive and dynamic political impulse" (44). She criticizes the orthodox Marxist distinction between the cultural and the mate-

rial as the result of a "selective amnesia of the history of Marxism itself." It is capitalism that separates the cultural and the material, through abstraction; hence, the separation is the "effect and culmination of the division of labor" (42).

Such a problematic postdifference ethics practiced in literature will return us to the older paradigms of universalism, with records of violence—epistemic, cultural, and otherwise. The reaffirmation of literature does not mean a return to the kind of unity or truth that caricatures, demeans, and domesticates difference. It is not that there was an original unity or monoliterature before the proliferation of differences but that monoliterature or universal literature as such was always a construct of power in the existential reality of differences. A global literature should be not the old world literature spiced with exotic or exceptional representatives from the "rest of the West" but a literature that critically examines its own construction by suspiciously interrogating all claims to universalisms, while acknowledging that any criteria emerging from these interrogations will be open to new questioning. This will be a more open stance toward the future, one that goes out to and engages with the other without appropriating it and sees this relation, à la Levinas, as the site of ethics. An unconditional law of ethics, in this case, is thus all the more able to respond to otherness in its past, present, and future forms so that the political of the future is not foreclosed but given the space of becoming.

Notes

[1] See, for instance, *Globalizing Literary Studies*, a special topic in *PMLA* (Gunn), and Palumbo-Liu.

[2] A notable exception is Pizer, who critiques Goethe's Eurocentrism and points out the contradiction between his convictions in national literature and world literature. Said's recent remarks on Goethe and the concept of world literature have been more positive, however. Instead of criticizing Goethe's "romantic Orientalist vision," as he did in *Orientalism* (154), Said in 2003 held up *Weltliteratur* as the model for a tolerant humanism that sees "literatures of the world as a symphonic whole" ("Window").

[3] The horizontal view of minor-to-minor relation is posited in Lionnet and Shih ("Thinking").

[4] For the notion of disidentification in the constitution of Asian American subjectivity, see Lowe.

[5] By "sinophone" literature I mean literature written in Chinese by Chinese-speaking writers in various parts of the world outside China, as distinguished from "Chinese literature"—literature from China. The largest output of sinophone literature is from Taiwan and prehandover Hong Kong, but throughout Southeast Asia there were many vibrant sinophone literary traditions and practices in the twentieth century. Numerous writers in the United States, Canada, and Europe also write in Chinese, the most luminary of whom is Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize winner in 2000. The imperative of coining the term *sinophone* is to contest the neglect and marginalization of literatures in Chinese published outside China and the selective, ideological, and arbitrary co-optation of these literatures in Chinese literary history. *Sinophone*, in a sense, is similar to *anglophone* and *francophone* in that Chinese is seen by some as a colonial language (in Taiwan). Sinophone literature, furthermore, is to be distinguished from the universalization of the Chinese written script during the premodern era in East Asia when scholars from Japan and Korea, for instance, could converse with Chinese scholars and each other in the Chinese written script by "pen talks" rather than speech. See the section "The Exceptional Particular," below.

[6] Of the responses, the most provocative is Ahmad's.

[7] Personal memoirs of brutality of life in Red China are so numerous that they almost constitute a subgenre. Anchee Min's *Red Azalea*, Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, Anhua Gao's *To the Edge of the Sky: A Story of Love, Betrayal, Suffering, and the Strength of Human Courage*, and Ting-xing Ye's *A Life in the Bitter Wind: A Memoir* are but a few examples.

[8] This is another way national allegory is required by cultural nationalists in minority communities.

[9] Even though postcolonial critics like Spivak often refuse to connect issues in postcolonial studies with those in ethnic studies, postcolonial studies is more politically productive for the local terrain when in dialogue with ethnic studies. The works of Radhakrishnan (*Diasporic Mediations*) and of San Juan (*After Postcolonialism* and *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*) are eloquent examples of cross-fertilization. In the light of the global multiculturalism I describe, immigration, diaspora, and globalization have caused the postcolonial and the ethnic minority to become increasingly intermingled.

[10] All quotations from the Nobel Prize committee are from the official Web site of the Nobel Foundation, located at http://www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/2000/.

[11] See, e.g., Huang.

[12] This definition of recognition as re-cognition is from Ahmed.

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