

*Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat, Pedro Páramo and One Hundred Years of Solitude: Haunting Narratives and Magical Realism in Thailand, Mexico and Colombia*¹

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Abstract

Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat (2016) by Veeraporn Nitiprapha, Thailand's first female who receives Southeast Asian Writers Award (S.E.A. Write Award) twice, is a novel on the overseas Chinese in Thailand that can also be classified as a work in the Magical Realism tradition. Inspired by the author's own biographical elements along with her interpretation of masterpieces of Latin American literature, the author fictionalizes a tragedy based on Chinese "outsiders" in Thai society through the saga of the Tang family from a ghostly perspective, based on local beliefs that bring up the subject of memory derived from *Pedro Páramo* (1955) by Juan Rulfo and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez. This article uses *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* as a case study that exemplifies the influences of Latin American literature in Thai contemporary literature. The Thai novel is, therefore, studied through the dialogue and interaction with its Mexican and Colombian models: a fictionalization of the "forgotten" history of the ethnic "outsiders," a creation of ghost characters, as well as a labyrinthic and "haunting" narrative. The analysis employs psychological and socio-historical dimensions to discover both parallelism and disparity in contemporary history and ancestral faiths between these two antipodes.

Keywords: *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat*, Veeraporn Nitiprapha, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Pedro Páramo*, Magical Realism

Introduction

Magical Realism is the only Latin American literary trend that has played an important role in Thai contemporary literature since the end of the 1970s. With the rising popularity of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, this literary trend entered the Thai literary circle (Luesakul and Preutisranyanont 294). A few years later, it emerged as a new alternative for Thai contemporary literature, particularly after the decline of Socialist Realism, whose repetitive formats and presentations had lost appeal among young writers (Pattarakulvanit 122–128). From the 1980s, there began to be translations of the works of García Márquez and other Latin American magical realist authors that helped popularize this trend among Thai authors (Pattarakulvanit 144). Towards the end of the 20th Century, the influence of Magical Realism became evident in many Thai short stories and novels, some of which were included in the shortlist or garnered different literary awards (Luesakul and Preutisranyanont 294). The term "Magical Realism" in the statement of the committee of the

Southeast Asian Writers Award or S.E.A. Write Award, one of the most prestigious forms of recognition for writers in Southeast Asia, represents a modern innovation and an interesting depth found in the selected texts (Pattarakulvanit 132).

One of the most notable examples of this “innovative” trend, influenced by Latin American literature, is *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* (2016) by Veeraporn Nitiprapha. This novel, centered on the experiences of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand, can also be regarded as a Thai contribution to the Magical Realism genre. In 2018, *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* won the S.E.A. Write Award, earning Veeraporn Nitiprapha critical acclaim as Thailand’s first female author to receive this prestigious regional honor twice.² The novel, narrated from a ghostly perspective, explores the tragedy of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand, portraying them as “outsiders” caught in the liminal space between Thailand and China during the political turmoil of the 20th century. Their struggle to establish a sense of belonging in this “foreign” world ultimately ends in failure. Nitiprapha’s phantasmagoric narrative style draws inspiration from local beliefs in ghosts and spirits prevalent in Thai and Chinese cultures and her interpretation of the masterpieces of Magical Realism. The author’s primary inspiration, distinct from other Thai contemporary works that exhibit a strong influence from Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and his short stories, stems from both this Colombian novel and *Pedro Páramo* (1955) by writer Juan Rulfo. These novels serve as a bridge between two literary traditions separated by geography, history, and culture.

This article examines *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* as a product of cultural hybridity arising from two distant literary traditions. Through the lens of Latin American literature, it focuses on the influence of Mexican and Colombian models, particularly those of *Pedro Páramo* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which play a pivotal role in Nitiprapha’s innovative portrayal of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand through the creation of haunting atmospheres, spectral characters, a distinctive storytelling style, and a labyrinthine narrative structure. Additionally, this paper incorporates insights from an in-depth personal interview with the author conducted in 2021, which explores her interests, impressions, and the inspirations she drew from these two masterpieces of Magical Realism.

This article is structured into three sections. The first, titled “Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat: An ‘Innovative’ Novel of the Overseas Chinese in Thailand,” examines the novel as part of the ethnic-centered literary trend while highlighting its new dimension through the lens of Magical Realism. The second section, “Ghosts and Magical Realism,” analyzes the central concept of Magical Realism and the role of ghostly characters, drawing on psychological and socio-historical

perspectives. The final section, “Latin American Magical Realism and the Ghostly Portrayal of Chinese ‘Outsiders’ in Thailand,” explores the inspiration, influences, and interactions between two Latin American novels and *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat*.

***Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat*: an “Innovative” Novel of the Overseas Chinese in Thailand**

Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat (2016) by Nitiprapha is a novel about the overseas Chinese in Thailand that engages in a dialogue with Latin American Magical Realism. Through this interplay, it invites readers to reflect on the history and narratives surrounding Chinese immigrants in Thailand. According to the statement of the S.E.A. Write Award committee, this novel:

presents the story of an overseas Chinese family from a new perspective. The struggles in the lives of each generation of this large family are told in parallel with the social and political changes taking place both in Thailand and in China (...) The novel is outstanding in its use of memory and personal history of emotions which became collective memory of the society completed with stories she opts to tell and stories she opts to forget, both fragmented and obscure. Her style of writing is notable for its use of literary techniques, especially the use of narrative convention of folktales with a surreal and magical nature. (The S.E.A. Write Award 1)

Novels of the overseas Chinese in Thailand typically depict this group's life experiences and crises, the largest community of its diaspora worldwide. This literary trend emerged around the 1960s, coinciding with a significant period in the identity formation of the Chinese community in Thailand. After the triumph of Communism in 1949 made their return to China impossible, these individuals were compelled to settle indefinitely in what they perceived as a foreign land. Sittithee Eaksittipong has examined the relationship between the emotional history of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand and its fictional representations, considering these works as their “emotional refuge” (17). This literary space enables the community to negotiate and reconcile their feelings of being “outsiders” while seeking their own place within Thailand, their new “homeland”. Throughout their prolonged settlement in Thailand, they have struggled with the sense of being caught “in-between.” On one hand, they created a “transnational emotional space,” characterized by a fluid identity that flows through the boundary between China and Thailand (Eaksittipong 19). On the other hand, they have been subjected to an “emotional regime” imposed by the Thai ruling class, which has sought to marginalize them

since 1900 by fostering feelings of shame and hostility based primarily on their ethnicity (103-107). This marginalization could be alleviated if the “outsiders” embraced acculturation, meaning they would need to “forget” their Chinese roots to achieve fuller assimilation into Thai society. In recent years, many members of this community have successfully achieved middle-class status, contributing significantly to the Thai economy through their entrepreneurial ventures (174-179).

Following the patriarchal Chinese tradition, novels of the overseas Chinese in Thailand portray a realistic myth of male immigrants escaping poverty in China. These men are depicted as arriving in Thailand with only the proverbial “a mat and a pillow” and, through their hard work, discipline, perseverance, and moral integrity, they successfully establish their clans within Thai society. This narrative is exemplified in the trend’s foundational novel *Letters from Thailand* (1970) by “Botan” and continues with distinguished works such as *Living with Grandfather* (1976) by “Yok Burapha” and *Lod Lai Mungkorn* (1991) by Prapassorn Sevikun.

Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat, in contrast to other classic works within this literary trend, challenges and demystifies this long-standing stereotype. The author constructs a fictional narrative around the Tangs, an influential family engaged in the rice trade, initially based in Talad Noi, Bangkok, and later expanding to Chachoengsao Province. The story traces their gradual decline into bankruptcy and the successive loss of descendants over generations until the family ultimately falls into oblivion. The narrator is a ghost who should have been born as the family’s last heir but instead haunts the clan’s abandoned house.

The novel is inspired by Nitiprapha’s own life and, notably, as a reader of World Literature, her interpretation of Latin American Magical Realism. The author herself comes from an extended family of Chinese immigrants, whose members served as emblematic models for the novel’s characters. For instance, Tong is based on her grandfather, who was determined to return to China at all costs; Jerdsri, the central figure in the family’s stories, is modeled on Nitiprapha’s aunt; Jitsawai is inspired by an uncle who grappled with his dual identity until the end of his life; and Hong is based on the uncle born to her grandfather’s Chinese wife, who later visited her family in Thailand after China reopened (Luesakul 4-5). Moreover, Nitiprapha has a profound interest in this group of “outsiders.” Subjected to longstanding social and legal discrimination by both Thai and Chinese governments that have “forgotten” their existence, they have been marginalized and rendered as if they were mere ghosts, despite their continued contributions to the country (Luesakul 4). This tragedy, unlike the narratives found in other novels about the overseas Chinese in Thailand, cannot be fully captured through the lens of Realism. For Nitiprapha, ghostly characters serve as powerful allegorical

figures, representing the invisibility, loss of identity, and the most painful aspects of being “outsiders” (Luesakul 3). In this context, the literary elements of Magical Realism are localized in this Thai novel, revealing a parallel between Asia and Latin America in terms of ancestral faiths in the supernatural and the socio-political upheavals of the 20th century, which profoundly affect the status and experiences of “outsiders” in both regions.

Ghosts and Magical Realism

The ghost is one of the most classic and universal characters in Magical Realism, a Latin American literary trend that emerged in the 1940s. This genre portrays reality through a “primitive” worldview rooted in ancestral beliefs in the supernatural. The “magical” is often linked to a society’s “otherness,” allowing authors to give voice to marginalized communities — in this case, ethnic minorities such as Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants — and reveal an “alternative” dimension of reality that contrasts with official historical narratives. The spectral character functions as a historical entity — “the other” from the past — that transgresses the boundaries between present and past, memory and oblivion, and invisibility and visibility. Through this liminal role, the ghost gives voice to marginalized, excluded, and repressed groups in Latin America. This character can be analyzed through various perspectives within the framework of the so-called “Spectral Turn,” an interdisciplinary field that examines the ghost as a globalized literary subject.

In Magical Realism, the exploration of the ghost's “reality” draws on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical approach and its functions are examined from a socio-historical perspective, as proposed by Jacques Derrida, Avery Gordon, and Martyn Hudson. Freud addresses the concept of the ghostly presence through his theory of “the Uncanny” in his essay “*Das Unheimliche*” (1919), defining it as something “which is secretly familiar (...), which has undergone repression and then returned from it” (Freud 240-241). The concept relates to the strange and mysterious that emerge within an “intimate” space. When no rational explanation is possible, this phenomenon can produce a haunting effect, often linked to animistic beliefs, the key element of Magical Realism. For Freud, the ghost embodies a repressed trauma that has been concealed and later resurfaces (245). As a result, the ghost serves as a medium through which horrific “personal” events, often absent from official historical accounts, can be revealed. The Uncanny, therefore, transcends the realm of individual emotion to acquire a broader historical dimension.

Decades later, Jacques Derrida developed on this concept in *Specters of Marx* (1993), framing it within his deconstructionist theory of official history, a proposal that aligns closely with the principles of Magical Realism. For Derrida, the ghost serves as a metaphorical representation of marginalized figures such as outsiders, immigrants, foreigners, and victims of historical injustice. These spectral figures “uncover” a “forgotten,” excluded, and silenced past, bringing to light stories that have been omitted from official historical narratives (Peeren 107). As a *revenant* — a figure that resists control and moves fluidly between past, present, and future — the ghost disrupts the chronological progression of historical narrative. This disruption allows for “other” alternatives to emerge, presenting fragmented, multi-perspectival accounts in which the voices of minorities “correct” or challenge official historical records (Derrida 123).

The ideas of Freud and Derrida serve as foundational concepts for contemporary critiques that examine the social function of the ghost, as presented in Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2004) and Martyn Hudson’s *Ghosts, Landscapes and Social Memory* (2017). For Gordon, the ghost is a social figure that carries a powerful message from “another” realm. While it may haunt as an individual entity, it also embodies the collective experiences of a community. Her approach emphasizes the interaction between cultural memory and the social perception of ghost stories — a literary space where “reality” and imagination converge— in communities where the visitations are fabricated, fictionalized, and finally re-narrated.

On the other hand, Martyn Hudson centers his exploration on the concept of a haunted landscape, where ghosts traverse and coexist with human beings. Such a landscape becomes a site of intergenerational communication, allowing descendants to “converse” with earlier generations. Figuratively, this space functions as a palimpsest, layered with the multiple strata of memories and discourses of the dead. As a result, it can be studied through historical practices such as archaeology and archival research (Hudson ix, xii, xx, 128). One of the most prominent examples of these ghostly spaces is the haunted house, a “familiar” site where sounds, movements, and traces from the past linger. Over time, it accumulates the stories of its occupants and their trauma and grief (77-78). The haunted house is also a significant motif in magical realist novels, as will be discussed later.

The most renowned works of Magical Realism featuring ghost figures as protagonists are *Pedro Páramo* (1955) by Juan Rulfo, the pioneering model of this narrative approach, and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez, who acknowledged the influence of Rulfo’s work and further developed his ghostly characters into universal archetypes, deeply intertwined to the themes of memory and solitude. Both novels offer an “alternative” interpretation of national tragedies

through haunting narratives that incorporate four key aspects of the ghost's "reality" as discussed earlier: traumatic nature, deconstructive history, cultural memory, and haunted landscape. The events in both novels unfold in fictional, imaginary spaces — Comala and Macondo, respectively — which remain isolated from the modern world. These self-contained worlds operate according to their own internal logic, where the magical is normalized, and the social and political realities of Mexico and Colombia are mystified.

Pedro Páramo is presented as a horror novel, employing narrative techniques, haunting characters, and an eerie atmosphere to reflect the physical and moral devastation of rural Mexico following decades of civil war, including the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) and the Cristero War (1926–1929). One of the novel's most distinguished features is its "chaotic" narrative structure, unfolding through the fragmented memories of ghosts as recounted in a conversation from the tomb between Juan Preciado and Dorotea. The protagonist, driven by the dying wish of his mother, Dolores, embarks on a journey to find his unknown father, Pedro Páramo, in Comala, a hellish space, inhabited solely by ghosts. His journey to this symbolic "origin," where he encounters a chorus of spectral voices that recount the "forgotten" history of the town through disjointed memories, ultimately leads to the end of his own life.

One Hundred Years of Solitude portrays the Colombian national tragedy through the saga of the Buendía family and the town of Macondo, both founded by José Arcadio Buendía. The family is plagued by an enduring curse of solitude and a recurring inclination toward incestuous relationships, ultimately leading to its downfall. The Buendía family is marked by the presence of extraordinary powers, including the natural interaction with ghostly figures, "signals of illusion of repetition" that highlight the "invisible" connection between the past and the present (Erickson 151). In this novel, these characters are divided into 2 groups: those who return after death to evoke and relive the past and those who, though still physically alive, retreat into a ghostly existence as a means to "forget" the untold violence of the world around them.

Prudencio Aguilar, the novel's first ghost, returns to haunt his murderer, José Arcadio Buendía, after being killed by him. Aguilar serves as a personification of unresolved guilt and a lingering reminder of past violence, embodying the cyclical nature of sin and retribution. The "living dead" are exemplified by Colonel Aureliano Buendía and José Arcadio Segundo. The former, once the most formidable soldier in Colombia's prolonged civil war — an allegory of the Thousand Days' War (1899–1902) — returns home after his military defeat. Similarly, José Arcadio Segundo, who works for the United Fruit Company, becomes the sole survivor of the infamous Magdalena Massacre

of 1928, a tragedy erased from public memory and official records. Both characters retreat into isolation, transforming into spectral presences within the family home.

With the unprecedented success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in the international literary arena, particularly following the global translation phenomenon that intensified after Gabriel García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1982, the concept of “Global Magical Realism” emerged. This literary trend has been liberated from its original Latin American context, introducing “a new multicultural artistic reality” into the realm of World Literature (Durix 162).

Its popularity is attributed to its unique storytelling framework and its transgressive and subversive nature, which provides marginalized and voiceless communities with a space to challenge dominant historical narratives and articulate alternative perspectives (Mariboho 4). Within this context, the ghost — rooted in ancestral beliefs about life after death in cultures across the globe — serves as a symbolic figure and a key narrative device in Magical Realist traditions worldwide.

Latin American Magical Realism and the ghostly portrayal of the Chinese “outsider” in Thailand

Like its counterparts in World Literature, Thai contemporary literature wholeheartedly embraces Magical Realism from Latin America. For Nitiprapha, this literary trend from this antipodal region is particularly well-suited for local readers, as beliefs in the supernatural — especially ghosts and spirits — are deeply rooted in Thai ancestral culture. At the same time, magical realism offers a fresh perspective on reality in the modern world, shaped in part by the influence of the film industry, which has become another source of “the magic” that literature must contend with. As she explains:

Magical Realism, much like Japanese Manga, presents a defamiliarized reality from normalized perspectives, and no logical justification is needed. In Thailand, this literary trend aligns with the unique cultural perception of reality, as ancestral beliefs — particularly those surrounding ghosts and spirits — continue to play a significant role in everyday life. Additionally, the increasing presence of computer-generated imagery (CGI) in daily life has contributed to a contemporary form of “lived” Magical Realism. This shift implies that purely realistic storytelling may no longer be perceived as entirely credible in the modern world (Luesakul 1-2).

Magical Realism’s narrative mode serves as an innovative vehicle for Nitiprapha’s portrayal of the experience of overseas Chinese “outsiders,” who are compelled to “forget” their identity and

undergo a “magical” transformation into “the other” to be accepted as part of Thai society (Luesakul 4). Their painful journey cannot be adequately conveyed through a strictly realistic narrative approach, as seen in other novels depicting the experiences of overseas Chinese in Thailand. To capture the duality of visibility and invisibility that defines the experience of these characters, Nitiprapha fictionalizes a story of the Tangs from the space of their haunted house, inhabited only by the ghostly family members created with a basis of Thai and Chinese local faiths together with distinguished characteristic concepts from Latin American Magical Realism. This narrative approach allows Nitiprapha to illuminate the liminal existence of the “outsiders” and the enduring impact of cultural erasure and assimilation.

The novel's title, *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* pays direct homage to *Pedro Páramo*, a work that significantly influenced Nitiprapha's narrative structure and storytelling approach. According to Nitiprapha, Rulfo's Magical Realist novel left the most profound impression on her, mainly due to its labyrinthine narrative and its unique treatment of characters' memories. She describes it as a narrative experience where “readers walk into a head filled with memories and imaginations, memories of themselves and memories of other people” (Luesakul 1). Similarly, Nitiprapha's novel is constructed through the fragmented “memories of memories” of deceased characters from different generations who continue to haunt abandoned spaces. These spectral figures present the “layers” of stories belonging to a “forgotten” clan, echoing Hudson's notion of a haunted landscape that requires “archaeological excavation” to unearth hidden stories.

Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat, on the other hand, mirrors the marginalization of Chinese “outsiders” within Thailand's 20th-century political crises, employing a narrative strategy similar to that of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Like García Márquez, Nitiprapha frames the story as a multi-generational family saga filled with personal secrets and unique experiences, offering a microcosm of broader historical issues. Nitiprapha also shares García Márquez's interest in addressing a “forgotten” history, as exemplified by the United Fruit Company Massacre, where José Arcadio Segundo becomes the sole survivor while thousands of workers disappear. His testimony is later invalidated by official records, which persist in claiming that “nothing has happened in Macondo (...). This is a happy town” (García Márquez 316). For Nitiprapha, Thailand is “a land with no memory,” where “many happenings have been erased and it is not possible to find any information about them” (Nitiprapha 53). This phenomenon includes that of the overseas Chinese community, as their ancestors “do not tell all their stories to the descendants in order to assimilate perfectly and become Thai” (Luesakul 6). In *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat*, the absence of official

documentation is compensated for by the personal accounts of society and family members — both human and ghostly figures — who reconstruct their history through imagination and belief. For Nitiprapha, these popular but unofficial versions of history are often more credible than official historical records (Luesakul 5).

The family’s saga, the diaspora of the “outsiders,” and the haunted house

In a manner comparable to how the Buendía family serves as a reflection of Colombia’s history of violence, *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* represents the tragedy of the Chinese diaspora in Thailand through the saga of the Tang family. The story’s timeline spans from 1937, with the arrival of Tong, the clan’s founder, and the establishment of a successful rice business, to its eventual decline, culminating in 1976 when all family members are murdered. As in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the central narrative space is a family house that once accommodated the entire extended family. However, unlike the “hidden” and isolated Macondo, the Tang family’s house is situated along the Bangpakong River in Chachoengsao Province, relatively close to Bangkok's capital. Tong becomes enamored with the house, surrounded by a forest of Watter trees adorned with blooming yellow flowers. Drawn by its tranquility and strategic importance as a key rice production zone, he decides to relocate his entire family and rice business from Talad Noi, a bustling area along the banks of the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok, to this more peaceful yet economically significant location in Chachoengsao Province.

The Tang family’s house, like that of the Buendías, represents the values of a patriarchal society. In this case, it is governed by traditional Chinese notions of clan continuity which prioritize male descendants as the legitimate heirs. Tong lives here with his wife, Sa-ngiem, and two generations of descendants. These include his two sons — Jongsawang, an adopted son and the “outsider” within the family, and Jitsawai, Tong’s only biological male heir—; his three daughters — Jarungsilp, Jerdsri, and Jarassang —; as well as his grandson, Rapin, and granddaughter, Rarin, who symbolizes the family’s “skeletons in the closet,” representing their members’ concealed secrets and transgressions. Like the Buendía family in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the members of the Tang family are consumed by their own solitude and peculiar behaviors. Some possess the ability to communicate with ghosts, while others display a tendency toward incestuous relationships.

Along with his descendants, Tong exemplifies the Chinese diaspora experience in Thailand, which is marked by the tension between accommodation and resistance within a host country where full acceptance is never fully granted. Despite living with an extended family and enjoying decades of successful business ventures in Thailand, Tong regards himself as a “foreigner.” This sentiment is

poignantly expressed in his reflection: “We are Chinese. We look Chinese no matter what. (...) We’re here to make a living, but it’s always someone else’s home.” (Nitiprapha 61). Tong’s experience aligns with the broader condition of expatriate minority communities, which, as Janna Odabas explains, are characterized by “mythical memories of an original homeland, with the feeling of not being accepted by the host country, with the idea of a final return to the original homeland, an ongoing engagement with the rebuilding of the original homeland” (30-31).

Tong, the protagonist, escapes poverty and political unrest in China to build a new life in Thailand, much like José Arcadio Buendía, who finds Macondo to evade Prudencio Aguilar’s ghost and, later, the violent reality of Colombia. However, despite this attempt at refuge, Tong and his family remain deeply affected by the postwar period, a significant turning point in Thai politics marked by its complex relationship with China. Similar to the depiction in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where Colombian governments “forget” their people and history, Thai and Chinese governments’ actions during this period led to their populations’ figurative and literal “ghosting.”

Throughout his years of apparent “exile” in Thailand, Tong experiences the profound loss of his family in China, most notably his beloved mother, the symbolic root of his origins. Her death occurred during the Battle of Wuhan as a result of the strategic destruction of the Yellow River’s dikes in 1938. This act carried out without prior warning to the local population, was intended to delay the Japanese invasion but resulted in one of the deadliest floods in world history, causing at least 500,000 deaths. The event remains controversial, as successive governments have refrained from publicly acknowledging responsibility or clarifying this military strategy’s circumstances. Nearly a decade later, in 1945, Tong once again faced the precariousness of his status as a “foreigner” in Thailand. The Yaowarat Incident, an armed confrontation between Bangkok’s Chinatown residents and the Thai police, rekindles sentiments of mistrust and insecurity among the overseas Chinese population.

From that moment on, Tong, exemplifying the decisions of many overseas Chinese in Thailand, begins planning a permanent return to China with his entire family. In preparation for this, he invests all his savings to purchase land in China and marries Ping Mui, a Chinese woman who assumes responsibility for managing the property and gives birth to their son, Hong, a child Tong will never meet. Additionally, Jitsawai is sent to China to pursue his education. However, this dream is abruptly shattered with the triumph of the Communist army in 1949, which results in the confiscation of all Tong’s property, leading to his financial ruin and the disappearance of his small Chinese family. Jitsawai is subsequently called back to Thailand, only to vanish a few years later, in 1951, following the

Manhattan Rebellion, a failed coup against Prime Minister Luang Phibunsongkhram, orchestrated by the Royal Thai Navy.

The tragedy of the Tang family reaches its culmination against the backdrop of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, a context that, in many ways, parallels the historical conditions depicted in Latin America. Jarassang, Tong's youngest daughter, marries John, a discharged soldier from the Vietnam War. This foreign figure symbolizes the violent intervention of the United States in Southeast Asia, a circumstance that mirrors the role of the United Fruit Company in the Caribbean as portrayed in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Confronted with the aggressive nature of this American "intruder," Tong's grandchildren, Rapin and Rarin, seek solace in one another, leading to an incestuous love affair that results in Rarin's pregnancy with Dao, who is presumed to be the clan's last heir.

Rarin and Rapin — like Aureliano Babilonia and Amaranta Úrsula in García Márquez's novel — have unclear identities, and this ambiguity extends not only to themselves but also to the rest of their respective families. However, different from the Colombian model, Rapin and Rarin are not bound by kinship: Rarin is the result of an extramarital affair involving Jongsawang, the Tang's "outsider," while Rapin is the result of an extramarital affair involving Jarassang. Furthermore, unlike García Márquez's final descendant, born with a pig's tail, Dao never has the chance to be born. The family's fate takes a violent turn when John murders three female members of the family: Jerdsri, Jarassang, and the pregnant Rarin, bringing the lineage of the Tang family to a definitive end.

Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat portrays the rise and fall of the Tang family, with the narrative unfolding from the perspective of their abandoned — and consequently haunted — house, stated by Hudson, one of the most emblematic locations of hauntology. The ghostly characters created by Nitiprapha to symbolize the historical tragedy that occurs "in-between" Thailand and China can be categorized into two distinct groups, reflecting a narrative strategy similar to that of García Márquez.

The first group consists of two ghosts — Dao and Tong's Chinese mother — who evoke the "untold" tragedies of the past. The second group is represented by Jitsawai, a "living dead" figure or self-specter who attempts to "forget" the world's violence. The characteristics of these three ghostly figures correspond to the models of Prudencio Aguilar, José Arcadio Buendía, and José Arcadio Segundo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as well as Dolores and Juan Preciado in *Pedro Páramo*. Like their Latin American counterparts, their roles underscore the profound interrelation between the psychological, historical, and social dimensions of ghostly figures. By invoking these parallels, Nitiprapha establishes a dialogue between Latin American and Southeast Asian narrative traditions,

using ghostly presences to confront the unresolved traumas of diasporic and marginalized communities.

The ghostly narrator of the “memories of the memories”

The narrator of *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* is Dao, a boy who was destined to be the family’s last heir but instead becomes a spirit who haunts the family’s abandoned house. As the novel’s central character, Dao embodies its defining characteristics as a work of Magical Realism. He is a lonely ghost, though he is occasionally accompanied by Grandma Sri (Jerdsri), his mother Rarin — a silent figure who “only locks herself in slumber and silence” (Nitiprapha 204) — and their pet, the Black Rose Cat, a cat with a rose-shaped design on its body. Despite the clan’s decline and the physical decay of the house, both female characters maintain a desire to continue living with hope. Jerdsri, after enduring multiple romantic traumas and years of isolation, finally finds the love of her life, with whom she plans to marry, while Rarin dreams of the arrival of Dao, or a “star” in Thai, who she believes will illuminate her life.

The influence of *Pedro Páramo* is most evident here, as both novels are narrated by ghostly characters who represent the last generation of their respective clans, emerging in the aftermath of the clan’s ultimate tragedy: Dao in *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* and Juan Preciado in *Pedro Páramo*. These two protagonists exemplify Hudson’s concept of intergenerational transmission of trauma as they retell, from their “memory,” the stories they have heard from the recollections of deceased characters from earlier generations. However, Nitiprapha extends Rulfo’s approach in significant ways. While Juan Preciado is a man with memories to recount to Dorotea — particularly his journey to Comala and encounters with the ghosts — Dao exists solely as a fetus, a being without a personal memory. Despite believing that he has learned of his family’s tragedy from Grandma Sri, Dao frequently becomes disoriented, unable to distinguish the stories he narrates from his own fragmented sense of memory. This confusion is explicitly conveyed in his reflection: “His memory was broken into infinitesimal shards, piecemeal and scattered. (...) It was as if his memories weren’t his own but belonged to someone else” (Nitiprapha 15).

More hauntingly, Dao is a ghost who remains unaware of his own phantasmagoric existence. He perceives himself as a 12-year-old boy who never leaves the house and enjoys listening to Grandma Sri’s ghost stories. While Juan Preciado is the only living human to explore the haunted city of Comala, Dao is a solitary ghost navigating the abandoned house he so deeply fears. His favorite space is Grandma Sri’s bedroom, where he feels most attuned to her voice and memory. However, this room

is also a source of terror, as he frequently encounters a mysterious girl who, unable to see him, behaves as though he does not exist. Grandma Sri's bedroom is filled with haunting sounds, reminiscent of the spectral atmosphere of Comala. Similar to Juan's experience with disembodied echoes, the eerie sounds in this space evoke a sense of the past lingering in the present: "It's like they were trapped behind the walls, or beneath the cobblestones. When you walk you feel like someone's behind you, stepping in your footsteps. You hear rustlings. And people laughing. Laughter that sounds used up" (Rulfo 44). According to Hudson, the most resonant aspect of a haunted house is its sound phenomena (79). In this context, Dao is similarly haunted by disembodied echoes:

The sounds of these things were sounds he could hear, though they were unheard by others. Dao believed that the sounds came from the room itself; bleak, multifold sounds, with a slight echo that vibrated the air for a minute or maybe two, and then were gone. (...) Perhaps it was a sound trapped from bygone days, encrusted like dregs and stuck in blind corners (...). (Nitiprapha 121, 123)

Both *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* and *Pedro Páramo* require an active reader to reassemble the fragmented pieces of memory belonging to both the narrators and their ancestors, which are dispersed throughout the novel in a nonchronological structure. In Rulfo's novel, the climax occurs at the midpoint, when readers realize that Juan has actually died in Comala and that his entire narration comes from his conversation with Dorotea, who shares a tomb with him. In contrast, the climax of Nitiprapha's novel is revealed in its final pages. Until this point, the story appears realistic like other novels of the overseas Chinese in Thailand, but the conclusion unveils the truth behind Dao's narration. Readers discover that Dao is not a child but a fetus who died along with his mother, Rarin. The mysterious girl he fears throughout the story is, in fact, his mother at the age of her death, a revelation he comes to when his narration reaches its conclusion. His grief is captured in the line: "He couldn't remember that the girl was his own mother. He couldn't remember that, how could he, when he couldn't even remember his own existence?" (Nitiprapha 329).

Moreover, readers understand that the story of the Tang family, which Dao narrates, originates from something other than Grandma Sri, as initially implied. Instead, it is transmitted through the Black Rose Cat, as the novel's title suggests. This tragedy is etched into Dao's consciousness as a story passed from Grandma Sri to Rarin and, indirectly, to him. Intriguingly, while the Tang clan is depicted as a patriarchal family led by male figures, the final voice of the family's story is conveyed by its female members and their pet, the Black Rose Cat, who accompanies them in solitude during the last period of their lives. The cat, far from being a mere animal figure, is a narrative agent capable of linking the

fragmented memories of the Tang family's story. It becomes the conduit that connects the past with the present and exposes the tragic conclusion of the clan's history.

Dao's "confusing" narration, derived from the fragmented and fragile memories of his ancestors, mystifies his clan's inability to establish firm roots in Thailand, described as "the land with no memory." As the final, unrecognized member of the Tang family, Dao symbolizes the last page in the family's history, a story destined to be "forgotten" as it circulates solely among their ghostly members. Dao, therefore, embodies the ambiguous identity of Chinese descendants who lack a concrete memory of their own familial history. The untold stories of their ancestors, left unspoken and unrecorded, are condemned to oblivion.

The ghost of Grandma and the ghost of grandson: the root and route of the overseas Chinese in Thailand

In *Memories of the Black Rose Cat*, the key characters symbolizing the beginning and end of the diaspora of Tong and the Tang family are the Chinese grandmother, or Tong's mother, and her Thai grandson, Jitsawai, who never have the chance to meet. These two characters embody the dynamics of diaspora, which, according to James Clifford, revolve around the concepts of "roots" and "routes" (250, 252).

Their relationship is grounded in the traditional Chinese notion of lineage continuity, which prioritizes male descendants as the carriers of the family bloodline. Tong's mother symbolizes the clan's origin and is an emotional bridge between Tong and his homeland, China. Meanwhile, Jitsawai, Tong's only biological male heir, embodies the culmination of his father's attempts to establish a lasting bloodline, whether in China or Thailand, efforts that ultimately fail on both fronts.

Tong's mother, whose name is never mentioned—to symbolize a "forgotten" figure in history—dies alongside the rest of her family during the catastrophic flooding caused by the Battle of Wuhan. According to rumors shared by a few surviving neighbors in her village, she "returns" home with her body soaked in water and weeps for her deceased grandson, a ghostly image that recurs in all her visitations. Tong learns about his family's tragedy during his first visit back to his hometown as a successful businessman. This definitive separation from his mother transforms her into a symbolic representation of the motherland he has lost forever. After hearing the ghostly tale of her return, Tong begins to wander through the streets each night, hoping to see her again, as if he himself were also a ghost haunting the village. Although his wish is never granted, his mother secretly follows him back to Thailand. Her ghost is seen by neighbors, reenacting the same gestures from her village as she

searches for her missing grandson. However, she never attempts to communicate with her Thai descendants, maintaining a spectral distance from them.

The only member of the Tang family who encounters her, albeit in an ambiguous and uncertain context, is Tong himself. She appears to him in his dreams as a drowning ghost calling his name. Her visitation is left open to interpretation: it could be a genuine supernatural experience or a projection of Tong's own traumatic imagination. Upon waking, he finds himself drenched, but it remains unclear whether he is wet from the water of his mother's ghostly body or from his own tears, shed in grief for her tragic fate.

The visitations of Tong's mother serve a dual function, which can be understood through a Freudian psychoanalytical lens and Derrida's deconstructionist theory. She incarnates both a voice of denunciation — exposing a tragedy orchestrated by the Chinese government — and a reflection of Tong's profound internal trauma.

From the perspective of deconstruction, her appearances as a ghost, always clothed in soaked garments that leave water stains along her path, both in her village in China and in her son's territory in Thailand, render visible the silenced history of the Battle of Wuhan. Her spectral presence materializes the “untold” story of the catastrophic flood, a tragedy that was erased from official records but remains imprinted in the collective memory of the affected region. As Avery Gordon explains, although Tong's mother haunts alone, she signifies the broader experience of loss and violence shared by her community.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, her presence also reflects Tong's unresolved guilt regarding his mother's tragic fate. Having left her with his father — a cruel husband — to seek “refuge” in Thailand, Tong is haunted by the knowledge that he abandoned her to a dismal destiny. As the only surviving heir of his mother's lineage, Tong's failure to establish a bloodline, whether in Thailand or China, further intensifies this guilt. In this context, Nitiprapha's reflection on the nature of ghosts becomes particularly relevant: “Ghosts are created by living people, by our subconsciousness. They are dead people whom we never let go” (Luesakul 3). Tong's inability to let go of his mother — and, by extension, the homeland and the legacy she represents — results in her continued haunting presence.

The Grandmother ghost serves as an ethnic marker that embodies a social function, as analyzed by Hudson and Gordon. She represents an ancestral figure committed to preserving the continuity of the clan's lineage, which, in accordance with Chinese tradition, is perpetuated exclusively through male heirs. Typically, the supernatural element in ghost stories grants power to a female voice,

often marginalized in patriarchal societies. However, in this case, Tong's mother, as a "refugee-ghost," paradoxically reinforces the patriarchal tradition in Thailand, viewing it as a means to secure the survival and settlement of her clan in this "safe" host country.

Her spectral presence is closely tied to Tong's personal turmoil regarding his failure to establish a male lineage. In his moments of deep depression over this crisis, Tong frequently sees his mother's ghost. Her visitation, therefore, becomes a manifestation of his anxiety about his family's "routes" and "roots" and the future of the Tang bloodline in Thailand. Shortly after the "arrival" of his mother, Tong comes to realize that his family is being punished, forced to pay for his mother's sad destiny: a curse for his entire clan to be "washed away" by the water. This belief has been passed down through generations. As Dao narrates, "The house had felt damp for a long time. Since the day Great-Grandpa Tong returned from China and brought with him the interminable curse of the swift-flowing water that once swept away his entire family" (Nitiprapha 65). The beginning and end of this curse are marked by the deaths, as a result of the crisis of their mothers, of two male infants, each representing the lost potential of the family's future heirs. The curse begins with the death of Jung, Tong's first grandson, who is drowned by his mother, Jarungsilp, during her severe postpartum depression. The curse reaches its tragic conclusion with the death of Dao, Tong's first great-grandson, who is murdered on a rainy day along with his mother, Rarin.

The curse of the Tang family, which ultimately leads to the clan's demise, finds clear parallels in *Pedro Páramo* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. On the one hand, the haunting figure of Tong's mother, who motivates the protagonist to seek his origins and authentic identity but ultimately drives him toward destruction, mirrors the role of Dolores in Rulfo's novel. Dolores urges her son, Juan Preciado, to return to her hometown, guiding him through her nostalgic memories of a paradisiacal Comala. However, this idealized image starkly contrasts with the infernal reality of the city that Juan encounters: it "sits on the coals of the Earth, at the very mouth of hell" (Rulfo 4). On the other hand, the curse stemming from Tong's guilt over his mother's tragic death parallels the curse afflicting the Buendía family, which originates from the murder of Prudencio Aguilar by José Arcadio Buendía. In both cases, the "original sin" committed by an ancestor demands intergenerational retribution. While the Buendía family members live and die in ghostly solitude, the Tangs are "drowned" in water-related incidents. Ultimately, both families are wiped from history and memory — the Buendías from Colombian history and the Tangs from Thai memory — as if their stories had never existed at all.

Jitsawai, on the other hand, is the only heir of the Tang family but also the key agent of its ultimate destruction. He represents the second generation of Chinese immigrants in Thailand, often

portrayed as being caught “in-between” two nations and two identities. In accordance with Tong’s vision of returning the family to its homeland, Jitsawai is sent to study in China, where he chooses to attend a military school, exemplifying the path taken by many young overseas Chinese from Thailand. However, the triumph of Communism results in the confiscation of the Tang family’s properties, leading to their financial ruin. This loss, coupled with Tong’s deep depression, prompts Jitsawai’s return to Thailand. He joins the Royal Thai Navy, a decision that aligns with his father’s plan to secure Thai citizenship for the family through his military career: “Being a soldier wouldn’t make anyone rich but it was a stable vocation. It gave the family a sheen of honour that would elevate its members from being mere tenants to being full-fledged civilians. It would also earn them respect in society” (Nitiprapha 132).

Unfortunately, Lieutenant Commander Jitsawai becomes entangled in the intrigues of the Manhattan Rebellion, taking on the insignificant role of a message carrier, unaware of the content he is delivering. Following the failure of the Rebellion, he is forced into hiding for several years before eventually returning in a state of destitution. His fate closely parallels that of Colonel Aureliano Buendía and José Arcadio Segundo from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Both characters, having survived the violence orchestrated by the Colombian government, isolate themselves in a room, seeking to “forget” the cruelty of the world while simultaneously erasing themselves from its memory. Likewise, Jitsawai becomes a “living dead” figure, retreating to an abandoned cottage on the grounds of his family’s house. Similar to Aureliano, who retreats into his room, isolating himself from the rest of the family and obsessively fabricating and re-fabricating small decorative fish made of gold, Jitsawai devotes himself to making model boats and disappears from society as if he had never existed. However, unlike the Colombian models who isolate themselves in their rooms until death, Jitsawai eventually returns to reality. Acting on Tong’s orders, he assumes control of the family business, which had been successfully managed by Jongsawang for an extended period. In stark contrast to Tong’s adopted son, Jitsawai drives the business into a state of financial ruin and, following his grandmother’s curse, ends his life by driving his car into the river. This scandalous event becomes the final blow for Tong. Overwhelmed with grief and guilt, he attempts to end his own life in a hotel, but his plan fails, and he ultimately dies in an ice factory, fulfilling his mother’s curse that all her descendants would “drown”. In his final moments, he hears his mother’s voice calling out to him, just as she did the last time he saw her before leaving China, a haunting image that he had repressed in his memory for decades.

At the end of *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat*, the narrative threads of *Pedro Páramo* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* finally converge. Following the tragic collapse of the Tang family, they are destined to be forgotten. A storm engulfs the house, hidden within the forest of Watter Trees, and the “desolate arrival of yellow pollen that was being blown across the grey sky and that would wipe out everything and bury the memories of the memories into oblivion” (Nitiprapha 330). This scene is reminiscent of the night José Arcadio Buendía, the founder of Macondo, dies, one of the most emblematic magical scenes of the Colombian novel. Although the Tang family's saga in Thailand ends, the same cannot be said for the one in China, the homeland that Tong had always longed for. Decades later, Hong, his only surviving son from his marriage with Ping Mui, travels to Thailand for his father and the family house. This journey mirrors Juan Preciado's pilgrimage to Comala in *Pedro Páramo*. However, much like in Rulfo's novel, Hong discovers only absence. Everyone has perished, and the house is now abandoned and haunted solely by ghosts.

Conclusion

In this article I have offered an exploration of *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* through the lens of Magical Realism. This literary trend originated in a region that was antipodal to Thailand. It highlights Nitiprapha's innovative depiction of the “outsiders” —a marginalized community metaphorically likened to “ghosts” in Thai and Chinese history— through haunting storytelling and spectral characters that reflect striking parallels with the Mexican and Colombian models. The analysis underscores the interplay between these foreign literary elements and local cultural references, emphasizing the effective “domestication” of Magical Realist aesthetics within Thai and Chinese historical and literary contexts.

However, it is important to note that *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat*, despite the profound influence of Latin American Magical Realism, retains the realistic essence characteristic of the novel of the overseas Chinese in Thailand. Nitiprapha's work unfolds in a more “realistic” mode than its Latin American counterparts. Unlike the mystification of characters, spaces, and events in *Pedro Páramo* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* portrays “ordinary” characters rooted in real, tangible settings. These include Talad Noi and Yaowarat in Bangkok, as well as Chachoengsao Province, areas historically inhabited by Thailand's overseas Chinese community. The characters are subject to significant historical events, and Nitiprapha explicitly references actual incidents, dates, and historical figures of the time. Even at the novel's conclusion, where all the protagonists have perished and the once vibrant family house is reduced to

a haunted, abandoned space observed by the neighbors, the broader geographical setting remains unchanged. Unlike the fully mythologized spaces of Macondo or Comala, which are swallowed by oblivion and erased from memory, the physical spaces in Nitiprapha's novel persist in the real world, continuing to exist as part of Thailand's everyday social and historical landscape.

Notes

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² Nitiprapha's debut novel, *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth* (2013), received the S.E.A. Write Award in 2015, followed by *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* (2016), which earned the same recognition three years later. Both works reflect the influence of Latin American Magical Realism, particularly the literary aesthetics and structural techniques found in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth*, a classic romance in which the female protagonists experience surreal love dramas, serves as a preliminary exploration of storytelling techniques that are later fully realized in *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat*, whose draft predates the former. According to Nitiprapha, the first novel is not a work of Magical Realism but rather an example of Impressionism, whereas the latter is a fully developed Magical Realist narrative, employing magical elements to recount history (Luesakul 2).

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