

## Magical Realism in Ken Liu's Short Stories

Tahira Jabeen\*, Shahida Khaliq†, Abida Anwar‡

### Abstract

*Contemporary fiction has incorporated magical realism, which is seen as an aesthetic category with a literary entry into the epistemological insight that governs our outlook. It is the depiction of the real and magical worlds using true incidents, unreducible materials, contrasting ideas of time and space, as well as myths exclusive to a particular cultural group. This study applies Magical Realism Narration Techniques, described by W. B. Faris, to three short stories: i.e., "The Paper Menagerie", "The Literomancer" and "Good Hunting" by Ken Liu. The study examines how these strategies are used by Ken Liu to convey various themes in his short stories. According to research, W.B. Faris' framework for magical realism narration is useful for analyzing the genre. Prejudice and colonialism are common themes in Ken Liu's writing. Moreover, he tries to evoke magic out of cultural elements and traditional characters which provokes reader's interest in the rich culture of Chinese people and develops the stories interest.*

**Keywords:** magical realism; short story; Ken Liu; history; culture

### Introduction

Franz Roh (1925), a German art historian and critic, first introduced the term, "Magical Realism" in his essay "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism", a return back to realism from the expressionism that was more abstract form of art. Roh asserts that in 1920's many art critics came to realize that expressionism has come to an end because it basically destroys the real image of the nature, as expressionism expresses personal inner experience and focuses on emotions. (Ignacio, 2014) Roh's essay "Magical Realism: Post Expressionism" has been extended into a book titled *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* by Franz Roh and Lois Parkinson Zamora (1995).

This book has been translated into Spanish and distributed in Spain and Latin America, and within a year it was used in the prose of European writers. The original Latin American novel was created by Latin American authors in the 1940s by combining the marvelous concept of a French Surrealist with mythology and traditional beliefs. Magical realism became popular in post-colonial world for depicting colonialism. So, in 1960s it

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\* Assistant Professor in the Department of English in the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir

† Assistant Professor in the Department of English in the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

‡ Lecturer in Post Graduate College

became the literary language of the Emergent Post-Colonial World (Hart and Ouyang, 2005).

Like literary realism, magical realism uses a realistic tone, though both are opposite in meaning.

Zamora and Faris (1995) suggest that magical realism is an oxymoron because it consists of two opposite words 'magic' and 'realism' which together form a new perspective.

Faris wrote another book, *Ordinary Enchantment: Magical Realism and Remystification of Narrative* (2004), in which she defines Magical Realism as, "Magical Realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them" (Faris, 2004). She identified five primary characteristics of the narrative mode of Magical Realism and suggested that necessarily not all but some of these elements should be present in all the magical-realistic narrations.

This study intends to trace the elements of Magical Realism in Ken Liu's short stories, "The Paper Menagerie", "The Literomancer" and "Good Hunting". It also analyzes different themes conveyed by these techniques in Ken Liu's fiction.

"The Paper Menagerie" is about a Chinese boy Kan, who struggles with issues common to many immigrant children. This short story demonstrates how he debases himself in order to blend in with that new society. Also, it depicts the interaction between parents and children and demonstrates how children grow apart from their parents.

In the opening paragraph of "The Literomancer", Young Lilly, who recently moved from the US to Taiwan, is introduced. Her dad is a counterintelligence agent. She initially doesn't make any friends, but later in school she befriends a local Chinese boy named Teddy, who aspires to play baseball for the Red Sox, and his grandfather, Mr. Ken, a Literomancer i.e. fortune teller. The story portrays Chinese culture and religion.

The main character of "Good Hunter" Liang is a demon hunter who befriends Yan, a shape-shifting fox spirit. After colonialism, when the magic fades away, they lost their livelihood, so they travelled to Hong Kong to find work. Yan becomes a prostitute, while Liang becomes a steam-engine engineer. However, Yan is unsatisfied with her new life. When Liang aided Yan in retrieving her former life using steel and chrome, magic appeared to be functioning once more. The themes and plots in these chosen short stories seem to be varied. The cherry on top is that each of these stories includes a brief history and cultural introduction

to China. To undermine reality and painful events, magical elements are blended with real settings and details.

### **Literature Review**

Being one of the popular literary trends in the twentieth century, much work has been done in Magical Realism.

Sanchez (2000) conducted research on Magical Realism, entitled "Magic Realism in Contemporary American Women's Fiction". Sanchez selected novels from 1970 to 1990 to find out the similarities and differences in the use of Magical Realism by different female writers to provide a flourishing model of Magical Realism. According to Sanchez, by establishing a relationship between reader and text through magical realism, these odd and unacceptable things become acceptable in this genre. Due to the writers' diverse political and cultural upbringings, magical realism takes on varied forms in the literature of African Americans and Indian Americans. The study comes to the conclusion that every writer employs magical realism in order to provide his audience with an indirect perspective of history. These female authors portray powerful female characters who raise their voice against societal stereotypes.

Jones' (2003) work, "A Novel Genre: Poly lingualism and Magical Realism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*", focuses on how the novel uses magical realism. Ghosh, by drawing upon the theory of Poly lingualism by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, portrays a large number of transverse histories from the shift of British Empire into a post-colonial world. According to Jones, the writer has diffused the long movements of history and strange moments of the Diasporas with enchantment through magical realism narrative.

Hart (2003) proposed a study of Magical Realism in "America's Politicized Ghosts in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The House of Spirits*, and *Beloved*", to test the hypothesis that the phantoms in magical realist fiction disappear due to being on the wrong side of a political, gender, or race line. Discussing the magical realism in, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Hart says that, the writer Marquez gives keen details with magical or supernatural elements, just like a description of the sheet blowing in the wind as the character's levitation. According to Hart, ghosts in magical realistic fiction are memorialized traumas that characters in the story experienced in the past, rather than actual ghosts.

The second novel in Hart's study is *The House of the Spirits* by Allende. Allende, like Marquez, depicts the world in which real and supernatural coexist. Her female character possesses magical powers.

According to Hart, Allende consciously gives the feminist touch to the magical realism, as women have six senses not men. The spiritual powers possessed by the women in the novel allow them to survive in the men's world.

Hart finds a number of similarities between *Beloved* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, such as the mundane context of the ghost's description, the use of the ghost as a supernatural power, and the use of supernatural to discuss the ideological rifts within a given society. It highlights the fact that what exist for a group does not exist for another.

Suyoufie (2009), in her study "Magical Realism in Ghadah Al-Samman's *The Square Moon*", explores how Al-Samman uses Magical Realism to present the new perspective of reality to her readers and enhance their experience of life. Suyoufie, by considering Al-Samman's works in a postcolonial context, finds out that Al-Samman's stories do not always give an ideal world to flee from the reality, but they do multiply the ability to deal with the hard realities of life. By presenting the extraordinary, Al-Samman tries to criticize the stereotypes in folk sayings and folk practices.

Kembryte (2018) studied, "Functions of Magic Realism in Tony Morrison's *Beloved*". Kembryte finds out that this novel has all the features of Magical Realist narration described in the theories of Chanaddy (2003) and Faris (1995). The novel challenges conventional wisdom about time, space, and identity. Kembryte suggests that since magical realism is employed in the story to represent the physical and psychological condition of African-Americans who encounter that historical period, it is essential to have knowledge of African-American history in order to understand the novel properly.

The current study examines Ken Liu's Magical Realistic Narrative techniques and analyses the various themes they represent. It also aims to investigate how culture has influenced Ken Liu's magical realistic narratives.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This study utilizes the framework of W. B. Faris to conduct an exploratory study into Magical Realist narrative techniques in Ken Liu's Fiction. According to Faris, there are five primary characteristics of the narrative mode of Magical Realism which are a mandatory part of every Magical Realism Narration. These characteristics are briefly described as:

*Irreducible Element*

The Irreducible Element of magic means familiar knowledge or received belief. These Irreducible Elements are highly accepted by the environment. In this kind of fiction, the narrator gives the concept of something extraordinary with some ordinary events. These extraordinary events or characters are often taken from mythical, religious, or folkloric beliefs.

*The Description of the Real World*

The second characteristic of magical realism is that it gives minute details about the phenomenal world. It is the description of real world in magical realism that makes it different from fantasy. The writer creates a fictional world that resembles the real world.

*Un-Settling Doubts*

According to Faris, before accepting irreducible elements, the reader may get confused by two contradictory understandings of the magical and realism of events, and therefore confront some Unsettling Doubts, i.e. the third characteristic of magical realist narrations.

The reader's own beliefs, based on his or her culture, serve as the basis for the crucial doubts. Some readers will find the narrative different from their own beliefs. When a reader finds a belief different from his own, he considers it as miracle. The scenes of magical realist text look like a dream, and the text tempts us to co-opt them as a dream or not a dream.

*Merging Realism*

The fourth characteristics of Magical Realism narration, is the merging/combining of magical and realism, e.g. in fables, where the writer considers himself in both human and non-human world. The writer remains in a state of uncertainty about belonging to one or the other. In cultural and historical stories, there is a merging of traditional and modern worlds. Sometimes the text has a magical and real world; it may have the realism of earth and heaven. Sometimes the narrator exhibits both the world of living and the world of the dead. The narrator presents these two worlds in such a way that the boundary between fact and fiction becomes blurred.

*Upsets the Received Ideas about Time, Space and Identity*

This is the fifth characteristic of magical realist narratives. This is disruption of time, space, and identity. The events are set into different

historical periods with different settings and thus disturb our received ideas about time, space, and identity (Faris, 2004).

### **Methodology:**

The researcher selected three stories by Ken Liu because of their tendency to use magical, supernatural and mysterious elements. The study uses textual and descriptive analysis to dig out the magical realism narration techniques and themes conveyed by these techniques. The study uses Faris' theory of magical realism narration to determine the magical features in the selected short stories.

### *Analysis of Selected Short Story*

#### The Paper Menagerie

"The Paper Menagerie" is a tale of a biracial young boy who experiences the challenges of migration. Because his family had migrated from China to the United States when he was 11 years old, Ken Liu may have shared his personal experience with his readers when he described the difficulties faced by Chinese immigrants in this short story "The Paper Menagerie." The story is about a boy, Jack, who struggles hard and totally loses his cultural identity to get in and accepted by that particular society. Jack's mother embeds him in Chinese culture. He speaks the Chinese language, eats Chinese food and plays with origami made by his mother. But when he faces American society in his school, he feels alien and feels embarrassment about his cultural identity. He puts Chinese culture out of his life to fit into American culture. He starts speaking English and eating American food. He puts all his origami made by his mother in a shoe box, which is the symbol of his cultural identity. He keeps his distance from his mother because he is embarrassed about his language and identity.

In this story, magical realism narrative is used through origami. The narrator elucidates that "Mom's breath was special. She breathed into them so that they shared her breath and thus moved with her life. This was her magic". And according to the narrator, these paper animals "growled the sound somewhere between a cat and a rustling newspaper."

In this short story, he depicts the Cultural Revolution, also known as the Dark Period of Chinese History, which caused widespread devastation and the deaths of millions of innocent people. It was sparked by the different opinions of two leaders of the ruling party, Mao and Shaoqi. It distorted the minds of people and turned neighbors and friends into enemies. For a long period of time, it left its impression on the

economy of China. Through the short story "The Paper Menagerie," Ken Liu tries to give a glimpse of the impact of the Cultural Revolution on the lives of common people. It causes life-changing moments in the life of Jack's mother. Her parents were killed due to having a relative in Hong Kong, and she led a life of orphanage at the age of 10. While stealing food from fields, she is captured by men, who smuggle her to a family to take care of their two young boys. For ten years, she lives a miserable life there. During that time, she suffers hard work and torture the whole day, and at night she is locked in the cabinet to make sure that she cannot escape. To get rid of such life she appears in catalogue and marries his father.

Ken Liu also discusses the Qingming festival (also known as the festival of the dead) in "The Paper Menagerie" and employs it to develop the story when the narrator discovers his mother's writings on a paper doll. When he considers her at the Qingming festival and discovers her mother's remark, "The animals will stop moving when I stop breathing. But if I write to you with all my heart, I will leave a little of myself behind on this paper, in these words" Origami and the Qingming festival are responsible for creating irreducible elements throughout the short story.

According to Faris second element of Magical Realism narratives are the description of the real world. Ken Liu not only gives keen details about the events which are taking place in the stories, but he also assists with the names of real places and dates to proclaim realism.

Kan's mother writes in her letter about her village and date of birth as, "I was born in 1957 in Sigulu village, Hebei province." Hebei is a coastal province of North China. And she also talks about the famine and Cultural Revolution of Chinese people, which struck China in 1966 and brought huge changes in the lives and history of Chinese people. It informs Jack about her mother's past, which seems helpful in reviving his mother's love in his heart and connects him to his culture. It also gives the essence of the Cultural Revolution to the readers and fulfils the requirement of the second element of magical realism, that is, a description of the real world.

Unsettling doubts arise in the short story when a tiger made out of wrapping papers begins to walk around and roar. And to settle the doubts of the readers, Ken Liu also describes his narrator's hesitation to accept the animation of the paper craft, and he imagines it as a childhood memory. "Or perhaps I had only imagined that these paper constructions were once alive. The memory of children could not be trusted." Ken Liu has used this technique to persuade his readers about the rationality of his words, and then he explains the possibility of the animation of paper toys. "The events which we consider as realistic are combined with the unrealistic and

unexplainable, which could consist of dreams or mythology” (Drabble, 2000).

Ken Liu uses the testimony of another character, a boy named Mark (a neighbor), to persuade the reader that paper toy animation is acceptable. “Laohu growled and leapt at Mark’s face. Mark screamed more out of fear and surprise than pain. Laohu was only made of paper, after all.”

Ken Liu has merged two worlds in this short story. Sometimes he talks about the history of China, like famines and the Cultural Revolution, and sometimes he brings the reader to another charming world where paper animals have some magical elements and they can talk and walk around. The character of the mother has magical breath, which gives life to the paper animals. These animals move and crawl and also utter the sounds of cats and rustling newspaper.

To give his short story a realistic image, Ken Liu intentionally gives all the details about these paper toys, so that the reader may not consider them a fairy tale or fantasy. “In Roh’s opinion, magic realism is a way to uncover the mystery hidden in everyday reality” (Kembryte, 2018). The short story depicts the prejudice that American society has towards others. American women, who visit their house, make fun of Jack’s appearance. When he speaks to them, they comment that he does not sound very Chinese. A young American boy, Mark, calls Jack’s paper toys cheap Chinese garbage. At the end of the short story, when he finds a letter from his late mother, he realizes that his heritage connects him to his ancestors. Tracing ai (love) on his mother’s letter again and again shows his regret and embarrassment at his faults.

In the last lines of the short story, he shows his acceptance of his identity as he refolds the paper back into the Laohu (Tiger), cradles him in his arms, and begins to walk home. This is a life-changing moment for him as he accepts his identity and connects with his roots. In this story, the prejudice of society, parent-child relations, and the journey of obtaining and accepting his cultural identity are depicted with a spark of magic in them to give a lighter tone.

#### *The Literomancer*

In this short novel, Ken Liu explores the life of an elderly man named Mr. Kan, who endured colonialism and civil war and lost every member of his family, friends, and well-wishers. After that, he wants to live out his final years in peace but is kidnapped by intelligence and brutally slain because of a suspect. Ken Liu, uses literomancy (fortune telling based on written



words) to generate magical realism in the story. In China, it is customary to use a single character supplied by the requester or the requester's name to inform him of his fortune.

In the short story, Ken Liu utilizes it as an irreducible element to create Magical Realism in the short story. Mr. Kan explains literomancy as, "The Chinese invented writing as an aid to divination, so Chinese characters always had a deep magic to them. From Chinese language characters, I can tell what things bother people and what lies in their past and future."

Another irreducible element is the use of mirrors to ward off harm. Mr. Kan gives the little mirror to Lilly, which is wrapped in masking tape with some Chinese characters written on it to shine it on the face of the girl. Lilly thinks it is stupid but takes it in regard to Mr. Kan.

Ken Liu uses the same technique that he used in the short story, "The Paper Menagerie" when he uses magical elements in the short story. Initially, the narrator shows hesitation to believe in the magical events that happen in the short story to get the reader's trust. And when readers are convinced to believe the words of the narrator, then the narrator shows his acceptance of that particular magical event. At first, Lilly also has doubts about how someone can tell about someone's future with the help of a word or by his/her name. However, when Mr. Kan makes a prediction about her, she appears to completely agree with him. Secondly, unsettling doubts arise when Mr. Kan gives the magical mirror to Lilly. She does not believe in the magical power of that ordinary looking mirror. But the latter tells readers about the awful condition of those teasing girls who appeared as horrible monsters in the mirror.

Besides that, the writer also utilized the names of real cities, countries, and players. At the very beginning of the short story, Ken Liu tells his readers that Lilly and his parents moved from Clearwell, Texas to Taiwan. The characters repeatedly talk about the New York Yankees, the Boston Redsox team, and Ted William (a famous baseball player at the time of World War II) and give the short story a more realistic image. Ken Liu mentions the historical events of the civil war and colonialism in the short story with the date, year, and other details. Mr. Kan tells Lilly about the Peshenggen rebellion that began on February 28. "The peshenggen rebellion began on February 28, 1947, and lasted for months."

Basically, this rebellion was a part of the civil war that was started by communists for power in 1927. During the Northern Expedition, the leader of the Nationalist party attacked the camps of communists and killed thousands of communists, and the nationalists became the ruling

party of China. During his ruling period, the leader of the Nationalist party remained busy suppressing communists, but in 1937, Japan invaded China and the Sino-Japanese war became the priority of the Nationalist party. The Communists seized the chance and strengthened themselves at the same time. After the Sino-Japanese Conflict ended, they gained control of a huge territory, and civil war broke out once more. Since thousands of people died during this uprising, the day it began—February 28—became taboo for many years. The Communists also became China's new ruling party in 1949.

In “Literomancer”, Ken Liu depicts the time of the Sino-Japanese war and the civil war between Nationalists (the ruling party of that time) and the Communist Party, which started after the Sino Japanese war. He has also tried to show the diplomatic role of allied forces. Firstly, Lilly finds a letter that belongs to her father, who works for intelligence, that shows that the infrastructure of the country has been destroyed and many public figures have been killed “have successfully sabotaged numerous factories, railroads, bridges, and other infrastructure. Agents have also assassinated several local Chicom cadres”.

At the end of the short story, Mr. Kan and Teddy become suspicious of Lilly's father as they talk about 2/28, the date when civil war started again. And they are captured by intelligence. When Lilly visits their cottage in the morning, she does not find them anywhere and finds the cottage ransacked too. She tries to ask about it from the neighbors, but the people of the village seem frightened. They do not even open their doors, nor do they try to find out where Mr. Kan and Teddy are.

In Literomancer, Ken Liu also merges words with knowledge and intuition. Mr. Kan interprets the past and future of people by using the words they suggest or by their names. With the help of the word Lilly suggests, Mr. Kan interprets that Lilly wants to be a cow girl. Lilly nodded, smiling. “I was born in Texas. We are born knowing how to ride.”

In Literomancer, Ken Liu talks about war, deaths, and terror and mixes it with magic and literomancy. “Magic realism holds a catalyst function in existing society and history” (Aldea, 2011). By merging the real world with the magical world, he has made the short story interesting for his readers.

### *Good Hunting*

Ken Liu's story “Good Hunting” is a blend of fantasy and steam punk. Ken Liu calls colonialism “a dark stain in the history of China, and most of his stories deal with the theme of colonialism. In this story, he has

used the Chinese mythological character "Hulijing" to evoke magic. Hulijing is a character from Chinese mythology, such as fairies in Europe. According to Chinese mythology, hulijings are fox spirits that can take human form. Because they are usually portrayed as females who transform into young and beautiful women, this character adds irreplaceable elements to this short story. At the beginning of this story, two demon hunters, Liang (the narrator of this short story) and his father, seem to be waiting for Hulijing behind a rock in the courtyard of a merchant whose son is bewitched by Hulijing. As it was Liang's first hunt, he was only supposed to splash dog piss on Hulijing to restrict Hulijing's transformation. Liang splashed dog piss at Hulijing when she was in the middle of her transformation. So, she seems like a mixture of fox and woman.

"Her face was thus frozen halfway between a woman's and a fox's, with a hairless snout and raised, triangular ears that twitched angrily. Her hands had turned into paws, tipped with sharp claws that she swiped at me."

All this looks like a fantasy, and some doubts arise in the minds of readers, so Ken Liu adds some historical events to differentiate it from a fairytale.

He discusses the Chinese Revolution period and the end of the Manchu dynasty (1912). He gives a description of the funicular railway in Hong Kong, located at the top of Victoria Peak. He also talks about the innovations and inventions brought about by the revolution. So, Liang has witnessed two worlds: a world before revolution and colonialism that is full of magic and fantasy, and a world after revolution and colonialism that is based on steam, chrome, and machines.

In this short story, no one seems happy and satisfied in modern and colonized society. Liang's father commits suicide as no one visits him. Besides, they go to Christian missionaries or the teachers from San Francisco to seek help to ward off ghosts.

Like the other characters in this short story, Liang and Yan learn to survive in the modern world but do not find happiness in it at all. Liang makes himself busy with his work to keep himself apart from the beautiful memories of his father and land any more. Yan also wants to go back to her old form to hunt. She wants to get rid of the dark face of modern society. At one point, she says, "A terrible thing had been done to me. But I could also be terrible". Ken Liu has used this dialogue not only for his

character but also as the voice of the colonial population who has suffered due to it.

The work of Ken Liu also brings to light the prejudice of people towards Chinese after colonization. The Chinese people not only lost their hold on their lands but also their respect and dignity. There are many dialogues where foreigners disrespect Chinese people, and sometimes the characters themselves feel or depict it.

There are many points in this short story where readers have some doubts, like the converting of fox into human or human into fox, or transformation into half human and half fox, but immense doubts emerge at the end when Ken Liu tries to merge the magical world and the real world by creating a mechanical Hulijing in his short story. Liang converts Yan into a fox. It is very hard to believe how a person can convert a human body into a fox with the help of chrome, metal, and a steam engine that can hunt like a fox, talk like a human, and use charcoal to run their engine. As Liang says, "a chrome fox as beautiful and deadly as the oldest legends stood before me." All of these transformations create a disruption of identity throughout the short story. This is a common technique of many magical realist writers; they intentionally leave the magical element introduced in the story unexplained to make the incident normal and a part of day-to-day life.

Culture is an integral part of Ken Liu's writings. He certainly talks about language, festivals, food, or any other element of Chinese culture in every short story he writes. In this fiction, he introduces his reader to two Chinese festivals: Yulan (festival of ghosts) and Qingming (the festival of dead people). One of the major characters of the short story Hulijing is also taken from Chinese mythology. It can be either good or bad. Through his short story, Ken Liu tries to create a good image of Hulijing. At the beginning of the short story, two demon hunters try to capture a Hulijing who has been bewitched. But with the development of the short story, we come to know that hulijing just visited the farmer's son to keep him calm. Hulijing is killed by the demon hunter. But her daughter (Yan) does not try to take revenge. Instead, she becomes good friends with the demon hunter's son (Liang)

#### *Representation of Culture*

Culture plays an important role in the stories of Ken Liu. The magical realism of the stories is entirely based on the things that are a part of Chinese culture. Like paper toys (origami), literomancy (telling people's fortunes according to words they select or by their name), and

hulijing, which is a Chinese mythological character. Besides it, Ken Liu has also used words from the Chinese language, some old sayings, and promoted his culture through his strong reflection on colonization, which was part of Chinese society for a long time.

The short story, "The Paper Menagerie," is based on the art of origami (the art of paper folding), which is an old traditional Chinese practice. Chinese people usually make paper toys from scrap paper for their children.

Chinese words are also used in the short story with English spellings, like "Laohu" for tiger, "zhe jiao zhezhi" this is called origami, "xiao laohu" tiger, "xuexiao hao ma?" used for asking if school day was good, "shajiao chink" for asking what happened, "bu haochi" not delicious, "fashao la" for fever, "ai" for love, "haizi, mama aini" for child, mama loves you, "numhui du zhongwn ma" for can you read Chinese? Ken Liu also introduces his readers to the Chinese festival of Qingming (festival of dead people).

The second short story "The Literomancer" is also based on the Chinese culture. Literomancy is an old Chinese tradition to tell the fortune of the people by their names or by the words they choose. Different Chinese dishes names as pork ball, three cup chicken and shantung style milk soup are used by writer to make the reader familiar with the Chinese cuisine. Some old Chinese sayings are also used in the short story like "wang nienchihchiao" which means, a friendship that forgets the years. "pu a puhsiang shih" which means that sometimes you cannot become friends until you have fought each other.

One of the characters of the short story "Good Hunting" is taken from the Chinese mythology. Hulijing is a Chinese mythological character; a fox spirit which has ability to transform into a young beautiful woman.

Every piece of writing of Ken Liu has a reflection of Chinese culture. And he tries to evoke magic out of cultural elements and traditional characters which provokes reader's interest in the rich culture of Chinese people and develops the stories interest.

### **Conclusion**

Faris' five primary elements of magical realist narration are found in Ken Liu's short story. Four elements of magical realist narration, like irreducible elements, description of the real world, unsettling doubts, and merging realism, are found in "Paper Menagerie" and "Literomancer".

The third short story, "Good Hunting", also has a disruption of identity, so it has all the five elements of magical realist narration. Ken Liu has used the same style or writing pattern to write these three magical albeit realistic short stories. In all the short stories, irreducible elements are developed by using traditions and myths. A keen description of each event that is occurring has been given. Events from history, names of real-world places and people are also used to make the fiction real. Unsettling doubts are aroused with the introduction of the magical element in the short story. And, after a while, these are minimized by the narrator's witness or other characters in the short story. In Ken's short story, old, new, and real, magical worlds are merged into one.

One technique that is commonly used in these stories to settle the doubts is the alienation of the narrator from the magical element when it is introduced in the stories to settle the doubts of the readers. And when the readers' trust is achieved by the narrator, then the narrator testifies to the magical element. Besides how all the stories have the theme of colonialism, Ken Liu discusses how it affects people's lives. He highlights their suffering and the prejudice of others towards Chinese people. Other themes of the stories are parent-child relationships, prejudice and the use of technology.

Culture is an integral part of Ken Liu's fiction. He has often used the Chinese language and introduced Chinese cuisine. Some Chinese festivals are also discussed with their minor details. Names or sometimes characters are based on Chinese tradition or mythology. And it is due to these Chinese traditions and mythological characters that the fiction contains magical elements.

Through his fiction, he has also tried to foreground the history of the Chinese people. Through these three short stories, the readers come across the history of China from 1840 to 1976. During that period, Chinese people passed through colonialism, civil wars, and the Cultural Revolution.

In this book, Ken Liu tries to give a glimpse of the series of bloodshed and destruction that the Chinese people passed through in these years. "Magic realism is not just a new way of looking at literature, but a new way of shaping cultural reality itself." In postcolonial cultures where the fantastic happens routinely, magic realism does not just show reality: it is reality. And it is mythology, a basis that brings together hybrid postcolonial cultures where people still struggle through Diasporas" (Anderson, 2016).

While giving the information about the history and culture of China, he has added the spark of magic in these short stories, which makes them interesting and enjoyable.

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