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Global Ambitions and Local Water:
A Study of *All Sounds Are Still*

Abstract *All Sounds Are Still* is a full-length novel written by Shandong writer Chang Fang. Compared with earlier generations, Chang Fang shows similar interests in topics such as local culture and modern political changes; however, she experiments with new literary styles, and her attitude toward the influence of the West, as mediated by nineteenth-century missionaries, is more ambivalent. Focusing on *All Sounds Are Still*, this paper explores how the author employs various themes and imageries to convey a sense of "globalness" in Luokou, a small town in northern China, and how she uses water as a phenomenon, topic, and metaphor to find unique indigenous expressions that coexisted with missionary activities. In doing so, Chang Fang creates a vision in which Luokou's local identity, as shown in its fictional hydro-environment, refuses to be subsumed under colonial or imperial discourses.

Keywords comparative literature, Western missionaries, land reform, hallucinatory realism, Yellow River map, Boxer Rebellion, Shandong province, hydro-environment

Introduction

All Sounds Are Still (*He tu*) portrays everyday life and political changes that took place in Luokou of Shandong Province during the Republican Revolution (1911). It primarily focuses on the experiences of ordinary people, revolutionaries, and foreigners in Luokou before and after the twelve-day independence Shandong declared during the Revolution.[1] Revolving around stories about the Nan family, this novel presents a multi-faceted picture by bringing together memories, rumors, legends, and supernatural beliefs. In terms of its literary style and character design, *All Sounds Are Still* is strongly influenced by Gabriel García Márquez's (1927–2014) *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. At the

1. This article is supported by General Research Fund of Hong Kong, project no. 16601623. An abbreviated version of *All Sounds Are Still* was first published in the literary magazine of *Shouhuo* (*Harvest: A Literary Bimonthly*) in 2022; the complete version of the novel was published as a book in 2023. In one of her interviews, Chang Fang says she was first intrigued by the brevity of the independence of Shandong and decided to write a novel to explore ordinary people's experiences during the Revolution ("*Changpian xiaoshuo* He tu").

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same time, the concept of "hallucinatory realism" used by the Nobel Prize committee to describe the works of Mo Yan (1955–) may also shed light on our understanding of this novel.[2]

The author of *All Sounds Are Still*, Chang Fang, is a native of Shandong province. Like the Nobel Prize Laureate Mo Yan, Chang Fang uses Shandong as the background of her full-length novels, with a particular focus on Jinan, Shandong's capital city.[3] In addition to *All Sounds Are Still*, Chang Fang also created several other full-length novels, including *The Peach Blossoms and The Flowing River* (*Taohua liushu* 2009), *A History of Romance* (*Aiqing shi* 2013), and *The Fifth War Zone* (*Diwu zhanqu* 2015). As a member of the state-sponsored Chinese Writers Association (CWA) and the Vice President of CWA's Jinan branch, Chang Fang's participation in the state-related institution and concerns about "mainstream" motifs such as Anti-Japanese resistance during World War II may render her literary autonomy within-the-system questionable. However, I agree with Xu Hangping that for writers within CWA, such as Mo Yan, "literary autonomy should be understood as a spectrum of possibilities rather than as part of some sort of mechanical binary" (Xu 165). At the same time, unlike Mo Yan, who has explored various significant political movements in modern China such as the Boxer Rebellion (*Sandalwood Death*) and the Land Reform Movement (*Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*), Chang Fang's interests primarily center on the Communist Revolution and the Second Sino-Japanese War. *All Sounds Are Still* is Chang Fang's first attempt to go beyond the Communist history and discourse in a full-length novel.

With *All Sounds Are Still*, Chang Fang is described in media coverage as a rising representative writer born in the 1970s. Nevertheless, there are only a few scholarly articles in Chinese that focus on her early novels. Shanghai University hosts a workshop in which literary scholars from various Mainland universities exchange their thoughts and reflections on *All Sounds Are Still*. In this article, I show that as a productive writer in contemporary China, Chang Fang's experiments with innovative literary themes and styles both continue and develop earlier generations' ways of writing, especially those as represented by Mo Yan.

The English and Chinese titles sum up the multiple directions Chang Fang explores in *All Sounds Are Still*: the modern and the traditional, the global and the local, and the acoustic and the visual. "All sounds are still" may refer to a moment of suspense before the total collapse of the Qing empire; this sense of

2. Mo Yan's "hallucination realism" is described by the Nobel Prize committee as merging "folk tales, history and the contemporary" (Nobel Prize, 2012). In *All Sounds Are Still*, Chang Fang also merges folk tales and fantastic imaginations with history.

3. Jinan is the backdrop of several of Chang Fang's full-length novels. In *All Sounds Are Still,* Jinan also frequently appears as the capital city that is adjacent to Luokou County.

stillness with great anticipation is heightened at the end of the novel, after the twelve-day Independence of Jinan fails. The Chinese title of the book, *He tu*, literally means "the map of the Yellow River." Borrowed from *The Book of Changes*, the map of the Yellow River is said to have originated from the legendary figure Fuxi and reveals the fundamental cosmological principle of yin and yang (Hellmut and Jung 309). In early Chinese thought, when Heaven brings out the map of the Yellow River, it is an auspicious sign that celebrates the rule of the Sage. Another interpretation of "the map of the Yellow River" may be the modern map(s) the Westerners make to chart the Yellow River, and by extension, the geography of China, for explorative and colonial purposes. Therefore, the Chinese book title has dual meanings that point to conflicting epistemological frameworks, respectively traditional and modern. In addition, while "all sounds are still" imagines an acoustic environment, "the map of the Yellow River" creates a visual effect, so these two titles also conjure up pictures that appeal to different senses.

Taking my departure from the contrasting yet complementary meanings of the English and Chinese titles, I first explore the novel's representation of the global on a local scale, and then study the author's usage of water as a topic, symbol, and metaphor in her representation of local identity. In the first part, I compare *All Sounds Are Still* with Mo Yan's *Sandalwood Death* (2001) in terms of their usage of language, representation of elements associated with modernity such as the Westerners, the train, Christianity, and the revolution. The second part of the paper discusses how water functions as a key element in the novel from literary, female, and indigenous perspectives. Through the mediation of water, the novel brings together divergent experiences and discourses from the traditional to the modern, and from the local to the global. Ultimately, the novel's representation of Luokou's hydro-environment and people's hydro-memories through the lens of "hallucinatory realism" constitutes an indigenous resource that appropriates, subverts, and resists discourses of colonialism and globalization.

Representations of the Global on a Local Scale

In one of Chang Fang's interviews, she describes her intention for *All Sounds Are Still* to be "presenting a Jinan that stands in the middle of the world stage;" additionally, she would like the novel to not only record historical vicissitudes of Luokou but also collective memories about Europe, America, and Asia.[4] Therefore, Luokou in the novel may be understood as a "contact zone," which Mary Louise Pratt defines as "where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other,

4. Chang Fang highlights the juxtaposition of Chinese and Western worldviews in *All Sounds Are Still*, suggesting that from an either local or global perspective, her story is simultaneously about Jinan and the world ("*Zhuanfang zuojia Chang Fang*").

often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they lived out across the globe today."[5] Set in a similar historical and geographical context, Mo Yan's *Sandalwood Death* offers an intriguing comparative perspective to Chang Fang's ambition laid out above. *Sandalwood Death* tells a story of how foreign and domestic oppressions made Sun Bing, a local opera singer and leader of the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), subject to torturous death carried out by his daughter's father-in-law, a superb executioner endorsed by the Empress Dowager. Despite their similarities in temporal and historical settings, these two novels take different approaches in representing the local and the global, as shown in their language style, character design, and attitude toward the Westerners.

Sandalwood Death uses multiple linguistic registers and local dialect in dialogues and the narrative prose, but *All Sounds Are Still* uses Mandarin Chinese influenced by Anglophonic syntax. For example, in *Sandalwood Death*, the self-referencing pronouns include both "*yu*" and "*an*": the former conveys a sense of formality and literary refinement, but the latter is used in ordinary life, often by less-educated characters. With these pronouns, Mo Yan distinguishes the voices of characters from various social classes and in different contexts of speech. In addition, the characters' emotions and concerns are mediated through lower language registers such as vulgar expressions, dialect, and lyrics from local opera, occasionally mixed with refined language meant to offer ironic contrast. The narrator's voice, often making humorous and satirical remarks, further enhances this heteroglossia. As Chen Sihe points out, the multiple narrative perspectives further enrich the narrative content (Chen 348–349). However, as Zhu suggests, such an emphasis on the vernacular in *Sandalwood Death* may also be read as a representation of the local as an "other" from a postcolonial perspective (Zhu 86). In comparison with Mo Yan's interests in fashioning a local identity through vernacular language and dialogues, *All Sounds Are Still* experiments with linguistic strategies that seem more "modern." For example, in the latter, the standard modern Chinese pronoun "*wo*" is used by all characters, and the narrative prose features long sentences with multiple clauses and modifiers, a language style which may be called "Europeanized."[6] Is this language style rid of "postcolonial" influences for which *Sandalwood Death* is criticized, or is it under a new form of "colonialism" called "globalization"? It is possible that the novel internalizes Europeanized language style as an indication

5. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.
6. Long Qilin at Shanghai Jiao Tong University also notices the uncommon sentence style in the novel. He proposes that this style implies other cultures' curious gaze at China. Wang Yumeng at Shanghai University confirms the linguistic style and thinks "it is not necessary for full-length novels about a particular locale to be constrained by dialects" ("*Chang Fang Changpian xinzuo* He tu"). These may be one way for us to understand the linguistic characteristic of *All Sounds Are Still,* but I suggest there are other interpretative possibilities, which I will explain in the next section.

of its "global" ambition, but it experiments to find a unique expression of local identity through a different medium. As I show in the next section, this medium is water.

Sandalwood Death and *All Sounds Are Still* show different attitudes towards the colonial history in Shandong through their representations of the foreigners. Throughout *Sandalwood Death*, the anticolonial sentiment is unambiguous. In this novel, German soldiers and officials are a devilish presence oppressing local villagers through political influence and exploitation. Their sexual violation of Sun Bing's wife directly causes Sun Bing's attempted revenge, subsequent imprisonment, and eventual death, executed with the demand and presence of the German general. In comparison, the foreigners in *All Sounds Are Still* are cast in a less hostile, sometimes even positive light, especially as providers of fresh perspectives and scientific knowledge.[7] There are humanistic understandings towards foreigners and foreign cultures in the novel, but at the same time, the foreigners are fundamentally "outsiders" who are immune to local revolution. This ambivalent attitude is exemplified by the character David, an American anthropologist and engineer who keenly keeps records of local people's everyday life and customs while participating in constructing the railway bridge.[8] David's intrusive questions for the villagers are indicative of his identity as an indifferent observer of the "object" he studies. At the same time, David and his wife are also observed by local people with keen curiosity. Therefore, gazes at the "cultural other" circulate between the foreigners and the locals. Further complicated by his secretive mixed-race ancestry, the character of David brings a piece of American history to Luokou. Therefore, compared with that in *Sandalwood Death*, the image of foreigners in *All Sounds Are Still* is more multi-dimensional.

In both *Sandalwood Death* and *All Sounds Are Still*, the train is an important symbol of modernity and colonial power. During the Boxer Rebellion, the setting for *Sandalwood Death*, the railway system is a threat looming in the future. However, *All Sounds Are Still* is set at a time when the railways have already become a reality people struggle to make sense of. In their representations of the train, Mo Yan and Chang Fang use different writing strategies. When creating *Sandalwood Death*, Mo Yan finds his first draft opening with an elaborate description of the train "too Western" and gives it up (Mo and Zhang 71). He chooses to begin the novel with the protagonist Meiniang's internal monologue and thereby sets up a main narrative perspective. Though the train symbolizes colonial power in *Sandalwood Death*, it is never foregrounded as a central image. In comparison, *All Sounds Are Still* opens with a stark contrast between the

7. Cong Xinqiang discusses missionary Charlie in *The Fifth War Zone* in "*Geti xushi, jiating lunli, Zhongguo gushi*," 201.

8. According to Chang Fang, this character is designed partially based on her great-grandfather's interaction with a German geologist ("*Chang Fang Changpian xinzuo* He tu").

train and donkeys that respectively represent modern and traditional means of transportation. Chapter 1 of *All Sounds Are Still* associates the train with rumors about several local women's madness and death, making it a modern symbol unambiguously associated with gender, sexuality, and desire.[9] In *All Sounds Are Still*, the train is foregrounded as not only an object in reality but also a mythical and ominous presence in people's imagination. One description of the steam emitted by the train goes, "At first, two-thirds of Luokou people secretly fear the white gas gushing from the locomotive. They say 'evil gas gushed from the devil's mouth'" (Chapter 1). Unlike Mo Yan, who shies away from Western influence in his writing about the train, Chang Fang uses the train as a central image, metaphor, and topic many have observed in the rise of modern fiction in world literature.[10]

Sandalwood Death is set against the background of the anti-Christian movement of the Boxer Rebellion, but it does not spend much space on the topic of Christianity. However, in *All Sounds Are Still*, Christianity is an important component in the image of "the global." For example, missionaries in Luokou may help and educate the locals and thereby bring some positive changes to the town (Chapters 3 and 5). Chang Fang also designs the character of missionary in her work titled *The Fifth War Zone*, a story about the experiences of people in a village during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Her interest in this type of character resonates with the observation made by Hou Xu and Wang Heng: that many contemporary novels created since the 1990s use the missionary as an important character to reflect on modern Chinese history (Hou and Wang 101). *All Sounds Are Still* also explores the theme of Christianity through the Nan family's experiences during the Taiping Rebellion, which was inspired by Christianity and received great interest from the foreigners from Christian states. For example, David records that the Nan family's maternal grandfather, a magistrate in Shandong, was decapitated by the Taiping rebels. As a result, his daughter, the Nan family's matriarch, holds great hostility towards Christianity. Nevertheless, as a mother, she is saddened to hear the story about Jesus's sufferings and sacrifice in the Bible (Chapter 7). Later in the novel, her son, Nan Huaizhu, also perishes for his political ideal. Therefore, the author implicitly draws an analogy between Jesus and the matriarch's revolutionary son. Taken together, Christian elements play an important role in connecting "the global" and "the local" in *All Sounds Are Still*. Foreigners with Christian roots send

9. This plot design brings to mind the iconic scene in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, in which the mentally unstable female protagonist throws herself in front of a freight train. The author also makes a connection between death and the train in the last chapter, which I will discuss shortly.

10. For example, the significance of the train in British novels is discussed in Jen Cadwallader, "Death by Train: Spectral Technology and Dickens's *Mugby Junction*." *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840–1940,* edited by Gavin, Adrienne E., and Andrew F. Humphries, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

stories about Luokou to their homelands; Christianity inspires the Taiping Rebellion that precedes the Republican Revolution, which is also influenced by Western beliefs; last but not the least, Christianity provides reconciliatory opportunities that transcend political, cultural, and religious boundaries.

Joseph Zhou, a coachman and Christian who received his name from a missionary, is an important intermediary character who embodies convergences and conflicts of the modern and the traditional. Joseph's moral values straddle both Chinese and Western worlds: he adheres to traditional virtues such as loyalty and industriousness, but seeks solace and redemption in Christianity. Joseph delivers not only goods but also news, and during the process he serves as a witness of many important events in the town.[11] In Chapter 1, Joseph Zhou observes the train as a witness of modernity and collects folk medicine formulas as an inheritor of the old. Later in the novel, Joseph plays a politically and morally ambivalent role: a loyal worker of the Nan family, he witnesses the death of the revolutionary Nan Haizhu; threatened by Gu Youzhi, the sheriff who suppresses the local revolution, Joseph disposes Nan Haizhu's body in the tank where he soaks the ingredients of folk formulas. Symbolically, Joseph Zhou erases traces of the revolution with methods from the past. His death at the end of the novel is mysterious. The sheriff, who is the only witness of Joseph's death (he may also be the murderer), describes that death as an incident caused by startled mules driving his carriage on the railway bridge. This arrangement may suggest that when conservative forces take charge of the town, little space remains for an in-between character like Joseph Zhou.

The relationship between Ed Feng and Gu Youzhi is worth noting. Ed Feng, who traveled around the world as a sailor, may be understood as a floating "contact zone." This character forms a complementary relationship with Gu Youzhi since they were both adopted by missionary Grand and his wife in Luokou. Therefore, these two characters form a bond resembling "fraternal twins."[12] When the missionary family went back to America, they took Ed Feng and left Gu Youzhi behind. Though Gu Youzhi is initially curious about Ed Feng's rich global experiences, his murder of Ed at the end of the novel is to a certain extent suicidal because he "kills" a part of his identity that is cosmopolitan and modern. As a result, Gu Youzhi becomes the embodiment of conservative political forces.

Like Christianity, the revolution is also an idea imported from the West. In *All Sounds Are Still*, the title of the first chapter, "The Folk Formula," and that

11. In the workshop about *All Sounds Are Still* held in Shanghai University, Shao Bu from Shandong University analyzed how Joseph Zhou "decentralizes" the family narrative. He pointed out that "Joseph Zhou's carriage shows us a unique geographical space "allowing the coexistence of perspectives of Jinan people, Luokou locals, and foreigners. See "*Chang Fang Changpian xinzuo* He tu."
12. Chang Fang talks about these characters in her interview, "*Chang Fang xinzuo* He tu."

of the last, "China," imply a narrative arc about curing a sickened China. This theme brings to mind C. T. Hsia's observation that modern Chinese writings, obsessed with China's humiliations and sufferings in the past, exhibit a trait of "provincial patriotism" (Hsia 533–554). At the end of the novel, *All Sounds Are Still* makes the implication that the Western recipe of revolution would replace "the folk formula" in saving China. However, the author does not idealize the revolution as a harmless and perfect remedy, shown in the violent histories Charlie and David share about the Russian Revolution and the French Revolution.[13] As a result, *All Sounds Are Still* puts the Republican Revolution into a global perspective and shows a reflective attitude towards revolution as a political ideal and historical practice.

In comparison with *Sandalwood Death*, which fashions itself with vernacular expressions and strong anti-colonial sentiments, *All Sounds Are Still* reveals a more ambivalent attitude towards Western languages, ideals, peoples, and cultures. Throughout the novel, the train is represented as a symbol of modernity, and incidents revolving around the train demonstrate conflicts between the modern and the traditional. Caught between Chinese and Western practices and beliefs, the intermediary character Joseph Zhou can hardly survive the political turmoil. Ultimately, the author situates the Republican Revolution in a global context with foreigners' voices that reflect on the political contingencies and violent consequences of revolutions in Western history.

Ecologizing the Local: Sounds of Water

All Sounds Are Still creates a fictional hydro-environment in which water is a topic, metaphor, and symbol. Through a layered sentence structure, the author creates a ripple effect resembling water waves on a linguistic level. In addition, a lyrical quality facilitates the novel's fantastic representations about water from multiple cultural perspectives. Descriptions of acoustic effects associated with water in the local environment resist the impact of imperial and colonial order represented by modern technologies. With its portrayal of many kinds of water, *All Sounds Are Still* intervenes upon the "global" discourse with local knowledge and experience.

Both *Sandalwood Death* and *All Sounds Are Still* use sound as a key element, and both use a distinct language style to create an imaginative acoustic environment. In *Sandalwood Death*, Mo Yan seeks to stimulate readers' awareness of sound in literary writing through rhymes of words and rhythm of sentences (Mo and Zhang 75). In comparison, *All Sounds Are Still* gives readers the impression that "all sounds" in nature and human society are interconnected and mutually influence each other. For example, Chapter 2 describes boat trackers' songs

13. Based on the way it conceptualizes revolution, Li Haipeng from Nanjing University thinks that the novel shows disillusionment about the myth of modernity. See "*Chang Fang Changpian xinzuo* He tu."

in the following, "[A]long the Yellow River that runs by Luokou, the boat trackers' songs travel down from afar with northern wind intermittently, as if they [the songs] were woken up by a slander whip while falling asleep; after a short while, they fell asleep quietly again." In this example, the writer vividly represents the weakened or interrupted acoustic effect not only by anthropo morphizing the sound of songs but also by a series of short sentences strung together. This example is representative of how the author deftly forms a web of people, things, and natural phenomena with the mediation of language throughout the novel. In highlighting sounds in local environment, Chang Fang "turns down the volume in the celebration of modern sound technologies" and thereby challenges Western imperial narrative, structure, and knowledge (Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan 4).

Water in *All Sounds Are Still* should be understood in association with Luokou as a geographically significant place. As Tetsuro Watsuji (1889–1960) points out, there is an essential relationship between the natural environment of a place and its local culture (Watsuji 4). Once called "Little Jinan," Luokou is an administrative district of Jinan today. Historically, Luokou was located by the Ji River until the Yellow River changed its course to take the estuary of the Ji River in 1855. Connecting various regions through waterways on both land and ocean, Luokou has been a major port in northern China since the Han dynasty (202 BC–9 AD, 25–220 AD). It became a vital port for salt transportation during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). At the end of the Qing (1644–1911), the strategically important role of Luokou was further heightened by the Jiaoji railways built by the Germans.

Luokou's connection with the Yellow River and its many tributaries was historical and primary, but this connection was changed by modern railways. A rumor about the Yellow River and the railway in *All Sounds Are Still* epitomizes the clash between traditional beliefs and modern technology. The rumor goes that the railway bridge hanging over the Yellow River is a sword that cuts the dragon of the Yellow River into halves and consequently destroys the *fengshui* of China. As a result, "[I]n the long run, the Chinese nation and people will be rendered extinct. In the near future, Luokou will become a dead city; with all its shops and houses burnt overnight by a Heavenly fire; the town would sink into the bottom of the river" (Chapter 2). At several other places in the novel, the Yellow River is a site for local people's disastrous deaths (Chapters 1 and 40). Thus, as an imaginative burial ground for Luokou and its people, the Yellow River holds existential significance for both, and this kind of connection is heightened by the introduction of modern technology.

The Yellow River does not only provide Luokou with a distinct natural environment but also forms the deepest structure of local people's psyche as

shown in magical and supernatural expressions.[14] However, to the foreigners, the Yellow River is a part of the global hydrographic system and a useful natural resource. For example, Luokou people believe that "the nearby Yellow River is connected to the Milky Way (literally, 'the Silver River') in the sky. Water of the Yellow River comes from Heaven; water in Heaven is in the Milky Way" (Chapter 40). A skilled local carpenter can "put" the sound of the Yellow River in a wooden stick with carved patterns of waves and spindrifts. The sheriff, though suspicious at first, "truly hears the muffled sound of deep currents formed only in the Yellow River" (Chapter 25). The sheriff locks up this stick in the Italian chest he purchases from Davis, an act symbolic of his attempt to seal the life force of the Yellow River—and by extension, that of the local people—with borrowed foreign and colonial forces. Nevertheless, his instant impotency at the thought of floods shows the power the Yellow River holds in his subconsciousness.

In comparison with local people, whose knowledge of the Yellow River is associated with supernatural power and subconsciousness, the Westerners look at the Yellow River from an empirical perspective. For example, the drifting bottle made by the missionary who saves Joseph Zhou's life may travel through the water networks worldwide and deliver the message to his family in America. In another example, David teaches the school children that the patterns they observe of the Yellow River may reflect precipitations in previous and future years. Put together, the epistemological systems of China and the West are respectively revealed through the different meanings held by the Yellow River for the locals and the foreigners.

In addition to the Yellow River, Luokou connects many other kinds of water, ranging from rain to springs and ocean. For example, Chapter 4 describes an everyday scene where Joseph Zhou's mules drink from the spring water between stone slabs in the street:

> Spring water flows on the pavement of this street all year round (…) The two animals (mules) can drink cool and clean spring water as long as they bend their noble heads. When there is plentiful rain in the summer, water in all springs rises. There is not only spring water between the cracks of slabs, but also flocks of little fish swinging tails and swimming in the streams.

This lyrical description shows a harmonious relationship between natural environment, livestock, and aquatic animals that forms an ordinary scene in Luokou in the past. However, this ecological balance may be disrupted by modern technology, as shown by the deaths of Joseph's mules caused by the

14. Xiao Shui at Shanghai University points out that the Yellow River is simultaneously a metaphor that provides a "psychological space" and a symbol of "fracture" of many opposite concepts such as modernity and backwardness (*Chang Fang Changpian xinzuo* He tu).

train at the end of the novel. Spring waters are ubiquitous in the streets, but the ocean is felt in the form of ocean salt transported through the Yellow River. This is best illustrated in the story about the Nan family's grandmother, in which pervasive senses about the salt is described in great detail (Chapter 7).

All Sounds Are Still represents ocean water from a female perspective. For example, the maternal grandmother of the Nan family suffers from insomnia and could not stop wandering in the house after her husband is killed by the Taiping rebels. Worried about her pregnancy, the family takes advice from a shaman to cover everything in her room with white salt. The room is described in the following, "the salty smell that floats over the ocean fills up the entire room, as if they (the family) have moved her room on to the ocean and made it a sailboat that rocks up and down on the waves" (Chapter 7). The maternal grandmother characterized by abnormal behaviors brings to mind Rebeca in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, who comes from afar to the Buendía's family with her parents' remains and has the habit of eating earth. Both characters experience profound family loss, and both exhibit eccentric behaviors. However, the maternal grandmother's story is also synthetic of gender, family trauma, and political history in late nineteenth-century China.

The fluidity of water makes it a medium that transcends the boundaries of forms and senses, and thereby a convenient means for hallucinatory realistic depictions. This is best illustrated by the images a young servant sees of Nan Huaizhu's hat when he was caught by the sheriff and policemen:

> Around the hat, there are many trembling leaves as slender as feathers (…) Those slender tree leaves are like fish swimming and lashing their tails freely in water. Ripples of water keep expanding and bouncing against the Gate of Pu'an (…) It turns out that those fish tails that swing casually are lashing out blooddrops. It is precisely those fallen blooddrops that make the sky ripple like a water surface (…)

In this paragraph, movements are carried from plant to animal through the mediation of flowing elements of wind, water, and blood. As a result, a sense of fluidity across forms of lives (i.e., tree, fish, and human) and materials (i.e., water and blood) creates a "hallucinatory" effect that foreshadows Nan Huaizhu's impending revolutionary sacrifice.

Aquatic animals with supernatural power are also symbolically significant in *All Sounds Are Still*. The two reptiles, a soft-shelled turtle and a crocodile, respectively symbolize traditional conservative power and foreign revolutionary influences. Associated with the opportunist sheriff, the turtle allegedly prophesies to him the short-lived nature of Luokou's revolution. However, in the fisherman Huang Sanguan's dream, the turtle takes revenge against him to collect karmic debts for all the fish he previously killed.

In comparison, the crocodile, the other reptile who speaks in the novel, is associated with outsiders. Brought to Luokou by a visiting circus, the crocodile's appearance and disappearance is a part of a magic performance. Among all locals, the crocodile has only spoken to Nan Huaizhu, who was still a boy at the time. In Chapter 11, Nan Huaizhu's elder brother believes that his ideas about revolution and democracy are as illusionary as the crocodile, which explicitly establishes a connection between this imaginary animal and the concept of revolution. Nevertheless, though the turtle and the crocodile are respectively associated with conservative and progressive forces, they are both cold-blooded reptiles symbolic of the inconstancy and cruelty of politics.

A fisherman of supernatural talents, Huang Sanguan is an intermediary character between the aquatic environment and human society. He is capable of catching any fish in the river, so the locals believe that he could communicate with the God of the Yellow River to wash away the bridge and the railways (Chapter 4). It is also believed that Nan Huaizhu has asked Huang Sanguan to support his revolutionary cause by transforming schools of fish into soldiers. In her other novel, titled *History of Romance* (*Aiqing shi* 2013), Chang Fang designs a similar character, a bird-catcher who can imitate birds' singing perfectly and is known by people as the Birdman (*Niaoren*). *History of Romance* reflects on disturbing changes brought by urbanization to a small town. In both novels, these characters' supernatural connections with nature diminish when political or economic tensions escalate as a result of modernity's encroachments on the close human-nature relationship established in the past.

An essential topic and metaphor in *All Sounds Are Still*, water is foregrounded as intrinsic to the identity of Luokou and its people. On the textual level, the author uses syntax and sentence structure to simulate rippling waves. The novel's descriptions of many forms and sounds of water, especially those of the Yellow River, form an indigenous expression that refuses to be subsumed under imperial knowledge structure. In *All Sounds Are Still*, water is simultaneously nourishing and disastrous, mystic and mundane, fluid and gendered. Through the animals and human beings that have supernatural power and are associated with water, the author registers conflicts between the conservative and progressive, and between human and nature in modern times.

Conclusion

Born in the 1970s, Chang Fang explores topics such as local identity, cultural roots, and history that also concern the generation of writers that came before her, among them Mo Yan. However, Chang Fang differs from them by embracing world literature in terms of language, tropes, and character design. Experimenting with a language style inspired by Western sentence structure, she gives the

impression of a continuous flow of things, people, and events, to the effect of a river. In comparison with Mo Yan's *Sandalwood Death*, *All Sounds Are Still* shows a less hostile and more ambivalent attitude towards the West as shown by its representation of the foreigners, the train, Christianity, and the revolution, thus giving the impression of "globalness." Water plays a key role in representing indigenousness in *All Sounds Are Still*. From the Yellow River to the ocean and aquatic creatures, the various kinds of water constitute Luokou people's unique experiences, memories, and identities. Taken together, *All Sounds Are Still* adopts tropes and character designs typically associated with modernity and the West to convey a sense of "globalness," but uses water as a medium, metaphor, and symbol to establish unique expressions about the local.

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