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Crafting Lives: The Evolution of Identity in the Works of Zhu Tianxin and Kapka Kassabova

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the issue of how women writers conceptualise identity through their writing, with specific reference to the literary careers of Zhu Tianxin and Kapka Kassabova. A new approach to this issue is offered, which considers writing as located on the continuum between auto/biography on the one hand and fiction on the other. Each writer’s life and writing are considered as a whole, an intertwined and complex entity. This responds to the extreme biographical tendency in the prevailing criticism of both writers which tends to read their works through an understanding of their lives. This emphasis on autobiographicality, both assumes that the writers present their lives through writing and offers readings through fixed and over-simplified impressions of cultural and political stereotypes. By contrast this thesis reveals the extent to which, in their writing, both Zhu, a second-generation Chinese émigré in Taiwan and Kassabova, a Bulgarian migrant in both New Zealand and the UK, actively and creatively exploit the political and cultural environments in which they operate. It further reveals how the complexity of narrative techniques deployed in each case, including polyvocality, intertextuality and blurring of genres, reflects the complexity of each writer’s conceptualisation of identity. In addition, through an original delineation of specific phases in each writer’s literary career, the evolution of identity presented by each writer via the increasing complexity of her narrative techniques is identified.

The radically new readings offered by this thesis are informed by its comparative approach. The parallel study of two writers from contrasting backgrounds enables each to illuminate the other in fresh and productive ways, particularly with regard to the way each writer differently exploits history and geography. This thesis presents Zhu as an alternative historian and Kassabova as an alternative geographer: through the exploitation of history and geography in their narratives, the writers construct a self and an identity. Their personalised and subjective de/constructions of history and geography also challenge any collective sense of history and geography, questioning the existence of an objective view of either discipline. Thus Zhu and Kassabova create multiple and inclusive views of identity, advocating for its hybridity and multiplicity. By so doing their work resists and problematises readings which are solely from a biographical perspective or from a single political/cultural viewpoint.
Dedication

For My Maternal Grandfather, Lin Jinse 林金色 and
My Paternal Grandmother, Chen Luo Muli 陳駱木莉

Neither of them had the chance to travel overseas when they were alive, but their spirits have been watching over me, their granddaughter, who has been travelling like a restless soul on the earth.

For My Beloved Aunt, Lin Lijiao 林麗嬌

In the last seventeen months of her life she lived with cancer, during which she gave me the greatest encouragement to work on my thesis but passed away a month before its completion.

Their love will always be remembered.
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This thesis could never have been completed without any of the following people, who have provided me with their love and support during my long thesis journey.

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I express my deepest gratitude to my PhD supervisors, Associate Professor Michael Hanne and Dr. Hilary Chung, both of whom have taught me since I began my life as a Masters student at the University of Auckland in 2000. Throughout the years of my thesis journey, they have guided me with their love, patience, wisdom and sense of humour. I will always remember Mike’s lovely metaphors and Hilary’s insightful opinions. From them I have learned not merely how to be a capable researcher, but also how to be a good teacher. The three of us have been working together as a wonderful team to ensure the success of this thesis, and they have transformed me from a PhD student to a young scholar.

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I have also received abundant support from my friends, among whom I am able to name just a few here: Amy Huang, Emily Tu, Oona Jin, Kamal Shaikh, Mary Li (Mrs. Tsai) and Robin Yang. Amy, Emily and Oona have been wonderful sisters in my life. Kamal has been a great ‘buddy’ who patiently listened to me talk about the progress of my thesis every day during the production of my initial drafts for all chapters. Mary generously accommodated me in her house during the final four months of my thesis writing. Robin was my computer guru, and made the last seven months of my thesis production a fluent process. In their own ways they have accompanied me through the highs and lows of my thesis journey as well as in my personal life. They are all indeed true friends who have helped me when I was in need.

Lastly, I would like to offer this thesis as a tribute to God, Heaven and the Divine Beings, who have guided me throughout my life and have shown me that I am never alone. They have taught me to be confident in myself and to know that anything is possible as long as I dare to dream.
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The English translations of passages from Zhu Tianxin’s work in Chapters One to Four, Conclusion and Appendix I are by me unless otherwise indicated. Figures are created by me unless otherwise indicated. Hanyu Pinyin Romanisation is used throughout with the exception of proper names that are known in non-standard forms, such as Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek.
Introduction

An ancient metaphor: thought is a thread, and the raconteur is a spinner of yarns—but the true storyteller, the poet, is a weaver. The scribes made this old and audible abstraction into a new and visible fact. After long practice, their work took on such an even, flexible texture that they called the written page a *textus*, which means cloth.

~ Robert Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style*¹

I refuse to be bound by any one literary tone, just as I refuse to be bound by any one literary genre. Or I refuse to be bound because I don’t feel that one genre does everything I want. And so my voices are wide and wild and sometimes varied. And in the real world this makes it hard for me to be catalogued by publishers, critics, readers.

~ Michelene Wandor, “Voices Are Wild”²

We should aim, in my view, for modes of comparison that work with the contradictions inherent in comparison, that expand the voices put in play, that creatively open up dialogue and new frameworks for reading and acting in the world.

~ Susan Stanford Friedman, “Why Not Compare?”³

This is a comparative study of works by two distinctly different women writers, Zhu Tianxin (朱天心, also known as “Chu T’ien-Hsin”, 1958-, Taiwanese) and Kapka Kassabova (1973-, Bulgarian-New Zealander). In age, these writers are about a generation apart; the countries from which they come are geographically distant and culturally disparate. Another major distinction between them is that while Kassabova has travelled extensively and frequently from one country to another, Zhu has spent most of her life in Taiwan. Whereas Zhu writes in her native language, Chinese; Kassabova, who speaks several languages, mainly writes and publishes in English, which is a language that she only started learning in her late teens. In addition, neither writer is familiar with the work of the other, so there is no question that either of them has influenced the work of the other.

Despite the apparent differences between them, there are significant reasons which make it worthwhile to study the works of these two women writers side by side; Zhu and Kassabova share some commonalities. Firstly, both of them come from countries which have been politically repressed, each having relatively authoritarian regimes. Kassabova left her home country, Bulgaria, in 1989 to get away from the aftermath of the East-European Communist regime, which collapsed a short time before she left. Zhu stayed in Taiwan where the GMD regime⁴ commenced rule in

¹ Robert Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style* (Point Roberts and Vancouver: Hartley & Marks, 1999), 25. The word in italics is the emphasis of Bringhurst.


⁴ GMD stands for Guomindang (國民黨), which is also known as “Kuomint’ang” or “KMT”.

1945 with a repressive totalitarian dictatorship. Having been challenged by the increasing Taiwanese nativist movements, the GMD government and the political environment in Taiwan have changed dramatically since the 1980s. The island was later ruled by the Taiwanese nativists (1990-2008), moving Taiwan towards a more democratic society. Secondly, both writers have an émigré background and thus, each has a complex identity. Zhu is a second-generation Chinese émigré, whereas Kassabova was a Bulgarian immigrant to New Zealand who now resides in the U.K. They are émigrés in different senses. Zhu is the child of a Chinese émigré, while Kassabova is much more a permanent on-going émigré. Therefore, issues which are closely relevant to identity, such as memory and nostalgia, sense of self and sense of place, are often themes in their writings.

Thirdly, both Zhu and Kassabova employ a considerable variety of genres in their writings, and they are unusual in their flexibility in terms of moving between genres. Fiction and the essay are the two areas they have in common. As well as writing in these two forms, Kassabova, who travels extensively around the world, does a considerable amount of travel writing; whereas Zhu, who remains in Taiwan, writes political and social commentaries. Kassabova has also written many poems in English and has so far published four poetry anthologies. Writing in a range of literary forms, both authors also tend to blur the boundaries between genres. Such a tendency makes it difficult for critics to categorise their work into any specific genre. Fourthly, in terms of the content in their writing, both Zhu and Kassabova focus on the issue of identity. In a sense, the writers’ flexibility in making use of literary genres reflects the way in which identity is formed in their writing. Blurring the boundary between genres, Zhu and Kassabova also blur the boundary between identities. Finally, despite the variety of genres they adopt, in their writings each of them shows a creative and sophisticated utilisation, not only of their personal lives, but also of their collective experiences that have been gleaned from their political, cultural and social communities. Therefore, the parallel study of the two writers and their works will illuminate both cases. When we look at Zhu’s work in the light of Kassabova’s work, or vice versa, we will see each in fresh and productive ways.

Existing scholarship has provided some valuable insights into the understanding of the two writers’ works. In Taiwan a large number of studies have been conducted on the life and writing of Zhu Tianxin, many of which show a tendency towards a highly political reading of her life and writing. Although Zhu had already begun her
literary career in the early 1970s, it was in 1989 that the first critical response to her work appeared and reviews and commentaries on her work continued to be prolific in the early 1990s. Each criticism of Zhu’s work tends to reflect the political situation in Taiwan at the time. Due to the political repression, reviewers of Zhu’s work in the early 1980s did not criticise but showed a tendency to make descriptive or clichéd comments about her works. After 1989, when the political climate became open, critics started to examine the issue of political identity as presented in her works. The life and work of Zhu have been studied by numerous Taiwanese researchers who specialise in Chinese literature, Taiwanese literature, or history. There have also been an increasing number of overseas studies of Zhu in recent years, which have been conducted primarily by researchers in Asian studies and comparative literature. Among the studies of Zhu, the most influential ones so far are probably the readings by Huang Jinshou (黃錦樹) and David Der-wei Wang (王德威). Huang provides detailed critical analyses of Zhu’s work from the first writings to those published in the year 2000. He examines the ways in which Zhu’s political views and conceptualisation of identity are reflected in her writing.⁵ Wang, on the other hand, explores the relationship between memory, history and geography as presented in Zhu’s stories.⁶ In general, existing expertise on Zhu Tianxin shows that critics tend to take a specific angle to analyse specific work(s) of Zhu. For example, Qiu Guifen (邱貴芬) reads Zhu’s “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound” (想我眷村的兄弟們) through the lens of feminism.⁷ He Chunrui (何春蕤) analyses Zhu’s I Remember... (我記得…) from the perspective of cultural studies.⁸ Lingchei

Letty Chen examines Zhu’s *The Old Capital* (古都) with postmodern theories.⁹ Whereas most critics tend to adopt a specific set of theories to discuss specific work(s), I use a range of theoretical tools to examine Zhu’s works as a whole. In that way, readers will obtain a sense of continuity and dynamism, which is not found in other studies of Zhu in the existing scholarship. Despite their limitation, each study offers specific insights into the writer’s work and provides a reference for me to examine.

Compared with the number of studies on Zhu’s work, research on Kassabova’s work is relatively sparse. While Zhu is a long established writer, Kassabova has only been writing in the literary field in the English language since the mid-1990s and started receiving recognition from the late 1990s, partly due to the literary prizes she had won. Therefore, unlike the existing scholarship on Zhu, there have not yet been prominent studies of Kassabova among critics in New Zealand and neither has her work been widely researched in the academic context. Most readings of the writer’s works are presented as book reviews in literary journals, magazines and newspapers. Despite the fact that they are often limited to a single work of Kassabova and are rather superficial, many of them offer insightful analyses of the writer’s artistic employment of the English language in her writing. For instance, Linda Burgess’s review of Kassabova’s novel, *Reconnaissance* (1999), examines the ways in which characters, objects and images are symbolically presented in order to reflect the protagonist’s displaced identity.¹⁰ Kim Worthington presents one of the rare literary criticisms which study a range of Kassabova’s works. As she suggests, “Kassabova is the most powerful voice yet produced that speaks of and for the experience of many exiles and immigrants resident in New Zealand, a sector of our population who often lack the ability to tell their stories in our language.”¹¹ Nevertheless, Worthington’s view reflects what is commonly seen among critics of Kassabova who tend to read her work from the viewpoint of a local New Zealander. That is, the writer is often perceived as a representative of “exiles and immigrants” in New Zealand who is able to “tell their stories in our language.” Overall, current studies of Kassabova in New

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Zealand focus on the ways in which the East-European features in Kassabova’s writing add a distinctive flavour to literature in English in New Zealand. More sophisticated and developed criticisms of Kassabova’s works, however, are made by overseas or international scholars, such as Paloma Fresno Calleja and Claudia Duppé. Fresno examines the way in which identity is manifested by a migrating subject in Kassabova’s *Reconnaissance*.12 Duppé studies the identity conceptualisation of a Bulgarian expatriate in Kassabova’s *Street without a Name*.13 Through their analyses, both critics break through the limited view of imposing a fixed East-European identity on the writer, as has often been the case in the readings of Kassabova in New Zealand. Both critics emphasise the complexity of a cultural migrant’s identity, and have inspired my study of Kassabova’s work in terms of the way in which identity is conceptualised through her writing.

Existing scholarship on Zhu and Kassabova shows a prevailing focus on the ways in which the lives and identities of the two writers and their representative cultural communities are reflected in their writing. In spite of the insightful knowledge it provides, there are inevitable limitations.

To begin with, there has been a tendency to overt and somewhat simplistic biographical interpretation of the works by Zhu and Kassabova.14 It can be argued that therein lies a weakness of the existing scholarship on the two writers, which assumes, somewhat naively, that the two women writers present their personal lives through their writings so that their works are considered to be directly autobiographical. In the Chinese scholarship, particularly in the studies which are influenced by traditional literary practice, there is still a tendency to use biography as a mechanism for a direct reading of literary texts. For example, Kassabova’s *Reconnaissance* is often read to be an autobiographical work, while it is a story about a young Bulgarian-New Zealand woman who explores her identity through her

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journey in New Zealand. Similarly, there is also a tendency to read Zhu’s *The Old Capital* (古都) as being autobiographical, whereas it is about a Taiwanese woman who investigates the issue of identity through her journeys to Kyoto and Taibei. Such biographical reading of a writer’s text can be problematic. Thus, a more complex and productive study of the works of the two writers is necessary.

In addition, studies of Zhu and Kassabova also tend to stereotype the two women writers in their analyses of the writers’ works according to the critics’ fixed impressions of Chinese émigrés and Eastern Europeans. Prevailing studies of Zhu Tianxin in Taiwan often reflect the critics’ personal political views, or their political pigeonholing of the identities of Chinese émigrés in Taiwan. Critics of Zhu’s work have often made the assumption that the writer was, and remains, a product of the GMD. Critics of Kassabova often focus on her handling of the English language. Whereas many reviewers are impressed by the fact that she writes exceptionally well in a language which is not her mother tongue, some tend to criticise her writing in English from the viewpoint of a native speaker. Reviewers of her work (mainly native speakers of English) have often projected their stereotypical perception of East-European exoticism on the writer. This is likely to be an impression that the reviewers have that is based on her Bulgarian name, or from the writer’s depictions of memories of her life in the former communist Bulgaria.

As well as stereotyping, studies of Zhu and Kassabova frequently attribute a fixed identity to each writer. The facile equation for many critics of Zhu is that Chinese émigrés, who came to Taiwan with the GMD military troops, are necessarily aligned to the GMD identity. Similarly, reviewers of Kassabova still tend to show a preoccupation with her Bulgarian background, despite the fact that she has resided in several countries and identifies herself as a “cultural mongrel” who speaks in an “East European-Kiwi-Scots accent”. Regardless of the fact that the meaning of a person’s identity constantly shifts through time or changes with the happenings in the environment, many critics do not make that adjustment and persist in their rigid categorisations of the writers’ identities. Zhu is often considered to be a spokesperson of Chinese émigrés in Taiwan, and Kassabova is seen as a representative of East-European immigrants in New Zealand. As a result, existing scholarship on the two

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16 Ibid. (accessed December 15, 2010).
17 See my interview with Zhu in Appendix I.
writers has a tendency to impose a Chinese émigré identity on Zhu and a Bulgarian immigrant identity on Kassabova.

The limitations in the existing scholarship on Zhu and Kassabova, in my view, are likely caused by reading each writer’s work from a localised political or cultural perspective. One finds that most criticisms of the two writers’ works are from the local, Taiwan and New Zealand viewpoint, and there is a tendency among the critics of Zhu and Kassabova to reflect a localised view of Chinese émigrés and East-Europeans when studying their works. Therefore, a comparative approach is necessary. As Susan Stanford Friedman argues, “Comparison across cultures defamiliarises what one takes as natural in any given culture.”18 Through the comparison of the two writers in this thesis, one discovers the fact that biographical reading and cultural stereotyping of Zhu’s and Kassabova’s works are commonly seen and have not been given extensive consideration in the existing scholarship.

Prevailing biographical readings show a tendency to study works by Zhu and Kassabova from a viewpoint considering a text as either autobiographical or fictional, while my study involves viewing these two writers and their work outside the categories in which many critics have wanted to place them. In opposition to the tendency for somewhat narrow biographical interpretations of the two writers’ works, I shall argue that the relationship between each writer’s biography and her writing has been formed with a high degree of complexity.

As well as interpretations of the two writers’ works which rely much on the writers’ biographical information, it is noticeable that the writers themselves also show a tendency to encourage readers to interpret their works either in an exclusively biographical way or as fiction. Some of the works are claimed as autobiographical by the authors themselves, while most of their writings are labelled as fiction by the writers or their publishers. In my interview with Kassabova,19 she points out that her "memoir", Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria (2008), is definitely an "autobiographical" work. She had resisted writing such an autobiographical work, but the idea was urged on her by her publisher in the U.K. Similarly, in my interview with Zhu,20 the writer insists that one of her early works, The Ploughman’s Song, is certainly "autobiographical", because she actually

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19 See my interview with Kapka Kassabova in Appendix II.
20 See my interview with Zhu Tianxin in Appendix I.
copied passages, almost word for word, from her high-school diaries. Kassabova, in particular, is inclined to claim her work as “fictional” or “non-fictional” at the beginning of each book. Zhu and her publishers, however, use the word “xiaoshuo” (小説, fiction) to define most of her work, which is subcategorised into “changpian xiaoshuo” (長篇小說, novel), “zhongpian xiaoshuo” (中篇小說, novella) and “duanpian xiaoshuo” (短篇小說, short stories) according to the length of the writing.

Apart from claiming some of their works to be autobiographical, publishers of Zhu and Kassabova also attach photographs of the writers to their “autobiographical” works, in order to convince the readers of the realities presented and emphasised in such writings. I shall suggest, along with the tendency of many readers and critics to frame their interpretations in biographical terms, the autobiographical framing of Zhu’s and Kassabova’s works by the writers themselves and their publishers also works in complicity in creating fixed and stereotypical images for their writings. “The autobiographical pact”, as termed by Philippe Lejeune, between the writer and the reader prescribes the biographical reading of the text, which may be anticipated by the writers and their publishers. Ironically, the establishment of such firm autobiographical impressions of the works may also become a burden to the writers. The problem occurs when the writers begin to create what they claim as “fictional” writings, and inevitably the readers will still read the writers’ fictive works through the biographical lens with which they were earlier provided. Hence, the complexity

21 For *Reconnaissance* (1999), which has been widely considered as an autobiographical work, Kassabova writes at the beginning of the book, "All characters are purely fictional. Place names do not always correspond to geographical reality. However, the political events set in Bulgaria are true." For *Love in the Land of Midas* (2000), the writer states at the beginning of the book, "This is a work of fiction. All main characters are fictional. Historical truth has been observed, but the names of many places and establishments have been retouched or invented, and dates occasionally slightly altered." Despite the fictiveness of this work that Kassabova wants to emphasise, some elements are associated with the writer’s biographical life. For *Street without a Name* (2008), Kassabova writes in the "Disclaimer", "This is a work of non-fiction. Nothing here is invented, in the sense that everything I describe happened. But the way I have described it is highly personal, and in that sense, not highly reliable. Those looking for a history book could use my slightly more reliable *Globetrotter’s Guide to Bulgaria*. Those looking for a history book could go to the history section in their local library, where they will find one very reliable recent history of Bulgaria.”

22 According to the publisher’s introductions to Zhu’s books, critics’ commentaries on her writing, and the descriptions of literary prizes she won, most of Zhu’s work is categorised as fiction.

23 According to Lejeune’s theory of “the autobiographical pact”, the most significant distinction between autobiography and fiction is the “pact”, or contract, between the writer and the reader. In the “pact” the reader assumes the work as a creation of the writer which presents his/her real life. See Philippe Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Pact,” in *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin and trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3-30.
in the autobiographical/fictional categorisation of works by Zhu and Kassabova lies in
the connection between the writers’ apparent intentions, their stated intentions, and
the interpreted intentions of their texts by readers. In other words, the narrative
intention involves several parties: the writer, the publisher, the readers and the critics,
which complicates the reading of a text.

In fact, one may find it difficult to categorise the writings of Zhu and Kassabova
as being fictional or autobiographical. On the one hand, there is the issue of the
“intentional fallacy”.24 As seen in the cases of Zhu and Kassabova, the writers expect
their works to be read either as autobiographies or as works of fiction. The publishers
in general expect to be told by the authors whether works are autobiographical or not,
because having the work packaged as an autobiography may result in public curiosity
pertaining to the author’s personal life, which generally equates with better market
selling of a book such as this. The tendency is especially true in the Chinese-reading
context where the interpretation of a literary work is often framed by the reader’s
understanding of the author’s biography. Hence, the writer, the publisher and the
reader all participate in “an appeal to the supposed intentions of the author”25 in their
readings of the works of Zhu and Kassabova, while, from the perspective of a
poststructuralist, “the author’s intention” remains a problematic notion. The author’s
or the publisher’s framing of the work is unreliable, because there are often issues
involved, such as problems concerning the author’s responses to the reader/critic26 or
the publisher’s market promotion of the work. The entrapment of such an intentional
fallacy is also something from which I would like to move away in my reading of the
two writers’ works.

On the other hand, there are often manifold narrative voices in the stories of Zhu
and Kassabova, which suggest the multiplicity of their narrative intentions. Despite
the fictiveness of the two women writers’ works, it can be seen in their writings that
they tend to focus on the lives of women and minority groups whose marginalised
situations the writers themselves identify with. Women, émigrés and social or

24 See W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” in The Verbal Icon: Studies
25 From Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds., The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and
26 In the case of Zhu Tianxin, the writer tends to respond to the critics as well as responding to a more
generalised expectation in the Taiwanese reading public. The reason for the latter is partly due to the
tendency of the publishers who promote her work in the Chinese reading context that tends to read
everything biographically.
cultural minorities are frequently presented as the protagonists in their stories and they often adopt the voice of the marginalised as the narrative voice. Sometimes, in order to show the ways in which the lives of the marginalised are misrepresented, the writers exploit the voice of the patriarchal or the dominant discourse. In Zhu’s stories she often adopts unreliable male-first-person narrative voices, through which she problematises the patriarchal conceptualisation of gender. Likewise, in the works by Kassabova, she tends to show the ways in which cultural Others are represented through the voices of Euro-centric Westerners, suggesting the unreliability of their cultural representations. In other words, both writers tend to show sophisticated construction of their narrative voices, which suggests that their works should not be read as being autobiographical or fictional in a simple sense. There is fictiveness in their seemingly autobiographical work, while in their overtly fictional work there are elements which are adopted and adapted from their lives. Thus, it is difficult to draw a line between the two genres in their writing.

Whereas, for many critics, the textual and narrative construction by the author is often considered as a reflection of the lived experiences of the author, I emphasise the integration of the two elements and suggest that a more complex relationship may exist between the life and the writing of a writer. What is shown in the writings of Zhu and Kassabova, and this is a matter that has not been attended to in existing studies, is the issue concerning the two writers’ utilisation and exploitation of their lives and experiences as material for the creation of lives through writing, and this is one of the domains which I will explore in my thesis.

To enrich the scholarship on Zhu and Kassabova, this thesis takes the reader in a new direction. As I will argue, it would be more fruitful if their writings were to be understood as reflecting the biographical shifts in multifarious ways. I suggest a more productive way to study the works of Zhu and Kassabova which is that: the relationship between each writer and her writing should be perceived as being dynamic, and that writing reflects the process of constant change in a person’s conceptualisation of identity. Therefore, an alternative reading of the works can be achieved.

It is the textual practice itself on which I focus, because, what is somehow problematic in the unnuanced categorisation which has often been applied to both writers, is that it does not sufficiently consider the textual construction of life as presented in their writing. Although some critics of Zhu and Kassabova have
undertaken insightful investigations on the issue of “textual identity” or “identity through text” in their readings of the writers’ works, they still tend to make a strong connection between the textual identity and the personal identity of the writer. My study, however, suggests that it is important to break such a biographical link with the text. Thus, my approach emphasises the practice of writing, meaning the textual and narrative construction of self and life. I adopt modern theories of narrative psychology and autobiography, which stress the construction of self, or self-making, through narrative because they provide useful insights into the manifestation of identity as shown in the narratives of Zhu and Kassabova.

My focus on the textual practice of the writers is based on the constructedness of self in narrative, which is largely explored in theories of narrative psychology and modern studies of autobiography. As narrative psychologists, for example, Jerome Bruner, say, “[T]here is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know, one that just sits there ready to be portrayed in words. Rather, we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future.” Taking ideas from narrative psychology, modern studies of autobiography emphasise the self-constructedness in the writing of an autobiography. James Goodwin provides valuable insight into the rethinking of autobiography through analysing the three joining segments of the word “auto/bio/graphy”. As Goodwin’s viewpoint suggests, whereas the traditional view of autobiography tends to focus on “auto” (which denotes “self”) and “bio” (which means “life”), the trend of modern conceptualisations of the genre emphasises the root definition of “graphy”,

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27 See, for example, Rosemary Haddon, “Being/Not Being at Home in the Writing of Zhu Tianxin,” in Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua, eds. John Makeham and A-chin Hsiau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 103-123. See also Claudia Duppé, “Tourist in Her Native Country: Kapka Kassabova’s Street Without a Name.”


31 See the definitions of the segments, “auto”, “bio” and “graphy”, in James Goodwin, Autobiography: The Self Made Text, 3.
which denotes the act of writing — the textual practice, to which this thesis gives prominence.

The creative construction of self, which is emphasised in both narrative psychology and contemporary studies of autobiography, opens up a more productive view for my examination of the textual practice of each writer. The conceptualisation of self, as narrative psychologists agree, is often presented in a story-telling form. David Epston suggests that “[i]n order to give meaning to our experience, we must organise it, frame it, or give pattern to it.”\(^{32}\) Such a perception from narrative psychology is adopted for the modern analysis of autobiography. As Mark Freeman points out, when writing an autobiography, “one is inevitably remembering selectively […] conferring meanings on experiences that did not possess these meanings at the time of their occurrence […] weaving these meanings into a whole pattern, a narrative, perhaps with a plot, designed to make sense of the fabric of the past.”\(^{33}\) Scholars of autobiography have long since changed their focus to the creative and artistic composition of self in autobiographical accounts. The tendency suggests their acknowledgement of an autobiographer’s textual and narrative reconfiguration of self through writing.

A writer’s active engagement with his/her writing in this textual practice suggests a focus on the relationship between narrative and identity which is explored in narrative psychology. It is Bruner’s belief that “narrative” decides and “shapes” the way in which a person embarks on “self-making” through his/her exploitation of language as the tool.\(^{34}\) From Bruner’s viewpoint, narrative, which presents the ways in which one tells about oneself, shapes one’s identity through the specific perception one adopts. In other words, the relationship between narrative and identity is dynamic. The literary philosophy of the Japanese I-novelist, Shiga Naoya, offers a good example of this. For the conceptualisation of the I-novel, which is the type of autobiographical writing that was prevalent during the early twentieth century in Japan,\(^{35}\) Shiga provides a revolutionary direction for the genre and suggests that life is


\(^{33}\) Mark Freeman, Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 8. The word in italics is the emphasis of Freeman.

\(^{34}\) Jerome Bruner, “The Narrative Creation of Self,” 73.

\(^{35}\) The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines “I-novel” as a “form or genre of 20th-century Japanese literature that is characterized by self-revealing narration, with the author usually as the central character [which] dominated Japanese literature during the early decades of the 20th century. The term
shaped “through the act of narrating” and that, “any experience ultimately is knowable only through narration.” As Shiga’s idea suggests, the narrative which shapes the event decides the nature of the past. There are actually two balanced elements in such a kind of life-writing. On the one hand, there is the living, and on the other hand, there is the meaning of actions as realised through the narration. In a sense, to realise life through writing means to make it real or complete. It is analogous to the idea of reception theorists that the meaning of a work is only realised in the reading process. Similarly, the meaning of the life is realised in the narration process. Therefore, it can be argued that it is less important how one has lived his/her life, than how the experience is interpreted through the narrative act, or the narrativity, which denotes the idea of textual practice that I would like to emphasise.

Narrative psychologists’ conceptualisation of the dynamic relationship between narrative and identity also suggests the indication of narrative intent behind every story-telling. Contemporary scholarship on autobiography suggests that the genre is often employed by people who seek to acquire narrative authority. Autobiography, or self-writing, provides a voice for women and minority groups, to challenge the way in which they are represented in the patriarchal or the dominant discourse. In her study of “the complexities of women’s public self-discourse”, Sidonie Smith discovers that, due to patriarchal society’s repression of women, female autobiographers tend to adopt an “alternative language of fluid, plural subjectivity”. To manifest their voices effectively, they often experiment with all kinds of narrative strategies in their writing about self, reflecting their specific narrative intentions. The “text” of a woman’s self-writing, as Smith points out, often “unfold[s] narratively in patterns tied to her different psychosexual development”, and presents the dialogue between a woman and “the discourse of her time” in the process of “the making and remaking of

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37 Ibid., 100.
38 Ibid., 112.
40 Ibid., 13.
41 Ibid.
the female self”. It is in such complex ways that women writers present their narrative intent.

Nevertheless, such radical insights from modern narrative psychology and autobiography have not been fully applied to the writing of authors whose works are fictional. Although most of the works in my case studies are not specifically autobiographical, the tendency to self or identity reconfiguration is clearly presented in their exploitation of various narrative genres and strategies.

The constructedness of self, as emphasised in both narrative psychology and the modern view of autobiography, suggests that there are alternative ways to conceptualise, or display, the self. As shown in the stories of Zhu and Kassabova, the writers intertwine the personal and the collective (political, social and cultural) experiences in their composition of self, which they present through fictive narratives. Their writings present the ways in which, as narrative psychologists point out, the self is constructed in a story-telling formulation.

Contemporary theories of autobiography, especially those on the textual and narrative manifestation and arrangement of an author, offer insightful references for my examination of the narrative articulation and the textual assembly of self in the works by Zhu and Kassabova. Nevertheless, modern theorists of autobiography, despite their efforts to express a more open and inclusive view towards autobiography as a genre, still inevitably show a tendency to emphasise the autobiography/fiction distinction. Therefore, I use the theoretical discourse of autobiography as my starting point in terms of a framework whilst, at the same time, not placing particular emphasis on “autobiographical practice”, as understood by scholarship in the study of autobiography. On the one hand, I apply approaches which have traditionally or recently been used in relation to autobiographical work, especially the radical strategies adopted in women’s autobiography and life writing, and I redeploy these methods in the analysis of fictional writing. On the other hand, I would like to avoid, or even to refute, the kind of traditional approaches to fictional works which suggest that the fictional stories mirror the mind or life of the authors in a simple and direct way. I argue that the works by Zhu and Kassabova reflect part of the process of self-

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construction, which is, nevertheless, not autobiographical in the generally accepted sense.

In a sense, when Zhu and Kassabova use a female-first-person narrative voice for their writings, there is a suspicion that these women writers may be inviting readers to read their works biographically. When the female writer adopts a male-first-person narrative voice, which occurs in the writings of both Zhu and Kassabova, the reader is obviously not being invited to read the work biographically. However, in both cases they may encourage an opposite inclination. The female first-person voice is not necessarily that of the author, although it may be partially hers, whereas, it could be the other way around with the male narrative voice. (The exploitation of various narrative voices in the writing of Zhu and Kassabova will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.) Therefore, it is in fact a question of association or disassociation of the narrative voice(s) with the author or the persona of the author. A narrative voice which presents more association with the author may be considered as “autobiographical”, while the one which tends to show disassociation with the author could be categorised as “fictional”.

Nevertheless, the judgement of association or disassociation as such may vary from one person to another, which also suggests that the perception of a work as autobiography or fiction may change in different reading contexts. This corresponds to Laurence de Looze’s observation of the autobiography/fiction genre taxonomy. Looking through the lens of reception theory, Laurence de Looze considers the categorisation of the two genres as the result of the way in which a text is read. As de Looze points out, the different outcomes of readers’ receptions of a work explain why some works have been interpreted divergently as autobiography and as fiction by readers across generations. In other words, considering the potential diversity of reader’s understandings and receptions of a literary work, the autobiographical/fictional dichotomy would be problematic. As de Loose suggests, some texts are difficult to categorise as either fiction or autobiography, because they incorporate, as well as contradicting, the traits of both genres, emphasising the “self-contradictory, paradoxical nature of this admixture”. The characteristics of ambiguity and hybridity in terms of genre, which are identified by de Looze as the

hallmark of “pseudo-autobiography”， are applicable to the key features in the writings of Zhu and Kassabova. However, this does not mean that “pseudo-autobiography” would be a proper term to describe the work of the two writers. De Looze’s observations on the rethinking of literary genres provide valuable insights into my reading of works by Zhu and Kassabova, but, in a sense, his adoption of the term “pseudo-autobiography” still inevitably reflects a connection with the fiction/autobiography dichotomy. To prevent myself from falling into the trap of categorisation by genres, I propose a more open and inclusive method for the study of the two writers’ works.

It can be argued that, through their writing, Zhu and Kassabova have been in the process of representing what is, sometimes, quite a painful construction of self. They have accomplished this in relation to, or coming out of, their political and social contexts. Both Zhu and Kassabova went through dramatic changes in Taiwan and Bulgaria in terms of the political, economic and cultural aspects of those countries. In their own ways the two writers manifest themselves through the variety of genres they use for writing. Their works present the narrative selves, or the textual constructions of lives, which are combinations of the writers’ life experiences in both personal and collective forms as well as of their literary creativities.

Therefore, I suggest a different way of reading the works by Zhu and Kassabova. I emphasise the continuum of their writing practice, in that I challenge the autobiography/fiction dichotomy which is suggested in both the traditionally biographical reading of fiction and modern studies of autobiography. My argument is that there is no dividing line which can be clearly drawn between the two categories, because, as presented in the works of my two case studies, there is a continuum, which is both autobiographical and fictional, throughout the whole body of work of each writer. Both Zhu and Kassabova draw upon experiences from their actual lives and blend them with their imaginary realms. Whether their stories are considered to be factual or fictive, the protagonists are often “an amalgamation of [the writer] and

46 According to de Looze, the term “pseudo-autobiography” was initially raised by G. B. Gybbon-Monypenny (ibid.) Alex Calder has also noticed the problem of the autobiography/fiction dichotomy. To draw attention to this issue, he adopts the term “pseudo-autobiography” and emphasises the word “pseudo”, suggesting the dilemma of defining such a kind of work as simply autobiography or fiction. See Alex Calder, “Wreckage and Writing: Problems of Pseudo-Autobiography in Melville’s Omoo and Conrad’s The Mirror of the Sea,” (paper presented at the Character, Author, Person: The Problem of People in Texts colloquium, Department of English, University of Auckland, New Zealand, December 17, 2009).
[her] fictional imagination”; such an amalgamation renders problematic any categorisation of their works as purely autobiographical or fictional. The two women writers write about themselves and reconstruct themselves, regardless of the point of the continuum on which any particular work of theirs can be placed. Some of their work, such as some of Kassabova’s travel writing and the early writing of Zhu, is closer to the autobiographical pole in the continuum, but none of it is actually autobiographical per se. As shown in their works, the two writers exploit characteristic elements from both the autobiographical and the fictional sides, formulating them into the kind of work which is in the intermediate area between the writer’s factual experience and her fictive creativity. The fact that both Zhu and Kassabova manifest such a self in continuum through their writings forms the prime justification for this comparative study.

To manifest the self in continuum, both Zhu and Kassabova embark on their textual and narrative practices of identity through their narrative act. As I will argue, in complex ways the two writers conceptualise textual and narrative identity (identity in general, which is not necessarily the identity of the author) through writing. The identities they create often problematise the stereotyped or pigeonholed identities of the writers which are imposed by the critics. To present the writers’ narrative act, I focus on the textual and narrative practices of identity, as presented in the works of Zhu and Kassabova. I investigate the constructedness of identity in their writing, as shown in their strategic use of narrative voices, textuality and literary genres. The writings of Zhu and Kassabova show an integration of various perspectives on the notion of identity. Therefore, through their texts one finds that identity is presented as a complex whole, showing its personal, collective, political, sexual and cultural facets.

To demonstrate this, a variety of theories of narrative voice and textuality are applied in my detailed examination of the narrative strategies of Zhu and Kassabova, in which I focus mainly on their construction of voices and texts. As lenses for my perception of the narrative voices and textual constructions in the works of the two writers, I employ theories, such as, Mikhail Bakhtin’s “dialogism” (particularly, his notion of “heteroglossia”), Françoise Lionnet’s idea of “métissage” (multiple voices in a braided text), Susan Sniader Lanser’s feminist poetics of narrative voice, Judith

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47 I borrow the phrase from Tomi Suzuki’s description of the protagonists in Shiga Naoya’s Japanese I-novels. Suzuki’s original sentence was, “Kensaku was an amalgamation of Shiga and his fictional imagination.” From Tomi Suzuki, “Shaping Life, Shaping the Past,” 99.
Butler’s conceptualisation of “gender performativity”, Julia Kristeva’s idea of “intertextuality” and Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of “cultural hybridity”. In addition, narrative therapeutic approaches and human geographical views are also redeployed in my analysis of the literary works.

Through their textual and narrative practices, the writers’ performed identities contradict many critics’ assumptions concerning the fixed identities for Zhu and Kassabova because writing does not passively mirror a writer’s life, self or identity. Thus, I emphasise the dynamic relationship between the writer and the writing, suggesting that the relationship is formed in a manifold sense. In my observation, identity constantly shifts in the case of both Zhu and Kassabova. As presented in their writings, both writers show the tendency to work and rework issues surrounding the self. Zhu adjusts her stories relating to identity to new conditions in Taiwan on a decade-by-decade basis, and that is why she has to change and develop her text according to the changes in the environment. The world is changing around Zhu; thus, her writing is concerned in large part with her reworking of the self in relation to the changing of environment through fictional and essayistic writings. Unlike Zhu, Kassabova does not stay in one place. She goes out and discovers a new and different world and, having journeyed, she actually goes back and forth between places. In response, her writing focuses on the representation of an identity. The protagonists in her stories are often displaced people like herself, and she emphasises the way in which their identities are perceived by themselves or by other people who tend to project stereotypical impressions on them. Therefore, writing does not passively inform a writer’s identity, but rather, it gives birth to the narrative and textual formation of an identity.

Moreover, the works of Zhu and Kassabova also show a significant change of narrative technique, which suggests an evolutionary construction of self through time. When a person grows and encounters different situations, s/he may require a new set of narratives for the reconfiguration of the gradually maturing self in relation to the increasing complexity of the environment. Such reconfiguration of self is extensively presented in the case studies in my thesis. My examination of writings by Zhu Tianxin and Kapka Kassabova presents the dynamic changes in narrative strategy from the earliest to the most recent phase of their writing, indicating the evolution and increasing complexity of their identity conceptualisation.
If self-construction is referred to in the writing process, then the authors are crafting images. Therefore, the way in which I perceive the works of Zhu and Kassabova is that both of them are crafting lives and selves through writing. In my observation of the ways in which the two women writers construct their works, I refer to skills conventionally associated with women. Zhu constructs a self by scrapbooking, while Kassabova achieves this by weaving and shuttling. Kassabova shuttles back and forth between a Bulgarian home, a New Zealand home and the wider world, weaving an identity of a displaced soul between locations. Her writing weaves across the gaps between the two homes, between a past memory and present life, between the self and people to whom the writer can relate, and between the self and the environment. To compose the weave, the narratives of her writings shuttle back and forth between the oppositional poles of the protagonist’s life in its political, economic, geographical and cultural aspects. In Zhu Tianxin’s case, writing reflects the anxiety of identity crises, presented in a paradoxical combination of the desire for elsewhere and the longing for home. Through writing about the lives of marginalised people, Zhu presents the situation of people like herself in Taiwanese society. Her writing displays creative documentation of personal and collective mementoes. She collects memories of all kinds and creates scrapbooks of personal histories, providing an alternative view of Taiwan and Taiwanese identity.

In addition, the crafting metaphors correspond to the arguments of my thesis in interesting ways. The weaving and shuttling metaphor in Kassabova’s writing emphasises travelling between two poles, which means that the creative piece takes place in the continuum. Her works can be placed on different points in the progression between the autobiographical and fictional poles, but in general, they are all on the continuum, the space between the two poles. As for the scrapbooking metaphor for Zhu Tianxin, the scrapbook can be considered as a connection between the geographical, temporal (past and present), contextual (personal and collective) and textual spaces; this also places her writing at a mid-point on the continuum. The idea of continuum also links with the hybrid identity and the textual hybridity, which are often presented in the works of Zhu and Kassabova, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

The crafting methods of both writers require a sophisticated usage of the raw materials and, more importantly, the need to create something new. They actually deal with practice, the business of making and of putting one work onto another,
which evokes the textual and narrative practice that I emphasise in the works by Zhu and Kassabova. The word “craft” is both a noun and a verb. It means not only what the women writers create, but also how they create the pieces. Through writing they craft with words, each creating herself. The etymology of the word “text” is something woven, like the textile art. In other words, text is the creative composition of words, like the ways in which threads of different colours and materials are woven together and turned into a fabric.

To take the feminist perspective on life writing, the two crafting metaphors I use for the two women writers relate directly to that in the sub-psychological and analytical interpretations of narrative. The metaphors suggest a dynamic relationship, which can be paralleled in both crafting and writing, between women and their creativity. Traditionally, women were often confined in their patriarchal homes and frequently engaged in the production of crafts. Through crafting, women’s artistic expression often reveals their imagining and desire for an idealised self, a self that is beyond the patriarchal expectation of their roles as women. Living in a modern age, both Zhu and Kassabova adopt writing as their way of crafting the lives of those who have been marginalised by patriarchal and mainstream cultures. Besides, both writing and crafting suggest some kind of story-telling. As Angela Rosenthal suggests, the “handiwork” of women is presented as “the antithesis of diegesis”, a contrast to patriarchal men’s story-telling.48 Therefore, the crafted lives and selves in the works of Zhu and Kassabova also suggest a feminist assertion that a woman can free herself from patriarchal confinement and explore her world through writing—her textual life, self and identity.

For an effective presentation of my study of the two women writers, a clear structure for the thesis has been formulated. Following the Introduction, the main body of the thesis is divided into two parts. Part One, Chapters One to Four, examines what I identify as the four phases of Zhu Tianxin’s life as a writer and her work; Part Two, Chapters Five to Seven, studies my division of the three phases of Kapka Kassabova’s life and writing. Each chapter begins with a “Biographical Sketch” providing information in regard to the biographical, political and cultural background of the writer during the specific phase being studied. The main portion of

the chapter following the Biographical Sketch is called “Literary Journey”, in which I select and analyse distinctive works by the writer which present identity construction through the writer’s creative exploitation of narrative strategies. The main body of the thesis is followed by the Conclusion, in which I compare specific works by Zhu and Kassabova as well as drawing conclusions from the insights taken from the comparative study of the two creative women writers. More importantly, I discuss the original contribution of this thesis to studies on autobiography and self-writing, women’s creativity, and research on the issue of identity and identity construction. The Appendices to the thesis include supplementary references obtained for the thesis, which are my interviews with the two women writers. They provide essential references to the reading of their works, through which readers may obtain answers from the writers themselves regarding the main questions posed in this thesis. Lastly, in consideration of the wide range of issues, materials and inter-disciplinary theories adopted for this study, the items in the Bibliography provide entries which may assist readers from a variety of disciplines to conduct their own further exploration of the writers, works, and subjects discussed in my thesis.
Part One

Scrapbooking

Zhu Tianxin and the Evolution of Identity through Historical Times
Chapter One

Impossible Coherence

A literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period […] It is much more like an orchestration which strikes ever new chords among its readers and which frees the texts from the substance of the words and makes it meaningful for the time […] A literary work must be understood as creating a dialogue, and philosophical scholarship has to be founded on a continuous re-reading of texts, not mere facts.

~ Hans Robert Jauss, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory”

Existing scholarship on Zhu Tianxin tends to attach little importance to her early writing. When her works were first published, they were, as suggested by the writer, often considered as nothing more than light reading for students, despite the fact that Zhu achieved great popularity and received several literary prizes. As Chen Peiwen (陳培文) points out, although Zhu had become well known as soon as she entered the literary field in the 1970s, she did not seem to be noticed by critics until 1989. Before then, there were no critical responses to Zhu’s writing apart from the complimentary forewords to her books which were written by her family and friends, who were also in the literary circle.

Zhu’s early works have rarely been closely examined, except in some Master’s theses in Taiwan that have focused on the writer’s life and works from the earliest to the latest periods for studies in Chinese literature, Taiwanese literature, or history.

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2 See my interview with Zhu in Appendix I.
4 The responses to Zhu’s writing before 1989 were prologues by Zhu’s mentor (Hu Lancheng for The Ploughman’s Song, 1977), her father (Zhu Xining, for It Never Ends…, 1982), her friends (Ding Yamin and Xie Caijun, for Yesterday When I Was Young, 1981) and her older sister (Zhu Tianwen, for The Diary of Guan Lin, a National Taiwan University Student, 1984). In addition, there were also two interviews by Yang Ming (楊明) and Huang Qiaobin (黃喬彬) in 1986. See Yang Ming 楊明, “Emotions on Her Lashes, Aloofness on Her Brows: Zhu Tianxin in Profile” 深情在睫，孤意在眉——側寫朱天心, interview with Zhu Tianxin, Wenxun Literary Monthly 文訊月刊 25 (August 1986): 250-253. Huang Qiaobin 黃喬彬, “Zhu Tianxin the Person” 朱天心這個人, interview with Zhu Tianxin, Donghai Literary Quarterly 東海文藝季刊 21 (September 1986): 79-83. See also the “Timeline of Zhu Tianxin’s Life and Writing” 朱天心生平, 寫作, 及相關年表 (1958-2004) in the Appendix to Chen Peiwen, “The Life Scape and Epoch Thesis of Chu, Tien-hsin” [sic] 朱天心的生命風景與時代課題, and the Bibliography to Wu Yahui 吳雅慧, The Time and Space Axes of Zhu Tianxin’s Fiction 朱天心小說的時空座標 (master’s thesis, National Zhongxing University 國立中興大學中文研究所碩士論文, 2001).
For example, the thesis of Zhao Qinghua (趙慶華) emphasises the way in which the GMD’s political teaching of the grand Chinese narrative dominates Zhu’s early writing as well as her identity. The analysis of Qiu Meiling (邱玫玲), although not focusing as much on the political context, is still limited to a consideration of Zhu’s early writing as “bildungsroman” presenting sensitive depictions of the lives of young Taiwanese people in the 1970s. In general, the studies of Zhu’s early works show a tendency to either consider them as young-adult popular reading or to interpret them as political writings in support of the GMD agenda, an issue I will discuss in detail in the later part of this chapter as well as in Chapter Two.

In this chapter, I take a different vantage point and examine the dynamic relationship between the life and the writing of Zhu Tianxin in the first phase of her literary career. My reading emphasises the integration of the two disparate elements, examining the ways in which she utilises the resources drawn from her life and experiences to enhance her literary creativity. The first part, Biographical Sketch, shows the biography of the writer in the first phase (before 1980), while the second part, Literary Journey, focuses on her writing (her textual practice) of the same period. As will be shown in my analysis, the relationship between the writer’s biography and her narrative/textual construction is manifested with great complexity.

BIографICAL SKETCH

Zhu Tianxin was born into a literary family with a mixed cultural background. Her father, Zhu Xining (朱西寧, 1926-1998), a Chinese émigré (外省人), was a well-known “military writer” and a writer of Chinese Homeland Literature (鄉愁文學).

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who followed Chiang Kai-shek’s troops and retreated to Taiwan in 1949. Zhu Tianxin’s mother, Liu Musha (劉慕沙, b. 1935), was a native Taiwanese and a translator of modern Japanese literary works. Liu was from a wealthy Taiwanese Hakka (客家人)9 doctor’s family,10 which (like many native Taiwanese families) was hostile to Chinese culture and tended to hold Japanese culture in high esteem. At the time when the couple met, which was about ten years after the “February 28th Incident” (二二八事件),11 it was a contentious issue for Liu to marry a Chinese émigré soldier.12 Despite the objections and pressure from Liu’s family, the young couple eloped, married and started their humble life in military compounds (眷村).13


9 The Taiwanese Hakka are a minority people in Taiwan. They had originated from the northern China and had moved to the southern Chinese provinces of Jiangxi, Guangdong and Fujian in the seventeenth century due to war, political and economic situations of the time. Soon after that, they became one of the groups who immigrated to Taiwan from China in the seventeenth century. As Lijung Wang (王俐容) points out, the Hakka base their identity on “the long history of migration” and viewing themselves as a “diaspora”. Since the Hakka were originally from the northern region, they were often considered as “guests” or “new comers” by the natives of the southern region of China, which is reflected in their collective name, “Hakka” (客家), meaning “guests” in the Hakka dialect. See Lijung Wang, “Diaspora, Identity and Cultural Citizenship: The Hakkas in ‘Multicultural Taiwan’,” in Ethnic and Racial Studies 30, no. 5 (September 2007), 875-895. The quotations are from pp. 876-877.


11 The “February 28th Incident” took place in the afternoon of 27 February 1947 due to a serious argument caused by the violent confiscation of contraband cigarettes from a Taiwanese native woman by some Chinese agents from the Tobacco Monopoly Bureau in Taibei, which eventually turned into an island-wide anti-GMD-government uprising on 28 February. It was later violently suppressed by the government and caused a large number of deaths of both Chinese and Taiwanese people, which had undermined the relationship between Chinese émigrés and Taiwanese natives before the GMD government retreated to Taiwan in 1949. Information from Xu Zongmao 徐宗懋, Twentiet-Century Taiwan: The Restoration 二十世紀臺灣: 光復篇 (Taipei: Taiwan guji 臺灣古籍, 2007), 52-57.


13 The military compounds (眷村) were villages and communities which were designed for settling the Chinese soldiers and their dependants who followed the GMD military troops and retreated to Taiwan. The earliest military compounds in Taiwan began in 1945 after the Japanese were defeated in WWII. See Guo Guanlin 郭冠麟, From Bamboofence [sic] to Mansion: A History of Armed Forces Military Dependent [sic] Quarters 從竹籬笆到高樓大廈的故事—國軍眷村發展史 (Taipei: Ministry of National Defence 國防部史政編譯室, 2005). For the reference to the love story of Zhu’s parents, see He Laimei 何來美, “Love after Four Encounters: Liu Musha Ran Away with a Chinese Émigré Soldier” 四面之緣: 劉慕沙跟外省兵跑了, United Daily News (聯合報, Taipei), March 31, 2009, http://mag.udn.com/mag/people/storypage.jsp?f_ART_ID=186956 (accessed April 12, 2011).
Later, Liu Musha gave birth to their three daughters, Zhu Tianwen (朱天文, b. 1956), Zhu Tianxin (朱天心, b. 1958) and Zhu Tianyi (朱天衣, b. 1960). The Zhu sisters had a great passion for reading, and, receiving, as they did, the influence of their parents, who both worked in the literary field and thus had a close relationship with contemporary writers and artists, and provided their children with an environment in which there were numerous books, the three girls all became writers and were called “the Brontës of Taiwan.”

Resources from her early life were frequently adopted as materials for Zhu’s work. Examples of this are the conflicts between the Chinese émigré and Taiwanese native communities, and an abundance of knowledge of art and literature. The environments of the Chinese émigré’s military compound and the Taiwanese Hakka village where Zhu grew up were both reflected in her conceptualisation of identity in the early years as well as in her writing later. Zhu was born in a military compound right next door to the Gaoxiong Huangpu Military School, which she often romanticised in her writing as a pre-destined factor for her to grow up as a Chinese patriot. After the youngest of the Zhu sisters, Zhu Tianyi, was born, Zhu Tianxin was sent to the Hakka village in Miaoli (苗栗, in northwest Taiwan) to live with Liu Musha’s parents; this occurred around the age when she started learning to talk.

For about a year Zhu Tianxin was looked after by her Taiwanese Hakka grandparents, who ran a clinic and spoke only the Hakka dialect. The medical environment of her grandparents’ home would later be adopted in some of Zhu’s

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15 Lingchei Letty Chen writes, “Like the Brontës of England, the Zhu family of Taiwan produced three girls who would grow up to become writers. Like the Brontës, too, only two of the Zhu sisters became productive and successful writers: Zhu Tianwen (b. 1956), the eldest, and Zhu Tianxin (b. 1958), the second daughter […] Both Zhu Tianwen and Zhu Tianxin began their writing careers when they were only sixteen and were immediately best-selling authors in Taiwan.” From Lingchei Letty Chen, “Writing Taiwan’s Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Zhu Tianwen and Zhu Tianxin,” 584.
16 Gaoxiong Huangpu Military School (黃埔軍校) was originally the Chinese National Military School founded by Chiang Kai-shek in China. The school continued in Gaoxiong after Chiang’s troops moved to Taiwan.
19 From Li Ruiteng, “Defending the Dignity of Literature—Interview with Zhu Tianxin” 始終維護文學的尊嚴——與朱天心對話, 173.
works, works, where the issue of health would be explored and presented in detail. During her childhood life in the Hakka village, Zhu was often jokingly asked by the villagers where she belonged and they would always laugh whenever she answered in the Hakka dialect, “I’m a Chinese émigré.” That was her first encounter with the issue of identity and belonging/not belonging, which would later dominate her life and her writing.

Except for this time in the Taiwanese Hakka village, Zhu spent most of her childhood and adolescent life in military compounds with Chinese émigrés and other second-generation Chinese children like herself. A large part of Zhu Tianxin’s early and even later work draws on her memories of the life and people in the military compounds. Zhu admitted that she had better memories of the military compounds than anywhere else. Compared with her experiences of living in the Hakka or mixed-cultural communities, the military compound was more like a home to her. Thus what dominated her identity and thoughts in the initial phase was the Sino-centric ideology, which was taught in the military compounds and at schools by the GMD government.

Zhu started her writing career at the age of fifteen and began publishing her short stories in newspapers, mainly *China Times* (中國時報, Taipei). At that time she was attending the best girls’ senior high school in Taipei—Taipei Municipal First Girls’ Senior High School (北一女中). Zhu’s first published short story “A Day in the Life of Liang Xiaoqi” (梁小琪的一天) was completed in November 1973. It is a third-person short story about the everyday life of a high-school girl, Liang Xiaoqi, who is, like the writer, a second-generation Chinese émigré from a military compound and also a student at Taipei First Girls’ Senior High School. Like most of Zhu’s early

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21 Such as “Passage of Things Past” (時移事往, 1984).
23 Although during her early childhood she was treated like a little princess in her grandparents’ Taiwanese Hakka village, she often heard the fights or complaints between her Hakka grandparents and her Fulao aunts, as if there had always been conflicts among the Taiwanese nativists. By contrast her impressions of her father (who was the only Chinese Mainlander family member she had in Taiwan) and other residents in military compounds seem to be more loving and less hostile to each other. See my interview with Zhu Tianxin in Appendix I.
work, it is filled with a teenage girl’s romanticised imaginings of Chinese culture, Western culture, GMD nationalism, and relationships between the sexes.

The person who had a great influence on the early phase of Zhu’s literary career was Hu Lancheng (胡蘭成), writer and ex-husband of the Chinese writer Zhang Ailing (張愛玲).²⁶ Like a literary father to the Zhu sisters, Hu had been the mentor who inspired their thoughts on Chinese history, literature, philosophy and politics. He told them that as long as they could get three thousand “shi” (士, people with knowledge) together, they would be able to save China.²⁷ Therefore in 1977, inspired by Hu, the Zhu sisters and some friends founded the Sansan Jikan (三三集刊, Sansan Journal) and later, in 1979, the Sansan Publishing House (三三書坊) was established in order to discover and to bring together patriotic young writers to contribute their knowledge for a better China.²⁸

Zhu also drew on Judaeo-Christian ideas, an influence from her father whose family in China had been Christians for three generations.²⁹ In 1977, her first book Days on the Ark (方舟上的日子) was published, the book title was obviously inspired by the Biblical story. It was a collection of short stories she had published in various newspapers since her high-school years, which included stories about the female character, Liang Xiaoqi. One of the short stories from this collection, “A Cool Autumn” (天涼好箇秋) received the merit prize for fiction in the United Daily News

²⁶ Like their father, Zhu Xining, the Zhu sisters were fans of Zhang Ailing’s writing, and their writing styles were also deeply influenced by Zhang. The literary critic David Der-Wei Wang indicated that among the writers in Taiwan, the Zhu sisters are considered literary inheritors of Zhang Ailing. The Zhu sisters knew Hu Lancheng through their father, who interviewed Hu when he was writing a biography of Zhang Ailing. Cited in Sun Jieru, “The Journey of Identity of the Second-Generation Chinese Émigrés: Zhu Tianxin and Her Stories as Example” 外省第二代的認同歷程——以朱天心及其小說為例.
²⁹ From Li Ruiteng, “Defending the Dignity of Literature—Interview with Zhu Tianxin” 始終維護文學的尊嚴——與朱天心對話, 175.
Literary Awards (聯合報文學獎) in 1976. In *Days on the Ark* Zhu illustrates the carefree lives of young Taiwanese high school students, who lived in military compounds in the 1970s. Like the variety of selected animals, living happily and peacefully in Noah’s Ark protected by God, and thus escaping the destruction/flood of the earth, the residents in the military compound were also specially chosen people who lived happily in their closed environment protected by the spirits of their GMD political fathers without being disturbed by the native Taiwanese and the chaos outside the compound.

Such romanticised teenage views on politics, culture, literature, religion and personal relationships were combined in Zhu’s second book, *The Ploughman’s Song: My Three Years of Life at Taibei First Girls’* (擊壤歌: 北一女三年記), which was also the book that made Zhu famous as a young writer. *The Ploughman’s Song* is presented in the form of a diary, which the writer claims to be an autobiographical account of her high school life. The *Ploughman’s Song* was so popular that a week after its first launch, Changhe Publishers (長河出版社) had to print an additional ten thousand copies. In 1981 *The Ploughman’s Song* was re-published by Zhu’s publisher, Sansan (三三). A later sales record of this book amounted to over 200,000 copies.

In 1981 Sansan published Zhu’s third book, *Yesterday When I Was Young* (昨日當我年輕時), a collection of short stories and essays that Zhu wrote during her four years at university. The stories still centre on the people and life on campus and in the military compounds. However, in this anthology, Zhu started venturing realistically into social issues through the depiction of personal stories. Two of the short stories from this anthology, “Love” (愛情) and “Yesterday When I Was Young” (昨日當我...

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31 The writer claims that the content of *The Ploughman’s Song* is based on her recollection of high-school life during her freshman’s year at university, while the passages regarding the third year in high-school life are technically a direct copy from the diaries she kept during that year. See my interview with the writer in Appendix I.
33 From the back cover of Zhu Tianxin, *The Ploughman’s Song* 擊壤歌 (Taipei: Unitas 聯合文學, 2001).
年輕時), were awarded the *China Times* Literary Prize (中國時報文學獎) in 1978 and 1979 respectively.  

**LITERARY JOURNEY**

Starting from the first phase of her literary journey, Zhu Tianxin’s writing demonstrates a high degree of complexity in terms of narrative voice, textuality and genre, a fact that is often neglected by critics of Zhu. It is surprising that a writer could present such sophisticated *textual practice* in her debut works which were completed in her late teens and early twenties.

**Multi-referentiality of Voice and Text**

To begin with, the narrative of Zhu’s early writing shows a combination of several voices in a single figure. Presented in female first-person narrative (in the form of diary entries and daily reflections), *The Ploughman’s Song* (1977) shows what Bakhtin calls a “stratified and heteroglot” dialogical structure through the “expressive system” of a teenage girl. It reflects the ambivalent feelings towards the GMD teaching of a hormone-driven teenage girl who tends to romanticise everything she perceives:

> The sapphire blueness of the August sky […] makes it look so clean and pure; weather like this always reminds me of the Han and Tang dynasties, which make me dream of taking a walk with a boy in the wind and the moonlight… But right now, I long to find a boy to love; I’d say to him, “Can we wait until we retake China, and then I’ll marry you?” When these troubled times are over, I’ll take off my military uniform and wear a beautiful dress. China, oh China!  

(八月的天 […] 天空寶藍得乾乾靜靜，這種天候原總要讓我想到漢唐，總要讓我憧憬和一個男孩走在風中走在月亮中…可是這會兒，我更想找一個我心愛的男孩，對他說：「反攻大陸以後，我再嫁給你好嗎？」亂世歲月以後，我再脫去一身戎裝，穿件很漂亮的女兒服，中國啊中國!)

Love and politics are equally romanticised and entwined in the imagination of the protagonist, whose longing for a romantic relationship is infused with the GMD political discourse. In her fantasy, love and political matters are presented in symbolic forms: the “sapphire blueness” of the sky implicitly represents the GMD,

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34 From National Central Library of Taiwan. “Database of Contemporary Literature” 國家圖書館當代文學史料系統.
36 Ibid.
37 Zhu Tianxin, *The Ploughman’s Song* 撃壤歌 (Taipei, Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 103.
which is often associated with the colour “blue” due to the party’s campaign emblem—a white sun in the blue sky.\(^{38}\) Walking in the wind and the moonlight, the female protagonist imagines herself switching from military uniforms to feminine outfits. As a result, her fantasy about romantic love is intertwined with concepts of homeland and patriotism from the GMD government education.

A work like this may be received differently by various reading groups. The way in which Zhu constructs her narrative made it appeal not only to young teenage readers but also to the GMD officials and Chinese émigré parents. On the one hand, through her writing, Zhu expresses the longing for romantic relationships of most female teenage readers. On the other hand, she also emphasises serious matters—love for the Chinese culture and nation—that the GMD government and the Chinese émigré parents tried hard to implant in the minds of young people. Hence, the monologue of a teenage girl actually presents the voices and expectations of different narrative contexts, or “social heteroglossia”,\(^{39}\) in Bakhtin’s terminology. It shows the heteroglossia of young people’s romantic fantasies, the GMD government’s nationalism, and the conventional Chinese patriarchal manipulation of gender relationships. Nationalism, Chinese patriarchal values and teenagers’ romanticism are plaited together in the same text and made acceptable for readers from various backgrounds, each of whom tends to interpret the text according to their own “ground of active and engaged understanding”, as Bakhtin puts it. Hence, such a text is monological in form but polyvocal in meaning.

In a sense, the polyvocality of Zhu’s text can also be read in terms of Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of “(cultural) hybridity”.\(^{40}\) As Raylene Ramsay suggests, Bakhtin’s idea of polyvocality presents “hybridity as a textual phenomenon, a ‘multilinguism’ or plurality of voices detectible within a single text.”\(^{41}\) In other words, the early writings of Zhu had already started to show the potential of linguistic “hybridity”, an idea

\(^{38}\) Nowadays the colour blue in Taiwan is often politically interpreted as an indication of the Chinese émigrés and the GMD supporters. See my discussion on the term, the Pan-Blues (泛藍), in Chapter Four.


\(^{40}\) See Homi K. Bhabha, _The Location of Culture_ (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

which increasingly dominates her narrative strategies as well as the writer’s conceptualisation of identity in the later phases.42

From the outset Zhu seemed to understand the trick of combining all these diverse voices into one. Nationalism, or an adherence to Chinese patriarchy in the raw, is unlikely to attract a teenager, unless it is packaged in a particular way. Zhu makes the political and the conventional moral discourses align with the escapist fantasies of teenage students. An unknown place like China provides an ideal site for a teenage girl to exercise her romantic imaginations and escapism in all respects, but it remains an empty space which exists only in the GMD indoctrination and the young protagonist’s dreams.

Zhu’s stories often contain several narrative strands (the personal, socio-political and cultural) in a single text. Kristeva’s idea of “intertextuality” provides insights into the multi-referentiality of Zhu’s writing. Completed in 1977, “Song of the Moralist” (采薇歌)43 allegorically implies the political relationship between Taiwan and the USA through the depiction of love between a Taiwanese university student, Wei (薇), and an American man, Roger (羅傑). The relationship is based on a stereotype in orientalist male fantasies: a middle-aged Westerner with a young Asian woman. The female protagonist romanticises her relationship with the married American who lives alone with his daughter in Taipei. Wei plays the role of a submissive lover to Roger and a caring mother to his daughter. From the beginning of their relationship, the couple often meet in the Chen family graveyard (陳氏墓園),44 and “graveyard” seems to suggest the destiny of their love. The relationship eventually leads to the tragedy in Wei’s life — what she receives from her trust in Roger is his betrayal. She becomes a prostitute in Zhongshan North Road (中山北路), a district of Taipei where there are bars visited by foreigners, mainly American and Japanese, implying the ambiguous political and cultural relationships between Taiwan and the two countries — the Japanese colonisation of Taiwan before 1945 and the American garrison in Taiwan, afterwards.

42 See my discussion on the increasing hybridity in Zhu’s writing and her conceptualisation of identity in Chapters Three and Four.
43 “Song of the Moralist” (采薇歌) is one of the short stories collected in the anthology Zhu Tianxin, Yesterday When I Was Young 昨日當我年輕時 (Taipei: Sansan 三三, 1981). The story was completed in 1977.
44 From Zhu Tianxin, “Song of the Moralist” 采薇歌, in Yesterday When I Was Young 昨日當我年輕時 (Taipei: Sansan 三三, 1981), 21 and 23. The story was completed in 1977.
Considering the political context of the time, the story suggests Taiwan’s excessive trust and reliance on the political relationship with the U.S., while the U.S. government secretly built another relationship with China. Losing the alliance with the U.S., Taiwan was basically alienated. On the other hand, the gradual rise of Taiwanese nativism, which finally turned into political movements from 1978 to 1980, such as the Zhongli Incident (中壢事件, 1978) and the Formosa Incident (美麗島事件, 1979), also questions GMD authority and the Chinese identity imposed on all people in Taiwan.

On the cultural level, the text questions those young Taiwanese who desert traditional Chinese culture and blindly worship Western cultures, which is indicated by the dramatic change in Wei after Roger leaves. She was a naïve university student with long straight hair and a snowy white dress, like a fairy (p. 22). However, after she starts working as a prostitute, she paints her face with French brand Coty costumes (p. 17), has her hair done in a dramatic spiral perm (p. 18); and draws her eyes in “the mysterious Oriental style” (‘神祕的東方’式, p. 19). While attempting in part to Westernise her appearance, she also adopts the stereotypical Oriental look as projected by Westerners, which eventually makes her lose her cultural identity, informing her role as a prostitute who flatters her foreign clients in order to survive.

The multi-referential feature of Zhu’s work evokes the way in which Kristeva conceptualises a text as an “ideologeme”, which is perceived as a “totality” or an “intertextuality” compiling various “novelistic utterances” (or meanings) originating from both “within the novelistic textual set” and “the extra-novelistic textual set”. The former denotes “a meaning in the text itself”, while the latter indicates a meaning of the text generated in the historical and social context. Whereas the love story of

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45 In an attempt to build a good relationship with the Chinese government, in February 1972 the U.S. president Richard M. Nixon visited China, which was a turning point of Taiwan’s relationship with the U.S. According to the “the Joint Communiqué in Shanghai” (上海公報, 28 February 1972), the U.S. government recognised that Taiwan was a part of China, and agreed that all U.S. military forces and installations were to be withdrawn from Taiwan. Information from Xu Zongmao 徐宗懋, Twentieth-Century Taiwan: Democracy 二十一世紀臺灣: 民主篇 (Taipei: Taiwan guji 台灣古籍, 2007), 16-21.

46 Information from Xu Zongmao, Twentieth-Century Taiwan: Democracy 二十一世紀臺灣: 民主篇, 72-75.


Wei and Roger presents the “novelistic utterance” within the text, the allegorical representations of the uncertainty of the cultural and political status of Taiwan and its frustrations in international relations in the 1970s indicate the extra-novelistic utterance.

The issue of identity gradually emerges in Zhu’s short stories. Her presentation of the protagonists’ identification with Western cultures, as shown in “Song of the Moralist”, suggests its ambivalence. In “Love” (愛情), Zhu implies the problematic attitude of Chinese émigrés towards Taiwan. The death of Chiang Kai-shek in 1975 evoked the question of home and belonging for the Chinese émigrés, who were not prepared to put down roots in Taiwan. In “Love” Zhu depicts the sense of alienation and displacement of the Chinese émigrés through her depiction of a Vietnamese-Chinese student, Qiu Jianrong (仇劍戎), who lives alone in Taiwan. The female protagonist’s love relationship with Qiu does not provide him with a sense of belonging. Qiu’s estrangement is presented through his mysterious and unsociable life style, as well as through his sudden death in his room, alone in the university students’ dormitory on the female protagonist’s birthday. Allegorical representations of the politics of Taiwan gradually become the hallmark in Zhu’s works, which are developed with greater complexity in the later phases of her writing.

Creative Exploitation of Literary, Linguistic, Political and Cultural Elements

Zhu’s writing presents creative exploitation of literary, linguistic, political and cultural elements. The textuality of her works manifests Kristeva’s idea that a “literary word” is “an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning)”. It involves “a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context.”

The first phase of Zhu’s writing shows sophisticated allusions to classical Chinese literary works. What Zhu presents is not simply taking materials from these works, but more importantly, how at odds the classical Chinese literature is with the

50 “Love” (愛情, completed in 1978) is one of the short stories collected in the anthology Yesterday When I Was Young 昨日當我年輕時.
52 Ibid.
GMD political interpretations—such as emphasising traditional Chinese values and encouraging patriotism towards the nation—which are played upon it. For example, many of the titles of her stories, articles and books are borrowed from ancient Chinese works. “The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”⁵³ (長干行, 1975) is taken from the poem by Li Bai (李白, 701-762). Li Bai’s poem, which was teaching material for high-school Chinese literature classes and designed to suit anti-romantic longings, is, nevertheless, romantically interpreted by Zhu’s teenage protagonists and is occasionally turned into a work which suggests sexual meanings. As in Li’s poem, in her short story Zhu presents the innocent love of childhood sweethearts who in this case grow up together in the military compound. In The Ploughman’s Song, the poem is used in Xiaoxia’s narrative about her homosexual love towards another female student, Maomi (貓咪, Kitty).⁵⁴ The title of The Ploughman’s Song (擊壤歌) is taken from an ancient Chinese folk song/poem (先秦古詩, 2,200-220B.C). The old verses emphasise the peasants’ enjoyment of and satisfaction with their self-sufficient life and daily routine alongside the world of nature, while political changes are outside their area of concern.⁵⁵ In the light of such an idea from the old poem, Zhu presents the life of some 1970s high-school students in Taibei, who are ignorant of the repressive political environment and who live carefree lives in the utopian world they have created for themselves. This is contradictory to the image of young patriots that the GMD would expect from all students in Taiwan. The title “Song of the Moralist” (采薇歌) is taken from another ancient Chinese folk song/poem, which praises people who maintain a high sense of morality and whose thoughts and behaviour would never be affected by the environment.⁵⁶ However, unlike the moralists, Boyi (伯夷)

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⁵⁵ The original poem of The Ploughman’s Song (擊壤歌) reads: “Starting to work when the sun comes up; going home when the sun goes down. Digging wells for water, farming the fields for food. The kings and dynasties have nothing to do with me!” (日出而作，日入而息。鑿井而飲，耕田而食。帝力於我何有哉！) From Shen Deqian 沈德潛, Sourcebook of Ancient Verse, 古詩源 (Hong Kong: Taiping 太平書局, 1966), 1.

⁵⁶ The poem describes two brothers, Bo Yi and Shu Qi (伯夷, 叔齊) from a royal family who could not identify with the king of the Zhou (周武王), who started the war in order to overthrow the king of Shang (商紂王) during the mourning period of his father’s death. To show their determination for morality, the two brothers retreated to a mountain and ate nothing but wild vegetables until they eventually died alone in the mountain. See Shen Deqian, Sourcebook of Ancient Verse 古詩源, 4.
and Shuqi (叔齊) in the Chinese legend, Zhu’s female protagonist, who has romantic dreams about love and the future, eventually loses what she previously believed in due to the failure of her relationship with an American man. Despite her attempts to be loyal to him even after he deserts her, she contradictorily turns herself into a prostitute. By adopting such a title, the story ironically mirrors the naïve and unrealistic belief of the female protagonist in a classic love relationship, presenting a sceptical view of traditional values. On the one hand, readers who are familiar with classical Chinese literature, may readily catch the theme of Zhu’s new story as soon as they see the old title. On the other hand, borrowing titles from classical Chinese verses, Zhu gives new life to the old works. It shows the way in which a classical Chinese theme may be reinterpreted in the contemporary Taiwanese context, like old wine in a new bottle. In that way, Zhu also presents ironic commentaries on GMD’s use of the classic texts in school.

Zhu presents creative exploitation of the GMD agenda in The Ploughman’s Song, where terms and passages from Sun Yat-sen’s political ideal, the Three Principles of the People and Hu Lancheng’s Chinese-centric philosophy, such as his idea of a “grand China” (大中國), are often adopted in the female protagonist’s narrative. One cannot help wondering why a teenage girl would write several pages in her diary about politics and defend the political beliefs of Sun and Hu. To pay more attention to the narrative tone, one finds that these passages about politics are actually used as materials for the protagonist to exercise her romanticism. For example, Sun Yat-sen is portrayed as a genius whose mind is filled with all kinds of political ideals, while his loneliness comes from the fact that people rarely seem to understand his ambition, which often makes Xiaoxia weep when she reads his Three Principles of the People (三民主義). It seems that what appeals to her is not politics as such, but the way in which politics may be turned into a romantic fantasy. The inference to this is that politics is not meaningful to the younger generation. Studying the Three Principles of the People, which had been a nightmare of boredom for most students, suddenly becomes interesting due to the way in which Zhu’s protagonist romanticises the GMD political father and the political agenda.

57 See Zhu Tianxin, The Ploughman’s Song 拳壤歌 (Taipei, Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 154-159 (on the political ideal of Sun Yat-sen) and 174-178 (on the Chinese-centric philosophy of Hu Lancheng).
58 Ibid, 154.
Another crucial element in Zhu’s early work is the utilisation of modern Western songs and movies, which were popular among young people in Taiwan in the 1960s and the 1970s. There are story or book titles which are taken from Western films, such as “忘年之戀” [“Love Across Generations”, a Chinese translation of the British film Jane Eyre (1970)], and “昨日當我年輕時” [“Yesterday When I Was Young”, the title of Zhu’s short story and book, borrowing from Roy Clark’s song “Yesterday When I Was Young” (1965)]. Popular songs in English and Western films of the time are often included in the texts of Zhu’s early works: for example, Andy Williams’ “A Summer Place” (1962), the British song and movie, “To Sir, with Love” (吾愛吾師, 1967), the Bee Gees’ “First of May” (1969) for the British film Melody (兩小無猜, 1971), Barbara Streisand’s song and movie The Way We Were (往日情懷, 1973), The Carpenters’ “Yesterday Once More” (1973), and Glen Campbell’s “By the Time I Get to Phoenix” (1976). These Western songs, films, singers and movie stars provide vivid background information and references to the life and thoughts of Zhu’s protagonists as well as to readers who were students in Taipei in the 1970s.

However, what makes Zhu’s early writing so interesting is not simply her presentation of the Western elements, but the way in which they are infused into the socio-political context of the Taiwan of the 1970s. For example, in The Ploughman’s Song, the film Melody and its soundtrack, Bee Gees’ “First of May” is presented in Xiaoxia’s recollection of her childhood sweetheart, Xiaosan (小三), with whom she grew up in the military compound. The theme of romantic puppy love between two children in Melody and the lyrics of “First of May”—especially the line, “our love will never die”, in the song—are applied to the Taiwanese context and reflect the protagonist’s recollection of her childhood love. In addition, the song and movie, “To

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59 “Love Across Generations” (忘年之戀, 1974) is one of the short stories collected in Zhu’s Days on the Ark (方舟上的日子, 1977). The film is also mentioned in Zhu Tianxin, The Ploughman’s Song 撃壤歌 (Taipei, Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 38. The title “忘年之戀” (Love Across Generations) is actually the title given in Taiwan to the film Jane Eyre (1970), starring George C. Scott (as Rochester) and Susannah York (as Jane).
60 See Zhu Tianxin, The Ploughman’s Song 撃壤歌 (Taipei, Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 35.
61 Ibid., 216-217.
62 Ibid., 59-60.
63 Ibid., 33.
64 Ibid., 35.
65 Ibid., 42.
66 Ibid., 59-60.
Sir, with Love”, are romanticised by Xiaoxia as a link to the fantasy about her high-school English teacher. In her imagining, he stands on the platform of the classroom with the eyes and smile which make him look “exactly like Sidney Poitier”67 while Xiaoxia would be the female student in the movie, because, like Judy Geeson, she “also has a thick and rising lower lip”68. Living in a politically repressed environment, the Western songs and movies provide a channel for the teenager to escape into her romantic fantasies. Zhu presents the fantasy world of the teenager, a world which is not found in the political context of Taiwan. It is only through the Western elements that the protagonist is able to romanticise her current situation as a high-school student in Taibei.

Zhu shows the ability to tap into the complexity of being a teenager in Taibei in the 1970s, which contains many threads: the repressed socio-political environment in Taiwan and the high school life routines. All these are knitted together in her narratives. Her texts weave together all the songs, movies, popular youth culture, as well as the Chinese traditional and the GMD teachings of schooldays, which would be instantly recognisable to the readership at the time. Zhu presents her stories in the idiom of the young people of the 1970s which enables her readers to encapsulate the moment when they read her work—to envisage the reality of where they are or where they were in the 1970s. It is the here and now which belonged to the teenagers of the 1970s in Taibei. When reading the passages of Zhu’s works, what later readers see is not necessarily the lives of her protagonists, but more likely their own lives as they were in the 1970s, singing or listening to the songs in English broadcast on the radio, watching the Western movies with their friends or the people whom they were dating, and talking among their peers about the singers or movie stars they admired.

This kind of feeling applies to the adolescent readers of Zhu’s works in the 1970s as well as to now middle-aged readers who had been teenagers in the 1970s in Taibei. The only difference is, for the latter, these early works of Zhu have become nostalgic. The nostalgic feeling occurs through time. Something which captures the here and now in the first phase of Zhu’s writing would give a sense of nostalgia later and would turn into a very important theme in her writing during the later phases.

67 “完全就是薛尼鮑迪的模樣”. Ibid., 216. Sidney Poitier is the actor who played the role as the teacher, Mark Thackeray, in the film, To Sir, with Love (1967).
68 “一樣有個厚厚翹翹的下唇”. Ibid. Judy Geeson is the actress who played the role as the female student, Pamela Dare, in the film, To Sir, with Love (1967).
Problematising Coherence

The admixture of diverse elements—infusing Chinese classical and Western popular works and blending classical Chinese, modern Chinese, and the English language—through all kinds of allusions, suggests the uncertainty of meanings. In a sense, it reflects the sense of uncertainty of Taiwanese teenagers of the 1970s. Their lives were surrounded by contrasting elements: the conservative teachings of Chinese morality and the GMD politics on the one hand, and the relentless expressions of love and desire in Western popular culture on the other.

Zhu is able to encapsulate the essential contradictions which existed in the socio-political environment of Taiwan in the 1960s and 1970s. Her writing mirrors the uncertainty and ambivalence of Taiwanese identity under GMD rule. At the time, the GMD government had to promote traditional Chinese culture, because modern China was ruled by the Chinese Communist Party, a forbidden issue, a non-subject, in the GMD discourse. The Chinese identity which the GMD imposed on all people in Taiwan was ambiguous. What the government presented was a virtual China, rooted in traditional Chinese culture which was propagandised by the GMD. It skipped the connection with modern Chinese culture in Mainland China, and linked up directly with Western popular culture, in which the political influence of Western countries, particularly the American involvement in Taiwan, played an important role. As a result, it showed a direct link between the classical Chinese then and the modern Western now, which made the GMD national identity somewhat insecure. Such an ambiguous connection is reflected in the link between the classical Chinese and the modern Western elements in Zhu’s writing, which is also an indication of the cultural and political incoherence of Taiwanese identity. This is contradictory to the political certainties imposed by the critics of Zhu unto her works.

All the incoherence was rendered supposedly coherent under the GMD policy. Zhu was able to highlight the actual incoherence which became more obvious to readers as time went by. The writer might not have been aware of this when she wrote the work in her late teens. However, she had the extraordinary intuition to creatively capture the phenomenon.

The intertextual construction of Zhu’s writing shows an attempt to mend the psychological (political and cultural) incoherence of identity through connecting textual meanings. As shown in many of her early works, in order to make
connections and create a sense of coherence, Zhu often creates allusion to, or citation from, several different contexts. Zhu’s female protagonists often borrow elements from the love stories in Western fiction, in order to make sense of their romantic fantasies. This is particularly seen in their obsession with the story of Jane Eyre. In The Ploughman’s Song, the female protagonist Xiaoxia describes an uncle as “resembling George C. Scott, so he would be the owner of Thornfield Manor, while I am Jane Eyre, pale and humble.” Zhu’s short story, “Love Across Generations” (忘年之戀, 1974), seems to set a basic tone for such romantic fantasies of her female protagonists. The Chinese translation of the film, Jane Eyre (1970), as “忘年之戀” shows that a relationship with a huge age difference — between a young/submissive woman and a much older/dominant man — was seen as of particular importance in the social context of Taiwan in the 1970s. In “Love Across Generations” Zhu’s female character, Liang Xiaoqi, obsessively romanticises her fantasy of love with Napoleon, which is not merely love across generations but also love across time and cultures. Liang Xiaoqi’s fantasy follows the patriarchal cliché of a love relationship between a strong and heroic man and a weak and sentimental young woman. Therefore, Zhu’s characters give a romanticised coherence to their lives through allusions to Western film, fiction and history.

Such problematic coherence is also reflected in the worship of father figures in Zhu’s early works. Whether it is a national hero of the GMD (like Chiang Kai-shek or Sun Yat-sen) or a national hero of France (like Napoleon), or simply a fictional male character like Rochester, Zhu’s female protagonists worship them in the same way. They all follow the same relationship model in the female characters’ imagination: he would be a powerful male giant, while she would be an anonymous little woman, which fits the stereotypical gender relationship in the Chinese/GMD patriarchal narrative. Here, the Freudian concept of “feminine Oedipus attitude”—or “the Electra complex” as Carl Jung terms it—regarding the young female’s fantasies about the father-like male figures may be applicable, although the theory itself is

69 “長得像喬治史谷特，那麼他是桑堡的主人，我則是簡愛，蒼白而謙卑。” Ibid., 56. The work was first published in 1977. George C. Scott is the actor who played Rochester in the film Jane Eyre (1970).
70 “Love Across Generations” (忘年之戀, 1974) is one of the short stories collected in Zhu’s Days on the Ark (方舟上的日子, 1977).
71 This is Jung’s modified version of Freud’s concept, “the Oedipus complex”. See Carl Jung, Freud and Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 151-156.
controversial from a feminist point of view. Under the GMD indoctrination, Chiang and Sun were considered to be larger-than-life father figures. Rochester is a combination of father and lover to Jane, and Napoleon is a heroic figure like the GMD national fathers. If falling in love with one’s father, as the Freudian cliché describes, could explain this kind of complex, then the link between the GMD nationalism and the teenage girl’s romantic fantasies about father-like figures here would work in this kind of narrative. However, this only works in a politically repressed environment, because in a society with less political control, no teenager would fall in love with the kind of serious grandfather figure like Chiang or Sun. The ideology during the GMD ruling period in Taiwan was so problematic, because nobody was able to separate themselves from the GMD patriarchal system. In such a political atmosphere, it was common for a woman—especially one who had grown up in a military compound, like Zhu’s female protagonists—to focus on any father-like figures in political traditional Chinese contexts. The politics and traditional values are closely interlinked due to the fact that traditional attitudes are re-enforced by the GMD. Hence, through the representations of problematic connections in cultural, socio-political and gender contexts, Zhu creates ironic and paradoxical effects, which are often evident in her narratives.

Paradoxical Narratives

Zhu’s female protagonists are frequently caught in the paradoxical situation of their romanticism having to be realised through repressed political or classical Chinese cultural/literary contexts, such as fighting against Communism, experiencing the traditional Chinese wedding night, or quoting poems of Li Bai. They try to escape from where they are through their romantic imaginings. However, they eventually escape into the very imprisonment from which they had originally departed.

Zhu’s early works often depict the here and now—Taibei City in the 1970s, but the protagonists do not seem to live in the here and now. They often have to imagine themselves being in another country, another culture, another historical time, or somewhere that does not even exist, such as the China portrayed in the GMD agenda. But talking about Western movies, singing songs in English, and throwing themselves into Western fiction are not enough for their need for escapism; they even embark on

72 See Zhu Tianxin, The Ploughman’s Song 撼壇歌 (Taibei, Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 70.
Westernising their ugly environment in Taiwan through romantic fantasies. In *The Ploughman’s Song*, Taibei City is the canvas for Zhu’s high-school characters to paint their Western dreams: Zhongshan North Road (中山北路), which is lined with maple trees, becomes the Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris, the Shangdao Café (上島咖啡館) with its red-and-white striped awnings turns into a French café, the coconut trees in Taibei are transformed into the plane trees of Paris; the scene of Yuanshan (圓山) at midday with houses on the hill top becomes “the little red-brick houses under the blue sky” in England.74

The representation of the here and now through another time, space, or culture in Zhu’s writing suggests two things. On the one hand, it indicates that the validation of an event/reality relies upon something else in another context. On the other hand, it allows the protagonists, who are confined to their real world in Taibei, to travel through narrative. These two features, constructing links to an event or a memory and travelling, have become increasingly evident in the later phases of Zhu’s writing. As we shall see, the here and now of the late 1990s and the early 2000s of the Taibei depicted in Zhu’s later works has to be realised through the nostalgic elements of the 1960s and 1970s, many of which have already been presented in her early writing in the first phase. As well as imagining, Zhu’s protagonists in the later phases of her writing would begin to physically travel to the foreign places where the characters in the first phase of her writing longed to be.

We cannot be certain how much Zhu was aware of the potential paradoxical effects she was creating when she was writing these works. This brings us back to the paradox of certainty versus uncertainty, because one may assume that the certainty of capturing the here and now is the reason which made Zhu’s works so popular. Ironically, her narratives involve a great deal of uncertainty (of being somewhere, sometime, or someone else). Paradox as such indicates the sense of ambiguity of identity.

However, as Zhu changed from a high-school girl into a university student, and being partly affected by the change in the political relationship between Taiwan and the U.S., she started to see the problem of escapism into Western cultures, which is presented in “Song of the Moralist.” She perceives the loss of cultural identity of the

73 Ibid., 53.
74 “藍天下的小紅磚房子”. Ibid., 52.
Taiwanese young people, which is also reflected in its social problems, as presented through the words of Wei’s prostitute friend, Amy (愛咪):  

“You asked me before about people, and I told you that foreigners are better. In fact there are actually very few good foreigners; maybe there are none at all; when they are bad they are worse than anyone else! We used to have a lot of customers, well they were all damned GIs, those big American soldiers, but I still liked them… I want to go to the States; I’d do anything there; I just want to leave here as soon as possible.”  

(“以前妳問過我人的事，我說外國人好，其實外國人好的太少了，也許根本没有，壞起來比誰都壞！以前那麼熱鬧，其實都是些臭 GI，那些老美大兵，可是我還是喜歡他們。……我想到美國去，去做什麼都甘心，就是趕快離開這裏。”)

It also implies that there is a problematic relationship between the GMD and the West. Although under GMD nationalism Westernisation was officially discouraged, the GMD government in Taiwan still needed to align with Western countries, especially the U.S., in order to help to fight against Communist China. This is similar to the way in which Amy hates the American GIs, but she still needs their help to leave Taiwan for a better life, which is why she works as a prostitute and accepts their terrible behaviour.

Hence, through her sophisticated construction of multi-referential voices and texts, creative exploitation of various elements, problematising coherence, and manifesting paradoxical narratives, Zhu presents the incoherence, ambiguity and situation of paradox in her conceptualisation of identity in the first phase, which is full of uncertainty and ambivalence. The complexity of narrative voice and textuality, as presented in the first phase of her writing, also suggests the complexity of identity.

Reading Across Time

As well as Zhu’s sophisticated narrative construction in the early phase of her writing, what also needs to be taken note of, as Hans Robert Jauss points out in his version of reception theory, are the potential new meanings which may be generated when reading the same work across historical time. In The Ploughman’s Song, the teenage protagonist’s romantic fantasies are projected onto such a serious patriarchal political figure as Chiang Kai-shek. She worships him in the way most teenagers worship their movie star or pop music idols. Through the rose-tinted spectacles of the protagonist, Xiaoxia (小蝦), Chiang “rides on a great horse, flies on the clouds, and

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75 From Zhu Tianxin, “Song of the Moralist” 采薇歌, in *Yesterday When I Was Young* 昨日當我年輕時 (Taipei: Sansan 三三, 1981), 49. The story was completed in 1977.
sometimes takes a look at his people from above with his usual smile, because he
knows his country is strong enough to stand on its own two feet” 77 while she “stands
straight and tall like a great little soldier” 78 in front of the President’s Hall every
morning to express her love towards him. Another young female protagonist, Liang
Xiaoqi (梁小琪) in Days on the Ark, romanticises her relationship with the Chinese
homeland by imagining that there was an “umbilical cord tying her tightly to the
placenta of the Homeland.” 79 All serious matters in such a politically repressed
environment are romanticised through the eyes of a teenager, which make them look
somewhat ironic and comic today. The passages might have been taken seriously by
the young women who read them in the 1970s, but we now get a sense of irony and
comic potential from them, as with any propaganda.

Ironic is actually the key in many ways to what is so interesting in Zhu’s early
works, which is what most critics tend to overlook. When seeing how Zhu’s teenage
female protagonists idolise Chiang Kai-shek and romanticise their patriotism towards
the government, the critics have often quickly jumped to conclusions assuming Zhu to
be a mouthpiece for the GMD. They do not see such a polyvocal effect in her early
writing, which becomes ironic and comic through time. One may argue that Zhu may
not have been deliberately ironic at the time of writing; that is the question that is still
left to be explored by the reader. Like a palimpsest, what is actually presented in
Zhu’s early work is a kind of writing whose secondary meaning becomes evident after
the event, and even perhaps becomes evident to the writer herself after the event, at
which time she may take an ironic view of it. Whether she was being ironic at some
level or not, through the way in which the narrative is exploited, it shows that,
although Zhu was a young writer, she was extraordinarily clever. The inbuilt
contradictions, ironies and palimpsests in her narrative voices suggest the sense of
uncertainty in terms of identity, which is a key issue presented all the way through her
eyearly works.

77 “騎在馬背上，在雲端上遨遊，時而俯瞰著他的子民，帶著如常的微笑，因為他知道，他的
國家是站得起來的。” From Zhu Tianxin, The Ploughman’s Song 撃壤歌 (Taipei, Unitas 聯合文
學, 2001), 48.
78 “站得直挺挺的，是個偉大的小兵丁。” Ibid.
79 “梁小琪覺得，她的臍帶和祖國的胎盤是連繫的那麼緊。” From “A Day in the Life of Liang
Xiaoqi” (梁小琪的一天), in Days on the Ark 方舟上的日子 (Taipei: Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 46. The
story was first published in 1973 and collected into the anthology, Days on the Ark (1977).
Association with Autobiography

Critics of Zhu Tianxin tend to ignore the complexity in the relationship between identity and textual practice in her writing of the first phase. There is a tendency to interpret Zhu’s early work as autobiographical writing, which has been a prevailing idea in the existing scholarship. For instance, critics often consider Zhu’s early work as something which shows and corresponds to the origin of her political identity with the GMD or the Chinese émigrés, suggesting that her writings are simply references to her personal life.

What makes it confusing for the reader is likely to be the female first-person narrative which Zhu often adopted in the writing of her early works. Besides, the similarities in background between the author and her protagonist, and also the claims, by both the author and her publisher, that the works are autobiographical, further complicate the issue. To take The Ploughman’s Song for example, Zhu was not the first writer who published this type of writing ostensibly about the author’s personal life by a young writer. It had already been a trend in the Chinese literary field since the May Fourth period of the 1920s. Young student writers of the time, such as Ding Ling (丁玲) and Shen Congwen (沈從文), also showed a tendency to publish autobiographical works, and readers tended to show great interest in the writers’ personal lives. Before Zhu’s The Ploughman’s Song, the only work in the Chinese literary field, which also focused on students’ lives, to make an equally popular ‘hit’ was probably The Song that Never Ends (未央歌), which was written by a male writer, Luqiao (鹿橋), in 1945. It was a depiction of student life in south-western Chinese universities in Yunnan during the Sino-Japanese War period. In fact, Zhu’s The Ploughman’s Song was even considered to be a high-school student’s version of The Song that Never Ends. However, compared to Luqiao’s fiction, Zhu’s adoption of a first-person narrative seemed to make the story more appealing to young Taiwanese readers, especially, as the setting was in Taibei and the writer had a very similar background to the protagonist. A kind of intimate feeling was created between the writer and the reader, such that Zhu often received letters from her readers regarding

the protagonist Xiaoxia’s life. There were other writings about Taiwanese students’ lives in the 1970s, such as “The Lonely Seventeen-Year-Old” (寂寞的十七歲, 1976) by Bai Xianyong (白先勇) and *The Lad Who Refused to Take the University Entrance Exam* (拒絕聯考的小子, 1975) by Wu Xianghui (吳祥輝). However, the protagonists Bai and Wu presented were rebellious male students struggling outside the mainstream educational system of Taiwan, while Zhu constructed her work in the context of the GMD and the Chinese traditional mainstream system. It was the GMD discourse in the narratives of Zhu’s early works, an uncommon characteristic in student writing, that drew the Taiwanese critics’ attention.

After the political environment in Taiwan changed dramatically in the late 1980s, the protagonist’s romanticising tone towards the nation and the patriarchal figures in Zhu’s early works started to be highlighted as an indication of the writer’s political identification with the GMD. Some critics in Taiwan, such as Yang Zhao (楊照), tend to have a generalised impression and define Zhu’s early works (before 1980) as writings which serve the GMD agenda and consider the writer to have been a mouthpiece for the GMD government. It is surprising that such popular readings for young people, which had been produced by a teenage writer, suddenly, ten years later, become the target of attacks on the issue of identity. The critics have obviously been misled by the terms of GMD education and the protagonist’s patriotic tone in Zhu’s early writing, and, therefore, they have imposed a fixed GMD/Chinese identity on the

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82 See the last chapter of Zhu’s *The Ploughman’s Song*.
83 According to Zhu, due to the popularity of Wu’s story, in the summer before entering university, she was invited by a publisher to write a book about a high-school girl who takes the university entrance exam in order to present a contrast to Wu’s rebellious high-school boy. Not feeling interested in such kind of cliché, Zhu refused the publisher. On the other hand, she was disappointed at the fact that after graduating from high school, all her friends would never be as close as they used to be because they started attending different universities and venturing into their own lives. In attempt to preserve the good old memory, she started to write a book about her high-school life, which then became *The Ploughman’s Song*. See my interview with the writer in Appendix I.
84 See Yang Zhao 楊照, “Pisces Swimming Back and Forth: The Zhu Tianxin I know” 兩尾逡巡遊的魚——我所知道的朱天心, in *Literature, Culture and Historical Imagining: Commentaries on the Post-War Literature* 文學,社會與歷史想像:戰後文學散論 (Taipei: Unitas 聯合文學, 1995), 160-170. The article was originally published in the “Literary Supplement” of the *China Times* (中國時報:人間副刊) on 20-21 January 1994. Yang Zhao is also known as Zhan Kailing (詹愷苓), who had been a student of Zhu’s father’s and a member of “Sansan” in the 1970s. However, he gradually moved away from the group and began to criticize Zhu in the 1990s. (See also my discussion in Chapter Two.)
85 In an interview Zhu expressed her grievance against the tendency for the Zhu sisters to be accused of being “government writers” (御用文人) or “GMD fighters” (國民黨打手) after the period of Nativist Literary Debate (鄉土文學論戰, which will be discussed further in Chapter Two) when Zhu was a university student. From Li Ruiteng, “Defending the Dignity of Literature—Interview with Zhu Tianxin” 始終維護文學的尊嚴——與朱天心對話, 177.
writer. They tend to create a sense of *certainty* by stereotyping and pigeonholing the identity of the writer, through which they interpret the meaning of her work.

The critics’ attempt to create *consistency* between the life and the work of the writer also explains why it would be so important for them to emphasise the *autobiographicality* of Zhu’s writing. By enforcing such a *consistency*, their arguments would be able to fulfil the political interpretations they expect. This is especially true of critics’ readings of Zhu’s work in Taiwan after the lifting of martial law. Whereas, before 1989, Zhu’s early writings were considered as nothing more than works of fiction for teenagers, after 1989 her works started to be scrutinised by critics because they could use her texts as an example of the GMD discourse which was the target of their attack.

In other words, many critics tend to read Zhu’s early works retrospectively: their identification of what Zhu wrote in her early writing is completed through a process imposed at a much later date. They impose their political views or values on the community of the Chinese émigrés—these are views that have been influenced by the political climate of Taiwan at different historical times (the late-1980s, the 1990s-2008, and post-2008)—onto the early works of Zhu which were completed in the context of the 1970s. In each period there were specific focuses regarding the issue of identity. The ambiguous and ambivalent identity of the Chinese émigré community has often been the theme of critics’ studies, because it reflects the status of the GMD. Zhu’s early writing, which presents a second-generation Chinese émigré student’s romanticised patriotism towards the GMD, seems to be a suitable subject for the critics’ political scrutiny.

However, the outcome of their reading is a simplistic association with autobiography, while Zhu’s writing is linked to autobiography in a complex way. There is a tendency for the critics in Taiwan to try to apply a new set of *certainties* (fixed and politically interpreted meaning) to the old works of Zhu. Nevertheless, this application of *certainty* is undermined by the *complexity* and sense of *uncertainty* in Zhu’s early writing. This tendency also reveals the fact that some critics have failed to notice the complexity of identity as presented in Zhu’s writing. Most critics have only considered Zhu as a person who grew up in the GMD educational environment or as a person who sympathises with the GMD. Contrary to what is assumed by critics of Zhu in the existing scholarship, starting with the early works, Zhu had
already shown great complexity in the articulation of identity and this is reflected in the multiple manifestations of her narrative.

It can be argued that Zhu’s writing shows a strategic deployment of the autobiographical voice through which she manipulates the protagonist-author relationship. One should recognise the fact that Zhu invites her readers to understand her works as being largely autobiographical, which could be read as a strategy in itself. From a poststructuralist point of view, the autobiographical voice is always problematic. It does not matter how the writer emphasises the autobiographicality of her work, the reader will never know exactly how much material she takes from her real life experiences. One should also be aware of the fact that diaries are also reminiscences of daily activities and events, which are full of constructed accounts. No critics have yet asked why Zhu and her publisher would frame some of her works as being autobiographical, or why she would want to publish information regarding personal matters. Therefore, it becomes a question of naivety versus irony. It makes one wonder how much the writer was aware of the fact that she was inviting the readers to read her work biographically. Despite the fact that studies of autobiography have for so long offered sophisticated analyses of the ways in which one constructs an autobiography, most readers (especially from the popular readership) are still fascinated by the idea of writers telling the truth through their autobiographies. In her early works Zhu was able to convince the reader that her work was autobiographical, while it is just as possible that she knew how to exploit autobiographicality in order to make her writing more appealing to readers.

The association with autobiography is presented in the reception of the female homosexual relationship referred to in Zhu’s early writing. In the 1970s, despite the conservative nature of Taiwanese society at the time, such an issue was hardly raised, and neither did her works experience government censorship on grounds of morality. The matter was not picked up by the reader, which is probably because, in traditional Chinese culture, intimate relationships between women had been considered as activities of normal sisterhood. The issue was not raised until the works were reviewed by Taiwanese scholars of contemporary feminist and gender studies in the 1990s. Critics such as He Chunrui (何春蕤), Ding Naifei (丁乃非), Liu Renpeng (劉人鵬) and Amie Parry (白瑞梅) pointed out the implicit female homosexual descriptions in Zhu’s early works, such as in The Ploughman’s Song and, particularly,
in the short story “The Waves of Sand” (浪淘沙), which is collected in Days on the Ark (方舟上的日子, 1977). The scholars’ focus on the homosexual issues in Zhu’s early works also reflects the gradually prevailing interest in women and gender studies and the blooming trend of homosexual literature in Taiwan since the mid-1990s.

Considering the tendency of readers who interpret Zhu’s works as autobiographical writing, it is not surprising that those passages on female homosexuality in her early works would also be read autobiographically. For instance, in The Ploughman’s Song Zhu describes the female protagonist Xiaoxia’s seemingly homosexual relationship with her female friends, such as a feminine character, “Maomi” (貓咪, Kitty), and a tomboy character, “Qiao” (喬, Jo). Readers tend to be convinced that the passages on female homosexuality represented the writer’s homosexual relationships in real life. It is particularly shown in the public’s growing interest in Zhu’s relationship with her high-school classmates, Leiqian (雷倩, a currently well-known politician in Taiwan), who has been identified as the character, “Qiao”, in Zhu’s story. As seen in the discussion of Zhu’s works in the Masters thesis of Chen Peiwen (陳培文), the character “Qiao” in Zhu’s The Ploughman’s Song is read as being interchangeable with the real person, Leiqian. Readers and critics started to be interested in Zhu’s relationship with Lei Qian after 2000, which is

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86 “The Waves of Sand” (浪淘沙, 1976) is one of the short stories collected in Zhu’s Days on the Ark (方舟上的日子, 1977).
partly due to Lei’s active participation in the politics of Taiwan: Lei has been a parliament representative for the Chinese émigré party, “New Party” (新黨). Her role as a second-generation Chinese émigré politician and Zhu’s role as a second-generation Chinese émigré writer could also be the reason which gave rise to public interest in their relationship. Such a tendency to emphasise the relationship between Lei and Zhu suggests a political interpretation of the story, especially since the issue was raised before the election.

The link between the author and the protagonist becomes problematic when Zhu uses a male narrator, as the reader will immediately be aware that the voice in her work cannot be autobiographical. “Days on the Ark (方舟上的日子, 1975)”90 was the first occasion that Zhu adopted a male-first-person narrative voice in her writing. Zhu had been using female-first-person narrative voice whose background was very close to the writer herself, but here she shows a point of departure. She presents a narrative voice which cannot be autobiographical and cannot be linked to the writer. That is, for the first time in her writing Zhu broke the autobiographical fiction, which had been carefully maintained in the early phase of her literary career.

The male narrator, He An (何安), is depicted as a rebellious high-school boy, who is similar to the protagonists in Bai Xianyong’s “The Lonely Seventeen-Year-Old” and Wu Xianghui’s The Lad Who Refused to Take the University Entrance Exam. It can be argued that, through her male first-person voice, Zhu presents a pastiche of the male characters in Bai’s and Wu’s work. Although both the male narrator and the female protagonist in Zhu’s story are second-generation Chinese émigrés who grow up in the military compound and whose parents expect their children to attend good universities, they perceive the GMD education system from different angles. Their contrasting behaviour, as presented through Zhu’s use of a male voice, shows the ambiguity of a Chinese émigré teenager’s identification with GMD teaching. By presenting a young female writer whose life background is so similar to her protagonist, Liang Xiaoqi, Zhu might be expected to show the way in which a rebellious male character, like the ones in the stories of Wu and Bai, would perceive a well-behaved girl through clichés of femininity.

http://rekiwang.idv.tw/forum/?action=view&id=360&fid=1&PHPSESSID=680b05fb0e1364c668ae2450a9104029 (accessed June 1, 2011).

90 “Days on the Ark” (方舟上的日子, 1975) is one of the short stories collected in Zhu’s Days on the Ark (方舟上的日子, 1977).
However, the writer’s construction of the female character, Liang Xiaoqi, through such a male voice actually problematizes the type of feminine characters in classic literature or romance. Whereas the male protagonist, He An, rebels against almost everything to do with the GMD and is vulgar in every aspect of his character, he makes positive statements about Liang. He is extremely respectful when describing her, about whom he uses all the romantic clichéd words in the GMD language, such as “elegantly bookish” (很書香氣的, p. 15), “fresh and interesting” (穠, p. 22), “a girl in white” (一身白衣裙, p. 23), “submissive” (乖乖順順的, p. 24), “childish” (娃娃氣的, p. 25; 孩子氣的, p. 31).91 The result of this is that she stands out as a strange character in his narrative. From the perspective of a boy who does not fit in the GMD/Chinese mainstream, all the seemingly positive adjectives that he adopts for the depiction of Liang Xiaoqi turn into parodies of the role model, because they sound more like the GMD/Chinese patriarchal clichés. Hence, the ironic image of a GMD role model presented in this story suggests ambivalent attitudes towards the GMD. Whereas the image of Liang as a good student in the GMD system suggests identification with the GMD, the ironic voice of He shows a longing to escape from that identity. That is to say, through the use of the male narrator in this story, Zhu indicates the desire to escape from a fixed identity. The male voice is in fact a voice through the female author. It emphasises the irony of the female clichés in male fantasies. Thus, it can be viewed as a feminist voice, which surprisingly occurred in the first phase of Zhu’s writing.

Therefore, through the utilisation of a male-narrative voice Zhu challenges the over-simplification of identity in the reading of her work. She begins to create an ironic relationship with her narrators, and the adoption of a male first-person narrative voice is the first step in her resistance to the accustomed reaction of the readers. It can be argued that in the first phase Zhu had already started using irony in her narratives and this is especially captured in “Days on the Ark”, where she switches from a female first-person to a male first-person narrative. Maybe this was when Zhu’s own sense of irony began to emerge.

In other words, the issue of identity in the deployment of the term “autobiography” is in fact contingent. It is beyond the control of the author and is dependent upon the way in which the reader or critic reads her works with their

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91 The quotations are from Zhu Tianxin, “Days on the Ark” 方舟上的日子, 13-37.
specific purpose in mind; this point links back to the reception theory discussed earlier in this chapter. The identity presented in Zhu’s writing is arguably a *textual or narrative identity*, where the writer constructs and conceptualises identity through writing. It is an identity presented in her text or narrative, which is not necessarily relevant to the writer’s personal identity. The fact is that no one can really know what the writer’s personal identity is, except the writer herself.

Uncertainty and instability of identity are the key issues integrating Zhu’s writing throughout the four phases, which seems to show a resistance towards the politically simplistic reading of her works by critics. As I shall argue in the following chapters, the *incoherence*, suggesting the sense of uncertainty and ambivalence towards life or identity in Zhu’s works, actually started to manifest itself from the beginning of her writing. This is more or less a reflection of the uncertain and ambivalent political status and cultural identity of Taiwan in the 1970s. Therefore, my observation is contrary to the viewpoint of most critics, such as Zhan Hongzhi (詹宏志), who has suggested that there is a “disjunction of style” (斷裂) in Zhu’s writing occurring in 1989 during the aftermath to the lifting of martial law (in 1987) and the beginning of the fall of the GMD. Whereas most critics consider 1989 and, in particular, the publication of *I Remember…* (我記得……, 1989), as the turning point when Zhu started to dramatically change her writing tone and style, I point out that the “disjunction” already existed in Zhu’s writing in the first phase.

I argue that the uncertainty of identity occurred right from the beginning of Zhu’s literary journey, and the change of her narrative style is in fact an on-going process, showing increasing complexity from the first to the fourth phase of her writing. In each phase the writer experiments with new ways to present *incoherence*, the sense of uncertainty and ambivalence in her writing, as well as combining a range of new methods with the strategies she had adopted in previous phase(s), which also explains why the narrative and textual construction in her work show a marked increase in the degree of complexity in later phases. The idea of *impossible coherence* in Zhu’s writing enables a parallel to be drawn between the first phase of her writing and that of Kapka Kassabova, whose writing began with the sense of *extreme contrasts*, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter Two
Venturing into Transformation

[Narrative voice is a site of crisis, contradiction, or challenge that is manifested in and sometimes resolved through ideologically charged technical practices. […] When I describe these complexities in some women’s writings I am not, however, suggesting any kind of “authentic” female voice or arguing that women necessarily write differently from men. Rather, I believe that disavowed writers of both sexes have engaged in various strategies of adaptation and critique that make their work “dialogical” in ways that Bakhtin’s formulation, which posits heteroglossia as a general modern condition, may obscure.

~ Susan Sniader Lanser, “Towards a Feminist Poetics of Narrative Voice”

There is nothing exclusively or essentially female about “the psychological sentence of the female gender,” because writers of both sexes have used that “elastic” and “enveloping” form. But it is a “woman’s sentence” because of its cultural and situational function, a dissension stating that women’s minds and concerns have been neither completely nor accurately produced in literature as we know it. Breaking the sentence is a way of rupturing language and tradition sufficiently to invite a female slant, emphasis, or approach.

~ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, “Breaking the Sentence; Breaking the Sequence”

[Women’s palimpsestic texts, like layered psyches, are potentially volcanic, enacting a drama of repression and resistance in an interplay of lyric and narrative discourses.

~ Susan Stanford Friedman, “Lyric Subversion of Narrative in Women’s Writing”

This chapter juxtaposes the transformation of the socio-political environment of Taiwan in the 1980s and the transformation of Zhu’s writing of the same period. I examine Zhu Tianxin’s life, her writing and the reviews concerning works written by Zhu during the 1980s, which I identify as the second phase of her literary career. The sudden change in the political environment of Taiwan in the 1980s is frequently reflected in Zhu's writing as well as having a crucial influence on the reading of her works. Critical responses towards works by Zhu began to emerge in the late 1980s after the lifting of martial law. Being influenced by the political climate, critics of the time tended to scrutinise her writing politically, a trend which still prevails today in contemporary scholarship on Zhu.

In response to the trend of criticisms within Taiwan which seems to over-emphasise the political and biographical framing of Zhu’s work, I focus on the way

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in which the writer reacts to, and utilises, the political and social situations of Taiwan through her writing in this phase. Whereas the first part, Biographical Sketch, presents the life of a writer who has experienced the political and social transitions of Taiwan in the 1980s, the second part, Literary Journey, focuses on her textual practice and particularly on the narrative strategies which the writer deploys. In articulating the life and writing of Zhu, my reading discloses the dynamic relationship between the writer’s life and her writing; this link is integrated in manifold ways through her literary creativity.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

In 1980 Zhu Tianxin was twenty-two and had just graduated from university. This proved to be a turning-point in both her life and writing, and stemmed partly from her response to the political, social and literary shifts which were occurring in Taiwan. Politically, because of the frustrations suffered by the Taiwanese in international relations, starting from the late 1970s the Chinese nationalism of the GMD was challenged. On the other hand, in the late 1970s, the idea of “anti-Communism and restoring the Nation” (反共復國) in the GMD context gradually lost any prospect of becoming a reality, thus the Taiwanese people began to ask for equality in terms of political, economic and educational resources for the entire population of Taiwan which then evolved into a major request of the Taiwanese Nativist movements.6

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4 Some studies on Zhu, especially those completed scholars overseas, have started to focus more on the issue of “textual identity” in her work. For example, Andrew Stuckey investigates the intertextuality with other works in Zhu’s story collection, *The Old Capital* (1997), in his recent book, *Old Stories Retold: Narrative and Vanishing Pasts in Modern China*. Rosemary Haddon examines several works by Zhu and discusses the way in which the writer presents the sense of “being/not being at home” through her texts. See G. Andrew Stuckey, “Globalised Traditions: Zhu Tianxin’s *The Ancient Capital,*” in G. Andrew Stuckey, *Old Stories Retold: Narrative and Vanishing Pasts in Modern China* (Lanham, Md: Lexington, 2010), 133-146. See also Rosemary Haddon, “Being/Not Being at Home in the Writing of Zhu Tianxin,” in *Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua*, eds. John Makeham and A-chin Hsiau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 103-123.


In the late 1970s, the Nativist Literary Debate (鄉土文學論戰), an influential literary movement in which Zhu and the Sansan members were involved, eventually led to the political rise of nativism (本土化) in the 1980s. Zhu and the Sansan group were harshly attacked during the Debate. As Zhu points out, the Nativist Literary Debate had the greatest impact on the transformation of her writing in the 1980s. The writer felt that her works were labelled during this movement, the focus being more on literary beliefs and ideologies than on the works themselves, believing that the movement was, in fact, not literary but political. In response to the criticisms, Zhu began to rethink what she had been reading and writing. She started paying more attention to the national, international and social news and also began reading journals which were published by the Taiwanese nativism activists. Their reviews of the history, literature and identity of Taiwan all challenged what she had been taught by the GMD. As a result, she underwent a ten-year period of reassessment, which eventually led to the surprising transformation of her writing style in the late 1980s.

The gradual disappearance of the military compounds was another issue which was reflected in Zhu’s writing in the early 1980s. For the purpose of city development planning (都市發展計劃), some old military compounds were demolished, and the compound residents started to move into the state apartments (國宅) which had been being built since 1977. In April 1981, Zhu completed It Never

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7 Here, I adopt Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang’s English translation of the term “鄉土文學論戰” as “the Nativist Literary Debate”. As Chang writes, “From the early to mid-1970s, a group of critics began to renounce publicly the foreign-influenced Modernist work and to advocate a nativist, socially responsible literature. This trend reached its apex with the outbreak of a virulent Nativist literary debate in 1977 and 1978 and suddenly declined when, in 1979, several key figures of the Nativist camp exited from the literary scene and became directly involved in political protests.” From Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction in Taiwan (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 149.


10 Qiu Guifen, Interviews with Taiwan [sic] Women Writers (不)同國女人的聒噪, 133.

11 The most recent demolition plan for military compounds began in 2006, and by the end of 2009 all military compounds have disappeared. See Guo Guanlin 郭冠麟, From Bamboo Screen [sic] to Mansion: A History of Armed Forces Military Dependent [sic] Quarters 從竹簾笆到高樓大廈的故事--國軍眷村發展史 (Taipei: Ministry of National Defence 國防部史政編譯室, 2005), 5-27. Due to the final
Ends (未了), a novel about the lives of a group of people in a military compound. It won the United Daily News Literary Prize in 1981\(^{12}\) and in 1982 the work was published by Lianjing Publishers (聯經出版社).\(^{13}\) In her introduction to It Never Ends, Zhu stated that the motivation for writing the story sprang from the sudden news of the demolition of the military compound in which she had lived. She wrote the story in order to recapture shared memories with other villagers.\(^{14}\)

It can be argued that in a sense the demolition of military compounds symbolises the death of the patriarchal figures in Zhu’s life. As Zhu mentioned in the introduction to It Never Ends, she dedicated the novel to her literary father, Hu Lancheng, who had died before the book was published.\(^{15}\) Hence, the disappearance of the political environment suggests not simply the loss of home but also the collapse of the patriarchal community created by the GMD, facing the gradual rise of Taiwanese nativism. As shown in her works from the second phase on, the death of patriarchy is increasingly reflected in the ways in which Zhu inquires into patriarchal values through her writing.

Starting from the early 1980s, members of the Sansan group, consisting of both Chinese émigrés and Taiwanese Fulaos,\(^{16}\) started to blur the boundary between Chinese émigré and Fulao experiences in their works. In 1981 Zhu, in conjunction with Zhu Tianwen and Ding Yamin (丁亞民)\(^{17}\), participated in the script writing for a

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\(^{13}\) The Lianjing Publishers (聯經出版社) was later renamed as “Unitas” (聯合文學). The publisher is associated with the United Daily News (聯合報).


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 20-21.

\(^{16}\) The Fulaos (福佬人 or 閩南人) make up the largest Taiwanese nativist community in Taiwan. Like the Hakkas, they were Chinese immigrants in the seventeenth century. They were mainly from the southeast Chinese province, Fujian (福建). The Fulaos speak the Hokkien dialect (閩南語), which is also known as Taiwanese (臺灣話).

\(^{17}\) Ding Yamin (丁亞民) was one of Zhu Tianxin’s high-school-time male friends, who is identified by the writer as the character “A-Ding” (阿丁) in The Ploughman’s Song. Ding became a well known writer in Taiwan and was one of the founders and editors for the Sansan publishers. See the final
TV serial drama, *Watching over the Sunshine, Watching over You* (守著陽光守著你, 1981).\(^{18}\) It is a story about campus life and love among some young Taiwanese students who are mainly second-generation Chinese émigrés. The serial drama, along with the theme song—with lyrics written by Xie Caijun (謝材俊)\(^{19}\)—turned out to be very popular. In 1984, Zhu married Xie.\(^{20}\) Despite her marriage to a man from a traditional Taiwanese Fulao family, after the wedding the couple lived with Zhu’s parents,\(^{21}\) and in 1986 their daughter, Xie Haimeng (謝海盟, aka. “Mengmeng” (盟盟)), was born.\(^{22}\) On the other hand, Zhu’s elder sister, Zhu Tianwen (朱天文), had become an outstanding film script-writer in the Taiwanese Fulao dialect about the Taiwanese nativist experiences, in which she cooperated with film director, Ho Xiaoxian (候孝賢, aka. Hou Hsiao-hsien).\(^{23}\) This broadening of cultural experiences is also largely exploited in Zhu’s writing through her depiction of Fulao characters.

Starting from the second phase, Zhu’s writing demonstrated the observant depiction of Taiwanese society by a mature adult writer, as presented in the significant change of her narrative tone in *The Diary of Guan Lin, a National Taiwan University Student* (台大學生關琳的日記, published by Sansan in 1984).\(^{24}\) It was a chapter of *The Ploughman’s Song*, “Hunting While Travelling” (行行且遊獵篇), which was completed in 1981 and only appears in editions of the book after 1981.


\(^{19}\) Xie Caijun is a Taiwanese Fulao writer who later published works with his pen name “Tangnuo” (唐諾). Zhu and Xie knew each other from high school days. In the final chapter of *The Ploughman’s Song*, “Hunting While Travelling”, Zhu identified Xie as the male character “Yiyang” (宜陽), a high-school friend of the female protagonist, Xiaoxia. Xie was also one of the founders and editors of the Sansan publishers.


\(^{21}\) Zhu Tianxin, “The Chinese New Year After Getting Married” 婚後的過年, in Zhu Tianxin, Zhu Tianwen and Zhu Tianyi 朱天心, 朱天文, 朱天衣, *Afternoon Tea Chats* 下午茶話題 (Taipei: Rye Field 麥田, 1992), 84-85. In traditional Chinese or Taiwanese culture, a married couple are supposed to live with the husband's parents. It is also fine for the couple to live in their own house. However, it is often a taboo for the couple to live under the same roof with the wife’s family, because a married woman no longer belongs to her family after the wedding.


\(^{23}\) Their works have won many prizes in international film festivals; their most well-known movies are *A City of Sadness* (悲情城市, 1988, on the February 28th Incident) and *The Puppetmaster* (戲夢人生, 1993).

\(^{24}\) In 1989 this book was republished under the new title *Passage of Things Past* (時移事往). The English translation of the title as “Passage of Things Past” is adopted from Lingchei Letty Chen,
collection of five stories that Zhu wrote after graduating from university. In the introduction to the book, Zhu stated that she was no longer interested in the direct and emotional expressions she had adopted in her early writing; but rather that she preferred to depict people and events in a less emotional tone, which would also allow the readers to judge the characters and events for themselves.\textsuperscript{25} As seen in Zhu’s writing of the second phase, the writer began to keep a narrative distance from the protagonists she depicted, showing critical representations of her characters.

Zhu also started to display a deliberate construction of narrative. She began to use male narrators which started to emerge in her novella, “Passage of Things Past” (時移事往, 1984), collected in The Diary of Guan Lin, a National Taiwan University Student.\textsuperscript{26} Instead of using a female first-person narrative voice as she had often done in the first phase, in “Passage of Things Past”, Zhu adopted a male perspective for the depiction of the female protagonist, Aipo (愛波). As well as the dramatic change in narrative voice, Zhu’s texts include references to contemporary social and political events in Taiwan from the 1960s to the 1980s. The art, literature, film and music of the time are also adopted as references in the story. Hence, “Passage of Things Past” can be considered as a milestone in Zhu’s narrative construction reflecting both maturity and an extraordinary complexity.

Another significant step for Zhu’s writing in this phase was a new tendency to explore the Taiwanese nativist environment. Her protagonists finally leave the closed environment of the military compound and start observing things from various cultural perspectives. For instance, in “Passage of Things Past” Zhu included the voice of Taiwanese Fulaos, presented in the Fulao dialect. The earlier occasion on which Zhu had presented her narrative in a Taiwanese dialect was in the short story, “The Green Bamboo Lament” (綠竹引, 1977), which she wrote in her maternal

\textsuperscript{25} From Zhu Tianxin’s Introduction to Passage of Things Past 時移事往 (Taipei: Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 18.

\textsuperscript{26} The first time Zhu adopted a male first-person narrative was in the short story, “Days on the Ark” (方舟上的日子). For more details, see my discussion in Chapter One. However, the tendency for Zhu to frequently use a male first-person narrator did not occur until the 1980s, starting from “Passage of Things Past”.\textsuperscript{25}
Taiwanese Hakka dialect. However, it was not until the 1980s that the frequent exploitation of Taiwanese nativist experiences began to appear in Zhu’s works.

Crucial changes in the environment of Taiwan occurred mainly in the second half of the 1980s; these all became valuable resources for Zhu’s writing. On 28 September 1986, the DPP, the largest Taiwanese nativist political party, was established. Within a year, on the 15th of July 1987, Chiang Kai-shek’s son, Jiang Jingguo, announced the lifting of martial law. Starting from 14 October 1987, Taiwanese people were allowed to visit China. Many Chinese émigrés and their descendants could finally return to their “home” on the Mainland for which they had longed during the forty years separation. On 13 January 1988, just as people had started to become excited about the changes, Jiang Jingguo died and his vice-president, Li Denghui (李登輝, a Taiwanese Fulao), became leader. On the other side of the Taiwan Strait, the June Fourth Incident, aka. the Tiananmen Square Massacre, took place on 4 June 1989. The aftermath of these political events enabled a more democratic environment in Taiwan.

Along with the political transformation, Taiwanese society was undergoing radical changes due to the impact of its outstanding economic growth and this also generated all kinds of social problems. Happy Lotto (大家樂), an island-wide gambling activity which started to become popular in Taiwan in 1985, reached its peak in 1987. More and more people, from peasants to intellectuals, became addicted to it. Soon after Happy Lotto had been banned, Taiwanese people turned their attention to another money-making game, the stock market. The effect of the frenzied stock market activity was that many people, including school teachers, housewives and “even monks and nuns”, became obsessed with investment in

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28 DPP stands for the Democratic Progressive Party (民進黨).
29 See Xu Zongmao, Twentieth-Century Taiwan: The Democracy 二十世紀臺灣: 民主篇, 125-127.
31 See Xu Zongmao, Twentieth-Century Taiwan: The Democracy 二十世紀臺灣: 民主篇, 131-133.
32 Ibid., 137-140.
33 Ibid., 144-147.
34 Ibid., 148-150.
stocks. The trend of pursuing money culture and materialism in the late-1980s totally changed the thought patterns and behaviour of Taiwanese people; this resulted in serious social and psychological issues.

The increasingly raised feminist voice, which affected not only the political environment but also the literary field in Taiwan, was another by-product of post-martial-law changes. Stories about the local experiences of the Taiwanese had been increasingly published since the late 1970s, whereas works dealing with women’s experiences only began to emerge in the early 1980s when female writers in Taiwan gradually turned their attention to women’s issues, marriage, and the situation of women in contemporary Taiwanese society. The best-known work among them was probably the controversial novel, The Butcher’s Wife (殺夫, 1983), by Taiwanese nativist woman writer Li Ang (李昂). It was based on a tragic incident which had occurred in Lugang (鹿港), her hometown. Although the story was written from the perspective of a Taiwanese nativist, its feminist stance challenged the patriarchal society of Taiwan.

Soon after the lifting of martial law, the removal of press censorship in January 1988 provided writers with much more space to express their ideas, especially on political and gender issues. Suddenly topics that had previously been taboo in the

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36 Information from Xu Zongmao, Twentieth-Century Taiwan: The Democracy 二十世紀臺灣:民主篇, 148-150.


39 As pointed out by Mei Jialing, with her audacious depiction of sex and taboos, Li Ang’s Killing the Husband bravely challenged patriarchy in the early 1980s. See Mei Jialing, “Gender Discourse and the Development of Post War Fiction in Taiwan” 性別論述與戰後臺灣小說發展, 134.


41 As pointed out by Gu Yuanqing (古遠清), the lifting of martial law in the political, economic and social structures brought along the lifting of martial law in the literary field, and, therefore, the mass publications of “political fictions” (政治小說) and “women’s literature” (女性文學) became a literary
political history of Taiwan, such as the 228 Incident, and the topic of sex itself, became very popular in the literary market. With such dramatic changes in the literary environment, the notion of pan-Chinese identity and traditional Chinese values, which had dominated the works issued by the publisher founded by the Zhu sisters, Sansan, became out-moded and the publisher eventually closed in 1989.42

Zhu was certainly influenced by the unexpected transitions in the political, economic, social and literary environments. Despite the demise of Sansan Publishers, the change in the GMD government’s attitude towards anti-GMD discourses actually opened up another avenue for Zhu, who had stopped writing in 1984.43 As pointed out by Mei Jialing (梅家玲), the lifting of martial law also transformed those who had been considered the representatives of “Ladies’ Literature” (閨秀文學), such as the Zhu sisters, such that these women writers started to involve themselves in the processes of “cultural production, urban discourse, and the reconstruction of identity”44 through their writing.

Hence, in a critical tone Zhu started writing allegorically and extensively about the politics and social phenomena of post-martial-law Taiwan, and this was identified by critics, such as Zhan Hongzhi (詹宏志), as a sudden change in Zhu’s writing style. According to Zhan, the transformation of Zhu’s writing emerged in I Remember… (我記得……, 1989), a collection of seven short stories that Zhu Tianxin had published earlier in newspapers or submitted for literary competitions between 1984 and 1989.45 Zhan points out specifically the “disjunction of style” (斷裂), occurring between “The Last Train to Danshui” (淡水最後列車), completed in 1984), and the rest of the stories phenomenon in the late-1980s. See Gu Yuanqing 吉遠清, A History of Theory and Criticism on the Contemporary Taiwanese Literature 臺灣當代文學理論批評史 (Wuhan City: Wuhan 武漢, 1994), 510.

42 Qiu Guifen, Interviews with Taiwan [sic] Women Writers (不)同國女人的聒噪 (Taipei: Yuanzun 元尊, 1998), 140-141.
43 See Sun Jieru, “The Journey of Identity of the Second-Generation Chinese Émigrés: Zhu Tianxin and Her Stories as Example” 外省第二代的認同歷程——以朱天心及其小說為例. The only book publication for Zhu between 1984 and 1989 was The Three Sisters (三姐妹, 1985), a collection of prose writings (散文) by the Zhu sisters published by the Crown publishers. The Crown Publishers (皇冠出版社) is well known for publishing popular/romance writings. The editor of Crown, Ping Xintao (平鑫濤), successfully created literary stars, such as Sanmao (三毛) and Qiongyao (瓊瑤), in the 1970s and 1980s.
44 “文化生產, 都市論述與國族認同的再造工程”. From Mei Jialing, “Gender Discourse and the Development of Post War Fiction in Taiwan” 性別論述與戰後臺灣小說發展, 134.
collected in *I Remember...* Except for in “The Last Train to Danshui”, one sees Zhu Tianxin observing and commenting on the dramatic changes in Taiwan through her stories. The anthology represents the political movements in “I Remember…” (我記得……, published in 1987), “Destruction of Buddha” (佛滅, published in June 1989) and “Decameron” (十日談, winner of the *China Times* Literary Prize in 1987, published in 1988), an ironic allusion to the Chinese émigrés who live in the past in “Last Year in Marienbad” (去年在馬倫巴, published in January 1989), the impact of economic growth in “The Crane Wife” (鶴妻, published in February 1989) and the influence of the frenzied stock market activity on housewives in “Nineteen Days of the New Party” (新黨十九日, published in January 1988). Four out of the seven stories in this book are depictions of social and political phenomena in Taiwan in the late 1980s and two of them deal with issues of gender. As well as the engagement with political and social issues, the explicit depiction of sex was another obvious change which started appearing in Zhu’s writing.

There had been a tendency for political scrutiny of literary works in Taiwan since the GMD ruling. The lifting of martial law had changed the way in which people read literary works, since they started to have more freedom. However, it had not changed the over-political interpretation. The only change was the direction for criticism, which had altered from a GMD to an anti-GMD perspective. When the stories in *I Remember...* were initially published in newspapers, Zhu received mainly harsh criticism.

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46 For the purpose of building the Mass Rapid Transport system (捷運) in Taipei, the railway branch between Taipei Main Station and Danshui, called “the Beidan Line (北淡線)”, stopped running from 16 July 1988. Before the railway route was closed, several media had used the title, “The Last Train to Danshui” (淡水最後一班列車), for their news reports, presenting the scenes along “the Beidan Line” in nostalgic tones. Information from Xu Zongmao, *Twentieth-Century Taiwan: The Democracy* 二十世紀臺灣:民主篇, 141-143. Danshui and the journey between Taipei Central and Daishui have been depicted in many of Zhu’s writings since her early works. Zhu’s “The Last Train to Danshui” had been published in *United Daily News* in 1984, and it was later collected as the first story in *I Remember...* (我記得……, 1989).

47 The title is taken from Italian writer Boccaccio’s *Decameron*.


49 Zhu adopts the title of this short story from the film *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (Last Year in Marienbad, 1961) directed by Alain Resnais and written by Alain Robbe Grillet.

50 The newspapers were *China Times* (中國時報), *United Daily News* (聯合報) and *Zili zaobao* (自立早報).
The ironic representation of the oppositional political activist and the linkage between sex and politics—particularly in her short story, “Destruction of Buddha” (佛滅, 1989)—quickly made Zhu stand out among the majority of anti-GMD voices and she became a target of criticism from critics. Besides, as pointed out by He Chunrui (何春蕤), the protagonists in this story could be identified with some well-known members of the cultural elite in Taiwan and this evoked suspicion regarding the writer’s intent and literary ethics. On the 15 and 16 July 1989, Zili zaobao (自立早報, a newspaper which supported the views of the political opposition), with the theme “The Novelist Fired, Who Got Shot?” (小說家開槍，誰中彈?), invited public discussion by debating the reality and/or fictiveness of Zhu’s work “Destruction of Buddha”. Despite the fact that the critic, He, emphasised the fictionality of Zhu’s writing and acknowledged its potential for advocating women’s sexual liberation, there was mainly negative feedback which assumed that Zhu had used her writing for the purpose of attacking anti-GMD movements. After all, the political and social activities in 1989 were, as He suggests, “an important force which generated social progress in Taiwanese society.” Publishing a work like “Destruction of Buddha” in post-martial law Taiwanese society could place Zhu in a

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51 “Destruction of Buddha” (佛滅) was serialised in the China Times (中國時報: 人間副刊) from 29 June to 3 July 1989. The story was later collected in I Remember… (我記得⋯⋯, 1989).
53 See “The Novelist Fired, Who Got Shot?” 小說家開槍，誰中彈?, Zili zaobao 自立早報: 副刊 (Taipei), sec. 16, July 15-16, 1989. Writers who contributed to the column discussion were He Chunrui 何春蕤, Kaweibo 卡維波, Jin Hengwei 金恒煒, Li Ang 李昂, Ye Zilin 葉姿麟 and Peng Ruijin 彭瑞金.
55 Jin Hengwei 金恒煒 believes that Zhu used the story to impose an ugly image on the oppositional political activities. [See Jin Hengwei, “Novelists Should Not Be Detectives” 小說家不是偵探.] Ye Zilin (葉姿麟) suggests that a writer should not use writing as a tool for political revenge. [See Ye Zilin, “I Still Prefer Fictional Games” (我喜歡的仍是小說遊戲).] Peng Ruijin (彭瑞金) indicates that literature should be used for the purpose of embracing or criticising life, not individuals. [See Peng Ruijin, “Literature Embraces Life, Not People” (文學擁抱人生, 不擁抱人).] Writer Li Ang (李昂) extends these oppositional views further and calls for boycotting writers who tend to use their works as mouthpieces for the GMD government in the cultural field. [See Li Ang, “Self-Detoxification in the Cultural Field: Establishing a Writer’s Sense of Ethics” (文化界自清: 建立作家的道德觀).] All these articles are from in “The Novelist Fired, Who Got Shot?” 小說家開槍，誰中彈?, Zili zaobao 自立早報: 副刊 (Taipei), sec. 16, July 15-16, 1989.
56 “推動臺灣社會進步的重要力量”. From He Chunrui, “Beyond the Ark: Recent Writings by Zhu Tianxin” 方舟之外: 論朱天心的近期寫作.
hazardous position. There were critics like Yangfu (洋父), who criticised Zhu’s parody of political activities and expressed his discomfort concerning the link between politics and sex in her story; his criticism eventually turned into a personal attack, accusing Zhu of an ambiguous relationship with the GMD.\(^\text{57}\)

Zhan Kailing (詹愷苓, aka 楊照 (Yang Zhao)) acknowledged the dramatic transition in Zhu’s writing from a naïve young woman’s romanticism in her Sansan Period\(^\text{58}\) to a mature writer’s insightful observation as presented in the new stories collected in *I Remember*... (1989).\(^\text{59}\) However, as indicated by He, Zhan’s statements about Zhu’s past with Sansan only reminded the readers of Zhu’s long-term close relationship with the GMD,\(^\text{60}\) which also encouraged readers and critics to look for evidence of this link in Zhu’s early works in order to pigeonhole her identification with the GMD. Hence, Zhu’s incorporation of political views into literature and the critics’ tendency to examine her work from a politically-polarised viewpoint became what David Der-Wei Wang (王德威) called, “a literary/political ‘incident’” (文學/政治‘事件’).\(^\text{61}\)

The prevailing trend of the political reading of Zhu’s work in the 1980s, which often turned into negative evaluation by the critics and the imposition of an assumed identity on the writer, eventually resulted in another transformation of narrative style in Zhu’s writing in the third phase. The issue of identity would be largely displayed in her work in the 1990s, which is partly the writer’s resistance towards the critics’ over-political criticism of her works. Through the increasing complexity of her narrative construction, Zhu has gradually added multiplicity to the conceptualisation of identity in the later phases of her literary career.

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\(^{57}\) See Yangfu 洋父, “Is It Frigidity over Politics or Frigidity over Sex?: Reading Zhu Tianxin’s ‘Destruction of Buddha’” 是政治冷感還是性冷感 — 談朱天心《佛滅》, *Liberty Times* 自由時報: 副刊 (Taipei), sec. 15, August 13-14, 1989.

\(^{58}\) The “Sansan Period” indicates the early phase of Zhu’s writing, particularly in the 1970s, when Zhu had close relationship with the Chinese émigré writer Hu Lancheng and her participation in the Sansan Publishers. See also the “Biographical Sketch” of Chapter One.


\(^{60}\) See He Chunrui, “Beyond the Ark: Recent Writings by Zhu Tianxin” 方舟之外: 論朱天心的近期寫作.

LITERARY JOURNEY

The socio-political vicissitudes of Taiwan in the 1980s provided Zhu with valuable resources for her work. On the one hand, her writing in this phase shows the writer’s creative exploitation of personal life, social phenomena and political changes. On the other hand, the complex narrative strategies she adopts show the way in which she responds to the transition of the environment and the changes in social values of this period. To present such complexity, which reflects the political and social environment as well as embodying an individual’s response to the situation, Zhu begins to show her deliberate construction of the narrative voice, and in sophisticated ways she also deploys strategies derived from the literary genres of autobiography and fiction. In this section I examine the narrative strategies which Zhu adopts for her writing. As I will argue, in multiple ways she represents the transformation of Taiwan in all respects, which also mirrors her manifestation of identity.

Manifestation of Political Voices

Observant Narrative Distance

A major difference between Zhu’s writing in the first and the second phases is the observant distance in narrative voice. She begins to keep a critical distance from the subject matter she studies, whereas in the first phase her narrator was often embedded in the political or social situation which she depicted. On the other hand, as often shown in Zhu’s early writing, there appeared to be no distance between the life of the writer and that of the protagonist in her story, which often made her critics consider the statements of the protagonists as reflecting the social and political opinions of the writer. Starting from the second phase, Zhu tends to examine the social and political contexts from different perspectives and to show critical responses towards them. The observant distance in Zhu’s writing is presented through the ways in which she manifests the narrative voice in her work, which is displayed in her exploration of political identities. In her political stories she both sympathises with and criticises most of the characters. Therefore, she shows detachment from the characters through her use of narrative voice. Zhu uses an omniscient narrative voice which does not favour particularly any one of the characters. She sympathises with the characters, but she criticises them more. Such a voice with a critical narrative distance also illuminates the exploration of gender in Zhu’s stories, which I will discuss below.
Ironic Representations
As often seen in Zhu’s writing in the second phase, she tends to exploit voices of characters which represent various political identities and cultural groups. The political identities of the protagonists she depicts range from communist or Taiwanese nativist to GMD nationalist. In an ironic and critical tone she represents the images of people, such as political idealists, political activists or blind followers of political ideologies, and the writer’s targets are across the political range.

The ironic voice in Zhu’s writing, which emerged in the first phase, is presented in manifold ways in the second phase. The rapid change in the socio-political environment of Taiwan of the 1980s, which reflects a tendency to accept all kinds of voices, has given Zhu useful resources for her narrative experiments. To demonstrate Zhu’s strategic deployment of political perspectives in Taiwan of the 1980s, I examine the political characters as presented in her short stories “I Remember…”, “The Decameron” and “Destruction of Buddha”.

In “I Remember…”, Zhu presents two anti-GMD activists who believed that communism would bring a better future for Taiwanese society, but who, ironically, find themselves increasingly indulging in the comfortable material life of the capitalist environment. The transition from feelings of passion to those of doubt towards their communist ideals is presented through the protagonist’s constant ruminations over the sentence taken from *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), “[We] have nothing to lose but [our] chains.” When the sentence appears in the story for the first time, it shows the protagonists’ naïve passion towards communism when they were young. Their positive expectation concerning their political ideal is reflected in the next phrase in the *Manifesto*, “they have a world to win.” As the protagonist states, both he and his friend, Lin-Sang (林桑, “Mr. Lin” in Japanese) “used to love the sentence deeply,” because their mutual political dream would always help resolve all personal conflicts.
between them. However, as the narrative proceeds, the ideals of Marx and Engels are gradually replaced by the protagonist’s growing doubts. He starts to wonder whether their political ideals would stay the same forever, and he finally realises that they may end up living a corrupt life like that of those capitalists whom they used to criticise. Eventually, the sentence turns out to be an ironic reflection of the protagonist’s life, because his communist thoughts become nothing but “chains” which stop him from enjoying life and make him feel guilty towards the comfortable material life he has.

In “The Decameron” Zhu examines a group of politically passionate people in post-martial law Taiwanese society. She presents the protagonists in “The Decameron” in an ironic way, the most representative case among them being the uneducated Taiwanese nativist, Red Monkey (紅猴). As Zhan Hongzhi (詹宏志) indicates, the contrast between Red Monkey’s political passion and his ignorance of political matters creates a comic effect. This contrast is what makes Red Monkey an ironic figure. As his nickname “Red Monkey” indicates, he is overloaded with ignorant passion for political activities, making him a fool controlled by politicians. The ridiculousness of Red Monkey is presented through the linkage of the protagonist’s political and sexual activities.

He believed that when Xu became the county mayor, it would be the day that his luck would change. […] He also asked for a copy of an election article by Xu, entitled “In My Heart I Will Always be a GMD Member.” He framed the piece and hung it on the wall above their bed. He had not read the content carefully, but merely thought that the black strokes of calligraphy looked beautiful on the clean white paper; but Jewel complained, “It looks like a damned funeral scroll!” […] He recollected how they had engaged in conjugal pleasures under that beautiful calligraphy piece.

In this reminiscence by Red Monkey, Zhu has borrowed from the news item about the DPP politician, Xu Xinliang (許信良), who had won the mayoral election

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65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 56.
67 Ibid., 65.
68 See Zhan Hongzhi (詹宏志), “Time Stays Still and Things Stay the Same: Reading Zhu Tianxin’s I Remember…” 时不移事不往——讀朱天心的我記得……
69 The Chinese text is from Zhu Tianxin, “Decameron”十日談, in I Remember…我記得…… (Taipei: Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 72-73.
for the Taoyuan county in 1978 and was considered a traitor to the GMD. As an unquestioning anti-GMD supporter, Red Monkey is unaware of the paradox in Xu’s statement which reveals the DPP politician’s feelings of ambivalence towards the GMD. He hangs the article on his wall in order to show his faithfulness to his political idol, while, ironically, such a serious political work is exhibited in the couple’s bedroom where they have sex. For Red Monkey, the only thing that could compare with the excitement he gets from election matters is the first time he had sex with his wife, Jewel (阿珠). The juxtaposition of Red Monkey’s enthusiasm towards politics and his passion for sex suggests the character’s irrationality in his participation in political activities. What draws him to politics is the sense of excitement he gets from the activity, which is the same as what sex offers him. The frequent criticisms of Red Monkey by Jewel, also suggest the fact that even an uneducated woman can see his political blindness.

“The hirelings may get a thousand dollars a day; but you, you don’t even get a betel nut from them as a treat. Whenever there’s an election you go nuts; I think you might as well get ready to be sent to Kasha-to for free meals.”

(“人家雇去做吆嘍仔一天也有一千，你啊檳榔一粒沒通號姑，一選舉你就瘋，我看你準備去火燒島吃免錢飯好了。”)73

Jewel’s words are presented in the Taiwanese Fulao dialect. In her comic expression they mirror the ridiculous behaviour of Red Monkey, which corresponds to Zhu’s comments about people like him in the sub-title, “The most stupid people are those who grow sugarcane for the Sugar Company to weigh on their scale” (第一憨、種甘蔗給會社磅), a Taiwanese Fulao idiom criticising the exploitation of peasants.

70 In spite of his Taiwanese Hakka background, Xu Xinliang (許信良) had been an outstanding and highly recognised GMD member in the 1960s and 1970s, until he decided to withdraw from the party in order to compete with the GMD appointed candidate for the Taoyuan mayor position in the election of 1978. Xu was, therefore, considered a traitor to the GMD. For the purpose of winning the election, the GMD was even suspected of conducting some illegal acts in the process, which eventually resulted in the Zhongli Incident (中壢事件), the most important Taiwanese nativist political movements after the February 28th Incident. See Zhan Jiawen 詹嘉雯, “The Zhongli Incident and Political Change in Taiwan” 中壢事件與臺灣政治轉型 (master’s thesis, National Central University 國立中央大學歷史研究所碩士論文, 2007), 43-44 and 48-74. The article by Xu, “I Will Always be a GMD Member in My Heart” (此心長為中國國民黨黨員), is available on p. 58 of Zhan’s thesis.


72 “Kasha-to” means “the burning island” (火燒島) in Japanese. It refers to the Green Island (綠島), where the most famous prison for political criminals during the GMD ruling period was located.

73 Zhu Tianxin, “Decameron” 十日談, 71.

74 Ibid.
by business people. 75 Whereas the original meaning of the Fulao idiom shows sympathy towards the uneducated people, Zhu’s adoption of the sentence emphasises the ignorance of the protagonist, who devotes his life to politicians who care less about the lives of people than about their own careers.

In “Destruction of Buddha” Zhu represents the double lives of a political activist couple. The female protagonist, A-Yun (阿雲), who writes a column on women and family matters, is in fact obsessed with sexual activities which are not likely to be acceptable to her readers. In addition, despite her active participation in environmental protection movements, which advocate recycling and saving, she is actually more interested in purchasing luxurious fashion items. The male protagonist, on the other hand, is into all kinds of social movements, while he never really understands why he gets himself involved. He had thought that social injustice was what motivated his passion for all kinds of social activities, but eventually he realises that he is merely involved in these activities for the sake of being an oppositional activist. He would like to start a movement to boycott newspapers, but finds out only that he cannot live without them. It is “dreadful” for him to know that “he is after all the sort of person he has been criticising.” 76 The contrasting sides of his double life eventually collapse into each other so that he cannot distinguish one from the other. The moment takes place at a public speech which he gives in front of a huge crowd of university students:

He felt that he was ejaculating the words in the very same way he ejaculated inside A-Yun: “The reason that I support you is because I support all oppositional movements!” As soon as he had finished, exclamations of happiness and satisfaction arose from the audience, just like the moment when A-Yun reached her orgasm.

(他覺得自己像在阿雲體內射精似的吐出話：“我之所以支持你們，是因為我支持一切的反對運動!” 台下立時轟的一聲爆出快樂滿足的喊聲, 就如同阿雲獲得高潮之時。) 77

The ambiguities of the protagonists’ double lives are presented through the ironic linkage between their political and sexual activities, suggesting that the seemingly sublime political passions they pursue are after all the same as their own

75 The origin of this Taiwanese slang/rhyme was during the Japanese Occupation when the Sugar Company was owned by the Japanese government. The sugarcane farmers were often exploited by the Japanese who bought their sugarcanes at very cheap prices, and the peasants ended up receiving almost nothing for their hard work.


77 Ibid., 189.
For people who are well-educated and familiar with politics like the protagonists, their attitudes towards political and social movements end up making no difference to the thoughts of an uneducated character like the character, Red Monkey, in “I Remember…”.

**Palimpsestic Voice**

Whereas Zhu’s depictions of the (political) oppositional activists in “I Remember…”, “The Decameron” and “Destruction of Buddha” are considered by most critics as the writer’s attacks on anti-GMD discourses, Zhu’s portrayal of the GMD supporters in *It Never Ends* shows that the ironic representations of the political characters in Zhu’s stories are in fact more complex than critics have assumed. In her depiction of a typical GMD community, the military compound, in *It Never Ends*, Zhu also maintains a critical distance from the Chinese émigrés, with whom her protagonists in the first phase often identified. This is shown in her revelation of the ambiguity of the military compound residents’ political view:

> The residents of the military compound were in the habit of calling those who live outside the compound—who are not necessarily from peasant families or Taiwanese nativists—the common people. Even Mrs. Xia, who was from a Taiwanese nativist family herself, called them the common people. The use of this appellation evoked especially complicated feelings, combining a bit of revulsion, a bit of sympathy, and a bit of pride, which is similar to the thinking of the old soldiers who consider themselves as brave warriors protecting the country at the battlefront.

(眷村的人總習慣叫那些村外的人,不一定是農家的,也不一定是本省人的,都一律叫老百姓,連夏太太自己是本省家庭出身的也習慣叫人家為老百姓,這種叫法的感情是很複雜特別的,有些輕視的意思,有些憐惜,又有些洋洋自得,像是老兵們的心情,自己真是戍守前方保鄉衛國的英勇戰士啊。）

Through the ambivalent attitude of the military compound residents towards people who live outside the compound, the writer presents not merely their strong identification with the GMD but, more importantly, the uncertainty inherited in such a collective identity. The military compound identity may unite the community residents with “pride”, but their “revulsion” against and “sympathy” towards the non-compound people also suggests an attempt to differentiate themselves from the Taiwanese nativists, making a distinction between the Chinese émigré and Taiwanese nativist identities. Such confusion also implies the ambiguity of a collective Chinese national identity that the GMD imposed on everyone in Taiwan. As shown in this

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78 From Zhu Tianxin, *It Never Ends* 未了 (Taipei: Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 133.
story, the differentiation between Chinese and Taiwanese in the thoughts of the military compound residents, who align themselves so strongly with the GMD identity, actually undermines the GMD teaching which is supposed to unite all people in Taiwan with Chinese nationalism.

This is particularly the case when such an identity is presented through a protagonist like Mrs. Xia, a Taiwanese Hakka woman who marries a Chinese émigré soldier and who lives in the military compound with their three daughters: the passage becomes an ironic commentary on the military compound identity.79 Her abhorrence of “the common people”, who are Taiwanese nativists like herself, does not make her a GMD supporter but, rather, increases doubts about her ambiguous identity. Zhu’s emphasis on the ambiguity of the military compound residents’ collective identity makes the GMD discourse problematic. The narrative in Zhu’s It Never Ends suggests a political resistance, which does not support the GMD identity, but functions as a “palimpsest”80 undermining the ostensible GMD identity on the surface.

Rendering Gender Voices

The features in Zhu’s representation of political characters—observant narrative distance, ironic representations and palimpsestic voices—provide insights into the reading of gender voices in her stories, which show a greater extent of complexity. However, there are few critics in the existing scholarship on Zhu who have approached her works from a gender perspective. As He Chunrui points out, the tendency for over-political interpretations in Taiwan has made critics overlook “the significance of Zhu’s works in other aspects”.81

He Chunrui was most likely the first critic who pointed out the potentially feminist voice in Zhu’s writing. As shown in her analysis of the writer’s representation of the lives of housewives, the ways in which the female protagonists

79 This appears very similar to Zhu’s own family background. See p.80-81 below.
80 According to Susan Gilbert and Susan Gubar, women writers often “produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meanings. Thus these authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards.” From See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 73.
secretly enjoy their lives, through stock-market activities (in “Nineteen Days of the New Party”) and through obsessive shopping (in “The Crane Wife”), which free women from their patriarchal role as housewives and inject great energy into their boring daily routines.\(^2\)

Compared with He, Lu Zhenghui 呂正惠 seems to be less positive concerning the feminist voice in Zhu’s works. Lu identifies what he believes as Zhu’s ambivalent attitudes towards women and feminism in her stories. The critic emphasises what he calls the “lack of integrity” displayed by Zhu’s female protagonists, such as the sexually active female protagonist, A-Yun in “Destruction of Buddha”, and the helpless housewife in “Nineteen Days of the New Party”, a woman struggling between her role in the patriarchal family and her new life as a blind follower in the stock market.\(^3\) Critics, such as Lu, seem to be unaware of the irony in Zhu’s narrative voice.

Qiu Guifen 邱貴芬 also acknowledges the way in which Zhu depicts the repressed lives of women in her work, which, as Qiu rightly points out, “ironically reveals the illusion of the traditional male discourse and revises stories about women in patriarchy”.\(^4\) However, unlike He, Qiu is reluctant to recognise the feminist potential in Zhu’s writing, suggesting that Zhu’s tendency to adopt a male narrative voice could be the problem. She is more inclined to believe that Zhu “identifies with the patriarchal value system and, therefore, repudiates the fixed female identity”.\(^5\) Qiu’s view was ground-breaking in many ways at the time (early 1990s) her criticism appeared in Taiwan. However, what limits her view is the political narrowness of her focus both in terms of national politics and feminism. Her criticism reveals the fact that the critic cannot let go of her idea of Zhu Tianxin as a GMD sympathiser, and she reads the gender voice in Zhu’s writing from that perspective.

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\(^2\) Ibid.


\(^5\) Qiu writes, “認同父權價值體系，冀望擺脫女性定位”. Ibid., 96.
As my investigation shows, there is a complexity behind the male narrative voices Zhu adopts, which has not yet been noticed by critics. To demonstrate this, I examine the sophisticated exploitation of a male first-person narrative voice in two of Zhu’s stories, “Passage of Things Past” and “The Crane Wife”. In both stories Zhu depicts a man’s mind, convincingly claiming to know how a man’s mind works, but what she presents is a male narrator who does not understand, cannot know, and desperately wants to know all there is to know, physically and psychologically, about a woman, which also reflects on the state of patriarchy in Taiwan.

The Palimpsestic Male-First-Person Narrative Voice

In “Passage of Things Past” Zhu presents an obscure love relationship between the female protagonist, an artist named, Aipo (愛波), and the male narrator, a gynaecologist. What the narrator claims as a romance between the two is in fact based on his years of erotic fantasies of the female protagonist, evoked by the sight of her legs. The narrator’s sexual fantasy of Aipo is through the animalisation of her body from his male perception, as indicated by her “deer legs”, to which he obsessively paid attention. Their relationship proceeds from his sexual fantasies to his physical contact with her, which is ironically not through sex but via his medical interventions on her sexual organs:

> In fact, when I was eighteen or nineteen what I dreamed about wasn’t simply Aipo’s deer-like fine legs and round white thighs. It was especially after I saw the naked portraits of Aipo in the exhibition that I kept dreaming of entering her body. She was even in my sexual fantasies [...] At that time I never thought that someday I would enter Aipo’s body like this—with surgical instruments thrusting deep into Aipo’s womb… 

(十八九歲時, 我夢到的其實不僅只是愛波鹿腳一樣的小腿和潔白渾圓的大腿, 尤其看過愛波的人體攝影後, 我不只一次夢見過我進入愛波的體內, 我甚至以愛波為我幻想男女之事的對象 […] 那時候一定沒有想到, 有一天竟會是這樣的方式進入愛波吧! 挾鉗深深進入到愛波的子宮⋯⋯)86

The medical intervention suggests both medical and sexual intentions. On the one hand, the instrument he uses to perform the abortion on Aipo symbolically presents the penis and frames the penetration in terms of sexual intercourse. On the other hand, the instrument is made of cold steel—a dehumanised tool as appose to the warmth of the human body—implying an invasion by a symbolic male sexual organ in the form of a metal instrument, on the feminine body. In such a bizarre way he is

involved — although not sexually — with her sexual organs four times: through abortion, child delivery, an operation for cancer of the womb and in an autopsy after her death. He ironically claims his medical treatments on her as sexual intimacy between them:

In this life, I have never really touched the depth of her soul. I have never really understood her. But—yes, that’s it, I have reached into the depths of her body four times; no one else has done that … (這一生中，我並沒有真正觸摸過她的靈魂深處，我甚至沒有真正懂過她，但是——是了！不會有人像我一樣，曾經這樣四次親手探到她身體內的最深處……) 

Zhu emphasises the ambiguity of the male narrator’s mind. On the one hand, all he knows about Aipo is merely her body, but he considers that as equivalent to knowing Aipo as a whole person. On the other hand, he persists in regarding the medical relationship as a romantic one. The obscurity of his feelings towards her is presented to the extent that he eventually dissects her body on an operation table, turning the woman he loves into lumps of meat. Thus, the narrator’s problematic representation of Aipo turns out to be ironic, which renders the male first-person voice unreliable.

In “The Crane Wife”, the unreliability of the male first-person narrative voice is presented through the narrator’s male-centred observations on the obsessive shopping behaviour of his wife, Xiaoxun (小薰). According to him, she has already collected clothes up to teenage size for their son who is only three years old, the soaps in the drawer would be “enough to wash an elephant for a year”, and the packs of instant noodles in their cabinets would be enough to feed a family for a month if nuclear war suddenly broke out. With his exaggerated and manipulative description, the narrator turns his wife into a woman with abnormal, obsessive and irrational consumption behaviour.

To convince the reader with his assumedly rational male logic, in the tone of a modern business expert he analyses what he considers to be his wife’s irrational shopping habits through what she has purchased and stored in their house. In his

87 Ibid., 222.
88 As the narrator states, “Especially when I am in my anatomy class, I am more and more certain that human beings are made of meat; the heart is a lump like this and the brain is a lump like that. They are always there as they should be in our bodies.” (尤其當我上解剖時，我愈來愈確定人真的是肉做的，心臟就是那樣一團，腦裏是那樣一攤，確確實實已生在那裏。) Ibid., 176.
90 Zhu writes, “拿來洗一隻大象都可以用上一年”. Ibid., 122.
91 Ibid., 119.
observation, the imported U.S soaps that Xiaoxun has purchased reflect “evidence of
the rise in the New Taiwanese dollar and the reduction in taxes on imported goods”,92
from the various socks she has bought for him, he sees “the development and history
of the sock industry in Taiwan”.93

However, his seemingly reasonable observation also shows his
misunderstanding of women’s behaviour, which dismisses the fact that careful
everyday calculations are part of the Chinese patriarchal requirements of a good wife.
In addition, the dramatic economic growth in Taiwan during the 1980s — which is the
background of this story — has certainly had a great impact on women’s lives.
Simply saving — as traditional Chinese women did — is no longer enough, she also
has to cope with everyday price fluctuations in order to sustain the family finances, so
that she can still fulfil the Chinese patriarchal expectation of her.

As well as presenting the male narrator’s ignorance of his wife’s difficult
situation as a woman in a patriarchal family, Zhu also emphasises the lack of
fulfilment in Xiaoxun’s life. It is specifically presented through her collection of
expensive lingerie, which she buys in great quantity but never wears. On the one
hand, she desires romance in her married life; on the other hand, she is still confined
by the Chinese patriarchal construction that a woman’s mind should be as pure as a
virgin’s, suggested by the lingerie which stays untouched in the drawer. The
ambivalence of Xiaoxun’s mind is reflected in the narrator’s paradoxical view
towards his wife: she needs to be erotically seductive but unapproachable like a
virgin—“a girl who could only be observed from faraway but not to be touched”,94—an
internalised patriarchal view of women shared by many Chinese men. As a result,
Xiaoxun transfers her lack of sexual fulfilment to her massive shopping enterprise,
endless housekeeping and obsessive child-caring. Xiaoxun’s obsession is presented
like a psychological disease, which takes on a symbolic form — the physical disease,
cancer, from which she eventually dies. Zhu seems to suggest this could be the fate of
a good wife under patriarchy, who may fulfil the patriarchal requirements while her
own life is extremely unfulfilled.

Hence, through the ignorance of the male narrator and the lack of fulfilment of
the female protagonist, Zhu articulates the displayed irony of the male first-person

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92 Zhu writes, “台幣升值和進口關稅降低的腳跡”. Ibid., 122.
93 Zhu writes, “台灣男祿業的發展史”. Ibid., 124.
94 Zhu writes, “是個少女只可遠觀不可褻玩”. Ibid., 117.
voice, which undermines the voice of the Chinese patriarchy it represents. In “Passage of Things Past” and “The Crane Wife”, Zhu shows a strategic deployment of male voices. The patriarchal voice which is presented on the surface is sabotaged by the feminist voice underneath, which makes Zhu’s narrative “palimpsestic”, as termed by Gilbert and Gubar. As shown in both stories, alienation is the outcome of the ambiguous male voice in Zhu’s narrative. The gradual decay of Aipo’s body in “Passage of Things Past” creates a sense of alienation in the narrator: his sense of familiarity towards Aipo’s body in imagination is slowly replaced by the cancer growing in her womb until she becomes a corpse on his operation table. In the process of dissection, he sobbed and “a teardrop […] fell on the wood-colour heart of Aipo”. He feels that she is like wood to him, because she does not return his affection, while the fact is that he did not even have the courage to express his love for her when she was alive. In “The Crane Wife”, the wife’s words are gradually replaced by the huge quantity of goods she stores in the house. The obsessive behaviour of the wife eventually makes the narrator feel alienated:

I have absolutely no idea what this woman who appeared so normal and quiet could have been thinking of. She was like a wild animal with young, but how could she have managed her lair so atrociously? Could it be that the easy home life I prized so highly was actually the cause of that sense of alienation in her that I myself had often felt? I seemed to see hair growing all over her body and two horns emerging from the top of her head. Illuminated by the red light of the setting sun, she made a mooing sound and rooted for food on the wild plain, and as darkness fell, the deep dusk echoed with her whinnying […] Where was I in those days? Where on earth was I? What was I doing? Making her fend for herself like cows or sheep put out to pasture while I confidently thought of myself as the heroic male, able to fend off wind and storm simply by holding up my hand…

(我完全不能懂得印象裡平靜平常的她在盤算些什麼，怎麼會像頭母獸似的窮兇極惡經營自己的巢穴，難道我曾羨慕過的可天天閒居家中的安適生活，竟還是會讓她萌生我常有的荒原之感嗎？我彷彿看到她生出毛來，長出長長的兩隻角，在一輪紅日將落的荒野上哞哞作聲的覓食，並隨著黑暗即將來臨的深沉暮色不時發出哀鳴[…] 那些個日子裡，我到底在哪裡？在幹什麼？讓她放野牛羊似的自謀生存而還滿心以為自己是一個一手擎天遮蔽風雨的雄性⋯⋯)

In his mind he still desires to be the man who protects the woman and the husband who brings his wife the most joy in life, which is why he is in despair when he discovers that shopping can make her happier than what he can do for her—

95 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 73.
although shopping does not make her happy either. It has just proved to him that he is useless and not important to her at all, which is opposite to the position he is supposed to hold as a husband in a conventional family. Both stories show the lack of understanding of women as intellectuals. The narrator in “Passage of Things Past” emphasises Aipo’s female body, while the narrator in “The Crane Wife” focuses on Xiaoxun’s abnormal hoarding behaviour.

In addition, both stories stress the animalisation of women, linking the images and behaviour of women to those of the animals. Aipo has “deer-like fine legs,” and Xiaoxun eventually turns into an animal in the narrator’s imagination. Her animalisation alludes to a Japanese fairy tale of the same title. Zhu’s female protagonist is presented as a conventional self-sacrificing woman stereotype, and similarly, the Japanese fairy tale of “The Crane Wife” depicts an extremely self-sacrificing wife who turns into a crane after the discovery of her secret by her selfish and suspicious husband. The animalisation of the wife also presents the sense of alienation that the narrator feels about her and their marital relationship. However, it also reflects his sense of quandary about himself as a husband, which can be interpreted as his uncertainty towards the patriarchal role he plays and the patriarchal system that he is in. Therefore, it can be argued that the seemingly male first-person voice in the two stories is actually a feminist voice in disguise. It presents the lack of understanding between men and women. By considering the misunderstanding between genders in animal terms, it shows objectification of women to the extreme, which is also an ironic representation of patriarchal conceptualisation of females.

**Gender Performativity**

Zhu’s adoption of a male voice for the representation of women can be seen as a strategy exploited for the purpose of confounding gender voices, showing resistance to gender construction in patriarchal narrative. It corresponds to Judith Butler’s idea of gender performativity. As Butler suggests, “the gendered body […] has no

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ontological status apart from the various acts which constitutes its reality.”

To confound the rigid gender binary, Butler proposes that the *cross-dressing parody* of drag is a radical act to disrupt the system through “play[ing] upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed.” On the one hand, it challenges the idea that every individual presents a fixed gender, in which the mind (the self) and body (the appearance) should maintain a coherence with each other. On the other hand, drag actually *performs* the gender characteristics, bringing into question the very notion of essentialised gender identities. That is, genders do not exist; gender is rather a question of *performance*.

Butler’s notion of *gender performativity*, or *cross-dressing parody*, can be applied to the narrative system. The male first-person narrative voice in Zhu’s “Passage of Things Past” and “The Crane Wife” can be considered as a kind of *narrative cross-dressing*, performing or parodying a specific gender identity. On the one hand, the unreliable and ignorant male voice is used as a *parody* of patriarchy, showing the misrepresentation of women by patriarchal discourse. Being a woman writer, Zhu’s adoption of a male perspective in her story is arguably a narrative strategy, which is used for the purpose of revealing the problematic male point of view as well as highlighting the marginalised position of women. On the other hand, the female protagonists in the two stories subvert the patriarchal female stereotypes. Xiaoxun *over-performs* as a stereotypical good wife according to Chinese patriarchal convention. She successfully achieves the Chinese traditional requirement for a woman, who “looks after her husband and children, and works hard to save for the family” (相夫教子，勤儉持家). However, her behaviour as a model wife turns out to be problematic, making Xiaoxun a *parody* of the ideal feminine stereotype in patriarchy. Aipo is presented as a *parody* of the negative patriarchal feminine model. Instead of focusing on her independent and risk-taking personality, throughout the narrative her body is extremely objectified in that there are often literary snapshots of Aipo’s body, showing either her legs or her sexual organs, and finally turning her into a corpse. She is never a complete woman in the male narrator’s representation.

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101 Ibid., 175.
In that sense, the feminist theories of narrative by DuPlessis and Friedman, which Qiu adopts in her critique of Zhu, actually turn out to be supportive of Zhu’s writing, showing the writer’s strategic deployment of gender voices. Instead of defining specific styles for women’s writing, as Qiu has assumed, both DuPlessis and Friedman acknowledge the ways in which women writers deconstruct the patriarchal discourse through “breaking, subverting, disrupting, tampering” with “paradigmatic” patriarchal narratives. DuPlessis encourages “a rewriting of gender in dominant fiction”, indicating that women writers may adopt the “transgressive invention of narrative strategies […] that express critical dissent from dominant narrative.” Friedman emphasises the “palimpsestic” character of women’s writing, which shows layers of voices, containing a “dominant narrative text” in a patriarchal form and “a muted lyric subtext” of the repressed female. In both cases, the feminist theorists suggest implicit forms of resistance to patriarchal discourse through narrative subversion, while Qiu’s interpretation of the theories by DuPlessis and Friedman presents an essentialist view in gender and politics.

Qiu’s expectation of a kind of writing which belongs solely to women evokes the idea of l’écriture feminine proposed by French feminists. Her conceptualisation of “woman’s writing” seems to be caught in the male/female (or masculine/feminine) gender binary, belonging ironically to patriarchal discourse where women would like to escape, reflecting the way in which l’écriture feminine is often criticised. However, even the French feminists who advocate l’écriture féminine, such as Hélène Cixous, show a reluctance toward the idea of identifying a specific type of writing which belongs exclusively to women. As Cixous writes, “It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this

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103 See the footnote #4 of Qiu Guifen, “Thinking of My (Self-)Exiled Fellow (Brothers and) Sisters in the Military Dependents’ Villages: Reading the Second-Generation “Chinese Émigré” (Female) Writer Zhu Tianxin”想我(自我)放逐的(兄弟)姐妹們：閱讀第二代“外省”(女)作家朱天心, 108.
105 Ibid., 163.
106 From Rachel Blau DuPlessis, “Breaking the Sentence; Breaking the Sequence,” 293.
109 As Ann Rosalind Jones points out, “femininité and écriture féminine are problematic as well as powerful concepts. They have been criticised as idealist and essentialist, bound up in the very system they claim to undermine.” From Ann Roselind Jones, “Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of l’Écriture Féminine”, http://webs.wofford.edu/hitchmoughsa/Writing.html (accessed June 7, 2011).
practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded [...]. Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, encourages women writers to “traverse” when confronting the “phallic position” in language, suggesting that “the subject experiences sexual difference, not as a fixed opposition (‘man’/’woman’), but as a process of differentiation.” She advocates “the possibility of exploring all the sources of signification, that which posits a meaning as well as that which multiplies, pulverises, and finally revives it.”

Hence, Zhu’s adoption of a male first-person narrative voice in her story actually corresponds to the ideas of narrative transgression, palimpsestic narrative and narrative traversing, as suggested in the theories of DuPlessis, Friedman and Kristeva. Her articulation of narrative voice shows the palimpsest and polyvocality in women’s writing, which Susan Sniader Lanser considers as “double-voiced” (with a “surface [text]” and a “hidden undertext”) and what Lanser terms, “a feminist poetics of narrative voice”.

Had Zhu chosen a female first-person narrative voice for her stories, as Qiu expected, they would not have been as subversive to the patriarchal discourse as adopting a male voice. As Lanser points out, “It is possible that women’s writing has carried fuller public authority when its voice has not been marked as female.” When women writers write about female experiences with a female voice, they may risk being “labelled immodest and narcissistic, and criticised for displaying either their virtues or their faults.” By using the male first-person narrator, Zhu shows a clever exploitation of the “authorial mode” of narrative, which, as Lanser suggests, “has allowed women access to ‘male’ authority by separating the narrating ‘I’ from the female body.”

Accordingly, Zhu’s adoption of a male narrator in her stories is radical in many ways. Firstly, she breaks out of the patriarchal literary convention, which focused on male representations of women, but not the other way around. Secondly, as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests, when a narrator “continuously contradicts himself [...], his

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111 Xavière Gauthier’s interview with Julia Kristeva, translated into English by Marilyn A. August, in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron eds., New Feminisms: An Anthology (Amherst: the University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 165.
113 Ibid., 3-24.
114 Ibid., 18.
115 Ibid., 19.
116 Ibid., 18.
chances of being fully reliable are diminished, since his interpretations, judgements, generalisations are not always compatible with the norms of the implied author.”

Through seemingly authentic male voices, Zhu shows the way in which women are problematically represented. The problematic male narrative voice in Zhu’s stories reflects the unreliability and ambiguity of the male logic, undermining the patriarchal discourse it represents. Finally, the tragic lives of the female protagonists also emphasise the patriarchal repression of women, making their silence and death a potential feminist voice of resistance.

Complicating the Authoritative Voice
Zhu’s writing in the second phase also shows strategic deployment of literary genres. Whereas in the first phase, the writer and her publisher tended to exploit the autobiographical voice, encouraging readers to make a connection between the life of the writer and that of her protagonists; starting from the second phase, Zhu shows an attempt to break the association between the two, emphasising the fictiveness of her work while her publishers began to frame her works as “fiction” (小說).

As discussed in Chapter One, the association with autobiography in the readings of Zhu’s work resulted in readers and critics forcing an identity on the writer. This is reflected particularly in the tendency for political interpretations of her work. Yang Zhao, who had been a member of the Sansan group with Zhu in the 1970s, eventually, decided to follow the trend of Taiwanese nativism in the early 1990s, participate in the DPP political activities, and turned his criticisms against Zhu. Despite some insightful ideas in his analysis of Zhu’s writing, his reading inevitably shows a persistent link between the personal life of the writer and the lives of the characters she presents. He Chunrui holds a suspicious attitude towards the focus on politics and sex in Zhu’s writing starting from the late 1980s, suggesting the dramatic change of writing themes indicates the writer’s desperation to fit herself into the post-martial law cultural mainstream. Qiu Guifen rightly indicates “the indefinite boundary

118 See Yang Zhao 楊照, “Pisces Swimming Back and Forth: The Zhu Tianxin I Know 兩尾逡巡迴遊的魚——我所知道的朱天心,” in Literature, Culture and Historical Imagining: Commentaries on the Post-War Literature 文學. 社會與歷史想像: 戰後文學散論 (Taibei: Unitas 聯合文學, 1995), 160-170. The article was originally published in the “Literary Supplement” of the China Times 中國時報: 人間副刊 (Taibei), January 20-21, 1994. For more information about Yang Zhao and his criticisms of Zhu, see also Chapter One and earlier in this chapter.
between autobiography and fictional creativity in Zhu’s writing” and explains how it reflects the tendency to reject a fixed identity.\textsuperscript{119} It is also insightful for Qiu to make a connection to the ambiguous political status of Taiwan and the difficulty of maintaining a collective identity in multi-cultural Taiwan.\textsuperscript{120} However, it is somewhat problematic that Qiu insists on making the connection with what she assumes as Zhu’s rejection of the female identity, and therefore of the writer’s persistence in identification with the GMD patriarchy, which Qiu perceives as a reflection of a generalised identity of the Chinese émigré community in Taiwan. Qiu assumes all of these to be a reflection of Zhu’s personal identity, as she frequently uses words, such as “the contradictory Zhu Tianxin”, “her of a fixed female identity”, or “Zhu Tianxin’s claustrophobia” in her discussion.\textsuperscript{121} In addition, the debate on the reality or fictiveness of Zhu’s story, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, also reflects the fact that critics tend to make too strong an association between the life of the writer and the content of her work. They tend to over-interpret her work according to what they know about her real life and what they see in her stories, through which they look for connections between the two aspects.

The criticisms of Zhu’s works show that the issue of political identity has dominated political, social, cultural and literary contexts in Taiwan since the lifting of martial law. Chinese identity had been the only choice for all people during the martial-law phase, while in the post-martial law period people suddenly started to embrace a Taiwanese nativist identity as if it was the only alternative. As a result, what is revealed by the politically polarised criticisms of Zhu’s work is that they seem to become another form of literary and political censorship which attempts to impose a fixed identity on the writer—the identification with the GMD, which is opposed by the new political mainstream—through their purposeful and selective interpretation of her work. The lifting of martial law certainly made possible the political expression of anti-GMD views, but ironically, to those who hold a different view from the anti-GMD discourse, it seems to be the beginning of a new censorship.

\textsuperscript{119} Qiu writes, “朱天心作品裏自傳和小說創作的模糊界線”. From Qiu Guifen, “Thinking of My (Self-)Exiled Fellow (Brothers and) Sisters in the Military Dependants’ Villages: Reading the Second-Generation “Chinese Émigré” (Female) Writer Zhu Tianxin” 想我(自我)放逐的(兄弟)姐妹們: 閱讀第二代 “外省”(女)作家朱天心, 104.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 106-107.
\textsuperscript{121} Qiu uses the terms, “矛盾的朱天心” (p. 96), “她的女性定位恐懼” (p. 102) and “朱天心的閉鎖恐懼” (p. 105). Ibid., 110.
Zhu’s stories suggest escapism from an imposed or fixed identity. As she did in the first phase, the writer tends to encourage readers to read her work biographically. There are aspects of biographical details of the writer, which one instantly sees in the story if s/he is a Taiwanese reader. For instance, in *It Never Ends*, the female protagonist, Mrs. Xia, is not a Chinese émigré but a Taiwanese Hakka who marries a Chinese émigré soldier and lives in the military compound. Her background resembles that of Zhu’s mother. The similarity in backgrounds between the central characters, the Xia family, and Zhu Tianxin’s family has invited readers to consider this work to be autobiographical. This is arguably a deliberate and ironic trap set for critics of Zhu. In addition to this, the writer’s emphasis on *It Never Ends* being a memoir and her familiarity with the military compound environment, as presented in her vivid and detailed portrayals of the lives and people of the community in *It Never Ends*, also convince the reader of the biographical framing of the work.

Hence, the connection between the life of the writer and that of her protagonist results in the critics’ political imposition on Zhu, assuming the work to be evidence of her identification with the GMD. For example, ambivalent feelings such as those of Mrs. Xia towards the people outside the military compounds in *It Never Ends* are termed by He Chunri (何春蕤) as “the imagined [Chinese/GMD] centralism (想像的中心觀)” of the military compound residents, which He assumes to be the core of Zhu Tianxin’s identification and the reason for the writer’s anxiety when the GMD gradually lost political power. However, critics like He and those who accuse Zhu of being a mouthpiece for the GMD seem to miss the irony presented in such a narrative voice and they, stereotypically, only focus on the way in which a Chinese émigré or a military compound resident is supposed to identify with the GMD.

Whereas some readers may interpret such a work by Zhu as a “roman à clef”, I would like to avoid the autobiography/fiction dichotomy and to emphasise the continuum of Zhu’s writing. Compared with the way in which autobiographicality is articulated in her works in the first phase, such as *The Ploughman’s Song*; in the second phase, as shown in *It Never Ends*, Zhu tends to stress the fictiveness of the work through providing fictional names for the characters. Such an ambiguity created by the writer, revealing the biographical elements in the story as well as resisting the

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122 See He Chunrui, “Beyond the Ark: Recent Writings by Zhu Tianxin” 方舟之外: 論朱天心的近期寫作.
claim of the *autobiographicality* of the work, actually confounds the expectation of the critics.

In the stories in which Zhu portrays the protagonist ironically or deliberately changes narrative perspectives, she shows an attempt to break the link between author and protagonist, which had been built in the first phase. Readers and critics, however, still persist with the idea of a connection between the writer and her protagonist. Clearly, the ironic presentations of political characters and the use of a male first-person narrator in the second phase are partly her responses or reactions against the fixed identity which critics impose on her. As one sees in the development of Zhu’s writing, she increasingly confounds the author-protagonist relationship and at the same time adds different layers of complexity to her narratives.

Likewise, the confusion of narrative purpose is also found in Zhu’s representation of women through male-narrative voices. In my interview with her, Zhu insists that her adoption of a male voice is “simply changing [gender] perspective”, which is itself a great simplification, because, as my analysis has shown, the male narrators are so well perceived by Zhu in terms of their ignorance about women whose lives they are trying to interpret. In the interview, she stated her wish that her works not be interpreted as serving a feminist or any other ideological purpose. While she seeks to avoid being labeled as a feminist, nevertheless, the narrative voice in her story enables a feminist reading, which is again strategic.

In other words, through the uncertainty of narrative authority and narrative purpose, Zhu sets a trap for critics, such as He and Qiu, who tend to show narrow political and biographical readings of Zhu’s work. She deliberately sets the trap for critics to indulge in the kind of criticism they would make. She is always on the move and does not want to be an easy target. Zhu has a highly sophisticated understanding of the way in which the critical world operates, while the critics are unaware of it. As is shown above, they do not seem to be aware of the irony and complexity of the narrative voice in her stories.

Zhu’s strategic deployment of narrative voice continued to develop in manifold ways in the third phase, where she adds further complexity to it with the use of a second-person voice, a prevailing narrative technique in postmodern fiction. Whereas in the

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123 See my interview with Zhu Tianxin in Appendix I to this thesis.
124 Ibid.
second phase Zhu had tended to pay more attention to the construction of narrative voice, starting from the third phase, she would focus more on building complexity in her texts, expanding the multi-referentiality of her work and emphasising the intertextuality of her writing. The increasing complexity of her narrative voice and text also reflect the sense of instability the writer has continued to emphasise through her writing, suggesting a growing sense of uncertainty in her conceptualisation of identity.
Chapter Three

Manifesting Marginality

[T]here is the writer who experiments with the limits of identity, producing texts where the law does not exist outside language. A playful language therefore gives rise to a law that is over-turned, violated and pluralised, a law upheld only to allow a polyvalent, polylogical sense of play that sets the being of the law ablaze in peaceful, relaxing void.

~ Julia Kristeva, “A New Type of Intellectual: the Dissident”

The growth of democracy in Taiwan was fully operational by the early 1990s. It was a formative period for the post-military dictatorship era in which writers and critics were allowed to freely express their thoughts. Despite being permitted to employ a wider range of critical approaches, many critics still tended to limit themselves to the narrow stance of political binaries, such as GMD/non-GMD or Chinese émigrés/Taiwanese nativists. Criticisms of Zhu show that her life and work have been interpreted in limited political terms. On the one hand, many critics tended by then to emphasise the freedom of Taiwanese from GMD rule, seeing the GMD as the coloniser of Taiwan and, therefore, advocating an anticolonial ideology against the GMD. As such, most critical responses fall into the trap of stressing another fixed identity, and this happens especially when critics study works by writers such as Zhu.

Whereas the writer’s conceptualisation of identity had continued to evolve, the critics’ impression of her remains somewhat rigid, labelling the writer as a second-generation Chinese émigré whose links with the GMD will not change. In a sense, this is similar to the way in which the GMD enforced a fixed Chinese identity for all the people in Taiwan. Hence, it can be argued that, during this democratic period, Zhu encountered further repression, in this instance from the critics in Taiwan who tended to criticise the writer and her work from their somewhat partisan political perspectives. The situation has actually enabled her writing to develop in multifarious ways. As I will argue, the complexity of the political situation in Taiwan is reflected in the

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2 See, for example, Qiu Guifen 邱貴芬, “Thinking of My (Self-)Exiled Fellow (Brothers and) Sisters in the Military Dependants’ Villages: Reading the Second-Generation “Chinese Émigré” (Female) Writer Zhu Tianxin” 想我(自我)放逐的(兄弟)姐妹們：閱讀第二代 “外省”(女)作家朱天心, Chungwai Literary Monthly 中外文學 22, no. 3 (August 1993): 94-110.
3 Ibid. Overseas critics rarely show a partisan political view, although they occasionally stress the connection between Zhu’s stories and her personal life as a second-generation Chinese émigré. See, for instance, Rosemary Haddon, “Being/Not Being at Home in the Writing of Zhu Tianxin,” in Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua, eds. John Makeham and A-chin Hsiau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 103-123.
complexity of Zhu’s writing in this phase, suggesting that identity is not presented in a simple or straightforward way.

Following the rise of Taiwanese nativism and the lifting of martial law in the 1980s, while the GMD government was facing a political crisis, the Chinese émigrés and their descendants, including Zhu Tianxin, were encountering their own crises of identity. Marginality, therefore, became the central issue in the third phase of Zhu’s writing. Her work shows a creative response to the situation by exploring marginality in political and sexual contexts. Her writing in this phase presents what Kristeva calls, “playful language”, which manifests marginality through narrative subversion, showing a resistance to the political mainstream with the articulation of multiplicity and hybridity of identity. The most dramatic changes in Zhu’s narrative, which emphasise the multi-referentiality of language in terms of voice, text and genre, occur in this phase. They become the hallmarks of Zhu’s writing as well as informing the style of her works in the fourth phase.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
Taiwan in the Early 1990s
After 1990, the political environment in Taiwan underwent further change. This was a transition period during which the political control of Taiwan gradually moved away from the GMD regime to the control of the Taiwanese nativists. The key factor in this political phenomenon was the Taiwanese nativist, Li Denghui (李登輝), who took over the presidential position as well as the GMD party leadership after the death of Jiang Jingguo. Feeling the need to convince all cultural groups in Taiwan as well as strengthening his political status in the GMD, Li started to conduct a series of political reforms which adjusted the political direction of the GMD and dramatically changed the political environment of Taiwan.

On 30 April 1991, Li announced the termination of “the Communist Rebellion Period” (動員勘亂時期)4 commencing on 1 May 1991,5 which indicated recognition

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4 In accord with the GMD-government’s policy towards Communism in China, “The Communist Rebellion Period” (動員勘亂時期) began in July 1947, which indicated that Taiwan had entered a new period against the Communists in China. The declaration of the Communist Rebellion Period actually contradicts the Constitution of the Republic of China, because it limits human rights. To make it seem legal, in May 1948 the GMD government announced the “Temporary Provisions” (臨時條款) as additional rules which applied a special condition to the Constitution. According to the Temporary Provisions, the president and vice-president of Taiwan were provided with extended rights and powers in order to ensure the safety of the country during the Communist Rebellion Period. In May 1949
that Taiwan and China were two different regimes. Li’s action put an end to the GMD mythology of “anti-Communism and restoring the Nation” (反共復國). Although the GMD still dominated the political mainstream, its composition and method of governance had changed. With the influence of Li, the voices of the Taiwanese nativists gradually took over and the Chinese émigrés in the party were marginalised. Starting from the “February political power struggles” (二月政爭) in 1990, the GMD broke into factions, and the mainstream group led by Li was in power. Some of the second-generation Chinese émigrés eventually left the GMD and established new political parties, among which the “New Party” (新黨) was the largest. Seeing the split within the GMD, some Chinese émigrés were forced to rethink the issue of their identity and different generations of Chinese émigrés gave different answers to the same question.

On the other hand, Li also secretly forged an alliance with the Taiwanese nativist activists. In May 1991 the issue of the independence of Taiwan was raised by “the Independence of Taiwan Committee” (獨立臺灣會). Contrary to the way in which such a matter would have been considered by the Jiang government as rebellion against the GMD regime, Li released the members of the committee who had been arrested. The Li government also changed the law on criminal insurrection. In 1992, the Taiwanese nativist scholar, Peng Mingmin (彭明敏), a political dissident...
during the GMD rule of Chiang Kai-shek and Jiang Jingguo who had gone into exile overseas, finally returned to Taiwan and received a welcome from Li Denghui. 9

In terms of cross-strait relations, in the early 1990s, Taiwan commenced a cultural and economic relationship with China. On 27 April 1993 the first “Gu-Wang Meeting” — peace talks between Gu Zhenfu (辜振甫), representative from Taiwan) and Wang Daohan (汪道涵, representative from China) — was held. The meeting took place in Singapore and this was the first official communication between China and Taiwan after forty years of political hostility.10

To accelerate democracy in Taiwan, democratic elections were gradually phased in. In 1994, the Taibei and Gaoxiong City mayors began to be directly elected by the people. Chen Shuibian (陳水扁, a Taiwanese nativist and a DPP representative) became the Taibei City Mayor, while the GMD representative, Wu Dunyi (吳敦義, a Taiwanese nativist from the GMD), continued in his position as the Gaoxiong City Mayor after the election.11 The Taiwanese nativists slowly became the political and cultural mainstream, while the old GMD and the Chinese émigré community with whom Zhu had identified, gradually became political and cultural minorities.

What emerged from this political change and the localisation of Taiwan was the question of Taiwanese identity—who could be considered as Taiwanese, or who should be regarded as Chinese? Most Chinese émigrés and their descendants, like Zhu Tianxin herself, faced the dilemma that they were not recognised as Taiwanese, whereas when they visited China they were considered to be “Taiwanese compatriots” (臺胞).

In accordance with the political trend of the 1990s, Taiwan was experiencing cultural localisation as well as rapid Westernisation. Whereas the localisation of Taiwanese culture was largely influenced by the post-Jiang Jingguo politics, rapid Westernisation resulted mainly from the dramatic economic growth that had been witnessed since the 1980s. From 1985 the tariffs on imported goods started to be gradually reduced.12 Despite the failure of Taiwan’s application to join GATT,13 in

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9 Ibid., 166-169. In March 1996 Peng represented the DPP and became a candidate in the presidential election, but eventually lost votes to Li Denghui who represented the GMD.
10 Ibid., 177-180.
11 Ibid., 181-184.
12 The reduction of customs tariff duty began in 1985, when the rate was lowered from 75% to 30%. The current tariff rate is 8.25%. Information from FedEx, “Taiwan Country Profile: Import Duties”.
1990, the New Taiwanese dollar began to rise dramatically in value against the U.S. dollar. The purchase of Western goods and overseas travel experiences became increasingly common in the lives of Taiwanese people. These trends also influenced Zhu Tianxin’s personal life as well as becoming a resource for her writing. Materialism and travel became the themes which Zhu frequently adopted to reflect the changing cultural phenomena of Taiwan. Zhu’s themes implicitly refer to the political and cultural dislocation and disorientation that was prevalent among Taiwanese people during this period.

Zhu’s Literary Production 1990-1995

The marginalisation and political crises faced by the GMD and Chinese émigrés actually provided Zhu Tianxin with new and abundant resources for her writing. In 1992 Rye Field Publishers (麥田) published one of Zhu Tianxin’s most debated works, *In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound* (想我眷村的兄弟們). This was a collection of six short stories that Zhu Tianxin had published in newspapers during 1990-1992 and which sketched the lives of six marginalised groups: middle-aged men, in “My Friend Ariza” (我的朋友阿里薩; published in February and March 1992); Chinese émigrés in “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound” (published in September 1991); political dissidents in “Once Upon A Time There was an Urashima Tarō” (從前從前有個浦島太郎;
published in November 1990); 17 “The Old Souls” (老靈魂, the melancholics) in “Chronicle of a Death Foretold” (預知死亡紀事; published in April 1992); 19 housewives with children in “Tale of the Kangaroo People” (袋鼠族物語; published in August 1990); and closet lesbians in “Romantic Matters” (春風蝴蝶之事; published in April 1992). 20 In general, this book presents themes of memory, crisis, and the sense of displacement of the people who had been marginalised due to the dramatic political, social, cultural, and economic changes in Taiwan during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In a time when the issue of deprivation of cultural minorities was starting to attract the attention of Taiwanese people, the publication of this book resulted in Zhu becoming the spokesperson for “marginalised groups” (畸零族群), 21 although she suggested that it was actually publisher Rye Field’s idea to emphasise the theme of marginalisation for the promotion of this anthology. 22

After the publication of this book, Zhu also completed another four stories, which were later collected in The Old Capital (古都, 1997). Most of the titles of these stories were adopted from works of foreign literary masters. The four stories are “Death in Venice” (威尼斯之死, 1992), 23 “Man of La Mancha” (拉曼查志士, 1994), 24 “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (第凡內早餐, 1995) 25 and “Hungarian Water” (匈牙...

17 Ibid. The work had originally been serialised in the China Times on 28 to 30 November 1990. It was nominated for the “Hong Xingfu Fiction Awards” (洪醒夫小說獎) in 1990.

18 Zhu Tianxin used the term, “the Old Souls” (老靈魂), to describe those people who remembered the past too well and would never let go of it. She suggested that the Old Souls were like the souls, who still stubbornly hung around their bodies and environment after death. They remembered everything but that was also where their loss and anxiety came from. Huang Jinshou (黃錦樹) suggests that the term “the Old Souls” is likely an indication of “the melancholiacs” (憂鬱症患者). See Huang Jinshou 黃錦樹, “From Gardens of Great Spectacle to Cafés: Reading/Writing Zhu Tianxin” 從大觀園到咖啡館——閱讀/書寫朱天心, afterword to The Old Capital 古都, by Zhu Tianxin (Taipei: Rye Field 麥田, 1997), 235-282.

19 The title is adopted from Gabriel García Márquez’s novel, Crónica de una muerte anunciada (English translated as Chronicle of a Death Foretold, 1981).


23 “Death in Venice” (威尼斯之死) is a title adopted from Thomas Mann’s novel Death in Venice.

24 “Man of La Mancha” (拉曼查志士) alludes to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s Don Quixote.
These four stories focus on the theme of identity, which is the main issue explored in the fourth phase of Zhu’s writing. Through her seemingly personalised fictional stories, Zhu adopted resources and terms from contemporary issues, such as gender identity, homosexuality, commodities and consumerism, foreign cultures, postmodernism and women’s issues. She also reflected the sense of displacement which was shared by many Taiwanese people during this rapidly changing period of Taiwanese history.

Apart from creating fictional works, from 1991 to 1994 Zhu Tianxin also embarked on the writing of non-fiction, which was an experiment in literary activism for the writer. This was more or less a reflection of her enthusiastic involvement in politics in this phase. Feeling the need to express her political views in a more direct way and to comment more forcefully on social issues, Zhu started getting involved in political activities. In 1992, out of disappointment with both the GMD and the DPP, the Zhu sisters, along with Zhu’s husband, joined, and actively participated in, one of the smaller political parties called the “Chinese Social Democratic Party” (中華社會

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25 “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (第凡内早餐) is a title borrowed from Truman Capote’s novella Breakfast at Tiffany’s (1958) and the film in 1961. The story was serialised in the China Times from 29 July to 4 August 1995. See the Appendix to Sun Jieru 孫潔茹, “Shifting/Hesitating?—Identity and Politics in the Work of Zhu Tianwen and Zhu Tianxin” 游移/猶疑?——朱天文、朱天心及其作品中的認同與政治 (master’s thesis, National Cheng Kung University 國立成功大學歷史研究所碩士論文, 2005), 167-234.

26 “Hungarian Water” (匈牙利之水) was inspired by the name of the first bottle of perfume made in 1370, See Zhu Tianxin, “Hungarian Water” 匈牙利之水, in The Old Capital 古都 (Taibei: Rye Field 麥田, 1997), 150. The story was originally published under the title of “Shanghai Blues” (上海之夜) in Unitas Literary Monthly (聯合文學) in October 1995. See the Appendix to Sun Jieru, “Shifting/Hesitating? — Identity and Politics in the Work of Zhu Tianwen and Zhu Tianxin” 游移/猶疑?——朱天文、朱天心及其作品中的認同與政治, 167-234. “Shanghai Blues” (上海之夜) was the name of a Chinese film in 1986, featuring the well-known actress and singer, Sally Yeh (葉蒨文), from Hong Kong. Yeh sang the theme song, “Night Breeze” (晚風), for the film. The lyrics of the song are included in Zhu’s story, “Hungarian Water”. In Zhu’s story, the male narrator was humming the song, “Night Breeze”, and suddenly realised that he had heard it in the movie, Shanghai Blues (上海之夜). See Zhu Tianxin, “Hungarian Water” 匈牙利之水, 142. Information about the film and the song is from Xah Lee’s Blog, http://xahlee.org/music/night_breeze (accessed June 8, 2011).

27 See Zhu Tianxin, interview by Li Ruiteng, in Li Ruiteng 李瑞騰, “Defending the Dignity of Literature—Interview with Zhu Tianxin” 始終維護文學的尊嚴——與朱天心對話, in Interviews with the Literary Fronts 文學尖端對話 (Taipei: Juje 九歌, 1994), 184.
In 1991 the three Zhu sisters were invited to write for a women’s column in the 
*Zili Morning Post* (自立早報). The Zhu sisters discussed issues that most Taiwanese 
women were interested in, such as shopping behaviour, the education of children and 
coping with men’s extra-marital affairs. In September 1992 Rye Field collected all 
the articles the Zhu sisters had written for the column and published them as a book 
entitled *Afternoon Tea Chats* (下午茶話題). In 1994 China Times Publishers (時報) 
published *Mengmeng Learns to Fly* (學飛的盟盟), a collection of Zhu Tianxin’s 
articles on the life of her daughter, Mengmeng. In this book Zhu Tianxin adopted her 
daughter’s perspective and observed Taiwanese society from a child’s point of view.

In 1994 China Times also published a collection called *A Novelist’s Journal on 
Politics* (小說家的政治週記), which was a collection of critical views on political 
phenomena in contemporary Taiwan that Zhu published as articles for the *China 
Times Weekly* (時報週刊) in 1993. They were inspired by the political activities in 
which she had participated during this period. Many of these articles concerned the 
issues of Taiwanese nativism, political and cultural identity, Chinese émigrés and the 
second generation Chinese military compound culture, and the ploys used by 
politicians and political parties in Taiwan, all of which corresponded with the themes 
about which Zhu had been writing in her fictional works. Through this non-fiction 
writing the writer expressed her critical views on politics and social issues in a more 
direct way and this gradually influenced the tone of her fictional writing after 1995, 
which also made Zhu Tianxin a more obvious target for Taiwanese nativist cultural 
critics.

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Her Stories as Example” 外省第二代的認同歷程——以朱天心及其小說為例, *Cultural Studies Monthly* 文化研究月報 39 (June 2004), 

29 In March 1991, the Chinese Social Democratic Party was established by Zhu Gaozheng (朱高正), 
who had been a member of the GMD and the DPP. In 1994 the registration of the party was removed 
and the members joined the New Party. See Zhongguo fanlan lianmeng 中國泛藍聯盟, “On Zhu 
March 25, 2011) and Chen Shanrong 陳杉榮, “The Retired Warship Travels Back and Forth Across 
the Strait” 退役戰艦，遊走兩岸, *Liberty Times* 自由時報 (Taipei), May 31, 2005, 

30 See Zhu Tianxin, interview by Li Ruiteng, in Li Ruiteng, “Defending the Dignity of Literature — 
Interview with Zhu Tianxin” 始終維護文學的尊嚴——與朱天心對話, 184.
LITERARY JOURNEY

Marginalisation is the main theme that runs through all of Zhu’s works in the period I identify as the third phase of Zhu’s writing career. In order to convey a “reconfiguration of identity”,31 Zhu makes use of the marginalised situation in the political, social and personal contexts, which she presents through strategic narrative construction. Starting from the third phase, the narrative of Zhu’s work shows an increasing complexity concerning the issue of identity, which also illuminates the theme of her writing as well as the direction of her narrative arrangement in the fourth phase.

To maintain a critical distance from the subject, in the second phase Zhu had shown a tendency to use a third-person (an omniscient perspective) or a male first-person voice in her stories. She also began to frame her works as fiction, so as to make a distinction from her more autobiographical writing in the first phase. This suggests a continuity of the critical distance from the subject, which the writer strove to maintain after the second phase. Starting from the third phase, she added a sympathetic tone to her critical observations. The change is likely to have been the writer’s response to critics like Zhan Hongzhi, who was disapproving towards the unsympathetic irony presented in Zhu’s stories in *I Remember*… (1989) in the second phase.32 As I will argue, the desire to negotiate between criticism and sympathy towards the subject complicates Zhu’s narrative, which leads to a major transformation of narrative technique in her writing. However, as my study shows, the outcome of her change in narrative tone surprisingly presents a potential feminist resistance, which challenges the patriarchal context with the female writer’s construction of voice. Through her *textual practice* the writer creates and intensifies ambiguity in all aspects (voice, text, genre, character and image construction) complicating the conceptualisation of identity.

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31 See Rosemary Haddon, “Nostalgia and Belonging in the Writing of Zhu Tianxin,” (paper presented at the *Poetics of Exile* conference, Programme of Comparative Literature, University of Auckland, New Zealand, July 2003).

32 Despite his acknowledgement of Zhu’s transformation of writing since the second phase, Zhan suggests that, to show a greater maturity in her writing, the development of Zhu’s narratives after *I Remember*… may consist of both irony and sympathy towards the protagonist. Zhan specifically points out that “Last Year in Marienbad” is the only story in *I Remember*… which displays both irony and sympathy towards the protagonist, and he predicts that this could be the tendency for the narrative tone in Zhu’s next work. See Zhan Hongzhi (詹宏志), “Time Stays Still and Things Stay the Same: Reading Zhu Tianxin’s *I Remember*…” 時不移事不往——讀朱天心的 我記得……, foreword to *I Remember*..., by Zhu Tianxin (Taipei: Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 12.
Marginality of Men

In her representation of the marginality of men in political and sexual contexts, Zhu challenges what Toril Moi considers the rigid binary of “unqualifiedly powerful men” and “unchangingly subordinate women” in patriarchal construction of language.33

In “Once Upon a Time There Was an Urashima Tarō” (從前從前有個浦島太郎), Zhu stresses the displacement of the male protagonist, Li Jiazheng (李家正), a GMD dissenter during the White Terror who has just been released from jail after the lifting of martial law. The dramatic changes in the political and social environment in Taiwan (during his thirty years of imprisonment) make him an out-of-place figure in society, which is well presented in the following scene:

One day, not long after he returned, he hesitated at a crossroads for a whole afternoon, lacking the confidence to make the crossing. It was not so much that he was afraid of the continuous flow of people and cars [...] but that he could not figure out a pattern or sequence—something that came as second nature to the townsfolk who performed this activity on a regular basis—which made him feel alienated.

(他曾在剛回來不久的一天, 徘徊在車水馬龍的十字路口一整個下午, 跨不出橫越馬路的腳步, 與其說是畏懼川流不息的人車 […] 不如說, 他根本還找不出一種秩序、頻率——屬於這個城市的人互相約束、願意遵守的底線——得以讓他插足。)34

Li’s hesitation at the crossroad is a projection of his new relationship with his family after his return from an absence of thirty years. Whereas he still considers himself to be the master who dominates everyone and everything in the family—from the life of his sister, Huili (惠理), to the marriage of his son, A-Xian (阿祥), to the decisions on the naming and education of his grandson—; everyone seems to be oblivious of his existence, except his grandson, Junjun (君君), who is still a child at kindergarten.

Nevertheless, even his conversations with Junjun make him feel displaced. For example, when answering his grandchild’s question about the meaning of the word “antioxidant”, he feels the urge to teach the child words, such as “people” and “Gorky”, which represent his Communist idealism.35 Unlike “antioxidant”, which

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35 Ibid., 103-104.
preserves and extends the shelf life of food, the words that he tries to teach a six-year-old boy are obviously outdated and impractical. The terms are misfits in contemporary Taiwan, just like him. On the other hand, the word “antioxidant” seems to reflect the mind of the displaced protagonist who tries to cope with the dramatic changes in his environment through time, a mind with the misguided expectation that everything will stay the same forever.

In such a marginalised situation he discovers that the way to resist the sense of displacement is to keep being as paranoid as he used to be during the White Terror. He regularly changes the route retaken to walk Junjun to school, he constantly reminds his family and friends about the possibility of government surveillance of telephone conversations, and he obsessively writes letters to the government reporting on his social observations. Therefore, writing letters and keeping vigilant, habits he has kept since his imprisonment, become the way for him to self-cheatingly stop the progression of time and to enable him to claim his subjectivity.

However, even his own letters betray him. It is through writing letters that he constructs a world for himself, a world filled with his own self-indulgent image as a powerful and dominant patriarchal man, who is an elder brother, husband, father, and a political idealist. Through the rediscovery of the letters he finally realises the fact that his family have been ignoring all his mail and that none of his letters to the government have been sent. The boxes of dusty, unopened and undelivered letters show how outdated and displaced he is in the real world, where he is no longer the all-powerful man.

Zhu sabotages the patriarchal gender binary further in her adoption of a male first-person voice in “My Friend Ariza” (我的朋友阿里薩) and “Hungarian Water” (匈牙利之水). Through articulating the subordinate characteristics of her male

36 Ibid., 97-98.
37 Ibid., 100.
38 Ibid., 93-93 and 101-103. As Zhu has mentioned in a panel discussion with writers from various cultural/ethnic backgrounds, “Once Upon a Time There Was an Urashima Tarō” is based on the life of an uncle from her Hakka family (her mother’s eldest brother), who was opposed to Capitalism (a link with the GMD government) and often wrote anonymous letters to express his social views, and she felt shocked that, after so many years, members of her maternal family still lived in the “White Terror” and the “228 Incident”. See Liao Xianhao (廖咸浩), Walisi Yougan (瓦歷斯・尤幹), Zhu Tianxin (朱天心), Xu Huizhi (許悔之), Cai Xiunu (蔡秀女) and Lan Bozhou (藍博洲), “The Sound-Mixing Chorus: Recording of a Panel Discussion of Writers from Various Ethnic Groups in Taiwan” (混聲合唱——台灣各族裔作家對談紀實), Chungwai Literary Monthly (中外文學) 21, no. 7 (December 1992): 12.
protagonists and the dominant personalities of the female characters, Zhu exemplifies the way in which Kristeva encourages writers to “struggle against centralised power” through producing “playful language” that resists “a writing praxis constructed as feminine” in the patriarchal discourse.40

In “My Friend Ariza”, Zhu presents the midlife crisis of two men, the male narrator and his friend, Ariza. Contrary to the way in which men are often depicted in the patriarchal context, Zhu emphasises the powerlessness of her male protagonists and the empowered women in their lives. The male narrator experiences hair loss, sexual impotence, verbal attacks on him from his wife, and the teasing of his female colleagues of the younger generation who are much better informed about the fast-changing society.44 Although the narrator often uses the word, “old” (老), to describe himself, he is in fact a young man in his mid-thirties. His projection of himself as an old man reflects his helplessness towards life, which Zhu highlights with the theme of men’s mid-life crisis.

Whereas Zhu portrays the narrator as a man who is dominated by women, she highlights the feminine characteristics of Ariza, providing him with sentimental, melancholic, gossiping and suicidal personality traits, which are the stereotypical qualities of women in Chinese patriarchal construction. The bachelor, Ariza, is often emotionally attached to the prostitutes with whom he has sex and naively expects commitments from the relationships, while in the patriarchal cliché such is often considered to be a woman’s behaviour in a romantic relationship. Working in the entertainment field, he is, like the narrator’s wife, “a processing machine of garbage information” (垃圾消息的處理機), anecdotes of celebrities and astrology, which makes him more like a gossiping woman than a conventional Taiwanese man.

Like “My Friend Ariza”, the narrative of “Hungarian Water” is also based on the juxtaposition of the lives of two men, who are experiencing mid-life crises in 1990s Taiwanese society. The life of the male protagonist, “A” (a Taiwanese nativist),

42 Ibid., 29-30 and 49.
43 Ibid., 30-31, 42 and 49.
44 Ibid., 26-29, 44-45 and 55-56.
46 Ibid., 24-25 and 39-40. The quotation is from p. 24.
provides an insight into the life of the male narrator (a second-generation Chinese émigré). Like the two marginalised men in “My Friend Ariza”, the male protagonists in “Hungarian Water” are also dominated by their wives who are aggressive and controlling. The wife of “A”, in particular, uses the smell of perfumes to control her husband’s memory of women, in order to ensure his fidelity to their marriage:

[S]he tried every perfume on the market—that way, no matter what fragrance I smell on other women, I immediately think of her. It’s something beyond my control, and if I ever have thoughts of cheating, the only way my wife will not be on my mind is if the other woman is wearing no perfume or makeup (unlikely) or is wearing a perfume my wife hasn’t tried (even less likely).

Through the writer’s representation, women behave as dominant men would in patriarchy. In these two stories Zhu articulates the subordination of men, whose family and social lives, physical conditions, and even their sense memories, are “beyond [their own] control”. Those who are in control of the male protagonists’ lives are, ironically, women (their wives) and people of the younger generation, who are constructed as subordinate in the patriarchal context.

The construction of gender voice in “My Friend Ariza” and “Hungarian Water” challenges what Butler calls the patriarchal “gender norms”, which “operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealisation of the heterosexual bond.” By providing the male protagonists with conventionally idealised feminine qualities, and vice versa, Zhu’s narrative presents a cross-dressing effect, subverting the patriarchal gender norms with the way in which her characters perform their gender roles.

In addition, Zhu also subverts the patriarchal discourse of gender norms through her articulation of the relationship between men. The way in which Zhu manifests the kinship between men in these two stories makes it resemble the sisterhood between

49 See also my formulation of the idea of “narrative cross-dressing” in Chapter Two.
women. In their exchange of messages, the male protagonists share their innermost secrets and reveal their most sentimental emotions toward each other. Together they use Greek Mythology to romanticise the Mediterranean cities (as in “My Friend Ariza”) and study the scent of perfumes and plants (as in “Hungarian Water”).

Zhu also creates ambiguity around the brotherhood between men with an implication of a gay relationship. In “My Friend Ariza”, the narrator considers his relationship with Ariza as “a feeling of compatible closeness” (契合之感), surpassing the friendship they had in the university days which “almost became a homosexual one” (差点可以发展成同性恋关系). Similarly, in “Hungarian Water”, the narrator terms his kinship with “A” as a “symbiotic relationship” (共生的關係), like the one between “crabs and sea anemones” (螃蟹和海葵). Zhu complicates the brotherhood even more in “Hungarian Water” with the romantic love song “Night Breeze” (晚風), in which the lyrics are:

Is the love in my heart, the dream in your heart?
Can we borrow a bridge to bring us together?
On this borrowed bridge,
Can the I of tomorrow, and the you of tomorrow,
Embrace again as we embrace today——
(我心的愛，是否你心的夢，
可否借一條橋讓我們相通，
在這借來的橋中，
明天的我，明天的你，
能不能像今天再相擁——) 53

Zhu “borrows” the lyrics of the song, which were written for a heterosexual romance, and re-applies them to the relationship between two men. The heterosexual context ironically becomes the “bridge” for an implicit gay relationship. As a result, the brotherhood is rendered somewhat ambiguous in the patriarchal context. It can be argued that through her manifestation of the male friendship, Zhu’s male protagonists perform the way in which a heterosexual love is constructed in patriarchal discourse. Whereas the kinship between two men and the romantic cliché fulfil the patriarchal ideas of brotherhood and heterosexuality, it becomes problematic when the two are

52 “Night Breeze” (晚風) is the theme song of the Chinese film, “Shanghai Blues” (上海之夜, 1984). See also footnote #24 of this chapter.
combined. Zhu’s manifestation of male kinship evokes Butler’s idea of “performativity” in “queer appropriation” of gender, which “mimes and exposes both the binding power of the heterosexualising law and its expropriability.” Therefore, such close relationships between men in Zhu’s stories, showing an implicit suggestion of homosexuality, present resistance to the patriarchal context in which only heterosexuality is accepted.

Doubling Effects
As shown in “My Friend Ariza” and “Hungarian Water”, starting from the third phase, Zhu tends to adopt dual protagonists whose lives mirror each other. In “My Friend Ariza”, Ariza is presented as a reflection of the narrator’s self, who helps the narrator contemplate his own marginalised situation. Whereas the narrator’s attitude towards the fast-moving/developing Taiwanese society is to resist learning anything new and to mark time, Ariza takes a rather extreme attitude—to move backwards against the social tide which is speedily moving forwards. This is presented through Ariza’s decision to take a journey of self-exile through cities of ancient Greece and Turkey in order to discover for himself the meaning of life so that he can know how to live. However, the trip does not provide Ariza with the answer to his question, but only reminds him again and again of the places he and the narrator used to go to when they were young.

Through the doubling effect, which juxtaposes the scenes Ariza sees in foreign countries and his memories of places in Taiwan, Zhu creates another layer of marginalisation—the protagonist’s sense of displacement in the present time. In the Turkish port of Izmir he recalls the good old times they spent together in the northern Taiwanese port of Jilong (基隆港), and in the Mediterranean islands he sees Penghu (澎湖), small islands off the west coast of Taiwan. What Ariza is looking for is his former, younger, energetic and confident self which is very different from the middle-aged, (sexually) impotent and depressed self of the present. Ariza expects to recapture his glorious moments in the ancient Greek and Turkish cities, which he naively thinks, do not experience the passing of time and would not make him feel displaced and marginalised as he does in postmodern Taiwan. However at present,

54 Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” 232. The words in italics are Butler’s emphasis.
the old Mediterranean cities with their abundance of broken monumental remains seem only to disappoint him, merely reflecting his own ageing. He reflects that at least he could feel his youth by hiring a motorbike which is “old” (老老的) like himself, dressing up in “shiny black leather jacket and dark sunglasses” (亮片黑夹克，墨镜) and “[riding] all over the hills” like a young man as did the French actor “Alain Delon in the nostalgic [1960s] film Plein Soleil” (『愛你想你恨你』的亞蘭德倫).\(^{56}\)

Another layer of the doubling effect is formed through Zhu’s adoption of the name, “Ariza”, which make her character an allusion to Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s male protagonist, Florentino Ariza,\(^{57}\) Zhu Tianxin’s protagonist is—like Marquez’s Ariza—a stubbornly romantic man who clings to memories of the past. Set in the Taiwan of the early 1990s, Zhu’s Ariza is similar to Marquez’s character—a man who holds an old fashioned romantic attitude towards love relationships and who is therefore, an out-of-place figure in the real world.\(^{58}\) In addition, by adopting a foreign name for the male protagonist, the writer also emphasises Ariza’s state of alienation.

Picasso’s painting *Don Quixote* (1955), which is mentioned in Ariza’s letter from Mykonos, creates yet another layer of doubling, because it projects the out-of-place-ness of such a lonely idealist like Ariza. As his message to the narrator states,

> On the blank sheet of paper there were only a few strokes: a black sun, skinny black horses, the foolish old man, all in black, and the black windmills lying along the horizon. It looked horrifying…

(空白紙上僅寥寥數筆,黑色的太陽,黑色的瘦馬,黑色的秀鬥老人和地平線上的黑色小風車,看了很可怕……)\(^{59}\)

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\(^{56}\) Ibid., 53.

\(^{57}\) According to Zhu Tianxin in my interview with her (See Appendix I), “Ariza”—Chinese translation as “阿里薩” (A-li-sa)—is actually a name adopted from the Chinese translation of the male protagonist’s name in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s novel *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (1985, English trans. *Love in the Time of Cholera*). Therefore, in my English translation of Zhu’s story “我的朋友阿里薩” in this thesis, I choose to adopt the original name “Ariza” as it appeared in Marquez’s novel, rather than the name “Alisa” as in Shu-li Chang’s translation, which is closer to the sound of the protagonist’s name in Chinese, but could easily be mistaken as a name for a female. See Shu-li Chang, “Zhu Tianxin’s Eros of Home/Land: Nostalgia as a Literary Strategy,” 45-85.

\(^{58}\) The character, Florentino Ariza, in Marquez’s novel is a stubborn man who silently waits for his beloved woman, Fermina, for nearly a lifetime despite the fact that she has married another man.

\(^{59}\) From Zhu Tianxin, “My Friend Ariza” 我的朋友阿里薩, 53.
Like the protagonist in Cervantes’s tale of *Don Quixote*, who is obsessed with the tales of chivalry he reads and ends up embarking on a journey which is filled with imaginary adventures, Ariza also begins his journey to the Mediterranean islands with the unrealistic expectation of reviving his youth. However, all he sees in the foreign cities is his former self as he once was when in Taiwan, and this self no longer exists in the present real world. This has resonance with the imaginary battles and courtships of Don Quixote.

Picasso’s painting, *Don Quixote*, with its melancholic black strokes, seems to provide a shocking mirror of reality to Ariza. While in reality he may ride all over the plains in his Alain Delon costume, the youth of his past is never to be regained. It seems that the only person who understands Ariza is the narrator. He is similar to Sancho Panza, the follower of Don Quixote, who alternates sarcastic and sympathetic attitudes towards his lunatic companion and master who lives in an imaginary world.

Like a lonely soul Ariza sojourns among the broken debris of the ancient Greek and Turkish monuments which reflect nothing but his fragmented memories of the past as a young and energetic man in Taiwan. The memories of the past only make his present self more absurd and alienated. As a result, Ariza eventually chooses to take his own life by shooting himself at the conclusion of his journey. Like the fate of Cervantes’s “Don Quixote de la Mancha” (the name Quixano called himself), Ariza also dies of melancholia. Committing suicide is an extreme action, suggesting his resistance towards the fast-moving Taiwanese society with which he cannot cope, because death stops the progression of time and ageing. Despite his powerlessness towards his mid-life crisis, he can choose to end his own life, and, ironically, this is what his friend—the narrator, who constantly jokes about Ariza’s womanly behaviour—lacks the courage to do.

Likewise, in “Hungarian Water”, “A” also functions as a reflection of the narrator’s self. However, in this story Zhu shows a tendency to emphasise the self-
reflexive-ness of the male dyad through the presentation of narrative. In “My Friend Ariza”, there is an explicit distinction between the two male protagonists’ statements. When presenting the dialogue between the two men, the words of Ariza (in first-person narrative) are often displayed in the form of letter or postcard messages. In “Hungarian Water”, Zhu begins to confound the distinction between the statements of the two male characters, making it difficult to distinguish the words of one from those of the other in their dialogues. As their relationship develops, a dash is placed at the beginning whenever “A” starts to speak, suggesting the change of the narrator’s view of his relationship with “A”—who has turned from a stranger (from another ethnic group) into a male double of himself—and sometimes it can really confuse the reader as to which of them is being addressed:

——Strictly speaking, the disaster probably dates back to 1990.——

Nineteen-ninety? The seventy-ninth year of the Republic? I needed a minute to think back to what happened that year… At the beginning of the year, the president stunned everyone by choosing someone without a voice as his vice-president… a “horror story” about the National Assembly… stupid, ugly political power struggles… in mid-year, when everyone in the country said that he couldn’t do it, the president wilfully picked a man in uniform as his premier….

I didn’t know if A’s disaster had its origins in any of those events. But given his provincial background, there’s no way he was related to the discredited GMD Treasurer Zhang, Premier Li, or Military Commander Wang.

——Nineteen-ninety, customs duties and commodities taxes dropped and the value of the New Taiwan dollar rose dramatically. Thanks to substantial imports, perfume was no longer considered a luxury item.——

Ah, then it occurred to me that A’s wife, like mine, probably could not control the expenditure on perfume that we considered so irrational …

(——嚴格說起來，這場災難大概起自於一九九○年——

九○年? 民國七十九年? 先讓我想想該年可有什麼大事……, 年初,元首跌破全國人眼鏡的挑了一個沒有聲音的人做副總統……，國大恐怖的山中傳奇……，愚蠢難看的政爭……，年中，元首又在全國皆曰不可的情形下擅自以軍頭為行政首長……

A的災難, 不知起自前前列者何? 畢竟依他的省籍, 肯定那批陸續被鬥垮的張賬房李院長王軍頭都不是他老子或祖上。

——一九九○年, 關稅貨物稅大降, 台幣暴升, 香水大量進口,不再是什麼奢侈品了——

噢, 我恍然大悟, 所以A的老婆大概和我妻一樣, 一定不免花了一些在我們看來實在不怎麼理性的錢購買香水……)  

Apart from the disappearance of quotation marks in the protagonists’ dialogue, also of note are the narrator’s frequent observations on the words of “A”, which are

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60 From Zhu Tianxin, “Hungarian Water” 匈牙利之水, 115-116. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 74-75, adapted. In Goldblatt’s translation, quotation marks are still used. To present the narrative construction and to show how the Chinese text by Zhu was originally presented, I have replaced all quotation marks (“ ”) with long dashes (——).
inserted throughout the narrative but do not actually occur in their conversation. It makes the dialogue looks like the narrator’s personal reflections on the experiences of “A”, which can be related to his own. Through merging the statements of the two speakers, Zhu suggests the self-reflexive function of “A”.

Zhu creates another level of doubling between marginalisation in the political and in sexual discourse. As we read these two stories about male marginality in the political context, the mid-life crisis encountered by the male protagonists also suggests the situation of the old GMD, which started to fall amidst the rise of Taiwanese nativism, feminism, and other radical movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s. As the story of “My Friend Ariza” suggests, while the patriarchal GMD was facing its mid-life crisis and decay, the Taiwanese nativists and feminists were rising energetically like the young generations X and Y. The rise of feminism, in particular, subverted traditional conceptions of gender relations. It is noteworthy that the male narrator uses the term “她們” (the ‘female’ collective pronoun for ‘they’ in Chinese) to refer to the younger generations, who marginalise and alienate middle-aged men such as himself, both professionally and sexually. The use of the pronoun undermines the comfortable patriarchal position that men had previously held in society. In “Hungarian Water”, the conversation between the two men regarding A’s experience reflects the narrator’s personal life as well as the social and political events of contemporary Taiwan. By showing the inter-related political, social and personal “disasters” of the year 1990, the writer presents the disadvantaged condition of the patriarchal role in the private and public contexts: while A started to be dominated by his wife through the smell of her perfumes, the GMD was also controlled by Li Denghui who manipulates people in Taiwan with a collective Taiwanese identity.

The doubling effects in Zhu’s stories, emphasising the self-reflexive-ness of protagonists, images and events, actually indicate the development of a new narrative voice in Zhu’s writing—the second-person narrative perspective—which will be discussed in the next section.

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61 “The characteristic of [women of] the new generation is that they care about nothing. They never know anyone or anything before their time. For them [the female collective pronoun] people who are older than them are like used batteries, which may pollute the environment if you throw them away.” (她們這代的特徵就是，理直氣壯的不關心、不知道她們出生前的所有人、事、物，對她們來說，比她們年長的人彷彿一個個用過的電池，丟了它都還嫌污染環境。) From Zhu Tianxin, “My Friend Ariza” 我的朋友阿里薩, 55.
Second-Person Narrative ("You")

The narrative perspective in Zhu’s stories shows increasing complexity as her writing develops from the third to the fourth phase. The beginning of such complexity is shown in the construction of narrative voice in “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound” (想我眷村的兄弟們), completed in 1992. The story starts with the narrator’s statement to readers by addressing them as “you” (你):

Before you read this story, please prepare in advance—no, I’m not asking you to fix yourself a cup of boiling hot jasmine tea and to take care not to burn your lips, as Eileen Chang asked of her readers in “The First Trip of Incense.” I apologise because my request is more challenging—what I ask is that you play the song, “Stand by Me.” Yes, I am referring to the original soundtrack of the movie, written by Stephen King, bearing the same title. […] All right, dear reader, thanks for your cooperation. Let’s begin.

The way in which Zhu begins the story evokes the hallmarking sentence, “You are about to begin reading […]”, from the Italian work of fiction, If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller (1979) by Italo Calvino, whose use of a second-person narrative has interested many scholars. The passage shows the possible influence of Calvino’s postmodern writing style; it also presents an explicit imitation of the narrative of Zhang Ailing (張愛玲), widely recognised as Zhu’s literary predecessor. Such “pastiche” of works by famous writers is employed extensively by Zhu in the fourth phase, particularly in “The Old Capital” (1996).

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67 As well as worshiping Hu Lancheng, the Zhu sisters and young writers of the Sansan Group also idolised Zhang Ailing (張愛玲), the well-known Chinese woman writer and the ex-wife of Hu. Like their father, Zhu Xining, the Zhu sisters were fans of Zhang Ailing’s works. See Zhu Tianwen 朱天文, “The Chapter from Jail” 獄中之書, The Flower in Memory of the Past 花憶前身 (Taipei: Rye Field 麥田, 1998).
By emotively addressing the reader with instructions for the reading of the story, the narrator attempts to build an intimate relationship with the reader, the confidant of the account. As Zhu indicates, through the adoption of an “emotive beginning” (抒情的開頭) in the narrative, she expects to “hypnotise” (催眠) her readers, to help them to become less guarded and hostile (due to differing identities or beliefs) in their response to the text so that a “dialogue” (對話) between the writer/narrator and the reader is able to commence. Nevertheless, as in the narrative of Calvino, the reader who is addressed is a fictional character, and the apparent author is also a fictional author. It is in fact a constructed narrator-narratee relationship. The second-person pronoun focuses on an imperative relationship between the narrator (“I”) and the narratee (“you”), namely the “teller-narratee interaction”, following Franz Karl Stanzel’s narratological dichotomy of “teller-character” and “reflector-character”. In Stanzel’s definition, a teller-character “narrates, records, informs, […] addresses the reader”, while a reflector-character “reflects, […] perceives, feels, registers but
always silently”.

In the third phase of her writing Zhu frequently exploits a postmodern narrator-narratee relationship in her “essayistic narrative” works.

In “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound”, Zhu also begins to increase the complexity of her second-person narrative voice by adding a self-reflexive function. In a teller-mode second-person narrative, the narrator invites the reader to peep into the secret goings-on in the military compound with him/her. Then, starting from the third paragraph of the text, the narrative quickly switches to the third person in order for the reader to perceive the military compound environment and its residents through the eyes of the protagonist, “she”, a teenage girl. However, the observation is not simply from the viewpoint of the narrator or the character. It is in fact a combination of the perspective of the female protagonist and the voice of the narrator, who shows a critical, as well as sympathetic, view towards the protagonist. Through the voice of the narrator Zhu reflects the mind of the narratee, the protagonist. As a result, the narrative voices move between the observer and the character, eliminating the critical distance which the writer has tried to keep from the subject.

After the third-person narrative (with occasional inserted statements to the reader, “you”) has proceeded until almost reaching the mid-point of the story, the narrative suddenly changes back to the second-person, but now with a new narratee, “妳” (the female second-person pronoun). This gendered form of the second-person pronoun occurs specifically in the modern Chinese language. Zhu cleverly exploits such a characteristic, highlighting the marginality of women through adopting the pronoun in a feminine form.

The female second-person, “妳”, may refer to the second-generation Chinese émigré females who grew up in the military compound, including the female protagonist of the story. As indicated by the words “in remembrance of my brothers in the military compound” [my emphasis], which appear in the title as well as in the last sentence of the story, the narrator is apparently from the military compound and is addressing the females in the Chinese émigré community. Sometimes the female

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73 See my discussion of Zhu’s “essayistic narrative” on p.108-112.
74 See Zhu Tianxin, “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound” 想我眷村的兄弟們, 68.
second-person pronoun is even changed to a plural from, “妳們”, emphasising marginality as a collective experience of women:

Therefore, to the lonely girls who sometimes wonder where all the boys from the military compound have gone: in addition to my deep sympathy for you [妳們], I must also remind you [妳們] not to forget how much you [妳] once wanted to leave the compound and this island, whatever it took. […] Do you remember? You [妳], the girl who missed your opportunity and failed to leave—(因而會偶覺寂寞的想念昔日那些眷村男孩都哪兒去了的女孩兒們，我在深感理解同情之餘，還是不得不提醒妳們，不要忘了妳曾經多麼想離開這個小村子，這塊土地，無論以哪一種方式。[……] 記不記得？妳，錯過時機尚未走成的女孩——)75

The narrator reflects the mind and speaks from the perspective of the protagonist, which thus makes the voice appear to be located in an overlapping area between the two narrative modes proposed by Stanzel.76 In Monika Fludernik’s view, the second-person narrative, which shows what Gérard Genette terms as “internal focalisation”,77 is closer to Stanzel’s reflector mode.78 As Fludernik observes,

[T]he most common second person text is the one where the fictional you predominates as an experiencing self in what I would like to call — after Stanzel — a reflector mode narrative in the second person. In such texts the second person protagonist’s experiences are mediated to us from his or her perspective, and this is done in the second person with no observable subjective deictic centre: The narrative you can therefore be said to camouflage an underlying subjective deictic centre; the you covers up for an I of the protagonist in the grip of narrative experience.79

Despite the self-reflexiveness of the second person, the differentiation between the narrator (“I”) and the protagonist (“you”) is still distinctly presented at this stage. The narrator’s emphasis on the words, “you” and “I”, indicates a clear distinction between “you (the narratee)” and “I (the narrator)”, which shows that to a certain extent the second-person narrative in the third phase is still restricted to the imperative teller mode.

In addition, the impression of an autobiographical voice that many readers have of Zhu’s early works may also influence the understanding of the female second-person voice in this story. In that case, “you” may easily be identified as the writer herself, especially if the narrative involves a direct opinion regarding political identity:

75 Ibid., 82. The English translation is from Michelle Min-chia Wu, 79, adapted.

76 See my earlier discussion on the two narrative modes of Stanzel in this chapter.

77 According to the definition by Gerald Prince, through internal focalisation, “information is conveyed in terms of a character’s (conceptual or perceptual) point of view or perspective. From Gerald Prince, A Dictionary of Narratology, revised edition (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 45.

78 See the Notes to Monika Fludernik, “Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism,” 48.

79 Monika Fludernik, “Second-Person Fiction: Narrative You as Addressee and/or Protagonist,” 222. The words in italics are Fludernik’s emphasis.
Just as it is unacceptable for you [妳] to be classified as belonging to the privileged group, you [妳] cannot accept the injustice of being equated with GMD simply because your father is a Chinese émigré. Rather than saying that you [妳] grew up drinking the thin, diluted milk of the GMD (which is the way your [妳] husband puts it when he teases you [妳]), you actually feel that your relationship with the party is more like that of an estranged couple who should have gotten a divorce long ago. Sometimes you [妳] hate the party more than your husband hates it, because within you [妳] are feelings of betrayal and desertion.

正如妳無法接受被稱做是既得利益階級一樣，妳也無法接受只因為妳父親是外省人，妳就等同於國民黨這樣的血統論，與其說妳們是喝國民黨稀薄奶水長大的（如妳丈夫常用來嘲笑妳的話），妳更覺得其實妳和這個黨的關係彷彿一對早該離婚的怨偶，妳往往恨起它來遠勝過妳丈夫對它的，因為其中還多了被辜負、被背棄之感。{80

This kind of self-reflexive second-person voice expressing explicit criticisms towards the political, social and cultural environment of Taiwan, will become the type of narrative voice which dominates the works of Zhu in the fourth phase.

In other words, Zhu’s second-person narrative voice embraces all kinds of narratees, including the Chinese émigrés, the writer herself, and any reader who identifies with the experience of marginality. It presents another function of a second-person narrative, which “allows the fictional narrator both to evoke the familiar setting for the community-internal reader and to draw readers from different cultural backgrounds into the fictional world of the [Chinese émigré] community, thereby increasing potential empathy values and forcing an in-group consciousness on the (factually) out-group reader.”81 With both critical and sympathetic views towards the protagonist, through the writer’s sophisticated construction of the “self” in multiple forms (as the narrator, the protagonist and the listener), the writer shows an attempt to reach a more comprehensive view of her identity as a second-generation female Chinese émigré.

On the other hand, the adoption of a female second-person narrative is also a strategy for Zhu, because through such an ambiguous voice—which can be personal and observational—the writer is able to present both personal emotions as well as critical observations of a controversial issue, such as political identity.

Whereas the gendered “you” is still specified in Zhu’s self-reflexive second-person narrative in the third phase, a non-gender-referential form of the second-person

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80 Zhu Tianxin, “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound” 想我眷村的兄弟們, 85-86. The English translation is from trans. Michelle Min-chia Wu, 83-84, adapted.
pronoun, “你”, is used in the works of the fourth phase, such as Zhu’s novella, “The Old Capital” (古都, 1996), her short stories collection, The Wanderer (漫遊者, 2000), and her most recent fiction, Love in Early Summer When Lotus Blooms (初夏荷花时期的愛情, 2010). As we shall see in the fourth phase, Zhu takes away the gender difference in the second-person narrative, making the voice more indefinite. Readers can only tell the gender of “you” through the narrative context. “You” becomes an all-in-one voice in Zhu’s narrative, replacing the roles of the narrator (“I”), the narratee (“you” in male or female form) and the protagonist (“he” or “she”). Thus, through the way in which Zhu’s narrative voice mutates, Zhu shows a tendency to collapse the rigid categorisation of narrative voices in literary convention, challenging it with her adoption of a multi-referential voice.

The multi-referential feature of a second-person narrative reinforces the sense of ambiguity which Zhu tends to create in her writing, showing several kinds of possible narrator-narratee relationship through the presentation of one narrative voice. It articulates the multiplicity in Zhu’s narrative construction, which also suggests the way in which she conceptualises identity. Therefore, through her experiment of using a variety of narrative voices in “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound”, Zhu makes the work a significant transition to the fully developed and more inclusive form of the second-person narrative in the fourth phase. The adoption of a second-person narrative voice also affects the genre of Zhu’s work. It makes her writing become “essayistic narrative”, a hybrid of essay, fiction and autobiography, as will be discussed in the following section.

Hybrid Genres

The “Essayistic Narrative”: a hybrid of fiction and essay
Another characteristic of Zhu Tianxin’s writing, in the third phase, is the adoption of an “essayistic narrative” in the works that she frames as “fiction” (小說), which often makes the work appear more like an essay than a story. Zhang Dachun (張大春) was one of the first critics to notice this major transformation in Zhu’s writing. As Zhang points out, the stories in Zhu’s In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military
Compound are “prose in a strong essayistic form” (議論性格強烈的散文),\(^8^2\) which “eliminates the features of plot, actions, dialogues and characters in stories”.\(^8^3\) Lu Kuang (路況), however, considers such writings by Zhu as “fictions which do not look like ‘fiction’” (不像小說的‘小說’).\(^8^4\) Clearly, Zhang and Lu still rely heavily on the definitions of conventional literary forms.

David Der-Wei Wang, however, tends not to use the terms, “prose” or “fiction”, but to call them “‘essayistic’ narratives” (‘論文體’敘述),\(^8^5\) which then frees Zhu’s writing from the traditional literary genre categorisation, and indicates the revolutionary narrative construction by Zhu in this phase. Shu-li Chang (張淑麗) also acknowledges the “hybrid writing” by Zhu, suggesting the way in which it corresponds to the marginality of the six groups of people in In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound through “travel[ling] randomly across generic borderlines and juxta[posing] story telling with cultural commentary”.\(^8^6\) Hence, the adoption of an essayistic narrative in this phase shows that through the confounding of genre in her writing, the writer embarks on identity re-configuration, resisting the notion of a fixed categorisation or identity.

Firstly, Zhu’s essayistic narratives are often presented in a speech/essay-like form in which “I” (the narrator) addresses “you” (the reader) regarding specific marginalised groups who are hardly taken notice of, but who reflect some contemporary social phenomena which require public attention. To show how these minority groups have often been ignored by most people, the narrator introduces them in a sarcastic tone, for example, “This group of people, I don’t know how to introduce

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\(^8^3\) This is my translation of Zhang’s words, “泯削了小說裡的情結、動作、對話和角色”. From Zhang Dachun, “On Old Souls: Wrestling with Time in Zhu Tianxin’s Fiction” 一則老靈魂——朱天心小說裡的時間角力, 131-132.


or even to address them” (in “Chronicle of a Death Foretold”),87 “You must have seen them […] They are so commonly seen, aren’t they? You […] are surprised how their existence has been taken for granted, but how indeed have you never noticed?” (in “Tale of the Kangaroo People”),88 or “Have we missed out a group, who hide themselves so well that we almost forgot about them?” (in “Romantic Matters”).89

By addressing the reader through the second-person narrative in an imperative teller mode, the narrator (“I”), instantly draws the reader’s attention. After all, the minority groups which Zhu exemplifies are not commonly recognised as social minorities (in terms of class, gender, etc.). This is suggested by the writer’s emphasis on the featurelessness and invisibility of these people in her introductions of them to readers. As Shu-li Chang suggests, the marginal people in Zhu’s stories “may not even be aware of their membership in a marginal group or agree with such labelling.”90 Their identification with marginalisation is “contingent”, as Chang indicates,91 because it is the postmodernity in Taiwan that suddenly makes them the misfits of society.

Secondly, the protagonists in Zhu’s essayistic stories are no longer individual cases as were the characters presented in her writings in the prior two phases, but tend to invite a categorisation of people in contemporary Taiwanese society. Unlike the characters in the conventional story-telling narrative, who often have names, the protagonists in these essayistic narratives by Zhu are not provided with specific names, and Zhu often refers to them by using the collective pronoun, “他/她們” (“they” in either male, female or neutral forms in Chinese), to refer to the subjects of her stories. To specify them, the writer adopts all kinds of group names, such “the Old Souls” (老靈魂) for the melancholiacs (in “Chronicle of a Death Foretold”), “the kangaroo people” (袋鼠族) for the women and children (in “Tale of the Kangaroo People”), and “the butterflies in the spring breeze” (春風蝴蝶) for closet lesbians (in “Romantic

87 “這群人們，我簡直不知該如何介紹、甚至如何稱呼他們。” From Zhu Tianxin, “Chronicle of a Death Foretold” 預知死亡紀事, in In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound 想我眷村的兄弟們 (Taipei: Rye Field 麥田, 1998), 133.
91 Ibid.
Matters’). Each of the characters loses their individuality and is presented in the form of “group or category” (族/類), which indicates that they are seen collectively as a social phenomenon, rather than as personalised characters. This corresponds to Huang Jinshou’s observation that Zhu’s characters conform to the “commodification logic” (商品化邏輯) in capitalistic Taipei that everything, including people, is seen as a collective form, like commodities. In that sense, the adoption of collective names in Zhu’s essayistic stories is a commentary on an increasingly commodified society. It shows a resistance towards the tendency to identity pigeon-holing in Taiwan where people are often categorised according to their political affiliations. This also reflects Zhu’s response to critics who tend to analyse her work with various theoretic approaches.

Besides, Zhu’s essayistic narratives show an increasing tendency to a “mimic-encyclopaedic” (偽百科全書式) narrative style, as it has been termed by several critics. It challenges conventional ideas of knowledge, which emphasise categorisation and origin(s). The narrators of the essayistic narratives seem to be experts in the knowledge of all disciplines. With references from philosophy, sociology, literature, and gender studies, the narrator imitates the tone of a scholar and examines the marginalised groups by using all kinds of special terms and theories.

In “Chronicle of a Death Foretold” (預知死亡紀事), in order to provide an explanation for the “Old Souls” (老靈魂, the melancholics) who seem to show great interest in the issue of death, the narrator adopts the spiritualism of various cultures and religions. Besides, the concept of “free death” in Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which suggests a positive attitude towards life and death, provides the narrator with an insight into the reason why the Old Souls are “strongly

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92 See Huang Jinshou, “From Gardens of Great Spectacle to Cafes: Reading/Writing Zhu Tianxin” Xu Danguo到咖啡館——閱讀/書寫朱天心, 246-247.
93 Mei Jialing acknowledges Zhu Tianxin’s erudition in Chinese and Western literatures, understanding of allusions from all cultures, and the up-to-date information of all kinds, which are incorporated into the texts by Zhu and, therefore, presents a “mimic-encyclopaedic” (偽百科全書式) narrative style in her writing. See Mei Jialing 梅家玲, “The Journey in Search of Memory” 記憶的追尋之旅, *China Times* 中國時報 (Taipei), June 12, 1997. The “mimic-encyclopaedic” narrative style, as David Der-wei Wang suggests, shows the peculiar way Zhu’s Old-Soul-like characters present their memories of the past. See David Der-wei Wang, “The Before and After Lives of the Old Souls: The Fiction of Zhu Tianxin” 老靈魂的前世今生——朱天心的小說, 17.
drawn to the idea that one may “voluntarily choose a time to die.” 96 In “Tale of the Kangaroo People” (袋鼠族物語), the daily lives of mothers and their little children are presented as if it were a sociologist’s or a zoologist’s observation in detail of human/animal behaviour. In “Romantic Matters” (春風蝴蝶之事), in a scholarly tone the male narrator complicates the commonly known heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual gender categorisation and theorises his observation on gender relationships with a more complex division. On top of the conventional categorisation, the narrator applies the binary concept of “the Apollonian and the Dionysian” from Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy. 97 Inspired by the contrasting characters of Apollo and Dionysus in Greek Mythology, Nietzsche uses “Apollonian” and “Dionysian” to symbolise the rational and the irrational parts of humanity, which are adopted by the narrator as a concept to distinguish spiritual relationships from physical ones.

The massive incorporation of references from all kinds of specialised knowledge makes Zhu’s work difficult for a popular readership. To obtain a full understanding of Zhu’s text, the reader is often required to do research on writers, works, theories, cultures and knowledge from various disciplines. As pointed out by Zhang Dachun, Zhu seems to suggest that she would take the risk of “breaking up” (決裂) with her readers who do not understand “the meanings of the particular allusions/references” (典故) adopted in her works. 98 It can be argued that Zhu is parodying the academic writings of those scholars who tend to pack their fields of knowledge with overwhelming numbers of difficult terms and references. On the other hand, this also challenges the way in which critics in Taiwan show a tendency to criticise Zhu’s writing with over-simplified interpretations. By adding complexity to the contents, Zhu forces the readers to read slowly and to discover the multiple meanings in her work, and such could be a suggestion of the way in which she conceptualises identity. The tendency to cite, quote and make allusions to other texts enriches the content and depth of Zhu’s writing and makes her text a kind of hyperlink to other texts. 99 It

96 “如此的被‘可以主動選擇死亡時刻’所強烈吸引”. From Zhu Tianxin, “Chronicle of a Death Foretold” 預知死亡紀事, 139.
99 See my discussion later on pp. 121-124.
shows an increasing intertextuality in her narratives, which develops into an even greater depth of complexity in the fourth phase of her writing.

The Continuum of Fiction and Autobiography

Auto biographical essays which can be fictional

The greatest amount of attention has so far been given by critics and scholars to the essayistic narratives of Zhu’s stories—which appear to be a hybrid genre between fiction and essay—while her essay writings, such as the articles collected in Afternoon Tea Chats (下午茶話題), Mengmeng Learns to Fly (學飛的盟盟) and A Novelist’s Journals on Politics (小說家的政治週記), are rarely discussed. As I will argue, in these essay writings Zhu encourages her readers to read biographically, while at the same time she emphasises the fictional features of the work. Whereas, Afternoon Tea Chats and Mengmeng Learns to Fly are likely to be considered by the popular readership as women’s reference books on family matters as well as windows through which the readers can peep into the personal life of the author, A Novelist’s Journals on Politics is often seen as a work through which Zhu directly expresses her political opinions. However, these seemingly autobiographical works show significant links with Zhu’s fictive stories.

The articles in Afternoon Tea Chats can be considered as a collection of voices of the silent female protagonists in Zhu’s male first-person narrative stories. In “When Your Husband is Addicted to Entertainment” (丈夫沈迷娛樂時),100 Zhu writes from the viewpoint of a wife whose husband is, like the male narrator in her fictional story, “My Friend Ariza”, obsessed by NBA games and all kinds of sport. In “I Love Supermarkets” (我愛超級市場),101 it is as if the female protagonist in “The Crane Wife”, who has a shopping obsession, finally speaks for herself and suggests that what appears to be a psychological obsession is actually common behaviour among Taiwanese housewives.

Mengmeng Learns to Fly is also not, as most people might have assumed, simply the writer’s recordings of her personal life with her daughter. As Zhu

indicates, she would like to eliminate her personal emotions towards Mengmeng as much as possible, to forget about her role as the protagonist’s mother, and to write from an observational perspective, like an anthropologist’s observation of people from a peculiar tribe.\textsuperscript{102} In \textit{Mengmeng Learns to Fly}, Zhu draws the reader closer to the daily life of the “mother and baby kangaroos”, as depicted in her “Tale of the Kangaroo People”. In the child’s seemingly out-of-place life in late-twentieth-century Taiwan, Mengmeng indulges herself in the acquisition of an encyclopaedic knowledge of archaeology, zoology and botany. Accompanied by colourful drawings by Zhu’s daughter, the writer presents the life of a child, who isolates herself from a fast-changing environment and pursues an ancient life style which has long since passed into oblivion. Hence, the desire to return to the good old past, a trait which often manifests itself in the protagonists of Zhu’s stories, also appears to be realised through the life of the child, Mengmeng.

Compared with \textit{Afternoon Tea Chats} and \textit{Mengmeng Learns to Fly}, \textit{A Novelist’s Journals on Politics} has attracted considerable attention from readers due to the currency of social and political issues in contemporary Taiwan as well as to the growing interest of critics in Zhu’s political identity. The writer admits that, like her active participation in politics, writing political commentaries is a method for her to directly express her thoughts regarding the politics of Taiwan,\textsuperscript{103} which is much easier and more instantaneous than expressing her political emotions through fictional constructions.\textsuperscript{104} However, the side effect of such political essays is that some readers tend to apply the opinions, as expressed in Zhu’s political commentaries, to the political stories in her fictional works, which then eventually become their criticisms of the writer’s political identity. In the Preface to Zhu’s \textit{A Novelist’s Journals on Politics}, Tang Nuo (唐諾) suggests that the readers should consider this collection as a “literary work” (文學書) like the stories of “the Old Souls” she created, although the fictional narrative form is not seen in her political commentaries.\textsuperscript{105} In other words, the narrator as a political commentator can be viewed as a fictional character,

\textsuperscript{102} See Zhu Tianxin, \textit{Mengmeng Learns to Fly} 學飛的盟盟 (Taipei: INK 印刻, 2003), 210.
\textsuperscript{103} See Zhu Tianxin, interview by Li Ruiteng, in Li Ruiteng, “Defending the Dignity of Literature — Interview with Zhu Tianxin” 始終維護文學的尊嚴—— 与朱天心对话, 184.
\textsuperscript{104} See my interview with Zhu Tianxin in Appendix I.
\textsuperscript{105} See “Memory, Hope and Living Well” 記憶, 希望並且好好活著, forward to \textit{A Novelist’s Journals on Politics} 小說家的政治週記, by Zhu Tianxin (Taipei: Unitas 聯合文學, 2001), 14. The book was originally published by China Times in 1994.
whose thoughts are filled with a second-generation Chinese émigré’s anxiety towards the politics of Taiwan.

With the addition of political cartoons by CoCo, Zhu presents the politically repressed environment of Taiwan and the confusion of being a second-generation Chinese émigré. In “The Age of Silence (噤聲的年代)”, Zhu suggests that the oppressive behaviour of politicians is analogous to rape:

No wonder our intellectuals, scholars and experts are no longer speaking. As soon as they realise that their statements which derive from their specialist knowledge and their conscience will be raped repeatedly by rude and brainless politicians, […] and that the only choice open to them is that between the two brothels of “mainstream” and “non-mainstream”, choosing to keep quiet is the best way to protect themselves from being politically raped again.

(難怪我們的知識份子、學者專家不再說話了，因為當發現自己出於專業和良知所做的論述，被粗魯無腦的政客們所再再輕易強暴 […]全天下別無分號只此主流、非主流二家窯子時，於是乎，除了選擇噤聲，實在沒有更好的讓自己免於失身的方法了。)106

pecial cartoon by CoCo for Zhu Tainxin’s “The Age of Silence”107

In CoCo’s illustration for this article by Zhu, the intellectuals, who take turns expressing their political views in front of the microphone, are examined by the politicians and then labelled as belonging to the “mainstream” (主流) or “non-mainstream” (非主流). The political cartoon vividly presents an anxiety about the tendency to political pigeon-holing in Taiwan, which often results in a sense of

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107 Ibid., 25.
displacement for those who are considered as “non-mainstream”, a concept that Zhu stresses in most of her works in the third phase. Such a cultural binary also corresponds to the labelling of Zhu’s work by many critics in Taiwan. Zhu reflects an anxiety towards the trend of political imposition in Taiwan through inquiring into the issue of identity, a theme which is largely investigated in her writing in the fourth phase.

Fictions which resemble autobiographies

Whereas the links with fictional works are often found in Zhu’s autobiographical essays, some of Zhu’s fictional works in the third phase present an explicit connection with Zhu’s biographical life, which often leads her readers to view these stories as being autobiographical; “Death in Venice” (威尼斯之死) is a good example of this. It is written from the perspective of a male narrator, a Taiwanese writer who created a short story titled “Death in Venice”—which is identical in many ways to Zhu’s “My Friend Ariza”.

The similarities between the two writers (Zhu Tianxin and the narrator), the intertextual relationship between the two stories (Zhu’s “My Friend Ariza” and the narrator’s “Death in Venice”), and the fact that Zhu is the writer of the story “Death in Venice”, could easily cause the reader to identify the narrator and Zhu Tianxin as being the same person. Besides, “My Friend Ariza” was completed in February 1992 and “Death in Venice” was written in July of the same year. Combined with the highly intertextual relationship between the two pieces of writing, “Death in Venice” could easily be read as a supplement to “My Friend Ariza”. It seems that the first story is from the perspective of the protagonist, while the latter is from the viewpoint of the writer, both relating to the same work. In that sense, presumably, through “Death in Venice” Zhu presents her role as the writer (of “My Friend Ariza”), in order to provide the reader with a better understanding of her story as well as of her creative process.

However, it would still be arbitrary to consider “Death in Venice” as being a work of autobiography. There seems to be another ambiguity behind the narrative of

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“Death in Venice”, which tends to invite the reader into the seemingly autobiographical atmosphere of a story while simultaneously revealing flaws in the fictional reality which are contradictory to the real life of the writer. The differences between the two stories—such as the dissimilarities in terms of the writers’ gender, the titles of the stories, the names of the characters and the locations of the protagonists’ journeys in Europe—defy any sense of reality in the story.

The sense of ambiguity in the narrative authority of the story challenges the habit of those readers and critics who are prone to reading Zhu’s work biographically. Such readers who tend to look for the identity of the writer in her writing—especially those who often pigeonhole Zhu’s identity according to what she writes—would be confused by, and disappointed with, the inconsistency between fiction and reality which are mingled together in this work. Whereas the reader may try to figure out whether “Death in Venice” is a fictional or an autobiographical work, the textual practice of the writer is often ignored. As the narrator points out:

I must unambiguously state that I have no desire to mock conscientious readers or critics of fiction, but I feel obliged to point out that the coming together of what a reader believes is a well-knit or self-ordained structure is in fact completely open, unknowable, infinitely variable, and filled with risk; most of the time, it cannot follow that person’s (the author’s) will.

The writing process of the male ‘author’ is constantly affected by all kinds of contingencies of writing, such as a sudden thought of his good old friend or his own involuntary emotion towards the protagonists. Even the environment where the writing is conducted is crucial to the development of his story. As the narrator defines the style of his own writing, “a coffee shop atmosphere dictated the style of each story”, and the writing is considered as an “experiment” which is full of various possible outcomes.

Whereas a reader may take Zhu’s story so seriously that he or she hunts for any autobiographical reality in the writer’s life through the details presented in the work, it

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111 Ibid., 64. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 20.
is suggested through the voice of the narrator that the reality a reader looks for may be a ridiculous coincidence which has occurred in the writing process. For example, the reason(s) for entitling the story, “Death in Venice”, which—as the narrator suggests, and which may have disappointed some readers, has nothing to do with Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*.

Just as the real Venice is merely the city through which the narrator “had spent all of one day tramping” (一日之内践踏威尼斯), Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* is not taken seriously in Zhu’s story, either. As the narrator states at the beginning of the story, “Hey—don’t worry, nobody dies and nothing happens. No Thomas Mann, no Visconti, not even a formal link to the real Venice.” It turns out that the title of the story is taken from the “Venice coffee shop” where the story was written (by the narrator), and the word “Death” is simply a reference to the narrator’s reaction towards a sudden change in the coffee house (an unexpected change of waiter and menu) with regard to the completion of his story, which is also taken as the narrator’s decision on the fate of his male protagonist A (and thus links to the fate of Zhu’s protagonist, Ariza), who committed suicide at the end.

Besides, the narrator’s statements, which frequently emphasise the powerlessness of a writer over his own writing and the denial of a relationship between his work and the source text he adopts, also make the title of the story, “Death in Venice”, ambiguous. The seemingly unintentional construction of narrative by the writer, through adopting the title of Mann’s famous work in the first place and then denying it totally, actually makes the writing look more purposeful. What is shown in such statements by the narrator is a desire to avoid the reader’s intent and expectation of obtaining a fixed textual meaning, which is analogous to the hope for escape from a fixed identity which has been imposed by others.

Contrary to the way in which the narrator emphasises the uncontrollable accidents in a writing process, the narrative of “Death in Venice” shows sophisticated construction by Zhu Tianxin. Especially, her choice of a male first-person voice for such a story, which can easily be interpreted as an autobiographical work of the writer,

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112 Ibid., 65. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 21, adapted. The word in italics is my emphasis.

113 It is from Goldblatt’s translation of Zhu’s text in Chinese, “嘿——別緊張，沒有任何人死，沒有任何事發生。也沒有湯瑪斯曼，沒有維斯康堤，甚至與真正的威尼斯也並無關係。” Ibid., 47. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 1.

114 Ibid., 63. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 19.

115 Ibid., 69-70.
reveals an intentional construction of narrative voice. On the one hand, by presenting the narrator as a man, Zhu is able to escape from the troubles with the biographical reading of her work by readers and critics. On the other hand, it is an indication which suggests Zhu’s purposeful construction of gendered voice in this story, which also reveals the intentional adoption of male narrators in other stories by Zhu, in all of which a male first-person voice is used for a specific purpose.\(^{116}\) The inconsistency and different purposes between the gender identity of the narrator and that of the writer makes a biographical reading of Zhu’s story somewhat problematic. Like the way in which a drag performs the gender identity in Butler’s theory, the male narrator of “Death in Venice” also performs his role as the author, which is often confused by readers with Zhu Tianxin herself. Hence, through confounding the gender of the narrator, Zhu also confounds the narrative authority of her work, placing it midway along the continuum between fictional and autobiographical writing.

As well as emphasising the unpredictability of a writer’s creative process, the meanings surrounding the name, “Death in Venice”, also suggest that the meaning of a work is multiplied in each writing and reading process. Therefore, through confounding the boundary between the real and the fictional worlds in the story, creating ambiguities in the narratives, and articulating multiplicity in meaning, Zhu implies the complexity of personal identity, which is full of uncertainty and often changes according to his/her environment and situation.

**Intertextuality**

Zhu tends to explore ways to create multiple meanings for her texts; one of the features which have become more and more important in the later phases of her writing is intertextuality. Starting from the third phase, the Chinese and foreign texts adopted in Zhu’s writing become increasingly crucial to her narratives. On the one hand, there are stories which show a superficial intertextual relationship with Western novels, such as “Death in Venice” and “Breakfast at Tiffany’s”. In these works there are hardly any direct associations with the original texts except for the titles. Through her writing Zhu presents an ironic connection to the idea of intertextuality, drawing attention to the way in which critics tend to focus on the intertextual structure in her work. On the other hand, there are stories which are highly intertextualised in

\(^{116}\) See my discussion on the male first-person narrative of “Passage of Things Past” and “The Crane Wife” in Chapter Two, and also “My Friend Ariza” and “Hungarian Water” earlier in this chapter.
narrative, showing that the meaning of words is “contextual”, as V. N. Vološinov and Kristeva suggest;\textsuperscript{117} “Tale of the Kangaroo People” presents a good example of this.

In “Tale of the Kangaroo People”, Zhu shows a feminist revision of the Classical Chinese poem, “Song of Beauty (佳人歌)” by the Han Dynasty male musician Li Yannain (李延年, ~82 BC). With Zhu’s strategic narrative arrangement, the patriarchal poem by Li provides an insight into the marginal lives of married women in contemporary Taiwanese society. As Moi points out, in order to produce “interesting results” from a (patriarchal) text, a writer may “take the whole of the utterance (the whole text) as one’s object” to examine “its ideological, political and psychoanalytical articulations, its relations with society, with the psyche and—not least—with other texts.”\textsuperscript{118}

The verses by Li are divided into segments and are used as the headings for the sections of the narrative. Each of the headings is presented as Zhu’s modern interpretation of Li’s classic verse, which is used as a theme and is followed by a section describing the life of the protagonist, “the female kangaroo”. The headings and the structure of the story are presented as the following:

Once upon a time, no, not long ago, there was a female kangaroo (In the North there’s a lady…)
\{從前從前, 哦不, 並不很久以前, 有個袋鼠族（北方有佳人……）\}\textsuperscript{119}

The section under this heading describes the change of the protagonist’s appearance, behaviour and her relationship with her partner after getting married. She is changed from a beautiful woman into a housewife who gradually loses her confidence and individuality. Whereas in Li’s poem the protagonist is presented as a beautiful woman, in Zhu’s story, the female protagonist has lost her humanity and becomes an animal.

She did not have a life (stunning and singular…)
\{她沒有生活（遺世而獨立……）\}\textsuperscript{120}

The passage following this heading portrays how the protagonist has been ignored by her husband and how she tends to sacrifice her own life for the family. The “stunning and singular” characteristic, which was considered as her mysterious

\textsuperscript{117} Toril Moi, \textit{Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory}, 157.
\textsuperscript{118} Toril Moi, \textit{Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory}, 155-156.
\textsuperscript{119} From Zhu Tianxin, “Tale of the Kangaroo People” 袋鼠族物語, 167. The verses in English are my translation of Zhu’s text, while the parts in italics are adapted from the translation of Li Yannian’s “Song of Beauty” (佳人歌), http://xahlee.org/music/melbi_ninmu_berti.html (accessed June 8, 2011).
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 170.
beauty in the Chinese classical context, is now interpreted as her marginalised situation in modern society.

She did not have any friends (Her first smile destroyed a city; her second smile dooms an empire…)

{她沒有朋友（一笑傾人城，再笑傾人國……）}\(^{121}\)

The narrative under this heading illustrates how the protagonist gradually loses her social connections and finds herself alienated by her friends who are still single or childless and who cannot understand what kind of life she has. What Zhu reveals in the heading is the different conceptualisations of alienation for women in different historical contexts. While alienation was perceived as a quality for the outstanding beauty of a woman in the classic Chinese female stereotypes — a beautiful woman often caused chaos in the environment, which made people hate her —, in the modern context, alienation means tragedy in a woman’s life.

Therefore, she wanted to die (Rather not wishing to know, the ruination that may follow…)

{於是，她想死（寧不知傾國與傾城……）}\(^{122}\)

This part of the narrative tells how the protagonist is disappointed with her married life and often thinks about death. In the Chinese verse, the woman’s innocence and ignorance towards her alienated state was presented with a sense of romanticism, while in Zhu’s interpretation, a woman’s out-of-place-ness in her married life becomes the motivation for her death.

Then, she died (Rare beauty is here and now…)

{她，就死了（佳人難再得……）}\(^{123}\)

For the reference to the final heading, Zhu displays a collection of news items about married women who committed suicide or those who took their own lives with those of their young children, while their husbands claimed that they had never noticed any problems in their marriages. Zhu’s reading of the classic poem shows a radical feminist revision which challenges the patriarchal clichéd image of a woman in Li’s verses. Accordingly, what the reader perceives from the juxtapositions of Li’s poem with Zhu’s revision is no longer the beauty of a woman (as praised by men), but how a woman’s sense of self is taken away by patriarchal society in the name of marriage, family and children. Zhu presents a parody of the classical poem by a man, which shows both sexual and textual resistance to Chinese patriarchy. The feminist view in this story also corresponds to some stories in the second phase of Zhu’s

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 176. The original sentence in Li Yannian’s poem was, “Her first glance destroyed a city; her second glance dooms an empire” (一顧傾人城，再顧傾人國).

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 181.

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 183.
writing which had feminist implications, such as, “Passage of Things Past” and “The Crane Wife”.¹²⁴

Thus, in her intertextual construction of narrative in the third phase, Zhu engages with the adopted texts with an increased intent and sophistication, reflecting a desire to obtain multiple meanings through the inter-textual relationships of texts. It can be argued that the presentation of multiple meanings in Zhu’s texts also suggests a resistance to the frequent habit of type-casting by critics when reviewing her work. The multiplicity and complexity of identity will be a theme substantially explored when considering the fourth phase of her writing.

Zhu’s writing in the third phase shows the creative exploitation of marginality in political, sexual, collective and personal contexts. Whereas there is a tendency among critics in Taiwan to pigeonhole Zhu, her work reflects the writer’s increasing self-awareness as well as the desire to disrupt readerly expectations, creating ambiguity in a more and more complex way. Through her strategic narrative constructions, she overturns marginality with her textual subversions. The writer presents ambiguity in all aspects through her textual practice. The indefinite and inclusive narrative forms she adopts, such as the use of a second-person (in voice), “doubling effects” (in character and image), the “essayistic narrative” and hybrid genres (in genre and textuality), continue in the fourth phase. They open up all kinds of possibilities to the meaning of her work, which add more complexity to her writing. Through the increasing sense of uncertainty in her work, Zhu suggests the confusion and complexity of identity, which presents resistance to the fixed identity with which she is often labelled.

¹²⁴ See my discussion of “Passage of Things Past” and “The Crane Wife” in Chapter Two.
Chapter Four

Articulating Hybridity and Multiplicity

Nowadays, others succeed in giving voice to their repressed traditions, initiating a genuine dialogue with the dominant discourses they hope to transform, thus ultimately favouring exchange rather than provoking conflict.

 [...] We have to articulate new visions of ourselves, new concepts that allow us to think otherwise, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground and the very condition of possibilities of thought, of “clarity,” in all of Western philosophy. Métissage is such a concept and a practice: it is the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages.

~ Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices* ¹

These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

~ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* ²

The writings of Zhu Tianxin in what I identify as the fourth phase of her writing career (since 1995) focus on the reconfiguration of political, cultural or ethnic identity, especially the negotiation between personal and collective identities. Her novella “The Old Capital” (古都, 1996), in particular, has received more attention than any other of her works that have been studied to date. A reason for this may be that, through her writing in the fourth phase, Zhu had begun to offer more explicit criticism of social and political phenomena in Taiwan. After 1995, at a time when Taiwanese nativism dominated political discourse and when conflict between Taiwanese native and Chinese émigré communities increased, studies on Zhu Tianxin tended to focus on political and cultural identity as presented in her works.³

Critics have provided insightful observations on Zhu’s writing in this phase, especially those who do not reside in Taiwan or who are themselves immigrants in Taiwan.⁴ David Der-Wei Wang points out the innovative construction of the narrative of Zhu’s “The Old Capital”, in which the writer manifests the history of

4 For instance, David Der-Wei Wang and Lingchei Letty Chen base in the U.S. Huang Jinshu, on the other hand, is a Malaysian-Chinese immigrant in Taiwan.
Taiwan through the exploration of geographical space. Huang Jinshu examines the narrative of *The Wanderer* (漫遊者, 2000) and suggests that Zhu shows a tendency to recall the past and the dead through the geographical journeys of her protagonist. Lingchei Letty Chen investigates the intertextuality between Zhu’s novella, “The Old Capital”, and Yasunari Kawabata’s novel, *The Old Capital* (1962), suggesting the writer’s reconstruction of her Chinese émigré identity through the articulation of a “coherence” between the Japanese colonial past and the Taiwanese postmodern present. Despite their insightful observations, there is a prevailing tendency among critics to consider Zhu’s works to be somewhat directly autobiographical, and this inevitably limits the understanding of the potential complexity of her writing.

As I will argue, Zhu manifests the notions of *hybridity* and *multiplicity* through her *textual practice*, which reflects a desire for *inclusiveness* in the writer’s conceptualisation of identity. Her reconfiguration of identity through strategic narrative construction evokes Françoise Lionnet’s concept of “métissage”, or “braiding” of diverse cultures through narrative, which challenges binary concepts by embracing the senses of “hybridity” and “multiplicity”. As Lionnet observes, “métissage” often occurs in postcolonial autobiographical writings, especially those of repressed women, whose works show re-appropriations of personal and collective experiences, in order to create a dialogue with the dominant discourse which alienates them. The increasing hybridity in Zhu’s writing and identity conceptualisation is also informed by Bhabha’s observation on people who are “in-between” cultures. As Bhabha points out, “The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.”

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8 Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-portraiture*, 4.

9 Ibid., 9-18. The key words, “hybridity” and “multiplicity” constantly occur in Lionnet’s discussion on the conceptualisation of “métissage”.

10 Ibid., 5 and 5.

negotiate between or among political polarities or cultural differences is reflected in the hybrid features of Zhu’s texts.

Lionnet’s radical idea of “métissage” in autobiographical writing and Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity” provide valuable insights into the reading of Zhu’s works, which belong to a hybrid genre in the continuum of fiction and autobiography. Although Lionnet’s study focuses on works by colonised people, the characteristics of “métissage” are applicable to the analysis of writing by Zhu, who, ironically, has been constructed by critics as a follower of the GMD (the former colonisers in Taiwan). It can be argued that in the political context of Taiwan after 1995, where Taiwanese nativism—advocated by those who claimed themselves to be colonised and repressed by the GMD—has become a new hegemonic discourse, writers like Zhu are paradoxically in the “submerged and repressed” position.

Zhu’s writing shows a potential resistance to the polarised political discourse of Taiwan through encouraging diversity and ambiguity of identity. As Lionnet states, “Variety and heterogeneity lead to richer and more fulfilling lives for all those who share a given environment; multiplicity flourishes when the shackles of homogeneity and rigidity are broken.” Additionally, in the literary context, “métissage” also denotes “a way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities”. These features are specifically presented in Zhu’s writing in the fourth phase, as will be examined in this chapter.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

**The Political Climate of Taiwan 1995-2008**

An increasing concern with ethnic issues began to occur in the socio-political environment of Taiwan in the mid-1990s. Identification with the local (Taiwanese nativist and aboriginal) cultures, was encouraged by the Li Denghui government, which resulted in the scrutinising of the identities of Chinese émigrés. Actions taken by Li showed his attempt to break the connection between Taiwan and China in cultural, historical, political and ideological terms and this helped to legitimise his status as a native Taiwanese president. These actions were also adopted for the

12 Ibid., 5.
13 Ibid., 17-18.
purpose of distracting the attention of the Taiwanese people from the problems within Li’s government, such as the cooperation of government officials with “the black channel” (Mafia, 黑道) and “black money” (illegal money, 黑金), corruption and serious crime.15

Li promoted the image of Taiwan as an independent country. On 6 June 1995 he visited his alma mater, Cornell University in the U.S., and gave a speech, which drew worldwide attention to Taiwan, including attention from the Chinese government. Li may have successfully improved Taiwan’s international relations,16 but his actions also increased tensions in the cross-strait relationship with China.17

In August 1994 Chinese émigré writer, Zheng Langping (鄭浪平), published the book *T Day: The Warning of Taiwan Strait War* [sic] (一九九五閏八月: 中共武力犯 臺世紀大預言) in which he predicted China’s military invasion of Taiwan.18 Although, as suggested by Wei Yong (魏鏞), this is “a book of prediction, allegory, and fiction in an omniscient perspective”,19 most readers tended to dismiss the fictional creativity of the book and consider it as a prophecy of a war between China

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16 Prior to his trip to the U.S., since 1993, Li had started advocating for Taiwan’s return to the U.N. and in 1994 and 1995 he had been actively visiting and building international relationships with the south-east Asian countries (the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand), the Latin-American countries (Nicaragua and Costa Rica), South Africa, and the Middle-East (the United Arab Emirates and Jordan). See Xu Zongmao, *Twentieth-Century Taiwan: The Democracy* 二十世紀臺灣: 民主篇, 189-192.
17 Ibid.
18 See Zheng Langping 鄭浪平, *T Day: The Warning of Taiwan Strait War* [sic] 一九九五閏八月: 中共武力犯 臺世紀大預言 (Taipei: Shangzhou wenhua 商周文化, 1994). In *T Day*, Zheng bases his prediction on a series of detailed analyses of the latest military deployment and political situation of China, his observation on the politics of China in history, as well as all kinds of religious and mystic prophecies on China’s invasion of Taiwan in 1995. Zheng defines “T Day” as “Taiwan’s fall day” [sic] (p. 31). According to the writer, Chinese history shows that dramatic disasters happened in each intercalary August in the Chinese lunar calendar and the most likely time for the T Day is in the intercalary August of 1995 (p. 317-318). Despite the writer’s emphasis on the neutrality of his political view, his GMD political tendency is obvious. In *T Day* he criticises not only the Chinese Communist government’s longing for control of Taiwan, but also the Taiwanese president Li Denghui for annoying the Chinese government with his anti-Chinese speeches during his overseas trips. In Zheng’s view, the Taiwanese nativist’s advocating the independence of Taiwan may accelerate the occurrence of a Taiwan Strait War, but most Taiwanese people’s expectation of keeping the current ambiguous political status is also unrealistic. Although the writer keeps stressing that it was not his expectation for this book to cause any social commotions in Taiwan, it ironically caused a great deal of anxiety concerning the Chinese invasion he predicted.
and Taiwan. Zheng’s book indeed caused a “collective social anxiety” (社會集體焦慮) in Taiwan especially after Li Denghui’s visit to Cornell University. China actually started a series of military operations in the Taiwan Strait area from July 1995 to March 1996, which made Zheng’s prediction seem real. Just in case the war happened, many Taiwanese people started applying for overseas immigration to any available country, and this became another social phenomenon in Taiwan in the late 1990s. Some people insisted that they would fight China to protect the sovereignty of Taiwan. There were still many others like Zhu Tianxin herself, who could not, and did not, want to leave Taiwan.

Although, in fact, China did not invade Taiwan as Zheng had predicted, the tension between China and Taiwan eventually allowed Li Denghui to win the 1996 presidential election. In the belief that, in the event of a cross-strait war, Taiwan would gain support from foreign countries and, in particular, from the U.S. Li spoke loudly and confidently about the sovereignty of Taiwan regardless of whether his words infuriated China or caused a commotion in Taiwan. In 1999, Li even openly stated that Taiwan and China were in a nation-to-nation relationship, which was his well-known “two nations” statement (兩國論). In fact, later in the period 2000-2008, it was on the basis of Li’s statement that the DPP government, led by Chen Shuibian, developed their idea of Taiwan’s independence.

Li also began to manipulate the issue of ethnicity (族群) for political purposes. In an interview with Ryōtarō Shiba in 1994, Li stated that he considered the GMD to be an “external political force” (外來政權) which had colonised Taiwan and that Taiwan should be governed by Taiwanese nativists. The statement was interpreted

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20 Over 200,000 copies of *T Day* were sold in six months and the issue of China’s possible invasion was widely discussed. See Xu Zongmao, *Twentieth-Century Taiwan: The Democracy* 二十世紀臺灣:民主篇, 195.
21 Ibid., 193.
22 Ibid., 195-196.
23 Ibid.
24 This was the first direct election of a Taiwanese president. By winning this election, Li gained solid political power in Taiwan.
26 Chen Shuibian (陳水扁) is a Taiwanese nativist politician, who was the Taipei City mayor from 1994 to 1998 and the President of Taiwan from 2000 to 2008. After the GMD returned to political power in 2008, Chen began to be faced with allegations of corruption and is currently in prison.
27 See Xu Zongmao 徐宗懋, *Twentieth-Century Taiwan: The Democracy* 二十世紀臺灣:民主篇, 197. The interview with Li Denghui by Shiba was entitled “場所の苦しみ”, was translated into Chinese as...
by some fundamentalists of Taiwanese nativism as viewing Chinese émigrés to be equivalent to the GMD colonisers.

Some Taiwanese nativists also took certain actions for the purpose of erasing memories of China and the GMD. The new mayor of Taipei City, Chen Shuibian, embarked on a campaign of renaming or demolishing historical monuments in Taipei in order to respond to the Taiwanese natiivist agenda of “de-Sinicisation” (去中國化).²⁸ For instance, in 1996 two prominent locations in the Zhongzheng District (中正區, the central district of Taipei, which had been named after Chiang Kai-shek) were renamed. Taipei New Park (臺北新公園) was renamed as “February 28th Peace Memorial Park” (二二八和平紀念公園) and the main road to the President’s Building, Jieshou Road (介壽路, “Jieshou” means long live Chiang Kai-shek) was renamed “Ketagalan Boulevard (凱達格蘭大道, ‘Ketagalan’ was the name of Taiwanese aborigines who had resided in Taipei).”²⁹ The campaign of “de-Sinicisation” was more thoroughly and widely carried out during Chen’s eight-year Presidency in 2000-2008.

Zhu’s Literary Production 1995-2008

The heightened tension in cross-strait relations and government activities aimed at the removal of the GMD discourse from Taiwan had a great impact on Zhu. She was anxious about the way in which the politicians pursued their political agendas without taking account of the possibility that they would be sacrificing the lives of ordinary people, and she constantly felt that the city she had been familiar with had been destroyed overnight and had been transformed into something she no longer recognised.³⁰ Therefore, starting from the fourth phase Zhu focused on the theme of

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²⁹ On 28 February 1996, the Taipei New Park was renamed as “228 Peace Memorial Park”, and on 13 March Jieshou Road was renamed as “Ketagalan Boulevard”. Information from the historical timeline of Taiwan in Xu Zongmao 徐宗懋, Twentieth-Century Taiwan: The Democracy 二十世紀臺灣: 民主篇, 316. These two locations were close to the high school Zhu had attended and were important in her memories of Taipei, which were also frequently depicted in Zhu’s The Ploughman’s Song.
memory, restoration and construction of memory and, representation of the past. As well as memory, identity gradually became a central theme in Zhu’s writing, especially in regard to the conflict between personal and collective identities. In response to the political climate, Zhu advocated “the freedom of not identifying” (不認同的自由),\(^{31}\) which suggested that each individual might or might not choose to identify with a place and that his/her view should still be respected by others. In Zhu’s view, not identifying with this place does not mean that the person has no love towards it. Through the question of whether those who do not identify could also be accepted to live in that place, which was often posed in her writing in the fourth phase,\(^{32}\) Zhu attempted to provide a broader and more inclusive sense of identity for contemporary Taiwanese society where the issue of identity had become over-emphasised and polarised.\(^{33}\)

In 1997 Rye Field published Zhu Tianxin’s most criticised and disputed work *The Old Capital* (古都). Five short stories, completed by Zhu between 1992 and 1996 and all relating to memory and identity in different aspects, were collected in this book. Whereas the first four stories (“Death in Venice”, “Man of La Mancha”, “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” and “Hungarian Water”) perpetuated Zhu’s narrative features of the third phase,\(^{34}\) the final story in this anthology, a novella entitled “The Old Capital (古都)”, completed in December 1996, showed the beginning of what I identify as Zhu’s fourth phase. The title was adopted from the Japanese novelist Yasunari Kawabata’s Nobel Prize-winning novel *The Old Capital* (aka. *Koto*, 古都, 1962). Presented in a second-person narrative, “you” (你)—a self-reflexive character to the narrator—, the story represents a Taiwanese woman’s solo journey to the old Japanese capital, Kyoto, where she feels more at home than in the rapidly changing

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\(^{32}\) It can be found in works, such as “The Old Capital” (古都) and “I Do Not Love Taiwan” (我不愛台灣).


\(^{34}\) See my discussion of these four stories in Chapter Three.
and Westernised Taiwanese capital, Taibei, where she had lived most of her life. During this period of time in Taiwan when identity tended to be polarised and when one could easily be labelled or classified as having a particular identity because of one’s words or actions, such an identity-focused work as Zhu’s “The Old Capital” became highly debated. The protagonist’s identification with Japan, which had been the enemy of the GMD as well as the coloniser of Taiwan, was a disputed issue raised by some critics.\(^{35}\) Therefore, Zhu’s political and cultural identity was frequently brought into question by both readers and critics.

In 1998, Zhu Tianxin faced the death of her own father, Zhu Xining; his death, as Hao Yuxiang (郝譽翔) suggests, represented the loss of all father figures and their accompanying symbols in her life.\(^{36}\) Zhu suddenly felt a total loss of direction,\(^{37}\) which was reflected in the themes and narratives of her writing. In 2000 Unitas (聯合文學) published *The Wanderer* (漫遊者), a collection of short stories which Zhu had already published in newspapers and magazines from 1997 to 2000. The short stories collected in *The Wanderer* are written in a similar narrative style to “The Old Capital” and, therefore, can be seen as a sequel to it. Like the narrative in “The Old Capital” they are all in second-person narratives, except for the last piece, which is an essay in first-person narrative as a memorial to her father. In these stories the protagonist embarks on journeys to Europe, Africa, Australia and New Zealand, where she looks for a resting place for the dead (her father) as well as the sense of familiarity toward the home in Taiwan that she had before.

Despite the reduction in number of Zhu’s published works after 2000, her participation in political activities has not lessened. The political trend in Taiwan since 2000 has involved the gradual polarisation of two groups — the Pan-Greens (泛綠, consisting of supporters of the DPP and other smaller nativist Taiwanese parties) and the Pan-Blues (泛藍, who are mainly the supporters of the old GMD and other

\(^{35}\) Zhu mentioned in a panel discussion that her presentation of an identity with the Japanese culture in “The Old Capital” was criticised by many people, such as critic Huang Jinshu (黃錦樹). See Liao Chaoyang 廖朝陽, Chen Guangxing 陳光興, Zhu Tianxin 朱天心, Song Zelai 宋澤萊, Qiu Guifen 邱貴芬, and Zheng Hongsheng 鄭鴻生, “Why Is It Not/Possible for a Great Reconciliation? — Disasters of and Hopes in Relation to the Ethnic Issue” 為什麼大和解不/可能——省籍問題中的災難與希望.


smaller parties derived from the GMD and the Chinese émigrés). However, there are still a large number of Taiwanese people who have chosen not to take sides and who have been frustrated with the way in which the two political groups in Taiwan have tried to manipulate differences and to cause conflict among ethnic groups. In January 2004, almost four years after the DPP took over political power in Taiwan and only four months before the next presidential election, the Zhu sisters, along with seventy well-known people from the art and literary fields in Taiwan, such as the film director Ho Xiaoxian (侯孝賢), writer Bo Yang (柏楊) and artist/dancer Lin Huaimin (林懷民), established “the Alliance for Ethnic Equality” (族群平等行動聯盟) in order to monitor and show resistance to any statements or actions which attempt to present “discrimination, manipulation or segregation among ethnic groups”. On 19 March 2004, the day before the presidential election, Chen Shuibian and his vice-president Lu Xiulian (呂秀蓮), who had anticipated the renewal of their current positions, were mysteriously shot in Tainan during the election campaign. This resulted in Chen’s narrow election victory over the other candidate and riots led by Pan-Blue fronts. Zhu, who was the spokesperson for “the Alliance for Ethnic Equality”, published a newspaper article. “I Do Not Love Taiwan” (我不愛臺灣), which expressed her view on social injustice, loss of human rights, and the worsening political, economic, cultural and natural environment of Taiwan due to the corruption of the DPP government.

Although Zhu has not published many works since 2000, she continues to express her social and political views through writing. In 2005 INK published The Hunters (獵人們), which presents the lives of some stray cats in Taipei city. Zhu calls them “the hunters” and has attempted to write a history of this subordinate species which lives in the same city as she does. Through her depiction of the stray cats’ lives, Zhu implies the issues of identity and belonging. She seems to suggest


that her life is similar to these little hunters on the streets, who do not show as much identification with the place as people expect, but who are desperate to find a home in the place they are too scared to call “home” because the locals would tell them to go somewhere else. \(^{41}\) In September 2006 Zhu published her short story, “A Glance at the Southern Capital” (南都一望), in *INK Literary Monthly* magazine.\(^ {42}\) Here Zhu attempts to start a conversation with the Taiwanese nativists and the nativist-dominated Taiwanese government. She questions the movement of nativism in Taiwan and raises the question of cultural identity. She hopes that the locals will make Taiwan a more accommodating and inclusive place for people from all kinds of cultural backgrounds, so that many people, including the writer herself, could also feel at “home”.

**Since 2008**

After eight years of DPP rule, on 22 January 2008, the GMD won three quarters of the seats in the parliament of Taiwan. Two months later in the presidential election, on 22 March 2008, the GMD candidate Ma Yingjiu (馬英九), a Hong Kong-born second-generation Chinese émigré to Taiwan, won 58.45% of the vote and became the new president.\(^ {43}\) The result showed that people who voted for him came from across all cultural and political backgrounds,\(^ {44}\) which suggests that the manipulation of the issues of Taiwanese identity and Taiwanese nativism is becoming less and less relevant for the people.

The GMD has once again become the political mainstream, while the DPP has returned to its previous state as a political opposition. Whereas many Taiwanese people are excited about the election result and looking forward to positive changes in the political, economic, social and cultural environment of Taiwan, some people feel worried that Taiwan will return to the situation which prevailed when the GMD was

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previously in power. In an interview after the election, Zhu expressed a positive view towards the new GMD government and their self-examination regarding the issues, such as “the February 28th Incident” and “White Terror”, which the Taiwanese nativists often used in order to create contradiction and conflict among ethnic groups. She looked forward to a more harmonious relationship among people in Taiwan. However, she also pointed out that the new GMD government should make Taiwan a home not simply for Taiwanese people but also for the “neo-immigrants” (新住民), the brides from China and south-east Asian countries. As she suggested, speaking up about any social injustice is the way to resolve the ethnic issues in Taiwan.46

Readers were, therefore, interested in the way in which Zhu would write about the political environment of Taiwan from then on. To the surprise of most people, instead of greater engagement with political themes, Zhu has returned to writing stories about personal love relationships—which is, according to the writer, “a return to the basics before her next literary departure.” In September 2008 Zhu published two chapters of her proposed new book, Love in Early Summer When the Lotus Blooms (初夏荷花時期的愛情), depicting the love life of a middle-aged couple. The complete book was finally published by INK in January 2010. Packaged in the title which appears to be a romantic cliché, Zhu presents irony in all ways with respect to relationships, showing a parody of the teenage girl’s dreamy view about love in her early works. The story begins with a housewife’s discovery of a diary kept by her husband when he was a teenager, in which he recorded in detail his love and passion towards his girlfriend—his current wife (the female protagonist, “you”) when she was also in her teens. Through the protagonist’s reading of the diary, Zhu re-examines the couple’s married life and manifests all kinds of possible outcomes for their relationship. As this work shows, the writer emphasises uncertainty in all aspects, even in terms of the plot of the story.

46 Ibid.
47 See my interview with Zhu Tianxin in December 2008, included in the Appendix to this thesis.
49 See Zhu Tianxin, Love in Early Summer When the Lotus Blooms 初夏荷花時期的愛情 (Taipei: INK 印刻, 2010).
The politics of Taiwan are still in Zhu’s mind, but the writer suggests that she would like to wait until she thinks it is time to write about these issues. Now is a period for her to take a rest and build up her energy for the next political explosion in her writing.\(^{50}\) The political environment may change through time and no one is certain about the future of Taiwan, but one thing is for sure—the critical pen of Zhu Tianxin will never stop.

**LITERARY JOURNEY**

Whereas the socio-political discourse of Taiwan after 1995 tends to differentiate the Taiwanese nativist and Chinese émigré identities, Zhu shows an attempt to create a space for all cultures in Taiwan to meet, share and negotiate. In order to solve the cultural polarisation, through her writing she emphasises the senses of hybridity and multiplicity in narrative. Her works in the fourth phase show increasing complexity and ambiguity in terms of voice, genre, narrative time and textuality. The adoption of a second-person pronoun, the use of “essayistic narrative” (a hybrid genre) and the exploitation of intertextuality become the main features in her writing. They collapse the rigid categorisation of conventional narrative forms and, therefore, create many possibilities for the interpretation of Zhu’s work. Through the manifestation of inclusiveness and multi-referentiality in her narrative, Zhu suggests uncertainty, hybridity and multiplicity in the conceptualisation of identity. Such a tendency in her writing is also a reflection of an inclusive and flexible view of Taiwanese identity, which the writer manifests through her writing in order to seek reconciliation in the increasingly severe conflicts between ethnic groups in contemporary Taiwan.

**The Second Person: an indeterminate narrative identity**

The use of a second-person voice prevails among Zhu’s writing in this phase. The second-person narrative evolves from the “teller mode” (as presented in the third phase) to the “reflector mode”.\(^{51}\) A clear distinction between the narrator and the narratee in the second-person narrative is discarded. With the increasing emphasis on the self-reflexive feature of the second-person narrative, “you” (the protagonist) and “I” (the narrator) gradually merge. As a result, readers often consider the second person narrator-protagonist in Zhu’s stories to be the writer herself. Critics, such as

\(^{50}\) See my interview with Zhu Tianxin in December 2008, included in Appendix I.

\(^{51}\) See my discussion on the two modes of narrative in Stanzel’s theory in Chapter Three.
Luo Yijun (骆以军) and Hao Yuxiang, have replaced the second-person pronoun, “你” (you), with the first-person pronoun, “我” (I), in their analyses of Zhu’s works.52

Such prevalence in the reading of Zhu’s text also reflects the way that critics continue to read Zhu’s work biographically. They have often assumed that the “you” in Zhu’s writing has a similar background to the Zhu Tianxin they know. Thus, they interpret her work according to their understanding of her life. Critics have even based their arguments upon their impressions of “her highly problematic ethnic identity.”53 Although understanding the life and cultural background of Zhu is crucial for the reading of her work, the meaning of the text does not have to be viewed entirely in terms of the life of the author.

Critics tend to be dismissive of the fact that by using the second person in her narrative, Zhu creates a dialogue with her reader, suggesting that the story of “you” is not a personal case but a universal experience. In addition, through the second-person narrator-protagonist, Zhu’s narrative presents “postmodern aesthetics and politics concerning the unseating of the autonomous subject, the fostering of multiplicity, the interrogation and dissolution of certainty”, and the subversiveness of the second person as narrative scholars have discovered.54 The second-person texts of Zhu show the potential to break the boundaries in the categories of narrative voices and literary genres. Dennis Schofield names such a second person the “Protean ‘You’”, emphasising the “shape-shiftiness” in the nature of the narrator-protagonist and, therefore, the complexity of it.55 Hence, my study suggests that through the examination of the manifold quality in Zhu’s second person, a more productive view of her work in this phase will be gained.

It can be argued that the split of self is emphasised in the self-reflexive “you” of Zhu’s writing. As pointed out by Hilary Chung and Jacob Edmond, the self-reflexiveness of the second-person narrative “evoke[s] the classic modernist split where the [90x191]

55 See “Chapter Five: The Intersubjective You”, in Dennis Schofield, “The Second Person: A Point of View?.”
narrative voice addresses itself.” By splitting the first-person narrative voice into two parts (“you” and “I”), the narrative emphasises a dialogue between the subject character and him/herself, which involves frequent self-reflection, self-affirmation and self-interrogation.

The dual form of self is clearly presented in the narrator-protagonist, “you” (你), in “The Old Capital” and The Wanderer. As shown in the narratives of these works, the narrator (“I”) is in charge of “telling” and “recounting” the memories and events, while the protagonist (“you”) is responsible for “showing” and “enacting”. Such collaboration between the narrator and the protagonist (the split parts of the self) corresponds to a narratological interpretation of the Platonic concept of “diegesis” versus “mimesis”. As Gerald Prince defines them, the former denotes “telling” or “recounting”, while the latter means “showing” or “enacting”. Accordingly, the narrator (“I”) is the diegetic or “reported” voice “telling and describing […] what is in the character’s mind and emotions”, while the protagonist (“you”) is the “mimetic” action “showing […] what is going on in [the character’s] inner thoughts and emotions through […] external actions.”

In addition, as David Lodge observes, diegesis denotes the “authorial report, description, summary and commentary”, while mimesis indicates “the quoted direct speech of the characters.” The narratives of novels, as Lodge points out, often show

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57 The words in quotation marks are adopted from Gerald Prince’s definition of “diegesis” and “mimesis”. See Gerald Prince, A Dictionary of Narratology, revised edition (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 20 and 52.
59 See Gerald Prince, A Dictionary of Narratology, 20 and 52.
60 According to The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism, a “somewhat reductive, but still useful example” which distinguishes the Platonic concepts of “diegesis” and “mimesis” is “the difference in a play between the acting out of a particular scene (mimesis) and a character’s telling of other action (taking place off stage, or before the actions represented in the play) which the audience does not get to see but only to hear reported (diegesis).” From Joseph Childers and Gary Rentzi eds., The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 82.
61 From “Mimesis in Contrast to Diegesis” in http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/mimesis/mimesis-in-contrast-to-diegesis.html (accessed May 2, 2011): “Diegesis was thought of as telling, the author narrating action indirectly and describing what is in the character’s mind and emotions, while mimesis is seen in terms of showing what is going on in characters’ inner thoughts and emotions through his external actions.” (The words in italics are the website author’s emphasis.)
62 Ibid.
ways in which diegesis and mimesis are “mix[ed]”, “fus[ed]”, and “elaborately exploited”. The second-person narrative voice in Zhu’s “The Old Capital” presents the combination of diegesis and mimesis:

You had no idea when the incessant longing for faraway places, the desire to go on a long trip, to fly far and high, first came to you. In fact, you’d been off the island less than a month altogether, like an island savage or an ocean pirate. For many years you had actually found life bearable only by regularly imagining some part of the city, some section of a certain road, or some street scene as some other city, one you either had or had not visited. It was like so many men who, regardless of how they feel about their wives—good or bad—have to imagine them as another woman before they can perform in bed.

You never tried to deal with this feeling, nor did you dare mention it to anyone, especially since there were always people who wanted to know whether or not you loved this place, even wanted you to hurry up and leave if you didn’t.

“If you want to leave, leave. Go back to where you came from”—as if you all had a place just waiting for you to return to, a ready-made place to live, but you kept hanging around, to your shame.

Was there such a place?

The passage appears to be in a diegetic narrative mode which summarises the protagonist’s non-identification with place. In seemingly reported speech, as shown in the first paragraph, the narrator describes and comments on the protagonist’s longing for “elsewhere”. The self-reflexive characteristic of the second-person narrative makes the narrator’s statement a self-reflection or self-interrogation of the protagonist. On the one hand, the split of self in the narrative suggests the desire to keep a distance between the narrator and the subject character. On the other hand, in an emotive tone towards the protagonist’s displacement, the narrative also shows...
“internal focalisation”, through which the narrator speaks from the protagonist’s point of view. Hence, the voice of the protagonist begins to increasingly involve the reported speech of the narrator. Eventually, in the third paragraph, the narrator’s diegetic speech is replaced by the mimetic speech of the characters who complain, “If you want to leave, leave. Go back to where you came from”, which is a representation of the voice of the people who criticise the non-identification of the protagonist.

It is noteworthy that, unlike the way in which the statement is presented in Goldblatt’s English translation, in the Chinese text by Zhu, quotation marks are not used in the seemingly direct quote. The narrative, in a direct-quoted form as presented in Goldblatt’s translation, shows the “represented speech” of the characters. Zhu’s original text, however, shows a diegetic representation of the mimetic speech through “transposing direct or quoted speech into indirect or reported speech”. Through the change of perspectives by changing the style of speech, the account which was used as a criticism of the protagonist is turned into a condemnation of the people who made the statement.

The last sentence in this passage, “Was there such a place?” is presented in both mimetic and diegetic ways. On the one hand, it can be considered as “represented speech” in Bakhtin’s terminology, which shows the “interior monologue” of the protagonist, who asks the question of herself. On the other hand, it also corresponds to what Bakhtin terms the “direct speech of the author”. As a result, the function of the reported speech in this passage is “not only to represent speech, but to represent thoughts and feelings which are not actually uttered aloud”. Thereby, the second-person narrative in Zhu’s story shows “an intermingling of authorial speech and characters’ speech”, which is a “novelistic treatment […] of diegesis and

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66 See my adoption of the term, “internal focalisation”, in Chapter Three.
67 David Lodge, “Mimesis and Diegesis in Modern Fiction,” 28.
68 See Lodge’s presentation of Bakhtin’s “typology of literary discourse”, which consists of three main categories: 1.) “the direct speech of the author”, which “corresponds to Plato’s diegesis”; 2.) “represented speech”, which “includes Plato’s mimesis—i.e. the quoted direct speech of the characters; but also reported speech in the pictorial style.”; and 3.) “doubly-oriented speech”, which “refers to another speech act by another addresser.” Ibid., 33.
69 According to the definition by Gerald Prince, “interior monologue” is “the nonmediated presentation of a character’s thoughts and impressions or perceptions”. From Gerald Prince, A Dictionary of Narratology, 44.
70 See footnote #64.
71 David Lodge, “Mimesis and Diegesis in Modern Fiction,” 29.
72 Ibid.
mimesis”, as Lodge puts it. This also reflects the ambiguity of speech in the Chinese language. Whereas the distinction between reported speech (“diegesis”) and direct speech (“mimesis”) seems to be clear in European languages such as English, it is not the case in the Chinese language. One finds that a statement can refer to either direct or reported speech and one can move between the two modes. In addition, the sentence in Chinese, “有那樣一個地方嗎?” can be translated either as “Was there such a place?” or as “Is there such a place?” Unlike English, and many other languages, which emphasise tense, in Chinese time is indicated in terms of aspect, through the development of adverbial phrases and the development of the particle “了” (le).

As well as the dialogue between the split parts of the self within the text, the passage also creates an external dialogue with Zhu’s previous works. In the first paragraph of the passage, the narrator’s diegetic observation of the protagonist’s “incessant longing for faraway places” is presented like a dialogue between the currently middle-aged Zhu Tianxin and the teenage female protagonists in Zhu’s early works (such as “Xiaoxia” in The Ploughman’s Song). The second and the third paragraphs of the passage, which comment on the identity crisis of the subject character, present a dialogue with Zhu’s protagonists in the third phase. This is especially so for the female protagonist in “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound”, who finds herself resembling “the bat who is neither bird nor beast, a being with no identity”. In that case, the second person in the passage can be read to refer to the protagonists in Zhu’s early works.

In addition, among Zhu’s works, The Ploughman’s Song, “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound”, “The Old Capital” and The Wanderer, seem to be more personalised than others. To bring the seemingly personal or

73 Ibid.
74 It is Wu’s translation of Zhu’s words, “正如那只徘徊於鳥類獸類之間, 無可歸屬的蝙蝠。”
75 Zhu’s framing of The Ploughman’s Song as an autobiographical work has been discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. Besides, David Der-Wei Wang tends to emphasise the autobiographicality of the three works by Zhu Tianxin, “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound”, “The Old Capital” and The Wanderer, claiming them as “the three steps of the Old Soul” (老靈魂三部曲). See David Der-Wei Wang 王德威, “Throbbing of the Dead: Reading Zhu Tianxin’s The Wanderer” 顫動的線條 —— 評朱天心《漫遊者》, in After Heteroglossia 羣聲喧嘩以後 (Taipei: Rye Field 麥田, 1998), 95.
autobiographical characteristic of these works into consideration, there exists another form of dialogue, which is the one between Zhu Tianxin of the present and the writer herself of the past.

Moreover, to the readers who identify with the protagonist’s experience, the second person can also be read to refer to the reader. Also to be noted is that a non-gender-referential form of the second person pronoun, “你” (you), is adopted, which can be applied to the experiences of both male and female readers. Thereby, the second-person pronoun is multi-referential in Zhu’s text, which addresses the self-reflexive protagonist (“you”), the protagonists in Zhu’s earlier works, the reader, and the writer herself. It evokes the characteristics of Schofield’s “Protean ‘you’”, which “can defeat our wilful attempts to specify and identify […] a mode in which it is unclear whether the “you” is a character, the narrator, a reader/narrator, or no-one in particular—or a combination of these—so that its utterances are at once familiar and deeply strange, its engaged readers at one and the same time identifying with and repudiating a seeming direct, even intimate address.”

When it comes to the stories in The Wanderer, the second-person pronoun, “you (你)”, presents an additional reading. The relationship between “you (the protagonist)” and “I (the narrator)” is confounded further with an ambiguous male third-person pronoun, which, as suggested by Huang Jinshu, may also indicate the death or the ghost of Zhu’s late father. As Huang points out:

In the dual relationship between “you” and “I”, two pronouns that belong to the same category in the linguistic and semiotic system, the regularly used first-person is placed in the position where “I” (the temporary position which is taken by the writing subject or the reader in the writing process) look at “you”. At the beginning of the narrative, “you” is often interchangeable with “I”. However, as the writing proceeds, “you”, whom “I” observe, gradually becomes implicit, as if being joined by a shadow and having imperceptibly moved away from a position of interchangeability. “You”, who is no longer interchangeable with “I”, becomes interchangeable with another subject, “he (or it)”. A ghostly presence now inhabits that ambiguous subject pronoun.

作为同屬一語言符號功能範疇的我——你這一雙重體中，常用的第一人稱刻意被擺放到被我（書寫主體及閱讀者在書寫過程中主體暫留的位子）所注視的位置：你。常常，這個你在敘事或講述的開頭還是可以和我互換，然而被我所注視的那個你，在書寫的進程中，卻漸漸的渾濁不清，好像多了層影子，而悄悄離開那可以互換的位子，那個被你

2001). In the introduction to After Heteroglossia (眾聲喧嘩以後), Wang explains that he adopts Bakhtin’s term “heteroglossia” as the book title in a creative way, suggesting the variety of voices presented in works by contemporary writers of Chinese language, which shows little relevance to Bakhtin’s original definition of the term.

76 From the Introduction to Dennis Schofield, “The Second Person: A Point of View?.”
所指稱的，不再是可以讓我互換的你，可以互換的對象變成了他（或它）。在那主詞的虛位中，幽靈到臨了。77

In other words, the self-reflexive relationship between “you” and “I”, the two split parts of the self, is joined by a third party, “he”, which can be read to refer to the father figures and symbols in Zhu’s life in general: the death of Chiang Kai-shek (her political father) in the first phase; the death of her literary father, Hu Lancheng, in the second phase; the fall of the GMD in the third phase, and the death of her biological father in the fourth phase. The shadow of a dead father which exists in Zhu’s second-person narrative in The Wanderer also symbolises a disconnection with the patriarchal system and a female writer’s departure on a voyage of self-discovery through narrative. The evolution of Zhu’s narrative and identity is partly driven by the death of the patriarchal figures, symbols and systems in the different phases of her life. In the evolutionary process, therefore, the death of the father triggers the rebirth of the woman writer’s self. It can be argued that an experience like this is shared by many women writers, who discover their selves through textually moving away from patriarchal literary paradigms.

The increasing implicitness of the second-person pronoun in Zhu’s narratives also signifies a desire to create a sense of inclusiveness in the readership. While Zhu has often been labelled as a writer of military compound literature which has presumably attracted mainly readers who have a Chinese émigré background, the adoption of a more inclusive narrative voice may be recognised by readers from other ethnic, cultural and gender groups who find the exilic experiences of Zhu’s protagonists applicable to themselves.

Zhu’s adoption of a second-person narrative can be seen as a remedy for the disadvantages of using a first-person or a third-person narrative when the subject of writing is very close to the writer herself. Whereas adopting a first-person narrative is likely to make the reader identify the protagonist as the writer, it is comparatively difficult to emphasise the expression of self in a third-person narrative. By using a second-person narrative, the writer is able to express herself freely through the self-reflexive voice of the narrator. As Darlene Marie Hantzis observes, the “I” and “s/he” in the first-person and third-person texts “have fixed, determinate identities”, while the “you” in a second-person text “is indeterminate and will slide more or less freely

across multiple referents: a dramatised character, the narrator, the narratee, the reader, even the author." It can be argued that, by adopting a second-person narrative, Zhu suggests the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the narrative identity, while critics tend to examine her text through their experiences of reading first-person or third-person narrative texts. Therefore, Zhu’s exploitation of second-person writing forms a barrier of resistance to the readers and critics who tend to habitually impose a specific identification of the writer with the subject in her writing. The multi-referential characteristic of a second-person narrative creates the tendency of ambiguity and inclusiveness in the narrative voice of Zhu’s writing, which also reflects the direction of her reconfiguration of identity.

The Multiple First Persons: complicating autobiographicality

The narrative voice in Zhu’s writing underwent a further transformation in her short story, “A Glance at the Southern Capital” (2006), in which she presents a combination of multiple first-person narratives (with occasional second-person narratives in both teller and reflector modes). This shows a further development from the idea of split selves in Zhu’s self-reflexive second person, presenting the characteristic of both first-person and second-person narratives. The identity of the first-person narrative voice, “I”, switches between a high school girl who is talented in writing, her mother (a second-generation Chinese émigré) and a female writer whose background is very close to Zhu Tianxin’s. A critical view of the politics of Taiwan is expressed through the three female characters, all of whom are presented in a first-person narrative voice. Whereas, the middle-aged female protagonist and the female writer speak in the victimised tone of a second-generation Chinese émigré, the teenage protagonist expresses (from the Generation Y viewpoint) extreme disappointment with the social and political chaos created by the DPP government and their supporters.

Zhu complicates the fictional and autobiographical realm through a combination of reality and imagination. In the style of an imaginary story, which more or less reflects the globally popular fantasy films of the early 2000s (adapted from J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*), the background is set in a pre-election time in Taiwan (in the future) between 2004 and 2008:

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78 From the Introduction to Dennis Schofield, “The Second Person: A Point of View?” Schofield quoted from Darlene Marie Hantzis, “You Are About To Begin Reading”: The Nature and Function of Second Person Point of View in Narrative” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1988).
Work has not yet started on the interior of the President’s Hall, but the exterior has already begun to be reconstructed according to the blueprint, which has adopted a very ancient method, namely the scattering of seeds from the sky. As a result, after the rainy season in May, Mikania micrantha (which is actually an imported plant species) has taken strong root and has begun to grow fiercely all over the buildings in the vicinity of the President’s Hall area, including our school, the surrounding banks and the high court. When viewed from afar, the President’s Hall, has started to look like a castle where a devil dwells and a princess is imprisoned.

In a fantasy narrative—through the voice of the teenage female protagonist who “imitates the tone of Tolkien”—Zhu depicts how Taiwan is forced to return to martial law status due to the increasing number of demonstrations against the DPP government (which had been caused by the controversial election result in 2004) in front of the President’s Hall in Taibei, and how the DPP government decides to desert the current President’s Hall in Taibei and move the capital to South Taiwan. As described in Zhu’s story, Chinese émigrés and their descendants start to be legally discriminated against, monitored and segregated by the DPP government, just as the Jewish people had been treated during the Nazi period. Taiwan is, therefore, divided into two parts: while the south belongs to the supporters of the Taiwanese nativist DPP government, the north is temporarily in the care of a Chinese émigré governor—the GMD Taibei City Mayor, Ma Yingjiu.

Virtual autobiographical characteristics are created in the story, which seem to deliberately complicate the question of narrative authority, to make the writer’s identity controversial and to invite debate about the issue of identity. The part of the story that can easily cause the reader to confuse the protagonist (the mother) with Zhu is the section titled “Confessions of a Chinese Émigré” (外省人書), a piece of political writing which, according to the story, the DPP government requires that every Chinese émigré should submit. The majority of the contents of the protagonist’s confession are identical to the political opinions which were previously

81 For the 2004 presidential election of Taiwan and the demonstration of the Pan-Blue supporters in front of the President’s Hall, refer to the Biographical Sketch in this chapter.
presented in works by Zhu, such as “In Remembrance of My Fellow Brothers in the Military Compound”, the articles in A Novelist’s Journals on Politics, “The Old Capital” and “Distant Thunder” (in The Wanderer). The narrative of confession often evokes passages of seemingly autobiographical works by Zhu, such as the Hakka childhood presented in “The Green Bamboo Lament” (緑竹引), the military compound life in It Never Ends..., and the happy school life in The Ploughman’s Song.

Zhu’s strategic exploitation of autobiographicality is particularly presented through the question—“Can you imagine what it is that you would miss most the moment you had to leave this island-nation forever?” (假想，必須永遠離開這島國的那一刻，最叫你懷念的會是什麼?)—which is in fact taken from Zhu’s previous work, “Distant Thunder”. 83 The question dominates the narratives of the protagonist’s confession as well as the theme for the whole story. Although, according to the story, the question was raised by an anonymous female writer (the third female protagonist), the reader who recognises the sentence from Zhu’s prior work would assume that the writer is Zhu Tianxin. To complicate the autobiographicality of the work, Zhu arranges for the mother (the second female protagonist) to respond to the female writer’s question through her confession. This presents a postmodern aesthetic, which challenges realism by creating a dialogue between the writer and the protagonist, who exist in different narrative realms. By doing this, Zhu emphasises the fictionality of this seemingly autobiographical work.

The confession of the mother, which was supposed to express her sin of having a Chinese background or associating with the GMD, ends up becoming emotive and shows a sense of nostalgia towards the GMD-ruled Taiwan of the past. Through the narratives in the confession, the protagonist also shows resistance towards the political attitude which tends to alienate the Chinese émigrés:

Once I thought that this island belonged to me, to us, to everyone. […] When I looked at those people with whom I could not communicate because they spoke a different dialect, or the faces of those people whose words I understood, but to whom I did not know what to say, I still softly exclaimed out of my naïve patriotism, “These are my compatriots…”

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In many ways the mother’s confession evokes the narratives concerning a Chinese émigré’s identity crisis as presented in Zhu’s “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound” and “The Old Capital”, which could make the reader suspect that Zhu is presenting certain political opinions through the voice of the mother. The link between the mother and the female writer is also suggested by the words of the teenage girl (the first protagonist), who observes the similarities between the narratives of the female writer’s works and her mother’s confession. As she states, “I started to take notice of her [the woman writer], because I feel that my mother is tying herself up with her without even knowing it,” and, as she points out in her comparison of the writing by her mother and the writer (in the teller mode of a second-person narrative, addressing the reader), “Take these two paragraphs, for instance, are you able to tell which of them is written by my mother, and which of them is written by the female writer?” Hence, the suggestive link between the anonymous female writer, the mother, and Zhu Tianxin seems to be a deliberate narrative act. Through multiple first-person voices, the mother (the second protagonist), the female writer (the third protagonist), and Zhu Tianxin create a complicity through narrative. The first-person voice, “I”, is therefore turned into a collective first-person voice, “we”, which shows apparent political resistance towards the grand narrative of the DPP government.

Besides, the voice of the teenage girl is also part of the complicit group. Her role is similar to that of the narrator in Zhu’s self-reflexive second-person writing, who constantly interrogates or confirms the thoughts and feelings of the subject character. The function of her voice is to provide an objective distance from the subject character (here, the mother), so that the narrative of the story does not fall into a narcissistic self-pitying mode. She comments on the nostalgic writing in the mother’s confession as “a piece of writing which cannot be continued and which contradicts its theme.” However, by pointing out the fact that the content of her

84 Zhu Tianxin, “A Glance at the Southern Capital” 南都一望, 53.
85 “我之所以會略微注意她，是因為我覺得我媽不知不覺的把自己與她綁在一起了。” Ibid., 57.
86 “例如這兩段，你分得出哪個是我媽寫的，哪個是女作家寫的嗎？” Ibid., 58.
87 “根本是一篇繼續不下去甚至背反題旨的文字”。 Ibid., 54.
mother’s confession contradicts the political agenda of the government, she actually criticises the ridiculousness of the government’s rule, which is seen as demonstrating discrimination against Chinese émigrés like her mother.

Despite the emphasis on the virtual reality of “A Glance at the Southern Capital”, which is suggested by the fictional characters and the fantasy-style descriptions in the narratives, it is likely that this is the story among Zhu’s works which has the strongest political implications. Such a work requires a narrative voice which shows the writer’s political view but at the same time distances her from the subject character (in case of political labelling of the writer by the reader). Therefore, Zhu’s adoption of multiple first-person narratives shows her exploitation of the self-reflexive and the split-self features in her second-person writing, which also develops in complexity to an even greater extent in her first-person narrative story.

The change of narrative perspectives in Zhu’s works from the first to the fourth phase presents a journey of evolution in terms of first-person writing, which corresponds with Friedrich Spielhagen’s observation on the constructive process of a first-person novel:

Spielhagen believed that in the first-person novel the author first changes his ‘I’ into a ‘he’; ‘When the He changes back again into an I, it can, of course, no longer be the old, empirical, naïve, limited and narrow-minded “I.” It must be a new, fictionalised “I”, artificially freed from its autobiographical limitations.’

This provides an insight into the transformation of the “I” in Zhu’s work. In the first phase of Zhu’s writing, the first-person voice is comparatively closer to the writer’s direct expressions relating to her personal life, which makes the voice closer to the “empirical, naïve, limited and narrow-minded ‘I’” in the initial stage of first-person writing, as Spielhagen suggests. However, because at that time in Taiwan there was a tendency to impose over-simple political interpretations on Zhu’s seemingly autobiographical works, in the second and the third phase she started to adopt a male-first person narrative voice in her stories, which shows an attempt to observe the self from the other gender perspective as well as to avoid being pigeonholed by her readers. That being the case, the female “I” is placed in a third-person position, corresponding to Spielhagen’s view that the author changes “I” into a “[s]he”—which

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88 The adoption of the genre, fantasy, in “A Glance at the Southern Capital” has been discussed above.
is most likely an intention in the narrative to obtain an observational distance from the self. When it comes to the fourth phase, Zhu begins to use a self-reflexive second-person narrative voice and an alternative to it, a multiple first-person narrative voice, which seems to reflect the “new, fictionalised ‘I’ ”, which, as Spielhagen concludes, is the outcome of first-person writing. Hence, the evolution of the “I” across the phases of Zhu’s writing develops from a self-specific or seemingly autobiographical voice to one that is multi-referential and inclusive. This also reflects the change of the writer’s view of identity over time.

Timelessness: subverting the logic of time

Zhu’s writing begins to challenge the limitations of the conventional logic of time. The protagonist’s memories of the past are often presented as if they exist in the present. Many of her protagonists also tend to feel out-of-place in their lives in the present and prefer to live in their memories of the past. For example, “The Old Capital” presents mainly the memory and history of the past. However, as the narratives show, the people, places and events are represented as though they are occurring in the present time.

The feature of timelessness is often presented through the montage of scenes of people and events from various historical moments which are shown as taking place in the same location, such as the following passage from “The Old Capital”:

One night twenty years later, when you are blind drunk for reasons you can no longer recall, you lie prone in your dark, silent bedroom, where, with eyes unfocused but with absolute mental clarity, you watch as your seventeen-year-old bodies, clad in school uniforms, book bags on your backs, take a danger-laden path under a gourd trellis in a yard teeming with chickens and ducks (neither of you know how to speak Taiwanese, and you won’t be able to explain to the farmer who owns the house that you are using the trellis as a shortcut and have no intention of stealing his gourds.) [...] So with enough to occupy your mind and heart, you walk past the Chinese hibiscus, cut between the yuccas and sisal. [...] Against the ocean, which is not far off and easily visible, the stamens look like ships’ masts, a scene nearly identical to that which the Canadian doctor Mackay saw a century earlier upon his arrival from the province of Ontario.

Beyond the yuccas and Chinese hibiscus is the ocean. You tell yourselves not to forget the password repeated to you over and over by one of A’s boyfriends the first time he took you through the secret passage. [...] You cannot know that, at the same time on the same day, 88 years earlier, the French navy launched an attack on that spot, their ships’ big guns covering 800 marines who came ashore at Shalun. The French fall for the trick and enter a dense forest of yucca and Chinese hibiscus, where their machine guns and cannons are ineffective, leaving them no choice but to engage in hand-to-hand combat with knives. You have memorised Qing history for the exams, so you cannot recall this life-and-death skirmish or its outcome in the dense forest of yucca and Chinese hibiscus. Unlike the ghosts of the French soldiers who were lost here eighty-eight years earlier, you pass through the yucca and Chinese hibiscus with ease under their envious gaze.
The protagonist’s personal memory of a teenage adventure in Danshui in the 1970s is juxtaposed with the historical records of Mackay’s arrival in 1872 and the Sino-French War in 1884. The way in which the teenage girls “took a danger-laden path under a gourd trellis in a yard teeming with chickens and ducks” and “neither of [whom] knew how to speak Taiwanese” makes their situation similar to that of the Westerners upon first arrival in the foreign island. The heading for the narratives in this section, “Beyond the yuccas and Chinese hibiscuses was the ocean” — the password which was given by A’s boyfriend—becomes the scene which links the narratives of different events. The personal memory of the protagonist and the collective memory of historical records are connected through the scene at the beach of Danshui. It is also through the description of the scene that the protagonist’s romantic imaginings of the historical events (which she learned in her high-school history class) come alive, as if the protagonist is the witness of (the personal and the collective) memories which occurred in different historical moments. Therefore, time—an important feature in the narratives of conventional storytelling—disappears from Zhu’s narratives in the fourth phase.

90 Zhu Tianxin, “The Old Capital” 古都, 161-162. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 123-125, adapted. Instead of using the past tense as Goldblatt does, I have changed most sentences into the present tense for the purpose of my discussion.

In fact, the use of “you” in this work evokes a postmodern aspect of the second-person narrative—what Louis Oppenheim terms, “a continuous present”\(^{92}\) or what Schofield calls, “an ‘impossible’ narrating situation”\(^ {93}\)—which subverts the division between past and present in conventional narrativity. Through the adoption of a self-reflexive second-person narrative, a dialogue of the split parts of the subjects which exist in different temporal realms—the self in the present who speaks and the self in past who acts—is created through the narrative. By doing this, the logic of time loses its function, which suggests that the two parts of the self exist in the same time—the present.

“Timelessness”, an important feature in the Chinese language where tense does not feature,\(^ {94}\) is well-presented in Zhu’s narratives. However, even with the existence of the time-referential words, Zhu is able to create the sense of timelessness in her narratives. She describes scenes in great detail and the sensation that the subject perceived or felt in a past moment, thus creating a sense of the “here and now” in the narratives.

In addition, timelessness is also created through the imaginary glances exchanged between the protagonists during a variety of temporal moments in the narrative, such as that between Zhu’s protagonist and the French army presented in the passage above. The gaze between characters of different temporal moments corresponds to David Der-Wei Wang’s observation of Zhu’s “The Old Capital” that “history no longer develops in a linear form”,\(^ {95}\) but is being “spatialised” (空間化).\(^ {96}\)

In other words, Zhu’s narratives suggest that through revisiting the place where past events occurred or through the gaze between the characters who are imagined to be in the same geographical location, the encounter and coexistence between the self of the present and the memory of the past is possible. Thus, as Wang points out, “history becomes a kind of geography, and memory is similar to archaeology.”\(^ {97}\) The spatialisation of history in Zhu’s narratives replaces the feature of time with space and,

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\(^{93}\) From “Chapter Five: The Intersubjective You”, in Dennis Schofield, “The Second Person: A Point of View?.”

\(^{94}\) See my discussion above.


\(^{96}\) Ibid.

\(^{97}\) “歷史成為一種地理，回憶正如考古.”. Ibid.
therefore, creates the possibility for a person to travel through time and to revisit the past.

Moreover, to make the temporal and spatial journeys proceed at the same time, through the narratives in *The Wanderer*, the protagonist’s journeys through time and space are presented as scenes in dreams\(^9\) or as the journeys of souls after death.\(^9\)

Hence, through her sophisticated exploitation of the tenseless features of the Chinese language, Zhu creates a sense of timelessness in her narratives which confounds the boundary between the memory of the past and the reality of the present, the frontier between personal and collective memories, and even transcends the border between life and death. The timeless characteristic in Zhu’s narratives indicates that memory is not restricted only to the past; it is possible to restore and represent memory in the present moment through the journey of narratives, which in Zhu’s Old-Soul-like protagonists (from the third phase), seems to evoke a common desire to stop time from progressing. Zhu’s preference for the past over the present is also reflected in the timelessness of her narrative. By representing past events in a way which makes them seem as though they are occurring in the present, Zhu also shows an attempt to validate and revive memory.

The feature of timelessness in Zhu’s writing in the fourth phase is often lost in English translations of her works. In Howard Goldblatt’s English translation of “The Old Capital”, the past tense is adopted for most of the narratives. However, by so doing, Goldblatt’s translation fails to capture the sense of “present”—to feel the past as if it is happening here and now because of the subject’s endeavours to revive or represent the past through recollection. A similar problem is also found in the English translation of “Distant Thunder” (遠方的雷聲, one of the short stories in *The Wanderer*) by Silvia Lichun Lin (林麗君).\(^{100}\) Although Lin begins the narratives of the story with the present tense, as soon as the recalling of past moments begins in the narrative, the past tense is used in the English translation. Hence, to present the sense

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of timelessness, which is important in Zhu's narratives in this phase, I suggest that the use of present tense could be a solution to the English translations.

The Intertextual Network: breaking textual boundaries

The textuality of Zhu’s writing shows a great degree of complexity, which corresponds to what Graham Allen considers to be the characteristics of “intertextuality”, showing “relationality”, “interconnectedness” and “interdependence” among texts. The narratives of “The Old Capital”, in particular, present a network of intertextuality between texts.

The story of “The Old Capital” is divided into three main parts. In a nostalgic tone the first part presents the female protagonist’s memory of her carefree teenage life in Taibei with her high-school friend, “A”, who emigrated to the U.S. after graduating from university. After losing contact with her friend for many years, she suddenly receives a fax from A, inviting her to meet in Kyoto, which triggers the second part of the story—the protagonist’s lone journey in Kyoto. A does not show up in Kyoto as she had promised, so the protagonist decides to return to Taibei earlier than expected. Upon her arrival in Taibei, she is mistaken for a Japanese tourist. Therefore, she disguises herself as a foreigner and begins to explore her home town with the guidance of a Japanese colonial map of Taibei, which leads to the third part of the story.

Apart from the initial structure, the narrative of “The Old Capital” is multi-framed by several layers of texts by Chinese and foreign writers. The texts shape the narrative of Zhu’s work in various ways; each of them providing a specific insight into Zhu’s story, and vice versa. All these various formats for narrative accumulate and are compiled in one work, which causes the narrative structure of Zhu’s “The Old Capital” to manifest a high degree of complexity.

Firstly, it is presented as, what Lingchei Letty Chen terms, a “pastiche” of Kawabata’s The Old Capital. Zhu imitates the textual format of Kawabata’s novel, in which the chapters are arranged according to the scenes of the four seasons in Kyoto, beginning with the first chapter, “The Flower of Spring”; through to the fifth chapter “The Gion Festival” (in summer); the sixth chapter, “The Colour of Autumn”

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and ending with the ninth/the final chapter, “Winter Flowers”. The narrative of Zhu’s “The Old Capital” is also arranged in the order of the four seasons. She weaves in the descriptions of the blooming of seasonal flowers, as recorded in the traditional Chinese agricultural work, the *Hundred Flowers Calendar* (百花曆). The excerpts from the calendar divide Zhu’s text into four segments, starting from summer (pp. 156-165), through autumn (pp. 165-189) and winter (pp. 189-221), and ending in spring (pp. 221-233). Whereas Kawabata’s arrangement of his story, ending in winter, indicates a sense of sadness, Zhu’s rearrangement of the order of the four seasons, leaving spring to the last, suggests going back to youth and a renewal of hope. Therefore, after the initial three-part structure, the four-season configuration, which evokes both Kawabata’s novel and the *Hundred Flowers Calendar*, provides the second format for the text.

Through the imitation of the structure of Kawabata’s *The Old Capital*, and the adoption of the passages from the novel for the framework of the second part of Zhu’s novella (where her protagonist travels alone around Kyoto), Zhu presents a juxtaposition of the two stories in her narrative. However, through her “pastiche” Zhu also shows a postmodern parody of Kawabata’s work. As Lingchei Letty Chen observes, Zhu emphasises the sense of disjunction in her story, which is in contrast to the sense of coherence (between all artistic elements in the story, such as the environment, tradition, characters, objects and emotions etc)—a distinct characteristic in Kawabata’s novel. Yang Ruying holds a similar view to Chen and suggests that, unlike the way in which the scenes of the four seasons in Kyoto correspond to the

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104 The *Hundred Flowers Calendar* (百花曆) consists of useful information about botany, season by season, for agricultural purposes. The knowledge had been passed on from one generation to another in China since the Xia Dynasty. At the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty (around the mid-seventeenth century), poet Cheng Yuwen (程羽文) compiled the agricultural information and presented it through a poem called, “Lyrics of Monthly Flowers (花月令)”, which is included in the calendar. The verses from the *Hundred Flowers Calendar* which Zhu adopted are from the poem by Cheng. For information about the *Hundred Flowers Calendar* and Cheng’s “Lyrics of Monthly Flowers”, see On “Lyrics of Monthly Flowers” (華月令印譜), Tian Shu (天舒), http://www.kongfz.com/blog/blog.php?do=showone&tid=32136 (accessed December 11, 2010).
106 Ibid., 165. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 128.
107 Ibid., 189. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 159.
108 Ibid., 221. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 201.
109 Ibid., 135-186.
minds and fates of the twin sisters in Kawabata’s novel, the scenes of the four seasons described in the *Hundred Flowers Calendar* are not in accord with the actual botany of Taibei, neither do they reflect the mind of the protagonist in Zhu’s story.\(^{111}\) Zhu emphasises the contradiction between the environment of Taibei as recorded by the Chinese ancestors and the way it is in reality:

> In the ninth month of the lunar calendar, the chrysanthemums bloom, the hibiscuses wither, the campions grow fuzzy, leaves of the calthrops and lilies dry out on the river, the oranges appear, and the yams turn milky…. No, no, it’s definitely not because there were chrysanthemums and osmanthus (if your father [was a Chinese émigré who] had come from another province), or hibiscuses and tree orchids (if your father was local Taiwanese), or wisterias and arhat pines (if your ancestors had spoken [Chinese or] Japanese), or eucalyptuses and breadfruit trees (if your ancestors had fought in the South Pacific, even Australia, as imperial soldiers). You’d know autumn was here when you stood on the Meiji Bridge, designed by Togaro Kataro, and could feel the wind coming from somewhere far, far away; how very sad.

(F農曆九月菊有英、芙蓉冷、漢宮秋毛、菱荷化為衣、橙橘登、山藥乳，不，不，絕不是菊花木樨（如果你父親是外省人），不是芙蓉樹蘭（如果你父親是本省人），不是紫藤羅漢松（若你祖上是國語家庭），不是油加利麵包樹（若祖上曾代表皇軍出征南洋甚至澳洲）……秋天的時候，你們一站在十川嘉太郎設計的明治橋上就知道，只覺那風從很遠很遠不知哪裡長長的吹過來，真真愁煞人也)\(^{112}\)

Following the description of autumn in Taibei, as written in the *Hundred Flowers Calendar*, with the words, “No, no”, the narrator shows an oppositional attitude towards the passage quoted here. As Yang suggests, the plants in Taibei which the protagonist perceives as being different from those recorded in the calendar, and the narratives about plants, are transformed into something with strong political implications.\(^{113}\) From Yang’s viewpoint, it can be argued that the blooming of the Chinese chrysanthemums and the withering of the Taiwanese hibiscuses are interpreted as the GMD colonisation of the Taiwanese people. The wisterias and arhat pines, plants which are originally from China and Japan, are decoded as the Chinese and Japanese languages\(^{114}\) and are, therefore, an allusion to the Chinese and

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\(^{111}\) See Yang Ruying 楊如英, “Multiple Intertextuality, Multiple Spaces: Cultural Identity and Textual Definition in Zhu Tianxin’s ‘The Old Capital’”多重互文、多重空間——論〈古都〉中的文化認同與文本定位.

\(^{112}\) From Zhu Tianxin, “The Old Capital” 古都, 165. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 128.

\(^{113}\) See Yang Ruying 楊如英, “Multiple Intertextuality, Multiple Spaces: Cultural Identity and Textual Definition in Zhu Tianxin’s ‘The Old Capital’”多重互文、多重空間——論〈古都〉中的文化認同與文本定位.

\(^{114}\) In Goldblatt’s English translation, the term “國語” (the national language) is translated as “Japanese”. However, the term is often used to mean “Chinese (Mandarin)” in Taiwan. Since the plants, wisterias and arhat pines, are originally from Chinese and Japan, the term can therefore be interpreted as an allusion to both the Chinese and the Japanese languages.
the Japanese colonisations. The eucalyptuses and breadfruit trees from the South Pacific and Australia denote the “imperial soldiers” who fought for the Japanese Emperor during World War II, which also suggests the Japanese colonisation of Taiwan. The emphasis on the political implications of plants in the passage suggests that the feeling of seasonal change through planning of the natural environment in Taiwan is no longer as sensible as it used be when it followed the agricultural calendar created by the Chinese; the politics of Taiwan have changed the natural environment. Only in Kawabata’s Japan can a person still feel the change of seasons, such as the way in which one senses the autumn wind “on the Meiji Bridge,” a scene from Kyoto which is also depicted in an early work of Zhu, “The Mountains and Rivers in My Dream” (江山入夢), in the first phase. In a sense, the adoption of a traditional Chinese agricultural calendar for the botany of Taiwan suggests the way in which the GMD imposed five thousand years of Chinese history on Taiwan. Therefore, in my view, the discrepancy between the adopted verses from the Hundred Flowers Calendar and the actual environment of Taiwan also indicates the problematic of applying Chinese traditions to Taiwan, which is in contrast to the coherence between modernity and tradition in Japanese culture.

As Lingchei Letty Chen states, “Kawabata’s novel is the silhouette of history, a shadowy outline of the meaning and representation of a coherent cultural identity”, while Zhu presents her work as a contrast to the coherence and continuity emphasised in Kawabata’s novel. Chen, therefore, assumes that the disconnection between self and place is what motivates Zhu namely a desire to fill the gap and to make connections in all ways, through “imaginary nostalgia” and “textual practice”. Chen’s observation provides an insight into the way in which Zhu forging a link between two cities through historical records, personal memory and travel, and how the writer joins the texts and meanings through the exploitations of juxtaposition and intertextuality.

Tao Yuanming’s “Peach Blossom Spring” dominates the third part of Zhu’s story. Accompanying the narrative by Tao is the description of Taibei on the

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117 Ibid., 317.
118 Ibid., 312.
119 Ibid.
Japanese colonial map. Whereas the foreign map guides the protagonist through the tour in her hometown which has gone through enormous changes; the verses by Tao, describing a fisherman’s accidental discovery of a utopia and failing to return to it again, predict and indicate the outcome of the protagonist’s journey—losing her way. In contrast to the old temples in Kyoto which “would be there forever” (永遠會在那裡), postmodern Taibei brings to the protagonist an increasing sense of alienation towards the place with which she used to be familiar. She is, therefore, “like an eyewitness who, after going to the police to report a dead body, returns to the scene only to see there was no body, no blood stains, everything normal,” which corresponds to the way in which Tao’s fisherman can no longer find his way back to the Peach Blossom Spring. Hence, Tao’s narrative functions as an insight into the sense of estrangement experienced by Zhu’s protagonist in her rediscovery of Taibei.

Weaving the verses by Tao (as presented in italic font in the English translation below) into her narrative, Zhu ensures that Taibei is presented as a place which is full of hostility and insecurity, which is in striking contrast to the friendliness and hospitality of the utopia depicted by Tao:

\[
\text{During the Taiyuan Reign of the Jin Dynasty a fisherman of Wuling once rowed upstream, unmindful of the distance he had gone, when he suddenly came to a grove of peach trees in bloom... the wild flowers grew beneath them, and fallen petals covered the ground—it made a great impression on the fisherman. He went on for a way...}\\
\text{But where would you be when you walked past the small sluice gate after risking your life to cross Huanhe Road (the dump trucks, as usual, showed no sign of slowing down when they came to a red light)?}\\
\text{There was a small opening in the mountain, and it seemed as though light was coming through it. The fisherman left his boat and entered the cave, which at first was extremely narrow, barely admitting his body; after a few dozen steps it suddenly opened out onto a broad and level plan... it turned out to be the Dadaocheng Pier for the Mahāsattva Ferry. You were hoping to use the toilet in the tiny pier office, but you didn’t see even the shadow of a dog, let alone a person. So you headed towards the riverbank.}\\
\text{This riverbank had no rich fields and pretty ponds. No mulberry, bamboo, and other trees grew there, no criss-cross paths skirting the fields, no sounds of cocks crowing and dogs barking, but where were you? […]}\\
\text{[They were surprised] when they caught sight of the fisherman […] You’d barely entered the village when pairs of eyes the same as your father’s came at you, showing surprise and fear, and they asked you where you came from. You didn’t think you looked all that different from other young village women, children in hand, and had no idea how a single glance could have marked you an outsider.}
\]

121 This is Goldblatt’s translation of Zhu’s words, “像個發現屍體報了警回現場卻見屍體也沒了血跡也沒了一切完好如常的目擊者”. From Zhu Tianxin, “The Old Capital” 古都, 200-201. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 174.
The contrast of people and environments between Tao’s utopia and Zhu’s Taipei highlights the estrangement and danger of the latter, which leads to the differing experiences of the two protagonists. Tao’s fisherman is welcomed by the villagers and is impressed with the beautiful scenes of the village of oblivion, while Zhu’s female protagonist is not welcomed by the people and she feels disgust towards the surroundings of Taipei.

For readers who are familiar with Tao’s “Peach Blossom Spring”, at first sight of the passage they may expect a magnificent journey for Zhu’s protagonist, due to the appearance of fragments from Tao’s poem which describe the picturesque scenes and the serene atmosphere of a utopia. However, between the segments of Tao’s work, Zhu inserts another narrative which depicts the experience of her protagonist in postmodern Taipei. On the one hand, Zhu’s narrative is presented as footnotes to Tao’s verses in the passage, which provides the classic Chinese poem with a modern interpretation. On the other hand, the narrative about the journey of Zhu’s modern “fisherman”—considering her disguise as a Japanese tourist wearing a fisherman’s hat—fills the gap between Tao’s beautiful fragments with the ugly scenes she perceives in Taipei. It reconfigures the narrative of Tao’s poem into something full of absurdity and estrangement, which corresponds to the protagonist’s impression of the postmodern city, a “dystopia”, as Yang Ruying and Linchei Letty Chen term it.123

123 See Yang Ruying 楊如英, “Multiple Intertextuality, Multiple Spaces: Cultural Identity and Textual Definition in Zhu Tianxin’s ‘The Old Capital’”多重互文、多重空間——論〈古都〉中的文化認同
Like the mixture of classic Chinese verses and Zhu’s modern colloquial sentences in the passage, the scenes of Taibei in Zhu’s representation are filled with a bizarre blend of traditional and modern buildings, uncomplimentary to one another. The combination of contradictory elements seems to evoke the postmodern aesthetic that means it is difficult to differentiate “high” and “low” arts or to distinguish the authentic and the duplication of a work; the idea as such also reflects the sense of disconnection, discontinuity and disruption in the postmodern life of people. Therefore, Zhu’s pastiche of Tao’s work is presented in a radical way, which shows an attempt to create coherence with something unfitting.


124 See Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism; Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 63 and 152.
An Overview of the Multiple Structural Layers in Zhu’s “The Old Capital”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer #1</th>
<th>Layer #2</th>
<th>Layer #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Western pop culture and texts by Kawabata and Tao)</td>
<td>(Hundred Flowers Calendar)</td>
<td>(Excerpts from Lian Heng’s A General History of Taiwan, other historical records of Taiwan, and works by Japanese and Western writers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Part I: Taipei** (pp. 151-170) | **Summer** (pp. 156-165) | ❖ I was at St. Mark’s Square, watching the acrobatic flights of angels and the dancing of the Moors, but, without you, my dear, the loneliness was unbearable. —— I. V. Foscarini

125 ❖ In the first lunar month in the seventh year of the Xianfeng reign, there was a major snowfall in Danshui.126 ❖ In the disgusting green and slippery damp city, the aging Governor had ancient eyes. —— D. H. Lawrence127 ❖ Beyond the yuccas and Chinese hibiscus was the ocean.128 ❖ When the Qing government took over Taiwan, there was talk in the court about laying waste to it.129 ❖ No need to go ashore, no need to shave your head, no need to change your clothing style; sending tribute and being a royal subject will suffice.130 ❖ There were King Arthur, who was as tall as a tree, a colourful Egyptian bas relief, giant sculptures of kings, and a portrait of the real Sphinx. It was like a dream world. —— Freud131 ❖ When I die, you’ll find white oaks imprinted on my heart. —— Thoreau132 ❖ The Taiwanese like to rebel, like moths flying into a fire, the dead followed by the living. —— Once again, Lan Dingyuan133 ❖ Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,/ I took the one less travelled by,/ And that has made all the difference. —— Robert Frost134 ❖ A land with no master; an island with no chance encounter.135 |
| Western songs and movies of the 1970s. | **Autumn** (pp. 165-189) | **Winter** (pp. 189-221) |
| **Part II: Kyoto** (pp. 170-210) | Tao’s “Peach Blossom Spring” + the Japanese colonial map of Taipei | **Spring** (pp. 221-233) |

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126 Zhu’s text in Chinese is, “咸豐七年春正月、淡水大雪”. Ibid., 153. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 113, adapted. The sentence is from Lian Heng (連橫), A General History of Taiwan (臺灣通史), 1918.


128 Zhu’s text in Chinese is, “穿過林投與黃槿, 便是海”. Ibid., 161. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 123, adapted.
In accordance with the geographical, political and cultural hybridity of Taiwan, which is largely emphasised in “The Old Capital”, in the narrative Zhu presents the work as a textual hybrid. As well as being framed by the major texts, Kawabata’s *The Old Capital*, the *Hundred Flowers Calendar*, Tao Yuanming’s “Peach Blosson Spring”, and the Japanese colonial map, the whole story of Zhu’s novella is divided into eleven segments, each of which is led by a quotation from a Chinese historical record, such as *A General History of Taiwan* (臺灣通史) by Lian Heng (連橫) and *Expedition to the East* (東征集) by Lan Dingyuan (藍鼎元); works by Western writers, including I. V. Foscarini, D. H. Lawrence, Sigmund Freud, Henry David Thoreau, and Robert Frost; and the article by Japanese writer, Ryōtarō Shiba. Also included are recollections of popular Western songs and movies of the 1970s, which frame the first part of the story: Zhu’s “The Old Capital” consists of works from a variety of cultures, authors and genres, which make the narrative a patchwork of texts.

The table above presents an overview of the multiple layers which accumulate one on top of the other eventually resulting in the complexity of narrative in Zhu’s “The Old Capital”. In the first layer of the structure, the story is divided into three

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129 Zhu’s text in Chinese is, “清人得台，廷議欲墟其地”. Ibid., 164. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 127. The sentence is from Lian Heng (連橫), *The General History of Taiwan* (臺灣通史, 1918).

130 Zhu’s text in Chinese is, “不必登岸，不必薙髮，不必易衣冠，稱臣入貢可也”. Ibid., 170. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 135. The sentence is from Lian Heng (連橫), *A General History of Taiwan* (臺灣通史, 1918).

131 Zhu’s text in Chinese is, “那兒有像樹一樣高大的亞述國王、色彩鮮麗的埃及浮雕、巨大的國王雕像、真正的獅身人面像，就像個夢幻世界。——佛洛伊德”. Ibid., 183. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 151.


135 Zhu’s text in Chinese is, “無主之地，無緣之島”. Ibid., 227. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 209. “A land with no master” (無主之地) is adopted from the interview with Li Denghui by the Japanese writer, Ryōtarō Shiba, in April 1994. In the preface to the interview, Shiba states that Taiwan “has been a land with no master […] since the seventeenth century” (自十七世紀以來，[……] 是無主之地).” The interview of Li Denghui by Shiba was entitled “場所の苦しみ” and was published in Japan in the *Asahi* weekly magazine on 30 April 1994. The article was translated into Chinese as “生為台灣人的悲哀” (The Sadness of Being Born a Taiwanese) and was published in the *Zili wanbao* (自立晚報) on 30 April, 1 and 2 May, 1994.
parts: the protagonist’s recollection of her personal memory in Taibei in the 1970s, her trip to Kyoto, and her return to postmodern Taibei. To illustrate the vivid scenes of the protagonist’s personal memory, in the first part of the story Zhu presents a large number of popular Western songs and movies of the 1970s. They evoke the memory of the life of Taibei’s young people of the time. The Western elements which are adopted to construct the memory of Taibei also suggest the hybrid nature of Taiwanese culture, in which Western popular culture (American culture in particular) plays an important role. The second part of the story focuses on the Japanese influence on Taiwan, in which Zhu appropriates Kawabata’s novel and uses it to represent Kyoto as a utopia; an ideal picture of Taibei in the protagonist’s mind, where everything will stay the same forever. However, even in such a section which mainly depicts scenes of Kyoto, the protagonist’s memory of Taibei and the Western influences on both Taiwanese and Japanese cultures are also included in the seemingly Japanese picture. The pure Japanese-ness of Kawabata’s portrayal of Kyoto is turned into Zhu’s hybrid-cultural representation of the same city. In the third part of the story the protagonist embarks upon a journey to rediscover her hometown through the eyes of the Japanese, the ex-coloniser of Taiwan. Nevertheless, what she sees is a hybrid view of the Japanese colonial narrative, her personal memory and, contemporary political revisions of Taibei. The Japanese colonial map reconfigures the view of her hometown until the moment she loses the map, which is when Tao’s poem cuts into the narrative. The adoption of a classic Chinese work here seems to indicate an attempt to return to the utopia (the idealised Taibei of the past) by the resumption of traditional Chinese culture through narrative. However, the classic Chinese verses eventually cause the protagonist’s journey to lose direction, which also suggests the impossibility of finding the utopia of Taibei in one’s mind.

In the second layer of the structure, the story is divided into four sections according to the floral scenes of the four seasons depicted in the *Hundred Flowers Calendar*. As mentioned above, the four-season structure is motivated by Kawabata’s novel. Therefore, in the second layer Zhu presents the structure as a hybrid of a classic Chinese work and a modern Japanese novel. As mentioned earlier, the disconnection between the Chinese and the Taiwanese culture is suggested by the incoherence that results from the use of the verses from the *Hundred Flowers*

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136 See the discussion about the adoption of four-season structure in Kawabata’s and Zhu’s works above.
Calendar (as the subheadings for sections) and the descriptions of Taiwan that follow in each section of the narrative. The textual incoherence challenges the idea of continuing an authentic Chinese culture in Taiwan, but instead, it suggests an acceptance of the hybrid nature of the island.

In the third layer, the story is divided into eleven small segments, each of which is introduced by a sentence quoted from Chinese, Japanese or Western writers. The eleven quoted sentences do not relate directly to each other. However, they do reflect the mind of the protagonist at different points of the narrative. The sentence from Foscarini, “[…] without you, my dear, the loneliness was unbearable”, which comes at the beginning of the story, corresponds to the desire of Zhu’s protagonist, who anticipates invoking and reconnecting with the double of herself (herself as a teenager and her best friend “A”), which then turns the story into a journey of nostalgia.

The sentence from Lian Heng about a snow scene in Danshui evokes the protagonist’s adolescent memory of a time in Danshui with A. The narrative of the segment ends with a separation between the protagonist and A, which corresponds to the parting of the twin sisters at the end of Kawabata’s novel. Thus, Zhu weaves in the last scene of Kawabata’s story (when Chieko and Naeko separate in the morning snow) and ends the segment with a mixture of Taiwanese and Japanese elements, “My love, my love, let me wish you the best…” snow flurries filled the air.”¹³⁷ The fact that it hardly ever snows in Taipei indicates that the snow reflects the sadness of the protagonist. The quotation of Lian Heng, “[…] major snowfall in Danshui”, which was originally from a historical document, is transformed into the description of the protagonist’s emotions.

The “damp city” and the “ageing Governor” in D. H. Lawrence’s verses, which are adopted as the heading for the third segment, invoke the colonial history of Taiwan when each group of colonisers transplanted their own culture onto the island. Nevertheless, the colonisers of today would become the history of tomorrow: Zhu highlights the way people experienced a change of belief, “Around 400 A.D., people stopped believing in Zeus; by around 1650 A.D., no one believed in shamans anymore; in 1700, doubts about God’s revelations began to spread. Isn’t everything like that?

¹³⁷ This is Goldblatt’s translation of Zhu’s words, “我愛、我愛，讓我祝福你——，眼前紛紛揚的降 起漫天大雪。” From Zhu Tianxin, “The Old Capital” 古都, 197. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 117. “My love, my love, let me wish you the best…” (我愛、我愛，讓我祝福你——) is from the lyrics of a song in Chinese “When the Sunset Rages in the Sky” (當晚霞滿天), a well-known song for high school choirs in Taiwan.
The glory and suffering of an age always belong only to a few sages, shamans, and sorcerers.” \(^{138}\) In the history of Taiwan, the changes in belief correspond to the change in ideology through different regimes, which, in Zhu’s writing, induces the confusion of political identity for the second-generation Chinese-émigré protagonist. The old “Governor-General’s Office” (today’s President’s Hall), in which the GMD leaders used to stay, has vanished into history, like D. H. Lawrence’s “damp city” and “ageing Governor”.

The quotation from *A General History of Taiwan*, “No need to go ashore, no need to shave your head, no need to change your clothing style; sending tribute and being a royal subject will suffice,” originally referred to the Qing emperor’s negotiation with the Ming general, Zheng Chenggong (鄭成功). After the Ming Dynasty was overthrown by the Manchus, Zheng retreated to Taiwan with his army in 1661, expelled the Dutch, and continued his opposition to the Manchurian Qing government in China. In Zhu’s quotation from the historical records, the meaning is switched to the protagonist’s ambivalent attitude towards the Japanese culture which she admires and idealises, but which is, after all, the culture of the ex-colonisers of Taiwan.

Then, Freud’s sentence, “There were King Arthur, who was as tall as a tree, a colourful Egyptian bas relief, giant sculptures of kings, and a portrait of the real Sphinx. It was like a dream world”, corresponds to the way in which Kyoto is idealised as a utopia in the protagonist’s mind. Thoreau’s sentence, “When I die, you’ll find white oaks imprinted on my heart,” represents the personal memory of the protagonist, which may be preserved in an unchanging city like Kyoto, but which will surely be erased in a fast-changing city like Taibei.

The verses by Robert Frost, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, / I took the one less travelled by, / And that has made all the difference”, mirror the protagonist’s decision to see Taiwan from the perspective of the Japanese coloniser. The Japanese colonial map provides her with an alternative view of her hometown, which “has made all the difference” in her perception of the city. It is to be noted that the word, “I” is emphasised in Frost’s poem. The repetition of “I” suggests one’s reflection on

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138 This it Goldblatt’s translation of Zhu’s words, “西元四百年左右,人們停止信仰宙斯,一六五○年左右,不再相信巫師術士，一七○○年，始對神的啟示產生普遍的懷疑，不也如此嗎，每一個時代的光彩和苦難老是只屬於那少數幾名先知先覺、巫師術士。” From Zhu Tianxin, “The Old Capital” 古都, 158. The English translation is from trans. Howard Goldblatt, 119.
his/her life: a decision made by the self in the past affects the life of the self at the present. Since “I” cannot return and change what happened in the past, it makes more sense to look forward and accept the way “I” am now. In addition, if we exchange it with another word of the same pronunciation, “eye”, then Frost’s verses will create an interesting connection with Zhu’s text. The word “eye” evokes the *hybrid visions* of Zhu’s protagonist, who sees her hometown through the eyes of the Japanese colonisers while her memory of the place still exists. Nevertheless, as soon as she loses the Japanese map, she loses her sense of direction, suggesting her loss of identity, which is in contrast to the emphasis of subjective narrative identity, “I”, in Frost’s poem. The protagonist’s loss of identity corresponds to the heading for the last segment, “A land with no master; an island with no chance encounter” (see table). On the other hand, the final heading also suggests that Taiwan is after all an island belonging to no one, but merely an “Ilha Formosa (beautiful island)”, as the Portuguese called it. Since no one owns the island, there is no point in emphasising the identity of its residents.

Zhu’s “The Old Capital” shows palimpsestic tendencies in many of its dimensions (geography, politics, culture, memory and identity), which are presented through the palimpsest-styled narrative construction. The multiple layers of intertextual format projecting onto Zhu’s story reflect the multiple colonisations of Taiwan, which result in a continuous (re)naming and (re)construction of the geographical sites and the (re)writing of (personal and collective) memories. Each layer is like an inscription on the palimpsest. Underneath the “apparent additional text” on the surface of the palimpsest are layers of text which are “erased, or partly erased”. In Zhu’s narratives the layers of inscriptions are made simultaneously visible occurring in multiple aspects. It is like compiling inscriptions of multiple layers in several facets on a two-dimensional surface. With such multiplicity and complexity in her narrative, Zhu’s story suggests the difficulty for any person of situating a fixed identity with a place, a country, or a culture. The textual hybridity of Zhu’s work seems to indicate that claiming a hybrid identity can be an alternative, but the ambivalence of the hybrid identity is also something that one has to recognise. Through her narrative construction Zhu proposes an inclusive view and an open

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139 The poem by Frost will be discussed further in Conclusion to the thesis.
attitude towards identity, which can be a way of resolving controversial issues (such as identity) in the postmodern era.

Besides, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out, female writers often produce “palimpsestic” works “whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meanings. Thus, these authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards.”

By parodying the works of male literary masters (such as Kawabata and Tao Yuanming), quoting passages from historical records and from works of Chinese and foreign male writers and then appropriating them to suit the narrative discourse of her work, which challenges the patriarchal discourse of Taiwan, Zhu’s work (“The Old Capital”) is “palimpsestic”. In that sense, through exploiting intertextuality, Zhu also shows feminist subversion of the male literary discourse.

In addition, Zhu’s appropriation of meaning of the adopted sentences from other texts evokes Julia Kristeva’s conceptualisation of intertextuality. Inspired by Bakhtin’s “dialogism”, Kristeva sees any text as “a mosaic of quotations; [...] the absorption and transformation of another”. Graham Allen extends the idea further in his observation on the meaning of a text in the intertextual context:

As Barthes reminds us, the very word ‘text’ is, if we remember its original meanings, ‘a tissue, a woven fabric.’ [...] The idea of the text, and thus of intertextuality, depends, as Barthes argues, on the figure of the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the ‘already written’ and the ‘already read’. Every text has its meaning, therefore, in relation to other texts.

The narrative of Zhu’s work is presented as a “web” or a “weave” which compiles the texts of various writers and in all kinds of genres. She appropriates the quotations and transforms the original meaning of each work into something new in the context of her work. Her appropriation provides new meaning for the works of other writers, and the works she adopts expand and multiply the meanings of her work, which corresponds to Kristeva’s idea that “poetic language is read as at least double”.

143 Graham Allen, Intertextuality, 6.
Multiple-intertextuality expands the textual spaces of Zhu’s work through the
textual dialogues with other texts. Her exploitation of an intertextual narrative,
suggesting opposition to the notion of a fixed meaning for a text, is also a resistance
to a fixed or imposed identity. Therefore, through the tendency to adopt a multi-
referential narrative voice, presenting duality and duplications and exploiting
intertextuality in the fourth phase of her writing, Zhu emphasises multiplicity and
hybridity in narrative, which also indicates an expectation of a flexible and inclusive
sense of identity. As presented in Zhu’s narratives, texts of other people and texts of
her previous works are presented like old newspaper cuttings for her scrapbook. She
reinterprets and rearranges them in accordance with the present situation of Taiwan
and of herself, and, therefore, creates new and dynamic meanings out of the
composition of old materials.

As I have discussed in Chapters One to Four, throughout the four phases of her
literary journey, Zhu has shown creative exploitation of the social, cultural and
political environment of Taiwan in her work. In each phase her writing evolves in
terms of narrative voice, genre and textuality, challenging conventional literary forms
and creating ever increasing complexity in her work. Through presenting the
hybridity, ambiguity, multiplicity and complexity of all aspects (voice, genre,
temporal space and textuality) in her narrative practice, Zhu disputes the fixed identity
imposed on an individual in the dichotomised and polarised political discourse of
Taiwan. In Love in Early Summer When Lotus Blooms (初夏荷花時期的愛情, 2010),
she creates further ambiguity in her narrative through complicating characters and
plots, showing multiple identities for each character and presenting multiple
developments for a story. To take a feminist point of view, it is also a woman writer’s
resistance to the patriarchy in the political context through her textual practice. The
socio-political environment may be a constraint on Zhu Tianxin, but through writing
she is able to be free from patriarchal confinement and feel at home in the literary
realm.
Part Two

*Weaving and Shuttling*

Kapka Kassabova and the Evolution of Identity through Geographical Places
Chapter Five

Extreme Contrasts

We no longer wish to erase your difference. We demand, on the contrary, that you remember and assert it. At least, to a certain extent. Every path I/i take is edged with thorns. On the one hand, i play into the Saviour’s hands by concentrating on authenticity, for my attention is numbed by it and diverted from other, important issues; on the other hand, i do feel the necessity to return to my so-called roots, since they are the fount of my strength, the guiding arrow to which i constantly refer before heading for a new direction.

~ Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other

In this chapter I examine the life and work of Kapka Kassabova before 1998, which I consider to be the first phase of her literary career. Just as researchers on Zhu in Taiwan have tended towards a narrowly biographical approach which pigeonholes the writer’s identity, so do critics of Kassabova in New Zealand. However, unlike Zhu, who writes in her mother tongue, Kassabova is an immigrant to New Zealand who has established herself as a prolific writer in English, a foreign language to her.

Existing scholarship on Kassabova has tended to pigeonhole the writer as a migrant author, emphasising her cultural background as a Bulgarian emigrant and suggesting the difference of Kassabova in the ‘Kiwi’ literary field. Bill Direen focuses on the way in which Kassabova presents her past life in politically repressed Bulgaria through richly symbolic images, which shows what he terms a “European” mode of expression. Readers such as Direen have obviously been impressed that “this New Zealand Bulgarian writer […] amazingly, had been learning English for only a few years.” Critics such as Jane Stafford suggest that the description of Kassabova as a “young Bulgarian immigrant poet”—as stated on the back cover of her poetry anthology, All Roads Lead to the Sea (Auckland University Press, 1997)—employs “biographical adjectives” which show “a necessary way into her work.” There are also readers such as Lauren Quaintance, who pays particular attention to the “deliciously alliterative exotic name” and the “sophisticated” Eastern-European look

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1 Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 89.
3 Ibid., 42.
of the writer. Hence, cultural framing seems to prevail in the studies of Kassabova in New Zealand. Readers and critics are often more preoccupied by the exotic otherness as presented in the culture and appearance of a writer such as Kassabova than by the creative literary practice as shown in her writing. In other words, it is through their impression of Eastern-European stereotypes that such readers have approached Kassabova’s work.

On the other hand, there are some voices which dispute such an approach. Mark Pirie objects to the way in which Kassabova’s Bulgarian immigrant status has been highlighted and, therefore, appeals to readers to “respect the poet and recognise her for what she is, i.e. a New Zealand poet.” Some scholars also claim that publishers and others have marketed her as an exotic writer. Heather Murray and Patrick Evans question the way in which publishers, media and the creative writing programmes at New Zealand universities tend to massively produce, package and promote good-looking young writers, including Kassabova, and have been selling their works as commodities in the literary market since the 1990s, with some critics even use the term, “exotic import”, to describe her. Such hot debates on the cultural identity of Kassabova, as pointed out by Paloma Fresno Calleja, show a problematic attitude to immigrant identity in the New Zealand cultural mainstream, which tends to classify the newcomers of the country in cultural stereotypes. As Fresno suggests, the disputation also reflects ambiguity in defining a New Zealand identity, which is in fact based upon cultural hybridisation.

As well as examining the way in which Kassabova and her writings have been pigeonholed by critics, I aim to undertake a more subtle account of her writing and of its relation to the biography of the writer, with the intention of taking the writer out of

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6 As Quaintance writes at the beginning, “The photograph on the back cover of the book shows a handsome woman of sophisticated European appearance with dark, cropped hair and milky skin [……]”. The description about Kassabova’s exotic look and the beautiful photographs of her are extensively presented throughout Quaintance’s article. See Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 86-92.


11 Ibid.
the pigeonhole. In other words, my study focuses on the way in which the writer utilises the migrant life experience and, therefore, constructs a self through writing.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Kapka (Nikolova) Kassabova was born in 1973 in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia. Her father, Nikola Kasabov, was Bulgarian while her mother, Diana Kassabova was Macedonian. Both parents were intellectuals and both were employed in the field of computer science in Sofia: her father lectured in computer science at Lenin Technical University while her mother worked as a computer programmer at a major company in the city. The couple’s interest in artificial intelligence influenced the choices made by their second daughter, Assia, whereas their first child (Kapka), considered to be the ‘black sheep’ of the family, later found her niche working in the world of the arts.

Despite their “intelligentsia” background, Nikola and Diana were overlooked in their careers due to the fact that neither of them was involved in the Communist Party. The couple were “paid less than a neighbour who was a crane driver.” Hence, the Kasabovs started their humble family life in a small two-roomed flat, located in a suburb of Sofia. Kapka and Assia shared the bedroom, while their parents slept in the sitting room, which also served as their study. The Kasabovs’ first home was in a grey concrete apartment complex situated in a suburb of Sofia commonly regarded as a residential area for ‘blue collar’ workers and their families and where the necessities of daily life, such as power and water, were frequently lacking. Scenes such as these are often utilised and depicted in the writer’s later works.

From the time she was a very young child, Kassabova started to show her talent in, and passion for, poetry. She had already been exposed to a considerable amount of

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13 The biographical background of the writer’s parents is from Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” interview with Kapka Kassabova, North and South, April 1999, 88.
15 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 David Eggleton, “Two Worlds,” 45.
poetry, such as the work of the Russian poet Pushkin.\textsuperscript{21} She wrote her very first poem at the age of eight. It presents “railway stations and farewell”, and as the poet suggests, “Maybe I just wanted to jump on the nearest train and go somewhere. I was only eight, though.”\textsuperscript{22} Somehow, that early poem by Kassabova discloses the poet’s sense of place, displacement, longing for journeys, and the desire for elsewhere, which were to become recurring themes in her writing.

Kassabova attended a French Lycée in Sofia for three years from the age of fourteen to seventeen.\textsuperscript{23} Life in the French-Bulgarian school would be explored later in her essays, “We Too are Europe” (2002)\textsuperscript{24} and “Polyglot Peregrinations” (2005),\textsuperscript{25} as well as in her memoir, Street without a Name (2008).\textsuperscript{26} During her high school years, Kassabova was a member of a writer’s club which was run by a leading literary magazine for young adults, Mother Tongue (Rodna Rech).\textsuperscript{27} The editorial board of the magazine published works in a variety of literary genres, and they often organised meetings in which “anti-establishment” writers and “young literary nerds” participated.\textsuperscript{28} Kassabova published a few poems in Mother Tongue between the ages of 15 and 16.\textsuperscript{29} The poems which were completed in her teenage years show the influence of “the Bulgarian neo-symbolist school of poetry.”\textsuperscript{30} This seems to have had a strong influence on Kassabova’s writing. Whether she presents her work in the form of poetry, fiction or essay, it is often characterised by her creative deployment of images and symbols.

Although she showed talent in poetry, and she inherited her “artistic aspiration” from both sides of her family,\textsuperscript{31} Kassabova describes her departure on the poetic

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{22} From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of The Poetics of Exile conference programme in July 2003.
\textsuperscript{23} See my interview with Kassabova in Appendix II.
\textsuperscript{24} See Kapka Kassabova, “We Too are Europe,” Landfall 203 (May 2002); 23-32.
\textsuperscript{26} See Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria (Auckland: Penguin, 2008).
\textsuperscript{27} See my interview with Kassabova in Appendix II. See also Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 90.
\textsuperscript{28} From my interview with Kassabova in Appendix II. See also David Eggleton, “Two Worlds,” 45.
\textsuperscript{29} See my interview with Kassabova in Appendix II.
\textsuperscript{30} David Eggleton, “Two Worlds,” 44.
\textsuperscript{31} Kassabova states in my interview with her that her grandmother used to work as a radio journalist in Sofia and was also a poet and radio playwright. See my interview with Kassabova in Appendix II. In addition, as David Eggleton writes, “Kassabova’s great-great-great-grandfather was a patriot and a revolutionary epic poet during the Turkish occupation.” See David Eggleton, “Two Worlds,” 44.
journey as an “unconscious process” and the way in which she “stepped into poetry writing almost against [her]self.”

Like many teenagers of her time Kassabova read a lot of science fiction and even dreamed of becoming a science-fiction writer, but very soon she discovered that she “had no talent in this area”. Therefore, she returned to poetry writing and also wrote some short stories at the time. Despite the frequent writing and publishing activities during her teenage years, she still did not see herself as a writer or poet: like most teenagers of her age she was drawn to many other things, such as playing the piano, drawing and painting, and she even fancied becoming a psychiatrist someday. However, all these early years spent contemplating the pursuit of a variety of ideas and interests still had some influence on her later career, as one can often see reflected in the symbolic, musical and psychoanalytical references in Kassabova’s writing. The writer considers her piano teacher in Bulgaria to be the one who had “the main early artistic influence” on her. Bill Manhire, Kassabova’s mentor and teacher in the Creative Writing programme at Victoria University of Wellington, describes Kassabova’s poetry as “poems which … sustained thinking in a musical framework: the various melodies of intelligence.”

Growing up in the totalitarian regime of Bulgaria also, to a certain extent, impacted upon Kassabova’s life and writing. Although life in those years was not necessarily as extreme and dangerous as some people may imagine life to have been in a communist country, the society was “paranoid”, especially on political issues. As Kassabova suggests, “You are either with them [the Communist Party], or you are against them.” This dualism in a “schizophrenic society” often affects how one

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32 From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of The Poetics of Exile conference programme in July 2003.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid. This part of the interview is recorded in the DVD attached to Michael Hanne ed., Creativity in Exile (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004).
37 From the back cover of Kapka Kassabova’s poetry collection Dismemberment (1998).
38 From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of The Poetics of Exile conference programme in July 2003.
39 Ibid.
interacts with people, because s/he often has to think before speaking.\textsuperscript{40} As a result, living “double lives”—what one had in one’s mind and what one could express to the outside—was a common situation for Bulgarians.\textsuperscript{41} As presented in Kassabova’s writing, her protagonists often live double lives and the writer emphasises the ways in which her characters negotiate the two disparate sides.

On the other hand, the double lives of Kassabova’s characters also evoke the extreme contrasts between communist and democratic countries. It was not until she reached the age of fourteen or fifteen that growing up in a communist society began to disturb her.\textsuperscript{42} Unlike most working class Bulgarians, the Kasabovs often had visitors and relatives returning from other Western European countries. They would bring all kinds of exotic gifts, which often made Kassabova “dream of other worlds”.\textsuperscript{43} In her adolescence, the contrasting life styles on the two sides of the Iron Curtain prompted an early sense of injustice and sense of displacement towards Bulgaria, as she states:

I started feeling depressed about where I was living, and I felt a sense of injustice about it. Not just about my life, but about this kind of division in the world where we were stuck on one side, and we were not allowed to go across; whereas, they, on the other side, had all the freedom and all this material wealth. And at the same time, I felt the whole—probably most of my young life—I felt that I didn’t belong in Bulgaria […] I just never really belonged there or anywhere, but it started with this sense of being born in the wrong place, wanting to be somewhere else.\textsuperscript{44}

She represents those encounters with people from the Western world and the displacement of a person growing up in the Eastern Bloc later in her essay, “Home is Where Every Memory Stops” (1995)\textsuperscript{45} and her travel memoir, \textit{Street without a Name} (2008). The consequence of this sense of displacement was that Kassabova started withdrawing from her life in Bulgaria and finding ways to escape from it:

Of course, I had no idea where I wanted to be, preferably in the West, but it was not to define the notion of where I wanted to be. I just knew that I was in the wrong place, so I practised escapism in every possible form, you know, going to movies, watching movies, reading books, or burying myself in books, the French literature that I had started studying in French college. In these worlds I guess ways of dealing with that feeling of — you could call it “internal exile.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid. This part of the interview is recorded in the DVD attached to Michael Hanne ed., \textit{Creativity in Exile}.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} See Kapka Kassabova, “Home is Where Every Memory Stops,” \textit{Landfall} 190 (Spring/November 1995): 240-246.
\textsuperscript{46} From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of \textit{The Poetics of Exile} conference programme in July 2003. This part of the interview is recorded in the DVD attached to Michael Hanne ed., \textit{Creativity in Exile}. 
A dramatic change in her life occurred in 1989 when the Bulgarian government, like other communist regimes across Eastern Europe, suddenly lost power following the toppling of the Berlin Wall in November of that year. The Kasabov family obtained an opportunity to leave Bulgaria in 1990 when Nikola Kasabov was offered a job as a lecturer at Essex University. Hence, the 17-year-old Kapka Kassabova left Bulgaria with her family and settled in the English town of Colchester.

Getting used to a Western European life style, which was very different from the one in Bulgaria, was difficult enough for her. In addition to that she had now encountered another fundamental challenge—the English language. Being brought up in Communist Bulgaria, Kassabova’s first and second languages were Bulgarian and Russian. Her three years of education in the French-Bulgarian Lycée made French her third language. Not until the family arrived in the U.K. did Kassabova begin to learn English, which was a “painful experience.”

Her passion for poetry had not subsided despite this dramatic shift of language and environment in her late teens. However, from the time she first moved to England, she started to realise that there was no point in her writing in her native tongue and that it was difficult for a new learner of the language like herself to write poetry in English. It was her English teacher and Scottish poet, Joe Sheerin, who encouraged Kassabova to start by translating her poems from Bulgarian into English and gradually shifting to writing directly in English. Apart from the translation process, her early English poetry writing was, at this stage, in a transitional phase. It was more like a test or an experiment with the new tool she had acquired, rather than deep self-expression:

I think the first poems I wrote in English were not really about what I was going through [...] I could only speak for myself, but the whole thing you’re going through when you change countries, especially at such a fragile age when you’re not really a fully-formed adult—I was in my late teens, the interesting thing is that there’s an after effect, a kind of delayed effect, where you’re not exactly sure what’s going on in your life. And it takes a few years—in my case, it took a few years to realize what I’d gone through. So, of course, there was the time I wrote love poems, even though that was not the true drama of what I was going through. But you know, when you were eighteen, you wrote love poems just

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47 Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 90.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
52 From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of The Poetics of Exile conference programme in July 2003. This part of the interview is recorded in the DVD attached to Michael Hanne ed., Creativity in Exile. In her essay, “Polyglot Peregrinations”, Kassabova identified the name of the teacher as Joe Sheerin. See Kapka Kassabova, “Polyglot Peregrinations,” 7-8.
It was not until two or three years later (around the age of nineteen) that she felt confident enough to write poetry in English, which was when she started her new life in another country—New Zealand.

After a year of life in England, Kassabova completed her final year of high school with excellent grades and the universities of both Oxford and Leeds offered her scholarships. However, the family’s visas expired and they were required to return to Bulgaria to make an application for an extension, so the family stayed the next ten months in Sofia waiting for news. The result was that everyone in the family, except Kassabova, because she was over the age limit for a dependent child, was granted a UK visa. Therefore, the family started to consider the possibilities offered by other countries. At the time Nikola Kasabov was offered positions at universities in several countries and the family eventually chose the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand.

In 1992 the Kasabov family migrated to New Zealand, and in 1993 Kassabova began her Bachelor of Arts in linguistics and languages at the University of Otago. Prior to their arrival in New Zealand, the way in which Kassabova imagined this country to be was as somewhere “exotic” and “tropical” with “a lot of hot beaches” like Tahiti. However, as she later found out in Dunedin, a town in the South Island of New Zealand where her family initially resided, it was “freezing all year around” and not the way she had expected. She was in shock because her first impression of New Zealand was more like a Little England, and, as she states, “Had we arrived perhaps in Auckland or the north, things might have been different. But it just so

53 From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of The Poetics of Exile conference programme in July 2003.
54 See “NZEPC: Seeing Voices on Kapka Kassabova.”
57 See Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 90.
58 See Prue Dashfield, “Literary Adventure,” 50.
59 Ibid.
60 See Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 91.
62 From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of The Poetics of Exile conference programme in July 2003.
63 Ibid.
happened that my first confrontation in New Zealand happened in Dunedin, and that wasn’t fortunate for me.”

The sense of out-of-place-ness, a theme which prevails in Kassabova’s early writing, somewhat reflects the displacement she experienced in ‘Western’ countries. Although she achieved well in university, she constantly felt “isolated” from peers, who often made her feel like “an exotic bird” in the group, a situation which had also occurred when she was attending high school in England. On the other hand, compared with the poverty experienced by her acquaintances in Bulgaria, the richer material life she had in the U.K. and New Zealand constantly made her feel guilty and, therefore, doubtful about her Bulgarian identity. Such a “grotesque juxtaposition” between lives in communist and capitalist countries and the feeling of not belonging anywhere are extensively presented in her works in the early phases. Without being enthusiastic towards the new life in New Zealand, she blocked herself off from the outside world again and escaped into extensive reading—the form of escapism she had adopted whenever she felt out of place in her adolescent years in Bulgaria. Unfortunately, escapism did not save her this time. The sense of displacement and the loss of her language of creative expression caused her to suffer from “depression and an eating disorder and agoraphobia” until she met a psychiatrist in Dunedin. She underwent therapeutic treatment, including art therapy, and, as the writer suggests, the outcome was satisfying. Painting helped her live through the passing phase before she was able to express herself confidently through writing in English. As Kassabova states, “in painting you don’t need language.” Eventually, with the encouragement of her psychiatrist, Kassabova started writing again.

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64 Ibid.
65 From Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 91.
66 As Lauren Quaintance writes about Kassabova’s high-school life in Colchester, “She felt ‘too exotic’ for the conservative local high school she attended at which she was constantly top of her class, and made only two friends during the family’s year in England.” Ibid., 90.
67 See Prue Dashfield, “Literary Adventure,” 52.
68 Ibid.
69 The examples for this are Kassabova’s essay, “Home is Where Every Memory Stops” (1996), and her fiction, Reconnaissance (1999).
70 See Kapka Kassabova, “Polyglot Peregrinations,” 11.
71 From Kay Douglas, Living Life out Loud: 22 Inspiring New Zealand Women Share Their Wisdom, 131. See also Kapka Kassabova, “Polyglot Peregrinations,” 11.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
She became an active participant in literary activities, and she showed excellent achievement in both academic and literary arenas. During the final year of her undergraduate life, she participated in a poetry club whose members had regular meetings at the Robbie Burns Hotel in Dunedin.\(^{75}\) She wrote film reviews for the University of Otago student newspaper, *Critic*.\(^{76}\) In 1994 she was the winner of the “Alliance Française’s National Prize for Poetry in French,” and in 1995 she won first place in “the *Critic* short story competition.”\(^{77}\) She was the recipient of the “Otago University’s George Young Award for academic achievement in Arts and Music” in 1995.\(^{78}\) In the same year, she was awarded a “Scholarship in Francophone Civilisation”, which offered her the opportunity to attend a one-month course in l’Université Française du Pacifique in Tahiti.\(^{79}\)

Kassabova began publishing her works in English in major literary magazines in New Zealand. After publishing the poems, “Fog” and “Being Wise” (spring 1994 in *Sport*),\(^{80}\) and “She and the Singer” (autumn 1995 in *Printout*),\(^{81}\) she started some prose writing. In 1995, she published her short story, “Out on a Limb”, in *Takahe*,\(^{82}\) and her essay, “Home is Where Every Memory Stops”, in *Landfall*.\(^{83}\) Four more short stories were published in the following two years: “Simian” (summer 1995-1996 in *Printout*),\(^{84}\) “The Apology” (autumn 1996 in *Takahe*),\(^{85}\) “Lovers” (winter 1996 in *Printout*),\(^{86}\) and “Too Much Light” (summer 1996-1997 in *JAAM*).\(^{87}\)

She gradually moved back from writing prose to poems again. Her experience of writing poetry after arriving in New Zealand was totally different from what she had gone through in England, as she states:

\(^{75}\) See Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 91. See also David Eggleton, “Two Worlds,” 44.
\(^{76}\) See the introduction to Kapka Kassabova in “Kapka Kassabova,” *Poetry New Zealand* 13 (Winter 1996): 10.
\(^{77}\) Ibid.
\(^{78}\) Ibid.
\(^{83}\) Kapka Kassabova, “Home is Where Every Memory Stops,” *Landfall* 190 (Spring/November 1995): 240-246.
Perhaps a couple of years after we arrived in New Zealand, I started writing poems about and stories about this new place. And I wrote “The Immigrant Cycle”, which is a series of poems, perhaps ten or so poems, which deal with these issues. And for the first time I felt I was articulating something that was really important to me, as if I’d finally gotten to the point, and I felt that I wasn’t just speaking for myself, but for other people with similar destinies that I’ve seen around me.\(^{88}\)

“The Immigrant Cycle”, which consists of seven poems, was first published in *Poetry New Zealand* in winter 1996.\(^{89}\) The linguistic challenge she experienced when writing poetry in England had turned into a challenge on the emotional level. She could finally embark on complex expression through poetic creativity as well as engaging in insightful observations on the lives of people who shared similar life experiences to her in New Zealand. The latter activity has been more significant in Kassabova’s poetry writing. On the one hand, it helped Kassabova to break out of the cocoon of the closed arena of the self and to start to focus more on the experiences of others. On the other hand, through the parallel experiences of other East-European immigrants and refugees in New Zealand, she was able to re-examine her personal experience from other perspectives and, very often, the blurring of emotional boundaries between self and other occurs in her writing.

In 1996 Kassabova completed her BA (Hons) in French and graduated from the University of Otago.\(^{90}\) She then moved to the North Island of New Zealand and settled in Wellington, where she started her Masters degree in Creative Writing and English at the Victoria University of Wellington.\(^{91}\) The Creative Writing Programme was directed by former Poet Laureate, Bill Manhire.\(^{92}\) Whereas her multi-lingual background and her BA studies in French equipped and benefited her in terms of the linguistic aspect of poetry writing, her MA studies in Creative Writing strengthened its artistic and literary aspects.

It was in New Zealand, a far away point of the earth from her birth place in Bulgaria, that Kassabova’s life as a poet and writer started to bloom. The literary magazine, *Poetry New Zealand*, selected her as the feature poet for their winter 1996 issue.

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\(^{88}\) From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of *The Poetics of Exile* conference programme in July 2003. This part of the interview is recorded in the DVD attached to Michael Hanne ed., *Creativity in Exile*.

\(^{89}\) See Kapka Kassabova, “The Immigrant Cycle,” *Poetry New Zealand* 13 (Winter 1996): 11-19. “The Immigrant Cycle” poem series are later included in Kassabova’s poetry anthologies, *All Roads Lead to the Sea* (1997) and *Someone Else’s Life* (2003). However, significant changes to the same poems were made in each publication.

\(^{90}\) From “NZEPC: Seeing Voices on Kapka Kassabova.”

\(^{91}\) See Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 91.

\(^{92}\) Ibid.
Also in that year, her poem, “Security”, won the 1996 International Poetry Competition held by the New Zealand Poetry Society. In 1997 she published her debut poetry collection, *All Roads Lead to the Sea* (Auckland University Press), which sold so well that the publisher had to reprint it less than a year after first publication. In 1998 *All Roads Lead to the Sea* was short-listed as a finalist for the poetry section of Montana New Zealand Book Awards and won the New Zealand Society of Authors’ Jessie Mackay Award for the Best First Book of Poetry.

**LITERARY JOURNEY**

Existing scholarship on Kassabova continues to treat the writer as a cultural *other* in the context of the New Zealand literary canon. Critics tend to focus on the issue of *displacement* in Kassabova’s works. This also reflects the tendency of New Zealanders who have a fixed impression of immigrants coming from totalitarian communist countries. In the works of writers such as Kassabova, readers in New Zealand look for elements which mirror the way in which they imagine life in communist societies to be.

In addition, there is a tendency to emphasise the autobiographical aspects of Kassabova’s writing. Her short stories in the first phase have been ignored by critics—with the exception of “Home is Where Every Memory Stops”, which is often considered as an “autobiographical essay”. The possible reason for such a tendency in the reading of Kassabova’s early works is that, unlike “Home is Where Every Memory Stops”, the remaining short stories are either not presented in a first-person narrative, or the protagonists’ backgrounds are not explicitly relevant to the writer’s biographical background as a Bulgarian emigrant in New Zealand. However, as will

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93 See David Eggleton, “Two Worlds,” 44. See also *Poetry New Zealand* 13 (Winter 1996): cover page and 10-28. The winter 1996 issue of *Poetry New Zealand* includes a brief biography of Kassabova and the first publication of her poems “The Immigrant Cycle” (7 poems), “Absent Mindedly”, “Father Climbing to the Stars”, “Windows: Variations on Magritte”, “In the Winter” (2 poems), “To My Children”, “Dumb Days”, “Pine Hill or Elsewhere” and “Storm”. Most of these poems are later included in *All Roads Lead to the Sea* (1997), and some of them are included in *Someone Else’s Life* (2003). As it shows, Kassabova often amends the same poems in each publication.

94 See David Eggleton, “Two Worlds,” 44.

95 See Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 88.

96 From “New Zealand Book Council.”

97 For example, David Eggleton regards Kassabova’s “Home is Where Every Memory Stops” as an “autobiographical essay”. See David Eggleton, “Two Worlds,” 44. Other critics, such as Lauren Quaintance, adopt passages from the work as reference to their constructions of Kassabova’s biographical life. See Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 86-92. However, the New Zealand Literature File of Kapka Kassabova at the University of Auckland categorises the work as a “short story”. See http://www.nzlit.auckland.ac.nz/author/?a_id=83 (accessed June 15, 2011).
be later demonstrated in my analysis, these early short stories of Kassabova present subversive narrative strategies which show the writer’s resistance to the conventional Western binaries of gender, race and culture.

As I will argue, there are other important features in Kassabova’s writing which deserve more attention. The tendency to read Kassabova’s writings biographically or to read them as though through the filter of a Western stereotype of the East European writer inevitably limits the perception of the potential complexity and richness of the writer’s work.

The trend of existing scholarship on Kassabova’s early work also reflects the expectation of the readers, who tend to show greater acceptance of works which present the life of an Eastern-European immigrant. For them, this is what makes Kassabova’s work different from the works of other writers in New Zealand, because they are familiar with the way in which Kassabova is packaged by her publishers, the media, and critics as a beautiful Bulgarian immigrant writer who writes about her cultural displacement. This perception can be an obstacle to Kassabova. As David Eggleton states, “That anxiety, a nervousness about cultural identity, about using too many Bulgarian references, is the problem of the artist in exile. She remains hopeful that she can write her way out of it.”

As will be shown in this section, the range of Kassabova’s works of what I identify as her first phase indicates the way in which the writer struggles to escape being categorised. Through her textual practice, in order to “write her way out of” the fixed image and identity, Kassabova presents “links, transgressions and border-crossings,” reflecting the postcolonial and feminist narrative subversion of the forced identity of sexual, racial and cultural otherness imposed by Western patriarchal discourse. This is specifically presented in her exploitation of autobiographical voice, manifestation of displaced experiences, and her rendering problematic the exotic other in the patriarchal representations of Western cultures.

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98 From David Eggleton, “Two Worlds,” 45.
Exploiting the Autobiographical Voice

Critics, such as Bill Direen, are fascinated by the way in which Kassabova is “not afraid of describing the emptiness she felt after leaving the land she loved and arriving in the one that could never be a substitute.” They seem to believe that the autobiographical voice genuinely represents the life of the writer. However, the first-person, “I”, in Kassabova’s work is more complex than critics have previously thought. Whereas, readers and critics of Kassabova have tended to focus on the biographical connection between Kassabova and the protagonists in her writing, I suggest a broader view of her works, emphasising the multi-referentiality of her stories.

My focus on the autobiographicality in Kassabova’s writing is not on what the writer reveals about her personal life to the public, but rather, how she exploits autobiographicality as a narrative strategy. As Susan Stanford Friedman points out, women writers often utilise the autobiographical voice to present their cultural, racial and gender resistances. To take the insight from Friedman’s observation on women’s autobiographical selves, the “I” in women’s autobiographical writing often suggests “dual consciousness—the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription.”

As Friedman states:

In taking the power of words, of representation, into their own hands, women project onto history an identity that is not purely individualistic. Nor is it purely collective. Instead, this new identity merges the shared and the unique. […] the self constructed in women’s autobiographical writing is often based in, but not limited to, a group consciousness—an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category WOMAN for the patterns of women’s individual destiny.

The narrative of Kassabova’s short story, “Home is Where Every Memory Stops” (1995) presents such a utilisation of the autobiographical voice, which shows a combination of the voice of a young Bulgarian woman and the voice of a collective Bulgarian (immigrant) identity. To highlight the sense of injustice, the writer juxtaposes the extreme contrasts between lives in Eastern-European communist societies and those of Western capitalism:

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100 Bill Direen, “Everything Changes,” 45.
102 Ibid., 39.
103 Ibid., 40-41. The word “WOMAN” in capital letters is Friedman’s emphasis.
New Zealand is my Western-dream-comes-true-and-stops-there. Sofia is to me what dreaming is to sleep. Sofia is my fear, my truth, my language.

[...]

Once I looked at the fair foreigners in quality T-shirts walking through Sofia, rich with dollars, and I desperately envied them. I the unfortunate dark girl from the Balkans who only knew two types of cheese, the yellow and the white, who lived in a muddy concrete complex, who was promising but clearly doomed to stay within the confines of this sad and surprisingly beautiful country.

[...]

They, the fair ones, had it all. They had real cars, real money, real clothes, real chocolate. When some Dutch friends of my parents came to visit us in their new caravan, with their bright trainers and boxes of sweets, I was ashamed of my country, of myself, I wished the earth would open up and take me back, so I would be born anew. How did they deserve to have all that? 104

The first person voice, “I”, is not restricted to a reference to the writer. It is more likely a collective voice which speaks for other Bulgarian immigrants, a voice which is counter to “they”—the “fair” Westerners who live in capitalist societies. In that sense, the seemingly personal experience is transformed into a collective experience of cultural resistance, making the personal feeling of injustice a collective political act.

The turning point occurs when the narrator begins her new life in New Zealand, a Western capitalist country which she had longed for. She becomes “a foreigner in a quality T-shirt, with dollars and a profound ignorance of what has happened in [her] absence” 105 in Bulgaria. Her sense of injustice is turned into a sense of displacement, because she has “forgotten [her] country’s geography” 106 while she has not yet “fit[ted] in” to the “Western’ suit” 107. Through the displacement of the narrator, Kassabova suggests that the self as an immigrant is situated in between the contrasting lives/environments, and the process of learning to negotiate a double life is crucial. It is an issue which Kassabova began to resolve through the narrative of her writing in the first phase, as well as through her physical journeys back and forth between Europe and New Zealand (starting from her first trip back to Bulgaria in 1998).

“Home is Where Every Memory Stops” presents the way in which the female protagonist’s double life, the memory of Bulgaria and the present life in New Zealand, is negotiated through the writer’s construction of narrative. Kassabova occasionally adopts the present tense for the past memory while referring to the present life in New Zealand as the past, as shown in the following passage:

104 Kapka Kassabova, “Home is Where Every Memory Stops,” Landfall 190 (Spring/November 1995): 240.
105 Ibid., 241.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 240.
I am back in the Youth 3 complex. I must resume my life which was disrupted during a few unimportant years in a far-away country, the life of the small shared room, the psychopathic neighbour, the stench of the packed morning bus, the happy ignorance of the child, the smog, the joy in spite of ugliness, the comfort of power cuts every two hours, because of the relief when the light came back. I check our mailbox on the ground floor (the lift is not working). There is a present for me: a packet of matchboxes, wrapped in see-through white paper, covered with Grandad’s writing:

“I am sending you this, my dear child, to help you get used to life here, after you’ve been to another, better world for so long. I am sad that you couldn’t stay there. I grieve with you. Your loving grandfather.”

I begin to climb the broken filthy stairs slowly, infinitely slowly. Every corner, every crack in the wall paint, every hole in the windows is encrusted in my mind forever like ugly and precious hieroglyphs that cannot be deciphered but at the same time hold no deeper meaning. As I get to the fourth floor there is a power cut. I sit on the last step as I used to when I came from school and didn’t have a key. But now I see the darkness, I see the ugliness in the darkness, I see my own life beyond this door of our flat, and it is a room filled with candles and matches, and the shadow of old furniture, but there is no light, no light.

This is where I belong. I will always end up here. I’ve never been elsewhere, it is all an illusionary episode, and now I’m back to my senses, the dream is over.  

As well as making the narrative tense ambiguous, the writer also complicates the sense of here and there. She turns the past in Bulgaria (there) into the here and now in her narrative, while the here and now in New Zealand becomes there in the past. The protagonist’s memory of her family apartment in Bulgaria is depicted vividly like a scene in reality and the description of it dominates the narrative, where as her current life in New Zealand seems to be a vague dream which is hardly mentioned in the passage. Besides, the negative impressions she had of Bulgaria are replaced by “joy”, happiness and warmth—an exile’s romanticised view towards people and things of the past. As well as overturning the duality, Kassabova confounds the past memory (reality, beautiful)/present life (dream, ugly) dichotomy further through the narrator’s statement that there is “the shadow of old furniture” and “there is no light”, suggesting that the life in Bulgaria is in fact the memory of the past. By complicating the dual concepts (here/there, past/present, happiness/sadness, beauty/ugliness and dream/reality), Kassabova collapses the rigid binaries and creates a continuous flow throughout her narrative between the two ends of the dichotomies presented.

In a sense, through oscillating back and forth between two contrasting poles, Kassabova makes sense of the life of the self as an exile who lives in between the two sides and feels displaced in both environments. On the other hand, such a narrative act by Kassabova also presents a resistance to the dualism in communist societies.

108 Ibid., 242-243.
109 See Kassabova’s explanation of the dualism in the Bulgarian communist society in the Biographical Sketch of this chapter.
and the self/other dichotomy in Western fantasies. The feature of extreme contrasts in the first phase of her writing denotes the departure of her literary journey, and in the later phases she presents negotiation through narrative with increasing complexity.

**Manifesting Displacement**

The sense of displacement is not represented only as a personal experience in Kassabova’s writing. In “The Immigrant Cycle” (poems, 1996 and 1997) Kassabova begins to incorporate the collective experiences of Eastern European immigrants in New Zealand. This is presented specifically in the first poem of the series, “Lament”, where the writer begins to adopt the first-person plural narrative voice, “we”, showing an explicit identification with the Eastern European immigrant community:

> We came and found paradise, but something was missing,  
> something in the water, in the sky, in the movement  
> of hands that couldn’t laugh, or embrace,  
> or punish  
> ‘they have no soul here, dushi nyet,  
> only sheep and empty roads  
> and full shops, but where is the soul?’

> […]  
> ‘back in Zagreb, to have a boat was my dream  
> so I built one, I call it Esperanza, I was about  
> to sail it on Sunday, then the war started’

Kassabova manifests the exilic and marginalised experiences which are shared by most Eastern European émigrés in New Zealand. To show the diversity within the Eastern European community, she quotes the words of a variety of migrants. This is evident from the foreign words in the poem, such as “dushi nyet” (“There is no soul.” in Russian) and Zagreb (the Croatian capital city). The words of the Russian migrant suggests the sense of loneliness and displacement s/he feels in New Zealand where there is “no soul”. The Croatian immigrant, on the other hand, dreamed of a better life in Western European countries, suggested by the boat name “Esperanza”, meaning “hope” in Spanish, which he planned to sail.

However, when Kassabova rewrites the poem, renamed as “Coming to Paradise” (2003), the quotations from different migrants are removed. Hence, the sense of cultural diversity in migrants, which was presented in the first version of the

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poem, “Lament” (1997), was de-emphasised. The effect of the changes is that in “Lament” Kassabova focused on an Eastern European collective identity, while in “Coming to Paradise” she starts to make the migrant identity a more inclusive one for all people. The development of the poem from “Lament” to “Coming to Paradise” suggests the sense of inclusiveness in the collective identity. Whereas, in “Lament”, there is a poetic voice (presumably the voice of the poet) which expresses itself beautifully in English, there are also voices of other Eastern-European migrants who express themselves awkwardly in English. By eliminating the quotations, Kassabova brings all these voices together, rather than individualising any of their cultural backgrounds. The sense of inclusiveness also suggests that the “I” and the “we” in Kassabova’s poems have become completely indistinguishable. This also indicates the development of Kassabova’s narrative voice, which in the later phases of her writing develops further to adopt an indefinite and inclusive voice, a second person, “you”, that involves a merging of the first- and the third- person voices. This presents an interesting parallel with Zhu.

As Susan Stanford Friedman suggests, “Women’s sense of collective identity […] can also be a source of strength and transformation.” Through the collective first-person voice, Kassabova represents the displacement of her own and of other immigrants from other East European countries. On the other hand, it also shows the way in which Kassabova seeks an alternative solution for her identifications with both Bulgaria and New Zealand, neither of which represents the way in which she perceives herself as an “immigrant”. Therefore, through making connections with other immigrant communities with the displacement they share, the writer finds a place to locate herself.

As well as manifesting collective displacement through identification with Eastern European immigrants, Kassabova also represents the displaced characters in the Western European/New Zealand communities. This is specifically presented in her short stories, which have rarely been discussed by critics. In “Out on a Limb” (1996), Kassabova presents a young woman, Jane, who constantly finds herself out-of-place in the environment where she stays. She is not even comfortable with her boyfriend, Tom. When they dine in a restaurant, she cannot help feeling “like the

spectator of a theatre play”, who is not involved in the situation. Instead of talking to her boyfriend, she constantly pays attention to strangers in the restaurant, especially those who also look out-of-place. Her sense of estrangement is presented especially in the scene when their meals arrive:

She stabbed the meat lying in her plate and without cutting it, she lifted it up in the air and then took it to her mouth. Once in her mouth, she pulled the fork away. Her nostrils filled with the smoky smell. She grabbed the meat with one hand. After all, having forks was merely incidental. They could have just as well not had them. Tom stared at her, slightly embarrassed.

“What are you doing?”
She could not reply because her mouth was full, so she just looked at him while chewing.

Jane’s strange behaviour reflects the way in which she perceives herself as a stranger in the restaurant who cannot fit into their environment and who cannot have proper interactions with other people. The sense of estrangement mirrors the situation of immigrants such as Kassabova, who are often seen as being different from the locals of their adopted country.

In “The Apology” (1996), Kassabova depicts a group of isolated characters in a retirement home. She perceives the group through the eyes of Tony Stone, the male first-person narrator of the story, an observant old man who often comments on other people in a sarcastic tone. For example, his impression of “old Minnie next door” is, “She is passing the time, just as she passes urine.” He criticises “poor Gary Parkinson” because “his 80 years of life don’t belong to him. They belong to someone else’s scarce, distorted memories.” However, his criticisms of them also reflect his anxiety about his own life, as he blames himself, “Come on, Tony, apologise for being no longer young, apologise for the pale colour of your blue eyes, apologise for the passage of time, for the persistence of desire, for being out of control [...].” Here, the word, “apology”, which is also in the title of this story, connotes “irony”. His criticisms of other patients ironically become the collective experience they share. They are a group of displaced people who do not have a home to return to, as the narrator states, “You have a home while you have a life.” The retirement home is not a real home for them, but it is “the closest [they will] get to home”,

114 Ibid., 21.
116 Ibid., 18-19.
117 Ibid., 18.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
which is, death. This somehow mirrors the displacement of those immigrants who cannot return to their home countries. The immigrant community in the new country is also “the closest [they will] get to home”. However, the members of the community are, more or less, like the patients in the retirement home in Kassabova’s story, whose collectively painful experiences and homesickness in the foreign country are comparable to waiting for death.

In “Too Much Light” (1997) Kassabova depicts the life of a closet lesbian in her 60s, who has isolated herself from the outside world for her whole life. She calls herself “a freak” who belongs to a dirty and dark corner of the world. She expresses her displacement and alienation directly: “I am always outside, so to speak, I am only inside my shirt and pants. […] I have always been right here in this room with a musty smell and dog hair, this is the outside, the world.” As the title of the story, “Too Much Light”, indicates, a lesbian ostracised by society lives inside the dark place of her own—the only place that makes her feel secure. But additionally she shies away from attention—she does not welcome light being shone into her dark place. The protagonist’s statement complicates the inside/outside binary. Through the voice of a lesbian, an alien in the New Zealand society, Kassabova resists the tendency in society which emphasises inclusion in or exclusion from the group whether this be gendered, cultural, racial or ethnical contexts.

Therefore, through her short stories Kassabova emphasises her protagonists’ out-of-place-ness. These out-of-place characters in her stories are people who belong to the established communities in New Zealand society, but their lives are invisible to the mainstream. Their experiences resemble the displaced situation of an immigrant from another culture and through the representation of such marginalised people, Kassabova seems to suggest that displacement is not for immigrants alone. It is in fact a collective experience for both ‘Kiwis’ and immigrants in New Zealand.

Problematising the Representations of Exotic Other

Three poems under the title “Associations” (published in Poetry NZ in winter 1996 and collected in All Roads Lead to the Sea, 1997), particularly “Exotic Bird Speaks”, “Apolonia” and “Summer 1996”, explore notions of exoticism in Bulgarian culture:

120 Kapka Kassabova, “Too Much Light,” 80.
121 Ibid., 82.
So far I even doubt my name
is the place of burgeoning roses
and grapes that burst
at the mere thought of them.\(^\text{122}\)

Her first-person narrative voice internalises the othering of her name by others, and presents the subject as a cultural \textit{other}, an “exotic bird”, whose name is \textit{exotic} like the “burgeoning roses” and the bursting grapes. Kassabova strategically positions the \textit{self} as an exotic cultural \textit{other} in New Zealand. The sense of exoticism “at the mere thought of” the name suggests the habitual attitude of those who tend to judge people according to their first impression. This echoes how Kassabova often felt herself to be rendered “exotic” among her peers when she was a high-school student in England and later when she became a university student in New Zealand.\(^\text{123}\) It also reflects the way in which the thought of Kassabova’s image as being \textit{exotic} prevails among the readers and critics in New Zealand. The word, “doubt”, in the first line points out the subject’s \textit{uncertainty} towards such an imposition of identity on her. Hence, by letting the “exotic bird” speak, the writer presents resistance to the stereotypical image of an Eastern European like herself, which is prevalent among Western Europeans and New Zealanders.

The words of the “exotic bird” are filled with pain. As well as the enforced exotic image she gains in the new environment, she imagines that she is “never remembered” and “never missed” back in Bulgaria, where there are “lonely poplars in autumn.”\(^\text{124}\) Although the narrative persona has “made it to this next life”\(^\text{125}\) in New Zealand, she has been distanced from her mother tongue, and is faced by the situation that she has to express herself through English. As the narrator states, “as an exotic bird I’ve learned to speak / this gentle language of oblivion, / of severed names.”\(^\text{126}\) Such an experience is not specific and therefore, the subject, “I”, in this poem can be read as a collective voice of the migrant communities, who find themselves displaced in their adopted countries; their names changed and their memories displaced by the new language that cannot contain them.

\(^{123}\) See the discussion of this in the Biographical Sketch of this chapter.
\(^{125}\) Ibid.
\(^{126}\) Ibid.
The poems, “Apolonia” and “Summer 1996”, show a deliberate deployment of cultural and historical nets to Bulgaria which play on these notion of the exotic: “the sphinx with its broken wings” standing on the cliff of the “Black Sea”, the “half-demolished Greek school”, the “mummified women in black”, the “kerchieved women”, the “black-eyed brides floating peacefully / on the Danube, flowers in their hands” and, the “dancing bears in chains”. These scenes are presented like postcard images, which may look beautiful to a foreigner. However, to Bulgarian immigrants, they reflect the sense of ambiguous nostalgia and sadness in their mind, which is presented in Kassabova’s narrative, the familiar images of people and monuments being accompanied by death, decadence and insecurity. As the subject in Kassabova’s poem says painfully at the very end of the poem series, “there are also nine million dishevelled sceptics / lying on clouds of cherry blossoms and pollution, / waiting for any damned god to come and save us.” The voice deploys the exotic images of Bulgaria in Western fantasies ironically, turning Kassabova’s narrative into postcolonial resistance to the Western gaze of the other. However, as the collective first-person pronoun, “us”, indicates, there is a transition from perceiving the exotic other from a distance to showing identification with the voice of the other, with whom the narrative persona sympathises. The fact is that exoticism suggests the contrast between the Western self and the ‘Eastern’ other. Therefore, oscillating between the positions of the gazer and the gazed at, the writer also suggests the desire to subvert the hierarchical cultural constructions that she encounters.

Kassabova utilises the polyvocal and palimpsestic functions in her narrative voice, which makes her text subversive to the cultural stereotypes in Western representation. In other words, exploiting the voice of the exotic other and presenting images of Eastern European exoticism in her writing are in fact narrative strategies which question the fixed representation of an Eastern European immigrant in New Zealand. This evokes Angela Coutts’s observation on the narrative of the Japanese writer, Hayashi Fumiko, that the woman writer “uses her marginal status as a place from which to give a critical account of her society and culture. […] she deliberately constructs herself as exotic to the mainstream in order to give herself a critical stance

from which to analyse it.” 129 Whereas Hayashi resists the Western stereotypical representation of Japanese women through her “self-constructed exoticism”, 130 Kassabova exploits the fixed impression of Bulgarians in Western perception, making it a problematic image which undermines the conception of the other.

Kassabova’s narrative voice blends together an immigrant’s painful displacement (being in an alien culture) and the irony of the Western locals’ stereotyped impression of an Eastern European immigrant. She problematises the narrative voice through the way in which the exotic images of Bulgarian people and culture are exaggerated in the narrative. The word “associations”, which is used as the title for these poems, also suggests the forced links between Western fantasies and the other cultures and reflects on it ironically. The “exotic bird” in Kassabova’s writing speaks for the writer herself as well as for other immigrants in New Zealand.

On the other hand, the images of Bulgaria in Kassabova’s writing present a non-English-native writer’s resistance to the foreign language that she has to adopt in order to make herself visible in an English-speaking country. Despite the fact that she presents her text in English, the poems are filled with Bulgarian images which are unfamiliar to readers of English. To obtain a better understanding of her poems, the readers are required to research the culture and history of Bulgaria.

As well as showing resistance in the cultural aspect, Kassabova also challenges the fixed impressions the sexual others in Western patriarchy; this is presented in her short stories, “Simian” (summer 1995-1996) and “Lovers” (winter 1996). In “Lovers”, Kassabova overturns patriarchal conventions of gender by presenting a young couple whose relationship challenges gender stereotypes. The male protagonist shows himself to have the feminine characteristics represented in patriarchal discourse on women: sensitivity, passiveness and dependency. By contrast, the female protagonist is presented as a rational, active, independent and dominant woman. Whereas he is hardly noticed by people, she is often the centre of attention. 131 She is a libertine, while he defends his chastity. Their relationship is constructed as an ironic subversion of the patriarchal romantic cliché:

His body was cold and frigid like an old man’s body. He had an old man’s heart. She lived with the vague conviction that he would be impotent, he had to be. “I’m sorry, but I don’t see you in that way,” she’d say and that would be a deadly blow to his tiny, atrophied ego. She didn’t think he had one. “I’m not intelligent enough for you.” (Of course you’re not). “My legs are the skinniest in town.” (They are.) “I’d like you to sleep here tonight.” (What?) So she does. Out of pity. […] She was his first lover, and only one. […] He didn’t want sex, he wanted love.

Kassabova rewrites the dialogue between lovers and the fixed impressions of men and women which one often sees in romances and soap operas. She makes the male protagonist a parody of the feminine stereotype in patriarchal context, and she subverts the patriarchal text further with the responses of the female protagonist to her boyfriend’s behaviour. Through the story, the woman writer revises the patriarchal conceptualisation of gender relationship, making a woman the powerful self who is in control of the “impotent” male other, which also shows resistance to the way in which women are categorised as other in male discourse.

In “Simian” Kassabova depicts the mind of a female protagonist, a PhD candidate and a tutor who lives a materially comfortable life but feels devoid of any love relations. Being a scholar who enjoys a stable financial life, she seems to belong to the dominant discourse of society. However, her personal life as a lonely woman undermines the comfortable status she has. She is a constant voyeur of her neighbours, Simian and his partner, two men who live across the road to her flat. Being convinced that the two men are a homosexual couple, through her imagining she obsesses over their intimate relationship. As indicated by the name, “Simian”, which means “ape-like”, the female protagonist’s observation of her neighbours is like studying animal behaviour. This attitude also implies society’s perception of the sexual other, who is often considered to be abnormal or animal-like, and whose behaviour is closely scrutinised by the heterosexual majority. It is through the female protagonist’s fantasies of the physical relationship between the two men, not through her own physical experience, that she receives sexual gratification. Towards the end of the story, the female protagonist is disappointed when she sees Simian and his partner bring two women home. Her fantasies of the homosexual relationship are demolished by the fact that the two men could be heterosexual.

Reality is not acceptable to the female protagonist. She has to live with the belief that the lives of the other (the homosexual men) fit the way in which she

132 Ibid., 60-61.
133 It also makes sense to suppose that the man’s name is actually “Simeon”, which is twisted as “Simian” for humorous purposes by the female protagonist.
imagines their lives to be. Her thoughts reflect the stereotypical representation of the other, the homosexuals, in patriarchal heterosexual discourse. The protagonist’s background as an academic scholar, whose social status is higher than average people, suggests the position of the dominant culture which observes the other. Hence, the story satirises the pigeonholing of identity whether it applies to gender, racial, cultural or political contexts. It also reveals the ambivalent attitude of the dominant discourse towards the homosexual other. On the one hand, the other is not accepted. On the other hand, mainstream discourse allows obsessive fantasies towards the imagined exoticness of the other.

Conversely, Kassabova presents the woman as voyeur, an active subject of gaze, which, in patriarchal discourse, is the position of men. By positioning a woman as the subject of gaze and making men the object, the writer overturns the male subject/female object binary. Through the perception of the female self, the two men are turned into homosexual other. Kassabova complicates and problematises the binary relations which are presented in her story: heterosexuality/homosexuality, subject/object of gaze, reality/fantasy. Firstly, the sexual inclination of the two men is ambiguous. They could be homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual. Secondly, although the female protagonist had been the voyeur of Simian and his partner, at the end of the story, the two men suddenly turn up at her new house into which she has moved, which suggests that they could have been watching her as well. Thus, it is uncertain which of them is the gazer and which the gazed at, confusing the subject and the object of the gaze. Thirdly, the writer blurs the boundary between fantasy and reality for the female protagonist. She has a beautiful feminine body but she can only have sex through her imagining of other people’s intimacy, as the narrative voice states, “She was too much out of touch with her breasts, her rounded thighs, the smoothness of her skin. […] She seemed to herself like a statue, beautiful, sure, but useless, sterile.” In addition, “Simian” is not the male character’s real name. It is the name which the female protagonist secretly calls her neighbour. Therefore, adopting “Simian” as the title of the story, Kassabova underlines the confusion of reality and fantasy in this story. Through the unrealistic fantasies of the female protagonist, Kassabova also questions the way in which a cultural other in Western

134 Kapka Kassabova, “Simian,” 49.
countries, like the writer herself, is perceived as an exotic other, whose exoticness only exists in a manner similar to the occidental imagining of oriental stereotypes.

Through her exploration of problematic construction of gender view in patriarchal discourse, Kassabova mirrors the ambiguous Western perception of the cultural other. As third-world feminists often argue, the Western representations of third-world women contain gender, cultural and racial/ethnical binaries. Through these works, “Associations” (poems), “Lovers” and “Simian”, Kassabova challenges the racial, cultural and gender binaries in Western patriarchal discourse.

Kassabova’s presentation of the exoticism of the other in Western discourse corresponds to what Sheila Rowbotham conceptualises as the “hall of mirrors” in the male dominant discourse about women and how women internalise these patriarchal reflections. It can be argued that the exoticism in Kassabova’s narrative shows an internalised image of self through the “looking-glass” of the dominant discourse in New Zealand on the cultural other. Kassabova presents the voice of a female Bulgarian immigrant, who perceives herself through the way in which the discourse of New Zealand locals/mainstream views her (a female immigrant other).

Kassabova’s emphasis on Bulgarian/Eastern European cultural elements in her writing also suggests an attempt to link personal marginalisation with collective experience, which corresponds to Sheila Rowbotham’s idea that women need to collaborate with other women and cultural minorities in order to build a strong communal identity of the cultural and sexual minority, so that it is possible to challenge misrepresentations of the other in the dominant discourse. As Audre Lorde suggests, “Survival […] is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.”

Kassabova’s writing in the first phase shows the way in which the writer explores the life of the self through the manifestation of a collective immigrant identity and the investigation of the collective life, experience and history of the group. This characteristic is further developed later in the exploration of Bulgarian history in

135 Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism.
137 I borrow this term from Sheila Rowbothan, “Through the Looking-Glass,” 26-46.
138 Ibid., 42.

Through her narrative the writer intertwines personal experience with collective Bulgarian and Eastern European identities. She presents the self as an exotic other (an Eastern European stereotype) in the eyes of a New Zealander, which makes her narrative resistant to Western patriarchal discourse. Kassabova also highlights the extreme contrasts of life styles between the Eastern and the Western Europe, and shows the desire of the self to cross the boundary which separates the two disparate sides. As is shown in the second phase of her writing, Kassabova’s narrative constantly moves back and forth between boundaries, creating a fluid continuity—between the past self in a communist society and the present self in a capitalist society. The boundary between the two sides also connotes the wall between Eastern and Western Europe, which collapsed in 1989 but still exists in the minds of Kassabova’s protagonists.

It can be argued that Kassabova uses her writing to integrate the self in all aspects: the self as a writer, the exotic image of self in Western stereotype/fantasy, and the collective lives of Bulgarian and Eastern European immigrants. The narrative of Kassabova shows the way in which the “fragmented” self of women in patriarchal construction, as pointed out by Susan Stanford Friedman, is replaced by a woman writer’s desire to create a “wholeness” of self through writing.\footnote{Susan Stanford Friedman, “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice,” 45.} Therefore, through her writing Kassabova weaves together the self in various aspects, merges the personal and the collective experiences, as well as including the problematic representations of Eastern Europeans in Western conceptualisation. She combines all these facets of self in her narrative, which also reflects the complexity of an immigrant woman’s identity. It corresponds to the “fluid self”, as Susan Stanford Friedman observes in the writing of Anaïs Nin, which collapses the boundary between self and other through showing “empathy and relation” with others in terms of identity.\footnote{Ibid.}

In addition, starting from the first phase, Kassabova has already begun to use several genres. On the one hand, by so doing, she is able to present herself in various ways, creating multiple channels for her writing. On the other hand, it also mirrors Kassabova’s resistance to the fixed image of herself and the pigeonholing of her
identity by critics. It suggests a resistance to being restricted in fixed categorisation (i.e. identity), a characteristic which one also finds in the writing of Zhu. Her writing explores a range of different genres, making it difficult for one to define her as a poet, an essayist, a novelist, or all of the above. This also suggests the potential hybridity of her writing, which is also a reflection of her conceptualisation of identity. As one sees in the later phases of her writing, she presents an increasing and extensive exploitation of this boundary-crossing tendency through her deployment of narrative voice and genre.

Her textual practice in the first phase indicates the development and direction which her writing will take in the second and the third phases. Firstly, her narrative negotiates extreme contrasts, showing a tendency to weave and shuttle between poles. Secondly, like Zhu’s exploitation of narrative voice, Kassabova’s construction of narrative voice shows increasing complexity throughout the phases, emphasising the performativity and “ventriloquism” of the voice, as Kassabova terms it. Thirdly, Kassabova gradually expands the collective experience with others, who belong to all cultures and nations, showing an attempt to collapse fixed identity and emphasising the complexity and hybridity of identity. Such a tendency to manifest a complex and hybrid identity through narrative also mirrors Zhu’s textual practice of life and self. Finally, both Kassabova and Zhu start their life and literary journeys with a disruptive situation. Zhu departs from the impossible coherence of the traditional Chinese and the modern and Westernised Taiwanese in the GMD discourse, and Kassabova begins with the extreme contrasts between the (Eastern) communist and the (Western) capitalist societies. Both writers encounter dualism in their environments. However, through their own kinds of textual practice, the two writers negotiate the strict binaries in the political, cultural, sexual and literary contexts.
Chapter Six
Crossing Borders

The powerful technologies of modernity have made possible new kinds of mobile identities, identities through which the masculinist logic of travel has to be renegotiated: [...] Through such narrative conventions the travel narrator locates the world, the space, and the time through which she has moved or is moving. As she situates land, landscape, language, and people, she also locates herself as a subject in motion through that world. Thus, the narrator is always engaged in the process of self-locating, and self-locating becomes an occasion for self-scrutiny, more or less consciously undertaken.

~ Sidonie Smith, Moving Lives

Whereas the phases of Zhu Tianxin’s writing correspond to the changes in the political environment of Taiwan, the phases of Kapka Kassabova’s writing reflect the changes of cultural environment as she moves from one place to another. Starting from the second phase (1998-2003), Kassabova’s writing focuses on the idea of travelling; whether she presents her work in the form of poetry, fiction, or essay, the idea of travelling dominates the theme as well as the narrative.

Placing her protagonists as travelling subjects, Kassabova presents and exploits the ideas of location, dislocation and relocation. Such concepts are also personalised through the writer’s life experience. Towards the end of 1997 Kassabova began her life as a traveller who constantly moved back and forth between New Zealand and Europe. Likewise, her narrative also shows the tendency to move between the opposing points of stasis, which were often presented in her writing in the first phase such as the polarised political and economic situations in Eastern and Western European societies, the binary concepts of self/other, subject/object of gaze, here/there, and past/present. Through the movement in her narrative she negotiates extreme contrasts. Travelling physically and narratively, Kassabova manifests a complex relationship between the self in reality and the self in writing, both of which are dislocated. Through her physical and narrative journeys, Kassabova relocates the self. As her writing begins to show, the identity of the self she manifests is, like the travelling subjects in her work, filled with indeterminacy, and is not restricted to an association with the writer. The manifold quality of her narrative subject challenges the commonly-held view of both readers and critics, who assume that Kassabova’s works are simply autobiographical, while I shall suggest they occupy a continuum between fiction and autobiography.

1 Sidonie Smith, Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women’s Travel Writing (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 27.
As in the development of narrative in the middle phase of Zhu’s writing, starting from the second phase of her writing, Kassabova also begins to show an observant narrative distance from the subject of her story. The change in Kassabova’s narrative viewpoint, as in the case of Zhu, is accompanied by increasing and explicit comments on the issue of identity, which I shall suggest was largely the cause of her work becoming a subject of dispute among critics. Commentaries on Zhu in Taiwan reflect the trend of Taiwanese nativism which challenged GMD nationalism after 1989, while criticisms of Kassabova mirror the views of those who held strong views on New Zealand “literary nationalism”. Presenting the desire to move away from British colonial influence, literary nationalism in New Zealand was a “shift of consciousness and movement to define a Pakeha (albeit male) identity”, beginning in the 1930s and being led by such writers as Frank Sargeson and Allen Curnow. As Alex Calder suggests, literary nationalism still prevails in the literary field of New Zealand today, and this can be seen in the trend of critics of Kassabova, who find her writing challenges the idealised “New Zealand identity” or the so-called “New Zealand literature” in which they believe.

However, even the concepts of “New Zealand identity” or “New Zealand literature” as such are indeterminate. As Kathy Ooi points out, “the category of ‘New Zealand literature’ is itself a construction. It is precisely because ‘New Zealand literature’ is a contingent category that one finds no unique traits that make New Zealand texts identifiably ‘New Zealand’.” In addition, there is a tendency among New Zealand critics who hold a somewhat pessimistic view of literary globalisation, expressing their worry about the loss of New Zealand national literature. The new rising young writers from Bill Manhire’s creative writing course, such as Kassabova,

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3 Ibid., 125-129.
are often the target for attack of literary critics. The situation evokes the way in which so-called “middle-class lady writers” (閨秀作家) in Taiwan (in the late 1970s and early 1980s), such as Zhu Tianxin, who were deeply influenced by the Chinese writing style of Hu Lancheng (胡蘭成) and Zhang Ailing (張愛玲), were criticised by Taiwanese nativist critics for the lack of Taiwanese localism in their works. Noticeably, starting from the second phase, Kassabova’s works began to be reviewed by critics in the U.K. and the U.S., who often refer to the writer as a “Bulgarian-born New Zealander”. The statement suggests that while Kassabova is often viewed as a Bulgarian immigrant in New Zealand, she starts to be recognised as a New Zealand writer overseas.

Just as literary nativism in Taiwan resists the colonial power of GMD Chinese nationalism by emphasising the localism of Taiwan, so does literary nationalism in New Zealand, which challenges British colonialism through stressing the localism of the country. However, the localist’s perspective of a collective New Zealand or Taiwanese national identity is problematised by writers such as Kassabova and Zhu, who complicate identity from the stance of migrants and émigrés. The criticisms of the two writers as posed by advocates of New Zealand literary nationalism or Taiwanese literary nativism, and the writers’ creative responses to the issue of identity, provide an insight into this comparative study.

Like the critics of Zhu, who tend to hold a fixed impression of her as a Chinese émigré writer and a supporter of GMD discourse, the critics of Kassabova also retain a static view of the author, locked in their early notion of her as a writer from Eastern Europe, still an exotic other, or a displaced Bulgarian immigrant. Critical readings of the works of both Zhu and Kassabova have often been undertaken with the somewhat simplistic first notions of the writer’s identity still in mind. Critics of both writers tend to be dismissive of the change of identity as presented in their works throughout the phases. It can be argued that Kassabova starts to show mobility in her life and writing, while the critics’ observations on the writer and her work stay immobile, which renders their criticisms somewhat problematic. In the second phase, Kassabova’s writing shows that the conceptualisation of the self as a displaced exile is

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8 See my discussion about literary nativism in Taiwan and the Nativist Literary Debate (鄉土文學論戰) in Chapter Two.
gradually replaced by the view of the self as a *traveller*, who tends to constantly *relocate* the self through travel and to perceive people and places from the viewpoint of an outsider. As I will argue in this chapter, Kassabova begins to *cross borders* through her physical journeys as well as through her narratives.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

After 1997, travel started to become a major part of Kassabova’s life, which she exploited extensively as the material for her writing. As soon as she had completed her MA in Creative Writing at Victoria University (Wellington, NZ), Kassabova flew to France and began to explore life in Europe. From late-1997 to early-1998 she worked as an English language assistant in Marseilles. These nine months in the southern French city proved to be a rich source of inspiration for her writing. It was in Marseilles that Kassabova completed the manuscript of her first novel, *Reconnaissance* (1999), which she had begun earlier as a project for the creative writing course in Wellington. Moreover, the city of Marseilles and the Mediterranean Sea began to feature in several of her works, including her short story, “A Day in Marseilles” (1998), her travel articles for the *NZ Listener* in 1998 (“Mediterranean Babylon” and “Blue Caprice”), and later in her second novel, *Love in the Land of Midas* (2000). It can be argued that the first trip back to Europe in 1998 after migrating to New Zealand was the source of Kassabova’s transformation from exile to traveller, which began to be reflected in the narrative of her writing.

In 1998, after the success of her first book, *All Roads Lead to the Sea* (1997), Kassabova completed her second poetry collection, *Dismemberment*, which was also published by Auckland University Press. Both *All Roads Lead to the Sea* and *Dismemberment* are now out of print, but twenty-six poems from these two collections were selected, revised and included in her next poetry anthology, *Someone Else’s Life* (2003).

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9 See my interview with Kassabova in Appendix II. See also Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” interview with Kapka Kassabova, *North and South*, April 1999, 92.
In *Dismemberment* Kassabova shows greater confidence in her use of the English language and she begins to present deeply philosophical ideas through an extensive adoption of imagism. However, this also makes her work less accessible to readers because an understanding of her work needs imagination and does not rely solely on the literal meaning of the English words.\(^{15}\) The change of style in her writing challenges the taste of her reviewers who are native speakers of English. As has been shown, reader responses to *Dismemberment* are polarised, the responses often focusing on Kassabova’s command of the English language. Whereas there are positive reviewers, such as Hamesh Wyatt, who acknowledges the book as, “the most powerful read in poetry” of the year 1998,\(^ {16}\) there are also harsh criticisms from reviewers, such as Bernadette Hall, who considers the work as showing “[i]nflated language, clumsy personifications and an overdose of rhetorical questions.”\(^ {17}\)

What critics think to be the weaknesses are, in my opinion, the strengths in Kassabova’s work. They show the fact that her writing has evolved into complex forms in terms of voice and genre, which also challenge the English native speakers’ idea of how writing in English is supposed to be. Her writing shows extensive practice of symbolism, simile and imagery, emphasising the artistic and musical qualities in her articulation of the English language. It can be argued that Kassabova resists the idea of herself being a foreign speaker of English, and she does so by creating alternative meanings to English words, making English look strange to native speakers. Although adopting English as the tool for her creative expression, Kassabova emphasises Eastern European or Bulgarian imagery, blending features of her Bulgarian mother tongue into her English writing. As Kassabova states, “English is a kind of artificial additive while Bulgarian’s the natural ingredient.”\(^ {18}\) Thus, her writing presents what Shu-mei Shih terms, “linguistic dissonance”,\(^ {19}\) which shows “multiple accents for one standard language […] whose hegemonic projection of uniformity is subverted through a […] representation that refuses to cover up


dissonance with uniformity.”20 It that sense, what is “dismembered” in Kassabova’s *Dismemberment* is the English language. The “linguistic dissonance” in Kassabova’s writing reflects her migrant identity, which is invisible to those who hold a single perspective towards the New Zealand identity. Kassabova’s articulation of language places her writing in a linguistic location which incorporates both English and her mother tongue but is dislocated from both, mirroring the in-between-ness of her protagonists’, as well as the writer’s, exilic situations and identities. As John McCrystal comments, “As an outsider, she brings a freshness to it [the English language].”21 Through her writing Kassabova enriches the use of English language in the literary field of New Zealand and other English-speaking countries, showing creative ways to command the language. She presents what John Fiske considers as a postmodernist “reworking” of the material provided by the dominant culture: English language is not treated “as a complete project to be accepted passively, but as a cultural resource to be used.”22

What is often neglected by critics is the transformation of Kassabova’s deployment of voice, starting from her writings in 1998. As shown in many of her poems in *Dismemberment*, her short story, “A Day in Marseilles” and in her travel writings, the writer begins to adopt the second-person narrative voice extensively, creating a tendency to blur the boundaries between the narrative subject (“I”) and the narrative object (“s/he”). Personal experience as an exile is no longer a subject of emphasis in Kassabova’s writing. As Bede Scott points out, in *Dismemberment* Kassabova has moved to focus on “exile as a feature of the human condition.”23 The writer’s transition from the presentation of personal life to the representation of the universal/collective experience eliminates the distinction between self and other. On the other hand, it is also an indication that Kassabova tends to steer away from the *autobiographicality*, with which her works have often been labelled by critics, and she starts to explore multi-referentiality. This change echoes the tendency of Zhu’s writing in the middle phase.

It was in the second phase that Kassabova began to write novels and, like Zhu, she started to emphasise the *fictional* construction of her work. Although she had

20 Ibid., 5.
published short stories in the first phase, her prose writing tended to be ignored by readers and critics. Her first novel, *Reconnaissance*, was published by Penguin in February 1999 and “received critical acclaim” in both New Zealand and the U.K.²⁴ It presents the journey of a young Bulgarian-New Zealander, Nadejda, who finds herself displaced in both her home country, Bulgaria, and her adopted country, New Zealand. The background of the protagonist is so similar to that of the writer that, despite Kassabova’s emphasis on the fictiveness of the story, it is often read as a work of autobiography.²⁵ The book was short-listed as a finalist for the fiction section of the 1999 Montana Book Awards in New Zealand. It also won the Best First Book Award in the South East Asia and South Pacific section of the 2000 Commonwealth Writers Prize.²⁶ The novel has been translated into Hebrew and Japanese.²⁷

In 1999, alongside Tina Shaw, Kassabova was awarded the Buddle Finlay Frank Sargeson Fellowship and based herself in Auckland.²⁸ During her six-month residence in the fellowship apartment she worked on her second novel, *I, Midas*, which would become *Love in the Land of Midas*, published by Penguin in 2000.²⁹ The novel, set in Greece, centres on the romantic relationships of two couples. The first (in 1998) is the romantic love of a young French woman, Véronique, and a Greek-Australian PhD student, Theo. The second is the 1948 love affair between a left-wing French journalist, Pascal (Véronique’s grandfather) and the Greek guerrilla fighter, Daphne (Theo’s grandmother), during the Greek Civil War. As in Kassabova’s first novel, *Reconnaissance*, the personal lives of the protagonists and the political-historical context also intertwine in the narrative of the story. For the background to this novel about the post-W.W.II political history of Greece, Kassabova conducted a considerable amount of research even participating in several news discussion forums on the internet. However, Kassabova, who occasionally

²⁵See, for example, Matt Johnson, “Reflecting Reality,” *Sunday Star Times*, sec. D2, February 14, 1999. The issue regarding the autobiographicality of Kassabova’s *Reconnaissance* will be explored further in this chapter on p. 235.
²⁹See Lauren Quaintance, “Exotic Bird Kapka Kassabova,” 92.
“made ‘innocent enquiries’ in several internet chat groups”\(^{30}\) about the Greek Civil War, received “death threats”.\(^{31}\) Despite that, her research shows convincing results in the novel, in which she “displays a subtlety of craft and a knowledge of her subject”\(^{32}\) in terms of the political-historical context of Greece, that has been acknowledged by reviewers.\(^{33}\)

Whereas critics, such as Rachael King, consider that Kassabova’s *Love in the Land of Midas* reminds people of the stories “about love—torn, doomed, but very much alive—and war” in many of the works by Gabriel García Márquez,\(^{34}\) Kassabova obviously exploits her knowledge of the writings of Franz Kafka in her short story, “Rebellion of a Kafka Character”.\(^{35}\) Through her narrative, she reworks the typical characters in Kafka’s works who often struggle in absurd situations or are in impending danger.

In 2000 Kassabova embarked on her first venture in collaboration entitled *Parallel Histories* (24 March to 20 April 2000 at the Fisher Gallery in Manukau City, Auckland, New Zealand). Her collaborators were the Caribbean-New Zealand artist, Nancy de Freitas, and New Zealand musician and composer, Mark Storey. Verses by Kassabova, such as “Place” (collected in *Someone Else’s Life*, 2003) and “Nothing That You Can Take” (from *Dismemberment*, 1998), were used for the creation of the artwork. They are engraved on the surface of glass pieces which connect with or lie parallel to each other.

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\(^{31}\) From John McCrystal, “Beauty and the Best Seller.”


\(^{34}\) From Rachael King, review of *Love in the Land of Midas*, by Kapka Kassabova, *Pavement*, October/November 2000, 186.


Hong-Key Yoon’s concept of “geomentality”, which suggests that the perception/creation of a landscape by an artist, poet or writer often reflects his/her mind, culture and life experiences, provides an insight into the exhibition. Projecting their personal and collective experiences as exiles, immigrants and residents of New Zealand, Kassabova, de Freitas and Storey presented their feelings towards the landscape of the country through literary, artistic and musical creativities, which were combined into one work that shows the parallel histories of all people living in New Zealand.

Like Zhu, in the middle phase Kassabova also began to write across various genres. Apart from writing poetry and fiction, she also tried her hand at essay and travel writing and these became increasingly important in her literary career. She started publishing extensively in magazines in New Zealand and overseas, and she was a frequent book reviewer and critic for the *NZ Listener*. From 1998 to 2000, she wrote book reviews of, *A Kind of Kingdom* (by James Norcliffe), *Sport* 21 (edited...
by James Brown and Fergus Barrowman), 41 *Salonica Terminus: Travels into the Balkan Nightmare* (by Fred Reed), 42 *Landfall* 196 (edited by Chris Price), 43 *The Red Heart* (by Rosie Scott), 44 and *The Curative* (by Charlotte Randall). 45 Kassabova has shown that, not only can she write creatively in English, but she can also comment as a discerning reader who is able to make insightful observations.

In the same way that an explicit political voice increasingly emerged in the middle phase of Zhu’s writing, starting from this phase Kassabova also began to present critical views on politics and social phenomena through her work. Like Zhu, Kassabova also expresses her social and political observations through commentaries. In “The Refugees as Ourselves: A TV Viewer’s Report” (1999), 46 Kassabova criticises the indifferent attitudes that audiences in Western democratic countries often hold towards tragedies in the rest of the world. As she writes,

> And so, quietly, we become Us as they become the Refugees. They are alien and incomprehensible to us as their executioners. Their new refugee-hood envelopes them like French aid-blankets, like British army tents. While the Red Cross and other humanitarian bodies busy themselves, we become superfluous voyeurs. The barrier is not the TV screen but the word Refugee. We remain human in our individuality, whereas they are deported from the realms of humanity, in great, swelling, unaesthetic herds. The trains puff past us and we wave to the faces and hands sympathetically, in our civilised manner, but we can’t stop their inexorable journey towards Refugee-Land. […] The TV screen is our passport to the land of voyeurism. Our passivity grows in proportion to the scale of the tragedy. 47

Whereas Zhu’s political commentaries focus on the social-political conflict between ethnic communities (Chinese émigrés and Taiwanese nativists) and the social injustice experienced by cultural minorities in Taiwan, Kassabova pays much attention to the social-economic contrasts between Western (capitalist) and Eastern (post-communist) countries, protesting against the way in which some Westerners tend to set boundaries between their own culture and other cultures. As occurs increasingly in Kassabova’s writing, the writer tends to obscure the self/other binary in her narrative.

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41 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
Drawing on her increasing number of travel experiences, in the second phase Kassabova begins to produce an extensive amount of travel writing, especially “travel essays”, a genre which will dominate the third phase of her work. In 2002, her first travel book, *Globetrotter’s Travel Guide to Delhi, Jaipur and Agra*, was published by the New Holland Publishers in the U.K. Her article “Dancing Queens” (2001), a travel essay on the lives of the *hijras*, eunuchs, of India, won the 2002 Cathay Pacific Travel Writer of the Year Award. In the same year her travel essay, “We Too Are Europe”, also made her the co-winner, with Patrick Evans, of the 2002 *Landfall* Essay Competition. Kassabova shows creative exploitation of genres in her travel essays, in which she makes use of important features from autobiographical, fictive, essayistic and poetic writings and blends them together in one genre. In her travel essays Kassabova discovers the sense of freedom and enjoyment, as she states,

> I like travel essays, which really get to the bottom of things, like Naipaul’s essays. […] I really like exploring a place with more possible angles; that is to me one of the most exciting experiences that I have in writing. And it is not a fictional one. I mean, yes, imagination helps, but you have to be an observer, you have to draw conclusions, and you have to see patterns in societies and behaviours. I just find it fascinating to find an aspect of my personality, and I find that as exciting as writing poetry or fiction.

It can be argued that through her travel essays Kassabova shows all the major narrative strategies she adopts in the second phase, such as maintaining an observant distance from the subject, an explicit socio-political voice, obscuring autobiographicality, and presenting her work in the *continuum* of fiction and autobiography. This makes Kassabova’s “travel essay” a hybrid genre, which is comparable to Zhu’s “essayistic narrative”.

As well as involvement in several literary festivals in New Zealand, such as the *Going West Festival* (1999, 2000 and 2003), the *Seeing Voices Poetry Festival* in Auckland (1999 and 2002), and the *Readers’ and Writers’ Week* in Christchurch (2000), she also started travelling overseas and making herself an international writer through joining international literary events, such as the *Commonwealth Writers’ Prize Week* (2000, in New Delhi) and international writers’ festivals in Sydney (2001),

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51 From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of *The Poetics of Exile* conference programme in July 2003.
Vancouver (2001) and Calgary (2001). The Seeing Voices Poetry Festival (2002) was later published as the first New Zealand CD poetry anthology, in which Kassabova’s reading of her poems was also included.

In 2002 Kassabova was awarded the Creative New Zealand Berlin Writers’ Residency. The approximately 60,000 NZ dollar grant provided her with a nine-month residency (commencing in September 2002) in central Berlin and a travel allowance, which enabled her to concentrate solely on her next poetry collection, Someone Else’s Life.

Starting from this phase, Kassabova also began to become increasingly involved in academic activities. She started lecturing at the Auckland University of Technology in 2000, teaching ESOL, Business ESOL and New Zealand Literature. After returning to New Zealand from her nine-month Writer’s Residency in Berlin, in July 2003 Kassabova was invited to present at the international conference, The Poetics of Exile, at the University of Auckland. In the year 2003-2004, she lectured in a University of Auckland English Department postgraduate course in Creative Writing.

In 2003 the Auckland University Press published Kassabova’s third poetry anthology, Someone Else’s Life, which collated some of the new poems that she had published in magazines and journals (including Glottis, HEAT, Landfall, Poetry New Zealand, Sport, Trout); these included the poems she had presented in the Parallel Histories exhibition, as well as selected and revised versions of some poems from her previous two poetry collections, All Roads Lead to the Sea (1997) and Dismemberment (1998). As New Zealand journalist Siobhan Harvey writes, “For Kapka Kassabova, there came a point in her career when she turned from being one of the country’s hottest literary imports into one of our hottest exports. This moment came […] when her collection of poetry, Someone Else’s Life, was published in England.” Rebecca Wilson-Lyn also states, “Whatever she writes, one thing is

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53 From NZEPC, “Seeing Voices on Kapka Kassabova.”
55 See my interview with Kapka Kassabova in Appendix II.
56 Ibid.
57 See the Acknowledgements page in Kapka Kassabova, Someone Else’s Life (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003).
58 Siobhan Harvey, “Foreign Exchange.”
certain: the future of modern New Zealand literature looks golden with Kapka Kassabova in the midst.” For a writer such as Kassabova, who, about a decade prior to this publication, had arrived in England from Bulgaria with little knowledge of written or spoken English, this was certainly a great achievement.

**LITERARY JOURNEY**

As Kassabova begins her life as a traveller in the second phase, the idea of travelling as a central theme is also manifested in her writing. Whereas in the first phase of her writing Kassabova presents the polarised life styles of the Eastern and Western (European) worlds and the problematic binaries in Western stereotypes, in the second phase she begins to move and shuttle between the distant poles through her physical journeys (travelling back and forth between New Zealand and Europe) as well as through her textual practice. Her narrative shows the tendency to cross boundaries between the rigid temporal and geographical separations (past/present; here/there; memory, fantasy/reality), fixed cultural impressions, the self/other binary, disparate narrative contexts (personal life and collective history, reality and imagination), clear distinction of narrative pronouns (I, we, s/he, they, you) and the strict categories of genre (fiction and autobiography). As I will discuss in this section, emphasising the concept of travelling, Kassabova resists the idea of being restricted to one place, time, context, culture, voice, genre or language, which also reflects the way in which the writer perceives identity.

**Moving between Moments of Stasis**

Kassabova’s narrative creates movement between moments of stasis in terms of time, space, status and context. This is specifically presented in her poem, “My Life in Two Parts” (collected in *Someone Else’s Life*, 2003), and her two novels, *Reconnaissance* (1999) and *Love in the Land of Midas* (2000). In “My Life in Two Parts”, not only does Kassabova present contrasting elements, as she often did in the first phase, but she also creates threads between the contrasting poles:

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Outside my window is a row of poplars growing from the turf of childhood. Poplars grow in rows, never on their own. It is Christmas. The sky is full of stars, the branches are bare, the wolves distant and menacing. Now is the only time for oranges. Their brisk fragrance fills the nails as we lie in cold rooms high in the Balkans dreaming of palm trees and the world.

Outside my window is a palm tree. It is winter. The sky is enormous and the ocean follows the moon. Oranges are on the window-sill with other tropical fruit no longer of interest. Bright-plumed parakeets sway in the palm tree and that’s the only time I look up. I lie in the low, stuffy rooms of adulthood dreaming of poplars and the world. Always, they come in rows.

Kassabova presents the “two parts” of the narrative persona’s life. Geographically, the Balkans and the South Pacific are the two locations in the life of the narrator. The former represents childhood, while the latter stands for adulthood. Therefore, the two geographical places also suggest a temporal meaning, which are presented as contrasts that mirror each other.

The two parts of life are presented as two still, frozen moments, like two dramatically contrasting photographs. The picture of childhood in the Balkans is like a black-and-white snapshot with images of poplars growing in rows and bare-branched trees, expressing much loneliness. What accompanies the childhood scene is the “distant and menacing” sound of wolves, which suggests danger and insecurity. Compared with the dark and threatening image of childhood (having the poplars standing in rows like a group of disciplined Communist soldiers), the picture of adulthood is colourful and relaxed with its “tropical fruits” and “bright-plumed parakeets”. Whereas childhood is presented as an insecure environment with orderly conformity (rows of trees), adulthood is shown as a place of safety and of unconventional beauty. In addition, the narrative persona’s feelings about exotic fruits, such as oranges, in the childhood and in the adulthood also present a contrast of scarcity versus surplus.

Nevertheless, there is something bizarre about this colourful picture of adulthood. Despite its colour, its spectacular images (an enormous sky with ocean following the moon), and its liveliness (tropical fruits and colourful birds swaying in palm trees), the image does not present a state of contentment at all. The sense of disappointment is also indicated by the change of smell from the “brisk fragrance” of oranges in the first part to the “stuffy room” in the second part, suggesting the change of the narrator’s emotion from excitement to boredom. While “the sky is enormous and the ocean follows the moon”, which looks fabulous, the narrator, “I”, does not even bother to “look up”. Compared with the “Christmas sky full of stars” of childhood, which is filled with hope, the adulthood of “I” is disillusioned.

Whereas, according to common logic, there is supposed to be a clean cut between the two parts of the narrator’s life, Kassabova strategically adopts the present tense for both, making both parts occur simultaneously in narrative. In that way, the two parts are no longer restricted to their own temporal and geographic spaces. Through the poet’s narrative arrangement, they are presented in the same space, which makes it possible for the narrative persona to travel between past and present or here and there. In other words, Kassabova creates a flow through narrative for the fixed geographical and temporal points.

In addition to exploiting the present tense, Kassabova also makes creative use of the image of the “window”, a symbolic separation between the interior and exterior spaces in this poem. Whereas the exterior space is the landscape outside the window, the interior space suggests the narrative persona’s state of mind. The narrator sits indoors and through the window s/he looks at the view outside. The window is a division between spaces, but, paradoxically, it also provides the person indoors with an opportunity to see what lies outdoors (or vice versa). Therefore, “window” is also a connection between spaces. The window is a passage which allows the narrative persona’s emotion to flow from the interior space to the exterior landscape onto which “I” projects the emotion inside onto the landscape outside. The landscape presented in the poem is not necessarily what lies outside. It is more likely to be a reflection of the narrator’s mind, which evokes Yoon’s idea of “geomentality” that a person’s conceptualisation of a landscape is a projection of his/her “frame (state) of mind

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61 The first-person persona in this poem is not specifically gendered, thus adding a layer of indeterminacy.
regarding the environment.” Whereas the symbolic window remains between the spaces, the poet creates movement through her narrative, which connects the states of the real and the imaginary realms.

The window is also a separation/connection between the two parts of the narrative persona’s life. The image in the second half of the poem is presented as a projection of the first half. In addition to the identical textual format of the two halves, in the second stanza the mind of the narrative persona persists in the state which is shown in the first stanza. It is indicated by the “stuffy” room of her adulthood (a connotation of “repression”) and the trees “in rows” (an indication of “rigid disciplines”), which suggest that the narrator projects her feelings towards her former home in the Balkans onto her adopted home in the South Pacific, both of which make her feel displaced.

Like the function of the “window”, the “ocean”, as Tanya Gilbert points out, symbolises the “barrier” as well as “doorway” between Kassabova’s lives in Bulgaria and New Zealand. Accordingly, in this poem the ocean separates and connects the two contrasting parts of the narrative persona’s life. The last three lines “I lie in the low, stuffy rooms of adulthood/ dreaming of poplars and the world” suggests the desire to embark on journeys back to the childhood in the Balkan home or somewhere else. This desire is personalised through Kassabova’s physical journeys in the second and the third phases.

Personalisation complicates the narrative authority in Kassabova’s work. Whereas the words, “my life”, in the title of the poem invite the reader to consider the work as an autobiographical poem, the title of the poetry anthology, Someone Else’s Life, in which the poem is included, lends a sense of ambiguity to the autobiographical voice. It suggests multi-referentiality in Kassabova’s first-person narrative voice. The “I” can be associated with the writer. However, it can also be dissociated from the writer, and, instead, can be linked to readers who have similar experiences, and therefore, identify themselves with the narrative persona. In this way, Kassabova breaks the boundary between self (I) and other (someone else), suggesting the complexity of identity through the complexity of narrative authority. This will be discussed further in the section about “collapsing genres”.

62 Hong-Key Yoon, “On Geomentality,” 388. See also an earlier part of this chapter.
Kassabova’s novels, *Reconnaissance* (1999) and *Love in the Land of Midas* (2000), present movement back and forth between moments of stasis in more complex ways. The sense of *mobility* is presented in the physical journeys of the protagonists as well as in the narratives of both novels.

The two stories centre on protagonists whose lives are displaced and whose identities are complex. In *Reconnaissance*, Kassabova presents the displaced and controversial life of a young Bulgarian-New Zealand émigré, Nadejda, who had left her native home in Bulgaria and became a resident in New Zealand. She resides in this new Pacific home with her mother, while her father, a professor of philosophy, has been left behind in Sofia. Travelling back and forth between Bulgaria and New Zealand, Nadejda struggles to fit into both cultures and finds herself stuck in between. While Nadejda’s past life in Bulgaria has turned into nothing but memories, her new life in New Zealand has also made her feel alienated. Such a displaced situation is typical among Kassabova’s protagonists. As Val Aldridge points out, her writing often presents “longing for the old and being not quite part of the new.” Therefore, the homeless Nadejda pursues a life as a backpacker travelling around New Zealand, making youth hostels her temporary homes.

Similarly, *Love in the Land of Midas* is also presented as a story of displacement. The female protagonist, Véronique, travels to the Greek city, Thessaloniki, in order to unravel the story behind her father’s death during his journey from France to Greece. There she encounters and falls in love with Theo, who has flown from Melbourne to Thessaloniki to meet his paternal family in Greece and to conduct PhD research on Alexander the Great. Véronique’s family tragedies (the disappearance of her grandfather in 1948 and the deaths of her father and grandmother in 1998) have resulted in depression for her. Theo, on the other hand, is disturbed by the turbulence of his family history (the deaths of his family members due to the political crisis in Greece in 1948). As a result, both protagonists adopt a course of escapism in their lives: Véronique, who is from a wealthy French family, pursues material life and sensual enjoyment and becomes a drug addict. Theo, who distances himself from the real life in the present, is drawn to classical studies and romanticism.

As shown in both novels by Kassabova, the life story of an individual often presents the complex relationship between personal and collective experiences. In

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64 From Val Aldridge, “Fleeing Sofia and Fearing Suburbia.”
Reconnaissance, what awaits Nadejda at the end of her seemingly aimless journey is the key to the family secret, which centres on a mysterious man, Bojan (Nadejda’s biological father), whose life, like the lives of Nadejda’s family members, is closely tied to the political history of Bulgaria. In Love in the Land of Midas, the tragedies in the families of both Véronique and Theo have been caused by the Greek Civil War of 1948. At the end of the book, as the lovers finally realise, there was once another secret romance between Véronique’s grandfather, Pascal, and Theo’s grandmother (on the maternal side), Daphne, whose love affair was triggered by the same war fifty years before. Through her narrative Kassabova presents the movement between the personal stories of her characters and the big picture, the political-historical context.

To present the “inextricably entwined” relationship between political history and personal life, the narratives of Reconnaissance and Love in the Land of Midas show a braiding of contexts: personal life, political history, and Greek mythology tend to intertwine with and mirror each other. Kassabova adopts the mythological story of Sisyphus as an analogy for the lives of the protagonists in Reconnaissance. Sisyphus repetitively pushed a rock up a hill and each time watched it tumble down again. The myth provides an insight into the lives of Nadejda’s family, who strove to escape from their unsatisfactory lives in Bulgaria and pursue better lives in New Zealand, only to find themselves back in the state of displacement and depression in which they had been in Bulgaria. The myth of Sisyphus and the lives of Kassabova’s protagonists also mirror the political history of Bulgaria, which, although it has been through several revolutions and political reforms, has always returned to the same poverty-stricken state in which its people struggle for existence. In Love in the Land of Midas, Kassabova uses two mythological stories: the myth of Midas, whose touch turned everything, including his daughter, into gold; and the pursuit of Daphne by Apollo, whose embrace transformed the woman he loved into a laurel tree. Drawing on tragic scenes from mythology, Kassabova presents the doom-laden fates of her protagonists, whose pursuit of personal desire (romantic love, physical fulfilment, and political idealism) inevitably takes something else away from their lives. The Greek myths and the lives of Kassabova’s protagonists also provide insights into the political history of the Balkans, where human greed turns a beautiful place into an area with a history of endless conflict.

In these two novels, Kassabova’s protagonists embark on journeys to reconstruct their family histories. Both stories begin with family mysteries which disturb the protagonists’ lives. The clear picture of the family story is not revealed until the very end of the protagonist’s journey, which is presented “like some stunted game of join-the-dots.” The figure is only apparent towards the end.66 The physical journeys of Kassabova’s protagonists tend to move back and forth between two locations. In *Reconnaissance*, Nadejda’s journey is presented as “the opposite of an Odyssey: beginning at a foreign place, she goes home, and gradually returns to the foreign place. New World, Balkans, New World.”67 In *Love in the Land of Midas*, Pascal (Véronique’s grandfather, a left-wing French correspondent for *Le Monde*) travels back and forth between democratic France and communist Greece in the 1940s, in order to liberate his lover, Daphne, and “to be liberated from Pascal [himself].”68

Likewise, the narratives of both novels are also presented in the form of a continuous movement between two points. The narrative of *Reconnaissance* often flashes back and forth between the protagonist’s past life in Bulgaria and her present life in New Zealand, showing the way in which the protagonist negotiates between the two contrasting lives. For example, in the chapter entitled “Supermarket Dreams”, Nadejda’s mother, Ana, wanders alone in a huge, modern and convenient supermarket in New Zealand, while her mind is taken back to life in Bulgaria where people often queued for hours in the cold winter to buy food and necessities. Whereas there is a variety of goods to choose from in New Zealand, there was only one type available in Bulgaria:

> [S]he is facing the biscuit wall. Once, in their first year in New Zealand, she started counting how many types of biscuits there were, and before she finished counting burst into tears, right here, by the biscuit section, much to Nadejda’s embarrassment. [...] Because there was in her ruffled mind an image of little Nadejda at her table, her sleeves rolled up to her elbows, with a packed of the only biscuit available in Sofia, the hard, white, square ‘Ordinary Biscuits’, and three types of homemade jams.69

The shopping scene in *Reconnaissance* evokes Zhu’s short story, “The Crane Wife”.70 Both Zhu and Kassabova exploit the relationship between women and capitalist society. Whereas Zhu’s story emphasises the anxiety of the protagonist who faces the dramatic change of economic conditions in society, Kassabova’s story

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67 Ibid.
69 Kapka Kassabova, *Reconnaissance*, 104.
70 See Chapter Two.
focuses on the way in which a woman negotiates the contrasting life styles when moving from one society to another.

In addition, Kassabova adopts the images of the penguin and the donkey, representative animals in New Zealand and the Balkans, and through her narrative she makes them the symbols which connect the polarised spaces in *Reconnaissance*. Nadejda claims to have seen a penguin on the shore of the Black Sea in Bulgaria when she was a child. Similarly, during her backpacking journey in New Zealand, Nadejda often saw a donkey in her dreams, and later, the donkey appears by Lake Taupo in New Zealand. Whereas the penguin in her childhood foretells her future journey to New Zealand, the donkey in her adulthood connotes her memory of life in Bulgaria. Through presenting a penguin (a Southern Hemisphere animal) in Bulgaria and showing a donkey (a Balkan animal) in New Zealand, Kassabova, unconstrained by the common knowledge of reality, makes a narrative connection between the two countries which are geographically apart. By doing this, Kassabova creates a link between Nadejda’s childhood in Bulgaria and her adulthood in New Zealand, making the protagonist’s past and present lives a continuous flow. The narrative strategy also reflects the protagonist’s sense of displacement. Nadejda is stuck in between her memory of Bulgaria and her new life in New Zealand. Feeling that she does not belong to either of them, she tends to choose the space in between and travels continuously. Through creating a *continuum* of the past and the present, here and there, memory and reality, reality and fantasy (considering the fact that the penguin and the donkey seem to appear in Nadejda’s imagining), Kassabova’s protagonist is able to make sense of her self.

Moreover, a donkey is known as a beast of *burden*. This animal characteristic is transformed into the *burden of history* in *Reconnaissance*, suggesting the protagonist’s and the characters’ displaced lives as being entwined with history. The penguin in *Reconnaissance*, on the other hand, indicates the life, history, art and literature of New Zealand, which centre on the natural environment of the country. Both images of the animals are linked to Nadejda’s uncle, Vassil. The penguin in Nadejda’s life initially appears on the image of a postcard from Vassil, who lived as a Bulgarian exile in New Zealand and occasionally sent letters back to Bulgaria. The first reference to the donkey occurs in the narrative when Nadejda’s uncle and grandfather were trying to escape from Bulgaria in 1975 for political reasons. The two of them had successfully crossed the border between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia by
hiding in the donkey cart of Kosta, the father of Nadejda’s biological father, Bojan. Therefore, the images of penguin and donkey in the narrative of *Reconnaissance* also make connections between the personal life of the characters and the broad history of Bulgarian exiles in New Zealand.

Kassabova constructs the narrative of *Love in the Land of Midas* in a similar manner. The titles and protagonists of the chapters are arranged in this order: “July 1998, Marseilles” (featuring Véronique and Theo), “June 1949, Gammos” (featuring Daphne and Pascal), “September 1997-March 1998, Thessaloniki” (focusing on Véronique), “March 1998, Thessaloniki” (focusing on Theo), “September 1997, Athens/Thessaloniki” (shifting from the life of Véronique to explicitly mentioning Pascal), “March-April 1998, Thessaloniki” (moving from the life of Theo to implicitly mentioning Daphne), etc. Hence, the narrative of the novel shuttles back and forth between two geographical locations (France and Greece), two temporal spaces (late 1990s and late 1940s), four protagonists (Véronique, Theo, Daphne and Pascal), two families and two romances, two contexts (personal lives and political history) which all centre on the same theme—love and war, a paradoxical combination. *Shuttling back and forth* between the points through her narrative, Kassabova weaves them all together into one story. The style of *movement*, as presented in the narrative of this novel, echoes the journey of the writer, who came from the war-torn Balkans and who constantly travels back and forth among Western Europe, the Balkans and the Pacific.

As Kassabova’s narrative shows, her characters often live double lives: the past and the present lives always accompanying one another. Their memory of the past is the shadow of the present reality, and the present event is the mirror to the past incident. Such a narrative strategy foreshadows the narrative of Zhu Tianxin’s works in the third and the fourth phases, where the protagonist’s memory of the past and life in the present are often juxtaposed in the narrative. Whereas Zhu’s protagonists tend to consider the past as *beautiful*, Kassabova’s protagonists think of the past as *unbearable*. However, they all share the same characteristic, which is that condition of displacement, because they are exiled from the past and out-of-place in the present. The lives of Kassabova’s characters belong on the *continuum* between the past and the present, and the here and there. This explains the back and forth movement in their physical and metaphorical journeys, as well as the presentation of Kassabova’s narrative.
In addition, the protagonists of Kassabova’s works tend to adopt escapism in every possible form. The narrator of “My Life in Two Parts” is unhappy wherever s/he (a persona which is not restricted to the writer) is and always dreams of being somewhere else. Véronique, the protagonist of Love in the Land of Midas, escapes from her real life into the realm of memory and fantasy which is induced by her heroin addiction. The protagonist of Reconnaissance, Nadejda, is always travelling or on the move. The name, Nadejda, means “hope”. As Kassabova states, “Either I wanted to convey a sense of hope or the opposite. […] A bit ironic because there isn’t much hope for her.” Nadejda’s extreme anxiety turns her into a habitual sleepwalker who unconsciously urinates in rubbish bins, a person who suffers recurrent nightmares, and a regular shoplifter. Her backpacker’s journey is also like sleepwalking. She has no idea what she is doing or where she is going:

She doesn’t know where she lives any more. She knows where her father lives, where her mother and uncle live, where some other people live. But Nadejda’s dwelling place is yet to be located—because right now she is not living anywhere. She is travelling, which is the opposite of living somewhere.

Therefore, travelling (a life without stable residence) becomes Nadejda’s resistance to the life that is stable and yet makes it impossible for a displaced person to fit in. Living as a displaced soul, Nadejda has no choice but to persist in carrying on her voyage—a voyage without a certain destination. Kassabova’s protagonists show a tendency to perceive themselves as “travellers” to the places they have been to and the cultures they have encountered, and in this way they deal with their sense of displacement. To ensure that they are not stuck somewhere, they tend to live an unstable life and to be constantly on the move. They also tend to keep an observant distance from people they encounter, making ironic presentations of cultures, which I will discuss below.

Past and present, present and future, here and there, and memory/fantasy and reality are the contrasting poles, and are elements in stasis. In both works, the narrator’s expectation for the future and feelings of nostalgia for the past motivate the movement between the contrasting poles. Kassabova’s narrative presents the

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71 Kapka Kassabova, Reconnaissance, 18.
73 Kapka Kassabova, Reconnaissance, 15-16.
74 Ibid., 84-87.
75 Ibid., 29.
76 Ibid., 166.
movement, the shuttling back and forth between contrasting poles, weaving across the space between them. Through her writing one sees the way in which Kassabova attempts to negotiate between the polarised elements which were extensively presented in her writing in the first phase, and how she attempts to weave between the contrasting parts in order to connect all the torn fragments into a whole piece. In a sense, the woven piece (the weave) is also a record of Kassabova’s physical and metaphorical journeys which flow back and forth between Europe/Bulgaria and New Zealand. It is in this way that the poet constructs a self and, therefore, locates her writing in the *continuum* of fiction and autobiography.

**Problematising Stereotypes**

Whereas in the first phase Kassabova focused on the way in which the image of the *other* was stereotyped or presented as being *exotic* in the Western perception, in the second phase she reverses the direction of the cultural gaze and observes cultures through the eyes of the *other*. This narrative strategy is adopted in her novel, *Reconnaissance*, and in her poem, “Balinese” (collected in *Someone Else’s Life*, 2003). In *Reconnaissance*, Kassabova invites the reader to examine New Zealanders and tourists from all cultures through Nadejda’s backpacking journey around New Zealand. However, the protagonist’s observation is presented in a complex way.

The people whom she encounters are not referred to by their own names. They are given names according to Nadejda’s snapshot impressions of their appearance and the cultures/nations they represent, such as “Squash-face” (a New Zealand male receptionist),77 “White-teeth” and “Pink-singlet” (a German male couple),78 “Vikings” (a Northern European couple),79 “Dutch Birdie” (a Dutch woman),80 “Cameraman” (an English male writer),81 “Narcissus” (a French man),82 and “Mare-woman/Nightmare woman” (a German female).83 As in the way in which people from other cultures are often classified by Westerners, during the journey, the tourists are labelled by Nadejda as soon as she meets them. In addition, the names which Nadejda uses for the Western Europeans often show indications of wealth, such as

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77 Ibid., 15-16.
78 Ibid., 30-31.
79 Ibid., 29.
80 Ibid., 54.
81 Ibid., 92.
82 Ibid., 58.
83 Ibid., 140 and 145.
“white teeth”, “pink singlet” (a gay look), “Birdie” (a term from golf) and “camera”. The irony in the names shows a resistance to the way in which Eastern Europeans, like Nadejda, are often perceived as people from deprived communist countries. The word, “Narcissus” for a French man also suggests the self-centred attitude and the emphasis on the self/other boundary as in Nadejda’s impression of Western European cultures. She avoids conversations with other travellers and often puts on her earphones,\(^\text{84}\) listening to the music on her walkman in order to block the noises around her, showing a tendency to distance herself from others. It also suggests that she refuses to understand the backpackers as individuals and relies solely on her fixed impressions of the cultures/nations they represent. Through Nadejda’s simplistic and problematic identity pigeonholing, Kassabova presents the irony of the cultural stereotyping habit which prevails among Western First-World people in their representation of other cultures.

As well as observing people, Nadejda is sensitive to the way in which she is observed. Her exotic appearance is constantly emphasised in the narrative, starting from the cover picture of *Reconnaissance* which shows an Eastern European young woman with dark long hair and sexy lips.\(^\text{85}\) Seeing herself through the viewpoint of Westerners who live in capitalist societies, she assumes that other travellers would consider it a “bizarre”\(^\text{86}\) situation to see “a lone girl from the Balkans leisurely touring the Pacific while there is the aftermath of war there, plus crime, poverty, national protests and general chaos.”\(^\text{87}\) She receives confirmation about this through the dialogues with her fellow backpackers. As the narrative shows, during the journey Nadejda is always asked the question about where she is from. Like playing a mind game, she usually tells the person that she is from Bulgaria, and then lets him/her continue the rest of the conversation with their impressions of her country. As she discovers, the people she encounters are often surprised to realise how “normal”\(^\text{88}\) she is, which is opposite to their stereotypical impression that “all people from there dressed in some kind of brown uniform and didn’t smile.”\(^\text{89}\) They often link Bulgaria with the Western fixed impression of communist societies as being poor and

\(^84\) Ibid., 29 and 116.
\(^86\) Ibid., 31.
\(^87\) Ibid.
\(^88\) Ibid., 39 and 90.
\(^89\) Ibid., 90.
“obscure”, their simplistic view or bias against people from “the Soviet bloc”, and some of them even confuse Bulgaria with other Eastern European countries. Nadejda’s dialogue with Pink-singlet and White-teeth provides an example of this:

“Ah, Bulgaria.” The “a” is pronounced as in “danke”. They both nod, suddenly serious.

“We know Bulgaria.”

Nadejda has always been bemused by the way some people say “we”, when talking in the first person and having no indication from the others that they agree. But they are both nodding, that’s an indication.

“It’s like Czechoslovakia, no?” Very poor.”

“No. It’s much poorer than Czechoslovakia.”

They are obviously from West Germany. Nadejda regrets having smiled at them at all.

“Ah.” Indeed, she thinks, Ah.

“Are you on holiday here?” Pink-singlet gets away with his pink singlet only because he is manly to the point of vulgarity, she notes. His muscles twitch under the smooth skin like creatures buried alive.

“Yeah,” says Nadejda, deciding not to grace them with the truth.

“We haven’t met any Bulgarians.”

Again, the strange “we”—how does he know that White-teeth hasn’t met any Bulgarians? He may even have met them carnally, in a clandestine nocturnal arrangement unknown to Pink-singlet unsuspectingly snoring in his bunk.

“And I have met a lot of Germans,” Nadejda says, sure of their inability to grasp the irony in her voice.

“Ah yes,” they laugh.

Why do they laugh? They aren’t even surprised that she guessed their nationality. It is pleasant to look at these dazzling teeth, though, designed solely for laughing.

“And… do you travel alone?”

Aha, she thinks, now we come to the point. “Yes.”

The self/other (we/they) binary is highlighted in Nadejda’s conversation with the German males. To question the problematic “we” articulated by the Western European man, she replies with the pronoun, “I”. Here, the pronoun, “we”, suggests both cultural and gender contexts: It means “we, the Western Europeans” and “we, the men,” while the opposite of “we” indicates Nadeja, the Eastern European woman. She deliberately exaggerates the poverty and invisibility of Bulgarians, in order to reflect the ironic pride of the West German men. Whereas the two men assume that they “know” her country and her situation, their words reveal their ignorance. As the passage shows, while the two Western European men may feel that they are in control of the conversation with the Eastern European girl, they do not realise that she is actually the person who carefully examines them and makes them the object of her gaze, the site of her “reconnaissance”, which is a military term for “an exploration or examination of an area” in order to “obtain information about it” before occupation.

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90 Ibid., 92.
91 Ibid., 164.
92 Ibid., 30-31. The word, “we”, in italics in the last sentence is Kassabova’s emphasis.
In that sense, Nadejda’s gaze is subversive in terms of gender and culture, considering such an activity is often done by men and for colonial purposes. It is presented through the way in which Nadejda secretly scrutinises and comments on the two men’s words straight after each statement they make, and that turns the Germans’ words into an ironic representation of themselves. Eventually, the way in which they look down upon, or “laugh” about, another culture becomes a criticism of their own ignorance. In other words, the problematic statements of the German men are presented like a *palimpsest*, a *polyvocal* utterance showing feminist resistance to and criticism of the European-male-centred viewpoint. Whereas the two German men show interest in Nadejda, she sees them as a homosexual male couple, whose *masculinity* is undermined by their “pink” singlet and their twitching muscles which are “buried alive” under “the smooth skin”. In her mind she attacks their words, “We haven’t met any Bulgarians”, which suggests cultural discrimination. She extrapolates meaning from the statement they have made and suggests that only the Bulgarians and women, whom they are biased against, know the dark secret about the arrogant West German men’s sexuality. Hence, through her narratives Kassabova *relocates* women and the cultural *other* and places them in an empowered position over men and Western culture.

Unlike the way in which the Europeans are labelled by Nadejda, Asians are referred to in the text according to their nationalities. Not as much attention is paid to the description of their appearance and costume as to their weakness in English and their passive attitudes, which are also stereotypical impressions of Asians in the Western perception. For example, “a young Korean man” would be “diligently copying some new English words into a notebook, his bilingual manual open in front of him under the bright white lights” at midnight in the backpacker’s lounge. “A group of Chinese women” would be “silent and hunched, suck[ing] noodles at a small table within earshot of the white table” where a German female (Mare-woman) loudly states, “Asians work hard, you know […] They will eat us if we don’t stick together.” The “bright white lights” under which the Korean studies “English” and the “white table” next to the group of Chinese connote *white Europeans*, and, therefore, the scenes containing Asians present the way in which prejudice operates among racial groups. Through Nadejda’s examination of Asians, Kassabova projects

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94 Kapka Kassabova, *Reconnaissance*, 82.
95 Ibid., 143.
the simplistic view of Asians held by Westerners. In addition to that, through Marewoman’s aggressive criticism of the Asians, Kassabova highlights the cultural bias of Western Europeans, in which her Bulgarian protagonist is in the victim’s position as are the Asians.

In addition, like the female protagonist in Zhu’s “The Old Capital”, Kassabova’s protagonist in *Reconnaissance* also, as Paloma Fresno Calleja points out, “sees the country through the eyes of both a migrant and a New Zealand citizen”. Both of them tend to choose the role of a tourist as the temporary disguise for their identity during their journey in Taiwan or New Zealand, while their perception of the country contains layers of visions. Whereas Zhu’s protagonist examines Taipei through the lenses of her personal memories of the city (in which she has lived all her life), the Japanese colonial map of Taipei and the historical records of Taiwan during European and Chinese colonisations, Kassabova’s protagonist projects her personal memory of Bulgaria and the political history of the country onto the landscape of New Zealand. For example, when the New Zealand coach driver and tour guide, Rodney, shows the backpackers a valley which was formed due to the eruption of Mt Tarawera, Nadejda’s mind flies instantly to a childhood memory with her parents in the Vitosha Mountains of Bulgaria. When seeing the raging water of the Huka Falls in New Zealand, she recalls the historical violence of the massacre of Bulgarians by the Turks who forced them to convert to the Muslim religion. Upon crossing a bridge in Taupo under which the busy water of the Waikato River runs, Nadejda sees in her fantasy the Bulgarians jumping off the cliff one by one after they refused to become Muslims. As pointed out by Anna J. Smith, “New Zealand is necessary for Nadejda to remember Bulgaria; Bulgaria is necessary to map a new New Zealand.”

Being a backpacker she is *burdened* with personal and collective memories of Bulgaria which accompany her throughout her journey in New Zealand, and it is through the memory and history of Bulgaria that she makes sense of nature in New

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97 See Chapter Four.
99 Ibid., 126-127.
100 Ibid.
Zealand. As Fresno suggests, “Bulgaria and New Zealand share this ambivalent characteristic: both become points of departure and arrival, but remain mere stages in Nadejda’s continuous journey. Both countries are islands which provide refuge, but also prisons from which Nadejda needs to break free.”

Nadejda’s self is always on a continuum between Bulgaria and New Zealand, of the past and the present, and of the personal and the historical contexts. The status of being on a continuum suggests that she cannot stay in a fixed location and has to keep moving in between. This indicates the hybrid identity of Kassabova’s protagonist, which is also true for Zhu’s characters.

Moreover, the backpackers in Reconnaissance symbolise people who are burdened with the fixed images of their own cultures. Nadejda’s problematic view of her fellow backpackers according to her impression of the cultures they carry with them presents an ironic comment and a resistance to the way in which she is often perceived by other travellers through their fixed impression of Bulgaria. Like the unreliable male narrative voice in Zhu’s writing, the cultural view of Kassabova’s protagonist, Nadejda, is questionable. It would be problematic if the reader were to take the surface meaning of the statements made by Zhu’s male narrator or Kassabova’s female protagonist and link them with the writers’ view on gender or culture, as critics of Zhu and Kassabova often do. The irony and polyvocality in their narratives are what need to be taken notice of. In Kassabova’s Reconnaissance, whether it is Nadejda’s representation of the cultures of the tourists or the tourists’ representation of her culture, neither of them is reliable. This is analogous to a person standing in front of a distorting mirror; the reflection is always twisted. What is emphasised in the ironic and problematic voice of cultures in Reconnaissance is the fact that there is always a certain degree of unreliability in the representation of another culture.

Starting with Reconnaissance, Kassabova adopts the narrative strategy of representing the self through the viewpoint of the other. The cultural gaze moves in both directions: while Nadejda positions herself as the subject of gaze of the backpackers from all cultures, she is at the same time the object of their gaze. In psychotherapy, especially narrative therapy, there is an approach that requires one to look at oneself not from one’s own perspective, but from the perspective of other

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people. Kassabova uses this method in her narrative and in using it she tends to adopt an alternative viewpoint for her narrative subject and blend it into the voice of the narrative persona. This is clearly presented in her poem, “Balinese”.

Kassabova presents the poem in two parts—part one: “Taking a photograph” and part two: “Made” (the name of a Balinese girl). The narrative of part one begins with the statement of the narrative persona, a Western tourist, who has made a voice-over for the scenery she captures in her camera, “This is the Indian ocean, breaking white over sharp coral.” A cultural encounter through the landfall of Westerners, an invading force of tourists coming towards Bali, is suggested in the statement. The term, “white waves”, is associated with the white European tourists. Like the waves, they move towards the shore of the Southeast-Asian island and break over the “sharp coral”, an indication of the exotic locals.

The text of the poem is presented from the viewpoint of a Western tourist. Made does not speak in the first person, while the narrator, a Western tourist, projects her thinking onto the Balinese girl. There is an attempt to present the view of the Balinese local underneath, but it is still done via the voice of the Western tourist. Although there is a sense of sympathy for the locals in the narrative voice, it does not necessarily represent their thoughts.

What tourists seek to capture Bali in snapshots represents what they think of as the essence of the country. Viewed through her camera lens, everything in Bali becomes exotic. The scenes which suggest the hard and sad life of the locals, such as the fishermen who “wade in and stand / with their backs to the island all day”, the garbage which “flutters” on “the empty field / behind luxury hotels”, and the “white blossoms” (which could suggest the Balinese girls) “fall from trees / with nobody to stand beneath / smiling photogenically”, look beautiful to the eyes of a foreign tourist. The “heat”, “filth” and “absence of hope” are, ironically, the essentially exotic beauty of Bali which the white tourist is looking for. The narrative is presented like a palimpsest. Underlying the European’s description of the exoticism of Bali is the voice of the Balinese locals who resist the problematic representation of their
culture. The irony of the narrative is presented especially in the following statement by the tourist:

Tonight I am the backdrop,
I am the blurry stranger in the photograph,
with her mouth open almost in laughter,
saying: This is not my ocean.
This is not my pain.\textsuperscript{108}

The narrative voice presents the shift of personas from “I” to “her” to “not my”, showing the desire to maintain a narrative distance and the oscillation between the first- and third-person narratives. It suggests the narrative persona’s attempt to examine herself through the imagined viewpoint of the Balinese. The narrator sees herself as a “stranger” to the island, which is taken from the viewpoint of the Balinese locals and is an ironic comment on her role as a tourist. The words coming out of her laughing mouth, “This is not my ocean. This is not my pain,” are presented as a criticism which emphasises the tourist’s ignorance and indifference to the life of the locals. Eventually, the photograph which was taken by the tourist reveals an ironic reflection on the tourist, rather than the exoticness of Bali.

The second part of the poem presents the story of a Balinese girl, Made, whose life is constructed by the narrative persona “I”, a female Western tourist. Again, the poet adopts the strategy of perspective alteration—representing the life of a Balinese through the viewpoint of a Westerner and blending the local’s view of the foreign tourist in the narrative voice. In her “false luxury hotel” the white European persona imagines the life of the local Balinese girl, who is a “second child with no father, / taken out of school at just eleven / when the money ran out.”\textsuperscript{109} In her fantasy, the Balinese girl is “from the village in the north / where nobody goes” and whose mother “sits / in the eternal shade / waiting for [her] letter, / nodding to mountain ghosts.”\textsuperscript{110} Presumably, the back story for the poem could be that the narrator has asked Made about her life. However, it is also likely that the life story of Made is a cliché, a construction of Southeast-Asian cultural stereotypes. The narrator’s fantasy of Made’s life is filled with Orientalist clichés about the suffering life of an Asian woman (poor, uneducated, growing up in a distant village). The word, “ghosts”, is used to represent the local gods and ancestors, suggesting a negative view towards Oriental mythic culture. Through this Western perspective she constructs the daily

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
life of Made, a cultural *Other*, whose life centres on serving foreign tourists like the narrator herself:

You have left the café of Bali Sun  
where it’s always sunset  
at the end of a long, empty evening  
sick from the blare of MTV  
and the copper shine of tourists.  
For us you smiled and spoke  
your self-taught English.  
For us you were the friendly local.\textsuperscript{111}

Presenting the life of an exotic local, the narrative is glazed with a sense of depression, which is indicated by words, such as “empty” and “sick”. For a young woman like Made, life is “always sunset”, approaching the end. The narrator constructs the struggling life of a Balinese girl whose life relies on “the copper shine of tourists”, at whom she tries to smile and with whom she communicates in her self-taught English. The construction is more obvious at the end part of the poem:

You think of me and my white tribes,  
how your life is our holiday.  
We’re out of here tomorrow but you,  
you’re only twenty four  
and you don’t dare dream  
before you go to sleep.

Through the eyes of Made she sees the indifference and arrogance of the many rich European tourists who come to Bali to look for the exoticness they have expected without feeling for the person whom they imagine as a “friendly local”, and this presents a criticism of the narrator and her “white tribes”. Hence, the voice shows the tendency to negotiate between opposing viewpoints. On the one hand, the narrator desires to maintain an observant distance from the local and to keep the boundary between the Western Self and the exotic *Other*. On the other hand, she expresses sympathy towards Made, whose life is in contrast to hers as a happy Western tourist. Hence, the narrative of the poem presents a move from possibly a casual conversation between the narrator and Made to a statement showing criticism of the Western tourists as well as empathy for the Balinese locals. The line between the representation of the real life of Balinese and the construction of cultural stereotype is, nevertheless, impossible to draw. Through her narratives Kassabova shows the shifts of perspectives; the tendency to oscillate and negotiate between identities is also found in the middle phase of Zhu’s writing.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
Kassabova blends together contrasting viewpoints in one voice and weaves connections between them. In “Balinese”, she presents the exchange of gazes and perspectives between the narrative persona’s self and the exotic other. The narrative persona is presented as the subject and imagines the self as the object of gaze. Through the construction of gaze and narrative voice, Kassabova complicates the Western Self/Eastern Other binary with the ironic, polyvocal and palimpsestic narrative voice in her writing. In this way, she problematises any fixed identities or cultural representations. In a sense, it challenges the way in which a woman and a cultural Other are often presented as disempowered objects of gaze in the patriarchal and colonial contexts. As begins to show in Kassabova’s narrative, she adopts many perspectives in the same piece of work, as if she attempts to explore life from all possible angles, so that her narrative is not restricted to a single viewpoint, like the situation of a person being confined to a single place. In that sense, through the narrative of her poem Kassabova is presenting mobile perspectives, an idea which is associated with her travelling subjects.

The Use of “You”

The idea of travelling is utilised in Kassabova’s presentation of narrative perspective. Whereas the use of a first-person narrative or a third-person narrative prevailed in her texts of the first phase, from 1998 onwards the use of a second-person pronoun, “you”, begins to emerge in her writing, especially in her poems. This, to a certain extent, corresponds with the tendency in the second phase in which Kassabova begins to maintain an observing distance from the subject of her writing. Her poem, “Someone Else’s Life” (collected in Someone Else’s Life, 2003), indicates the transition in her narrative voice:

I listened carefully to doubts and revisions
of someone else’s life, safe in my room of tomorrow,
a passing witness to sorrow and wonder.

Then night came and I was quickly
drifting inside that life. I was leaving mine.113

The life of the narrator, “I”, which is often considered to be an autobiographical voice, is no longer the subject of focus in her writing. The first-person narrative voice is adopted as a medium or vehicle, “a passing witness” to the “sorrow and wonder” of

112 See Kassabova’s statements as cited earlier in the Biographical Sketch.
“someone else’s life”. In other words, the narrative persona in Kassabova’s writing becomes an observer through whom the reader experiences the life of “someone else”. To emphasise the observing distance between “I” and “someone else”, the adoption of “you” becomes an alternative choice. However, the identity of the narrative persona, the “I”, or the “someone else” remains undetermined. The identity of the narrator or the subject (“someone else”) depends on the reader’s perception of the poem, which presents a sense of ambiguity as well as of multi-referentiality, and such a tendency is increasingly shown in Kassabova’s narrative voice. As I have discussed in Zhu’s use of “you”, ambiguity and multi-referentiality are the major characteristics of her second-person texts. This provides an insight into Kassabova’s second-person narrative poems.

It is worth pointing out that by using the term, “second-person narrative”, I do not refer to a specific point of view, but rather, a narrative situation. Narrative, as Susan Sniader Lanser conceptualises it, presents “a multifaceted and dynamic interaction” between all participants (the narrator, the narratee, the writer, the reader and the text) in the narrative act, suggesting the focus on a narrative relationship. Basing on Lanser’s conceptualisation of narrative, Darlene Marie Hantzis indicates the “intersubjectivity” of a second-person text by pointing out that the “second person point of view exists when the narrator, character, narratee, and, consequently, the reader and author are simultaneously constituted in the pronoun ‘you.’” Hence, a collaborative relationship between the author, the text and the reader is emphasised in my examination of Kassabova’s poems. “The Door” and “Lemon Tree Witnessing Man Being Built In” present a high degree of complexity in terms of the writer’s exploitation of the second person.

“The Door” was originally published in Dismemberment (1998) and was then entitled, “The Door: Anticipation of Wisdom”. The poem was revised and collected in Someone Else’s Life (2003):

One day you’ll see:
you’ve been knocking on a door
without a house.
You’ve been waiting, shivering, yelling
words of daring and hope.

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114 See my discussion of Zhu’s second person texts in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.
116 From Darlene Marie Hantzis, “‘You Are About To Begin Reading’: The Nature and Function of Second Person Point of View in Narrative” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1988), 79.
One day you'll see:
there is no one on the other side
except as ever, the jubilant ocean
that won’t shatter ceramically like a dream
when you and I shatter.

But not yet. Now
you wait outside, watching
the blue arches of mornings
that will break
but are now perfect.

Underneath on tiptoe
pass the faces, speaking to you,
saying 'you', 'you', 'you',
smiling, waving, arriving
in unfailing chronology.

One day you’ll doubt your movements,
you will shudder
at the accuracy of you sudden age.
You will ache for the slow beauty
to save you from your quick, quick life.

But not yet. Hope
fills the yawning of time.
Blue surrounds you. Now let’s say
you see a door and knock,
and wait for someone to hear.  

The identity of the second person, “you”, in the poem(s) is uncertain. It presents both the “teller mode” and the “reflector mode” of second-person narrative. When applying the teller mode, “you” can refer to specific narratees (considering the “intradiegetic” narrative context) or the reader (considering the “extradiegetic” narrative context). In this circumstance, there is an implicit narrator, “I”, who is addressing the narratee(s) in the poem. For the reader who identifies himself/herself with the narratee’s situation, s/he is automatically included in the narrative discourse. On the other hand, if the reflector mode is adopted, “you” may refer to a self-reflexive “I”, which is not restricted to the poet. In the reflector-mode situation, the pronoun, “you”, suggests a split of self into two roles: “I” the observing narrator and “you” the acting subject. In other words, the second person in “The Door” shows the sense of

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118 See my discussion of the “teller mode” and the “reflector mode” of the second person in Chapter Three.
119 According to Gerald Prince, “intradiegetic” means “pertaining to or part of the diegesis presented (in a primary narrative) by an extradiegetic narrator” (Prince, 46), whereas, “extradiegetic” denotes people or characters who are “external to (not part of) any diegesis” (Prince, 29). From Gerald Prince, A Dictionary of Narratology, revised edition (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 29 and 46.
uncertainty and multiplicity, which corresponds to what Hantzis considers to be the “postmodern” construction of “multiple perspectives” in “you”, through which the authors are able to “house the multiple perspectives of the narrator, character, narratee/reader, and themselves together. Each perspective retains a measure of individuality and yet fully merges with others.” In that sense, the narrative voice in Kassabova’s writing develops from the explicit distinction between self (I or we) and other (s/he or they) in the first phase to the merging of the two opposing perspectives through “you” in the second phase. Such a phenomenon also occurs in the narrative of autobiographies, where the “I” is both the subject (the self) and the object (other), making the voice on the continuum between the two. In fact, starting from the third phase, Kassabova tends to adopt a first-person narrative in her writing. However, the “I” in her work no longer refers to a definite persona, and neither is it autobiographical in a simple sense.

“You” is the narrative pronoun which is situated between the first and the third persons, placed as a mediated voice on the continuum of the narrative subject and the narrative object. The sense of in-between-ness is also suggested by the symbolic image of “the door”, which is located in the middle, connecting and separating the geographical and temporal spaces. Accordingly, the narrative subject, “you”, finds resonance with the image of “the door”, which presents the self on the continuum of the past and the present, of the here and the there, and of memory and reality.

As well as revealing the manifold construction of her second-person narratives, Kassabova also adds complexity to the first-person voice in her work. In “Lemon Tree Witnessing Man Being Built In” (collected in Someone Else’s Life, 2003), she presents the combination of first-person and second-person narratives. As shown in the poem, unlike the other first-person narrators in her work, the “I” in this poem is dehumanised into a lemon tree, the eye witness of the life of “you”, a man. The lemon tree observes and tells the life of a man, his past relationship with a woman, and how he deals with his memory:

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120 From Darlene Marie Hantzis, “‘You Are About To Begin Reading’: The Nature and Function of Second Person Point of View in Narrative,” 67.
121 The poem was originally published in Landfall 198 (November 1999): 265-266. Although there is a revision in line stanzas in the 2003 version, the content is basically the same.
“Lemon Tree Witnessing Man Being Built In” (2003)

| No, I said             | Until one day you said Right.              |
| as I stood between the house to be | That’s enough.                          |
| and the house to die. You mustn’t. | You made a decision about the house.    |
| Anyway the opposite of memory | One needs more comfort, you explained     |
| takes over in the end. Believe me. | though I was merely a witness.           |
| I am a tree.           | One needs a new house. The old house must go. |
| You were too tired to speak. | Wait a moment, I said                    |
| You just pointed with your chin | standing in the way as I always had.      |
| to the large, blurred architectures of the past | By pulling the house down               |
| that explain your urge for demolition. | you won’t forget.                       |
| The old story I know.   | Whatever you do, you won’t forget.       |
| You loved a woman, and she loved you. | Believe me. I am a tree.                 |
| You lived in the house. | But you were beyond reasoning.           |
| Many years passed.      | You just pointed with your chin         |
| It wasn’t going to change. | to the builders who came               |
| But it changed.         | in their trucks and T-shirts            |
| You loved the memory of her | and started laying bricks and mortar.   |
| and missed her terribly. | They covered you up to your neck in no time. |
| You fed some chickens and grew some forests | Before your calm face disappeared       |
| around the house         | I saw reflected in your eyes            |
| and missed her terribly. | the rubble of the old house.            |
| You left and travelled the world | I saw a terrible absence.             |
| which was empty of her.  | And bitterly, I shed a small sun.       |
| You returned.           | It rolled down to your feet.            |
| You read some books on relevant topics. | Here, for the new house.               |
| You aged. She aged without you. | For the long, dark centuries of happiness. |
| You missed her terribly. |                                 |

Despite the dehumanization, paradoxically, the lemon tree is provided with more human emotion and explicit judgement than the human character, a man. These are presented through the way in which the narrative begins with the statement of the lemon tree, who exclaims, “No, I said […] You mustn’t. […] Believe me.” The lemon tree speaks in a more expressive and emotional tone than any of the human personas referred to as, “I”, in Kassabova’s poems. In addition, the poet exploits one of the important features of a first-person voice, that “I” is often the subject of gaze. Since “I” and “eye” are homophones, it can be argued that the meaning of “eye”, which suggests the role of an observer, is emphasised in the “I”, the lemon tree. Thus, ironically, the seemingly invisible lemon tree is given a powerful, controlling, and

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123 Even in the situations when a first-person narrator is an object of gaze, his/her awareness of being observed also suggests that s/he is a subject of gaze.
manipulative first-person voice. Kassabova’s strategic construction of the first-person voice in this poem reflects what Hantzis considers to be “postmodern responses to narrator authority”, which show “the construction of in-credible narrators—narrators who flagrantly violate traditional expectations of narrators” and “blatantly manufactured—self-contradictory, ignorant, unbelievable, unidentifiable, multiple, and sometimes even unhuman—narrators” in texts. 124 Such a postmodern construction of narrative authority is also found in Zhu’s first-person narrative voice in the middle phases, especially in her representation of the unreliable male narrators. 125

In this poem Kassabova also shows increasing complexity in her construction of a second-person narrative. Although, as it seems, the poem is presented as a second-person text in teller mode, the narrator, “I”, does not simply address the character, “you”. It also reflects the mind of its addressee. The lemon tree mirrors the mind of the man who is struggling with making the right decision for his house. It foresees the possible result after the demolition of the house, and so it endeavours to stop the man from taking that course of action. The demolition still takes place, and the lemon tree feels the man’s sense of loss after the old house is pulled down. In that sense, the narrative of this poem also presents the “reflector mode” quality of a second person, which suggests that “the lemon tree” which speaks and “the man” who acts are in fact the split parts of one self, thus emphasising the self-reflexive feature of the narrative. This idea is especially presented in the final section of the poem in which the lemon tree expresses sorrow for the man by “shed[ding] a small sun”, a lemon. The “bitter[ness]” of the lemon reflects the sadness of the man, whose tears are still held in his eyes.

In spite of the lemon tree’s identification with the man, which is shown through its sympathetic tone towards the character, the narrative voice of “I” also reveals the desire to maintain an observant distance from “you”. This is presented through the way in which the lemon tree constantly criticises the man’s thoughts and behaviour. Particularly, at the end of the poem the lemon tree addresses the man with a certain irony, “for the new house. / For the long, dark centuries of happiness”; the words,

124 Darlene Marie Hantzis, “‘You Are About To Begin Reading’: The Nature and Function of Second Person Point of View in Narrative,” 62.
125 See Chapter Two.
“new” and “happiness” offer an ironic reflection on the man’s nostalgia, regret and sadness.

Moreover, the characters and images in the poem are presented in symbolic ways. The house symbolises the life of the man. “The house to be” denotes his new life, while “the house to die” indicates his life of the past. Nevertheless, the house is not necessarily where the home is. His home stays in the past with the “woman” he loved, who is a denotation of his “memory” of home. Through the man’s relationship with his beloved woman, Kassabova reflects the migrant (or mobile) status shared by most people nowadays who constantly travel from one place to another. She represents the imagined and problematic return of an exile: whereas people think that the place they have left behind will, forever, stay the way in which they have remembered it, to their disappointment, like the woman who ages without the man, the homeland changes without the traveller. As stated in the first stanza of the poem, “Anyway the opposite of memory / takes over in the end.” Through her work Kassabova poses the question of what is “the opposite of memory”. The answer to this could be living in the here and now or changing the past. The protagonist in the poem has done both through his demolition of the old house and establishment of a new life, while that does not seem to ease his feeling of loss.

In addition to its role as a witness to the man’s life, the tree is also a reflection of the emotional aspects of the man’s life. Whereas the old house can be demolished and a new house can be built, the man’s feeling towards the old house and his memory (of home and the woman) will continue living as do the growing roots of a tree. Hence, the lemon tree represents the mind (the internal life) of the man whose life takes root in the past and extends to the present, while the house (the building) mirrors the external life of the man who manages to cope with the change of environment.

Through the two poems, “The Door” and “Lemon Tree Witnessing Man Being Built In”, Kassabova represents the life of travellers, whose lives move on the continuum of the past and the present, the here and the there; both the images of the door and the tree symbolise the life of the self on that continuum. Kassabova’s adoption of “you” in her narrative also corresponds to the idea of continuum in that her second person crosses the boundary between the first and the third persons, eliminating the distinction between self and other, which also evokes Zhu’s use of the
second person. It is through their exploitations of “you” that both writers manifest a multiple and hybrid sense of identity.

Collapsing Genres

Kassabova adopts a variety of genres for her creative expression; these include poetry, fiction, autobiography, essay and travel writing. Not only that, she also collapses genre categories in her work, which suggests that the writer also shows the tendency to travel and cross borders in her exploitation of literary forms.

Her novel, Reconnaissance, shows an amalgam of genres. As shown above, readers and critics often identify her protagonist, Nadejda, with the writer126 and the novel is, therefore, commonly read as an autobiographical work, despite the writer’s emphasis on the fabrication of her story. As Kassabova suggests, Nadejda is not a portrayal of the writer herself but a representation of “the young immigrant psyche—anarchic, egoistical, cynical, extreme, discontented”.127 However, her impression of many writers’ first novels as “disguised autobiographies”128 reveals that autobiographicality is used as a narrative strategy in Reconnaissance. The underlying issues to this are what the writer says about her work and how a reader deals with it.

In Reconnaissance Kassabova utilises her personal background as a Bulgarian-New Zealander who obtains access to both cultures as well as experiencing a sense of displacement as a migrant. By drawing on her personal and collective experiences of global migration and cultural displacement, she creates the characters of her novel. The similarity between the lives of Kassabova and Nadejda encourages the validation of an “autobiographical pact” between the reader and the writer, which makes the story convincing. This is reflected in the differing reader responses to Kassabova’s two novels, Reconnaissance and Love in the Land of Midas. The former, which is assumed as autobiographical by most readers, tends to be more popular and has been better received among critics, judges of literary prizes and the bookselling market than the latter, which shows explicit fictivity. It is not surprising that, along with her first poetry collection, All Road Leads to the Sea, which also presents a high degree of autobiographicality, Reconnaissance, too, has been considered to typify Kassabova’s work. It can be argued that the image of the protagonist created in these two

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126 See, for example, Matt Johnson, “Reflecting Reality.” See also p. 203 of this chapter.
128 Ibid.
“disguised autobiographies” is closer to the reader’s prevailing impression of the writer as an exotic Eastern European immigrant, which turns into the reader’s expectation of her work. Therefore, by showing an ambiguous attitude towards the issue of autobiographicality in her own work, Kassabova suggests a blur of genre boundaries in her writing. The combination of fictivity and autobiographicality becomes the dominant tendency of Kassabova’s writing.

In addition, the use of vivid imagery is adopted for Kassabova’s prose, especially in her fiction, in which one finds the descriptiveness of travel writing. A key feature of travel writing is the presentation of images of place. In her prose Kassabova uses strong imagery, which is typically a characteristic of poetry. The first chapter of *Reconnaissance*, for example, begins with a scene at a beach on the Black Sea coast in Bulgaria where Nadejda spends a holiday with her parents. Nadejda is “practising a perfect series of marble ball knocks” (a toy which attaches two marble balls on a string which hooks onto the player’s fingers, making the two balls move back and forth and knocking each other), while her mother is anxiously waiting for her father who has been swimming off the shore for hours. After her father returns, her parents begin to argue intently. To avoid getting involved in her parents’ squabble, Nadejda disappears into the Queen’s Gardens with her toy and listens to the sound of marble balls as they swing and hit each other, mirroring the constant fight between her parents:

> The Gardens are an inexhaustible labyrinth of shady paths, menacing waterfalls, giant, indecent water-lilies that remind her of something she can’t quite name, death-cold stone thrones where the Queen would sit and where now Nadejda sits with royal casualness and seeks the blue patch through a wall of leaves. Once the recalcitrant blue triangle is spotted, she must run down, as if pulling a thread from a small tear to unweave the whole gardens and reveal the blue wound of the sea.129

A passage like this at the beginning of the novel is a test of the book reviewers’ patience. Sarah Quigley criticises this practice, suggesting that “the change in genre is not wholly successful. […] Kassabova doesn’t seem at home with prose and she often slips into a heavily descriptive style.”130 Laura Kroetsch considers the novel as “suffer[ing] from being overwritten” and suggests that more editing is required if the novel aims to attract “a wider audience”.131 The imagism of *Reconnaissance*, as

Tracie Barrett observes, is “peculiar to European academics” and shows an “over-ripe wordiness” in Kassabova’s prose, which “can at times overwhelm [...] the novel form” and, as Barrett suggests, the style should be restricted to poetry writing. What is reflected in the reviews is the fact that the appreciation of the writer’s creative exploitation of language and genre is somewhat lacking in the existing scholarship.

Critics tend to be dismissive of the strategic exploitation of imagery in Kassabova’s prose writing. The passage actually reveals the core of the story that will be gradually unfolded throughout the book. The “labyrinth of shady paths” indicates the family history of the protagonist, which awaits her exploration. The “menacing waterfalls” and “giant, indecent water-lilies” suggests her adventure in New Zealand where she encounters exotic nature and culture, whereas the “death-cold stone thrones” of the Queen symbolise the centuries of violent political history in Bulgaria’s past with which Nadejda and her family are still burdened in their present-day lives. The “recalcitrant blue triangle”, implies the protagonist’s family relationship in which Nadejda’s parents are physically separate in Bulgaria and New Zealand, while she, the third point of the family triangle, is displaced and, therefore, moves restlessly between the two locations in the search for her identity. Her journey of self discovery eventually clarifies the labyrinth of her family story, which is presented as a set of gardens that link to the political history of the country. The imagery presented in this passage starts to make sense after the reader has read the whole book; to obtain a better understanding of what the images represent, it is often necessary to go through a novel several times. As it transpired, Reconnaissance eventually impressed the judges of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in the South Pacific region in 2000 with the novel’s “remarkable prose”. This shows Kassabova’s success in the blending of poetic features into fiction, which provides a broader view of prose writing in English. Through her creative exploitation of autobiographical, fictive and poetic features, Kassabova presents the complexity of her novel.

The narratives of travelogue and essay are also used in Kassabova’s fictional writing, an example of which is shown in her short story, “A Day in Marseilles” (1998). The narrative of the story is presented in the form of a travel journal, which is

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divided into several parts according to the progression of time: “Today”, “In the Morning”, “In the Afternoon”, “In the Evening”, “At Night”, “At Midnight”, “On Sunday” and “Tomorrow”. Kassabova adopts the second person, “you”, which often appears in travelogues, throughout the work. However, unlike the “you” in travelogues, which usually refer to the reader, the “you” in Kassabova’s short story is presented as a self-reflexive female second-person voice, making the “you” a narrator-protagonist, like the “you” (你/妳) in Zhu’s later works, such as “The Old Capital” and The Wanderer. In addition to the second person, Kassabova also chooses the present tense for her narrative in “A Day in Marseilles”, which is different from the way in which the past tense is usually adopted as the primary tense for her short story and fiction.

In Marseilles, “you” encounters people from various cultures. Nevertheless, unlike most travelogues which focus on the representation of local people and cultures, Kassabova’s story shows that her young female protagonist is more often, an object, rather than a subject, of gaze in the foreign city and that she is more of an object of interest for other people. Despite the effort of “you” to “look as inconspicuous as possible”, she is always “approached” by the locals, to whom she avoids speaking, “so as not to give away you’re a foreigner.” The person with whom she has the longest conversation is an Albanian migrant painter, who “came here six years ago, with no French”, and whose cultural displacement mirrors her situation as a stranger in Marseilles. She asks him, “Do you get any prejudice from people here, on the grounds of your nationality?” The answer of the Albanian reflects her mind, as he states, “I want to live normally like the rest of you […] I want to live as a European too…” In that sense, her conversation with him is closer to the protagonist’s dialogue with herself, making the voice of the Albanian man self-reflexive to the protagonist, “you”.

Through the exploitation of features of travelogue, Kassabova breaks the boundary between fictional and essayistic narratives. In addition to this, to a certain extent, she inserts an autobiographical element into the text. The short story was published after Kassabova returned from her trip to Marseilles in 1998. The locations

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134 See my discussion about the second-person narrator-protagonist, “you”, in Zhu’s work in Chapter Four.
135 The quotations in the sentence are from Kapka Kassabova, “A Day in Marseilles,” Sport 21 (October 1998), 178.
in the story, such as the city of Marseilles, the Mediterranean Sea and the Château d’If are also the key locations in her novel, *Love in the Land of Midas*, which was published in the same year as the short story. It is inevitable that the reader may link the narrator-protagonist of “A Day in Marseilles” to the writer, who shares the exilic situation as a traveller with her characters. Hence, the potential for an autobiographical voice is also included in the fictional work.

Travel writing gradually dominates Kassabova’s writing. Not only does it fulfil the life of the writer as a traveller in the second phase, but it also provides a space which enables Kassabova to explore freely the features of literary forms and cross boundary between genres. She gradually develops her travel writing into a *hybrid* genre, the “travel essay”, which is similar to the function of Zhu’s “essayistic narrative”. In particular, this hybrid feature is presented in her travel essays, “We Too Are Europe” (2002) and “Dancing Queens” (2001).

In “We Too Are Europe” Kassabova presents the identity crisis of the narrative persona “I”, which is reflected in the protagonist’s trip to her hometown in Bulgaria. The female protagonist, “I”, returns to Bulgaria after several years of residing in New Zealand. The similarities between the writer and the narrative persona tend to make the reader consider this work as being autobiographical. This is especially so since the writer’s framing of the work as an “autobiographical essay” also suggests a relative absence of fictiveness. However, the narrative of the essay presents a considerable amount of construction and manipulation, which starts with the protagonist’s conversation with a taxi driver in Sofia:

The taxi driver who takes me to the police station where I am to pick up my new Bulgarian, *European* passport, says as he drops me off:

‘May you pick up your passport successfully and leave the country with it.’

‘Why?’

He looks at me as if I’m deranged. ‘Why?’

‘Where should I go?’ I ask disingenuously, for I am leaving next week.

‘I don’t know. Europe. It doesn’t matter. Wherever we go, they hate us.’

‘But we hate *ourselves*.’

‘Indeed we do. Have a nice day.’

He takes off with a screech. I walk in the rain to the police station where a silent queue waits patiently for their new passports.137

The perception of Bulgaria is presented as a portrayal interwoven with the narrator’s emotions towards her own displacement. The Bulgarians who have placed one foot in the new Bulgarian-European identity and look forward to becoming

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137 Kapka Kassabova, “We Too Are Europe,” *Landfall* 203 (May 2002): 23. The words in italics are the writer’s emphasis.
“Europeans” are trapped between the ideas of waiting to be Westernised and retaining the Bulgarian tradition. Their sense of ambivalence towards the country’s new identity as part of Europe is presented in the way in which they complain about the Westernisation of the country but still patiently wait in the queue for a new passport. As the narrator states, “Now new passports are being issued and, although they look proudly international and people are eager to get them, going Westward is still the dream of a peasant longing for bright lights, big city.”\textsuperscript{138} The ambivalence of the country’s cultural identity mirrors the personal situation of the narrator. Going West was her childhood dream, which was realised after she grew up. After spending years in Western countries, she discovers that the West is not the way she thought it would be. Feeling disappointed, she returns to her hometown but only finds that Bulgaria has been westernised by capitalism during the years of her absence.

The renewal of the Bulgarian passport reflects the problematic collective identity concepts, such as “European” and “we”, both of which suggest the existence of a barrier between self and other or between the East and the West. Through the combination of “we” and “Europe” in the title, Kassabova draws the reader’s attention to the issue of identity.

To erase the boundaries, Kassabova strategically adopts the present tense throughout the essay, including the protagonist’s recollections of her memory. The narrative is arranged in the progression below:

It is 1985 in Sofia. I am thirteen. I smell the dusty rain in the courtyard of the French college; I smell the approaching winter.\textsuperscript{139}

It is 1987 in Sofia. I am fifteen. I speak fluent French. My dream is to go to France. Just once, just to see the Eiffel Tower that I’ve drawn so many times in my notebook. My friend Emil talks of studying medicine in France. I don’t want to study medicine, but if that’s what it takes to go to France, I will.\textsuperscript{140}

It is 1997 at Sofia airport. I am visiting for the first time since immigrating to New Zealand five years earlier. Among the shivering émigrés disgorged by British Airways I see a familiar chubby figure. Seven years have passed since I saw Emil. [...] He has been living in France. He is graduating in dentistry but unable to find work. [...] We have both made it to the West, but the West is not what we thought it would be. The ‘West’ has lost its pull and we have more problems than ever before. Here, in this peeling building, is our past: the place where we spent happy years gazing at pictures of the Eiffel Tower and dreaming of Europe. Or so it seems. The nostalgia for childhood is fed by the disorientation of a new world order.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 26.
It is 2001 in Sofia. I listen to a late-night talkback show on Radio Sofia. The topic is “What do Bulgarians believe in today?” Various individuals call in with “I believe in communism/socialism/capitalism/Stalinism/socio-nationalism/Jesus.” But most people call to say “I don’t believe in anything. There’s nothing left to believe in.”

As Margaret Mahy suggests, Kassabova’s use of the present tense shows “constant interplay of past and present” which “gives the essay a timeless quality.” The timeless feature is also found in Zhu’s “essayistic narrative”, in which she exploits the tense-less characteristic in the Chinese language. Through the timelessness in their writing, both Zhu and Kassabova collapse the restrictions in the concept of time, enabling their protagonists to travel freely across past, present and future, so that it de-problematises the sense of displacement. The present tense juxtaposes the various selves of the protagonist belonging to specific moments. Through the narrative of travel writing, the narrator keeps an observing distance with her hometown as well as with herself.

The narrator’s past memories of Bulgaria are like a “peeling building”, which has been outmoded by the new Western culture and is going nowhere. Like the Westernised Bulgaria, the Westernised protagonist and her friend, Emil, cannot find their way back to their Bulgarian identity. The nation and the person are both lost in Westernisation and stuck in their present situation. Kassabova makes parallels between the narrative persona and Bulgaria. The protagonist’s inner world (her dream and her loss) and her external world (the Bulgarians’ anticipation of European identity and their disappointment) mirror each other repeatedly, which also suggests this is not simply personal displacement, but the displacement of the Bulgarians as a collective self.

Another travel essay, “Dancing Queens”, shows more complexity in terms of narrative voice. The female first-person narrative persona, a writer from New Zealand, travels around New Delhi with a male European photographer, Pablo, in order to find the eunuchs (the hijras). As in most of Kassabova’s writings of the second phase, the narrative voice shows an observing distance from the subject of the story. The essay begins with a general impression of the transgender group in India, which, as the surface meaning of the statements shows, is filled with judgements based on a Western patriarchal perception of gender:

142 Ibid., 29.
In the empire of rules that is India, there is a society of beings that defies all rules. These beings can only visit the world of normality by invading it quickly and then retreating back into their freakishness. They make a living out of being abhorred. Destined to be childless and unmarried, they dance and sing uninvited at weddings and births. Their blessing is an important part of such occasions, their curse is dreaded. [...] They are in a caste of their own. [...] They are the hijras — “neither male nor female”. They are the Indian eunuchs. [...] They embody the Krishna principle of sexual ambiguity.  

However, when taking a close look at the passage and reading between the lines, one finds that it reveals a potentially subversive voice which challenges Western patriarchy in terms of cultural and gender binaries. The eunuch is presented as a person who “defies all rules” of Indian society as well as the Western conceptualisation of gender. As the narrator suggests, eunuchs belong “in a caste of their own” and cannot be categorised as either “male or female”. The seemingly negative words about the eunuchs, such as “freakishness”, “abhorred”, “destined to be childless and unmarried”, “uninvited”, “curse” and “ambiguity”, turn out to be ironies which criticise the misrepresentations of the group by the Indian public and Western tourists, making them the marginalised people who have to hide away from the mainstream norms. It can be argued that the narrative is “codified in [patriarchal] gender ideologies”, suggesting that “narrative voice is a site of crisis, contradiction, or challenge that is manifested in and sometimes resolved through ideologically charged technical practices.” Accordingly, the narrative voice of Kassabova’s “Dancing Queens” is polyvocal and palimpsestic, blending together the voice of a European patriarchal view and a feminist voice which resists it.

The gender conflict is reflected in the two European travellers’ visits to the Indian eunuchs, in which the female narrator and the male photographer show differing attitudes towards the cultural and the sexual other. Whereas the female narrative persona tends to hide herself among the crowd of Indians, follows and observes the eunuchs secretly on foot, her male partner, Pablo, exhibits more aggressiveness in his actions. He guides the female narrator; the two of them would make “a reconnaissance” of the locations, and then intrude on the places of the eunuchs by bicycle or by car. In their interview with the leader of the eunuchs, the female narrator shows a tendency to discreetly observe the people and the

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146 Ibid., 7-8.
147 Kapka Kassabova, “Dancing Queens,” 96.
surroundings, while the male photographer urges her in a whisper, “Fire away, this is one chance in a million”. Being able to communicate in their language, Pablo becomes the person who fires away at the eunuchs with his direct questions, such as enquiries concerning the subject’s sexual inclination, thus reflecting his personal perception of the eunuchs through the lens of the Western patriarchal gender binary. The narrative of the essay, however, constantly inserts the female protagonist’s statements which inquire into or challenge the mainstream culture’s perception of eunuchs, such as; “What is the modern Indian eunuch? A castrated man? A transsexual? A transvestite? A hermaphrodite? An impotent man? A living anachronism?” or “Transsexuals remind us that we live in an imperfect world. What would they be in an ideal world?” The essay ends with the reflections of the two eunuchs on what their ideal lives would be, and they, paradoxically, fall into the trap of idealised gender roles in patriarchy. One of them “would like to join the army […] to serve my country. To fight for my country, maybe even to die”, while the other would like to “have been born a real woman” and to share the life “with a man I love.” The answers of the eunuchs emphasises the fact that their trans-sexuality is repressed in the, still gendered, world.

In addition, the title of the essay, “Dancing Queens”, is culturally subversive. Firstly, it reminds the reader of the well-known popular song, by Swedish singing group, ABBA, “Dancing Queen”, an icon of middle-class European culture. The subject of Kassabova’s story, the Indian eunuchs, presents a parody of European pop icons. Secondly, it evokes the British Queen, a colonial icon. Kassabova applies the name to the postcolonial Indian eunuchs, who are in the subaltern position in cultural, political and gender contexts. Like the problematic male voice in Zhu’s fiction, Kassabova seems to present a problematic colonial voice through the voice of her female first-person narrator.

The female narrator-protagonist in Kassabova’s travel writing is often aware of the gaze of the locals upon her as a Bulgarian/European woman. She is an exotic Bulgarian woman when she travels in Western European countries, while she becomes a white European woman when she travels in Asian countries. The definition of her cultural position suggests the postcolonial power and gaze which are
exercised in accordance with the perception of the narrator’s representative culture in the specific environment. On the other hand, her narrative-protagonist presents an identification with the displaced *Other* in her stories, which reflects the displaced situation of the female narrator in a patriarchal men’s world. This contrast with the way in which the *Other* is presented in men’s travel writing.

Kassabova’s travel essay is presented as a hybrid genre of fiction and autobiography, through which she gains autobiographical narrative authority as well as the space to exercise fictive imagining. On the one hand, the tendency of personalisation in Kassabova’s travel essays evokes the issue of narrative intention in the I-novel of Japanese writer, Shiga Naoya, whose work shows the domination of narrative over life experience. Whether it is the female narrator’s journey back to Bulgaria (in “We Too Are Europe”) or her adventure in India (in “Dancing Queens”), the travelling experience is shaped “through the act of narrating”. The narrative intention is presented in the writer’s explicit framing of the works as “autobiographical essays”. As Tomi Suzuki’s observation on Shiga’s I-novel shows, the author’s attitude towards his/her work—whether or not s/he considers the writing to be “situated [...] in an autobiographical context”—decides if the work is autobiographical. In addition to that, Kassabova *shapes* the journeys of her narrators with such themes as displacement and cultural/gender identity crisis, showing purposeful interpretations of the travelling experiences.

On the other hand, she pushes the limits of “travel writing”, which is historically, a literary genre for men. Kassabova renders the seemingly authentic voice of travel writing unreliable, which also emphasises the problem of cultural and gender representations. Travelling physically and narratively, Kassabova challenges the conventional idea that travelling and travel writing belong to men exclusively. Her travel essay revises the genre in male literary convention. The female narrative persona of her travel essay asserts an authoritative voice and adopts the position as the subject of gaze, which provides the female writer with the narrative power of representation and appropriation—a power that used to belong to Western men. Kassabova’s female narrator-protagonists cross geographical borders, and her writing

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152 Ibid., 113.
153 Ibid., 109.
is able to cross borders in all respects (geographical, temporal, cultural and sexual), which also suggests the complexity and instability of identity.

Kassabova manifests border crossing in all dimensions. Her writing crosses borders through moving between moments of stasis, problematising cultural stereotypes, adopting a multi-referential narrative voice (“you”) and creating a sense of hybridity in narrative genres. The development of Kassabova’s writing parallels that of Zhu’s writing, presenting articulations of hybridity and multiplicity, which reflect the writers’ conceptualisation of identity as well as placing their works on the continuum of fiction and autobiography. As will be shown in the next chapter, through her narrative Kassabova presents a more complex relationship between the self as a traveller and the travelling subjects of her writing, mirroring the uncertainty of identity as a global experience in the postmodern era.
Chapter Seven

Global Roaming

[Her] diasporan “I” is strategic as well as incorporative. In the autobiographical narrative she is […] a wanderer, an artist, a collector of tales, a teller of tales, a child, a philosopher, a young girl, a woman […] an individual, and an inhabitant of the globe. The more she multiplies identities, the more she undermines the fixedness of any identity. It is as if [she] is saying to her reader, you think I am here, but I’m not. Try to fix me in your interpretations if you can. For my part, I will try to unfix your interpretations, for they would fix me as some kind of statue of the person you would like me to be.

~ Sidonie Smith, Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body

In the period after 2003, which I consider as the third phase of Kapka Kassabova’s life and work, the writer began to adopt what I call a global roaming style as her mode of living. Such a life style redefines the role of a “cosmopolitan”. Whereas the term “cosmopolitan” often referred to someone who was comfortable and confident wherever s/he travelled, in the case of Kassabova, “comfortable within discomfort” was the way in which she described her life as a “universal migrant” in 2003. She begins to represent herself as being much more comfortable in a global and international role. The writing of Kassabova in this phase also reflects the global roaming life style of the writer through which she explores the meaning of being a “global soul” in the twenty-first century.

Starting from 2004, she gradually shifted out of her life as an immigrant in New Zealand to settlement in the U.K., a new point of departure and arrival for Kassabova in terms of her physical and literary journeys. On the one hand, as Clive James observes, “domiciled in Auckland and now based in Edinburgh when not roaming the world, Kapka Kassabova is among the most prominent of the younger New Zealand poets and novelists, and is rapidly acquiring the international reputation she deserves.” On the other hand, the new beginning indicates a move from local to international, suggesting that the reading of Kassabova’s work needs to go beyond a limited perception of Bulgarian or New Zealand culture and requires a globalist view.

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2 From the interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of The Poetics of Exile conference programme in July 2003. This part of the interview is recorded in the DVD attached to Michael Hanne ed., Creativity in Exile (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004).
3 The interview with Kapka Kassabova which was part of The Poetics of Exile conference programme in July 2003.
Hence, it can be argued that through the globalism presented in her life and writing, Kassabova manifests the contingency, indeterminacy, and temporariness of identity.

Although one finds it difficult to categorise Kassabova as a Bulgarian, a New Zealander, or as a British writer because she tends to travel constantly and does not restrict herself to staying in one place, it can be argued that she is now fully at home when writing in the English language. Whereas she started with the painful struggle of switching from Bulgarian to English, she is now extraordinarily subtle in her construction of poetry and prose in her adopted language. As Dougal McNeill observes, Kassabova has transformed herself from a writer who faced “the difficulties of linguistic dislocation”, to “a ‘happy tenant’ in the ‘English language house’.”\(^5\) Kassabova’s writing in English, as Emma Neale suggests, “has helped to reconstruct a new identity”\(^6\) for the writer. In that sense, through her creativity in English, Kassabova is “skipping over invisible borders”\(^7\) of nations, making her identity free from the constraints of any nationalist ideologies.

In addition, she seems to be more accepted in the literary scene of the U.K. than in New Zealand, although she has been living there for a comparatively shorter period. Her works are well received by critics there, who, unlike the reviewers in New Zealand, tend to give less emphasis to her Bulgarian background and consider her to be a professional writer in English. Through the development of her literary career in the U.K., Kassabova has begun to gain an international readership. Her books are published worldwide, but mainly in three countries: New Zealand (Auckland University Press for the publication of poetry and Penguin for prose), the U.K. (Bloodaxe for poetry and Portobello for prose) and the U.S. (Skyhorse).\(^8\)

As well as writing for publication, in 2005, she also established an official website (www.kapka-kassabova.com), through which the writer travels beyond the limitations of geographical boundaries via the internet. Roaming globally through life, writing and media, Kassabova has become an international writer whose identity

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\(^8\) The first publication of Kassabova’s work in the U.K. was Someone Else’s Life (2003, by Bloodaxe), while in the U.S. it was Street Without a Name (2009, by Skyhorse).
cannot be easily fixed. As with the writing of Zhu Tianxin in the fourth phase, complexity, hybridity and multiplicity are the main features in Kassabova’s manifestation of identity, and they also characterise the narrative of her work, which is practised through the voice and genre of her texts.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Travel essays dominate Kassabova’s writing in the third phase. In 2004 Kassabova was awarded the Cathay Pacific Media Awards New Zealand Travel Writer of the Year for the second time for her travel essay, “The New Capital of Europe” (2003), a work completed during her writer’s residency in Berlin in 2002-2003. The positive reception of her travel essays, starting from the end of the second phase, seems to indicate the direction of her writing. As shown in her works after 2003, her writing gradually shifts from explicit fiction to travel essays, a form of writing which is a combination of essay and journalism. Kassabova considers her travel essay writing as an artistic interpretation of reality, which is the writer’s truth, and is therefore, to a certain extent, fictitious. Despite the fact that such writing, which presents a hybridity of genres, is often termed “creative nonfiction”, I do not apply the term to the writing of Kassabova (or Zhu) in order to avoid any genre categorisation. However, the characteristics of creative nonfiction, which, as Angela Kölling points out, show a writer’s appropriation from a range of genres (“novel, poetry […] reportage, essay”) as well as his/her “crafting” of a story, provide valuable insights into Kassabova’s travel essay. Like the term, “pseudo-autobiography”, mentioned in the Introduction, “creative nonfiction” also reveals the fact that such hybrid writing is

10 See the interview with Kapka Kassabova by Elena Aleksieva, “Капка Касабова: ‘We Are All Foreigners in the Country of Its Past’” (Капка Касабова: “Всички сме чужденци в страната на миналото си”), in the Bulgarian magazine, Fakel (ФАКЕЛ), http://fakelexpress.com/2006/fakel-2006-2_Kapka_Kasabova.htm (accessed April 30, 2011). This is my translation from Bulgarian into English with the help of Dessy Clemson in the Europe Institute, University of Auckland.
12 The quotations are from Angela Kölling, “Writing on the Loose: Reading Florian Illies’s Generation Golf, Maurice G. Dantec’s Périphériques, Joschka Fischer’s Mein langer Lauf zu mir selbst, and Frédéric Beigbeder’s Windows on the World as Examples of Creative Nonfiction,” 11-29. However, Kölling’s categorisation of “fiction (novel, poetry) and nonfiction (reportage, essay)” is not applicable to my thesis.
situated in the contested field of genres where one overlaps another, thus obscuring the boundary between genres (autobiography/memoir, fiction and essay/reportage). I propose the term, “continuum”, as a better description of Kassabova’s writing, which also applies to the writing of Zhu. While the term, “continuum”, indicates the hybrid feature of Kassabova’s writing, it also reveals the fact that the writer’s works can move along different points of the continuum. Whereas some of the works are closer to autobiography or memoir, some are closer to fiction, whilst others are near to reportage or essay; none of them is essay, autobiography or fiction per se. Hence, it is more appropriate to consider Kassabova’s writing to be on the continuum of fiction and autobiography or on the continuum of fiction and essay/reportage. This offers the writer more generic freedom in writing, because she is able to adopt features from all genres.

Her poetry and prose writings from this phase also reflect features of her travel essays, such as the use of a first-person narrative, the creative exploitation of the autobiographical voice, and an observant narrative voice which shows criticism as well as empathy. Kassabova’s writing presents, “a delicate mixture of objectivity and subjectivity”, a quality which she considers important in a good travel essay. In other words, her first-person narrative in this phase shows exploitation of the characteristics of the second person which she used extensively in the previous phase. Her construction of the first-person voice, which presents multi-referentiality and inclusiveness, also mirrors the tendency of narrative in Zhu’s writing of the fourth phase, in which Zhu adopts second-person and multiple first-person voices.

In 2004 Kassabova was awarded a British Arts Council literary grant. She has been residing in the U.K. since 2004, and is currently living in Edinburgh with her partner. During her residence in Britain, she has published several articles in New Zealand magazines (NZ Listener and Metro), expressing her observations on British people, life, and culture, to New Zealand readers. The articles include “A Brilliant Bunch of Guys” (about the Australian emigrant writer in the U.K., Clive James),

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13 Elena Aleksieva, “Kapka Kassabova: ‘We Are All Foreigners in the Country of Its Past’” (Капка Касабова: “Всички сме чужденци в страната на миналото ни”).
14 See Zhu’s construction of narrative voice in Chapter Four.
16 See my interview with Kassabova in Appendix II.
“The Prize Factory” (about the University of Cambridge), 18 “The Unbearable Lightness of Being English”, 19 “A Royal Bank Cheque”, 20 “A Right Royal Occasion” (about meeting the Queen), 21 and “Army Wife” (about an interesting experience with her partner in the U.K. army). 22

As well as representing British people and culture, starting from 2005, she has also written travelogues about other European and African countries. Through Kassabova’s travel essays, readers travel with her to Tangier in northern Morocco (in “Letter from… Kapka Kassabova in Tangier”), 23 Budapest (in “Middle-Europe”), 24 to Madrid (in “Bohemian Street Life in the Barrios of Madrid” and “Letter from… Kapka Kassabova in Madrid”) 25 and to Vienna (in “Loitering without Intent”). 26

Based in her new life in Scotland, Kassabova began to roam around the globe, starting with literary festivals in the U.K. and Ireland, then continuing elsewhere in Europe and the world. She has accomplished this through all the kinds of opportunities that have been brought to her via literary grants and events. In 2004 she attended the Cats’ Night Out Poetry Series (2004, in London), the Cambridgewordfest (April 2004, in Cambridge), the Dublin International Writers’ Festival (16-19 June 2004, in Dublin) and the Ledbury Poetry Festival (8-10 July 2004, in Ledbury, U.K.) 27 She then turned her focus to Latin-American culture and this is reflected in two events in which she took part in 2005, the Festival of Latin American Poetry (15-17 June, in Vienna) and the Festival Internacional de Poesía (Third International

Festival of Poetry in Rosario, Argentina on 14-17 September 2005). The trip to Argentina was supported by a Scottish Arts Council Travel Grant. During this trip she completed a poem, “The Argentine”. A few of her poems were translated into Spanish and were introduced to readers in Latin America by Enrique Moya through the Mexican magazine, Casa del Tiempo. Later, she also published an essay, “Lyric Voice”, in the British newspaper, the Guardian, which discussed the modern literature of Argentina.

In 2005 and 2006 she participated in an international creative writing project, “Writing on the Wall”, through which she began to explore the history of Bulgarian exiles in the U.K. During the writing residencies she created poems which were inspired by the traces of the Roman military troops from Thrace (the territory which is now Southern Bulgaria) who were garrisoned along Hadrian’s Wall where the towns of Newcastle, Birdoswald and Morpeth stand today. The poems are “Roman Whore Blues”, “Request for Leave: a brief history of Empire”, “The Past and Future of Aurelius Marcus”, “Letter from Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina” and “Farewell I Wish That You Are Very Happy”. Through these poems Kassabova presents distant historical and geographical connections between the ancient “Bulgarian” soldiers in the Roman times and Bulgarian expatriates in the 21st century, all of whom were

28 Ibid.
31 The poems translated into Spanish were: “Argentine” (2005); “My Life in Two Parts”, “Berlin-Mitte”, and “Nature Morte” (from Someone Else’s Life, 2003); and “Mirage” (from Dismemberment, 1998). See the Mexican magazine, Casa del Tiempo (February 2005).
34 See “Writing on the Wall.” A list of locations on Hadrian’s Wall which were garrisoned by people from various nationalities is available in “Writing on the Wall,” ARTS UK, December 2005, http://www.arts-uk.com/newartsuk/newwow/writers_int.html (accessed April 30, 2011).
35 Ibid. All these poems, except “Request for Leave: A Brief History of Empire”, are collected as a series of poems under the title “Roman Blues” in Kapka Kassabova, Geography for the Lost, 54-57.
exiles in the British Isles. Hence, through Kassabova’s poems about Hadrian’s Wall, the stories of the ancient and modern Bulgarian diasporas inform each other.

Being a Bulgarian-New Zealand immigrant in the U.K. enables Kassabova to examine the lives of people who live in-between languages and cultures; this status also inspires her writing themes. She began to publish essays on issues of exile and displacement in magazines and newspapers in New Zealand and the U.K.; these include, “Polyglot Peregrinations” (about her journey through changing languages and cultures),36 “What’s Wrong with Bulgarians and Romanians?”,37 “Britain Is Scarier than Bulgaria”,38 and “The Joy of National Hybridism”.39 Through her essay writing, Kassabova expresses critical views about the social, cultural and political phenomena in the U.K. and the world regarding the issue of identity.

In 2007, Kassabova’s poetry collection, Geography for the Lost, was published by Bloodaxe Books (in U.K.) and Auckland University Press (in NZ). As framed by the publishers, it is a collection of “travelling poems” which “speak of the many ways to be lost and disoriented: in a place, in the past, in fear, in the very quickness of life” showing “what we all are, have been, and will be.”40 The notion of travelling is the key to this poetic collection. The verses reflect Kassabova’s life as a traveller of the world as well as presenting the constant migrating life of people in the postmodern world. The book includes poems completed by Kassabova between 2004 and 2007; many of them were inspired by Kassabova’s literary trips. For example, the four poems under the title of “Lying with the Ghosts of Berlin”41 were partly produced

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36 Kapka Kassabova, “Polyglot Peregrinations,” in Modern Poetry in Translation 4, Series 3 (“Between the Languages”), ed. David and Helen Constantine (London: Modern Poetry in Translation, 2005), 5-13. The article was slightly revised and published in the title of “Between the Languages” in the same year. See Kapka Kassabova, “Between the Languages,” Landfall 210 (November 2005): 21-27. Another minor revision of the article was completed in 2007 and was published in the title of “Skipping over Invisible Borders”, collected in Kapka Kassabova, Geography for the Lost, 58-66.


41 The four poems are “A Woman in Berlin 60 Years Later”, “Berlin—Mitte”, “Someone Else’s Life” and “Lying with the Ghosts of Berlin”. Two of the poems, “Berlin—Mitte” and “Someone Else’s
during her writer’s residency in Berlin (2002-2003).42 “The Argentine”,43 which was written during the poetry festival in Argentina (2005), and four of the poems produced for Writing on the Wall (2005 and 2006)44 are also included. Some of the poems had previously appeared in literary magazines in New Zealand, the U.K., Colombia and Mexico.45 For instance, the series of poems under the title, “Mister Hu”, had originally been published as “The Estranged Mister Hu” in Landfall (2004);46 Kassabova revised these poems for the 2007 publication of Geography for the Lost.47 At the end of the poetic collection, she also included an essay, “Skipping over Invisible Borders”,48 which was a revision of the essay “Polyglot Peregrinations”.

The book, as Gabriel Hershman suggests, “featur[es] disparate voices throughout the world […] expressing the alienation of the outsider.”49 The sense of global displacement, which is emphasised throughout Geography for the Lost, is recognised by readers around the world, while some New Zealand critics seem to find it difficult to relate to the idea, and, therefore, consider Kassabova’s poems to be “intensely personal”,50 “dysphoric”51 and unbelievable.52 Despite that, Geography for the Lost

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42 Two of the poems, “Berlin-Mitte” and “Someone Else’s Life” had been collected in Kapka Kassabova, Someone Else’s Life (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003).
44 The poems are under the title of “Roman Blues”, which include “Roman Whore Blues”, “The Past and Future of Aurelius Marcus”, “Letter from Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina” and “Farewell I Wish That You Are Very Happy”. See Kapka Kassabova, “Roman Blues”, in Geography for the Lost (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), 54-57.
45 See the “Acknowledgements” page of Kapka Kassabova, Geography for the Lost (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007).
50 As Trevor Reeves states, “Some of the poems are intensely personal, like ‘The Travel Guide to the Country of your Birth’, contains no memories for most of us. […] However, there are many lessons to be learned by those reading Kassabova’s writing — if you buy this book, you should study it closely. I recommend this book to serious writers.” From Trevor Reeves, review of Geography for the Lost, by Kapka Kassabova, Southern Ocean Review, http://www.arts.org.nz/rev43.htm (accessed June 18, 2011).
51 As Emma Neale writes, “Reality, though, still means disconnection, disappointment, disillusionment: the tone of these affecting poems is almost exclusively dysphoric […] the strong pull from the current of sadness found in the rest of the collection.” From Emma Neale, “We’re All Émigrés Now.”
52 As Hugh Roberts comments, “The more I read the poems in Kapka Kassabova’s latest collection, Geography for the Lost, the less I believe them. These are poems that explore the same territory of global dislocation […] a world of exile, immigrants, refugees, where not even the ‘natives’ can find themselves at home, although for Kassabova […] world is no new product of contemporary globalism.” From Hugh Roberts, “Never at Home: Kapka Kassabova’s ‘Pornography of Exile’,” NZ
has generally been well received by readers; Simon Sweetman considers it to be "[Kassabova’s] strongest [poetic] collection to date." 

After moving to New Zealand, Kassabova still occasionally returned to her hometown in Bulgaria for visits. Her first visit to Bulgaria after leaving was in 1998, since which time she has returned to the country every one or two years. She has become more like a traveller to, and an observer of the country of her birth. In 2006-2007 Kassabova returned to Bulgaria to do research for the writing of her second travel guide, *Globetrotter’s Travel Guide to Bulgaria* (2008). She travelled across the country and perceived her home country through the eyes of a tourist. However, it was a very different experience from writing a travel guide about any other country, because her personal attachment to the people and places in Bulgaria has never subsided. Therefore, with the encouragement of her British publisher, Portobello, she also completed a travel memoir, *Street Without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* (2008), which is identified by the writer as autobiographical "non-fiction". The book has been published in four countries, through Portobello (U.K.), Penguin (NZ), Ciela Books (Bulgaria, in Bulgarian translation by Mariana Melnishka), and Skyhorse (USA). In the first part of the book, "Childhood", the narrator, Kapka, recounts her childhood and teenage years, which show a complex relationship between the protagonist’s personal life and the political history of Bulgaria under communist rule. The second part, "Other Misadventures", presents the journeys of the protagonist who returns to the country after her fifteen years expatriation, and looks for the memories of the past in post-

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54 See my interview with Kassabova in Appendix II.


56 See my interview with the writer in Appendix II. See also the “Acknowledgements” of *Street Without a Name*. Kapka Kassabova, *Street Without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* (Auckland: Penguin, 2008), 336.


58 See the “Disclaimer” page of Kapka Kassabova, *Street Without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* (Auckland: Penguin, 2008). See also my interview with Kapka Kassabova in Appendix II.


communist Bulgaria. The narrative of *Street Without a Name* follows the style of Kassabova’s travel essays, which show a mixture of observant, ironic and sympathetic tones, reflecting the protagonist’s ambivalent situation as both an insider and outsider of the country.

Whereas the book is often credited by non-Bulgarians with showing insightful observations on Bulgaria, some Bulgarian readers tend to consider it somewhat controversial and suggest that the accounts in Kassabova’s book are “false and designed to please a foreign audience.”

The book is written in an ironic tone, which, as Kassabova points out, presents an Anglo-Saxon form of humour, as it is written in English for readers of English. Despite that, the success of Kassabova’s *Street Without a Name* is widely recognised in the U.K. and Europe, and it has been generally well received in Bulgaria, New Zealand and the U.S. It was selected as the Book of the Year (2009) by Jan Morris in the *Financial Times* (U.S), was shortlisted for the Dolman Travel Book of the Year Award, and was selected for the 2009 Prix Européen du Livre. As a result, in October 2009 Kassabova was selected to be a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Strathclyde University in Glasgow. Her literary achievements have also been recognised in Bulgaria. The annual *Golden Quill* (Златно перо, Zlatno Pero) awards in Bulgaria, which acknowledge individuals and organisations who contribute to Bulgarian culture, selected Kassabova as the only writer in 2009 to receive the honour.

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From 2007 to 2010, Kassabova attended many literary and art festivals worldwide. She appeared at the Auckland Readers’ and Writers Festival (2007 and 2008), the London Literary Festival (July 2008), the Edinburgh Book Festival (August 2008), the Apolonia Art Festival (September 2008, in Sozopol, Bulgaria), the Bluecoat Literary Festival (October 2008, in Liverpool), the Zagreb Poetry Festival (April 2009), the Aberdeen Word Festival (May 2009), The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival (9-18 October 2009), and the Durham Book Festival (1 November 2009). Kassabova has been a very active participant in the literary scene in the U.K., where she has been involved in all kinds of literary events, such as the Poetry Association of Scotland reading (March 2008), the Sopo poetry readings (29 April 2009, in Soho, London), and the Shore Poets reading (28 June 2009, in Edinburgh). She is a regular participant in writers’ programmes in the U.K. and Ireland such as, the New Writing Worlds Symposium and Forum at the University of East Anglia (2005 and 2006, in Norwich), the John Hewitt International Summer School (2007, in Armagh, Northern Ireland), the Travel Writing Course in West Dean College (7-9 June 2010, in Chichester, West Sussex), and the Arvon Foundation Course (9-14 August 2010 in Totleigh Barton, Scotland). Kassabova is also becoming well known in Bulgaria. She was selected as one of the writers to attend the annual Sozopol Elizabeth Kostova Foundation Programme (June 2009, in Sozopol, Bulgaria), where she shared her creative experiences with other writers. She has also been invited to many international conferences, including the University of Stirling Poetry Conference (July 2008), the Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture conference (23-26 July 2009, Freiburg University, Germany), the East Looks West conference (23 October 2009, (accessed December 11, 2010). See also the announcement of the 2009 Golden Quill awards in the website of the Bulgarian radio in Sofia, Classic FM. “2009 Golden Quill” (Златно перо 2009). http://www.classicfmsofia.com/news_inside.php?id=69 (accessed December 11, 2010).

68 During the Cheltenham Festival in October 2009, Kassabova was invited to be a writer in residence and completed three essays on reflections she had concerning the literary event, these are; “Looking at the Stars”, “Mad, Bad and Sad” and “A Day of Democracy and Britishness”. See “Cheltenham Festivals (October 2009)”, Arts Council England. http://cheltenhamfestivals.com/blog/tag/writers-in-residence/ (accessed December 11, 2010).


70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 The papers presented in the conference, including works by Kassabova—an essay, “From Bulgaria with Love and Hate: The Anxiety of the Distorting Mirror (A Writer’s Perspective),” and two poems from Geography for the Lost (“Our Names Long and Foreign” and “The Travel Guide to the Country of Your Birth”)—have been published as a book. See Barbara Korte, Eva Ulrike Pirker and Sissy Helff,
University of London), and the Determining Form: Creative Non-Fiction Journeys conference (11-12 June 2010, University of Glasgow). Kassabova’s active participation in all kinds of literary activities shows the fact that she is open to the discussion of her works with readers and critics. Her involvement in the Determining Forms conference, in particular, suggests that, as is my emphasis in this thesis, the academic community has started to take notice of the way in which Kassabova adopts various genres and collapses genre forms in her writing. She constantly looks for inspiration from literary occasions and learns new ways to experiment with her writing practice, thus making herself a more adventurous writer in the literary field. Through her active and intensive participation in art and literary events worldwide, Kassabova has begun her life as a globetrotter, a cultural mongrel with expertise in several languages, and as an international writer.

The readership for Kassabova’s works includes the academic community as well as the non-academic audience, showing the flexibility of her writing which can adapt to all kinds of reading contexts. She has been a regular writer for newspapers and magazines, these include; the Guardian (U.K.), the Times Literary Supplement (TLS, U.K.), the Sunday Times (U.K.), Vogue (U.K.), the NZ Listener, Metro magazine (NZ), Next magazine (N.Z.) and Vagabond (Bulgaria). Like her late grandmother, she also writes for radio programmes and, in particular, for BBC Radio 4 and Radio 3 in the U.K. Her writing for newspapers, magazines and radio stations covers a variety of themes. There are the book reviews, in which she comments about works by writers from many parts of the world, such as, The Book of Telling: Tracing the Secrets of My Father’s Lives by Sharona Muir, With Borges by Alberto Manguel, For Bread Alone by Mohamed Choukri, The Moldavian Pimp by Edgardo Cozarinsky.
Contemporary Film Directors Series: Roman Polanski by James Morrison,79 Solo by Rana Dasgupta,80 The Russian Dreambook of Colour and Flight by Gina Ochsner,81 A Short Border Handbook by Gazmend Kapllani,82 Waking up in Toytown by John Burnside83 and The Concert Ticket by Olga Grushin.84 There are essays about writers and artists, such as “Kapka Kassabova on ‘Parting’ (by Emily Dickinson)”,85 “Catching the Moment of Light” (about New Zealand photographer, Marti Friedlander)86 and “The Past of Others” (an interview with Bulgarian writer, Iliya Troyanov).87 There are travelogues, such as, “Hats off to Quito”88 “Europe (without the Euro)”,89 “A Dive into Macedonia’s Past at Lake Ohrid”90 and “Belogradchik,
Bulgaria: little white town”\textsuperscript{91} There are essays about Bulgaria and Eastern Europe, which were published in \textit{Vagabond}, a Bulgarian monthly magazine in English, and the articles submitted include “Border Crossing”\textsuperscript{92} “Keep Migrant Workers Out”\textsuperscript{93} and “Are East Europeans Racist?”\textsuperscript{94} There are also essays on issues about women, published in \textit{UK Vogue}, such as “Material Girl”\textsuperscript{95} and “The View: Orchid”.\textsuperscript{96}

Kassabova has always shown a great interest in working with artists and musicians through various media, reflecting her desire to cross boundaries in every sense. She undertook her second collaboration, \textit{The Weight of the Human Heart}, again with Nancy de Freitas and Mark Storey, on 2 April - 27 June 2004 at Borg Henry Gallery in Christchurch, New Zealand.\textsuperscript{97} Three months later (3 September - 3 October 2004), their third art collaboration, \textit{Different Directions: Narrative of Being in the World}, was shown at Lopdell House Gallery, Waitakere City, Auckland, New Zealand.\textsuperscript{98} In 2007, she was involved in the exhibition of the New Zealand photographer, Marti Friedlander, “Marti Friedlander: Shadows and Light”, which was held from 8 May to 21 June 2007 in the Fogarty Hojsgaard Galleries in Auckland, New Zealand. (Kassabova also came back to Auckland at that time for the 2007 Readers’ and Writers’ Festival.) For the exhibition, Kassabova presented a new poem,

“City of Shadows and Light”.\textsuperscript{99} It was to the photographer that she dedicated her poetry collection, \textit{Geography for the Lost}.\textsuperscript{100} In 2009, Kassabova wrote a “Foreword” for Leonard Bell’s book on \textit{Marti Friedlander}.\textsuperscript{101} This involvement in art projects has also inspired Kassabova’s writing. She shows a particular interest in photography and the narrative construction of images, which is presented in her poem, “Self-Portrait of Anastassia in 12 Random Snaps” (collected in \textit{Geography for the Lost})\textsuperscript{102} and her study of family photos in \textit{Street Without a Name}. Through her poetic metaphors and narratives she blends artistic concepts into her writing.

Kassabova has undergone a number of dramatic changes of place and life style: growing up in a socialist society in Bulgaria; adjusting to a more liberated life in Western Europe; turning into an economic migrant in New Zealand; becoming a professional writer in NZ and the U.K., and later transforming herself into a traveller of the world. All of these complex changes have evoked the question of self in relation to place—sense of belonging, displacement and estrangement—themes that often characterise Kassabova’s writing. As time goes by, Kassabova shows different attitudes towards her condition as a traveller. This is reflected in the way in which the writer has updated the statement in the first-person narrative about herself in the “Bio” section of her website. In an early version of the “Bio” in 2006, she registered herself as “a professionally displaced person”,\textsuperscript{103} expressing irony towards the displacement she had experienced. In 2008, she presented herself as an escapist. Kassabova described her city of residence, Edinburgh in the U.K., as a “tropical” place “in sunny Scotland, also known as ‘old Dunedin’”,\textsuperscript{104} which suggests a point of contrast with, as well as irony towards, the writer’s first domicile in cold Dunedin after her family emigrated to the South Island of New Zealand. As she wrote, “I

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See the “Dedication” page of Kapka Kassabova, \textit{Geography for the Lost} (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007).
\item Kapka Kassabova, forward to \textit{Marti Friedlander}, by Leonard Bell (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), xi-xiii.
\item As she stated, “I now live in tropical Edinburgh in sunny Scotland, also known as ‘old Dunedin’.” From the “Bio” section of Kapka Kassabova’s website, http://www.kapka-kassabova.bio.shtml (accessed July 9, 2008).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
escape whenever possible. In 2009, she called herself "a happy cultural mongrel" with an "East European-Kiwi-Scots accent." As her statement suggests, the writer has started to show a positive attitude towards her displaced situation and to celebrate the hybridity and multiplicity of identity. In late-2009 Kassabova began to switch the narrative voice of her "Bio" into the third person, revealing less of the personal emotions and more of the critical observation of her own writing which, as Kassabova points out, "grossly hint at her preoccupations as a traveller and cultural mongrel." The content of the "Bio" has remained the same with an occasional slight change in wording.

To date, Kassabova remains a highly productive writer. Her new poems: "Lovers of the Arctic Circle", "The Problem with Perfection", "Urbina Station, 3650m", "Sometimes We Lie", "Nobody will Pray for Their Souls" and "Valentine's Day at the Inca Ruins" have been published in the International Literary Quarterly. She has also tried her hand at translating literary works. Kassabova’s U.K. publisher, Portobello, released her English translation of a Bulgarian novel, Circus Bulgaria by Deyan Enev. Her latest novel, Villa Pacifica, was published in August 2010 by her New Zealand publisher, Penguin. Portobello, is also preparing for the publication of her next travel memoir, Tango: Twelve Minutes of Love, which will be out in November 2011.

Kassabova has gained international recognition as a poet, novelist, essayist, travel writer, journalist and translator. She is a rising star in the literary field.

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108 As accessed on 11 December 2010. Starting from the beginning of 2011, Kassabova has done another major update of her website (www.kapka-kassabova.com). Although the address for the site remains the same, the paths to website articles have been amended and some contents, which still appeared in December 2010, have been removed.
Considering the repressed and alienated life she began in Bulgarian, her global roaming life as a vagabond of cultures and languages is surely a huge transformation. Writing is the tool for such a transformation. It is through writing in a foreign tongue (English) that the writer finally discovers her self and her home.

It can be argued that the potential of her writing is, ironically, motivated by her *escapism*, a term which seems to suggest a passive attitude as its surface meaning, while Kassabova exploits it creatively. As the writer points out, she often has the impulse to escape or get away from somewhere or something, so that she can feel a sense of *continuous renewal*.113 The desire for *continuous renewal* is presented through the increasing complexity of her narrative throughout the phases, showing a journey of evolution, which also mirrors her conceptualisation of identity. It is also reflected in her choice to live life as a traveller who *roams the globe*, in her tendency to write and mix various genres and in her inclination to write for audiences ranging from academic readers of the *TLS* to general readers of *Vogue*, and the way in which she *crosses boundaries* through the narratives of her writing. In this way, she refuses any fixity of identity and advocates for its *multiplicity* and *hybridity*.

**LITERARY JOURNEY**

Kassabova’s writing in the third phase focuses on the identity of *nomadic* subjects, which partly reflects the *global roaming* tendency of her physical journey after 2004. Displacement has been the central issue in Kassabova’s works since the first phase. However, as her writing increasingly shows, displacement is not treated as a problem but rather as a theme to be explored throughout her literary journey. The protagonists of her work in this phase tend to present what Charlotte Newman observes as being, “the tension and contradictions inherent in someone who has moved about so freely in terms of travel, but who has struggled to find any kind of identity”.114 This sense of displacement and *nomadic* identity is considered to be a *universal* issue which plays a major part in the lives of those twenty-first century people who constantly travel and migrate. Hence, in the third phase of her writing, Kassabova questions and rethinks the relationship between people and place through her *nomadic* subject.

The phenomenon of globalisation suggests the complex relationship between people and place: through globalisation people are no longer restricted to a single culture or a nation. Hybrid and multiple identities prevail in the postmodern world. To manifest such a complex self and identity in her writing, Kassabova plays with the fiction/autobiography axis in her narratives. She complicates the first-person singular voice, “I”, and the first-person plural voice, “we”, in her works. Although first-person narrative texts dominate her writing in the third phase, they cannot be viewed as being autobiographical in a simple way. Contrarily, the “I” in Kassabova’s writing begins to show multiple voices and manifold identities. The complexity of identity is also presented through the writer’s exploitation of genres. Her text blends together features of various generic forms, including essay, autobiography, fiction, travelogue, and social and political commentaries. Thus, in this part of the chapter I shall present the way in which nomadic identities of travelling subjects in the globalised world are manifested through the narratives of Kassabova’s writing, which are along the continuum between fiction and autobiography.

Rethinking Places

In Geography for the Lost (2007), Kassabova depicts the displacement of travelling subjects in the twenty-first century and the complexity of their identity, which are specified in the poems, “Geography for the Lost”, “We are the Tenants”, “I Want to be a Tourist” and the essay, “ Skipping over Invisible Borders”. As shown in her narratives, Kassabova observes the globalised world through the viewpoint of “a peripatetic soul, a transient being, a constant traveller”, as Sweetman suggests. In this section I examine the relationship between people and place in Kassabova’s writing. Whereas in the three poems I focus on geographical places in relation to nomadic subjects, in the essay languages become metaphoric places and I explore the relationship between language(s) and a migrating/travelling person. As I will argue, through the complex relationship between people and place in the globalised world as presented in her works, Kassabova questions the idea of home or sense of belonging for people in the postmodern world; in that way, she also complicates the relationship between people and identity.

115 Simon Sweetman, review of Geography for the Lost, by Kapka Kassabova.
A collective first-person voice, “we”, is adopted for “Geography for the Lost” and “We are the Tenants”, emphasising the sense of dislocation as a collective experience in the globalised world. The connection between people and place is not fixed, as presented in “Geography for the Lost”:

**Geography for the Lost**

The outlines of the hills are clear, very clear.
The stones are full of stately glee.
We don’t know what has brought us here.
We don’t know what will make us flee.

Seagulls in free fall, marbled weather—
with or without us, this city is complete,
and other cities for that matter,
and villages, and countryside. They sleep

in peace without us. Yes, an insult. Never mind,
we’re here. Uninvited, but we’re here.
We even have a window, and we’re pleased to find:
the outlines of the hills are clear, very clear.

The title of the poem as well as that of the poetry collection, “Geography for the Lost”, shows that Kassabova is playing with the idea of “geography”. When considering “geography”, one often thinks about the “map” and the substantial landscape, but here Kassabova is dealing with the city of the mind, a landscape of hills with clear outlines but there is a lack of engagement with the physical place. Kassabova utilises the idea of “subjective geography”, a radical concept proposed by modern geographers who point out that a geographical landscape is conceived differently by different individuals. The idea of “objective geography” does not exist, because there is always a personal or cultural framework involved in the representation of landscape. Through the indeterminacy of geography, the writer suggests the contingency of reality. Since geographical landscapes are contingent reality, it is not necessary for people to consider serious relationships with places. Thus, as Kassabova’s poems suggest, everyone in the world is “the lost”, a “tenant” or “a tourist” who continuously comes to and leaves from geographical places, including the one(s) we called “home”. In other words, the relationship between people and place is temporary. It is via the place that the writer manifests the conceptualisation of identity. As Kassabova’s verses show, people may not belong anywhere, and places are simply points of departure and arrival. The loose relationship between

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travelling subjects and geographical locations suggests that identities are *indeterminate, contingent* and *temporary*.

“The outlines of the hills are clear, very clear”, which is used as an introduction and conclusion to the poem, also indicates the relationship between people and place. As the verse and other descriptions show, there is solidity, present-ness and liveliness about the place, but the narrator shows much less clarity about the relationship of himself/herself with it. The idea evokes the question of who the “we” or “the lost” are in this poem. Although the narrative seems to show the separation of two groups (the locals as “they” belong to one, and the foreigners as “we” to the other), the distinction between people and landscape suggests that “we” include both the locals and the foreigners who are separated from “them”, the landscapes. In other words, Kassabova indicates a detachment of people from place in the poem, suggesting that every one of us is a displaced and a lost person in the world. The idea of being a resident of the place is, therefore, an unreality and a loss.

In addition, one notices that the exchange of cultural gaze (West looks East or vice versa), which prevailed in Kassabova’s works of the earlier phases, is no longer emphasised. When a person travels constantly, the idea of East-West geographical relations and the East/West boundary become irrelevant. Without the concern of cultural distinction, Kassabova’s protagonists travel freely and frequently into and out of geographical places.

The landscape in the second stanza of the poem, which shows “marbled weather” may reminds a person of scenery in Scotland where “the outlines of the hills” are actually *not* “clear”. In a sense, Kassabova’s residence in Edinburgh provides a reference to the landscape. Being a non-local in Scotland, s/he is not, as it seems, part of the place even if the person is able to relate to the city. The feeling as such reflects the experience of being a tourist or an immigrant in a country. What is important for a newcomer to a place is his/her feeling about the *present* moment. Whereas in Scotland the outlines of the hills are often shrouded in mist, for the narrative persona it looks clear to him/her *now*, and that is what really matters. As is shown in the three poems discussed in this section, the emphasis on the *here-and-now* dominates the narrative.

The use of the present tense in combination with the adoption of a first-person voice in plural form, “we” (the collective “I” or “self”), in the two poems (“Geography for the Lost” and “We are the Tenants”) indicates the tangibility of the
here-and-now for the narrative persona. For a global roaming subject, the only thing that is meaningful is the here-and-now, and life is viewed as a continuous present. Hence, the repetition of the statement “we’re here” in the poem suggests that although “we don’t know what has brought us here” and “we don’t know what will make us flee”, the fact that “we’re here” is what really matters. The constant juxtapositions of what is known (the here-and-now) and what is not known (the past, the future and the foreign place) also indicate that reality is only what can be seen in the present moment.

As suggested in Kassabova’s travel memoir, Street Without a Name, “all important journeys are supposed to be circular”; to complete the journey one needs to return to the point of departure and “close this circle”.\textsuperscript{117} Such an idea is presented in the circular narrative form of “Geography for the Lost”, where the first line is repeated at the end. It also reflects the conceptualisation of time as in a circular form, showing continuous repetitions of here and now. Time is not considered as a straight line on which the here and the there or the past and the present are separate and intangible; it is actually in a circle and the points are all connected. In that way, time becomes tangible for the subject of the present. The emphasis on here-and-now also occurs in the fourth phase of Zhu’s writing, such as The Old Capital and The Wanderer, in which she presents a sense of timelessness through narratives.\textsuperscript{118} Zhu’s manifestation of wandering subjects who travel across time and places is echoed in the theme of Kassabova’s Geography for the Lost.

By emphasising the sense of here-and-now, it becomes trivial for a moving subject to consider his/her self as belonging somewhere permanently. People become “tenants” of any cultures or nations. As the narrative persona of “We are the Tenants” claims, “We have been nowhere forever. / We are the ones possessed by arrival. / […] / Old mail piles up, their lives were temporary / just like ours.”\textsuperscript{119} Hence, identities are rendered contingent and temporary. They are not defined by people’s cultures or nations of origin, but, as Kassabova points out, by “the sum of the places we have been to and we have come from”.\textsuperscript{120}

As well as travelling across cultural and geographical boundaries, Kassabova’s narrative subjects also confound the binary of reality and imagination through writing.

\textsuperscript{117} Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Name, 328.
\textsuperscript{118} See my discussion of the timelessness feature in Chapter Four.
\textsuperscript{119} Kapka Kassabova, “We are the Tenants,” in Geography for the Lost (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), 2.
\textsuperscript{120} From my recording of Kapka Kassabova’s speech in the seminar, “Who Do You Think You Are?,” on 16 May 2008 during the 2008 Auckland Readers’ and Writers’ Festival.
They are “the tenants of imaginary floors” and they “must write in order to be real”.\(^{121}\) Thus, the writing itself creates an identity in the here-and-now, appropriating the continuous present. This textual reality is the only basis upon which the textual identity is created. The idea also evokes Kassabova’s role as a writer of travel essays, in which she gives places a reality by the way in which she perceives and writes about them. Thus, to the writer, the cities become “my Berlin, my Tangier, and so on.”\(^{122}\) In that way, one does not feel anxious about not belonging to a place, because through writing s/he possesses the place.

The idea of creating personal reality about a place or a landscape through writing evokes the conceptualisation of self in the I-novel by Shiga Naoya, which is also found in the narrative of Kassabova’s writing about the self.\(^{123}\) Both Shiga and Kassabova emphasise the created reality about self, or the textual self, through writing. The simple difference is that with Shiga, the self who is constructed in writing and the self who actually lives the life both exist in deliberate relation to each other; whereas with Kassabova, the textual self is the only self and there is no self outside the writing. For the Japanese I-novel writers, what is most important is the coherent relationship between the written self and the real self (the experiencing self), while for Kassabova the written self is more emphasised.

In “I Want to be a Tourist”, Kassabova manifests the relationship between people and place through the use of irony. The idea of seizing the here-and-now is amplified in the poem, which Kassabova presents through a first-person narrative voice:

\[\text{I Want to be a Tourist}^{124}\]

I imagine my life as a city
somewhere in the third world, or the second.
And I want to be a tourist
in the city of my life.

I want to stroll in shorts and baseball hat,
with laminated maps and dangling cameras.
I want to find things for the first time.
Look, they were put there just for me!

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\(^{121}\) The quotations are from Kapka Kassabova, “We are the Tenants.”

\(^{122}\) See Elena Aleksieva, “Kapka Kassabova: ‘We Are All Foreigners in the Country of Its Past’” (Капка Касабова: “Всички сме чужденци в страната на миналото ни”).

\(^{123}\) See also my discussion in Chapter Six.

\(^{124}\) From Kapka Kassabova, “I Want to be a Tourist,” in Geography for the Lost (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), 3.
I want a room with musty curtains.
I want a view of rubbish dumps and urchins.
I want food poisoning, the dust of traffic
in the mouth, the thrill of other’s misery.

Let me be a tourist in the city of my life.
Give me overpriced coffee in the square,
let me visit briefly the mausoleum of the past
and photograph its mummy,

give me the open sewers, the stunted dreams,
the jubilation of ruins, the lepers, the dogs,
give me signs in a funny language that I never
have to learn. Then take my money and let me go.

Although, as it seems, the narrator claims that s/he wants to be a tourist because
the tourist’s life is far simpler than engaging in a complex relationship with a place,
the claim itself is in fact ironical. The ironic tone of the poem begins in the first
stanza where the narrative persona states that the city of his/her life is located
“somewhere in the third world, or the second”, and s/he wants to be a “tourist” in that
“city of my life”. The statement as such suggests that the narrator considers
himself/herself to be someone who came from the second or the third world and s/he
now travels with the identity of a first-world traveller. Despite the fact that it is not
necessary to make a connection of the narrator with Kassabova who is originally from
Bulgaria (a country of “the second” world) and has become a person who lives in
first-world countries such as New Zealand and the U.K., it still makes sense that
Kassabova exploits the way in which she is stereotyped by critics. It can be argued
that Kassabova responds to the kind of perception by critics who pigeonhole her
identity as a cultural Other. In this poem she adopts the position taken by the critics
in order to observe herself through their viewpoint as well as ironising their
problematic perception. Through the perception of a tourist from the first world, the
narrative persona observes the self as a local from a second-class culture. In other
words, Kassabova blends two cultural identities together in one voice. On the one
hand, being a tourist from the first world, the narrative persona is supposed to be the
subject of gaze who happily explores and exploits the second and the third world
countries. On the other hand, the part of himself/herself as a local from “the third
world, or the second” is an object of gaze who resists the tourist’s behaviour. The
idea of shifting between the first-world and the second/third-world perspectives
evokes the question of how the narrative persona is going to deal with their identity of
being an insider as well as outsider of a country. Such an issue is explored further in
her prose work, *Street Without a Name* (2008), in which Kassabova blends together the perceptions of an insider and an outsider in Bulgaria in her manifestation of an expatriate’s identity.\(^{125}\)

The combination of opposing cultural viewpoints complicates the narrative persona’s cultural identity as well as creating an ironic effect in the narrative. The idea of a tourist being the subject of cultural gaze who exploits, or that of a local being an object of cultural gaze who is exploited, is no longer fixed. As shown in Kassabova’s poem, the narrator’s imagining of self as a foreign territory in the second or the third world suggests the idea of being the object of gaze and being the one to be exploited. Through the narrative of her poem, Kassabova projects the situation of someone from a second-class culture on the life of a first-world tourist, making her narrative a criticism of the cultural stereotypes in tourism. Although it seems that the statements of Kassabova’s narrative persona express happiness to be a tourist who is exploited, pigeonholed or misunderstood, underneath each statement, there is a question which interrogates whether such is the way that first-world people would like to construct cultural identities. Hence, the statement in the first stanza complicates the idea of tourism as well as providing an insight into other statements of the narrator in the rest of the poem.

Kassabova objectifies the place, the distance and what is seen by the tourist in his/her journey. It seems to suggest that to be a happy traveller is to apply the tourist clichés. The repetition of first-person pronouns in all forms (“I”, “me” and “my”) suggests the emphasis of subjectivity: the impressions of places are dominated by the perception of the travelling subject. The poet presents the travelling experience in an ironic tone. Despite the negative elements in the journey, such as “a room with musty curtains”, “a view of rubbish dumps and urchins”, “food poisoning”, “the dust of traffic” and so on, the narrative persona chooses to take them happily. However, this does not mean that the tourist accepts the situations passively. Contrarily, s/he takes the irony further and expresses his/her excitements about the experiences. The statements which begin with “I want…” suggest that being a tourist of a place, everything the narrator perceives shows a vividness, as with something that has happened or been experienced for the first time, and s/he wishes her life would be just like that. There is always baggage associated with things which one has already

\(^{125}\) See discussion below.
known or is familiar with, including places. Therefore, the narrative persona suggests that s/he wants to be a tourist in order to see or feel his/her own life as if s/he is experiencing it for the first time (again). Through objectifying the things which are described by the tourist, Kassabova expresses irony in relation to all the tourist clichés. She draws attention to the tourist/local dichotomy and the gaze (the viewer versus the object of gaze) in tourism by emphasising the difference between the insider and the outsider of the place.

As with the way in which Kassabova exploited the colonial and the stereotyped clichés about the Other, such as the exoticism of Eastern European and Asian cultures, in the earlier phases of her writing, here the writer plays with the clichés of tourism, making her narrative subject the bearer as well as the reflection of the tourist clichés. Despite the cultural difference, the tourist shows his/her easiness towards the lack of knowledge (about the local culture or language) and the lack of closeness or hospitality (of the local people and environment). It is as if the narrative persona is saying, “I am not serious with whatever it is in the local culture. It is common that the tourists do not understand anything anyway. I will ‘visit briefly the mausoleum of the past / and photograph its mummy’, and then I will leave. The room smells bad and the coffee is too expensive, but I do not care, because I will just move on to my next destination.” Whatever the tourist experiences, s/he will continue on her journey. In that way, the narrative persona suggests that s/he wants a superficial relationship with wherever s/he visits. Hence, through exploring the relationship between tourists and places, Kassabova questions the idea of home or the sense of belonging, suggesting the instability of (cultural) identity.

It can be argued that, through the relationship between the tourist and the city in her head, Kassabova implies the relationship between a person and an identity. Just as a tourist can have a temporary and contingent attachment to a place, so it is with the conceptualisation of a person’s identity; that is, a person is not restricted to a permanent or fixed identity. Such a view echoes Zhu’s advocacy of “the freedom of non-identification” and the uncertainty of identity, as emphasised in her writing in what I define as her fourth phase.126 Through her narratives, Kassabova turns a traveller’s fear of uncertainty about identity into a celebration of cultural hybridity, contingency, and multiplicity. As Lackaye points out about Kassabova’s travelling

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126 See my discussion in Chapter Four.
subjects, “while they carry a certain amount of the uncertainty that accompanies itinerancy, they ring with confidence and certitude.”¹²⁷ Such is also the attitude towards identity as conceptualised in the writings of Zhu and Kassabova, both of whom tend to explore possibilities through the indeterminacy of identities.

In the essay, “Skipping over Invisible Borders”, published at the end of the poetic collection (Geography for the Lost), the narrator, a Bulgarian-New Zealander who turns herself into a traveller of the world, presents the complexity of her identity after experiencing a series of linguistic transitions:

But a writer’s adventure with words starts not with Shakespeare, but with doggerel and lullabies, with slide-shows of fairy tales, with the deepest, pre-language memory of a certain smell of damp leaves. I can nicely render this memory into English, but it’s an emotional travesty because the smell of those damp autumn leaves is in Bulgarian. This is why I could only ever be a tenant in the English language house, albeit a happy tenant. This is also why my poetry bristles with metaphors of restlessness and the search for some kind of surrogate home to replace that lost original place of innocence. Of course, above and beyond the question of language and geographical displacement, the loss of the original ‘home’ is something we must all experience, in one way or another.¹²⁸

Some of the poems in this poetry collection, such as “Geography for the Lost”, present the writer’s choice to adopt a “doggerel” style, showing verses with explicitly rhythmic and popular rhymes:

The outlines of the hills are clear, very clear.
The stones are full of stately glee.
We don’t know what has brought us here.
We don’t know what will make us flee.

[...]

we’re here. Uninvited, but we’re here.
We even have a window, and we’re pleased to find:
the outlines of the hills are clear, very clear.

Such a rhyming form is often used by a novice writer of poetry or for a beginner’s poetry reader, which is usually seen in nursery rhymes. Through the presentation of a very tight and popular rhyming structure, the writer suggests that it is where most of us start in our understanding and participation in literature, “not with Shakespeare, but with doggerel and lullabies” and with children’s books in which the illustrations are like “slide-shows of fairy tales, with the deepest, pre-language memory of a certain smell of damp leaves”. In a sense, this is also how a person starts when arriving at a new place; s/he begins with simple things like a writer or reader of

¹²⁸ Kapka Kassabova, “Skipping over Invisible Borders,” in Geography for the Lost, 65.
simple rhymes. What difference does this popular form of rhythm make? As well as its rhythmic quality, “circularity” is also adopted for the poem. It is not merely that “the outlines of the hills are clear”, the form of the poem (rhymes, line structures, and the rhythms) is also “very clear”. Hence, the narrative structure of the poem incorporates self-mockery. Kassabova is certainly not a poet of “doggerel”; she is exploiting the notion of this kind of poetry for a productive poetic purpose, in the same way that “clichés” are utilised in her poems in order to create ironic effects.

The conceptualisation of self as a “tenant” or “tourist”, as discussed above, is reflected in the narrator’s relationship with languages. Living in a globalised world where people speak and communicate through a variety of languages, she feels “a happy moment of escape from the tyranny of a master language” because there is no need for her to “worry about being a local, a foreigner, or worse, a thing in between”, and the idea is reflected in the poems discussed above. As a person who constantly travels into and out of a place, she is also able to hold the same attitude towards language and identity. Hence, the narrator, “I”, considers the lives in between languages to be “my true place: on the noisy, multiple frontier of languages, a traveller passing through, free from the constraints of residence permits,” which is not a loss but “polyphonic bliss”.

Because of the seemingly autobiographical voice of the essay, critics tend to personalise the narrative voice of the poems in Geography for the Lost as that of the writer. Sweetman considers the article as “Kassabova giving even more of herself in print […] by discussing the changes and travels she has made with words, with learning to converse and write in other languages”, an action which “forms the perfect coda to an immaculately conceived selection of poems.” Newman views the essay as the writer “describing the multicultural difficulties of her life which details, with the kind of clarity that characterises the whole book, her experience of the plight of tourist and immigrant.” Hugh Roberts, despite his criticism of the book, gives credit to “the terrifically taut and concrete autobiographical essay with which the volume concludes.” In spite of critics’ tendency to personalise her writing, many of them also identify the sense of dislocation presented in Kassabova’s work to be a

129 Ibid., 66.
130 Ibid.
131 Simon Sweetman, review of Geography for the Lost, by Kapka Kassabova.
universal experience shared by people in the contemporary globalised world. As Lackaye suggests, “Kassabova’s work passes easily from the individual to the universal”.134 Jackie Hagan considers Kassabova as “a spokesperson for those who are geographically uprooted, illuminating the hidden inner process that occurs when a person lives inside more than one language, one culture, one place”.135 Emma Neale views the sense of “rootlessness” in Kassabova’s work as a phenomenon “not just of the new generation, nor of émigrés, but of the era.”136 As Chris Miller points out, “Kassabova's achievement is to make the émigré life a metaphor inclusive of more general alienation.”137 It can be viewed as a narrative strategy for Kassabova to include the seemingly autobiographical work in the collection of poetry. In that way, the narrative of her work becomes multi-referential, which refers to personal as well as to collective experiences, making her book more appealing to a wide range of readers who are able to identify with the stories of her protagonists.

The Ventriloquist and Medium of Displaced Ghosts

Whereas the voices of the narrators in the works discussed above seem to be closer to that of the writer, causing some readers to consider the voice to be autobiographical; the works discussed in this section show the writer’s explicit construction of narrative voice through adopting the situations of others. A sophisticated exploitation of narrative voice has been a major characteristic in Kassabova’s writing from the first phase onwards, as she points out, “With each book I write, be it poetry or prose, I am more conscious of who is speaking.”138 In my interview with Kassabova, the writer mentions “ventriloquism”, the new “poetic device” of her writing.139 The technique is practised explicitly in the poems in Geography for the Lost. The first-person narrative voice, “I”, in her poems becomes the medium for a range of displaced characters,

134 Stephen Lackaye, review of Folly, by Mike Stocks, Outswimming the Eruption, by Allan Crosbie, Hawks and Doves, by Alan Gillis, and Geography for the Lost, by Kapka Kassabova, 162.
136 Emma Neale, “We’re All Émigrés Now.”
138 My interview with Kassabova in Appendix II.
139 Ibid.
from an Argentine DJ in Brazil (in “The Argentine”), a Chinese man in Berlin (in “Mister Hu”), a Vietnamese man who was run over by a British lorry driver (in “Hanoi to Haddon: life and death of a stowaway”), the Jewish ghosts in Berlin (in “Berlin-Mitte”), to the ancient Romans of the second century (in “Roman Blues”). Such a narrative technique as the one used by Kassabova is acknowledged by the critics who consider her to be “a great storyteller” of “the travelling lives of others” to whom the writer “expertly gives voice”.

However, Kassabova does not simply provide her characters with voices. What needs to be noted is the way in which the writer renders the voices in her narrative. As Kassabova suggests, through “ventriloquism” she creates “a deliberate ‘symphony’ or cacophony of experiences and emotions which go far beyond [the poet’s] personal experiences”. In order to present the complexity of the ventriloquist “I” in Kassabova’s narrative, I examine two poems: “Request for Leave: a brief history of Empire” (from the Writing on the Wall project, 2005) and “Mister Hu” (from Geography for the Lost, 2007).

In “Request for Leave: a brief history of Empire”, Kassabova merges the voice of a second century Thracian (ancient “Bulgarian”) male soldier with that of a twenty-first century female Bulgarian migrant (which may or may not be the writer herself), both of whom write to the political authorities of the time regarding their desire to leave or stay in Britain:

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144 Kapka Kassabova, “Roman Blues,” in Geography for the Lost (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), 54-57.
146 Simon Sweetman, review of Geography for the Lost, by Kapka Kassabova.
147 Ibid.
148 My interview with Kassabova in Appendix II.
I ASK THAT YOU CONSIDER ME A WORTHY PERSON TO WHOM TO GRANT LEAVE AT ULUCIUM wrote the Thracian soldier to his officer in 174 AD. He didn’t want to be in Britannia, land of pesky winds, barbarians and no Coliseum. The answer is lost for posterity.

I ask that you consider me a worthy person to whom to grant leave to remain in Britain, wrote the Bulgarian migrant to the Home Office in 2005 AD. She wanted to be here, despite the pesky winds.

The answer is lost for posterity.

Through the first-person narrative voice, “I”, Kassabova juxtaposes the stories of two “Bulgarian” exiles living across time. The two letters being written in disparate historical moments share the same narrative form, starting with the same sentence which is taken from the fragments of the Roman letters in Kassabova’s research of the history of Hadrian’s Wall. Whereas the Thracian soldier in 174 AD is desperate to leave Britain, the Bulgarian woman wants to stay in the country for longer. Both characters are “Bulgarians” who live in the foreign country with “pesky winds”, and their fates are in the hands of the officials (the Roman official in the former and the British official in the latter) who have the power to grant permission.

Despite the differences in their situations, the narratives of both protagonists express irony at the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. In the first

149 Kapka Kassabova, “Request for Leave: A Brief History of Empire”, in “Writing on the Wall.”

150 The words, “I ASK THAT YOU CONSIDER ME A WORTHY PERSON TO WHOM TO GRANT LEAVE AT ULUCIUM”, are taken from a letter (a tablet) of the ancient Romans at Vindolanda. In the request, the author of the message specifies the location at which he would like to be granted leave. Information from “Vindolanda Tablets Online—Vindolanda Tablet 174 LeafNo. 1 (front)”, http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/4DLink2/4DACTION/WebRequestQuery?searchTerm=174&searchType=number&searchField=TVII&thisListPosition=1&thisPageNum=0 (accessed May 4, 2011). As Bowman writes, “Ulucium” must be a place, but it cannot be identified. From Alan K. Bowman, Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier: Vindolanda and Its People (New York: Routledge, 1994): 107.

151 Although “Request for Leave: A Brief History of Empire” is not included in the publication of Geography for the Lost in 2007, it shares the use of capitalised sentences in the texts with other poems which were written for the 2005 Writing on the Wall project. Kassabova explains in the “Notes” to Geography for the Lost that these capitalised texts are taken from the “fragments of Roman letters or tombs found along the Hadrian’s Wall”. See Kapka Kassabova, Geography for the Lost, 67.
century, the Roman officials dominated the lives of Thracians like the character in this poem as well as the lives of the British people who were considered to be savages at the time. However, in the modern time, it is the British officials who decide the fate of Bulgarians in the U.K. such as the female protagonist. The use of language in this poem challenges the idea that the colonisers are civilised while the colonised are barbarous. One notices the contrast between the very formal language adopted in the request and the colloquialism of the language used by the official ‘in Sheffield’. The colloquialism is presented through the repeated word “pesky” in the first stanza, which is a derogatory epithet commonly used in northern England; as well as through the term “sod ‘er” in the second stanza, which reflects the rough and disrespectful attitude of the official to the writer of the requests. The rudeness of the official is also mirrored in the crude rhyme of “sod ‘er” and “fodder” in the final stanza. Through the letters Kassabova manifests dislocation in disparate historical time. The narratives of the letters reveal displacement in different contexts, intertwining the personal lives of the “Bulgarian” characters with the political history of Eastern European exiles in Western Europe.

On the other hand, the implied similarities between the poet and the female protagonist may inevitably result in the tendency to personify the “I” in their reading. Hence, the ventriloquist first-person voice in this poem is rendered multi-referential, telling stories of both imaginary and factual characters, and thus causing the narrative voice to be fictive as well as autobiographical. In this way, the narrative of the poem includes the experiences of exiles of the past and of the present; these experiences are not solely restricted to the Bulgarians in Britain but are for all other displaced people, invoking the universality of the displacement.

In the poem, “Mister Hu”, Kassabova presents a higher degree of complexity in her narrative ventriloquism, which serves to illustrate the combination of various perspectives in one voice. The poem is presented in five parts: “I often think of Mr Hu”, “Dancing with Mr Hu”, “Mr Hu drunk”, “Saying goodbye to Mr Hu” and “Email from Mr Hu: no subject”. The female narrator constructs the life of a Chinese man in Berlin who lives in between the Western world of his imagination and his actual experience of the reality of life in a Western country. Whereas, through writing, Mr Hu creates a life with a “small blonde women / hungry for exotic thrills”, in reality
he has a wife, who “got pregnant from an ex”, making him broken-hearted. The first line of the poem, “He had a bar called Mr Hu”, suggests that the protagonist’s life is a bar, which is filled with drinking sessions, reducing his life to a state which is half intoxication and half soberly clear. In a sense, Mr Hu’s half-dreaming and half-waking state reflects the (mis)understanding of another culture in this poem, which is filled with one’s imagining of it, rather than what it really is. Or, it can be argued that the reality of a culture does not even exist; it is often the question of cultural projection and imagination. As the Western female narrator states in “Dancing with Mr. Hu”, “I see your halo and I promise I won’t misunderstand you”. The poem is about the understanding and misunderstanding of cultures.

The first-person voice is adopted for both the female narrator, a Western woman, and for the male character, a Chinese man, while the latter is likely imagined through the voice of the female narrator. Quotation marks are omitted throughout the narrative, so that, in order to identify who is talking to whom, the reader is required to pay attention to the contents of each statement. Without the clear distinction of voices between the narrator and the protagonist, the poet confounds the Self/Other and East/West binaries, making “I” the connection between cultures. Mr Hu’s statements present a braiding of cultural representations, which is presented particularly in the part of the poem, “Mr Hu drunk”:

You wanna dance with Chinese?  
Yeah, I’m little bit drunk.  
Thank you. Thank you very much.  
Last tango in Berlin…

Tomorrow I go sauna, wanna come?  
Yeah, naked sauna, mixed. I don’t look at you.  
Then Naked Lunch, at sushi bar call Ishin, it’s mean single heart. Make Chinese happy.

Have you had Chinese before?  
You don’t wanna try Chinese?  
Chinese good and last longtime. Free for you.  
I can get no satisfaction…

Can I fall in love?  
No, as long as I have cigar.  
Chinese don’t fall in love with no one. Nothing gonna change my world…

Have I told you’re beautiful woman?  
I tell you next time. You’re not free?

152 The quotations are from Kapka Kassabova, “Mister Hu,” in Geography for the Lost (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), 10.  
153 Ibid., 11-12.
I know you not free. I must pay price.
Please please please, please me…

You kick me out already? Only 12 o’clock.
At home, just tango music, cut my throat.
I sleep here, I don’t touch you.
You are so good, Norwegian wood…

Okay, I go. Thank you. Thank you for everything.
Yes, I find my way home.
Fucking Chinese always find way home.
The long and winding road…

Mr Hu’s perception of self shows a mixture of Chinese stereotypes across cultures, which include the feminisation of a Chinese man according to Western stereotypes, as well as a powerful man in the Chinese patriarchal view (which is undermined in the Western construction of Chinese men as small—including their genitalia). All of these are in fact clichés of (another) culture. Therefore, what is challenged here is not the issue of which culture is representing or which culture is being represented, but the idea of cross-cultural representation itself. Hence, the poem deals with the problem of cross-cultural representations and the clichés of cultural stereotypes, which include the Western female narrator’s representation of Mr Hu as a Chinese man as well as Mr Hu’s perception of the narrator as an European woman. The pun of “Hu” and “Who” also indicates the problematic aspect of such representations, making the readers wonder whether “Mr Hu” does exist, or if it is after all a “Mr Who” which is manifested throughout the poem. As with the way in which Kassabova plays with the tourist clichés in “I Want to be a Tourist”, in “Mister Hu” she also exploits the clichés in the construction of cultural stereotypes, and through which she creates a character such as Mr Hu.

As well as in terms of physical size, Kassabova characterises Mr Hu through the way in which she constructs his expressions in English. The broken and limited English of Mr Hu reflects his linguistic displacement, which also mirrors his cultural dislocation. As Newman points out, “These senses of displacement and exile […] are transfigured into language itself, and how, especially in a multilingual context, it may be alienating rather than communicative.”\(^{154}\) Mr Hu’s struggle to master a European language (itself a cliché when referring to the Chinese) projects the alienation of his life in a European country. There is a sense of sympathy towards Mr Hu’s displacement in the narrative tone; however, the Western female persona’s

representation of him also reveals that it is difficult to totally move away from cultural stereotypes in her construction of the person.

Mr Hu is depicted as a man who falls for all kinds of clichés about love and sex. His mind is reflected in the name of the sushi bar, “Ishin” (one heart), suggesting a person’s loyal commitment to love. His fantasies of love are presented through the linking of his pursuit of the female narrator to that in the Italian film, *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), or the novel, *The Naked Lunch* (1959) by American writer, William S. Burroughs, both of which are well known to be controversial works in their overloaded depictions of sex and drugs. In addition, the verses from the song of the Rolling Stones and the songs of the Beatles are adopted for the last line of each stanza: “I can’t get no satisfaction…” (from the Rolling Stones’ *I Can’t Get No Satisfaction*, 1965), “Nothing gonna change my world…” (from the Beatles’ *Across the Universe*, 1969), “Please please please, please me…” (from the Beatles’ *Please Please Me*, 1963), “You’re so good, Norwegian wood…” (from the Beatles’ *Norwegian Wood*, 1965) and “The long and winding road” (from the Beatles’ *The Long and Winding Road*, 1970). The references to film, fiction and songs in this poem present yet other layers of narrative ventriloquism, making the works speak for, and assist with, the construction of Mr Hu/Who, who simply reproduces the clichés of love from popular songs, rather than speaking for himself. The quotations of lines from songs and the titles from film and fiction recall the intertextuality in Zhu’s writing of the later phases. Whereas in Zhu’s writing the songs and movies are adopted in order to encapsulate the “here and now” of Taiwan and Taiwan in the 1960s and 1970s, in Kassabova’s poem the references are adopted to encapsulate the clichés of cultural representation.

The character, Mr Hu, is shown as a bearer of representations. On the one hand, there are stereotypes of Chinese people which form the way in which the reader perceives a character such as Mr Hu. On the other hand, there are details which are not necessarily the stereotypes of Chinese, but are actually the hardship of immigrant life in general, which is not restricted to that of Chinese people. Hence, the question becomes how much the character is stereotyped or individualised. Whereas Mr Hu seems to be an individual case, the construction of him is actually presented as a whole set of stereotypes stacked one upon another. The individual and stereotypical representations are all imposed upon the character. For example, whereas the use of mock English for the construction of Mr Hu’s speech is part of the stereotype, it
appears to be an individual characteristic of the protagonist. In other words, through the representation of Mr Hu, Kassabova also plays with the distinction of what is stereotypical and what is individual in terms of cultural representation.

In addition, in “I often think of Mr Hu” Kassabova shows the juxtaposition of Mr Hu and the female narrator looking at their thin legs in the bath:

Looking at his thin legs in the bath,
he thought that surely, not everything was lost
although it felt that way.
[…]
Looking at my thin legs in the bath,
I think that surely, there must be more
to Mr Hu’s life, surely,
than gestures of longing and loss.\textsuperscript{155}

There is overt linkage between the “I” (whoever the “I” is) and the “he” (whoever the “he” is), which emphasises how the subject and the object of cultural representations (the Self and the Other) are not separate but actually mirror each other. This is a significant mechanism in the reading of the poem.

It can be argued that through the ventriloquist “I” Kassabova represents the voice of an exilic Chinese man in Europe, while Mr Hu performs the Chinese male stereotype in Western fantasies. Mr Hu’s awareness of the East/West cultural binary and his out-of-place-ness in Western society is manifested in an exaggerated way. It is presented through the way in which Mr Hu constantly replaces the pronoun “I” with the word, “Chinese”, in his statements, such as “Make Chinese happy.”, “Have you had Chinese before? / You don’t wanna try Chinese?”\textsuperscript{156} or “Have you seen […] a Chinese cry?”\textsuperscript{157} Mr Hu’s “gestures” of smoking “cigars” reveal that even his habits are poses.\textsuperscript{158} As a result, he is turned into a parody of the Chinese stereotype, showing irony in relation to the Western representation of Asians.

In the last part of the poem, entitled “Email from Mr Hu: no subject”, Kassabova presents the protagonist through extreme linguistic clichés:

\textit{Email from Mr Hu: no subject} \textsuperscript{159}

\begin{quote}
I don’t blame u if u don’t write
I don’t blame u if u don’t call
I just put some music in phonemachine
to tell u I thinking of u. Right now
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{155} Kapka Kassabova, “Mister Hu,” 10.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 11-12.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 12-13.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 13.
my coolrunning chicken
is on the way in curry-truck.
Yesterday I cook biological pig
I’m not sure pig is happy to be bio
Pig just wanna be pig.
Like chinese want to be loved.
This midday, I read Fernando Pessoa,
it always make clam wenn depress.
I want write roman
about fucking Berlin and how to be happy…
Maybe one day you correct my mistake…
I want learn how to cook good
Maybe one day I be you butler…

Ciao my friend, smile wide mouth
Hu

The linguist clichés are presented in a seemingly more individualised context. The clichéd ideas, such as “I just put some music in phonemachine / to tell u I thinking of u” sounds like an individual act of the protagonist, but it is actually a romantic cliché. Reading poetry makes him “calm” and writing “roman” (deliberately using the German word) “about fucking Berlin” (deliberate use of the English expletive) also shows linguistic clichés. The “biological pig” suggests problematic appropriations, like the clichés. In addition to the misrepresentation of the word, “biological”, Mr Hu’s statement, “I’m not sure if pigs want to be bio, pigs just want to be pigs”, points out the problem of identity pigeonholing. The Chinese do not want to be stereotyped, they just want to be the people they want to be. As a result, Mr Hu’s email presents how the narrative ventriloquism is exaggerated until it almost self-destructs.

Then, the question to be asked is, “Who is performing the ventriloquism?” On the one hand, it seems that the Western female narrator makes Mr Hu speak through her voice (with an image of Mr Hu as the dummy). On the other hand, it may be thought that Mr Hu makes the female narrator speak through his voice. She can be the one who voices on behalf of Mr Hu, or the other way around. Both situations are possible in the narrative ventriloquism of this poem. In that sense, the narrative voice of “Mr Hu” is like a “spiritual medium” who speaks in the voice of a ghost or someone who does not exist, and this is also the case of “Request for Leave: a brief history of Empire”, in which the narrator speaks in the voice of a Roman soldier’s ghost and that of a modern Bulgarian in the U.K. “Mr Hu” can also be considered to be a kind of ghost, a real person but is a bearer of cultural marks which show the combination of people’s imagining of the Other. Despite the fact that Kassabova
claims to have known Mr Hu personally in Berlin,\textsuperscript{160} both his characters and the female narrative voice are equally constructed. Hence, it can be argued that the idea of “Mr Hu/Who” applies to both the speaker and the dummy of the narrative ventriloquism. Through such complexity of narrative voice Kassabova questions the idea of cultural representation: who is representing whom? In that way the writer challenges the signifier and the signified of cultural stereotypes as well as that of identity.

Auto-nomado-graphy

In Street Without a Name (2008), Kassabova manifests a diasporic identity through the exploitation of an autobiographical voice. The theme of cultural diaspora is presented in the life of the protagonist, through the way in which the narrative is constructed, as well as through the way in which genre categories are confounded. Hence, a more complex view is required for the reading of the work than simply perceiving it as an autobiography in a normal sense. The word “autobiography”, as James Goodwin reminds us, contains three components: self (auto-) life (bio-) writing (-graphy).\textsuperscript{161} In my view, a better description of Kassabova’s Street Without a Name would be to consider the work to be an “auto-nomado-graphy”, writing of a nomadic subject. In other words, my reading emphasises the sense of nomadism as presented in the theme, protagonist, narrative, and genre of the book, suggesting that it is more appropriate to read the work from the viewpoint of a cultural nomad. By replacing the word “bio” with the word “nomad”, I highlight the nomadic (or exilic) character of the protagonist’s life (bio). Whereas “auto-nomad” reflects the protagonist’s life as a subject who is constantly on the move and who does not have a stable home, “graphy” suggests that “writing” defines the identity as well as providing a home for the nomadic subject. In addition, the word “auto-nomado-graphy” also indicates the potential generic subversion of the work as a hybrid of genres which challenges the conventional view of an autobiography. Hence, in this section of the chapter, I explore the way in which the sense of nomadism is presented through the narrative voice, text and genre of Street Without a Name, showing the way in which Kassabova expands the genre of autobiography through the writing of a cultural nomad.

\textsuperscript{160} See my interview with Kassabova in Appendix II.
A hybridity of genres—fiction, autobiography and travelogue—forms the basic style for Kassabova’s *Street Without a Name*, a work framed by the author as a “travel memoir”. The first part of the book, “Childhood”, is presented as a memoir of the narrator, Kapka, who recalls her childhood and adolescent life which was spent in a suburban area of Sofia until her family migrated to the U.K. after the fall of the communist government in Bulgaria and then, later, to New Zealand. The narrative of “Childhood” stops on the day the family left Bulgaria for New Zealand. The second part, “Other Misadventures”, is presented as a series of travelogues which record the narrator’s trips back to Bulgaria after she became a citizen of New Zealand living in the U.K. Kapka reports in a journalistic tone on the post-communist society of Bulgaria. However, the narrative of *Street Without a Name*, as indicated by Vesna Goldsworthy (Yugoslav-British writer of the memoir, *Chernobyl Strawberries*, 2005), shows a “skilful blend of memoir and travelogue”. In other words, it is inappropriate to read the two parts of the book separately, as many critics have done, and to consider them either as exclusively memoir or, as exclusively travelogue. The combination of the two genres in one work suggests the potential complexity of the narrative.

**Complexity of the “Autobiographical” Voice**

Although Kassabova claims *Street Without a Name* to be an autobiographical work—as she states, “I am very conscious of the fact that I (first person singular) am the narrator”—the narrative of the work shows a carefully crafted autobiographical voice. By using the word “crafted”, I do not suggest that the writer has made up the accounts in her book, but rather, I emphasise the way in which she utilises and represents experiences (both personal and collective), and turns them into convincing stories which draw the reader’s attention. As Kassabova indicates, “Childhood memoirs are pointless unless they can make the reader feel deeply, and for that to happen, the writer has to do it first.” In addition to that, as Claire Allfree suggests,
the publication of the book immediately after the commencement of Bulgaria’s EU accession in 2007, has “prompted this travelogue of return”, bringing the attention of readers who are curious about this country that has transformed itself from a communist totalitarian society into a pursuer of capitalist profits.

In the “Disclaimer” page of Street Without a Name, the author begins the book with an ambiguous statement: “This is a work of non-fiction. Nothing here is invented, in the sense that everything I described happened. But the way I have described it is highly personal, and in that sense, not highly reliable.” On the one hand, Kassabova invites her readers to read the book as an autobiographical work, and this seems to have been successful, as a majority of critics tend to believe that this is the case and focus their reviews on the author’s life as a representative case for people who have grown up or have resided in the communist Bulgaria. Critics such as Clive James are convinced of the autobiographicality of the narrative voice presented in Street Without a Name, acknowledging Kassabova’s “uncanny ability to recall her childhood perceptions in all their intense purity”, despite the fact that memory is always (re)constructed whenever one “recalls” the past.

On the other hand, the statement of the author in her disclaimer also reveals a certain degree of constructedness in the seemingly autobiographical account. Although not making any direct reference to the constructedness of the work, some of the reviews of Street Without a Name indicate that critics are aware of the issue. The book is considered by the Kirkus Review to be “a well-wrought memoir”, suggesting that, as well as being interested in the content of the memoir, the critic is also interested in the construction and presentation of the account. Cathy Galvin perceives the work to be a “multifaceted book” which combines “raw memoir” and

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167 The “Disclaimer” page of Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Name.

168 For example, as Misha Glenny observes, “In this autobiographical travelogue, Kassabova returns to her home country in order to find out what has happened, and whether the violent transformation it has undergone since the revolution has left any of her identity intact.” From Misha Glenny, “Mum, Why Is Everything So Ugly?” Review of Street Without a Name, by Kapka Kassabova. Guardian (U.K.), 5 July 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jul/05/saturdayreviewsfeatures.guardianreview27 (accessed May 1, 2011). The words in italics are my emphasis.


the writer’s “meditation on nationality”. From Galvin’s comments, it can be argued that there are at least two types of representations in the seemingly autobiographical narrative: the recalling of the personal life is one aspect, and the “meditation” on politics through the personal context, is another. The most insightful view among the criticisms of the book is the observation of Claudia Duppé. Whereas, like other critics, Duppé considers Street Without a Name to be an “autobiographical book”, she is also aware of the fact that the narrative presents a “polyphony of voice(s)”. As she points out, the narrator “is acutely aware of various subject positions”; the narrative voice switches from the perspective of an “insider” (the Kapka as a child in Sofia), to that of an “outsider” (the Kapka as a “revisiting adult journalist traveller”). In addition, as Duppé observes, the writer “manages to fuse three perspectives into one: the perspective of her immature self, the perspective of her adult self anxious to confront her own emotions and the ironically detached voice of the ‘cosmopolitan as intellectual’.” The constructedness of narrative in Street Without a Name undermines the views of those critics who tend to consider autobiographicality to be a sine qua non of the work.

Ironically, the constructedness of narrative in Street Without a Name makes this “non-fiction”, similar in style to those of her works that Kassabova claims to be “fictional”. One finds that, in the same way that Kassabova presents the narrative of Reconnaissance and Love in the Land of Midas, in Street Without a Name, the personal life of the character and the political situation are also intertwined, mirroring each other. The narrative of the book braids together the personal life of the narrator-protagonist, Kapka, with the political history of Bulgaria and Eastern Europe in relation to “the West”. In addition, the descriptions of personal life and events are very purposeful, as presented in Kassabova’s arrangement of the chapter titles, such as: “East and West: the poor cousin syndrome”, “Chernobyl Summer: Life and Death in the Provinces of Socialism”, “Wind of Change: Perestroika in the Air”, and “And

172 Claudia Duppé, “Tourist in Her Native Country: Kapka Kassabova’s Street Without a Name,” in Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture, eds. Barbara Korte, Eva Ulrike Pirker and Sissy Helff (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), 423.
173 Ibid., 425.
174 Ibid., 427.
175 Ibid.
Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now: Emigration”. These entries are included in the first part of the book, “Childhood”. One finds that the socio-political transitions of Bulgaria are adopted as the landmarks of the protagonist’s life. As the chapter titles indicate, this section of the book does not merely present the protagonist’s childhood, but rather the political history of Bulgaria vis-à-vis the rest of the world around her in her childhood years (the 1970s and 1980s) and the way in which her personal life is situated in that socio-political context. It is actually closer to what Françoise Lionnet terms “autoethnography”, a “métissage” (braided structure) of narrative which shows “one’s subjectivity as mediated through language, history, and ethnographical analysis […] a kind of ‘figural anthropology’ of the self.”

Therefore, it can be argued that in her work Kassabova presents a cultural analysis of the protagonist’s self as being perceived through the socio-political history of the nation.

The conventions of autobiographicality, such as providing photographs of the author, are exploited as a narrative strategy for Street Without a Name. The narrative of the book shows the desire to give a voice to the self in both personal and collective/political contexts, which is explicitly presented in the “Prologue” of the book:

Totalitarian regimes are not interested in personal stories, they are interested in the Party, the People, and the Bright Future. Nor are post-totalitarian democracies. They are too busy staying alive. Equally, in the West there hangs about a vague idea of collective life behind the Iron Curtain, and life after it, but there are surprisingly few personal stories to go with the idea. […] This book is among other things, my own act of exorcism. […] In the Western mind Bulgaria is a country without a face. It appears in English language literature as a chapter—the shortest one—which begins with an edifying sentence about the unjust obscurity of Bulgaria in the Western mind. Or as an appendix, a kind of afterthought. […] So it’s probably time for a modern take. I know that Bulgaria has many faces—I have seen them—so I decided to write my own Bulgaria into being […] The portrait I sketch of modern Bulgaria, then and now, is almost always personal and almost never flattering. […] Beauty might be more important to the ego of countries, but truth is more important to me.

The narrative voice manifests resistance in both its personal and its collective aspects. As well as the way in which “personal stories” have been repressed in Bulgarian society, Bulgaria has been stereotyped by “the West” as one of the communist countries “behind the Iron Curtain”. In both cases, the self is deprived of individuality and a collective identity is imposed upon the person or the nation. On the one hand, Kassabova presents “I” as an individual who is in resistance to clichés

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177 Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Name, 1-3.
(or the collective truth) about the Bulgarian identity and, thus, is fighting for the personal truth. On the other hand, when confronting the clichés about Bulgarians in the West, the collective “we” (as Bulgarians) becomes a necessary voice with which to challenge the cultural stereotype. Hence, the first-person voice in Kassabova’s story constantly oscillates between individual and collective identities. In other words, the “I” in Street Without a Name identifies with, as well as opposing, the collective Bulgarian identity.

Writing is presented as an act of personal resistance to the collective clichés about the self (the person and the nation), as the narrative persona claims this book to be “my own act of exorcism” through which “I […] write my own Bulgaria into being”. The emphasis of the “personal” voice suggests the individuality of the “I” in Street Without a Name, while, ironically, the readings of the book in both Bulgaria and the West have all focused on the collectiveness of the narrative voice, considering the story a representative case for Bulgarians. This more or less explains why readers in Bulgaria and the West tend to show disparate responses towards the book. Whereas it has been well received in Western European countries, including the U.K., the U.S., France, Australia and New Zealand, it remains a controversial work for Bulgarians. As Claudia Duppé suggests, “Among expatriate Bulgarians, Street Without a Name has, for many, struck a chord of recognition in the sense that someone is telling their story. Within Bulgaria, however, far from receiving celebratory praise, it has caused a degree of public outrage in which the author has been accused of being a traitor to the country of her birth.”

Whether the book is taken to be a truthful account about a person growing up in a communist country (as commonly assumed by Western critics) or is considered to be a misrepresentation of Bulgaria (as criticised by some Bulgarian readers), both views show an over emphasis on the account’s representative-ness of a collective Bulgarian identity. In addition to that, if readers consider the book to be an autobiographical work, their views turn into either, praise of, or attacks on, the writer personally. Despite the controversy, by adopting an autobiographical voice, Kassabova has made both Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian readers pay attention to the complexity of Bulgarian identity, especially to that of an expatriate who is both an insider as well as an outsider of the country.

178 Claudia Duppé, “Tourist in Her Native Country: Kapka Kassabova’s Street Without a Name,” 424-425.
The narrative of *Street Without a Name* presents a contrast to that of the *Globetrotter’s Travel Guide to Bulgaria*; the latter emphasises factual and objective information in a travelogue. Personal emotions and subjective views (sympathy or bias) are explicitly revealed in *Street Without a Name*, while in *Globetrotter’s Travel Guide to Bulgaria* a more objective narrative distance is emphasised. In a sense, the narrative of *Street Without a Name* challenges the emphasis of truthfulness and objectivity in the convention of historical and travel narratives in male discourse.

The complex relationship between the protagonist’s personal identity and the collective Bulgarian identity is presented in the narrative where the narrator ties the voice of the self, “I”, with the collective voice, “we”, presenting resistance in personal and collective dimensions:

> During the Olympics or other international sports events, we watched breathlessly as our gymnasts, athletes, and weightlifters battled with the West for medals. It was a serious matter, and whenever gold or silver was won for Bulgaria and the national anthem was played, the whole nation shed a tear together with the long-suffering, steroid-fed medallist on the podium. It was collective therapy: in those few minutes, before we were plunged behind the Iron Curtain again, back in the drab anonymity of the Soc Bloc, the world knew that we existed, and that we were good at something, and that was balm for a nameless wound.179

The narrative voice expresses sympathy as well as irony towards the collective Bulgarian identity. On the one hand, through the collective voice, “we”, Kassabova highlights the narrator’s sympathy towards Bulgarians who are rendered obscure and stereotyped by the West. It identifies with the collective Bulgarian identity; as the narrator states, “in those few minutes […] the world knew that we existed, and that we were good at something, and that was balm for a nameless wound.” On the other hand, the narrative voice presents an ironic view of the collective experience, causing what should have been a touching moment in the Olympics for all Bulgarians, to be somewhat comic. Athletic competitions are turned into political battles between Bulgaria and “the West”. A Bulgarian sportsman’s success in the Olympics is considered to be “collective therapy” for “the whole nation” who “shed a tear together with the long-suffering, steroid-fed medallist on the podium.” The mixture of, and oscillation between, sympathetic and ironic voices suggests a constant negotiation for a narrative distance from the subject (Bulgaria and Bulgarians). Through the comic effect, the narrative voice presents what Bakhtin terms as “heteroglossia”, the

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179 Kapka Kassabova, *Street Without a Name*, 34-35.
polyvocality of narrative.\textsuperscript{180} Whereas the surface meaning of the text seems to conform to the ideology of Bulgarian patriotism, the hidden meaning underlying it shows a criticism of it, making the text a \textit{palimpsest} of personal voices in relation to the collective Bulgarian identity.

The collective experience (the socio-political relationship between Bulgaria and the West) is exploited for the purpose of mirroring the personal experiences of the characters whose lives are filled with East/West cultural confrontations. The personal voice is presented through the experiences of the protagonist’s family members and herself. The narrator, Kapka, represents the memories of cultural encounters experienced by her father, her sister, and herself through the eyes of the adult self as a cultural commentator. For example, in “East and West: the poor cousin syndrome”, a cultural-political meditation on Bulgaria is blended in the description of a photograph of Kapka’s father taken with his Dutch colleagues when he was granted a six-month work permit in Holland in 1984:

\begin{quote}
Here he was, my own dad, blending in with these Westerners, these people who had stepped off the page of my atlas and somehow ended up in Delft, to become his friends. Just like that. I was at once proud and troubled. Proud that we were no less than them. Troubled by the thought that if it was so easy, so natural, if the people on the other side were so friendly, then what exactly was the Wall protecting us from? It was protecting us from ourselves, as it turned out.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{quote}

The narrative voice shows the protagonist’s ambivalent attitude towards the West, which mirrors her questioning of the “we” as framed in the context of the totalitarian regime. It is presented through the way in which the narrative voice switches between “we” (the collective Bulgarian identity) and “I” (the self as an individual in the Bulgarian society), reflecting the mind of the protagonist who is “at once proud and troubled” with the “we” who are protected from the West by “the Wall”. Through the protagonist’s confusion, Kassabova presents a resistance towards the collective Bulgarian identity. This resistance is emphasised through the highlighting of the extreme contrast between Bulgaria and the West in terms of their socio-economic situations.

There is also a constant struggle of the individual with the collective identity. Although Kassabova’s characters feel that they need the sense of “we” to support them, they are bothered by the negative images of the collective identity as projected by the West, and, thus, choosing to turn away from the “we”:

\textsuperscript{180} See my discussion of Bakhtin’s “heteroglossia” (aka. “polyvocality”) in Chapter One.
\textsuperscript{181} Kapka Kassabova, \textit{Street Without a Name}, 69.
Meanwhile, my sister was befriended at her school by a little boy from Cameroon. They were the only foreign kids at an all-white, all-English school, which explained why nobody else wanted to befriend them. One day, the boy said to my sister, ‘Assia, I really like you.’ My sister, gripped with nameless feelings, spat back, ‘And I hate you,’ and ran away in tears. What she really meant to say but couldn’t was that she was lonely, and that she didn’t want to feel like a freak from a country that nobody could find on the map, just like him.  

As a result, the narrative shows a combination of a collective resistance against the West and an individual resistance within the collective Bulgarian identity. The oscillations between Bulgarian and Western cultures and between personal and collective identities turn Kassabova’s characters into cultural diasporics. It can be argued that through her nomadic characters Kassabova enquires into the idea of a collective identity. Her protagonists’ nomadic positions challenge any attempt to fix them in one specific culture, and their existences also question the essentialism of a culture which tends to include or exclude them.

**Multifaceted Narratives**

The narrative of *Street Without a Name*, especially in the second part of the book (“Other Misadventures”) is presented in the form of the travel essay, a hybrid genre and a multifunctional text which shows the features of travelogue, essay (journalism or social, cultural and political commentaries), as well as working as a continuation of the “memoir” in the first part of the book. Roaming across generic boundaries, Kassabova suggests that, like the nomadic identity of her protagonist, her writing is not to be categorised in any fixed genre.

As in the narrative of her travel essay, Kassabova adopts the present tense for the second part of *Street Without a Name*, reflecting an attempt to travel across time through narrative. For example, in “Balkan Blues: surviving in the Balkán” the writer presents Kapka’s four different visits to her aunt and uncle in Suhindol after she returns to Bulgaria as an expatriate:

Uncle and Auntie arrive in their Moskvic from Suhindol to pick me up at the railway station. It is 1999. Auntie has squeezed herself into the rusty husk of the car. She puts the gear into second for Uncle, and he presses on the accelerator. We go in second gear all the way. Donkey carts piled up with hay and kids overtake us. […] Auntie’s white hair is a cloud of petulant authority, though her legs are dead. Uncle’s 1970s brown suit is missing a button or two, and he has a three-day stubble, or is it a week? Hair grows more slowly when you’re old, he says.
A few years later, I stand again outside the peeling yellow house. This time I have brought Michael. The creaky wooden gate opens to a vine-shaded courtyard. It’s very quiet. The grapevines are ripening. Inside the house, they greet us with feeble cries of joy. Auntie has become completely crippled. Uncle is bent over in his favourite brown suit.  

My most recent visit to Suhindol. The creaky wooden gate opens to a vine-shaded courtyard. Auntie is bedridden. ‘She gets drowsy’ is the operational term, which in this family could mean anything from tired to comatose. But this also helps Uncle maintain the illusion that she will get better. […] He’s so bent over his chest is parallel to the floor. The favourite brown suit jacket looks oddly lopsided.

A year later, Auntie has died. I am already too late for the funeral, so I make a slow pilgrimage back to Suhindol, travelling up through the Balkán and giving myself time to prepare for the sight of Uncle alone in the big house. […] It’s exactly ten days after Auntie’s death. The house seems derelict without her. Uncle is bereft and disoriented, and keeps looking for things—his glasses, his keys, his slippers—to distract himself from the ultimate, unacceptable loss that has made all other losses insignificant.

Although the four visits take place at different times, the writer juxtaposes them with the same narrative tense. The erasure of time difference suggests the narrator’s attempt to stop time from progressing, because the development of time indicates that moving forward to the future is the only choice and returning to the past is an impossibility. However, the changes to the uncle and the aunt’s physical condition (their ageing) suggest the fact that the progression of time is inevitable. Hence, the narrative presents the narrator-protagonist’s “wrestle with time”, a characteristic which is also found in Zhu’s Old-Soul-like protagonists. Whereas the narrator moves forwards physically in her journey, during her revisiting of the country her mind travels backwards looking for memories of the past in the places in Bulgaria. The use of present tense throughout the narratives also shows the emphasis on the here and now, implying the narrative persona’s desire to make time tangible, as I have discussed above in relation to Kassabova’s poems.

As well as rediscovering the self of the past, the protagonist also reflects the situation of herself as a displaced expatriate in her home country through highlighting the presence of other diasporic people whom she meets during the journey, such as a blind accordionist on the street who sings “‘Exiles’, a poem by the early twentieth-century poet Peyo Yavorov”, and an Arab man, Abdel, who marries a Bulgarian

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184 Ibid., 202.
185 Ibid., 208.
186 Ibid., 212-222.
187 See my discussion of the way in which Zhu’s Old-Souls-like characters “wrestle with time” (與時間角力), as termed by Zhang Dachun (張大春), in Chapter Three.
188 See my discussion of the poems in Geography for the Lost above.
189 See Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Name, 152-153.
wife and runs a Bulgarian “import-export” business in Sofia (in “She Grows but Never Ages: Getting Reacquainted”),\(^{190}\) the Turkish-Bulgarians, such as the taxi-driver Mahmet (in “Into the Memory Hole: Bulgaria, Turkey, and the Death Strip”) and the Turkish family in the Rodopi (in “The Curse of Orpheus: A Rodopean Story”), whose identities are complex;\(^{191}\) and other Bulgarian expatriates, such as Rado (in “Freedom, Perfection or Death: Macedonian Misadventures”),\(^ {192}\) Stoyan and Ahmed (“Balkan Blues: Surviving in the Balkán”),\(^ {193}\) who find themselves displaced in the West as well as in Bulgaria. Through representing her encounters with other diasporic people, the narrator confounds the boundary between Self and Other; this is in contrast to the emphasis on the “wall” of East/West or Self/Other in the first part of Street without the Name. As the narrator indicates, “The point is about fear of the Other, real or imagined. […] It seems primitive to ask people who are culturally divided in time, like Mahmet, or in space, like me, to have single loyalties.” Hence, through the depictions of diasporic characters in the book, Kassabova also manifests the possibility of having multiple identities, making the issue of identity more flexible, and such is also the tendency in Zhu’s writing.

**The Intertextual Network**
Like Zhu’s The Old Capital and The Wanderer, which present an intertextual networking with the writer’s previous works,\(^ {194}\) Kassabova’s Street Without a Name also provides references to most of her works and thus creates an intertextual relationship with the texts of her other compositions. Street Without a Name displays a link to Kassabova’s novels, Reconnaissance (1999) and Love in the Land of Midas (2000). For example, the Queens’s Palace in Balchik on the Black Sea coast is adopted in Reconnaissance as the protagonist Nadejda’s favourite place.\(^ {195}\) In Street Without a Name, it becomes the location where there are the “private premises” of the protagonist Kapka’s childhood.\(^ {196}\) The penguin in Reconnaissance which Nadejda claims to see in Balchik on the Black Sea shore\(^ {197}\) becomes a broken penguin statue in

\(^ {190}\) Ibid., 161.
\(^ {191}\) Ibid., 245-247. The story about Mahmet is on 272-274.
\(^ {192}\) Ibid., 189.
\(^ {193}\) Ibid., 227.
\(^ {194}\) See my discussion of the intertextual networks in Chapter Four.
\(^ {195}\) See my discussion of Nadejda’s exploration of the Queen’s Palace in Reconnaissance in Chapter Six.
\(^ {196}\) See Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Nam, 25-26.
\(^ {197}\) See my discussion of the penguin in Chapter Six.
Street Without a Name which had stood by the jetty when Kapka was a child. Kapka’s maternal grandmother, Anastassia, was originally from “a small lake town called Ohrid” in Macedonia, which is also where the protagonist, Daphne, in Love in the Land of Midas, spends the rest of her life after escaping from Greece. Both Daphne and Anastassia are diasporic characters. Daphne is a Greek exile in Macedonia, and Anastassia is a Macedonian exile in Bulgaria. On the other hand, the name of Kapka’s maternal great-grandfather (the father of Anastassia) is “Kosta”, which is also the name of one of the characters in Reconnaissance. Like the character “Kosta” in Kassabova’s fiction, Kapka’s grandfather in Street Without a Name is also involved in political activities in Bulgaria. However, by making associations between Street Without a Name and the two novels, I do not suggest the autobiographicality of any of the works, because they are located on the continuum of fiction and autobiography.

Street Without a Name also has explicit links with many of Kassabova’s travel essays. In Street Without a Name, the character, Grégoire, who is a homosexual, is also one of Kapka’s best friends at the French school in Sofia. He completes his university degree in France later but finds himself displaced in both France and Bulgaria; this character is also found in Kassabova’s travel essay, “We Too Are Europe” (2002), but under a different name, Emil. In addition, the Bulgarian peasant girl, Vera, in Street Without a Name, whom Kapka encountered during one of her visits to her aunt and uncle in Suhindol, also appears in “We Too Are Europe”. Identical conversations between the characters are found in both works. Trayan, a Macedonian man with a “neurotic patriotism”, reminds the narrator-protagonist, Kapka, of “Alexandros”, a Greek man with a similar personality, while the story about Alexandros is depicted in Kassabova’s travel essay, “Only Love Can Save Us” (2000).

By creating links between her works, Kassabova also complicates the

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198 See Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Name, 291.
199 Ibid., 66. See also pp. 169-173 of the book. A photo of Kapka’s grandmother in Macedonian traditional costume is provided on p. 169.
200 In Reconnaissance, Kosta helps Nadejda’s grandfather and uncle escape Bulgaria with his donkey cart. See my discussion of Kosta in Reconnaissance in Chapter Six.
201 Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Name, 173.
202 Ibid., 110, 145.
203 Ibid., 201-202 and 209. See also From Kapka Kassabova, “We Too Are Europe”, in Landfall 203 (May 2002), 32.
204 Ibid., 189-190 and 195.
Autobiographicality of her work, making it increasingly difficult for the reader to define the work as fiction, autobiography, travel essay, or by any genre categorisation.

**Closing the Circle: route of the nomadic subject’s journey**

The first chapter of the book, “Peach Street: The Émigré Returns”, begins with a scene in the airport lounge in Frankfurt where the narrator-protagonist, Kapka, queues among Western foreigners and other Bulgarian émigrés like herself who are awaiting their arrival in the “Hostile” (Vrajdebna) Airport in Sofia. The memoir begins at Part One of the book, “Childhood”, which takes place mainly in Sofia, with the narrator-protagonist’s occasional trips to other cities or towns in Bulgaria and with a brief migration to the U.K. also included. “Childhood” ends at the airport in Sofia, where the protagonist’s family are departing for their emigration to New Zealand. Part Two of the book, “Other Misadventures” starts with her return to Bulgaria after leaving the country for fourteen years. Her return journey begins in Sofia, where “all sorts of strange new names [have replaced] the strange old names”.206 The street without a name in Sofia where she used to live is now provided with a name, “Transfiguration Street”,207 which well describes the post-communist environment in Bulgaria. After arriving in Sofia, the narrator-protagonist begins to travel across the country “anti-clockwise round the map”208 until her journey ends at her maternal grandparents’ apartment on Peach Street in Sofia. By travelling in an “anti-clockwise” direction, the writer suggests an attempt to return to the past. The narrative of the book ends at another scene at the “Airport Hostile” in Sofia where the narrator-protagonist waits with other “Bulgarians with Europeans passports”209 for departure from the country.

**The “Autobiographical” Voice versus the Readership**

Many readers, especially readers from Western European countries, show more interest in the first part of the book, where Kassabova’s protagonist/narrator, Kapka, recounts her childhood and young adolescence in Communist Bulgarian society, whereas they tend to feel less interested in the second part of the book where the protagonist becomes a tourist/traveller to Bulgaria. It suggests that in the readership the desire to fix Kassabova’s identity as a Bulgarian writer still prevails. When she

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206 Kapka Kassabova, *Street Without a Name*, 142.
207 Ibid., 328.
208 Ibid., 334.
209 Ibid., 335.
writes about Bulgaria, or something which looks “autobiographical”, readers tend to show more interest. Therefore, it will be interesting to see what kind of reception Villa Pacifica (2010), a work which looks less autobiographical, will receive, although the novel presents the journey of a female travel writer like Kassabova.210

The Bulgarian identity in Street Without a Name is somewhat problematic. It shows the challenge to Bulgarian stereotypes as well as resistance to the Bulgarian identity in the expectations of Bulgarian readers. For Bulgarian readers, the narrator-protagonist, whom they associate with the author, appears to resist the patriotic Bulgarian national identity, whereas for Western readers, she represents the seemingly authentic voice of a Bulgarian, which fits into their imagination or stereotyped impression of a person growing up in Eastern Europe. In other words, Kassabova resists readers from both cultures through problematising identities, and in doing so, she suggests that identity is not fixed; but rather, complex and multiple. Both Western and Bulgarian readers of Street Without a Name tend to have an essential/fixed idea about what a Bulgarian life/identity should be like. The narrative of Street Without a Name challenges the dominant historical discourses about Bulgaria (in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe, as well as in the West). This also shows a resistance to a simplistic collective identity, be it a collective Bulgarian/Eastern European identity or a collective and fixed Western imagining of Eastern-European (communist) culture. When emphasising collective identity, the personal identity of an individual is often ignored; such an idea is also emphasised in Zhu’s writing, for example, in “Hungarian Water”.211

Historical accounts provide a sense of “truthfulness” in Kassabova’s narrative—although the fact is that history is also highly constructed. Using socio-political events Kassabova reconstructs a history of self, in order to make the narrative of the writing convincing to the reader. In addition to that, the author emphasises the “truthfulness” of accounts of the memoir at the beginning of the book as well as the provision of her own, personal photographs for the book, which also complicates the

211 See my discussion in Chapter Four.
narrative. Hence, Kassabova challenges the idea of autobiographicality and genre categorisation through problematising the autobiographical voice.

In a sense, the complexity of narrative voice, text and genre in Kassabova’s *Street Without a Name* also suggests her conceptualisation of identity, that is, the identity of a *diasporic* subject. The book is neither a writing of Bulgaria from a Bulgarian nationalist perspective, nor is it an account based on a Western perception of Bulgaria and (communist) Eastern Europe. It is arguably a representation of the Bulgarian identity from the viewpoint of a *diasporic* subject, who is both an insider and outsider of the country. The narrative of *Street Without a Name* presents a variety of contesting discourses, including the collective Bulgarian identity, the protagonist’s personal view, autobiographical accounts and fictive constructions—which mirror the complexity and struggle of the protagonist’s *diasporic* identity as a Bulgarian expatriate who obtains New Zealand citizenship, resides in the U.K. and travels around the world. For a travelling and *diasporic* subject, identity is *ambiguous, indeterminate, hybrid and multiple*; this corresponds to the quotation from Smith regarding Zora Neale Hurston’s autobiographical voice at the beginning of this chapter. Thus, like the narrative in Hurston’s *Dusk Tracks on a Road*, Kassabova creates protagonists and narrative voices which perceive cultures from the viewpoint of both the *insider* and the *outsider*.

In the third phase of her life as a writer, Kassabova presents the idea of *global roaming* through her physical journeys, through her protagonists of *nomadic* identity, through the *ventriloquist* first-person voice, as well as through her *auto-nomado-graphy* (a hybrid and multi-referential genre). Through the increasing complexity of narrative in her writing, Kassabova shows the *roaming* of identities, and in that way identity becomes *indeterminate, temporary and contingent*. Her writing reflects the complexity and uncertainty of identity as being the norm in an age of *globalisation*, in which identity mirrors the *postmodern* conceptualisation of self, showing performative, constructive and subversive tendencies (to traditional values and cultures). Both Zhu and Kassabova utilise “a self-reflexive style of narrative typical in postmodern fiction” through which the writer “confounds the categories of serious and popular literature, autobiography and fiction, to produce a writing free of generic
In the case of Kassabova’s writing, when one begins to travel, the whole world changes constantly and nothing is fixed or certain anymore, because any binaries or boundaries would become invalid for a *nomadic* subject.

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Conclusion

Even in Kyōto—
hearing the cuckoo’s cry—
I long for Kyōto

京都にても
京なつかしや
時鳥

~ Matsuo Bashô (松尾芭蕉)¹

The constantly changing and troubling terrains of identities and cultures under contemporary transnational conditions echo […] the shifting psychic identifications that border writers and artists are able to negotiate with acute sensitivity. This melancholic valence of the border is perhaps that which most resonates with the “minor” key in a musical sense. If the minor mood in music is an introspective and mournful tone different from the more triumphant “major” key, then “minor transnationalism” is perhaps the mode in which the traumas of colonial, imperial, and global hegemonies as well as the affective dimensions of transcolonial solidarities continue to work themselves out and produce new possibilities.

~ Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, Minor Transnationalism²

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.

~ Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture³

This thesis juxtaposes the parallel and closely corresponding careers of two women writers, Zhu Tianxin and Kapka Kassabova. I examine the evolution of each writer’s literary techniques throughout her career. To demonstrate this, in the preceding chapters I have identified the various phases of each writer’s career.⁴ The comparison reveals two evolutionary processes. In the early phase of their writing both Zhu and Kassabova began with what they each claimed to be autobiographical writing. In the middle phase of their writing both switched to an emphasis on the fictionality of their work. In their later phase/s, they have both shown a tendency to confound genres.

⁴ Some historical researchers in Taiwan, such as Sun Jieru (孫潔茹), have also divided Zhu’s writing into phases. See Sun Jieru 孫潔茹, “The Journey of Identity of the Second-Generation Chinese Émigrés: Zhu Tianxin and Her Stories as Example” 外省第二代的認同歷程——以朱天心及其小說為例, Cultural Studies Monthly 文化研究月報 39 (June 2004), http://hermes.hrc.ntu.edu.tw/csa/journal/39/journal_park320.htm (accessed May 25, 2011). However, their division of the phases focuses more on the contemporary history of Taiwan in relation to the writer’s biography, whereas the way in which I distinguish the phases of Zhu’s life career emphasises the development of her narrative style. See also my discussion in Chapter One.
addition, both writers also present an increasing complexity of voice and textuality. Such an evolutionary process in their *textual practice* reflects the evolution of an identity. As I have shown in this thesis, it is a *textual identity* that is manifested through the writing, and the identity itself is not restricted to the personal life of the writer. Hence, the reading of texts by Zhu and Kassabova needs to reach beyond the biography of the writer.

**Manifesting Identities through Exploring the Environment**

According to my observations, through their writings both Zhu and Kassabova treat the issue of personal identity in relation to collective identity. They respond to the tendency of critics to stereotype and simplify their identities as writers. Both of them emphasise the complexity of personal identity: the dynamic modification of personal identity, both in itself and in relation to national, international, socio-political and cultural changes. To examine these issues, Zhu and Kassabova explore the relationship between people and places. Whereas many critics of the two writers tend to read their works from the viewpoint of fixed political or cultural perspectives, this thesis expands on such unchanging fixity. Instead of stressing the dichotomy of personal and national identities, I focus on the émigré/migrant identity in relation to personal as well as national contexts.

Zhu and Kassabova do not propose a fixed concept of national identity, but they question what it is to be a Taiwanese, a New Zealander, or a Bulgarian. Hence, this thesis examines the way in which the two writers engage with the issue of identity through their writing. They explore the issue of identity throughout all phases of their literary careers, and in each phase they conceptualise it in different ways. Whereas critics tend to pigeonhole the political or cultural identity of the writer, the writers fight this tendency to limit them to a single category. In other words, the writers are very reflective and flexible in relation to the responses of critics, and this thesis presents the individual author’s dynamic behaviour shifts in relation to national debates on the issue of identity. Both writers show creative exploitation of the political environments in which they grew up. Through their works they question the influence of nationalism on the conceptualisation of identity, and each of them proposes more open ways of viewing the issue. To illustrate my argument in more
detail, in this section I present a comparative study of some specific works by Zhu and Kassabova, and then I draw theoretical conclusions from my observations.

**Political Communities in Childhood: the military compound in Taiwan and the residential complex in Bulgaria**

Throughout what I identify as the various phases of their lives and careers, both Zhu and Kassabova depict the childhood environments of their protagonists as being highly repressed political communities. This depiction is shown in such works by Zhu as *The Ploughman’s Song* (擊壤歌, the first phase), *It Never Ends* (未了, the second phase), “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound” (想我眷村的兄弟們, the third phase) and *The Wanderer* (漫遊者, the fourth phase). In the case of Kassabova, the protagonists’ lives in communist Bulgaria are vividly presented in “Home is Where Every Memory Stops” (the first phase), *Reconnaissance* (the second phase) and *Street Without a Name* (the third phase). Zhu depicts growing up in a military compound in Taibei, while Kassabova represents growing up in a residential complex, Youth 3 (Mladost 3), in Sofia.

The names of the residential complexes in Bulgaria and of the military compounds in Taiwan suggest kinds of political control, showing a combination of political agenda and systematic categorisation. For example, “Youth 3” in Kassabova’s *Street Without a Name* and “Film and Drama 5” (影劇五村) in Zhu’s *The Wanderer* (漫遊者) reflect the political agenda of the nation in the naming of the communities. The name, “Youth” (Mladost) indicates the role of young people in Bulgarian communist society, while “Film and Drama” refers to the political or military function of residents in a specific compound. It is from such politically repressed environments that the characters created by the two writers begin their life journeys. However, Zhu’s and Kassabova’s protagonists tend to hold differing attitudes towards their political communities. Whereas Zhu’s Chinese émigré characters consider the military compound community as their “home”, Kassabova’s Bulgarian-emigrant protagonists feel alienated in relation to the residential complex environment and are desperate to leave.

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The military compound community was designed by the GMD, while the residential complex was organised by the Bulgarian communist regime. Although the two governments are often regarded as contrasting with each other (the GMD nationalists being perceived to be on the political right wing, while the Bulgarian communists are seen to be on the political left wing), they were in fact extraordinarily similar totalitarian regimes. Hence, the environments of the two political communities have many features in common. Despite the cultural differences between Taiwan and Bulgaria, both the military compounds and the residential complexes are presented as closed environments which are highly organised and controlled by the GMD and the Bulgarian communist state governments respectively. As can be seen in the photographs in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, the houses and flats in the two political communities have been built in close proximity to each other and look very similar, showing a lack of privacy and individuality. The changes in the political climate in Taiwan since the late 1980s, and in Bulgaria since the early 1990s are also reflected in the newly developed appearance of the military compounds and residential complexes. The residential buildings in both countries, which today are no longer as politically repressed as they once were, look surprisingly alike.
Fig. 1 presents a military compound in three different phases. The area with the old houses is the Chongren military compound (崇仁新村) near the Youth Park (青年公園) in Taibei City. The old houses in the middle and the bottom parts of the image are the earliest buildings of the compound. In the early 1980s some military compound villagers started moving to five-floored state apartment buildings which resemble those in the left of the photograph. In 2008, the old houses of the Chongren military compound were demolished and were transformed into tall, brand new, apartment buildings, which look similar to the Youth State Apartments (青年國宅) in the top area of the photograph. Fig. 2 shows the Mladost 3 Residential Complex. The buildings in the complex were completed at different times. The newer buildings

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of each residential complex are often taller than the older ones, which is likely a result of the rapidly growing population in the area through time. The tall buildings closer to the foreground of the photo are the new buildings of Mladost 3 (Youth 3), while the grey buildings to the rear are Mladost 4 (Youth 4).

It can also be argued that the political communities—the military compound in Taiwan and the residential complex in Bulgaria—functioned as the physical starting point for the two writers’ literary journeys. The writers’ narratives about their protagonists’ childhoods in political communities both show a combination of two conflicting features: the requirement to fulfil the nation’s political agenda, and the desire to pursue Western culture (Western European and U.S. in particular). As presented in Zhu’s early works, such as *The Ploughman’s Song*, and Kassabova’s later works, such as *Street Without a Name*, their teenage characters often imagine Western worlds in order to escape from the politically repressed environments to which they belong. In these works Zhu and Kassabova exploit material from their childhood and teenage years.

Interestingly, given the similarities in their beginnings, the two writers actually went in different directions. The young female characters in Zhu’s early work apply the GMD agenda, trying to make a connection between traditional Chinese culture and Western culture, which represents an impossible coherence of cultures. This shows deliberate avoidance of modern Communist China, which reflects the way in which the GMD denied the existence of Communist China, encouraging a direct link between traditional Chinese culture and Westernised modern Taiwan (as I have discussed in “Chapter One: Impossible Coherence”). The characters in Kassabova’s first phase, however, emphasise the extreme contrasts between East and West (as I have discussed in “Chapter Five: Extreme Contrasts”). Whereas Zhu, who wrote *The Ploughman’s Song* in her late teens, tended to adopt the GMD agenda unthinkingly, Kassabova, who completed *Street Without a Name* in her thirties, composed the work critically. Zhu’s teenage protagonist tends to accept the political situation of the time. Kassabova, however, adopts the viewpoint of a teenager, but the narrative perspective shows a combination of the teenage protagonist, Kapka, and the adult writer who was in her thirties. The scenes and the socio-political contexts of the two works look similar, but the writers’ representations of them contrast strongly with each other.

Starting from the middle and later phases of their writing, both Zhu and Kassabova have tended to adopt an observant narrative distance from the political
communities in which their protagonists, and the writers themselves, grew up. This was the stage at which Zhu’s environment began to transform itself⁹ and the issues of (political, cultural and sexual) marginality emerged,¹⁰ while Kassabova started to perceive herself as a border-crossing traveller, rather than as an immigrant.¹¹ The phenomena are also reflected in the writers’ works. To take Zhu’s “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound” and Kassabova’s Reconnaissance as examples, the narrative shows multiple perspectives, and the narrative tone presents a mixture of criticism and sympathy towards the protagonist’s community. In Zhu’s case there is a clear ambivalence on her protagonist’s part being an insider of the military compound community, who identifies with the GMD but also adopts the critical view of an outsider. Kassabova’s protagonist, on the other hand, feels alienated from the residential complex community. Both protagonists maintain double vision in the narrative as both an insider and an outsider of the community, which are weighted differently in each case. Zhu’s protagonist tends to be more sympathetic while Kassabova’s protagonist tends to be more critical towards the community.

The inhabitants of the political environments in the works of Zhu and Kassabova, the military compound and the residential complex communities, are depicted as being explicitly categorised and labelled by the regimes. The sense of categorisation and cultural stereotyping is particularly presented in Kassabova’s Street Without a Name (Part One: Childhood) and Zhu’s “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound”. In Kassabova’s Street Without a Name, the residents of the “Youth” (Mladost) community are categorised and stereotyped according to the specific residential complex in which they live:

In 1979, we moved into an extravagantly spacious two-room flat in an eight-floor concrete building surrounded by thousands of identical concrete buildings, purposeful and sturdy like nuclear plants in freshly bulldozed fields of mud. This was Youth 3, and here I spent my youth. Youth 3 was preceded by Youth 1 and Youth 2, followed by Youth 4, and its neighbours were Friendship 1 and Friendship 2. How many more Youths and Friendships were meant to spring forth was a state secret [...] Furthermore, I came to realise with a pang of pride, Youth 3 was superior to the underdeveloped Youth 4 which petered out into desolate fields. But it was inferior to Youth 2 with all its shops, cinema and gym, while the older, well-developed Youth 1 was practically the garden of the Youths.¹²

⁹ See Chapter Two (on Zhu Tianxin).
¹⁰ See Chapter Three (on Zhu Tianxin).
¹¹ See Chapter Six (on Kapka Kassabova).
The description of the environment is strictly impersonal. As the narrator states, “When you received the mail, your address looked like this: Sofia, Mladost 3, block 328, entrance E, floor 4, apt. 79. Your name came last, if there was room for it.”

The presentation of addresses in Bulgaria mirrors the social structure of the communist society, where national identity is prior to anything else while individual identity is ignored unless “there was room for it”. The Youth community is not an environment comprising different human beings but, as the narrator puts it, a “citizen storage” which “tried to make ‘citizens’ out of the peasants and the gypsies [while] the native citizens […] who were born and raised in central Sofia, were turned into ‘workers’ with no access to the pleasures of city life.”

Likewise, the military compound residents in Zhu’s narrative are also put into various categories. This is particularly shown in the way in which the mothers are presented in “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound”:

Very often the mothers varied according to their husbands’ armed service affiliation. The mothers in the Air Force compound were the most Westernised. They knew how to wear make-up, and it was said they all danced and spoke English. The mothers from the Army compound were conservative and honest; maybe it had to do with the low pay of the Army. The playing of mahjong prevailed in the Navy compound, which had the greatest number of psychotic mothers, possibly because their husbands were away from home most of the time. The military police compound mothers were almost all native Taiwanese, and they were all young, with some of them still childless. [...] The strangest of all the compounds was the military intelligence compound. The fathers of the compound were away most of the year, and some residents never met each other in their lifetime. [...] Some of the mothers in the military intelligence compound started to live with a widow’s mentality. The strong took over the responsibilities of the family and supported the young and old, and we could deduce the length of the husband’s missions by observing the age differences of the children.

(往往媽媽們的類型都因軍種而異。空軍村的媽媽們最洋派、懂得化 妝，傳說都會跳舞，都會說些英文。陸軍村的媽媽最保守老實，不知 跟待遇最差是否有關。海軍村的牌風最盛，也最多精神病媽媽，可 能是丈夫們長年不在家的關係。憲兵村的媽媽幾乎全是本省籍，而且 都很年輕甚至還沒有小孩 […] 最奇怪的大概是情報村，情報村 的爸爸們也是長年不在家，有些甚至村民們一輩子也沒見過。[……] 情報村的媽媽們有的早以寡婦的心情過活，健婦把門戶的撐持一家老 小，我們可依其小孩的年紀差距推斷出丈夫每次出勤的時日長短。)
In contrasting ways Zhu and Kassabova represent the political categorisation by the GMD and the Bulgarian communists. Whereas the Bulgarian community sought to unify disparate groups, the GMD insisted on a very hierarchical and differentiated labelling of individuals. The military compound mothers are categorised according to the national political function of their specific villages. Their personalities as individual women are totally erased, and the mothers are stereotyped through the jobs which their husbands have been assigned by the GMD government. As the narrative shows, their personal characteristics and behaviour are treated as a reflection of their husbands’ political service. Zhu makes an ironic representation of the way in which people in the men’s world are categorised. Hence, this is not simply her depiction of the situation, but contains potential feminist overtones.

In a sense, the narratives of Zhu and Kassabova in these two passages present an ironic reflection upon the categorisation of people from the government’s political viewpoint. They criticise the way in which individuals are perceived through the respective nationalist discourses, which impose a forced identity on people. The writers respond to this political categorisation through the narratives of their works. They subvert it by exaggeration or irony and, thus, draw attention to it. In their representations of the hierarchical or categorised structure, they inflect it with their responses to it.

The writers’ criticism of cultural stereotypes is also presented through the way in which exotic Others in the political communities are represented. In *Street Without a Name*, Kassabova’s narrator-protagonist depicts the lifestyle of Gypsies in her residential complex:

> Block 328 was a perfect human cross-section of the imaginary Socialist cake. On the ground floor, next to the elevator, lived a Gypsy family of unknown dimensions. It contained three generations of pregnant women and girls, men who dwelled in a vague alcoholic mist, and countless kids. Once, through their open front door, I got a fascinating glimpse into their apartment. They had stripped the carpet and were living on bare concrete, without furniture. […] Once, on St George’s Day, a religious festival in May […] the Gypsies brought a live lamb. To the children’s delight, they tethered it on their ground-floor balcony. It bleated and trembled piteously for days, then they hung it up on the pull-up bar, cut its throat into a plastic bucket, skinned it, and dismembered it. Rivers of blood flowed along the pavement. The neighbours watched from their balconies, and buses stopped to see the gory spectacle. Our street experienced its first traffic jam.17

The narrative emphasises the barbaric behaviour of the Gypsy family, presenting them as the exotic Other in the community. The way in which they are arranged to

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17 Kapka Kassabova, *Street Without a Name*, 37.
reside “on the ground floor, next to the elevator” suggests the constant invitation of cultural gaze, making their personal lives the object observed by the public. Like the “identical” apartment buildings in the residential complex, most residents in Youth 3 are turned into “citizens”, behaving in a similar way to each other. The Gypsies, however, are portrayed as social outcasts, whose lifestyles do not fit the political image of modern and civilised Bulgarians, as regulated by the communist state. The Bulgarian authority attempts to homogenise people, while the Gypsies resist this through their ‘barbaric’ lifestyles. Kassabova’s strategic use of the example of the Gypsies shows how false the notion of unification is in the Bulgarian communist society.

Just as Kassabova depicts the Gypsies, so Zhu highlights the exotic and barbaric behaviour of the Old X’s in the military compound community in “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound”:

They are mostly known as Old Chang, Old Liu, or Old Wang (depending on what their last name is). Usually there would be such an Old X in the compound. Because he is single, and way past marrying age with no possibility of starting a family, and most often possesses no special skill as a retired sergeant, the compound sort of supports him by allowing him to build a shack behind the administrative office at the gate. [...] Come winter time, the children circle around and watch him roast a wandering little black dog outside the compound, and in summer he would be seen skinning a snake in the pungent, toxic aroma of the oleander tree. These are Old X’s. They are usually illiterate, and cannot even decipher their own names, or the tattoos saying “Kill Chu and Remove Mao” or “Fight Communism and the Russians” tattooed on their arms. But they are the first teachers for many kids in the compound. [...] Despite their very heavy accents, for some unknown reason most children had no trouble understanding them; even though their shacks resemble garbage dumps, the children considered them to be treasure troves.

Like the Gypsies in Kassabova’s work, the Old X is also required to live close to the entrance to the village, turning his lifestyle into the object of gaze for the rest of the villagers. Both Zhu and Kassabova depict the somewhat abnormal family

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18 Zhu Tianxin, “In Remembrance of My Brothers in the Military Compound” 想我眷村的兄弟們, 77. The English translation is from trans. Michelle Min-chia Wu, 73-74, adapted.
backgrounds, the animal slaughtering habits and the lack of material wealth in the lives of the Old X’s and the Gypsies, emphasising the cultural Other’s uncivilised and out-of-place characteristics. Like the rest of people in the political communities, the cultural Others are not provided with individual names, either. In the narratives of Zhu and Kassabova, they are stereotyped as “the Gypsies” and “the Old X’s”, as is their behaviour. It can be argued that both Zhu and Kassabova select the cases of the outcasts to suit their narrative purposes. Through the representation of the Gypsies Kassabova suggests that despite the efforts of the authorities to ‘civilise’ them, these people still turn out to be Others in the residential complex. Zhu’s depiction of the Old X’s as the teachers of children in the military compound also challenges the idea that parents and teachers are supposed to be the educators in the GMD discourse. Thus, both writers resist the political systems through their representations of the exotic Others in the communities.

**Misadventures of Exilic Adults: the disguised tourists of their nations**

In the later phases of their work both Zhu and Kassabova present their protagonists as foreigners or tourists in the nation of their birth. In a sense, the protagonists’ choice of an outsider’s or a foreign tourist’s position also evokes the disparate life styles of the writers, as I have discussed extensively in the Biographical Sketch sections of the chapters above. Whereas Zhu has spent most of her life in Taiwan, especially in Taipei City, Kassabova has travelled from one country to another. The contrasting life styles of the two writers reflect the different ways in which each of their characters plays the role of a foreigner in her own nation. Zhu’s protagonists tend to imagine themselves as foreigners, while Kassabova’s narrative personae focus on cultural conflicts through their official identity as “expatriates”.

In Zhu’s “The Old Capital”, her narrator-protagonist, “You”, deliberately disguises herself as a Japanese tourist, whereas in Kassabova’s *Street Without a Name*, the narrative persona, Kapka, takes on the role of a foreigner. In both cases, the protagonist’s identity as both insider and outsider provides her with dual perspectives of place: the view of a native and that of a foreigner. As a result, the narrative tone constantly oscillates between sympathy and criticism, suggesting a negotiation between two conflicting viewpoints. Such a narrative strategy is adopted in Kassabova’s *Reconnaissance*, “I Want to be a Tourist” and *Street Without a Name*. In
Street Without a Name (“Part Two: misadventures”), Kassabova’s narrator, an expatriate, examines Bulgarian culture through the perspectives of a Bulgarian and a Western tourist:

We reached Veliko Tarnovo and I’m standing at the gates of the medieval citadel Tsarevets, watching a puppet show. There is a choice of Bulgarian or English, and I join a group of elderly American evangelists for the English version. [...] True, Bulgaria’s medieval history is impressive. But I know, and the puppeteer knows, that today the rest of Europe looks to the Bulgarian ‘kingdom’ with either indifference or condescension. Still, the American evangelists are impressed. ‘We love East Europe,’ the cheerful pastor enthuses as he drops some coins for the puppeteer. ‘It’s so romantic.’

With regard to the history of Bulgaria, the narrator juxtaposes the conflicting views of an American tourist and a native Bulgarian. Whereas, for the tourists, the history of the Bulgarian kingdom—to which they do not have any emotional attachment—is nothing but a puppet show, for native Bulgarians (including the puppeteer) the historical drama reflects national pride—its cultural heritage. Nevertheless, national pride is challenged by the modern world of the capitalist. The Bulgarian “kingdom” stays in the past and in the puppet show, while in reality the modern Bulgarians long to be recognised by the West and the world. The American tourist’s statement, “We love East Europe”, suggests that there is a boundary between “us” (the American tourists) and the Bulgarians, who are stereotyped as poor East Europeans with their “impressive” and “romantic” history. In addition, the tourist’s coin donation for the puppeteer highlights the cultural differences—as in their perception—between the people from capitalist societies and those from their communist counterparts. Through the opposing views of the nation, the narrator problematises the notion of fixed national identity for modern Bulgarians. On the one hand, her role as a Bulgarian expatriate enables her to observe the nation from different perspectives. On the other hand, her dual vision (as an insider and an outsider) also makes her rethink her double identity, as she interrogates her role: “And what exactly am I doing now—apologising to the foreigner as a Bulgarian, or complaining under the false guise of a foreigner? How tiring, this business of national self-consciousness?”

The presentation of multiple identity perspectives is also found in Zhu’s “The Old Capital”, in which her narrator-protagonist, “you”, disguises herself as a Japanese tourist in her native city, Taibei, by wearing a Japanese tourist’s hat and holding on to

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19 Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Name, 218-219.
20 Ibid., 305.
a Japanese map of the city. Through the guidance of a Japanese colonial map, she rediscovers Taibei with a new vision:

Seimen-chō, the Japanese pleasure district, according to the colonial map. […] The last time you were here might have been right after college graduation, when you took in a movie with your boyfriend, who was on leave from the army. […] Seimen-chō looked so pathetic, no longer the pleasure district of your school days. You saw, for the first time, its decline, its filth, its noise. The snacks in the vendors’ stalls were unappetizing. The Bee Gee’s “Saturday Night Fever” blasted everywhere. Low-quality, glitzy disco clothes in the store displays underscored the resemblance of the places to aging, heavily powdered prostitutes trying to turn a trick or two. Overcome by sympathy, you decided not to go there again; it was the least you could do for the area.

(西門町，日本人の歓楽街。殖民地図上這麼說。[……] 你上一次來，可能是大學畢業後與服兵役休假的男友約了看電影。[……] 你覺得西門町可憐透了。不再是你們做學生時候的歡樂街，第一次，你才看到它的衰敗，髒兮兮、臭哄哄、小攤的零嘴看了就很難吃，滿街都是Bee Gees的週末狂熱，服飾店裡亮閃閃的劣質狄斯可舞衣更凸顯得它像個塗了濃妝看能不能拐兩個客人的老妓女，你同情極了，不願再去，這是你唯一能為它做的。)²¹

There is a loss of cross-cultural meaning in Goldblatt’s English translation of the name, “Seimen-chō”. The place, “西門町”, was established by the Japanese, who called it “Seimen-chō” (in Japanese), while the Taiwanese people pronounce the same characters as “Ximending” (in Chinese). Because the same script is pronounced differently in each language, by selecting only one alternative (the Japanese pronunciation) the English translation loses the multiple resonances of the original. The English version is unable to evoke all the possible resonances of the original: the Japanese colonial, the contemporary Japanese, the Taiwanese of the past and the Taiwan of the present. This multiple referentiality is key to what Zhu does in The Old Capital, which has at its centre the notion of gazing and what a person understands by the gaze. The protagonist uses the Japanese colonial map of Taiwan and explores Taibei, but what she sees is not colonial era Taibei but her personal memories of the place. Hence, the layered and complex meaning of Zhu’s text is also embedded in the writer’s use of a place name such as this, reflecting the writer’s complex narrative strategy.

In the case of Zhu’s protagonist, the disguise of a foreigner is necessary, for being a person who has resided most of her life in Taibei, the role of a Japanese tourist, an outsider, helps her to perceive Taibei from a critical distance. From the

viewpoint of a Japanese tourist, she sees “for the first time” the “decline”, “filth” and “noise” of Seimen-chō, the district of Taibei which used to be “the pleasure district” of the Japanese colonial era and that of her school days. The beautiful memories the protagonist had of this area when she was a teenager are no longer connected to the look of the place now. Through her depiction, Seimen-chō is seen only in terms of its present seediness, and is disconnected from the memories and historical resonances of its glory days. As well as expressing her critical view, being a native of the city, the narrator-protagonist is also “overcome by sympathy” towards the place. Hence, the narrative about Taibei presents a negotiation between cultural perspectives: impressions of Taiwan through the eyes of a foreigner and those of a local. The protagonist’s dual vision of the city reflects the complexity of her double identity.

Whereas Zhu’s and Kassabova’s protagonists take the position of outsiders and tourists in their homelands, their emotions towards their nations still remain strong. Through their journeys they explore their old familiar haunts with a new perspective, while simultaneously looking for images of places as they remembered them. Realising that the places have changed dramatically, their personal attachment to the nation turns them into Zhu’s “Old Soul (老靈魂)”22 or Kassabova’s “ghost from the past”.23 Kassabova’s protagonist finds her exploration of the past to be a “horror-tour”:24

I look up to the limestone cliffs, searching for the hillside villas of Dobrich. But there are only cheap, ugly new hotels and wild overgrowth. I ask the sellers at the souvenir stalls outside the gardens, but they nod no, they’ve never heard of the villas of Dobrich. I search their sunburnt faces and feel a strange void. We share nothing except a language. My Balchik is not their Balchik. I’m a ghost from the past, but it isn’t their past. […] I stubbornly beat my way through this desolate jungle, determined to find the house of my childhood. It’s a bit like pushing your way back into the birth canal. It’s a painful business. I find ‘our’ house, or at least something that looks like it. It’s unlocked, and when I step inside I see that everything has been gutted. […] The three empty iron bed frames—me, my grandmother and my grandfather—stare at me like eyeless sockets. How could anyone have been happy here? But we were. We played dominoes on the veranda and turned red in the sun. […] Right now, my whole life amounts to this cemetery of childhood slipping into the drain of the sea.25

Likewise, Zhu’s protagonist also emphasises her shock on discovering the disappearance of the place in her memory:

Until that year you took the person you were going to marry to visit your secret garden. Just as before, you followed familiar paths and walked beneath the big banyan tree by Mackay Hospital. Telling him to watch out for the wet, slippery moss underfoot, you

22 See my discussion of the term in Chapter Three.
23 Kapka Kassabova, Street Without a Name, 292.
24 Ibid., 291.
25 Ibid., 291-293.
took his hand and traversed the shaded slope, until suddenly an open space appeared before you—Zhenli Street, no, it was the obligatory four-lane Zhongshan Road in every town, city, country, and village. All of a sudden you couldn’t recall what it had been before. Like an eyewitness who, after going to the police to report a dead body, returns to the scene only to see there was no body, no blood stains, everything normal, you told your future husband in a sobbing voice that the place was never like this or like this, that it should be like that and like that. In a panicky mood, you pointed here and there aimlessly; in a word, you were lost.

(一直到某一年，你帶著確定要結婚的丈夫拜訪你的秘密花園。如同往常一樣，熱門熟路逕穿過借醫館旁的大榕樹下，你拉著他的手，邊提醒他注意腳下綠苔的濕滑，穿過斜坡濃蔭，豁然開朗，眼前的真理街，不是了，是一條所有城鎮縣市都有的八線道寬的中山路，剎那間你竟然也想不起來原來該是什麼，你像個發現屍體報了警回現場卻見屍體也沒了血跡也沒了一切完好如常的目擊者，你哽咽地告訴未來的丈夫，這裡原來不是如此如此，應該好像是那樣那樣，慌張地漫空指東指西，總之，你迷路了。)

The narratives in both writers’ works present differing cultural viewpoints (the tourist and native perspectives) and layers of memory (including personal and historical memories) about their nations. Through juxtaposing various depictions, which often conflict with each other and all of which are subjective to a certain degree, the writers question the idea of an objective view of a nation. In this way they also question the validity of a fixed national identity.

The Continuum of Fiction and Autobiography

This thesis has proposed a new approach to reading the works of Zhu and Kassabova, showing a rethinking of the autobiographicality in their writing. Whereas many critics of the two writers in the existing scholarship have tended to argue that the authors are presenting their personal lives or identities through writing, I suggest that a more complex way of reading is required.

Critics within existing scholarship on Zhu and Kassabova tend to consider the life and writing of the writer as consisting of two separate entities. They read the texts of the writer through the lens of the writer’s biography. Regardless of narrative voice or genre, readings of texts will be informed by an analysis of the so-called biographical facts about the author. However, what some commentators consider to be the biography of, or facts about, the writer is often based on highly specific cultural stereotypes, which may reflect their own fixed impressions of Chinese émigrés or Eastern European immigrants. Zhu and Kassabova tend to complicate the reading of

their texts through their deployment of the full range of narrative voices (first-, second-, or third-person narrative) and a variety of genres (fiction, autobiography, essay, or poetry), confounding the idea that the lives of the writers are directly reflected in their writing.

My reading challenges the idea of the existence of a real life, the self, and the identity of the writer. Their writing is not a passive record of the author’s life, and there is no clear separation between the two parts. It would be more appropriate to perceive the life and the writing of a writer as a unity. In the writing experience, each writer takes her resources from all aspects, including her personal experience, the collective experiences of a particular cultural or communal group, and specific political, social or cultural discourse(s). She (re)mixes all these and constructs a complex self, which is on a continuum between reality and fiction. As shown in Fig. 3, each of the writers’ texts braids together the personal life or experiences of the writer, the collective life or experiences of other people, the social or political discourses of nations, the representations of cultural stereotypes, and the imagination of the writer.

Life and Text of the Writer as a Unity

Fig. 3. My view of works by Zhu and Kassabova

My study disputes the tendency towards a biographical reading of the works of Zhu and Kassabova which is prominent in existing scholarship on both writers. If the works of Zhu and Kassabova simply mirror the real lives of the writers, as many readers and critics have assumed, then one may find it difficult to explain their pursuit of complexity and ambiguity in narrative and genre. As I have pointed out, their works are not autobiographical or fictional per se, but are on the continuum of fiction.
and autobiography. The writers and their publishers may strategically frame the writers’ works as being either fictional or autobiographical. However, the reader does not have to read them through either specific genre lens. The complexity presented in the narrative of the two writers, showing a tendency to confound and complicate narrative voice, genre and textuality, indicates that the reading of their works also requires a complex view and sophisticated analysis.

*Crafting Lives* through History and Geography

The works of Zhu and Kassabova in the later phases emphasise the unstable relationship between a person and a place, as well as between a person and an identity. Very often their characters do not know where they are because they do not recognise the places to which they travel. Zhu’s narrator-protagonist, “You”, in “The Old Capital” is lost in her native city, Taibei, which has changed dramatically. Compared to the city in which she grew up, she identifies more with the foreign city, Kyoto. Kassabova’s narrative persona in “I Want to be a Tourist”, however, does not feel at home anywhere. Just as Zhu's protagonist in "The Old Capital" disguises herself as a tourist, returns to Taibei and perceives everything as though seeing it for the first time, so Kassabova’s narrative persona in “I Want to be a Tourist” also sees her native place through the eyes of a foreign tourist.

However, the sense of place of each of the two protagonists is presented differently. The narrator-protagonist in Zhu’s “The Old Capital” shows more personal attachment to the places to which she travels, be it the ancient Japanese capital she loves or the postmodern Taiwanese capital that she hates. Like many of Zhu’s characters, “You” has the habit of “travelling with a sense of nostalgia” (*帶著鄉愁旅行*).27 Wherever she travels, her mind is often taken back to the memories of her youth in Taibei. On the other hand, the narrator in Kassabova’s “I Want to be a Tourist” shows no emotional attachment to anywhere, including the place she claims to be “the city of my life”. S/he enjoys the role of a traveller to all places, and in that way s/he can travel easily without being emotionally burdened.

Through their protagonists’ sense of place, the two writers explore a person’s conceptualisation of identity. The fact that Zhu’s character prefers a foreign city to

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her native one suggests that an alternative choice of identity is acceptable. When “The Old Capital” was published, the writer was often criticised for the political identification of her character, or rather, on the assumption this reflected the author’s personal identity.28 Readers wonder why the subject identifies more with Japanese culture while criticising Taiwanese culture.29 Through her work Zhu explores the formation of an identity, which is complex. Those who criticise the identity of Zhu’s protagonist or the writer do not seem to see the irony of her text. The fact is that Japanese culture still prevails in Taiwan. This is not only true for the older generations of native Taiwanese who experienced Japanese colonisation but also for the younger generation of today who worship Japanese popular culture. Considering the way in which Taiwanese people have been deeply influenced by Japanese culture, it is somewhat contradictory to criticise the alternative identity of Zhu’s character. Therefore, the choice of Japan is arguably a significant choice for the text. Zhu deliberately chooses Japanese culture as the mechanism through which to problematise prevailing cultural and political allegiances in Taiwan, suggesting that identity is more complicated than people usually think it is, especially, if they interpret the issue from the viewpoint of nationalist discourse.

Whereas in the political context an alternative identity is not acceptable, in the literary context both writers advocate the acceptability of the idea. Zhu’s protagonist’s constant projection of her memory of Taipei onto places in Kyoto, or vice versa, also implies that an individual may have double or multiple identities. Kassabova’s narrator, on the other hand, shows an emotional detachment from everywhere, which is an indication that it is not necessary for one to have a fixed identity. In both cases, the writers destabilise the characters’ relationship with identity, suggesting that a more open-minded view towards the issue is required.

29 Zhu states in her public speech that soon after the publication of “The Old Capital”, she received criticisms from scholars, such as Huang Jinshu 黃錦樹, who was disappointed with the way in which Zhu’s protagonist identified with Japanese culture, which Huang assumed was a reflection of Zhu’s personal cultural preference. See Liao Chaoyang 廖朝陽, Chen Guangxing 陳光興, Zhu Tianxin 朱天心, Song Zelai 宋澤萊, Qiu Guifen 邱貴芬, and Zheng Hongsheng 鄭鴻生, “Why Is It Not/Possible for a Great Reconciliation?—Disasters of and Hopes in Relation to the Ethnic Issue” 為什麼大和解不可能——省籍問題中的災難與希望, Cultural Studies Monthly 文化研究月報 4 (June 2001), http://hermes.hrc.ntu.edu.tw/csa/journal/04/journal_04.htm (accessed June 13, 2011).
Zhu utilises the political history of Taiwan, while Kassabova exploits the way in which geographical places are perceived differently by individuals. In Zhu's "The Old Capital", she re-examines the "history" of Taiwan through the construction of her narratives, suggesting that there is no objective view of history (of a nation or place). Kassabova explores the idea of subjective geography\(^{30}\) in her writing, and such an idea is applied to her poems in *Geography for the Lost*, to the character Nadejda’s impression of New Zealand in *Reconnaissance*, as well as to the narrator’s personal view of places in Bulgaria in *Street Without a Name*.

Hence, it can be argued that Zhu is an *alternative historian* who juxtaposes different historical moments in her writing and explores historical narratives through her protagonist’s travel in geographical locations. In “The Old Capital”, Zhu’s narrator-protagonist, “You” (你), reconstructs histories for geographic locations in Taipei. Her narrative of each place often juxtaposes personal memories of the location, historical records of the place by Taiwanese and foreign colonisers, as well as bits and pieces taken from novels, poems, songs and movies which correspond to the theme of the narrative. In other stories which are also collected in *The Old Capital*, such as “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (第凡内早餐) and “Hungarian Water” (匈牙利之水), the protagonists create alternative histories of diamonds (in “Breakfast at Tiffany’s”) and perfumes (in “Hungarian Water”) through their recollections of their personal lives in relation to the social-political changes in Taiwan. Kassabova, on the other hand, is an *alternative geographer* who juxtaposes different cultures in her work. Through the individual histories of her characters, which are reflected in their relationship with places, she explores different cultural meanings for geographical landscapes. For example, in *Reconnaissance* she presents Nadejda’s projection of Bulgarian political history onto the New Zealand natural landscape. In *Street Without a Name*, the narrator reconstructs Balkan history through depicting the geographical places in which she travels.

\(^{30}\) The idea of subjective geography has been largely explored in the field of human geography, particularly in behavioural geography and cultural geography where an “environmental perception” of a landscape is emphasised. Scholars in human geography, such as John Kirtland Wright, Carl Sauer and Yi-Fu Tuan, have written about the concept extensively. Such a radical view of geography is in contrast to the traditional idea of natural geography in which human or cultural influences on a place tended to be ignored. See John Kirtland Wright, *Human Nature in Geography: Fourteen Papers, 1925-1965* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966). See William M. Denevan and Kent Mathewson, eds., *Carl Sauer on Culture and Landscape: Readings and Commentaries* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009). See also Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
Zhu’s narrative focuses on the rewriting of *history of a place*. To present an *alternative view of history*, in “The Old Capital” her character *explores geography*, utilising the names of places, plants and landscapes in her narrative. Her writing presents layers of description of each location, and the layers include the narrator-protagonist’s personal memory as well as collective historical records of the place. Just as personal memory and collective history of the same geographical place may conform or conflict with each other, it is also thus with the relationship between personal and collective identities. In other words, through the exploration of different histories of a geographical place, the writer rethinks the conceptualisation of an identity. By presenting the subjectivity and unreliability of collective histories about geographical places, Zhu suggests the uncertainty of a collective *identity*. The emphasis of *personal memory* over collective memory in the narrative implies the desire to construct an *alternative history*, and therefore indicates the stressing of an *alternative identity*.

Kassabova’s narrative presents the reconstruction of *geography*. To show an *alternative conception of geography*, her characters *project various historical and cultural narratives* onto the same geographical landscape. Names of political icons and records of historical events are frequently adopted in her narrative. The differing perceptions of a landscape reflect the disparate cultural views/stereotypes of a specific group of people, which often conflict with each other. That is to say, through the way in which geographical and cultural views are conceived, Kassabova reconsiders the issue of identity. By showing the subjectivity of geographical conceptions and cultural representations, the writer suggests the instability of an *identity* and, thus, invites a more open view of it. Kassabova’s narrative emphasises the protagonist’s *personal* experience in a geographic location, which indicates the construction of an *alternative geography*, and suggests the desire for *alternative* views regarding the issue of identity.

Through the exploitation of history and geography in their narratives, the writers construct a self and an identity, which often reflect the way in which one responds to or utilises one’s political or cultural environment. The personalised and subjective view of history and geography, as suggested in the narratives of Zhu and Kassabova, also challenges the collective sense of history and geography, questioning the existence of an objective view of either discipline.
In addition, my view of Zhu as an alternative historian and of Kassabova as an alternative geographer evokes the contrasting ways in which the two writers craft lives through their writings, as indicated by the title of my thesis. The idea of Zhu as an alternative historian is mirrored in the title of “Part One: Zhu Tianxin—scrapbooking.” The idea of scrapbooking is to provide an alternative history, a personal or family life history, as well as the history of a society from a personal or an alternative view. Hence, through the scrapbooking style of her writing Zhu embarks on a journey through time, which also reflects the biographical life of the writer, who has been residing in Taiwan, witnessing the socio-historical changes of her native place, and constructing imaginary journeys through her writing. On the other hand, there is also a significant connection between “Part Two: Kapka Kassabova—weaving and shuttling” and my perception of Kassabova as an alternative geographer. One of the crucial facts about weaving is that the person who executes the craft constantly goes back to the point from which the weaving started; this is reflected in the physical journeys of Kassabova and her characters. They constantly return to Bulgaria, New Zealand or the UK, and then leave the place again. The same method is also applied in Kassabova’s storytelling, which is more likely to be a spatial journey. Hence, the disparate ways in which Zhu and Kassabova craft lives correspond to the writers’ differing focuses on the historical or geographical axis in their narratives, which also reflect their contrasting life styles.

The Series of Continua in Storytelling

The narratives of Zhu and Kassabova present a high degree of complexity in terms of voice, genre and text. Both writers focus on the construction of narrative voices which reflect their manifestation of identity. Zhu confounds gender binaries through the adoption of unreliable male narrative voices in works such as “Passage of Things Past”, “The Crane Wife”, “My Friend Ariza” and “Hungarian Water”. Kassabova complicates cultural stereotypes through the problematic voices of cultural representatives in works such as Reconnaissance, “Balinese” and “Mr Hu”. Through their examination of gender and cultural representations, the writers question the issue of identity labelling and pigeonholing. Both Zhu and Kassabova also tend to confound genre categorisation. They exploit features of all genres and blend them together in their writings, rendering their work a hybrid of various genres. In terms of
textuality, both writers show the tendency to create intertextual networks within their own writing. In addition to that, Zhu also emphasises the intertextual relationship between her work and the work of other writers.

Remarkably, both writers quote from a poem by Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken”, which provides an insight into the narrative constructions of Zhu and Kassabova:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and I—  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Whereas Kassabova quotes the first stanza of the poem in her novel, Villa Pacifica (2010), Zhu adopts the last three lines of the final stanza of the same poem for her novella, “The Old Capital” (1996). Although the writers exploit Frost’s verses as points of reference for specific works, one finds that their writings as a whole present a revision of Frost’s poem. As indicated in Frost’s verses, the “two roads” “diverge” at the beginning of the journey, and the narrative persona is faced with the question of choosing one of them for his trip, while pondering the implications for the present if the alternative choice had been made in the past. Frost’s poem can be applied to the conceptualisation of narrative, as shown in Fig. 4.

33 From Zhu Tianxin, “The Old Capital” 古都, 218. See also my discussion in Chapter Four.
Writing in conventional forms tends to require a consistency of narrative tense, explicit reference to narrative voice and persona, and clear distinction of genres. When confronting a range of times, places, subjects and genres, writers may choose to adopt one of them for his/her writing, in the way in which Frost’s narrative persona has to choose to travel along one of the two roads. Yet, the narratives of Zhu and Kassabova suggest that there are alternative ways to take the journey. As their writings show, the narrative of a story presents various times, locations, subjects, voices and genres, and the writer blends them all together in one work. To achieve this, their storytelling oscillates between narrative features. Instead of choosing only one road, the subject travels by zigzagging between the two roads. Reflecting the way in which weaving is executed by a crafter, the storytelling of Zhu’s and Kassabova’s narrators move back and forth to incorporate the narrative features on the two separate roads. The route which the narrative persona travels follows the series of continua between the reference points on the two roads. In that sense, through narrative a writer is able to travel on diverse roads simultaneously, as the lyric subject of Frost’s poem wishes he could do. What seems to be an impossible journey is, in reality, therefore, made possible through writing. The narratives of Zhu and Kassabova travel on the middle area between the reference points standing for disparate voices, tenses, places, personas, languages and genres, which also reflect the dislocated identity of
their subjects. Such a mode of travel reminds the reader of the movement of Bhabha’s cultural hybrid, who continuously swings back and forth between “[t]he hither and thither of the stairwell,”34 the “primordial polarities”35 of identity. It is in such a narrative style that the writers craft lives through writing, although they employ diverse ways to tell a story.

Their choice of either the first or the last stanza of Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” reveals that the two writers are on different journeys. There is a major difference in terms of how the writers travel: Kassabova is on a literal journey, while Zhu is on a metaphorical journey. Whereas Kassabova is still at the point of divergence of the two roads, “look[ing] down one as far as [she] could” and deciding which one to take, Zhu has already made her decision. She “took the one less travelled by,” and realises “that has made all the difference.” In addition, the repetition of “I” in Frost’s poem also indicates the emphasis on the self.36 In their writings both Zhu and Kassabova focus on self-construction and what makes a person who s/he is, namely, one’s identity. Therefore, the writers’ coincident choice of this poem as a reference to their works suggests the significant parallel between them: it is in the form of a journey that Zhu and Kassabova manifest self, life and identity, although they construct their journeys in differing ways.

Through their writing, Zhu and Kassabova conceptualise identity. Both writers emphasise the uncertainty and hybridity of identity through the narratives in their works. This presents resistance to the fixed and pigeonholed identity of cultural stereotypes in modern societies, such as that of the perceived identity of the Chinese émigré in Taiwan or the stereotypical identity of the Eastern-European (Bulgarian) immigrant. The writings of Zhu and Kassabova focus on and manifest the complexity of identity. Their protagonists hold various cultural or political views. They manifest a hybrid and complex view of identity, and respectively, emphasise the hybridity and complexity of narratives in their work.

The view of identity, as proposed by the writings of Zhu and Kassabova, presents the dislocated identities of minor transnationalists. Their subjects do not belong to any specific culture or nation. They travel around cultures and nations, and their identities cannot be fixed. When a person has two or more cultures/nations in

34 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 4.
35 Ibid.
36 See also my discussion of the repetition of “I” in Frost’s poem in Chapter Four.
his/her background (like Zhu, Kassabova and many of their protagonists), an open view of his/her identity is required. To be an insider as well as an outsider of a culture or nation does not restrict one to the space in between identities, but rather, suggests the possibility for moving freely and exploring different identities. Through writing, Zhu and Kassabova create *multiple* and *inclusive* views of identity, advocating for its *hybridity* and *multiplicity*. Any criticism which tends to interpret Zhu’s and Kassabova’s writing solely from a biographical perspective or from a single political/cultural viewpoint will become problematic.

This thesis offers an alternative reading of works by Zhu and Kassabova. My thesis suggests that new productive readings will be gained when one examines the complexity of the writers’ narrative constructions in their works, especially the ways in which they exploit and draw upon personal and collective experiences in various contexts in order to manifest a *textual* life of the self. Through my analyses of works by Zhu and Kassabova in this thesis, I inquire into the biographical readings of their works in the existing scholarship, especially those in Taiwan and New Zealand. In my observations, while both countries have been encouraging multiculturalism for decades, the prevailing literary assessments of works by *transnational* writers such as Zhu and Kassabova still present the somewhat limited views of nationalists or nativists. By juxtaposing the works of Zhu and Kassabova, which are on the *continuum* of fiction and autobiography, I also challenge the conventional genre dichotomy, and suggest a complex view when reading any works which are framed as being either fictional or autobiographical. In other words, my study provides an original and radical insight into the study of fiction and autobiography as well as the complex relationship between the two.

Finally, to link the ideas of “continuum” and “alternative historian/geographer” to women’s writing, one finds that the ways in which Zhu and Kassabova *craft* their lives and works challenge the patriarchal concepts of categorisation and the so-called ‘objective’ views of history and geography. As Susan Stanford Friedman suggests,

> The comparative study of women writers from different historical periods, national cultures, and world regions is a form of carrying over from one context to another. This recontextualisation opens up insight into how gender functions across time and space—in/commensurably, as both similar and different. […] Transhistorical, transcultural comparison, in other words, enables the production of a cosmopolitan feminist theory based on an expanded archive of women’s writing.37

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This thesis began with two writers, Zhu and Kassabova, who seem to be incommensurable or incomparable at the first sight. Through my comparative study, I show that there are indeed strong connections between the two cases. Their connections, being metaphorised and theorised with women’s crafts in my thesis, provide us with a valuable insight into “the archive of women’s writing”, a literary field that continues to be explored and expanded by emerging studies.
Appendix I.

Interviews with Zhu Tianxin (excerpts)

January 11, 2005, at SOGO Shopping Mall, Taipei City

陳：妳有很多作品都是採用男性第一人稱，有沒有什麼特別的因素？

朱：當主題跟自己這麼貼的時候，再寫下去真的會不舒服。[……] 當這樣的黏貼感讓妳覺得不舒服時，我覺得最方便的一個方式就是換一個性別或換一個角度來看事情。

所以，我在猜想要是我是男生的話，面對同樣的這個處境的時候，我可能天天坐這個位子看的風景都一樣，很煩了。我會選擇換一個角度，雖然面對的可能還是同一個景，但是角度不同了，那個新鮮感或者陌生感都可以為我帶來一些新的熱度或者不同的觀察。

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陳：有些評論家會去批評妳使用男性第一人稱寫作，例如，邱貴芬，她認為這是妳對女性身份的不認同，認為這是妳在眷村封閉環境成長所致，還有其他一些評論者喜歡從國族文化的角度來探討妳的作品，甚至幫妳貼上政治標籤，請問妳對這部份有什麼看法？

CHEN: You have adopted a male-first-person narrative voice in many of your works. Are there any specific reasons for this?

ZHU: It can make me feel uncomfortable to continue writing when [the subject] is so close to myself. […] When such a situation occurs, I think the most convenient way is to observe something through an alternative gender or another perspective.

If the subject I am writing about is identical to me, the situation would be similar to sitting on the same spot and looking at the same scene every day, which would be very boring. In that case, I would tend to choose a different perspective, because the same scene may look different from another viewpoint. The sense of freshness or estrangement can bring me some new motivation or alternative observations.

If I were a male writer, I may choose a feminine perspective for convenience when encountering the same situation. Therefore, it is simply to change an identity, rather than being aware of any gender issues, say, for example, feminist theories of gender.

CHEN: Some critics have commented on your use of a male-first-person narrative voice. For example, Qiu Guifen views the deployment of a male voice as your non-identification with females, which she considers to be a result of growing up in a closed environment such as the military compound. There are also critics who tend to discuss the issues of national or ethnic identity in your work, or even politically pigeonholing you. What is your view about all this?
ZHU: I have to admit that, indeed, my primary identification is with life in the military compound, rather than that in the Hakka village, where I spent my childhood. When I lived in the Hakka village, I was very precious to my maternal grandmother. However, when she held me in her arms, what I heard was always how they tended to kept the Chinese émigrés at arm’s length and their hatred towards the Fulaos. [...] My maternal grandfather was a doctor in the village, in which my maternal family owned a lot of lands and material resources. Therefore, since my childhood I had seen how my uncles and aunts would plot against each other, which was what I disliked.

The life in the military compound was different. Most families were short of everything. However, people who lived on the same street or in the same village were like brothers and sisters. They would support and stand up for each other. They hardly argued with each other. Everything was shared and justice was emphasised. All these were the values I liked.

Therefore, I would tend to compare life at my maternal grandfather’s home (where most people were related to me) with the people in the military compound (where most people were not related to me except for my nuclear family—my parents and my sisters). The conclusion I drew was that I preferred those [from the military compound]—who were not related to me.

I think this is a matter of “hierarchy”, rather than an issue of ethnicity. [...] Back to the statement made by Qiu, I think she is not familiar with the military compound environment. The females who grew up in military compounds are actually very aggressive. [...] The question [of gender difference] was never an issue to me, at least it was never considered as a problem in our life in the military compound. Therefore, I can make it clear that the suggestion offered by Qiu Guifen as well as the critiques made by others afterwards—despite the systematic analyses in their readings—are somewhat problematic. It is like using wrong cutlery for a meal. They have adopted Western cutlery for Chinese food.
陳：聽起來妳似乎常常注意針對妳或妳的作品的評論，是嗎？

ZHU: I would not say that I never pay attention to any commentaries. However, regarding the critiques on ethnicity, I am aware that it is not a personal issue, and I do not want to be considered as a “spokesperson” for Chinese émigrés. Whenever there are discussions about the military compound issue, I am asked to say something.

There are all kinds of people in the military compound community, and I do not want to be categorised into any specific ethnic group. There are other people in the military compound, such as those old veterans who went through the eight years of the Sino-Japanese War. They have been forgotten and they hardly have any channels to express themselves. […] They had come to Taiwan alone for reasons which seem ridiculous to us today, such as ‘protecting the nation’. However, these reasons are the driving force which has sustained them for forty or fifty years, regardless of the poverty of their lives or social status. When the ‘localisation’ of Taiwan was emphasised in the 1990s, they were suddenly turned into the butt of jokes. Sometimes they were ridiculed by society. Sometimes, it was their own children who made fun of them, saying that they had been deceived by the GMD. Their ideas were ridiculed and trampled down, which was where their sense of loss came from. […]

Critics have their own ways to read my work and that is fine. Nevertheless, when they bring up the issue of ethnicity and if I am the subject of such discussion, I feel the responsibility to say something.
陳： 姑的作品〈我的朋友阿
里薩〉裡的主角「阿里薩」這
名字有無特殊典故，因為它看
起來不像一般中文名字？直
接發音成英文是 “Alisa”，
聽起來像是西方女性的名字，
是否有特別的性別隱喻？

朱： 它其實是來自我喜歡
的外國作家馬奎斯的一部作
品，翻譯為《愛在瘟疫蔓延
時》。[……] 這本書男主角
的名字中文翻譯就叫「阿里
薩」[Ariza]。

他其實是一個蠻荒謬的角
色，他可以等一個他愛上的女
人，種種因緣際會這個女人也
嫁給別人，他還是繼續等她，
等到這兩人都七十、八十歲了，
才一起展開一趟老年的愛情旅
程。因為我自己在寫這個角色
時，也會覺得整個意象是非常
荒謬、荒誕的，所以用了「阿
里薩」這名字。

我當時在作品裡沒多交
待，大概也是因為寫此故事當
時《愛在瘟疫蔓延時》這部作
品的中譯本在台灣也剛好出
版，好像很多人讀過會知道是
指什麼。就像我們現在提到
「羅麗塔」[Lolita] 這名字
大家都知道是什麼意思，是從
哪兒來的。

CHEN： Is there any specific reason or
meaning for the name of the male protagonist,
“Ariza”, in your work, “My Friend Ariza”? It
does not look like a Chinese name. If we
translate the name directly from its
pronunciation in Chinese, it would be “Alisa”,
which sounds like a Western name for a
woman. Is there any gender implication in the
name?

ZHU: It is actually adopted from Love in the
Time of Cholera, a novel by Gabriel García
Márquez, one of my favourite foreign writers.
The name of the male protagonist is “Ariza”,
which is translated into Chinese as “阿里薩”(A-
li-sa).

He is actually a ridiculous character. He
falls in love with a woman, who ends up
marrying someone else; he still waits for her until
both of them are in their seventies or eighties,
and only then do the two of them finally begin
their love relationship. When I was writing about
the male character in my own story, I also felt a
sense of weirdness and ridiculousness about it.
Therefore, I adopted the name “Ariza” for my
protagonist.

When I was writing this story, the Chinese
translation of Love in the Time of Cholera had
just been published in Taiwan, which was
probably why I did not provide any explanation
about the name in my story. I assumed that
people who have read Márquez’s story would
make the connection. It is similar to the name
“Lolita”; when the name is mentioned, everyone
knows what it means and where it is from.

December 29, 2008, at Syros Café, Taipei City

陳： 關於《擊壤歌》一書，
目前學者們傾向於以政治化的
角度來看它。請問妳高中時期
就開始著手寫這本書嗎？還是
到了妳上大學之後再去回憶當
時的狀況？

CHEN: Critics tend to adopt a specific
political lens in their reading of The
Ploughman’s Song. Did you start writing this
book in your high-school days, or was it a
recollection of high-school life after you
became a university student?
朱：其實在高中唸書的時候都沒有想過要去寫這樣一本書，雖然那時寫了很多小說和散文。[……]我升大學那個暑假吧，有一本書賣得很好，叫《拒絕聯考的小子》，所以那時候就有書商就找兩個明星高中畢業的學生（我和王範生，一男一女）去寫《接受聯考的小子》和《接受聯考的小妞》（連書名都幫我們想好了）。那時的我會覺得非常排斥，覺得怎麼這麼商業化，所以完全不考慮！

大概是放榜以後，我們高中時代的幾個好友沒能考上同一所大學，於是在那一刻我有一種很深的感覺是：我們不會再一起了。儘管我們高三唸完、畢業典禮後一直都慢慢能夠接受這個現實，可是到那一刻才驚覺從此之後跟以前那種常常在一起的日子不同了。所以我就想說：把它記下來吧！把它寫下來吧！就好像幾個好朋友趁天氣好時出去拍拍照、留個紀念，當初是因為這樣而寫。

這本書的前半段大概都是按幾個月前印象最深刻、最想寫的事情寫。寫到高三的那一份（應該是書的最後那一章吧），我是把高三的日記拿來看著寫。好像高三那年對我來說是蠻重要的一個時候，當時面臨著要不要進入這樣一個「體制」，跟所有人做同樣一件事（考聯考、上大學）的抉擇，那個軌跡對我來講是有意義的。所以我是把高三的日記幾乎拿來抄上去。

ZHU: I never thought about writing such a book when I was in high school, although I had written several essays and short stories then. [...] During the summer vacation before I began university, there was a book which sold really well, entitled, *The Lad Who Refused to Take the University Entrance Exam*. Then, a publisher contacted two students who had graduated from well-known high schools (Wang Fansheng and me, a male and a female). We were asked to write *The Lad Who ‘Agreed’ to Take the University Entrance Exam* and *The Girl Who ‘Agreed’ to Take the University Entrance Exam*. (The publisher even very thoughtfully provided us with the names for our books.) The idea was repellent to me, considering how commercial it was, so I never gave it a second thought!

Then, the result of our university entrance exams was published. My good friends from high school were not able to attend the same university as me and I had the strong feeling that we were never going to be able to get together again. Despite that, after completing our final year of high school and after the graduation ceremony, we had all started to accept this fact, and it was not until that moment that I realised that from then on we were to begin a new life which would be different from those days when we had fun together. Therefore, I thought about writing it down and keeping everything in words. It was like going out with best friends on sunny days and taking photos as souvenirs. That was the motive for writing the book.

I started the first part of the book with the most unforgettable and impressive things that had happened in the several months prior to the time I began to write. When I started writing the part about the final year of high school (which would be the last chapter of the book), I decided to draw on words from the diary I kept during that year. The final year of high school was very important to me, because I was facing the dilemma of whether or not to enter the “system”, to do the same thing, and to make the same choice as everyone does (taking the entrance exam and attending university). The process was very significant to me, so I virtually copied from my high-school diary almost word for word.
陳：妳早期的作品，如《擊壤歌》和《方舟上的日子》，出版當時尚未解嚴，那時對這樣的作品的評論有何傾向？

朱：完全沒有任何評論，我覺得就是被看作「校園文學」吧！因為我覺得在那個時候其實是一個很重視「純文學」的年代，當時文壇裡會被拿出來評論的大概就是陳映真、黃春明、白先勇、王禎和……等作家。[……] 在當時「純文學」這麼清楚被辨識的時候，我寫的東西，不管它的銷量是好到什麼程度，是完全不被談論的，就只覺得這是一個「校園文學」吧，甚至連很一般性的評論都沒有。

陳：〈時移事往〉(1984) 和〈鶴妻〉(1989) 這兩部作品出版的年代應該是在臺灣女性主義萌芽的時候，請問當時女性主義的思想對妳的作品有沒有什麼影響？

朱：我完全沒有意識到女性主義這部份，可能是湊巧吧！而當時的我自己也剛好到了一個不再是小女孩的年紀。再回身看一下自己的處境，如果我是處在一個成長時非常被壓抑的環境，可能會呈現兩種情形：一種是像李昂那樣地反抗父權，另一種是根本就習慣於當柔弱而依附於父權的女人而不自覺。所以就看妳是一個自覺的還是一個病態的樣子。

我自己處的就是一個女權至上的環境[……]印象裡家事都

CHEN: Your early works, such as The Ploughman’s Song and Days on the Ark, were published before the lifting of martial law. What kind of reviews were there on the books then?

ZHU: There were no commentaries on them. I think they were considered as nothing more than “campus literature”, light reading for students! It was a time when “pure literature” was emphasised, and the kind of thing that critics would comment on were works by writers such as Chen Yingzhen, Huang Chunming, Bai Xianyong, Wang Zhenhe et al., the list of literary masters. […] During the time when “pure literature” was clearly identified, what I wrote, no matter how popular it was, was not studied by critics. They simply considered it as light reading for students, and there was not even a general review of it.

CHEN: “Passage of Things Past” (1984) and “The Crane Wife” (1989) were published around the time when feminism in Taiwan started flourishing. Did feminist thoughts have any influence on your works?

ZHU: I was totally unaware of feminism when I wrote. Maybe there were coincidences! At that time I reached an age when I was no longer a young woman.

Now that I look back at my situation then, if I had been brought up in a very repressed environment, two results might occur: first, resistance to patriarchy, such as the way Li Ang did; or second, becoming a tender woman who is submissive to patriarchy without knowing it. Therefore, it really depends on whether you are a self-aware type or the weak-minded type.

I myself was brought up in an environment where females are respected. […] As I recall, my father was the one who did all the housework. […] My mother, apart from her job as a translator, often wore my father’s military jacket,
is father in doing. ...mother also translated. ...is paired do to the mountain lakes, and waited for my father to deliver meals to her. [...] Hence, the environment in which I was brought up did not assign work according to gender stereotypes. I was very lucky later on when I met my husband because he liked the way I was—an aggressive woman. He never made me feel that he would like to change me in any way, let alone control me. Therefore, I think, at least during my childhood and teenage years, or when I was in my twenties, I enjoyed the life I had. I did not receive pressure from my father or from any other male.

Actually, I often felt that those who emphasise feminist ideas tend to feel dissatisfied with the situation we have. They would ask why don’t you (a woman) step forward a bit. Why don’t you show resistance or be critical? However, I personally feel that I am more interested in the reality of our lives. For example, some of my works present lesbian relationships. Some people ask me, “Why don’t you ‘come out’? Why don’t you make it more obvious?” The fact is that many people in our real lives have never figured out whether exactly they are male or female, and they do continue to live their lives like that. I am more interested in these people than those who emphasise such an arbitrary and simplified attitude towards “what our lives should be like”. Overemphasis may simplify what you want to express and you end up contradicting yourself.

After all, a literary work is different from a movement. For a movement you have to make the statements simple and clear, so that people will understand, but that is not how a literary work should be like. How could our lives be so simple? They can never be categorised into a few types. Therefore, when you want to capture what happens in these grey and ambiguous areas, you may encounter those who are not satisfied with what you do and ask you to “come out a bit further and join us.” I am actually very familiar with this scenario.
陳：關於《小說家的政治週記》這本書，請問妳在寫小說的朱天心與從事政治活動的朱天心之間如何平衡？

朱：會要把這兩者分開的部分其實是很可以理解的，其實包括到現在我都還是這個態度。我會意識到我是在這個地方生活的，我有一個作為公民的責任。我必須做這樣一個切割，因為就一部小說而言，你可能為一部題材一準備就是三十年。天啊！三十年後你想說的那些話，那些你想為他們說的兩句話的人，可能都死的死了、跑的跑了，那不真的是急死人嗎？

可是當你有另外一個「公民」的身份在時，我會用一個公民的身份做我自己的社會參與也好，或是不同形式的，如：用文字，我覺得那是可以立即的。我覺得這個區隔，就好像是有壓力鍋吧（一個洩、一個起），不要讓我對政治的急切之心影響到寫小說的我。

陳：妳的作品從早期開始就一直很緊扣時事，尤其是政治議題，但在最近的一部作品《初夏荷花時期的愛情》裡，妳卻又回歸到談論「愛情」這個議題。這陣子臺灣的政治理論發生了很多事，例如：前總統陳水扁的貪瀆案，妳怎麼反而選擇沉默了？

CHEN: Regarding *A Novelist’s Journal on Politics*, how do you find a balance between the Zhu Tianxin who participates in political activities and the Zhu Tianxin as a novelist?

ZHU: It should be understood that I have always sought to keep these two spheres separate. In fact, I still hold the same attitude now. I am aware of the fact that I live in this place, and that therefore I have responsibilities as a citizen here. I have to make a division between the two roles, because it may take as long as thirty years to prepare the material for a novel. My God, in thirty years, what you want to write about or those for whom you want to speak might well be dead and gone! Then it would be too late.

However, if you are also aware of yourself in the role of “citizen”, you can make good use of it. I exploit my role as a citizen to play my part in society, or alternatively, I can do this through writing, which in my view can have immediate effect. I think this can help me separate my role as a political activist from my role as a novelist. It is similar to the way in which a pressure cooker works, one part goes down to produce the pressure, whilst the other comes up to release the steam. In that way, my enthusiasm about politics is expressed through instant political commentaries, which has no effect on my novel writing.

CHEN: Starting from your early works, you have been exploiting the news, especially political issues. However, in your most recent work, *Love in Early Summer When the Lotus Blooms*, you have returned to a discussion of ‘love relationships’. Recently, there have been many developments in Taiwanese politics, such as the corruption of ex-president, Chen Shuibian. Why did you choose to keep your observations on these political matters silent?
朱：在〈南都一望〉出版後跟唐諾的對談裡我已經提到現在臺灣的時事已經快到你無法想像。你绞尽脑汁还没编好故事，实际生活中事情就已经发生了，而且比你编的更精彩，似乎有种夸父追日的心情。

这次在提笔写《初夏荷花时的爱情》时，我会觉得说，我给自己放个假吧！享受一个小说家的乐趣，就纯粹好像我是一个傀儡师，我可以做一些实验，我可以操縱一下底下的人物。甚至就像做一个小小的实验，我把几隻白老鼠装在一个箱子裡，看看他们会有什么反应？我记得很多半小说家终其一生都在享受这个乐趣，可是我都沒有過。所以我想：
一、给自己放一个假，我来写一次，自己做一个实验。也许那个主题触及到爱情，可是我觉得是写人在面对，在做一个实验；二、我想恢复一些手感
[……]我多年來一直想要追逐那个大題材，使我对于细腻的東西变得毫無兴趣，甚至不耐煩。

我很想藉這次這部作品放一个假，重回到那个畫素描、最单纯的練習。（因為我不習慣用電腦，所以我的意象還是用紙。）要怎麼描绘出纸筆作业？在创作的时候，我会很願意把我的筆講得像一把剑一樣，就是你要煉劍：火裡燒，然後插到水裡。這是一個粹煉，要自己的劍養回的過程。可是要是對現在的我來說，此刻我要怎樣描述自己的筆？就是你要把我的鉛筆削尖一點、畫一张好一點的素描，這樣就夠了。我不曉得这是不是跟年纪有关，或只是一個暫

ZHU: In my public conversation with Tang Nuo after the publication of “A Glance at the Southern Capital”, I mentioned that the news in Taiwan has been changing so fast that one finds it impossible to keep up. Whereas you may have racked your brains and not yet finished constructing a story, what has happened in real life is more exciting than the story you might construct. It makes one feel like ‘the giant who pursued the sun’.

When I started writing *Love in Early Summer When the Lotus Blooms*, I felt it was time to give myself a break! It was time for me to finally feel the enjoyment of being a novelist, as if I was a puppet master who was able to experiment while controlling the characters below. It was also like those little experiments when you put guinea pigs in a box and see what happens to them. I think most novelists have felt this kind of enjoyment through their careers, but it had never happened to me. So what I wanted to do was: firstly, to give myself a break, to write and to experiment. The theme would be love relationships, but I would focus on the ways in which people face the issue and make that into an experiment. Secondly, I wanted to get back to the basics of writing. [...] For years I had been after big themes, which made me lose interest and become impatient in the description of detail.

I wanted to take the opportunity of writing this work as a return to the basics, like drawing, the simplest practice. (I am not used to using computers, so the image I have is using a pen.) How do I describe such a practice with pen and paper? When I create, I like to imagine my pen as a sword. You have to test the sword: heat it in the fire and then put it in cold water. Through this process you bring out the essence. How would I describe my pen at the moment? All I need to do is sharpen my pencil a little bit and do a good drawing, and that would be enough. I am not sure if this has anything to do with age or whether it is a temporary condition. I seem to feel like going back, tidying things up, and starting with what most writers consider as the basics. This is the original enjoyment of creativity.
時的現象？我似乎很想回去收
拾一下，去從事一些對很多小
說家來說像是基本功，最原始
的創作樂趣。

陳：妳給我的感覺好像是一個
揹著背包到處去旅行的人。從
旅途一開始妳就一路地拍攝許
多照片，但後來走到了一個有
很多特殊風景和很多特別的人
的地方，妳卻令人意外地停止
了手裡的相機。這會不會是身
為一個長期閱讀妳的作品的讀
者所持一個不切實際的想法？

朱：我覺得這三、四年對我來
講當然是很重要的一個盤整
期。我身邊的朋友換了一大
批，這些很多是從事工運、農
業或本身是外籍配偶、原住
民。這些其實都是我以往重點
觀察、很好奇的一些人，但在
深入認識他們以後，你知道
[...]他們的處境是非常地窘
迫。那你看到他們在這樣做的
時候，會沒跟他們一起做嗎？
我覺得這幾年對我來講，心裡
真的非常複雜，因為我們按一
般的想法會說這是擴展視野，
增加你的題材，但我覺得正好
是相反 [...] 因為越接觸他
們，我能寫的就越少。碰到這
些社運人士，他們已經落到這
種地步，我寫的時候會唯恐不
能幫他們多講兩句。

可是，你知道小說家的天
職，去逼視它的時候，你必須
去呈現很真實的一面。當然你
不會去醜化它，但是你不可以
神化它，也不可以美化它。
[...] 但是站在小說家的天職去
寫出他們真實的處境，又會有
違你想幫他們說話的初衷。

CHEN: You have given me the impression
that you are a traveller who travels with her
backpack. You have taken a lot of photos all
along the trip. However, when you finally
reach a place where there are spectacular
scenes and special people, to everyone’s
surprise, you give up the camera in your hand.
Would this be an unrealistic thought from a
reader who has been studying your work for
such a long period?

ZHU: I think the past three or four years has
been an important phase in my life. I have been
mixing with a new group of friends, many of
whom are activists, farmers or even foreign
brides or Taiwanese aborigines. In fact, these
were the groups of people whom I used to study
and feel curious about. However, after getting to
know them more, you realise [...] how difficult
their circumstances have been. When you see
how their lives are, how could you not work with
them? For me the last few years have been very
complicated. Usually we would tend to think of
this as an opportunity for a writer to broaden their
literary horizons, whereas what I feel is quite the
opposite [...] The more I am involved with
them, the less I am able to write. When I
encounter these activists and learn how difficult
their lives have been, I feel like speaking for
them when I write about them.

Nevertheless, you also know that the duty of
a novelist is to closely examine life and to
represent its reality. You will certainty not
besmirch the image of these people, but neither
can you deify or beautify them. [...] But, to
represent the reality of their lives as a novelist
would do may contradict your initial wish to
speak for them. [...] If you are to speak for them,
you would have to forget about your role as a
writer. Hence, whenever I become involved with
a group of social outcasts, I lose a subject for
writing.

Of course, this could be a passing phase. [...]

你又得忘記自己是小說家的身份。所以每接觸一群弱勢團體，我寫小說的範圍就少了一塊。

當然，也許這是一個階段性 […] 也許，就像當年出版《我記得……》之前我休息了一段日子，利用這段空檔期大量補修學分 […] 這段期間，即使我對臺灣的政治生態懂得很多，但總覺得消化和準備還不夠。

Maybe, it is similar to the period I had experienced before I published I Remember…. I took a few years rest and used the period to absorb all kinds of knowledge. […] Despite the fact that I have learned a great deal about the political environment in Taiwan during these years, I still feel that I need some more time to digest it properly and to do more preparation before I write about it.
Appendix II.
Interview with Kapka Kassabova (excerpts)

June 13, 2007, at Riva Cafe, Mission Bay, Auckland

CHEN: Regarding the narrative voices adopted in your work, how do you choose specific voice(s) for your work? Many of your early writings (essays and poems) were presented in a first-person narrative. Then, gradually the second-person voice (“you”) and the collective personas (“we” or “they”) started taking over. Your two fictions were both presented in third-person narratives, while only a few of your poems were presented in the third person. What would be your observation of such a phenomenon in your writing?

KASSABOVA: My early choice of voice and narrative persona—in *Reconnaissance* and the early poetry—was more intuitive than thought-through. I was always interested, since the beginning, in other voices, but did not always know how to use them effectively. For example, the poem ‘Razor Salesman’ in *All Roads Lead to the Sea* makes use of a third-person character voice, but still through the medium of the first-person authorial voice.

With each book I write, be it poetry or prose, I am more conscious of who is speaking. For example, the book I am working on now, *Street Without a Name*, is a travel memoir about Bulgaria, and I am very conscious of the fact that I (first person singular) am the narrator. Likewise, in my latest poetry collection, *Geography for the Lost*, there are many voices speaking, in a deliberate 'symphony' or cacophony of experiences and emotions which go far beyond my personal experiences; this use of ‘ventriloquism’ as a poetic device is a new development in my poetry, using other voices to tell other people’s stories, and I think it has simply come with maturity. So, there is definitely a shift from the immediate personal experience of the world to using the voice as a device to tell other stories. At least in my poetry, there is a shift, and I find this ‘literary ventriloquism’ very exciting.

With prose, it’s interesting because the first novel [*Reconnaissance*], as I said, […] refer back to my cultural experiences. The second novel [*Love in the Land of Midas*] moved away from my cultural experiences. It was entirely fictional and was based on other cultural experiences and other historical perspectives, Greece and France. At the moment, I’m writing a non-fiction [*Street Without a Name*]. I’m writing a book about Bulgaria, and it’s a travel memoir, so I’m in fact returning to the ‘I’ narrative, because it’s a travel memoir, a personal life’s look at Bulgaria: the way it was when I was growing up in the 1970s, and the way it is now. So, it’s an undisguised and honest “I”. It’s really about my experience of communist Bulgaria. The themes of the book (cultural, belonging, and what it was like to grow up under Communism) are similar to that of my essay, “We Too Are Europe”, but the voice is different. In this book the voice is slightly more grotesque—there is a kind of tragic-comic voice. I’m returning to a very honest “I” which I’ve never used in my first-person narrative fiction. I guess because it’s a non-fiction, that I allow myself to use the “I” as a device tagging to the cultural experience (the communist then and the Bulgarian now in a transitional phase.)
However, it seems to me that poetry lends itself to first-person narratives more naturally, since it tends to come out of personal experience more spontaneously than fiction which itself tends to pass through several ‘filters’ before it reaches the page.

When I talked about different voices in *Reconnaissance*, they are different voices but I think all of them contain quite a lot of me, whereas the later work now, the poetry [*Geography for the Lost*], doesn’t have me. All those other voices, though, contain me to the same degree, in a way they are a much more successful departure from the personal experience than that first novel. That first novel, which I wrote when I was 24 or 25, still shows a very young person trying to write from all the people’s points of view, and I’m not sure it was entirely successful. I think these later poems are more mature. Let’s say these voices in *Reconnaissance* were contaminated by my personal voice, whereas the voices in *Geography for the Lost* present sophisticated ‘ventriloquism’.

**CHEN:** On the issue of ‘autobiographical writing’, which ones among your work would you call “autobiographical”? Why? Do they have to be presented in a first-person or any other specific persona(s)? How do you see your ‘autobiographical writing’? How comfortable are you when presenting some personal parts in your life, and how do you deal with it?

**KASSABOVA:** I think often you find a first novel seems to have direct resemblance to the writer’s life, voice, story, or family story, and then, later, writers begin to step away from themselves, exploring other worlds. I don’t think of my writing in terms of autobiography, but more in terms of direct versus indirect rendering of experiences. (You could of course argue that everything a writer writes—any writer—is in some ways ‘autobiographical’, because one’s writing is so inextricably linked to one’s personality. Hence, Flaubert’s famous statement, “Madame Bovary, c’est moi.”) But yes, there are in my writing degrees of direct experience, but they are to be found in the poetry, not in the fiction. My first novel, *Reconnaissance*, was written from several different points of view, but the general assumption was that it was autobiographical. This surprises me, but it shouldn’t have: the main character shared some traits with me (Bulgarian, female, same age), and the assumption was based on those obvious similarities. In a way, though, that first novel was my way of dealing with difficult and complex personal experiences: emigration, loss of homeland, bewilderment in a new country, confusion of identity, and of course coming of age. So, in that sense—rather than in terms of plot and story, which was invented—it *was* autobiographical.1 People have assumed that it was autobiographical, but it wasn’t. The female protagonist, Nadejda, wasn’t me, and the primary story is fictional.

My new book, the travel memoir *Street Without a Name*, is a straight personal account of a place and a time, and in that sense it is a straight, if highly subjective, ‘biography’ of a country. It is clearly based on fact. I have to confess a certain discomfort with this very straight-talking, real-life first person, but I think I am getting used to it. It comes down to treating yourself and your ‘I’ narrator as a character in her own right! This way you won’t be boring to yourself or the reader.

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1 The word in italics is Kassabova’s emphasis.
CHEN: In terms of cultural confrontations, when you encounter people or things from another culture during your journeys, what sort of elements would catch your attention most? Why? On the other hand, in what way(s) would you expect people from another culture to see you? What sort of impact do these cultural confrontations have on your writing?

KASSABOVA: I am always interested in where people are culturally. I am interested in mixed cultural identities, cultural hybrids, divided loyalties, blurred boundaries, personal maps if you like. Why? For two reasons: first, it is my own ongoing experience of the world, and secondly, it is a massively and rapidly growing phenomenon, as people move countries more and more and nationalities become less important than choices of lifestyle and opportunities.

It has been very difficult to present myself to the world as what I am: a Bulgarian-‘Kiwi’. The combination is just too weird for most people to grasp. Both nationalities are quite obscure in the general scheme of things (small, not very important countries on the edge of continents/oceans), and they present completely different clichés: Bulgaria as a Balkan land emerging from the darkness of totalitarianism, and New Zealand as a sunny island of hobbits and postcard picture beauty. So, I usually have to choose one or the other when I introduce myself to people: either as a Bulgarian or as a Kiwi. In Britain, my ‘Kiwness’ does not seem to work, because I do not present the expected cliché of a blonde surf chick with an antipodean accent, so I often revert back to the default Bulgarianness. This is annoying, obviously, but I understand people’s need to simplify. We all have that need. As a result, I have ended up writing a book about Bulgaria—which is a very enriching experience.

CHEN: I am particularly interested in two of your poems, “Balinese” (in Someone Else’s Life, 2003) and “Mr Hu” (or “The Estranged Mr. Hu”, from Geography for the Lost, 2007). In what circumstances or from what inspiration did you write these two poems? Why did you choose to present them as the object of gaze in the cultural context? Is there anything specific that you would like to show or deliver through these two poems? Regarding the “Mr Hu” poem, would you like to talk about the changes from “The Estranged Mr. Hu” (published in Landfall, May 2004) to “Mr Hu” (in Geography for the Lost, 2007)?

KASSABOVA: Please refer to the question above about voices. It was a question, in both poems, and in many others in Geography for the Lost, of how to present a person’s struggle with identity and meaning in an original and authentic voice, without patronising the character or distorting the truth of the original experience.

The inspiration of the poem “Mr Hu” started with someone I met called “Mr Hu”. He lives in Berlin and I think he is still in Berlin. It is entirely based on or inspired by the way he spoke and the way he lived his life, which I thought was very idiosyncratic. He’s an unusual person, and I somehow walked into a flat in his life to rent his life in writing. He had all this cultural baggage: his experience of the world, his culturally dislocated life (he’s a Chinese man from Indonesia), and he had an émigré status in Germany. He can negotiate all these cultural boundaries and speak several languages, although not quite fluently. I thought that I could relate to him,
and I wanted to somehow write about him, and I find that series of linked poems to be the right way because they are in his voice more or less.²

Using the other voice is a device. Even though it removes my personal experience, it still reflects my perceptions. All the poems in *Geography for the Lost* are around my perception of displacement, identity, and looking for places in the world. All these voices and characters that populate the book are travelling with similar issues in their own contexts. It’s a constellation of voices and lives that sort of revolves around perhaps one focus, one theme, or one bundle of themes which are presented in my previous works too, but I think they are perhaps more interestingly explored in the latest book [*Geography for the Lost*] because of the voices, and each poem is a new experience.

**CHEN:** It seems that quite a few critics and readers tend to emphasise the Bulgarian/East European part (styles/features/elements) in your work. Some of them even look at this as something “exotic” in your English writing. **What would be your response to this?**

**KASSABOVA:** Please also see the question about cultural confrontations. I think that expression, “exotic bird”, was what I said ironically in an interview. I refer to myself as an exotic bird, because that was how I felt that I was being perceived, and I used that expression ironically. So, I think maybe in that interview or later people started using the term to refer to me. I used it sarcastically because I was sick of feeling like I was an exotic bird. But I think if you put your finger on it, it’s a perception of Bulgaria, where I came from; it is an exotic place that holds a kind of aura on my writing.

It seems to me that New Zealand is far away from Europe, whereas Bulgaria, even though it’s within Europe, is perceived as an obscure country. Nobody knows much about Bulgaria even in Europe, and let alone in New Zealand, so it gives a kind of double obscurity and that annoys me, because I don’t want to be always associated with where I come from. I mean, my material and my writing go beyond that. However, the book I am writing now actually explores the heart of the Bulgaria experiences. Now I live in Britain, again, perceptions shift a little bit in terms of cultural stereotyping and exoticism.

In Britain now I’m finding that people tend to perceive me much more as a Bulgarian than as a New Zealander, which kind of surprises me at first. But now, three years has gone passed, and I realised that in fact I’m more a Bulgarian than a New Zealander culturally, the way I feel, and I don’t react against that perception now in Britain. The fact is that the publisher was more interested in my stories of Bulgaria, which is again an example of that perception. So, I think there is stuff that shifts all the time when you are a person in a second or third country, your identity is shifting in very subtle ways, and that’s ok, and it’s ok to reflect that in your writing, I think. In that way your writing keeps moving, not static.

² I mention to Kassabova that Mr Hu is a bit different from typical Chinese or Asian men, who tend to hide their emotions, where as Mr Hu was very open about his emotions. Kassabova suggests that perhaps Mr Hu is a “cultural hybrid” like the writer herself, although they are “in completely different set of paradigms.”
CHEN: In terms of readers’ responses, what would you like the readers to see in your work? What kind of relationship would you prefer to keep with your readers? (For example, some writers would often correspond with their readers through websites or mails, while some writers would prefer to keep a distance from their readers and to have no worries whether the readers like their work or not.) Do the readers’ responses have any influences on your writing?

KASSABOVA: If we distinguish readers’ response as the perception of me and my writing on the one hand, and the critical response to my work on the other, then I would say “yes” [there’s influence on my writing] to the first and “no” to the second. Readers’ perceptions do impact my writing in a direct way. For example, this book I’m writing now [Street Without a Name], the idea did not come from me. Actually, my publisher in the U.K. wanted me to write it. They wanted me to publish the book, and I kind of talked about it for a long time (about ten months) before I felt confident that I could tackle it. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to write a personal account of my childhood and the Bulgarian now. I felt a bit uncomfortable with the idea. Then I thought about it and decided that it could make an interesting book, so I’m writing it now. That is very much me as a Bulgarian telling a story of the country through my personal stories. I wasn’t going to write this book if that publisher hadn’t suggested it, so in a way the book which I quite enjoyed writing was a product of cultural perception by this British publisher who thought that I was an interesting writer from Bulgaria and they don’t have many books on Bulgaria. They kind of imposed that idea on me, which is a positive thing, but in a way I wouldn’t have written this book, otherwise I would have written something more fictional and less personal. So, this it is an example of how a reader’s response—because a publisher is also a reader—can impact your writing.

But in terms of criticisms of my work, I’m always very open to positive and negative comments, and I tend to read the reviews of my books. I had an intense language journey, because I moved a long way in a very short period of time (about ten years) and my writing now is very different from my earlier writing. I’m very open to responses, but I also have my own integrity, and I would write certain things in a certain style, because that’s just who I am.

My hope is that readers of my poetry in particular will find their own personal resonances in my work, regardless of how they perceive me culturally, as an author. I hope that the work will transcend the author’s perceived identity.

At the same time, it is true that I shape my cultural and artistic identity as much through my work—and the response to it—as through, say, travelling and interacting with other cultures in a more direct way. After a couple more books, I believe I will have ‘come of age’ as a writer, and as a result, the writing and the themes will speak independently of their author’s origins.

CHEN: On the relationship between life and creativity, how does your life journey come to be embodied in your creative journey, or vice versa? How do you manage your multiple identities (the self in reality, the self in writing, and the self as a writer) at the same time? What do you do when these identities conflict with each other in any way? P.S. On the poetry reading night a couple of weeks ago, C.K. Stead (who happened to sit right next to you) presented the poem of a dialogue between “C.K. (the self as writer)” and “Karl (the self in everyday life)”,
how would you compare the situation to your own? What kind of role does your writing play in your life?

KASSABOVA: I define myself as a writer and not much else. Writing is my lifeblood and the core of my identity, I think—it comes before gender, nationality, or any interpersonal relationships. Without that core, I would dissolve.

My life journey has been quite characteristic of our age (immigration, displacement, cultural hybridity), and it keeps finding its way into all my writing. In that sense too, my writing self is joined at the hips with my ‘real’ self, in fact they are probably Siamese twins. I think the challenges ahead lie in figuring out whether I can sustain a credible profile as a writer in several different fields—poetry, fiction, non-fiction, travel, without watering myself down. As I said, people need to simplify, and it is much simpler to say that you are a poet or a novelist, or a travel writer. Hybridity in literature has a long way to go yet! Only time will show.

CHEN: Regarding the various literary genres you have adopted, you have been writing all kinds of works: poetry, essays, travel essays, novels, travel books, newspaper/magazine articles and book reviews. How do you see these writings in various forms presenting the specific parts of your life? How do they work as references to your life or the lives you have perceived? In what ways do they correspond to each other?

KASSABOVA: Please see the question above regarding the relationship between life and creativity.

My travel essays are the most personal, the most directly rendered form of writing I have attempted. The new book, Street Without a Name, belongs in this genre, as does the short biographical essay about language at the end of Geography for the Lost, which is a kind of blueprint for the memoir part of the book.

Poetry comes next, and fiction last, but increasingly, my relationship with poetic narrative and voice is more complicated and more layered (as outlined in the questions above). I suspect I might come to write poems entirely in other voices.

CHEN: Below are some questions about your biographical details: Would you mind telling me your middle name? (I happened to spot “Kapka N. Kassabova” in one of your early publications. That letter “N.” reminded me of “Nadejda” in your Reconnaissance, although I see very clearly the differences between you and the Nadejda character you created.) Did you happen to adopt the name “Nadejda” from anyone or anywhere?

KASSABOVA: My middle name is Nikolova—but I never use it, and it has no relevance to Nadejda (which incidentally means hope, and it was chosen deliberately in the novel, where there is quite a lot of hopelessness and loss).

CHEN: When did you start learning English? Did you happen to receive any education in English when you were in Bulgaria? Or did you only start right from the beginning after arriving England in your late teens?
KASSABOVA: I had virtually no English when I left Bulgaria in 1990, aged 16, and started learning it almost from scratch when I arrived in England.

CHEN: It seems that you are the only person in your family who has embarked on artistic/literary work, while your parents and younger sister specialise in computer science. From whom in your family did you inherit the talents in arts and languages?

KASSABOVA: There is actually a line of artistic aspiration in our family, on both sides. My grandmother, for example, was a radio journalist in Sofia and wrote poetry and radio plays. But I think the main early artistic influence for me was my piano teacher who showed me an alternative sensibility to the one in our family. I was always an avid reader, but it helped that there were always tons of book in our home.

CHEN: In the interview during The Poetics of Exile Conference (2003), you mentioned that you read a lot of poetry since you were little. Who were the poets and what kind of poems? What was the title of the first poem you wrote (about the train station and farewells) when you were little? Did you happen to publish it anywhere, or would it be possible to provide me with the poem in English translation?

KASSABOVA: I have copies of these early poems (though not the first one about railway stations, which was terrible anyway!), but I do not feel that I can share them with anyone. I had a few poems published in a literary magazine in Sofia, called *Mother Tongue*, when I was 15-16. Then we emigrated and I stopped writing for a long time because I had no language.

CHEN: Also from the interview during The Poetics of Exile Conference (2003), you mentioned that you were a member of a young writer’s club in Bulgaria. What was the name of the club and how did it assist you on writing? And the literary journal (English translated as “Mother Tongue”) where you published your early works in Bulgarian, do they tend to publish any specific kind of works?

KASSABOVA: Please see above. *Mother Tongue* was a well-established literary magazine for young adults, and they published all sorts of things—essays, poetry, fiction. I think they are still going. The magazine also worked as a kind of literary club, which organised meetings with writers (some were anti-establishment) and fellow young literary nerds.

CHEN: How many years did you study in the French Lycée in Bulgaria?

KASSABOVA: 3 years.
CHEN: When did you teach at the school in Marseille, AUT, and the University of Auckland? (specific years, semesters, names of the courses, etc.)

KASSABOVA:
1997-1998 Marseille, as an English language assistant
2000-2003 Auckland University of Technology, ESOL and Business ESOL/ NZ Literature
2003-2004 University of Auckland, Creative Writing

CHEN: When was your first return to Bulgaria after starting your life as a resident in New Zealand?

KASSABOVA: In 1998, almost 6 years after emigrating. I have visited more often ever since. At the moment, I go to Bulgaria every year or every second year—it is much easier from the UK of course.

CHEN: When did you start living in the UK? Why did you choose there?

KASSABOVA: In 2004. If you would like to read an amusing story about this, go to my website and find the article, “Army Wife” (published in *Metro*). You will find out why.

CHEN: What kind of books do you like? Do you have any favourite books or favourite writers? In what ways do they have influences on your writing?

KASSABOVA: Influences probably came quite early, before I was a writer, and before I knew any English. As a child and young adult in Sofia, I read a lot of Bulgarian and Russian authors, as well as translated fiction by Jack London, classics such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and French authors such as Camus and Sartre. I also read a lot of science fiction (*The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, Isaac Asimov, H.G. Wells).

These days I read quite omnivorously—mainly fiction and travel writing, but also biographies and essays. Among my favourite writers are Graham Greene, Pico Iyer, Clive James, Lloyd Jones (NZ), Lucius Shepard (US). I am drawn to writers who explore in radical ways different geographic, cultural and psychological worlds, and all of the above writers share this quality. It is also what I aspire to in my own writing, but I am still very much a beginner.
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