

The Fantastic/Exotic Uncanny: Kafka's and Borges's Labyrinthine Narrative of China

Jiayan Mi

ABSTRACT

High modernism always proclaims the absolute sovereignty of aesthetic purity for its artistic experimentalism. However, Western modernism, when looked at historically, is deeply rooted in its deathly enchantment with the "Orient" as a non-Western cultural Other.

This article seeks to problematize a modernist fetishized literary genre—"the fantastic"—by situating modernist writers' uncanny gaze of China in a post-colonial discursive context. To take up two modernist texts, Franz Kafka's "The Great Wall of China" and Jorge Luis Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths," this study is threefold: it first discusses Jackson's theoretical revision of the fantastic; it then demonstrates the fantastic narrativity of an exotic Other; and finally it reveals the fictive/deceptive ethics embedded in Kafka's and Borges's imagining of China and probes their ideological slippages.

Through analysis of how China was configured as an uncanny spectacle in these two short stories, I argue that the geopolitical spectacularization of an exotic China can not be said to legitimate the ideological sanctity of fantasy literature, but more often than not reflects a disturbing discourse of hegemony, dominance, and Orientalism. The reification of a cultural Other, through the process of narrative strategies of allegorization, mythologization, and labyrinthinization, insidiously reveals the authors' own cultural identity crisis and obsessive mentality.

KEY WORDS

Orientalism, labyrinthinization, postcoloniasism, Franz Kafka, the fantastic, Jorge Luis Borges, the exotic, the uncanny



Critics of literary genres maintain that “the fantastic” designates the world of the unspeakable, the unimaginable, the unfamiliar, and the foreignness of a cultural Other (Todorov *The Fantastic*; Jackson; Lynette; Cornwell); they argue that it serves as a legitimate expression of the human desire for exotic alterity. However, recent postcolonial theories have critically challenged fantasy literature as an ideologically neutral genre; in particular, they question its canonical sanctity as the source for exotic Otherness (Arac; Bongie; Rousseau; Todorov *Human Diversity*; Foster; Huggan). “The exotic” world fabricated by high modernists, according to postcolonial critics, always reflects a disturbing discourse of hegemony, dominance, and geopolitical spectacularization. To rethink the issues of “the exotic” created in fantasy literature, this essay will re-examine two canonical texts in modernist literature, Franz Kafka’s “The Great Wall of China” (1936/1946) and Jorge Luis Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths” (1964). The structure of this essay is threefold: it first discusses Jackson’s theory of the fantastic; it then demonstrates the fantastic narrativity of an exotic Other; and finally it reveals the fictive/deceptive ethics embedded in Kafka’s and Borges’s imagining of a cultural Other and probes their ideological slippages.

I. The Fantastic: Narrative of Otherness and Absence

In his trail-blazing work on “the fantastic”, Todorov offers a structural analysis of this genre. He defines the fantastic as designating the time of uncertainty between the imaginary and the real, a designation that occurs in three formal activities: the verbal, the

syntactic and the semantic. What yields “the fantastic effect” in literature, according to Todorov, is the “possibility of the hesitation” created by the reader, the narrative, and the character. The core argument by which Todorov seeks to define the fantastic is as follows:

The fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader’s role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work. . . . Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as “poetic” interpretations. (33)

As the self and the other are the two most significant themes in fantasy literature, Todorov undertakes a specific discussion of them. For Todorov, the self is the limit of vision that operates in the system of “perception-consciousness;” the other is the expression of desire that transgresses the limit of the perception-consciousness and is the narrative of the “as-if” of the supernatural figuration; thus, the other signifies the system of “unconscious-impulses,” that is, the unreal structure of the unconscious (149). The confrontation of the self with the world one constructs does not need to name an intermediary. The other refers precisely to that intermediary, which leads to the construction of the third relation. Thus, Todorov points out that the thematic discourse of the fantastic serves to explore the “asymmetrical” oppositions between the self and the other, the “I” and the “non-I” and the *I* and the *thou*. Todorov finally concludes that “the *self* is present in the *other*, but not conversely” (155; italics original).

Todorov’s radical statement has contributed significantly to the discursive formation of “the Other” in the emerging realm of the fantastic. However, because of the intimate relation of the self and the other to the psychological area, Todorov, from a structural, formalist

perspective, warns that literary studies should not become trapped within the confines of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and its tendency to oversimplify, mechanize and reduce the riches and complexity of the fantastic literature (147–52). He claims that literature should not be used as a means of penetrating the author's psyche or revealing her/his psychological symptoms, nor should it be used to represent any *a priori* social condition as historical.

It is precisely upon the basis of this rejection of Freudian theory/method that Rosemary Jackson launches her critique and revision of Todorov in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981). Jackson identifies two shortcomings in Todorov's approach to the fantastic: first, his refusal of Freudian theory and method, which she considers is his "major blind-spot" (6); and secondly, his indifference to the imaginary order of ideological desire imbedded in the "cultural formation" of the form of literary texts (*ibid.*)—an oversight that she regards as a causal consequence of Todorov's first blindspot. Using Todorov's exclusion of psychoanalysis in the study of the fantastic as her point of departure, Jackson directs her attention to this ignored area, *i.e.*, to the fantastic literature of desire and its ideological formation, and she subsequently attempts to "stretch Todorov's ideas into a more widely based cultural study of the fantastic" (7).

Initially, Jackson points out how, as a literature of desire, fantasy functions in two ways: it serves to "tell of, manifest or show desire" and to "expel desire" or, in its combinatory function, it represents "expression as manifestation and expulsion as expression" (3–4). According to Jackson, literary fantasy that introduces "unreality" to a dominant cultural order is generically opposed to the category of the "real." Thus, from her perspective, the fantastic explores "the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'" (*ibid.*). The fantastic, in its power of interrogating the nature of the "real," serves to "produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* 'new', absolutely 'other' and different" (8; *italics original*). To effect such anti-realist desires, the fantastic questions the truth, and shatters the known and the seen, but always identifies "the im-possible, the un-real, the nameless, shapeless,

unknown, invisible” (28). From Jackson’s point of view, these traditionally negative terms (“*negative relationality*”) are reversed in order to characterize the meanings of the modern fantastic.

Instead of following Todorov’s structural model, Jackson modifies his scheme. She suggests a definition of the fantastic as a “*mode*” from which different generic forms emerge. As she states, “the fantastic is a mode of writing which *enters a dialogue with the ‘real’ and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure*” (36; italics in original). Within this essential structure, the boundary between the fantastic and the “real” is completely blurred; the literary text moves toward its impossibility of verification of events and consequently constructs another kind of “fictional autonomy.” Jackson ascribes this particular mode which she terms “linguistic fantasies” to Kafka and Borges. To articulate further these linguistic “enclosures” that she holds to be “central to modern fantasy” (47), Jackson borrows linguistic analogies such as sign and meaning, signified and signifier. According to Jackson, a gap emerges between sign and meaning, signifier and signified in the modern fantastic. Because of this signifying gap or dissolution, language in the fantastic signifies nothing and affirms its “emptiness.” As a result, the signifier becomes a free-floating, pure utterance, and the signified meaning is “hollowed out,” indicating its proper “density” and “semiotic excess.” As the fantastic moves progressively towards the objectless density of its signifying activity, it becomes “a literature of separation, of discourse without an object” (40). In the context of the “semiotic excess” and “semantic vacuity” toward which the fantastic pushes, the signifying narrative can never arrive at an absolute reality.

Jackson adopts Sartre’s observations on the fantastic to argue that this “realm of non-signification” and “zero point of non-meaning” can be more effectively accounted for in the images of “the labyrinth of corridors, doors and staircases” and the “mirrors, glasses, reflections, portraits, and eyes” characteristic of vision and visibility. However, Jackson argues that these images are mere representations of the impossibility of desire; they are the worlds of the non-seen, the unseeable, and the unknown; worlds of absence, lack and void. As

Jackson points out, "that which is not seen, that which is not said, is not 'known'" in the fantastic narrative desire constructs a threat and an unnamable darkness; and it serves a subversive function with regard to the epistemological and metaphysical system of the dominant culture (49).

At the core of darkness a problematic relation between the "I" and the "non-I," the "I" and the "you," and the self and the other is structured through discourse and desire. The discourse that constitutes the world of the other in Western cultural narrative is as follows: the devil force, demonic, diabolic, magic, and supernatural; a stranger, a foreigner, an outsider, a deviant; the otherworldly, the bizarre, the barbaric and the eerie. As Jackson writes, "[b]lackness, night, darkness always surrounded this 'other,' this unseen presence, outside the forms and visible confines of the 'ordinary' and 'common'" (54). The fantastic narrative usually expresses itself as a cultural limit bordering upon the latent vacancy, emptiness, and absence of the infinite desire of the other. Jackson further distinguishes two kinds of myths in the modern fantastic. The first suggests that "the source of otherness, of threat, is in the *self*" and the second, that "fear originates in a source external to the subject" (58). In the former, self becomes other through self-alienation and self-metamorphosis; in the latter, otherness is developed through a fusion of self with something external, leading to the generation of a new order. This generic configuration of self and other is specific to the fantastic narrative and reconstructs the subject's desire for cultural formation.

When touching on the relation between literature and the fantastic, Todorov writes: "[T]he fantastic permits us to cross certain frontiers that are inaccessible so long as we have no recourse for it" (*The Fantastic* 158). In her pursuit, or, more precisely, in her revision of Todorov, Jackson, while maintaining that the fantastic narrative is the unconscious human desire for the impossible Other in its imaginary fictionality, concludes that "fantasy hollows out the 'real,' revealing its absence, its unspoken and its unseen" (180). With this scenario of the fantastic in mind, we can now turn to the fictional world of Kafka and Borges and examine their modes of fantastic specularization of an

exotic Other.

II. Kafka's "The Great Wall of China": Fearful Space of Claustrophobia

Franz Kafka's fiction reveals many of the qualities of the fantastic. Among them, his unfinished tale "The Great Wall of China" (*Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer*) offers perhaps the best example.¹ The story is a mnemonic employment (as shown in the syntactical composition of recalled memory in phrases such as "I can still remember quite well . . . ;" "I recall an incident in my youth;" "I can no longer remember . . . ;" "so it seems to me in recollection," etc.) that recaptures two significant events that occurred in the youth of the "I" who narrates the tale from China: the construction of the Great Wall and the delivery of the dying Emperor's message to His people. Structurally, this story is thus composed of two parts narrated by one first-person character, a scholar who has occupied himself with the "comparative history of race" ever since the building of the Great Wall, and who is now writing a "purely" historical essay as "an explanation of the system of piecemeal construction which goes farther than the one that contented people then" (159).

In the first part of the story, we are told of two details by the story-teller: that the purpose of building the wall is to protect the empire against the nomads in the north (although its final "accomplishment" turns out to be a wall with many gaps and holes) and that narrator was twenty when the building of the wall began and he had luckily passed the last examination of the lowest grade school. Regarding the failure to complete the wall as "a system of continuous construction," people in the early days showed little doubt about the cause of this imperfect architecture. However, the narrator discovers that the real purpose of building the wall is not protection against the Northern nomads, but a ploy of the omniscient "high command" to achieve national brotherhood. In opposition to the high command, the people's solidarity "deliberately chose the system of piecemeal construction" and "prevented a system of continuous construction"

(158). It was decided to mobilize the people's energies, to join forces for a single aim and to provide "a secure foundation for a Tower of Babel," thus, "[E]very fellow-countryman was a brother for whom one was building a wall of protection . . . Unity! Unity! Shoulder to shoulder, a ring of brothers, a current of blood no longer confined within the narrow circulation of one body, but sweetly rolling and yet ever returning throughout the endless leagues of China" (154).

The second part tells of a parable describing the delivery of the Emperor's "imperial message." From his deathbed, the Emperor wants to send his final message to his humble subjects. To fulfill this mission, he has commissioned a messenger, "a powerful, an indefatigable man" to whom he whispers the message. To deliver the Emperor's message to the farthest corner of the country, the messenger has to cross many places and many things on his way: through "the chambers of the innermost palace;" down the infinite stairs; out of thousands of courts and then to the outermost gates where the imperial capital—"the center of the world"—lies before him with its own refuse. Because of the vastness of the land and the endless multitudes of resistance supporters, all the efforts of the messenger to penetrate through this totally enclosed labyrinth are in vain. Exhausted and worn out, the messenger can never fight through these obstructing walls and blocks; and the Emperor's message will never reach "you," the humble lonely subject. But, as the narrator has finally realized: "you sit at your window when evening falls and dream it all true to you" (167). However, according to the observation of the narrator, although the Emperor is dead, and "totters and falls from his throne," "the Empire is immortal" (165). People in the land still revere the Emperor and show their faithfulness to him because the Emperor and Peking, the Empire, the village and China are "one, a cloud" (171). To further explore this connection would destroy the very ground on which people live. "To set about establishing a fundamental defect here would mean undermining not only our conscious, but, what is worse, our feet" (173). At the end of his tale, the narrator withdraws from his deeper inquiry into such risky questions.

From the scenario delineated above, it becomes apparent that two

narratives—the historical and the fictive—are juxtaposed. In the historical narrative, the building of the Great Wall is historically and geographically located while in the fictive narrative the delivery of the Emperor's message is a pure fictional configuration of the fantasy. Here, Kafka skillfully employs historical narrative to treat what is *de facto* the imaginary, that is, the marvelous or “the unreal as real” in the story (Brooke-Rose 51). To introduce the fantastic into the historical narrative, to inscribe an imaginary difference into the already known, is to replace/displace familiarity, *das heimlich* and certainty (Jackson 179). Thus in the historical narrative of the construction of the Great Wall, we can read an effect of the unknown identity, the fictive and the fantastic “unreality” that is at work throughout the entire story. Two moments of hesitation are evoked, sustained and ultimately unresolved in the process of the narrator's remembrance of what happens to him: the absolute ambiguity of the “high command” and the absolute mystery of the Emperor's message. To the reader as well as to the character in the tale (both the builders of the Great Wall and the narrator-scholar), the decrees of the “high command” are somewhat supernatural and beyond the rational explanation of “the laws of this same familiar world” (Todorov, *The Fantastic* 25). Regarding the “Imperial Message” delivered by the messenger, it is impossible for either the reader or the narrator to know the content because the Emperor passes his message to the messenger through “*whispering*.” This esoteric knowledge communicated only between the Emperor and the messenger has caused what the narrator has labeled “the universal uncertainty” (167). “Hopelessly” and “hopefully,” the desire to know the message persists throughout the land, and this might itself have been the ultimate obstacle in preventing the messenger from getting through the imperial capital.

What is even more essential to the fantastic narration of this story is Kafka's particular creation of a *portmanteau* space, namely, the use of multiple narrators with multiple structures within or behind the story. Through this portmanteau space, Kafka is able to inscribe the fantastic impulse within the mimetic impulse so that the fantastic affectivity is strongly experienced by both the reader and the character. As Jackson

points out, "fantasy re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbolic relation to the real" (20). This portmanteau structure may be encapsulated in terms of multiple characters, multiple story-levels and multiple, labyrinthine forms of space and time.

To proceed specifically, the fiction of "The Great Wall of China," written by Franz Kafka and bearing his signatory, is thus "as a matter of fact" a research essay of the narrator on his travels (159; 171) and consists of at least ten significant parables ("parable" signifying infinite detours of ultimate meaning), which suggest polyphonic, anonymous authors of non-verification. The first parable ("one of the legends") is about the building of the Great Wall whose final form is filled with holes and gaps; the second, a scholar who writes a popular book comparing the building of the wall to the construction of the Tower of Babel; the third, the "decrees of the high command"; the fourth, the cruel northern nomads; the fifth, the narrator's discovery of the virtues of the Chinese political institutions; the sixth, the Emperor's palace and his court; the seventh, the messenger; the eighth, the news of the dead Emperor; the ninth, how the rebels' "leaflet" is brought to the narrator's father's house by a beggar; the tenth, the story of a the villager's fidelity to the Emperor and Peking, and so forth. These parables are retold by many heterogeneous fictionalists: the first fabrication is of course Kafka-as-author; the second is the scholar-narrator of the tale; the third is the anonymous legend-maker of the wall, the "high command" and the messenger; the fourth is the writer of the book about the cruel northerners; the fifth is the scholar writing the book about the Tower of Babel; the sixth is the beggar who came to tell the news of the revolts . . . etc. etc. The story in the portmanteau space is always *re*-narrated and recaptured, each handed down to the other, one by one, by successive creators—like a relay race in which each runner always continues the process of tense mobility. Thus, the signifying finality is forever deferred, postponed, and deviated from until the ultimate dissolution of semantic meaning and the emergence of semiotic excess.

According to Jackson, one of the hallmarks of the modern

fantastic is the radical dissolution of the classic units of space and time. In the spatial landscape is the shift of perspective and vision; the hollow, empty world has replaced classical two dimensionality. Modern fantastic space has “narrowed down” into a labyrinthine enclosure. In the temporal world chronological time explodes, resulting in a suspension of time past, present and future. Calendar and clock time are dead or lost in an indefinite suspension. The intervals between episodes of time have substituted the “units, objects, and fixities” of the substantial category of time (46–48). In “The Great Wall of China,” the unfinished circle of the wall in which the people are forever trapped; the imperial palace of Peking; the narrator’s native village (“Here, I must confess, I can only speak once more for my native palace.”) and even the vast land of China itself are labyrinthine enclosures in space. Although the blocks, divisions, corners, numbers, sections, and points will never converge into a perfect wall, they themselves are “already aligned on an unlimited straight line” and contiguously territorialized (Deleuze 72–79). For the messenger, the Imperial Palace of Peking (its forever evasive circular spirals closing and opening behind him as he tries to cross them level by level and step by step) represents his eternal imprisonment. Endless layers of subterranean passages are constructed as a claustro-architectural hierarchy: the land is so vast, “Peking is only a dot in it, and the imperial palace less than a dot in it” (164). Messenger must cross infinite passages—the walls, the courts, the staircases, the throng, the palace, the capital, the center, the doors, the chambers, the fields, and the frontiers. These labyrinthine enclosures, for Kafka, have been located as a “negative transcendence,” manifesting the impossibility of spatial redemption (Jackson 162).

Temporal experience in this narrative configuration, although marked by temporal measures like now, the past, the present, 20 years, 50 years, or a dynasty, blurs into an obscure timelessness in which the fictive time is experienced by both the reader and the narrator. Laborers building the wall die generation by generation, yet the “high command” is always there; the Emperor is dead, but the empire is immortal. With this reworking of eventual time into the fantastic fictionality of non-being, an unknowable indeterminacy is inscribed that eventually

becomes a quest for the transparency of truth (as avid desire for the content of the imperial message and its final destination)—“Peking and its Emperor are one, a cloud, say, peacefully voyaging beneath the sun in the course of the ages” (171). Through this imagery of “obscure timelessness,” Kafka successfully produces a utopian timelessness, an imperceptible sense of change, and a self-contained, cloistered landscape of a life unaffected by external vicissitudes.

This portmanteau space—the multiplicity of characters, stories, and authors—and the radical shift of space-time in Kafka’s tale have together pushed the narrative of the wall towards semantic emptiness, semiotic excess, and the unreality of the absolute otherness. “Structural confusion,” writes Jackson, “increases the circularity of quests for meaning, as impossible attempts are made to defeat semantic evasion” (161). This non-signifying impulse of Kafka’s tale creates the most complexity of the fantastic narrative and anticipates the generic shift of the modern fantastic as well.

III. Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths”: Abysmal Site of Blindness

Borges’s works are always noted for their fantastic features. In this respect, his debt to Kafka is immense, and the influence of Kafka’s “The Great Wall of China” upon the formation of his fantastic world is particularly discernible (Irby xix). Borges develops many aspects of the Kafkaesque fantastic narrative and brings this particular genre to its modern maturity, by creating the literature of fantasy as fabulation, as meta-fiction embodied in its linguistic autonomy and self-reflexive, non-referential fictionality (Jackson 36; 164). This contribution to the modern fantastic has justified his aphorism that “every writer creates his [sic.] own precursors” (qtd in Maurois xi). Choosing “The Garden of Forking Paths” as the text of our analysis, I attempt to foreground some of the defining features of the modern fantastic as crystallized in Borges.

“*El jardín de senderos que se bifucan*” can be read as a war fiction

(about World War I), a spy story (about a secret struggle, a “duel” between a German and a British spy), or even a detective novel (about mystery, trapping, murdering, pursuing, decoding, arresting and executing). Like Kafka’s “The Great Wall of China,” Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths” is also a configuration of a mnemonic event (in terms of what occurs *post hoc*) that opens with a written (or *quoted*) statement by the Chinese spy-narrator Dr. Yu Tsun, a former professor of English born in Hai Feng in China (“having been a child in a symmetrical garden of Hai Feng” [20]) whose great-grandfather, Ts’ui Pen, was once the governor of Yennan (22). Dr. Yu Tsun served as a spy for the Germans during the First World War in England, and has now been arrested and will be condemned to death at the gallows. Thus, this story is in fact Dr. Yu Tsun’s confession in his death-cell.

At the beginning of the story, Yu Tsun has received the news of the arrest and death of his fellow spy Victor Runeberg. Yu Tsun realizes that British Intelligence agent Captain Richard Madden is rapidly approaching him and that he will encounter the same fate as Runeberg because he possesses the secret information of “the exact location of the British artillery park on the River Ancre” in Picardy, where the Germans are preparing to attack. Therefore Yu Tsun decides to flee (“*I must flee,*” he says to himself). But before his escape, he is irritated by the problem of how to transmit the secret name of the city “Albert” to his Chief in Berlin, since the normal lines of communication have been cut. As he is searching his room, an inspiration from the telephone book occurs to him: he could murder someone who shares the same name as the city. This murder case would then be published in the newspaper the next day along with both the names of the murdered victim and the murderer, thus offering his Chief (who is coincidentally a tireless reader of the *periodicos*) the clue necessary for deciphering the secret. With a plan so wisely fabricated, Yu Tsun starts to take action by killing the famous British sinologist Stephen Albert, who is living “in a suburb of Fenton, less than a half hour’s train ride away.” As he sits in the train leading to Albert’s residence, he suddenly catches the sight of Captain Madden running to the platform. A sense of trembling fear fills Yu Tsun.

Through the direction of the boys at Ashgrove station who tell him to “take this road to the left and at every crossroads turn again to your left,” Yu Tsun smoothly arrives before “a tall, rusty gate,” a pavilion of Chinese music and a garden of paper lanterns—the house of the sinologist Stephen Albert. It seems that the sinologist has anticipated his coming, so without hesitation, Yu Tsun is invited in. Then Yu Tsun and Albert share a long but esoteric conversation about Yu’s ancestor, Ts’ui Pen, who (as a learned Chinese master in astronomy and astrology as well as a famous poet and calligrapher) once composed a chaotic book and a contradictory maze in his thirteen years’ seclusion. In their dialogue, Albert tells Yu Tsun that he was a missionary in Tientsin before becoming a devoted sinologist, and through his study of “hundreds of manuscripts” left by Ts’ui Pen, he has corrected the errors, re-established “the primordial organization” and finally penetrated the mystery of that great work. The work constructed by Yu’s ancestor Ts’ui Pen is itself a labyrinth and its “enormous riddle” is *The Garden of Forking Paths* whose theme is all the possibilities of time. As the metaphysical speech of Albert draws to an end, Yu Tsun glimpses Captain Madden’s appearance in Albert’s garden; he takes out his revolver containing only one bullet and shoots Albert, who dies instantly. Madden breaks in and arrests Yu now awaiting a death sentence. As a result, Yu’s German chief in Berlin deciphers the message, and orders the bombing of the city “Albert” in which the British artillery park is located. Hence, Yu Tsun completes his mission and his plan succeeds.

Like Kafka’s tale, Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths” has a portmanteau structure in which a complex fictive/fantastic space is created. Calvino calls this particular narrative “hypernovel” (Calvino 126). The striking feature of this fiction lies in its author’s firm rejection of authorial authority and his continual detour from narrative finality; through the use of indirect voicing, quotation, borrowing and allusion, he interweaves successive stories that cross one another’s paths while infinitely bifurcating. At the very beginning of the story, we read from Liddell Hart’s *History of the World War I* the reason for the postponement of the British attack from the 24th of July, 1916 until the

morning of the 29th (namely, “torrential rains.”). Yet Captain Hart suggests that heavy rain is not the most significant cause of the delay. In addition to the climatic reason, Yu Tsun’s signed statement “throws an unsuspected light over the whole affair” (19). With Hart’s comment, the narrative turns to Yu Tsun’s prison confession and the path first bifurcates. Thus, in the first forking narrative, we actually read three bifurcations: the written history of World War I by Hart; Hart’s comment on the reason for the postponement of the attack, and Yu Tsun’s dictated statement.

Each bifurcation occasions another new forking path that leads to the intrusion of an alien world constructed by this linguistic autonomy. Consequently, historical reality as such is absolutely excluded from these endless forking paths of fantastic narration. A non-referential, purely fantastic world emerges, enclosing itself in the fictional totality of time. As a point of departure for bifurcation, the initial narrative reveals the confusion of time that results from the superimposition of the historical experience of time and the fictive one. The postponement of the attack creates a rupture in the historical narrative, which is finally filled in with the fictive narrative (Sturrock 191). With the quotation of Yu Tsun’s signed statement, the narrative forks into a purely fictional world (bearing in mind that the first two pages of the document are missing and Yu Tsun’s narration begins with “. . . and I,” revealing another gap and signaling a temporary departure from reality), and we consequently enter into a secondary world of mere duplication and copy.

Following the short itineraries of the spy-narrator, another forking path is reached: Yu Tsun finds the telephone book that contains the name of Stephen Albert, the sinologist, who shares the name of the ill-fated city. On the way to Albert’s house, the boys direct Yu Tsun to always turn left at every crossroads in an indirect voice (“Are you going to Dr. Stephen Albert’s house?”). Another bifurcation occurs. At Albert’s house, where the entire discussion is held, we encounter a series of bifurcations, namely, Albert’s story and his discovery that lead to Yu’s ancestor Ts’ui Pen’s great book *The Garden of Forking Paths*, which shares the same title as Borges’s fiction. By using the principle

of the bifurcation that unremittingly multiplies itself, new stories are thus created as the path of narrative turns each time. We as readers, like the pursuer Captain Madden, always travel in this labyrinthine world, lose ourselves and are sometimes quoted as traces of its infinite bifurcation in the passage of time. This forking narrative is both the trap that Borges has set for the reader as well as the salient feature of modern fantastic metafiction.

The forking narrative engendering the fantastic density of this story is also produced in its unfolding of a series of murders, or, in other words, the accidents of killing make possible the bifurcating narrative. The first victim is Yu Tsun's fellow spy Hans Rabener, alias Victor Runeberg, who is killed by Captain Madden. It is the death of Victor Runeberg that makes the narration of the entire event possible. The second victim is Yu Tsun's ancestor Ts'ui Pen who, after shutting himself up for years with the ambition of writing a great novel and constructing a labyrinth, is somehow suddenly murdered by "the hand of a stranger." Ts'ui Pen's death has made his work incomplete and incoherent, and his labyrinth has been lost ever since.

However, such incompleteness and incoherence brings in the sinologist Stephen Albert, who has finally penetrated the secret of the book, thus setting up the space of revelation for Yu Tsun. After revealing the discovery of Yu's ancestor's mystery in the book and the meaning of the labyrinth, Albert comes to the end of his life. He is shot to death by Yu Tsun. Albert's death helps Yu Tsun complete his mission—the bombing of the city Albert and the postponement of the British attack—but also anticipates Yu Tsun's destiny. Yu Tsun, killed by foreigners, becomes the fourth victim, and inaugurates the signed statement as the main line of the story. The "high mortality rate" of this story (Sturrock 190) is realized at the hands of "foreigners" and fortuitous incidents. This narrative of death-within-death serves a generative rather than a terminal function, i.e., a new narrative agent is born with each death, and in so doing demonstrates the desire for impossibility characteristic of the fantastic. Just like the forking narrative of the story-within-story, when each death takes place, the story bifurcates, continuously pushing the fantastic action towards the

zone of semantic vacuity and the zero-point of non-signification. Viewed in this light, quotation (the editor quotes Yu, who as a narrator quotes Albert, who in turn quotes Ts'ui Pen), bifurcation (the forking paths in the labyrinth multiply and proliferate), and the narration of death function to disrupt the linear progress of time and challenge the desire for finality. As we have seen above, emplotment, quotation, bifurcation and death are the dominant narrative forces in this story (Rimmon-Kenan 646), yet how can these narrative forces explode themselves? In other words, what elements materialize the fantastic desire and make the reader believe what occurs in this story? To answer this question, we need to discuss briefly the function of the gap (absence, void, omission and fragment) and three controlling images: the labyrinth, the encyclopedia and the circle, and their significance in the configuration of the fantastic.

The story "The Garden of Forking Paths" opens with the postponement of the British attack caused by the "torrential rain." This postponement of the planned action introduces into the historical narrative a gap, a void of meaning and a wound that will have to be filled in and cured by the fictional narrative. This is the first gap of vision that generates the narration of Yu Tsun's fictive experience. The second gap occurs with the editor's remark that "the first two pages of the document are missing"; thus Yu Tsun's signed statement begins in the form of ellipses: ". . . and I hung up the receiver." These two missing pages and the ellipses create a space of regressive imagination, a horizon of expectation for the readers to hesitate on and to participate in, an absent reality. They mark the borderline between the real and unreal, a fantastic marginality that always hovers around history and fiction. ". . ." is the very lack and otherness that the narrative desire strives for, and the conjunctive "and I" serves as a linking-point that bridges the self and the non-self, the "I" and the other. Formalistically, this ". . . and I" serves as a textual invitation that calls for intertextual interference and the transgression of the limit typical of modern fantastic narrative (Cornwell 157-58).

The third gap occurs when Yu Tsun, in an attempt to telephone his colleague Runeberg, speaks instead, in German, to his enemy Captain

Madden, which leads to Madden's pursuit and the end of Yu's life. This communication gap is brought about by chance (a kind of Freudian slip) when a new bifurcation of narrative occurs, functioning as the trajectory that foreshadows future events. The fourth gap is the incoherence and incompleteness left after Ts'ui Pen's sudden death, which leads to the reorganization conducted by Albert. The fragment of a letter by Ts'ui Pen that Albert has discovered offers him insight into the secret of the book and the maze, thus constituting the fifth gap.

This gap-within-a-gap narrative evokes the moment of occurrence that diverges from the continuity of temporal experience, hence producing a temporal experience of discontinuity from such zigzag chains of gaps in the story. As Ts'ui Pen's fragmentary letter states, "*I leave to the various futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths*" (25; italics in original). However, all the modes of the fantastic narratives—story-bifurcating-within-a-story, murder-within-a-murder, and gap-within-a-gap—which have made the story so complex and intricate, are altogether inherent in Borges's most important symbols of the labyrinth, the encyclopedia, and the circle (and also the mirror, the compass and the cone [Stark 1974: 47; Hussman 1990: 144; Faris 1988: 88–120]). Through these symbolic images, Borges forces modern readers not only to encounter "the labyrinths *in* the texts," but also to confront "the labyrinths *of* the text" (Faris 10). The latter refers to the situation in which the labyrinths of the fictions exactly match, or correspond to the labyrinths in the fictions and thus create a labyrinthine world of the fantastic, the imaginary and, significantly, a meta-fictional world.

In the story, the circle is comprised of the forking paths that lead Yu/Madden/the reader to the infinite, timeless labyrinth. The trajectory of the circular movement is irretrievable, repetitious, nonlinear and non-originary: the beginning is the end and the end the beginning, which constructs its own enclosed world into which the real can never intrude. As Yu Tsun gets off the train at Ashgrove (Borges's play on the word "ash-grove": a predetermined fatality for Yu Tsun), he "descended a few stone steps and started down the solitary road. It went downhill, slowly" (22); he then loses himself in "an unknown period of

time,” and “at the slope of the road” comes to the place where “the road descended and forked among the now confused meadows” (25); “the damp path zigzagged like those of my childhood” (24). This cyclical recurrence in time is also manifest in the images of “a tall, circular clock” at Albert’s house (24) and “a cyclic volume, a circular” book that Albert considers to be Ts’ui Pen’s incomplete work (25). A book as circular as time would have no beginning or ending. “A book whose last page,” remarks Albert, “was identical with the first, a book which had the possibility of constituting indefinitely” (24).

For Borges, the ideal book to reveal this temporary and linguistic circularity is the encyclopedia, a great Chinese encyclopedia that contains the universal contents of the *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* created in the story. In the fantastic vision of Borges, an encyclopedia represents the ultimate idealization of Everything, the accumulation of all kinds of possible entries, either compatible or self-contradictory, real or unreal, with no discrimination. An encyclopedia is the most fictional absolute structure, an infinite Babel that forms the world as a circular universal system.

After arriving in “the garden of forking paths,” Yu Tsun and Albert go to “a library of Eastern and Western books” in which Yu Tsun finds “bound in yellow silk several volumes of the Lost Encyclopedia, edited by the Third Emperor of the Luminous Dynasty but never printed” (24). Three levels of meaning can be discerned here: (1) this “Lost Encyclopedia” is the reality in which both Yu and Albert are anchored; (2) since the “Lost Encyclopedia” is edited by the Emperor but never printed, it is invented by Borges himself, a product of fictional unreality; and (3) since only several volumes of the “Lost Encyclopedia” remain, its confusion must be infinite, its chaos eternal, and even a temporary ordering of the system impossible. Therefore, the novel “The Garden of Forking Paths” is the symbol of infinite chaos, a labyrinthine design tantamount to the Lost Encyclopedia. “The world-as-labyrinth surrounds the book-as-labyrinth” (Faris 99). The chaos of the world stands for the rational disorder of the human world, indicating the failure of the desire of words (*les mots*) to represent things (*les choses*). Thus, Ts’ui Pen believes (so does Borges?) that to

write a book and to construct a maze are one and the same (25).

Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" culminates in the symbolic image of a labyrinth that dictates an understanding of time and history, fiction and the world. Thus, in the novel we witness Yu Tsun tracing the circular forking paths into different kinds of labyrinths: Ts'ui Pen's maze and his work; Albert's world and his discovery. The labyrinthine journey reveals to Yu Tsun many possibilities: "I thought of a labyrinth of labyrinths, of one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars" (23). For Borges, the key to this labyrinth is not space but time—"forking in time, not in space" (26). This labyrinthine time as a rejection of unicursal or linear time unfolds in its infinite bifurcation of all kinds of possibilities. Events take place simultaneously. "He [Ts'ui Pen] *creates*, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork" (ibid.). This fantastic challenge to actual time in history is best summarized in Albert's discovery of Ts'ui Pen's time-perception. As Albert says to Yu Tsun:

He [Ts'ui Pen] believed in an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times. This network of times which approach one another, forked, broke off, or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces all possibilities of time. We do not exist in the majority of these times; in some you exist, and not I; in others I, and not you; in others, both of us. In the present one, which a favorable fate has granted me, you have arrived at my house; in another, while crossing the garden, you found me dead; in still another, I utter these same words, but I am a mistake, a ghost. (28).

Each individual can experience only one potential time out of the multiplicity; the unknown existence of time is a labyrinth for each. Since labyrinthine time is so infinite and multicursal, any desire to attain its finality is impossible.

Borges invents this labyrinthine narrative to configure a new horizon of modern fantastic literature as a self-reflexive,

self-referential world. Linda Hutcheon calls this fantastic configuration “narcissistic narrative” (Hutcheon). The novel as labyrinth starts and ends in its own structures without involving any external agent of the real. The agency of its fictional narrative comes from its own textual tension; and the shift in its fictional events is provoked by its own textual density. The resonating echoes of textual oscillation constitute a self-sufficient fictional labyrinth just like Ts’ui Pen’s construction of the book and the maze. The bifurcating narrative paths like Yu Tsun’s itinerary, only lead the reader to nowhere and nothing. The labyrinth in Borges’s fictional world is an endless journey of death, initiation, mystery, chaos, and self-estrangement. In this invisible labyrinth of time and multiple narrative bifurcations, the conception of “reality” is completely inverted. According to Borges, “reality” is not found, but made. “Time,” Borges writes metaphysically, “is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river, it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, unfortunately, is real; I, unfortunately, am Borges” (*Labyrinths* 234). This might be the most classic motto of the fantastic in its modern crystallization.

In sum, Kafka’s “The Great Wall of China” and Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths” reveal a narrative rejection of signifying finality, a non-signification and semantic vacuity particular to the modern and postmodern fantastic. For most of the analysis above, I have followed Jackson’s conception of the modern fantastic as an exploration of the unsaid, the unseen, and the unknowable. I have demonstrated in Kafka’s and Borges’s stories the impossibility of the desire for the Other. In what follows, I will go beyond the formal aspects of the fantastic narrative to explore the ideological unconsciousness latent in these two stories.

IV. Labyrinthine Uncanny: the Prisonhouse of Ideological Unconscious

Jonathan Spence, a devoted sinologist renowned for his works on China, addressing the “extraordinary upsurge of works” set in China,

warns Western readers that works by Western authors such as Kafka and Borges can offer “little insight into China as a civilization” because, according to Spence, they are not really “*about* China,” they intend to “*use*” China to present feelings about “*other*” matters (*italics mine*). Spence writes: “China can also be a device, and a foil” (*Search* 387; *Chinese* 89–90). It is true that *Western* readers can hardly gain any accurate knowledge of China from these two stories, nor can they take the stories as a cartographic route to that territory. This is partly due to the fact that in the modern fantastic, the fictive referent or the narrative signified is always absent or “hollowed out.” Most significantly, this particular blindspot, I would argue, is produced by the ideology that operates within the fantastic narratives, namely, the ideological inscription of the major symbolic image of the labyrinth into the fantastic narration of the two stories—the labyrinthinization of a cultural/exotic Other.

According to Jackson, “fantasies are never ideologically ‘innocent’ texts” (122). They are expressions of unconscious desire, manifesting deeper cultural issues in certain social contexts in which the subject of the cultural order is constituted (62–63). To study the structural effects, the formal and thematic features of fantastic literature can reveal their ideological functions, or in Fredric Jameson’s terms, “the political unconscious” behind the fantastic narrative (1981: 142). It goes without saying that the China represented in these two stories has been created as a cultural “not-I,” as an unconscious “Other” and a cognitive “you.” The fictive configuration of China sets up a heterogeneous space of the Other.² By means of the superimposition of ethnic information upon the narrative of fantastic details about China, China has been *used* to develop both Kafka’s and Borges’s ideological desire for something different—be it mysterious, horrible, revelatory, or utopian. Briefly put, what is ideologically mediated in the representation of China in these two stories is the allegorization, mythologization and reification of its cultural/natural landscape.

In Kafka’s story, China becomes the political and psychological Other. On the political level, to build the wall is to construct national unity in spite of people’s sacrifice and ignorance. Even though the

Emperor is dead, people still show loyalty to Him because the empire is immortal. On the psychological level, human beings endeavor to build the wall in order to achieve spiritual perfection. But the wall will never achieve a perfection because each individual is part of the structure and has psychological “gaps and holes.” Likewise, the messenger can never get through the imperial labyrinth to fulfill his mission because the desire for the finality of truth is a delusional dream leading to nothing and nowhere. On the political level, Kafka distorts the truth of Chinese history through the *allegorization* of Chinese bureaucracy for his political unconscious of rebuilding a post-World War nation/Europe. As a result, the cruelty of the despotic Chinese bureaucratic system is *mythologized* into a conflictless utopia.

On the psychological level, Kafka excludes the possibility of understanding a cultural Other by claiming that the gaps and holes in the wall represent humanity’s immanent flaws that can never be perfected from the outside. In the imperial labyrinth, truth is just a delusional consciousness; thus the knowledge of China is the impossible, the unknowable, and the unreal. In Kafkaesque narrative, China (the Emperor, the Imperial sun, the sacred dragon, the Imperial Palace, and the Great Wall) is timeless and static. Change is rare because of the immortality of the empire, the people’s loyalty, and their self-contentedness. Stagnancy and stasis are virtues celebrated as the nature of Chinese history. To fantasize China as such a utopia of timelessness, stagnation, and primordial innocence, Kafka completes the projection of his desire for exotic ideals of certainty, stability, and order, a projection that reflects his personal and national yearning for moral and spiritual reconstruction (“Peking and its Emperor are one, a cloud, say, peacefully voyaging beneath the sun in the course of the ages” [171]) then taking place on the European continent.

What is ideologically registered in Kafka’s story is also true in Borges. In addition to the allegorization and mythologization of China as a labyrinthine garden (“an ivory labyrinth” [25]), a hegemonic symbol shared by both Kafka and Borges, what is more specific to Borges’s fantastic configuration of China is his ideological re-enactment of the ethnic/racial identity represented by the Chinese

scholar-narrator-spy, Yu Tsun. Politically, Borges deals with the theme of justice: the execution of Yu Tsun for his amoral treachery. Yu Tsun is a Chinese who teaches English. He serves as a spy for the Germans, and thus he is a traitor; he helps the Germans to prove that “a yellow man” can save the German Chief, who has shown a certain racial prejudice against the Chinese race (21), and thus he is a racist. As both a traitor and a racist, he devises a cunning plan to murder the sinologist who has penetrated his ancestor’s secret/mystery/riddle in the unfinished book; thus he is a radical nationalist (in the sense of protecting the national cultural quintessence). Therefore, the ultimate arrest and execution of Yu Tsun by British Intelligence is an act of restoration of justice. It is the fate that Yu deserves.

From another perspective we can discern a different version of the story: the story is an exploration of the moral responsibility for an irrational action. Yu Tsun, who has been deeply hurt by his Berlin Chief’s racial bias against him as “a yellow man” and in order to prove to the Germans his racial wisdom (“I didn’t do it for Germany, no. I care nothing for a barbarous country which imposed upon me the abjection of being a spy. . . . I did it because I sensed that the Chief somehow feared people of my race—for the innumerable ancestors who merge within me,” Yu confessed later in his cell [21]), irrationally plays a game that brings about the deaths of British soldiers and the sinologist. Again, his death is the price he has to pay. All of these titles—“a traitor, a racist, a radical nationalist and a narrow-minded irrationalist”—imposed upon Yu Tsun represent Borges’s fantastic reworking of his own fears and obsessions, reflecting Borges’s sense of the crisis of his own cultural identity. As an Argentinean writer, Borges was always trapped in the contradictory zones between Western culture and his Argentinean nativity. It is not the Argentinean cultural tradition that Borges identifies with, but Western culture. As he confesses:

I believe that our tradition is the whole of Western culture, and I also believe that we have a right to that tradition, a greater right it may be than the inhabitants of any one particular Western nation.
(Borges, *Obras* 272)

This irresistible desire to legitimize his cultural identity within the Western tradition rather than the Argentinean culture establishes the ideological roots from which Borges constructs his fantasy of a cultural Other. On the one hand, this identification with the hegemonic Western culture makes Borges's ambition of being a recognized *Western* writer possible; on the other hand, such identification makes Borges feel at the risk of betraying the indigenous Argentinean culture—the fear of being a traitor as Yu Tsun was. In the era of exhaustion in Western literature, Borges, through this story, expresses his obsession with narrative identity and cultural authenticity, which leads to a more exploitative and appropriative deprivation of the Other's subjectivity and identity.³

One crucial image of the fantastic in both Kafka's and Borges's configuration of a cultural Other is the labyrinth. According to Wendy Faris, "most symbolic labyrinths frequently contain centers" (108). In both stories, the center of the labyrinth is China, its cultural/natural landscape: Kafka's labyrinthine narrative of the Great Wall and the Imperial Palace and Borges's labyrinthine narrative of the forking garden. What is so problematic in this act of labyrinthinizing China as a cultural Other is that to locate China at the secret center of labyrinth indicates that China is a chaos as well as a marginal Other. Chaos is incomprehensible and incommunicable; a marginal other is inaccessible and unapproachable. Their relations are logically commensurable, that is, because China is a chaos, it is a marginal Other; because China is a marginal Other, it is hence an incomprehensible chaos. This hegemonic process of binary categorization, abstraction, and dogmatization of the Orient, according to Said, is the ideological root of Western Orientalism (300).

In this binary dichotomy of visibility (characterized by the West's hard logic, rationality, positivism, its categorical imperative of order and its legal system) vs. invisibility (characterized by the East's intuitive way of thinking, irrational universality, and mandate of the heaven); center (in terms of the Western development of technology, science, economy, capital and media) vs. marginal (in terms of Eastern countries' poverty, backwardness, and underdevelopment), China,

made to represent chaos and marginality in these stories, is excluded from Kafka's and Borges's narrative understanding, its physical reality is forever semiotically denied and erased. As a result of this repositioning and exclusion, all ethnic landscapes—both natural and cultural—are finally hollowed out. China becomes a symbol of a mere void, absence, emptiness, and an absolute Other, devoid of its temporal and spatial identities. In both Kafka's and Borges's fantastic narratives of labyrinth, China is not the source of a positive knowledge but a fearful negation of life, a journey of death. In this manner, China is evasively forced to fade into its chaotic invisibility and impossibility—a nameless/anonymous space outside the cultural order and narration. In the end, China as a strange, unfamiliar, supernatural, and eerie Other is presented, displayed before Western readers. It is this very fantastic blindness and the “unseen” that should be questioned and critically highlighted.

In this sense, Borges's morbid vision of China and his own obsession reveal a psychosis of what Freud calls “the uncanny” (“*heimliche*”). According to Freud, the German word *unheimliche* suggests a paradoxical ambivalence. “*Unheimliche*” refers to something ghostly, secret, foreign, hidden, gruesome, mystic, uncanny, homeless, hostile, and dangerous while its opposite indicates something familiar, intimate, homely, comfortable, friendly, and domestic (Freud). This paradox implies that the uncanny is both familiar and strange, comfortable and dangerous, intimate and foreign, known and inaccessible. For Freud, the most strange, eerie, and frightening comes not from what is far away from our experience and feelings (the exotic, foreign, the utterly new and alien) but from what is close to home, the private and the familiar that has been rendered secret through repression, but then returns. Freud writes, “[f]or this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression (394). . . . In this case, too, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimlich*, home-like, familiar; the prefix ‘un’ is the token of repression” (399). In other words, the *unheimlich/heimlich* pairing constitutes a psychic ambivalence, an uncanny Otherness within the

self. If we extend this Freudian *unheimlich/heimlich* double to Borges, we can say that this ghostly, alien China Borges describes is nothing but his own, reflecting the crisis of his cultural identity torn between his rejected Argentinean culture and his fetishized Western culture. The prefix “*un*” in *unheimlich* reveals Borges’s own despair, disavowal, and repression of his indigenous cultural identity. The failure to grasp China stems from his inner fear that his post-modernist play with narrative itself constructs an *aporia* for his own creative imagination, because the labyrinth that he inscribes in China lies nowhere but in his won cultural and psychological incompleteness of identity formation.

To configure China as a mysterious and grotesque space, to mark China as an undefined semantic void, is to reify China—that is, to create a China of what is not, and to make its identity otherwise/otherize, an uncanny spectacle. Allegorization, mythologization, and labyrinthinization all turn out to be the fantastic reification of a cultural Other carried out from a hegemonic perspective. Narration as knowledge is possible only through its valid mediation of what is substantive/historical (*shi*) and what is fictive/fantastic (*xu*); only through its appropriate location of the particular events in the narrative contextuality (Holdheim 1984), and only through the conscious unfolding of the narrator’s “cognitive motive” and “moral authority” (Mink; White). As we have argued at the beginning of this essay, the fantastic as a desire for the Other always problematizes the real, pushes the narrative referent into a semiotic vacuity and explores the unseen, the unsaid and unknowable. Thus, to use the fantastic narrative as a mediator for representing a cultural Other is dangerous and the knowledge it provides is sometimes invalid, even distorted, if the authors’ self-reflexive ability is shadowed by his/her hegemonic, ideological unconsciousness.

To conclude, in this essay I first put forward Jackson’s re-conception of the fantastic as the desire for the Other, then analyzed the fantastic narration of Kafka’s and Borges’s stories, and finally discussed the ideology of the symbolical image of the labyrinthine landscape in its representation of China. We have seen throughout that the fantastic as a transgressive genre permits the narrators to cross

certain radical borders and to gain certain truth in the imaginary world. Nevertheless, in the silent space of the unconscious desire for the Other always dwells a dark area, a blind spot, and the unseen.

NOTES

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¹ Kafka wrote "The Great Wall of China" in 1917 but never published it during his lifetime. He did take one segment from the original story and published it in a separate title "An Imperial Message" in 1919. According to Jonathan Spence, Kafka abandoned one fragment from the story which describes the stock images of Chinoiserie and exoticism such as pipe, pigtail and embroidered silk. See Chapter 12 "Genius at Play" in Spence's *The Chan's Great Continent* (1998).

² I disagree with Zhang Longxi and Jonathan Spence's argument that China in these two stories is neither a cultural Other nor difference but an affinity of self-identity or universal entity. When read these two stories in historical and post-colonial context, their observations are undoubtedly problematic. See Zhang Longxi, "The Myth of the Other" (1988); Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent* (1998).

³ For an illuminating study of Borges's Orientalist package and his exploitative appropriation of the Oriental Other, see Ian Almond, "Borges the Post-Orientalist: Images of Islam from the Edge of the West." *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.2 (2004): 435–59. Though the focus of Almond's essay is on Borges's Orientalist representation of Islam and the Middle East, its critiques can be similarly applied to my study of Borges's imagining of China. As Almond observes, the Islamic/Arabian Orient Borges perceives is "bizarre, ridiculous, and even grotesque" (441), alien, esoteric, insidious, and malevolent. In other words, Borges uses the Orient only to develop and "forge his own identity" (448). While Almond deplores that such a critique of Orientalism in Borges's works has "surprisingly" never before been launched, a shorter version of my present article was published in Chinese in 1995 in Beijing University Press. See Mi Jialu, "The Fantastic Unseen: Kafka's and

Borges's Labyrinthine Narrative of China." *Guowai Wenxue* (Foreign Literatures) 59.3 (1995): 25–39.

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