

■ A Study of the Prose of Choong Yee Voon (Zhong Yiwen): A Case of a Malaysian Chinese Writer in Taiwan

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Abstract

Described as an “all-conquering” contestant in major Taiwanese literary award competitions for Taiwanese writers, Choong Yee Voon (1969-) presents an interesting case of a Malaysian Chinese immigrant writer in Taiwan, as she finds her foothold in a foreign land and wins the hearts of Taiwanese readers and the literary scene alike. While good looks and immense literary talents certainly contribute to her popularity, this paper investigates why is it that many other Malaysian Chinese writers see themselves as being discriminated against as facing discrimination in the Taiwanese literary scene due to their foreign nationality, while Choong, on the contrary, is embraced

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by readers and indigenous writers alike. This paper will show that Choong's urge to utilize her multi-layered individual identity to transcend nationality shows her desire to not only blend into the Taiwanese literary scene, but also to maintain her roots in Malaysia, and to become part of the international writing scene.

Keywords: Choong Yee Voon, Zhong Yiwen, Malaysia Chinese literature, prose, Taiwanese literature, Malaysian writers in Taiwan

Introduction

In 1979, Li Yongping, a Malaysian writer based in Taiwan, won the prestigious Taiwan United Daily Novel Award. This caused a stir in the Taiwan literary scene as it was the first time that an overseas Chinese (*huaqiao* 華僑), rather than a native Taiwanese, won the first prize in this award, one of the two most recognized literary competitions in Taiwan. In fact, as early as 1967, another Chinese Malaysian Chinese writer, Lin Lu, was awarded the prize of Outstanding Young Poet in Taiwan. Later, other writers such as Zhang Guixing, Pan Yutong, and Shang Wanyun continued to win writing competitions in Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s. This winning trend by Malaysian Chinese in the Taiwanese literary scene escalated in the 1990s. From 1995 to 1999, with the exception of 1998, Malaysian writers such as Huang Jinshu, Li Zishu, Choong Yee Voon, and Chen Dawei attained literary recognition by winning the top prizes in numerous Taiwanese literary awards.

The presence and dominance of Malaysian Chinese writers in Taiwan (*liutai Mahua zuojia* 旅台馬華作家) did not go unnoticed. After all, these writers have come from a country where the national language is Malay, yet they have managed to outshine their Taiwanese counterparts in Chinese literary competitions. These Malaysian writers had mostly left their country to pursue tertiary studies in Taiwan. Some returned to Malaysia immediately after their studies, while a number of them stayed on and settled down in Taiwan.

Described as an “all-conquering” contestant in major Taiwanese literary award competitions by Taiwanese writer Jiaotong [pseudonym of Ye Zhenfu], Choong Yee Voon (1969-) presents an interesting case of Malaysian Chinese immigrant writer in Taiwan, as she finds her foothold in a foreign land and wins the hearts of Taiwanese readers and the literary scene alike.

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Born in Kampar, a small town in Perak, Malaysia, Zhong spent her childhood among a palm oil tree orchard. Educated in Chinese independent high schools (*Duzhong* 獨中) in Malaysia, Choong built up a strong foundation in the Chinese language when young and was provided with an environment conducive for literary pursuits. Like most of the other Malaysian Chinese students in Taiwan (*Mahua liutai sheng* 馬華留台生) who were unable to progress in their higher education due to the pro-Malay educational system at home, Choong headed for Taiwan which offered an open educational system that recognized her academic qualifications.

Choong went to Taiwan for her undergraduate studies in the late 1980s. After obtaining her BA in Chinese Studies at National Taiwan Normal University in 1992, she proceeded to pursue her Masters and Doctorate degrees in the same university. Currently, she is a professor and Head of Department in Yuan-Ze University in Taoyuan teaching Chinese literature. Choong and her husband Chan Tah Wei (Chen Dawei), a fellow award-winning Malaysian Chinese writer who is also a professor teaching Chinese literature in National Taipei University, have attained the status of celebrity writers with their good looks and outstanding talents. While looks and talents certainly contribute to her popularity, why is it that many other Malaysian Chinese writers see themselves facing discrimination in the Taiwanese literary scene due to their foreign nationality while Choong, on the contrary, is embraced by readers and indigenous writers alike?

Shortcut to Fame—the Literary Award Route

Choong's first prose collection, *The River Banquet* (*Heyan* 河宴), was published in Taiwan in 1995 when she was pursuing her Master's degree. Though the book caught the attention of the Taiwanese when it was awarded the Golden Globe Award for books by the Taiwan Ministry of Information in the same year, it was 1997 that put her into the limelight when she simultaneously topped Taiwan's two most prestigious literary awards—the Taiwan Times Literary Award and the Taiwan United Daily Literary Award. In fact, from 1991 to 2001, Choong won a long scintillating list of literary awards in Taiwan.

Following her success in literary contests, Choong's second prose collection *Hooking Sleep* (*Chuidiao Shuimian* 垂釣睡眠) was published a year later in 1998. Nearly a quarter of the stories collected in *The River Banquet* and *Hooking Sleep* were award-winning pieces. Three other popular prose collections followed rapidly, *From What I Heard* (*Tingshuo* 聽說, 2000), *I and the Cosmo I Raised* (*Wo he wo huanyang de yuzhou* 我和我養的宇宙, 2002) and *Floating Study Room* (*Piaofu shufang* 漂浮書房, 2005). *From what I heard* clinched the Golden Globe Award for her for the second time.

The recognition of the importance of what Pierre Bourdieu calls, in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, economic capital, that is the command over economic resources, such as cash, assets, and sales, which in Choong's case is the value of her works after she won awards, should not be underestimated. I would argue that this is a strategy Choong utilized to gain a foothold in the Taiwanese literary arena.

As in other parts of the world, gaining literary awards is a shortcut to fame in the Taiwanese literary scene. For newcomers, getting their works published in major newspapers like the *Taiwan Times* and *Taiwan United Daily* is very difficult and the “easier” way is to win the literary awards of these two papers. Many young writers in Taiwan simply produce an amount of work to take part in various literary competitions, “as if the only objective of literary creation is to win awards” (Jiaotong 4).

While Choong is a prolific writer who publishes extensively besides taking part in literary awards and thus does not fit the bill of the typical competition-goer which Jiaotong describes, one can see from her winning entries that she knows the “modus operandi” of how to stand out in a literary competition. Her winning works cleverly appeal to the judges, subscribing to what the latter are looking for in winning entries.

1. *Nanyang secai*

One of the most palpable traits of Choong’s earlier works is her portrayal of Southeast Asian characteristics, or what is commonly known as *Nanyang secai* (colours or characteristics of Southeast Asia). These works are based on Malaysian historical and geographical settings with Southeast Asian characters (such as Indian women and Malay villagers) and characteristics (such as rainforests and tropical fruits).

In “Teahouse” (*Chalou* 茶樓), Choong recollects her childhood experience in the marketplace-like teahouse with her grandfather. She uses the Malaysian colloquial of “kopi-o” (咖啡島) for black coffee, makes fun of the vulgar language used by a Cantonese-speaking “old uncle,” and creates a picture of a teahouse daily operation that is familiar to the tropical country but refreshing to the reader from Taipei. These images include the waiter, who is always clad in a white singlet with a towel tucked round his neck, speaks in heavy Cantonese-accented Mandarin, and is tanned like an “Indian boy” (*yindu zai* 印度仔); the rising steam of boiling water and hot *dim sum*; the floating chrysanthemum in the pot of hot tea; faces of old men hiding behind different local Chinese newspapers, and, once in a while, one face popping out to greet a friend with good morning; the debates among loud-speaking old men about daily life and how government policies affect people’s lives.

This amalgamation of exotic elements, which includes languages, images, and odours, represents the “*nanyang*” characteristics and creates a picture that is distant yet familiar to the Taiwanese. It is familiar yet estranged for two reasons: firstly, it is basically a Chinese setting but with a mixture of other

dialects and races. Secondly, this reminds the Taiwanese reader of the fact that Taiwan, like most Southeast Asian countries, has been colonized before. While a teahouse, *dimsum*, and chrysanthemum tea are typical Chinese things, these are mixed together with “kopi-o” (a Malay word) and a Chinese who can be as an Indian. This integration is a product of British colonization and an open door policy, which attracted Chinese and Indians to the Malacca Straits; these groups settled among and influenced each other’s cultures. This was not unlike Taiwan, which was colonized by Japan for fifty years, and whose Japanese influence can be clearly felt in its human and physical characteristics, such as the dominance of *tatami* rooms in houses, the abundance of banana trees, and the commonly used Japanese terms like *obasan* (old auntie) and *ojisan* (old uncle).

In “Tropical Rainforest, the crawl of civilization” (*Manglin, wenming de paxing* 莽林，文明的爬行), a work that won her the China Airlines Travel Literary Award, Choong presents a picture of the Malaysian tribal life. The piece relates the story of a Taipei urbanite who goes into the deep forest of Kerating (a tribal area in Malaysia) with her rugged friend, Noah. In it, she describes the violent scenes of “snake killing” and “snake cooking,” and finally the “snake banquet” that follows. Later, the protagonist starts to feel uneasy when she thinks of how the snake has become part of her as she has devoured it and hence it temporarily ties her to the land that produces the snake. The Snake, a definitive symbol or totem of a tribal culture and lifestyle, is an example of Choong’s *nanyang secai*. Moreover, the fact that the snakes roam the Kerating jungles and are captured, slaughtered and cooked by primitive methods differentiates the entire experience from that of the snake-eating in Huaxi Street of Taipei [(in)famous for its exotic foods] and the description of snake-eating during the periods of hunger in Cultural Revolutionary China detailed in A Cheng’s “Chess King.” The Taipei urbanite experiences a whole spectrum of exotic *nanyang secai* by her descriptions of viewing, tasting, and digesting the snake.

It should be pointed out that Choong’s use of the word “civilization” in the prose is very interesting. The native in the tropical rainforest tells the urbanite that he is bringing her to a world of “civilization,” hinting that the city is not a civilized place as one thinks. Hence, in a way, while the exotic touch easily captures the heart of the readers, it also serves to set the readers thinking of the conditions of life in Taipei, which is infamous for its pollution and social chaos.

While portraying *nanyang secai* in her works adds to its appeal to readers, Choong realizes that the use of it is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the portrayal of exotic images of her native land is refreshing to Taiwanese

and serves as an important resource she relies on in her early literary career. On the other hand, it has its limitations, especially in the works when protectionism prevails—that is, when protecting and awarding native talents take precedence for the judges in Taiwanese literary awards.

An experienced literary award competitor knows that different competitions have different preferences or even politics. While some judges of one contest may favour foreign essence, others might look out for a local essence that portrays an indigenous culture.

As a matter of fact, Choong's works that reflect heavy *nanyang secai* did not win the top prizes in Taiwan literary competitions. Works like "A Possible Map" (*Keneng de ditu* 可能的地圖), "Gone through together" (*Yitong zouguo* 一同走過) and "Travel notes in an island" (*Daoyu jishi* 島嶼紀事), which all contained heavy *nanyang secai*, won prizes in Malaysian, but not Taiwanese, literary competitions, and "Tropical Rainforest, the crawl of civilization" only won a merit award in a Taiwanese literary competition.

2. Rhetoric and Imagery

Choong's two most notable winning pieces are "Hooking sleep" and "Declaring war on time" (*Gei shijian de zhantie* 給時間的戰帖). The former is a personal account of insomnia and the latter is about learning Chinese calligraphy from an old neighbour. They are both without any trace of *nanyang secai*. What stands out instead is the skillful use of rhetoric and images, a powerful "cultural capital" she possesses.

In Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about the structure of the literary field, "cultural capital" refers to the "acquisition of knowledge and skills that can result in lucrative positions within any given field (Larson 178). In Choong's case, her good grasp of the Chinese language and deep understanding of culture through her Malaysian and Taiwanese education are valuable "cultural capital."

I shall use "Hooking sleep" and "Declaring war on time" to analyse Choong's skillful utilisation of rhetoric and imagery in her works. "Hooking sleep" is a simple essay about insomnia and how "I" try to "coax" sleep to return each night but in vain. The critic Chen Wanyi compares this with a Japanese Haiku about fighting off houseflies, which is trivial but touching, and changes the readers's perspective about looking at certain things (44). The power of the essay lies in Choong's clever use of personification. She describes sleep as a "bad child who abandoned his home or lost his way" and finally "returns like a tired bird" (*juanniao zhifan*). She uses an abundance of unconventional metaphors and witty linguistic maneuvers, which Chen describes as "linguistic flavour"

(*yuqu* 語趣) (44). Such linguistic flavour is apparent right from the beginning of the essay: “Someone has definitely put a curse, abducting my sleep who has never once run away” (Choong, *Hooking Sleep* 33). “Curse” instills a sense of mystique, while “abducting” suggests a sense of adventure—both of which create a powerful and entirely fresh perspective to look at the everyday topic “sleep,” which readers may think they are so familiar with. As such, Taiwanese doyen poet Yu Guangzhong describes Choong’s writing style as a pelota, bouncing between the imaginary and the real. Such imaginary/real dialectics can be seen in Choong’s constant and frequent vacillation between her actual description of the sleeping situation and her imagination of her “sleeping fantasy” in “Hooking Sleep.”

Furthermore, instead of writing that she has insomnia, she writes that sleep has abandoned her and it is impossible to catch it back. This, in fact, is the technique of personification which Choong used more abundantly after the success of this essay. Not only does she simply personify “sleep,” she injects a sense of adventure, character, and even emotions into “sleeps”:

At this hour, millions of “sleeps” that have wandered off have already retired to where they belong, with mine as the only exception, nobody knows where it has gone. It has probably lost its way, or has landed in somebody else’s dreamland mistakenly, taking root and germinating there and forgetting its way home. (*Hooking Sleep* 34)

Besides innovative personification [compared to others who may perhaps only superficially and conventionally personify sleep as Zhou Gong (Prime Minister Zhou)], the metaphors and similes Choong uses are above all expectations and force the readers to agree in surprise, sometimes even in disbelief. Taiwanese writer Feng Xinzi compares Choong to Eileen Chang, commending Choong as a master at using imagery and mimesis, depicting life, and analysing emotions (He). While describing how insomnia has caused her to lose concentration and hurt herself carelessly, Choong blames sleep for abandoning her:

It uses such methods that abrade one’s temper and hurt one’s body to show me “colours,” very similar to a lover who constantly hurts you and enjoys doing it. However, a lover will leave you for a reason, and now I am abandoned without any reason at all. (He 35)

In drawing parallels between the intimacy of a person with his/her “sleep” and the love/hate relationship of lovers, Choong manages to give the intangible “sleep” a human face—that of a lover who one loves and hates at the same time—and an emotional aspect that is complex even by human standards—an enjoyment of cruelty.

In “Declaring war on time,” the protagonist gradually discovers that his neighbour, the old calligrapher, is desperately trying to fight the changing of

times by practicing calligraphy. One of the reasons this simple story touches the heart of the judges is that it taps on the survival of a traditional Chinese art—and the cultural resistance to modernisation. The rhetoric and imagery used is powerful. She injects life into the old man's calligraphy:

This life of practicing calligraphy infatuatedly as if practicing martial arts has fed the Yan Zhenqing-styled calligraphy to become sturdier and sturdier. The characters, having absorbed a human's energy, look moist and glossy, and are so dignified and imposing, they can almost dash towards the battlefield and charge forward. (Choong, *Hooking Sleep* 120)

The simile of equating calligraphy, which is traditionally considered “of a quiet nature” (*jing* 靜) and “scholarly” (*wen* 文), to the “motion-related” (*dong* 動) and “military-related” (*wu* 武) of martial arts not only allows the “force” (*li* 力) in the dormant calligraphy to be represented visually, but also gives life to each and every character, as if each character is a soldier with different weapons and martial arts (like the different strokes of a character).

As time passes and age catches up, “I” realizes a change in the old man's calligraphy:

In the beginning, the calligraphy is steady and fixed like a mountain, gradually the characters seem to have caught a cold, trembling and shaking slightly, yet still put on a front as if nothing has happened. There is no trace that the cold has ever fully recovered. The handwriting becoming shaky and shakier with each letter I receive. It is apparent that the state of illness is not favourable. (Choong, *Hooking Sleep* 121)

While the utilisation of a mountain image as the simile for a steady and fixed entity may be common, the metaphor of catching a cold is certainly a surprising twist, which is almost playful, but such playfulness is typical of the attractiveness of Choong's linguistic flavour.

Such rhetoric and imagery forms the essence or point of interest in every single line of Choong's prose, and as a whole, the entire piece becomes a summation of brilliance of individual lines, all serving a common theme, such as insomnia or resisting the passing of time. To Choong, a piece of writing is just like a magnificently themed gallery, filled with exuberant imaginative individual exhibits that are both dazzling on their own and serve the larger purpose of contributing to the overarching exhibition theme.

Molding a “Writer Figure”

Many of Choong's entries in literary competitions in the past dealt with

the larger things in life such as life and death and cultural survival, and at times she linked her works to historical issues, such as China's modernization. "Hooking sleep," is an exception as it can be described as highly, evenly completely, individualistic and concerns mainly (perhaps only) personal life. It is highly likely that this prize prompted Choong to move towards a different style of writing: her prose that was published in newspapers at the same time and literary magazines afterwards are more and more micro and individualistic in nature.

Choong's works in *I and the Cosmos I Raised* are typical of this nature. As the title implies, the themes of the works are all about "I"—her personal accounts and experiences with cars, quilts, her pet cat, Chinese medicines, and so on. In fact, the "I" in the English title even comes before the "Cosmos," which I believe may not be due to a grammatical error but her (perhaps subconscious) desire to emphasize herself as the centre and precondition of her life.

Generally speaking, in the pieces in this book, Choong seems to bare herself in front of her readers, exposing all her daily doings, but she cleverly selects what she wants her readers to see—faces of her which may have minor defects, but do not in anyway tarnish her overall good image. As such, she engages her readers to indulge in voyeurism, satisfying their desire to peep into the life of a writer. The illustrations and pictures used in this book are photographs of Choong herself and her possessions, such as her pet, her car, and her wedding photograph. The cover of the book is an artistically processed and enlarged photograph of the side view of her fine-looking face. These personal elements contribute to the packaging of a book which speaks strongly of the "writer figure" Choong. As she uses her personal details, she is strongly manipulating how the book portrays her.

Besides the packaging and illustrations, Choong is extremely masterful in creating "city legends" (*dushi chuanqi*) in her works. For instance, ordinary private possessions and personal space such as her hair, plants, and pets are transformed into enchanting subjects. She converts a monotonous urban life into subjects of gusto. In fact, her works can very well change the ways in which the readers view city life as she attempts to mold the city via her personal life and interpretation of her experience in the city. She can also be said to be following the inward-looking trend in Taiwanese literary circles. As pointed out by the Taiwanese writer Zhang Xiaofeng, since the 1990s, prose writers have been inclined towards individual thoughts, and the zeal for nation and politics has reduced and has been replaced by individualist thinking and dialogue with the world (National Donghua University Digital Cultural Centre). In fact, Choong's prose is not too dissimilar to Zhang's, who also writes about personal space in Taipei, but while Zhang's fondness for her possessions, such as an old

haversack or a maternity vest, is generated out of a more universal human nature of reminiscing the past. Choong's addiction to her possession, which is a kind of fetishism, brings out her personality and her way of life that is intriguing for readers.

"Bosom Quilt" (*HuaiBei* 懷被) is about the author's affection for her old quilt. However, Choong does not write about her quilt alone. She begins by tracing back to the day when she first arrived in Taipei and, being brought up in a tropical country, experienced the coldness of autumn for the first time. Choong, then new to the city, travelled several hours just to get a new quilt, not knowing that there was a shop selling quilts just around the corner from her hostel. Gradually, her affection for her quilt grew as she crawled under it each night for warmth while writing her letters home. Throughout the essay, she portrays an image of a young and poor overseas student in Taiwan that easily captures readers' hearts.

While Choong furnishes readers with details of her quilt, she is actually relating an intimate relationship with her quilt, as if it is her lover. In fact, more than her quilt, she is constructing and molding her own image as a sensitive cat-lover and a writer who indulges in reminiscence:

"By quilt, I actually include the quilt cover as well. My only quilt cover is just like my quilt, which has been used for six to seven years. I am not acting poor, but it is merely a matter of habit. I am used to the warmth of worn-down stuff, and also, the smiles of the one hundred cats on my quilt cover . . . Just thinking of the hundred cats sending me to my dreamland will lighten my spirits. Before I sleep, I will cuddle the one hundred cats and at the same time cuddled by them, and then I will bury my head into the quilt, take several deep breath, oh! The familiar smell of the quilt makes me feel that concrete felicity is indeed gentle and genial. (Choong, *I and the Cosmo I Raised* 74)

Choong, in a way, is similar to Eileen Chang in the 1930s: both enjoy being a writer in the limelight and at the same time manage their life to fit that of a writer. When Choong discloses the design of her quilt cover, she is candidly unveiling her personal life (although it is unknown whether this is made up or not) and placing herself and her personal life (perhaps imagined) in the limelight. I would think that, in fact, she is deliberately highlighting, even molding an interesting writer's image—such that anything and everything can be interesting in her mundane life—so as to fully captivate her readers.

For instance, she transforms the dreadful experience of medicine-taking into a fascinating experience in "Medicine Addiction" (*Yaoyin* 藥癮):

Whenever I go out, I will always bring along a "baoteping" (plastic bottle). Be it an empty bottle of mineral water or other beverages, be it flat or rounded in shape. I will pour in various types of home-made beverages, as replacement for plain water.

Therefore, although the bottle may read grape juice, what I drink from it is actually red date tea. (144)

Later in the essay, Choong continues to amuse the readers by describing, self-mockingly, how she goes through acupuncture and painful massage, linking medical terms to making fun of elixir-obsessed Wei-Jin scholars, as well as comparing and contrasting the old and young generations' views on Chinese medicine. In other words, Choong turns an undesirable condition (her debility) into something intriguing, which in turns transforms an undesirable image into one that is not only acceptable but almost amusingly desirable. For is it not that the most frail and delicate of talented beauties (*cainü* 才女) in the past and in literary texts, like Lin Daiyu and Xi Shi, are the ones that are most desirable?

In her prose, Choong presents a clear image of herself as a cat-lover (for instance, she writes several stories on her pet cat, named "Little School Girl"), an adroit driver who maneuvers her way vigorously in traffic-congested Taipei, and a Taipei dweller who laughs at her own little obstacles in life. A reader has written in her online blog that she sees Choong as a legendary female, that is, someone who has her own room (which reminds one of Virginia Woolf) and life, and who badgers with her hair or socks, or finds loads of excuses for having insomnia, and so on.¹

Choong, in a way, is performing what Peter Barry describes as a socialization role. According to Barry, "the representation of women in literature was felt to be one of the most important forms of 'socialization,' since it provided the role models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations" (122). These characteristics make Choong a writer who is easily accessible to the readers, yet with her literary talents, a figure whom they can look up to.

In the process of molding herself as a "writer figure," Choong also is going through the process of strongly establishing her own identity. While her first prose collection *The River Banquet* displays intense *nanyang secai*, it is interesting to note that never once does she mention the word "Malaysia" in any of her works in this collection. However, we see that in the later works of Choong, such as *Wild Peninsular* (2007), she begins to establish her identity as a Malaysian Chinese writer. The use of origin-related words like "Malaysia" and "tropical" increases noticeably, as she constantly reminds readers of her identity. In a 1997 essay, "Reverberate, across two latitudes" (*Huidang, zai liangge weidu zhijian* 回蕩，在兩個緯度之間), Choong compares Taipei, a city she has lived in for nine

¹ See http://seraphimdeblog.blogspot.sg/2014/03/blog-post_25.html (Accessed 15 Oct 2015).

years, to Kuala Lumpur, the city where she spent her earlier years prior to Taipei. She describes herself being molded by time and Taipei City:

. . . my fussy taste buds are no longer addicted to hot flavour, and my stomach can no longer stomach overly spicy stuff. However, don't ever think that they are tamed. As even the tamed tiger has latent beastliness. (Choong, *Hooking Sleep* 232)

If taste buds are a metaphor for identity, we can say that Choong is trying to embrace the best (flavour) of both worlds, adapting to her newly found Taiwanese identity. She is always ready to return to the Malaysian exoticness. More evidence of her desire to return to her identity roots can be seen in her confession after describing her frail body in "Medicine Addiction":

I have left Malaysia for such a long time, but my body is still subjected to the tropics; although they both use herbs, Chinese prescriptions never work as well for me as the secret prescriptions in the tropics. (*I and the Cosmo I Raised* 154)

Reading such honest words by Choong, which show her Malaysian traditional and cultural roots, we can clearly sense Choong's confidence in not only revealing her roots now (which she may have had reservations about earlier when submitting her works for competitions), as she has established her foothold in the Taiwan literary circle, and how she intelligently uses such roots to her advantage by creating interesting and alternative interpretation of her personal image in Taiwan. Her strategies of molding her ideal writer's image in her works are in fact more interesting as they include how she "molds" the city in her prose and how the city molds her as a writer.

Conclusion

In a conference held in 1999, Choong posited herself as a "world writer" (*shijie zuojia* 世界作家) and "purely a person who creates" (*danchun de chuangzuo zhe* 單純的創作者) vis-à-vis either a "Taiwanese writer" or a "Malaysian Chinese writer." In fact, her prose collection published in 1991 is titled *I and the Cosmos I raised* (italics mine), a clear indication of her determination to discard the identity of an immigrant writer in Taiwan and join the rank of international writers. More than the many other native writers who simply prefer to elevate themselves to the status of being a "world" writer, Choong's urge to utilize her multi-layered individual identity to transcend nationality shows her desire to not only blend into the Taiwanese literary field, but also to maintain her roots in Malaysia, and to become a figure on the international writing scene if possible. The foundation of her literary career in Taiwan is already stabilised by

the multiple literary prizes of her early days, and her cultural and economic capital will further allow her to conquer greater international markets like China, Singapore and overseas Chinese communities in the West.

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旅台馬華作家鐘怡雯之散文探析

摘 要

被譽為臺灣文學獎常勝軍的鐘怡雯(1969-)不僅成功立足異鄉，同時深得臺灣文壇與讀者的認可，確是一值得研究分析的旅台馬華作家個案。本文探討為何好些旅台馬華作家因國籍問題而難以融入臺灣文壇，然而鐘怡雯卻深受歡迎。外貌與文學創作才華固然對其知名度的提升有直接影響，更重要的是鐘怡雯善用個人複雜的身份與背景來超越國籍，既深入臺灣文學場域又根植大馬，同時又更進一步把文學觸鬚伸向國際文學舞臺。

關鍵字：鐘怡雯，馬華文學，散文，臺灣文學，旅台馬華作家