Trauma in Chinese North American Fiction

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Hiermit erkläre ich an Eides statt, dass ich die Arbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die von mir angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt habe. Auch habe ich die Arbeit nicht bereits an einer anderen Hochschule zur Erlangung eines akademischen Grades eingereicht.

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                                          Lin Fu

Zusammenfassung der Dissertation von Lin Fu

Trauma in Chinese North American Fiction

Als Trauma wird ein qualvoller Zustand bezeichnet, der zu einer Destabilisierung des individuellen und kollektiven Wohlbefindens führt und besondere Herausforderungen an unser Leben stellt. Diese Studie untersucht das Phänomen Trauma als interpretatives Werkzeug sowie als strategischen Tropus und hat sich zum Ziel gesetzt, Traumata in der chinesisch-nordamerikanischen Literatur zu untersuchen. Dabei liegt der spezielle Fokus auf Fragen häuslicher Gewalt, sozialer Unterdrückung und sozialer Ungerechtigkeit. Gestützt auf Theorien zur Traumaforschung der Psychologie, Sozialwissenschaften und Literaturwissenschaft hat diese Studie den Anspruch, herauszuarbeiten, wie wissenschaftliche Theorien über Traumata mit fiktionalen Traumadarstellungen in Romanen korrelieren - und wie beide Perspektiven Verständnisse von traumatischen Erlebnissen bereichern können. Dabei werden Kenntnisse, die aus den Interpretationen gewonnen werden, in die Traumatheorie zurückgeführt.

Diese Studie versucht zudem, die Interpretationsmöglichkeiten über die Vorstellung von Traumata zu erweitern, indem die psychologisch-physiologischen Aspekte von menschlicher Verzweiflung, hervorgerufen durch Immigration, in die Untersuchung mit einbezogen werden. Durch die Analyse der Dynamik der Einwandererfamilie, die in Lan Samantha Changs Roman *Hunger* (1998, USA) dargestellt wird, soll aufgezeigt werden, dass Immigration an sich nicht zwangsläufig Traumata hervorrufen muss. Vielmehr sind die vorhergehenden persönlichen Lebenserfahrungen (sog. Prä-Immigrationsbedingungen) sowie die akkumulierten Post-Immigrationserfahrungen der Auslöser von Traumata für die chinesisch-amerikanischen Romancharaktere.

Zudem richtet diese Studie den Fokus auf Traumata, die, durch Rassismus und Doppel-Identität hervorgerufen, bei der chinesischen Minderheit in Kanada bestehen. Durch das Studium des Romans *Banana Boys* (2000, Kanada) von Terry Woo in Verbindung mit Artikeln über Rassismus-bezogene Traumata von Bryant-Davis und Ocampo sowie DuBois' Konzept des "Doppel-Bewusstseins" versucht diese Arbeit aufzuzeigen, wie die andauernde Bedrängnis sich bereits im Bewusstsein der chinesischen Migrant_innen verwurzelt hat. Jene Bedrängnis, provoziert durch wiederholten Rassismus sowie durch Verleugnung der eigenen kulturellen Authentizität, führt zu einem zerrissenen Selbstwertgefühl sowie zu Zweifeln an der eigenen „kulturellen Zugehörigkeit".

Weiterhin versucht diese Studie, den historischen Zusammenhang zwischen kollektivem Trauma auf nationaler Ebene einerseits und Traumaerfahrungen der Person auf individueller Ebene andererseits analytisch zu durchdringen. Anhand einer Fallstudie zur chinesischen Kulturrevolution, wie sie in Yan Lis Werk *Lily in the Snow* (2009, Kanada) repräsentiert ist, will diese Arbeit beweisen, dass dieses politische Ereignis einen massiven Einfluss auf zwei Generationen von Chines_innen hatte, deren Glaubenssätze und Lebenswege durch die sinnlose Grausamkeit dieser staatlichen Aktion geprägt worden sind. Diese Dissertation argumentiert weiterhin am Beispiel der Kulturrevolution, dass für diktatorische Gesellschaftssysteme einfache Schemata, die nach Opfer hier und Täter dort differenzieren, nicht tragen können, weil es zum Wesen solcher Systeme gehört, Opfer in Schuld (gefühle) zu verwickeln.

Schließlich wird diese Studie beschreiben, wie der Roman *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001, USA) von Amy Tan die Fehlkommunikation zwischen Müttern und Töchtern, Geistergeschichten sowie die

verwundeten und mit körperlichen Narben übersäten Überlebenden von traumatischen Situationen als stilistische Mittel nutzt, um Traumata zu porträtieren. Ferner demonstriert der Roman, wie die Akkumulation von aufdringlichen traumatischen Erinnerungen über die Jahre hinweg zu einer Dringlichkeit und Notwendigkeit führen, diese Traumata durch den Akt des Schreibens und Übersetzens loszulassen. Diese Arbeit soll zeigen, dass jene Akte des Schreibens und Übersetzens wie durchgeführte kulturelle "Exorzismen" wirken. Deren Zweck ist es nicht, die Erinnerungen an Traumata völlig auszulöschen, sondern ihre tieferliegende existenzielle Bedeutung herauszufinden, um einen gerechtfertigten Frieden mit der Vergangenheit schließen zu können. Damit leistet die vorliegende Studie einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Theoretisierung von (fiktionalen Repräsentationen von) Trauma im transkulturellen Kontext.

ABSTRACT

Trauma, a distressful condition which contributes to the destabilization of individual and collective well-being, poses unique challenges to our lives. This study employs trauma both as an interpretive tool and a strategic trope to examine traumas in Chinese North American fiction, with a particular focus on issues of domestic adversity, social oppression, and social injustice. Drawing upon trauma theories from psychology, sociology, and literary studies, this study seeks to investigate how trauma theories resonate with narratives of traumas, and how they both enrich our understanding of traumatic experiences. In doing so, conclusions drawn from the interpretations will be tested and fed into theories on trauma.

The study hereby also expands the interpretive feasibilities of the notion of trauma by encompassing the psycho-physiologically distress triggered by immigration. By examining the dynamics of the immigrant family portrayed in Lan Samantha Chang's *Hunger* (1998, USA), the study argues that immigration as such does not necessarily cause traumas; rather, the Chinese American characters' pre-immigration experiences, as well as a series of cumulative post-immigration conditions, trigger their traumas.

Moreover, the study brings attention to the trauma of racism and trauma that is part of double consciousness experienced by Chinese minority subjects in Canada. Through reading Terry Woo's *Banana Boys* (2000, Canada) in dialogue with Bryant-Davis and Ocampo's articles on racism-related trauma, and Du Bois's notion of double consciousness, this study proposes that the enduring affliction arising from repeated exposure to sustained racism and denial of their cultural authenticity is ingrained in Chinese minority subjects' consciousness, disrupting their sense of self

and sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the study seeks to demonstrate the interconnection between historical trauma on a national scale and the anguish experienced by the individual. Through the case study of Chinese Cultural Revolution as represented in Yan Li's *Lily in the Snow* (2009, Canada), the study discusses its massive impact on two generations of people whose beliefs and lives have been shaped by the senseless ferocity of the movement, and argues that distorted historical circumstances destabilize the stringent dichotomy of victim and perpetrator.

Finally, the study discusses how Amy Tan's novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001, USA) utilizes miscommunication between mothers and daughters, ghost narratives, and trauma survivor's body to demonstrate trauma, and how the accumulation of intrusive traumatic memories over the years speaks of the urgency and necessity for them to be unleashed through the act of writing and translation. It argues that the act of writing and translation functions as conducting cultural exorcisms, the purpose of which is not to eradicate the hunting memories of trauma, but to negotiate the meaning of their existence out of a concern for justice, and to attain peace with the past. In doing so, the study opens up new perspectives on and research finding about (fictional representations of) trauma in transcultural contexts.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION: TRAUMA IN CHINESE NORTH AMERICAN FICTION

> Writing and reading about trauma presents painful dilemmas for writers and readers alike.
>
> (Laurie Vickroy, p.2)
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> Realistic View counseled that trauma, in any of its forms, is not a failure or a mistake. It is not something to be ashamed of, not a sign of weakness, and not a reflection of inner failing. It is simply a fact of life.
>
> (Mark Epstein, p. 2-3)

Trauma, a distressful condition that contributes to the destabilization of individual and collective well-being, poses unique challenges to our lives. The concept, which was developed in the nineteenth century in clinical medicine to describe the wound inflicted on both the body and the mind, has now seeped into many areas of cultural production, becoming a critical vocabulary to explain modern distress. From large-scale catastrophic events, such as wars, genocides, terrorist attacks and natural disasters to individual experiences such as the loss of loved ones, abuse, and accidents, the broad range of "traumatogenic events and the diversity of responses to these events serve to problematize and relativize the very notion of trauma."[1] Today, multiple disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry, sociology, cultural studies, media studies, history, anthropology, law and literature, have shaped the dimensions of trauma studies. As a well-established analytical category in Humanities, it has often been used

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[1] Lerner, Paul and Micale, Mark S., eds. *Traumatic Past: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001: 20.

as a trope to address the issues of collective memory, collective identity, and political struggle. The need of seeking meanings from the past in order to sustain its continuity with the present and to anticipate a better future has prompted many social actors to actively engage in constructing the discourse of trauma. The divergent uses of the term, whether as a bodily wound, mental anguish, a distressful experience, or a trope, offer a key to understanding the tragic aspect of human existence.

Trauma shakes people's meaning-making systems, yet it also evokes narratives. Trauma survivors use narratives to make sense of their experiences in order to heal. Writings that contain traumatic experiences provoke our reflections towards our own lives and trigger our sudden flood of emotions regardless of our disparate cultural backgrounds and diversified life experiences; they also draw our attention to particular historical, social, cultural, political, and ethical issues.

Like other literature that conveys traumas, Chinese North American fictions provide alternative sites for representations of sustained anguish and grief. My intention in this dissertation is to provide a critical study of representations of traumas in four Chinese North American fictions: Lan Samantha Chang's *Hunger* (1998, USA), Terry Woo's *Banana Boys* (2000, Canada), Yan Li's *Lily in the Snow* (2009, Canada), and Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001, USA). It is intended to make a further contribution to existing literary trauma studies by incorporating fictional accounts of Chinese experiences to broaden the scope of cultural reference.

The selected fictions have provided narrative journeys into human sufferings at individual and collective level under specific sociohistorical circumstances. Each text deserves to be studied as a unique story which

has its own historical specificity, physical environment and aesthetic reach towards the causes and consequences of victimhood. These texts collectively experiment and reflect the tragic parts of human experiences that are not restricted to psychological understanding of trauma, but rather allow for a broader scope of possibilities with their referential values and stylistic innovations.

Three novels and one novella have been selected to serve as examples, due to the consideration that three of them, *Hunger* (1998), *Banana Boys* (2000) and *Lily in the Snow* (2009) have not received adequate scholarly attention within the field of Asian North American literary studies, nor have they been studied from the perspective of trauma[2]. My priority is not given to the fiction books that have already gained international reputation. Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), however, is an exception. It has been well received by general readers[3] and literary scholars[4] alike, but

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[2] There are very few scholarly articles on Lan Samantha Chang's *Hunger*, and none of them have approached the novella through the lens of trauma. For instance, in Belinda Kong's "When Ghosts Dream: Immigrant Desire in Lan Samantha Chang's *Hunger*" (*Death in American Texts and Performances: Corpses, Ghosts, and the Reanimated Dead.* Eds. Lisa K. Perdigao and Mark Pizzato. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010: 99-112), the novella was studied from a Gothic perspective; in Patrycja Kurjatto-Renard's "Metaphors of Hunger and Satiety in Patricia. Chao's *Monkey King* and Lan Samantha Chang's *Hunger*" (*Transnational, National and Personal Voices: New Perspectives on Asian American and Asian Diasporic Women Writers*. Eds. Begona Simal and Elisabetta Marino. Munster: Lit Verlag, 2004: 215-30), it was studied in relation to metaphors. There are hardly any scholarly (journal) articles on Terry Woo's *Banana Boys* and Yan Li's *Lily in the Snow.* The author Terry Woo was briefly introduced in Arlene Chan's *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to Inside the Circle*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2011: 192. The storyline of *Lily in the Snow* was briefly reviewed by Luo, Shao-Pin in "Writing Chinese Diaspora." *Canadian Literature*, 12 Jan. 2012. Web. 10 Sept. 2014. <http://canlit.ca/reviews/writing_chinese_diaspora>).

[3] The book was nominated for the Orange Prize, the IMPAC Dublin Award, and New York Times Notable Book. See *Select Awards*. Southwestern University, n.d. Web. 12 Nov.

the variational narrative strategies Tan employed in her novel to exemplify the complexity of characters' traumatic experiences may enrich our understanding and imagination of traumas, and their profound impacts on the psyche. Although I acknowledge the value of other Chinese North American novels that convey traumas, and I am aware that evidently the number of books I have selected cannot do justice to the multi-faceted representations of traumas in Chinese North American fictions, I am more concerned with introducing the relatively less-known texts, as well as stylistic variations of narrative strategies to the existing literary studies on trauma. I do think these texts can be understood and interpreted in multiple ways by critics from a diversity of positions, not necessarily from the perspective of trauma only. Hence, despite the fact that these texts conform to the mode of what Anne Whitehead calls "trauma fiction"[5], and can be interpreted through the lens of trauma, I would not categorize them under such a genre label; rather, I would address them as "fictions that represent traumatic experiences."

The present study employs trauma both as an interpretive tool and a strategic trope to examine varied literary strategies writers adopt to represent traumas, and to identify different forms of human suffering in relation to specific historical, social and cultural conditions. In doing so, the

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<http://www.southwestern.edu/infoservices/writersvoice/past_voices/Amy-Tan/awards.html>.

[4] See Schultermandl, Silvia. *Transnational Matrilineage: Mother-Daughter Conflicts in Asian American Literature.* Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009; Adams, Bella. *Amy Tan.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005; Dong, Lan. *Reading Amy Tan.* Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Press, 2009; Bloom, Harold, ed. *Amy Tan.* New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009; Ramsey-Kurz, Helga. *The Non-Literate Other: Readings of Illiteracy in Twentieth-Century Novels in English.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.

[5] Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

research endeavors to answer the following questions: How to define trauma in literary studies while attempting to capture the essence of it from psychology and social science? What is the value of studying trauma in literature? How do literary studies differ from clinical studies in tackling trauma? What is the relationship between trauma and the sociohistorical background in which the literary text is positioned? What narrative techniques are adopted by these writers to portray the multi-faceted human psyche and variety of traumatic experiences? How do characters' traumatic experiences affect their identities and their relationships with others? How do they cope with their traumas? How do the past and the present invoke and inform each other? What is the relation between the act of writing and trauma, and between the act of reading and forgiveness?

To probe these questions, I will adopt a pluralistic approach by drawing upon works from trauma theorists Cathy Caruth, Jeffrey C.Alexander, Neil Smelser, Ron Eyerman, Piotr Sztompka and Aili Aarelaid-Tart, in order to construct a reconceptualized model of trauma theory, which I will apply in Chapters Three to Six to analyze traumatic scenes in Chinese North American fictions. My choice of theories focuses more on cultural, literary, and sociohistorical aspects of trauma because they are more relevant to the literary texts I have selected which contain fictional innovations, aesthetic structures, and express social and cultural concerns rather than providing pathological resolutions. I am consciously aware that there is no universally applicable approach that can explain the diverse and often elusive literary expressions of trauma. The existing theoretical debates on trauma do not cover the specificity of each traumatic experience, as well as the ambiguity the text may present. Each theorist is inclined to speak from a particular perspective and for a specific context. In exploring trauma theories along with analyzing fictional accounts of traumatic

experiences, I seek to investigate the ways how theories of trauma resonate with fictional representations of trauma, and how they both enrich our understanding of traumatic experiences.

After discussing theoretical approaches to trauma as well as reconceptualizing trauma theory in the second Chapter, from Chapter 3 to Chapter 6, I move into an investigation of the intersection of fiction and trauma in varied manifestations. A multifaceted spectrum of issues, such as the impact of trauma on family relationships, the contextual specificity of trauma in terms of racism, double consciousness, Cultural Revolution, varied responses to traumatic experiences, and narrative strategies will be explored.

Chapter 3, "Family Trauma in Lan Samantha Chang's *Hunger*" illustrates the dynamics of the immigrant family life in the US, and the psychological distress associated with immigration. I propose that there is a need to broaden and reconceptualize the discourse of trauma to encompass the psycho-physiologically distress triggered by immigration, and to acknowledge how immigration-related stressors such as separation from parental home, the loss of kinship and socioeconomic status may challenge characters' psychological resilience. By exploring the characters' pre- and post-immigration experiences in conjunction with an analysis of their physical and psychological responses towards prolonged distress, I argue that immigration as such does not necessarily trigger traumas, but rather, the pre-immigration experiences and a series of cumulative post-immigration conditions evoke immigrant parents' traumas. In addition, I seek to examine the profound impact of immigrant father's trauma on his family.

In Chapter 4, "Double Consciousness and Racism as Traumatic Stressors

in Terry Woo's *Banana Boys*," I propose to read racism and double consciousness as forms of cultural trauma that impellently engage ethnic minorities in the negotiation of their cultural identities and cultural belongings in the context of multiculturalism. The term "Banana Boys", on the one hand, denotes a derogative connotation of being "inauthentic" and having no "essence" of two ascribed identities; namely, Chinese and Canadian; on the other hand, these banana boys also realize that neither identity can sufficiently define them. Drawing upon psychologists Bryant-Davis and Ocampo's articles "Racist incident-based trauma" and "The Trauma of Racism: Implications for Counseling, Research, and Education", I will discuss the traumatizing dimension of racism as represented in the novel. Moreover, I will discuss Du Bois's use of the notion of double consciousness in the context of African Americans and how it can be potentially traumatic for Chinese Canadians who strive to assimilate in a *white*-dominated society. Just as African Americans, all these Chinese Canadian characters struggle with defining themselves throughout the novel. The ongoing denial of their cultural authenticity by both *white* Canadian and Chinese communities has left indelible marks in their psyche, disrupting their sense of self and sense of belonging.

Chapter 5, "Trauma of Cultural Revolution in Yan Li's *Lily in the Snow* (2009)," demonstrates that Chinese Cultural Revolution provides a culturally-specific case study which may enrich the current debate on cultural trauma. I explore trauma as a contextual issue rather than merely a distressful psychological condition. By examining the massive impact of the Cultural Revolution on two generations of people, I argue that the strained mother-daughter relationship not only becomes a source of daughter's trauma, but also accounts for the turbulent history/herstory. In addition, I will discuss how distorted historical circumstances destabilize the stringent dichotomy of victim and perpetrator.

In Chapter 6, "Translating Trauma: Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001)," I will examine how the novel utilizes miscommunication between mothers and daughters, ghost narratives, and trauma survivor's body to demonstrate trauma, and how the accumulation of intrusive traumatic memories over the years speaks of the urgency and necessity for them to be unleashed through the act of writing and translation. In addition, I will discuss the functions of diary, memoir, writing, and translation, and how they facilitate sharing and working through trauma.

My effort in this dissertation is not to achieve the impossible by providing a comprehensive representation of traumas in Chinese North American literature, nor do I seek to provide a definitive interpretation of fictional traumas. Rather, my close reading of Chinese North American texts serves as a heuristic study that will propose some theoretical tools and analytical findings on fictional representations of trauma that may be pursued by future research in this field.

After these prelusive notes, in what follows I will outline the history of Chinese immigration in the United States and Canada in order to provide the necessary context for understanding the development of Chinese North American literature.

1.1. Historical Background to the Research: Chinese in North America

According to the most recent census, with a population of approximately 1.3 million in Canada and 3.8 million in the United States, Chinese are the largest Asian immigrant community in both Canada and the United

States.[6] The earliest arrival of Chinese in North America can be traced as far back as the eighteenth century; however, due to the paucity of dependable sources, it is difficult to verify precisely when and where they first arrived in North America.[7] A combination of pull and push factors have contributed to Chinese immigration to North America.

A range of domestic push factors: the first Opium War (1839 - 1842), foreign invasions, Taiping Rebellion (1851- 1864), and natural disasters, have contributed to mass immigration of Chinese from southern coastal provinces of China to North America.[8] The last imperial dynasty of China – the Qing dynasty (1644 -1912) witnessed foreign domination. The year 1838 marked the starting point when China failed at the battle against Britain in the Opium War. The direct consequence of this defeat was the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), under which China was compelled to lower its tariffs and abandon the territorial rights of Hong Kong. Domestically, the direct consequences of the Opium war were: heavy taxation levied by the Qing government to the peasants in order to pay Western powers indemnities, peasants' dispossession of the land due to failure to pay tax timely, and scarce employment opportunities resulting

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[6] It is based on "Race Reporting for the Asian Population by Selected Categories: 2010." *United States Census Bureau*, n.d. Web. 1 Sept. 2014. <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC _10_SF1_QTP8&prodType=table>.
"Ethnocultural Portrait of Canada Highlight Tables, 2006 Census." *Statistics Canada*, n.d. Web. 1 Sept. 2014. <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/hlt/97-562/pages/page.cfm? Lang=E&Geo=PR&Code=01&Table=2&Data=Count&StartRec=1&Sort=3&Display=All& CSDFilter=5000#Notes>.

[7] Yin, Xiao-huang. Chinese Ameri*can Literature since the 1850s*, 12.

[8] Yin, Xiao-huang. *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*,13; Li, Peter S. *The Chinese in Canada*, 17-18.

from the deficit trade.[9] Britain's victory encouraged many other foreign invasions — each one led to an unequal treaty that aggravated the social unrest in China. According to Wakeman,[10] between 1838 and 1900, Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Japan, the United States, Italy, and Russia engaged in a series of wars in China's territories and succeeded in securing trading and other concessions from the Chinese government.

Foreign invasion accelerated the dissolution of China's last empire which was already blighted by domestic social and economic turbulence. The public's ever-growing discontent with the corrupted Qing regime was compounded with the devastating impact of the Opium War, which ignited Taiping Rebellion, the massive peasant uprising in southern China. Towards the second half of the nineteenth century, China also suffered from declining productivity in farm yields and frequent natural disasters such as floods, typhoons, earthquakes and famine.[11] The widespread political turmoil and economic upheavals forced many people from southern China to immigrate to foreign countries such as Canada and the United States.

Although domestic factors played a critical role in the immigration of Chinese to North America, external factors also contributed significantly to their immigration. Like other immigrants who came to North America in pursuit of prosperity, Chinese attempted to achieve affluence through their hard work and intelligence. The main external pull factors for early Chinese immigration to North America are the Gold Rush and various employment opportunities. The combination of the discovery of gold in

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[9] Chan, Sucheng. *Asian Americans: An interpretive History*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991: 7.

[10] Wakeman, Frederic, Jr. *The Fall of Imperial China*. New York: Free Press, 1975.

[11] Li, Peter S. *The Chinese in Canada*, 18.

California in 1848, news reports of wealth in California, and affordable ships' fares all impelled Chinese to enter the United States.[12] Similar immigration patterns can be seen in Canada. Around 1858, precipitated by the discovery of gold in Fraser Valley of British Columbia, the first group of Chinese coming from California made Victoria, British Columbia, their first base in Canada.[13] As the gold rush declined, in the 1860s, many Chinese migrated from China to British Columbia in search of employment opportunities such as mining and building bridges and roads.[14]

In the US, however, since the early 1850s, an increasing level of anti-Chinese sentiments came into existence; Chinese were accused of seizing jobs from *white* people and of hardly contributing to the local economy as most of their income was sent to their relatives in China.[15] In a similar manner, many organized laborers in British Columbia viewed Chinese as a threat since they were willing to undercut their wage. This resulted in the emergence of anti-Chinese sentiments. When cheap labor was demanded for building the Canadian Pacific Railway (1880-1884), a large number of Chinese from southern provinces of China were brought to Canada. According to Baureiss,[16] historically, in an advanced capitalist system such as Canada, immigration policies are regulated by the need of providing wage labor. The request for cheap labor is an important part of

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[12] Chan, Sucheng. *Asian Americans: An interpretive History*, 3; Yin, Xiao-huang. *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*, 12-15.

[13] Baureiss, Gunter. "Discrimination and Response: The Chinese in Canada." *Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Canada.* Eds. Rita M. Bienvenue and Jay E. Goldstein. Toronto: Butterworths, 1985: 241-61.

[14] Ma, Ching. *Chinese Pioneers: Materials Concerning the Immigration of Chinese to Canada and Sino-Canadian Relations.* Vancouver: Versatile, 1978: 14-15.

[15] Yin, Xiao-huang**.** *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*, 17-21.

[16] Baureiss, Gunter. "Discrimination and Response: The Chinese in Canada." *Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Canada,* 241-61.

capitalist expansion. When the provision of labor services for production and expansion is menaced by the low unemployment, pressure is placed on the country to open the boarders. However, when the high unemployment attacks the state, borders are forced to close. Therefore, immigration policies regulate in accordance with domestic demand for labor. Ethnic people of different, sometimes less desirable backgrounds are given permission to enter the country when abundant labor (especially in the low-paid category) cannot be ensured from within the country or from countries with similar cultural backgrounds. As Smith notes,[17] with the purpose of keeping Canada as a *white* man's country, immigration preference was given to immigrants such as northern and western Europeans.

In the US, followed by a few attempted anti-Chinese legislations in California, finally in 1882, US Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, a discriminatory law that specifically prohibited Chinese workers from immigrating to the United States.[18] Such institutionalized discrimination against Chinese was utilized as a source of reference in its neighboring country, Canada. As Li states, "[t]he resemblance had to do with the structural imperative in both countries to rely on a racialized labor force for capital accumulation at a time when a shortage of *white* workers was impeding industrial expansion."[19]

For decades after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway,

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[17] Smith, W. G. *A Study in Canadian Immigration.* Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1920: 161.

[18] Cassel, Susie Lan, ed. *The Chinese in America: A History from Gold Mountain to the New Millennium.* Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002: 5; Yin, Xiao-huang. *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*, 15.

[19] Li, Peter S. *The Chinese in Canada*, 17.

Chinese immigration was restricted by the Canadian government through the imposition of head tax, which initiated in 1884.[20] The increasing head tax was eventually superseded by the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 (known in the Chinese Canadian community as the Chinese Exclusion Act), which prohibited Chinese immigration altogether, except for diplomats, merchants, clergy, educators, students, and tourists.[21] Berton argued that the reason for exclusion of Chinese immigrants from Canada was that the mainstream media played an important role in creating the filthy, unintelligent and insensitive image of the Chinese.[22] In addition, their willingness of undercutting wages, their low standard of living and their acclaimed inassimilation were all integrated into the official reasons of exclusion.[23]

Driven by the Civil Rights Movement, the US Immigration and Nationality Act removed the last barriers from Chinese immigration in 1965, which was two years earlier than the Canadian counterpart.[24] The new immigration regulation since 1965 has allowed many well-educated Chinese immigrants to enter the US which increases the diversity of Chinese population there.

Until the 1960s, restrictions on immigration kept the Chinese population in Canada rather small. In 1967 when the new immigration regulation was

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[20] Cassel, Susie Lan, ed. *The Chinese in America: A History from Gold Mountain to the New Millennium*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002: 18.

[21] Ibid., pp. 5-18.

[22] Berton, Pierre. *The Last Spike* (Second Printing). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1971: 195.

[23] Ma, Ching. *Chinese Pioneers: Materials Concerning the Immigration of Chinese to Canada and Sino-Canadian Relations.* Vancouver: Versatile, 1978: 24.

[24] Pan, Lynn, ed. *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas.* Surrey: Curzon, 1998: 267.

enacted to remove the barriers against specific countries of origin and racial quotas in Canada, waves of Chinese immigrants, largely from Hong Kong and mainland China, have made Chinese one of Canada's fastest growing ethnic populations. The 1967 Immigration Act resulted in dramatic changes in Chinese communities across Canada.[25] Unlike many earlier immigrants who entered Canada as contract laborers and confined themselves to Chinatowns, many post-1967 Chinese immigrants entered Canada as well-educated professionals who resided in places other than Chinatowns.[26] Together with the Canadian-born Chinese, they requested for equal treatment in Canada. The heterogeneity of Chinese communities in Canada and the United States is reflected in a variety of factors, such as place of origin, place of birth, dialect, purpose of stay, duration of the stay, educational level, and political inclination.

Since the policies of both governments towards Chinese immigrants have historically run parallel to a great extent, it is not surprising that there are similar themes occurred in Chinese American and Chinese Canadian literature. For instance, the majority of early Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century were illiterate peasants and unskilled workers from southern provinces of China who brought their social and familial customs that bore remarkable Confucian traits to North America. They upheld the values such as filial piety, male privilege, patriarchal relations, ancestral rites, and hierarchy which were passed to the second and later generations. The values as well as their early lives in China formed

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[25] Anderson, Kay J. *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991; Chao, Lien. *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English.* Toronto: TSAR, 1997; Li, Peter S. *The Chinese in Canada*; Thompson, Richard H. *Toronto's Chinatown*. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1989.

[26] Chao, Lien. *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English.* Toronto: TSAR, 1997.

common themes in later generations' writings (e.g. myths of China, ghosts, superstition, marriage and Chinese food). The later generations write in English to depict their forefathers' experiences and the hardships they had endured. Novels based on such personal and familial experiences are presented by Chinese Canadian writers such as Wayson Choy and Sky Lee, and Chinese American writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. One common characteristic of these writers' works is the close relationship between fiction and history, and the recovery and reinvention of historical memories that were not recorded in official documents. As Jay [27] suggests with reference to Chinese Canadian writings, these writings re-construct the social history of the Chinese in Canada during the early periods; the primary goal is to document the historical events associated with their survival stories.

1.2. Chinese North American Literature and Literary Studies: An Overview

Before I provide an overview of Chinese North American Literature and Literary Studies, it is necessary to discuss a few contested terms. Following the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, terms such as "Chinese American" and "Asian American" came into existence, highlighting each group's full membership in the United States,[28] as Lisa Lowe points out, none of the terms is a "static category"; both are used strategically for

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[27] Jay, Jennifer W. "Writing the Chinese Canadian Diaspora: Multiculturalism and Confucian Values." *Power and Identity in the Chinese World Order: Festschrift in Honour of Professor Wang Gungwu.* Eds. Billy K. L. So, et al. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003: 311-30.

[28] Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. "Chinese American Literature." *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature.* Ed. King-Kok Cheung. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 40.

political reasons.[29] A unified and fixed community of "Asian Americans" or "Chinese Americans" would only be an "imagined one", to coin Anne Anlin Cheng's words.[30] Ruth H. Chung Gim argues that, to use the collective term strategically, it implies a collective identity of sharing the "history of oppression as people of Asian ancestry in America" and certain level of commonality "in the context of America,"[31] but she also warns that the use of such a collective term may serve to sustain the misconception that all Asian Americans are alike.[32] Concerning the specific term "Chinese", it is also highly problematic, since there are people of Chinese descent who lived in mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore, or other countries before immigrating to the US or Canada. To categorize them simply as "Chinese" does not reflect their different political views, languages, cultures, religions, to name just a few of many relevant aspects. As Ien Ang points out, "who gets to decide what it means or should mean, are the object of intense contestation, a struggle over meaning with wide-ranging cultural and political implications."[33] Indeed, each person or group may have their own understanding and definition of their identities.

As for the term "Asian American literature", Somdatta Mandal suggests that in the simplest way, "Asian American literature" refers to literature written by people of "Asian descent in the United States, not necessarily

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[29] Lowe Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996: 82.

[30] Cheng, Anna Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001: 101.

[31] Gim, Ruth H. Chung. "The Sites of Race and Ethnicity in Psychological Research on Asian Americans." *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies*. Eds. Gary Y. Okihiro, et al. Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1995: 413.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ang, Ien. *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West,* New York: Routledge, 2001: 39.

citizen[s],"[34] but she is also aware that such grouping cannot demonstrate the heterogeneity within the group. Many critics also incorporate Asian Canadian literature into the umbrella term "Asian American literature".[35] As Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong warns when referring specifically to Chinese American literature, "[j]ust as ambiguities surround the term 'Chinese Americans,' so there exists no consensus on what properly falls within the purview of Chinese American literature."[36] Another controversy that rises is whether there should be a hyphen between "Asian" and "American" or between "Chinese" and "American". For some scholars, with the hyphen in between, it indicates Asians or Chinese are perpetual foreigners in America; without the hyphen, "Asian" or "Chinese" becomes an adjective, suggesting they are Americans of Asian or Chinese descent.[37]

In this study I use the unhyphenated term "Chinese North American Fiction" to stress that these are fictions written by authors of Chinese descent in either Canada or the United States, and these works reflect transcultural concerns. The term itself may encompass multilingual works, such as those written in English, Chinese, Spanish, or French; however, in this study, I will only discuss works written in English.

Chinese North American literature had long been unrecognized by both scholars and general public since its inception and only formally emerged since the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s. Chinese North

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[34] Mandal, Somdatta, ed. *Asian-American Writing. Vol. 1 Interviews and Creative Writing.* London: Sangam Books, 2001: 9.

[35] Rubin, Joan Shelley and Casper, Scott E., eds. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History.* New York : Oxford University Press, 2013: 88.

[36] Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. "Chinese American Literature." *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature,* 39.

[37] Mandal, Somdatta, ed. *Asian-American Writing. Vol. 1 Interviews and Creative Writing,* 40.

American literature has often been positioned under the umbrella term "Asian American literature". Within the community of Asian American writers, "Chinese Americans make up the largest and most influential group of Asian American writers".[38] Although the majority of Chinese in North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were illiterate peasants and unskilled workers from southern provinces of China, who worked as indentured laborers and suffered from harsh living conditions and racial discrimination, there was a group of students who had been sent by the Qing government to study in the US and had received relatively better treatment.[39] Although they constituted a rather small number of Chinese in the United States, they had made major contributions to the earliest Chinese American Literature.[40] The widespread hostility and racial discrimination that had been experienced by the early Chinese laborers were perceived by these students as a consequence of American general public's insufficient knowledge of Chinese culture and civilization rather than the condition of naturalization of *white* supremacy.[41] Hence, the main purpose of their works was to reclaim stereotypical conceptualisations of Chinese and to inform the American general public of Chinese history, culture, customs and

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[38] Mandal, Somdatta, ed. *Asian-American Writing. Vol. 1 Interviews and Creative Writing,* 10. The dominant status of Chinese North American literature in Asian North American literary studies is evidently demonstrated in works such as *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982), *Asian American Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (1988), *The Big Aiiieeeee!* (1991), *Asian American Literature: A Brief Introduction and Anthology* (1996), *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English* (1997), *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s* (2000), and *Asian-American Writing Vol. 1 Interviews and Creative Writing* (2001).

[39] See more in LaFargue, Thomas E. *China's First Hundred: Educational Mission Students in the United States, 1872-1881.* Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1987.

[40] Yin, Xiao-huang. *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s,* 53.

[41] Ibid., p. 54.

traditions by means of autobiographical accounts of their lives in China.[42] Works of this type were evidenced in: Lee Yan Phou's *When I Was a Boy in China* (1887) and Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People* (1935).[43]

In the nineteenth century, very few Chinese who came to North America could afford to bring their family members along; most Chinese immigrants were young males who came alone.[44] Before the end of the Second World War, married couples among Chinese immigrants were rare; instead, married bachelors who sent remittances to support their families in China constituted the majority of the Chinese community. Economic hardship and social discrimination discouraged them from bringing their wives and children along, although in the period prior to the Chinese Exclusion Act it was still legally possible to sponsor them.[45] Moreover, the increasing cost of the head tax further deterred many Chinese from bringing their family members to North America. Due to these historical reasons, the number of the North American-born Chinese before 1940s was fairly low.

In the 1940s, as both the United States and Canada had repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act respectively, a new generation of Chinese authors born in North America had voiced their experiences in their writings. Autobiographies such as Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943, US) and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950; US) unveiled these authors' wish to enter mainstream society, their desire to claim and prove their Americanness, their lives in Chinatowns, and their

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[42] Yin, Xiao-huang. *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*, 55.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Li, Peter S. *The Chinese in Canada*, 63.

[45] Ibid., p. 64.

encounters of cultural and generational conflicts.[46]

Chinese North American literature has witnessed dramatic changes since the 1960s. The enactment of new immigration laws in the United States and Canada has fueled the growth of an increasingly diverse Chinese population. A range of social events in the 1960s, such as the Anti-War Movement, the African-American Civil Rights Movement, the second wave of feminism, and the Asian American movement all have profoundly shaped and enriched Chinese North American literary scene.[47]

Although Chinese have been living in Canada since the middle of the nineteenth century, there was hardly any significant literature produced by earlier Chinese immigrants prior to the 1970s. In 1976, a group of Canadian-born Chinese and Japanese jointly organized a Writer's Workshop through which *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese & Japanese Anthology* (1979) was published, and the first generation of Chinese Canadian writers made their collective voices heard.[48]

Chinese North American literature since the 1960s has expanded to encompass all genres such as novels, short fiction, poetry, drama, anthologies and autobiographies; it has also demonstrated diverse thematic concerns, such as the bachelor society in Chinatown that resulted from the Chinese Exclusion act,[49] reconstruction of Chinese American masculinity,[50] mother-daughter relationship, cultural conflicts

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[46] Yin, Xiao-huang. *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s,* 119.

[47] Ibid., p. 229.

[48] Chao, Lien. *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*, ix-x.

[49] See Louis Chu's novel *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961, US) and Sky Lee's novel *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990, Canada).

[50] See Frank Chin's play *Chickencoop Chinaman* (1972, US).

and women's identities,[51] the pursuit of the American Dream and the sense of homelessness,[52] Chinatown secrets and cultural belongings,[53] and hybrid identity.[54] A significant commonality of those relatively well-known authors such as Louis Chu, Sky Lee, Frank Chin, Maxine Hong Kingston, Gish Jen, Wayson Choy, and Fred Wah is that they were either born in Canada or the United States, writing in their native language, English; their writings often incorporate cultural heritages they have inherited from their parents and other ancestors. The divergent genres and themes of their works reflect a multiplicity of experiences and standpoints that repel a homogeneous representation of Chinese communities in North America and provoke heterogeneous textual interpretations.

As Chinese North American literature expands, Chinese North American literary studies also proliferate. There is a significant shift in emphasis in such studies: earlier theoretical approaches focused on "cultural nationalism and American nativity", whereas newer critical projects emphasized "heterogeneity and diaspora".[55] The shift has been from the purely national concerns towards an increasingly transnational perspective;[56] from being concerned with cultural authenticity to cultural

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[51] See Maxine Hong Kingston's factual and fictional autobiography *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976, US) and Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club (*1989, US).

[52] See Gish Jen's novel *Typical American* (1991, US).

[53] See Wayson Choy's novel *The Jade Peony* (1995, Canada).

[54] See Fred Wah's semi-fictional biography *Diamond Grill* (1996, Canada).

[55] Cheung, King-Kok, ed. *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 1.

[56] See Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads." *America Journal* 21.1-2 (1995): 1-27; Bowers, Maggie Ann. "For East, Look North: Cross-Border Comparisons and the Future of North American Asian American Studies." *Transnational, National and Personal*

hybridity;[57] from highlighting a collective identity to the concern of individual multiple/situational identities.[58] Sau-ling Cynthia Wong was among the first scholars who introduced transnationalism in Asian American literary criticism. Her starting point was from the realization of heterogeneity and mobility of diasporic subjects, and she argued for the shift from purely national (Asian American) concerns to a transnational perspective (Asian Diaspora).[59] In a similar manner, Maggie Bower promoted a global Asian diasporic approach by considering historical and cultural contexts of respective countries.[60]

Earlier attempts to define a collective identity served the purposes of breaking through the collective silence of Chinese immigrants in North America, of challenging historical injustices they have suffered, and of articulating their political demands. Later perspectives on individual multiple identities suggest the dynamic and heterogeneous characteristics of Chinese immigrants. The shift of focus in Chinese North American literary studies reflects social, cultural, institutional and individual changes. The focus on various aspects of literary works indicates not only the critics'

Voices: New Perspective on Asian American and Asian Diasporic Women Writers. Eds. Begona Simal and Elisabetta Marino. Münster: LIT, 2004: 107-17.

[57] Chin, Frank, et al. *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*; Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. "Chinese American Literature." *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, 39-61.

[58] Chao, Lien. *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*; Lowe, Lisa. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian-American Differences." *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader.* Eds. Jana E. Braziel and Anita Mannur. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003: 132-155.

[59] Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads." *America Journal* 21.1-2 (1995): 1-27.

[60] Bowers, Maggie Ann. "For East, Look North: Cross-Border Comparisons and the Future of North American Asian American Studies." *Transnational, National and Personal Voices: New Perspective on Asian American and Asian Diasporic Women Writer,* 107-117.

approaches but also the changing conditions which reject uniformity but embrace flexibility and versatility.

An increasing number of critics have displayed concerns in gender negotiation and sexuality while studying Chinese North American literature. In her articles "Of Men and Women: Reconstructing Chinese American Masculinity" and "Art, Spirituality, and the Ethic of Care: Alternative Masculinities in Chinese American Literature", Cheung contributes to masculinity studies by offering deconstructive readings of masculinity in Chinese American literature while drawing upon the notion of "gender performativity" from Judith Butler[61] and Asian American queer studies.[62] In his article "Gender Negotiations and the Asian American Literary Imagination", Li suggests that rather than polarizing the gender debates surrounding Chinese/Asian masculinity and femininity in Asian North American literary studies, scholars should move from the restricting gender strife such as masculinity versus femininity, heterosexuality versus homosexuality to the construction of "a more coherent Asian American identity" by locating and maximizing their common ground and acknowledging the fluidity of constructions of sexuality and gender.[63] Other thematic concerns that recur in Chinese North American literary studies are, for instance, women's studies and mother-daughter

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[61] Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993: 2.

[62] Cheung, King-Kok. "Of Men and Women: Reconstructing Chinese American Masculinity." *Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Color*. Ed. Sandra K. Stanley. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998: 173-99; Cheung, King-Kok. "Art, Spirituality, and the Ethnic of Care: Alternative Masculinities in Chinese American Literature." *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Direction*. Ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002: 261-89.

[63] Li, Wenxin. *"Gender Negotiations and the Asian American Literary Imagination." Asian American Literary Studies*. Ed. Guiyou Huang. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005: 109-110.

relationships. Amy Ling's *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (1990) investigates both well-known and relatively less-recognized female authors of Chinese descent who published their works in the US. In her chapters on Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan's works in the book *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing* (1999), Wendy Ho focuses on the tangled relationships between Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters and argues that mother and daughter relationships are "complicated by race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and social-economic issues."[64]

This overview of Chinese North American literature and related critical studies demonstrate that both of them have expanded in multiple directions over the years. However, the number of authors being studied is still rather limited. The critics' approaches are often inspired and affiliated with cultural studies, poststructuralism, diaspora, transnationalism, feminism, and gender studies; critical studies on representations of individual and collective traumas in Chinese North American literature have not received sufficient scholarly attention. Hence, there is a need to "tease out the multiple layers of psychic pain that underwrite the history"[65] of people of Chinese descent in North America.

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[64] Ho, Wendy. *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira. 1999: 35.

[65] Feng, Pin-chia. *Diasporic Representations: Reading Chinese American Women's Fiction*. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010: 19.

CHAPTER TWO

2. THEORIZING TRAUMA

2.1. A Genealogy of the Discourse of Trauma

The etymology of the word 'trauma' can be traced back to the Greek word for wound. Initially, 'trauma' referred to bodily injury caused by external event, which appeared in medical literature in the mid-1600s. In the late 1800s, due to industrialization and accelerated pace of everyday life, new types of injury (resulting from railway travel and machine accidents) began to emerge as a research field within clinical studies. Accidents arising from railway travel did not only injure a person's body, but also left a sudden mental shock to the person's nervous system. This was evidenced in British surgeon John Erichsen's work *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System* (1866), which asserted that "physical shock to neural tissue could result in mental injury."[66] Since then, the term 'trauma' has extended its meaning from bodily wounds to psychic wounds, and a shift towards a psychological perspective of trauma has occurred.[67]

In fact, although recognition of the psychological impact of trauma has emerged in the nineteenth century, traumas as well as their effects have always been existing in human history, appearing wherever catastrophic events interfere with human lives. For instance, *Ajax*, a Greek tragedy written by Sophocles in the fifth century BC, has already exhibited the effect of the war hero's trauma. In the play, after the death of the Greek

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[66] Farrell, Kirby. *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univesity Press, 1998: 7.

[67] Kirmayer, L., et al., eds. *Understanding Trauma: Integrating Cultural, Psychological and Biological Perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 5.

hero Achilles in Troy, both Greek warriors of the Trojan War, Ajax and Odysseus, competed for Achilles' armor. Odysseus eventually won the award. Infuriated by the jury's adjudication and bamboozled by the goddess Athena into believing that livestock were his true enemies, Ajax butchered a herd of livestock and kept the rest in his hut to torture. Later, after realizing what he had done to the animals, Ajax was traumatized by the dishonor of slaughter. Suffered from the ignominy of defeat by his rival as well the discredit of butchering animals, Ajax committed suicide. Ajax's tragic reactions towards his dishonor clearly demonstrate the impact of a traumatic experience.

Admittedly, ancient stories of trauma are not exclusive to Greek mythology. Ten years after his first wife's death, Su Shi, a remarkable Chinese poet of the Song Dynasty (960–1279), composed a poem "A Dream on the Night of the 20th Day of the First Month (江城子.乙卯正月二十日记梦)" as a dedication to his deceased wife in the awake of his dream:

> Ten years have we been parted by your death
>
> Trying not to think,
>
> Yet how can I ever forget
>
> Your lonely grave is a thousand miles away
>
> Nowhere can I express my sorrow
>
> Even if we met, you wouldn't recognize me
>
> My face is covered with dust
>
> My temples are frosty white
>
> A dream at night suddenly brought me back to our old home
>
> By the small window
>
> I saw you combing your hair
>
> We gazed at each other in silence
>
> As tears streamed in thousands of lines down our faces

> Year by year, the grief of my heart is drifted
>
> Towards the moon-lit night and pine-guarded grave[68]

The grief that arises from the traumatic loss of his beloved wife is revisited through a vivid dream of the deceased ten years later, yet the trauma of living-death separation is always imprinted in the poet's memory. The opening line sets a rather sad tone for the entire poem. Ten-year separation between the living and the deceased does not dilute the poet's affection for his deceased wife; rather, it intensifies his feelings for her. His mind dwells on the thoughts of her, yet the pain associated with her death remains unbearable. Transcending time and space, the poet is reunited with his wife through a dream after decade-long yearning for a reunion. "[T]ears steamed in thousand of lines" carries endless sorrows that no utterance is capable of expressing the rayless grief.

Although trauma and traumatic effects were not recognized and studied systematically in ancient time, it is likely to find depictions on traumatic experiences everywhere in ancient world literature.

Studies on trauma began in the study of hysteria.[69] Influenced by the pioneering research on hysteria and hypnosis conducted by French clinician J.M. Charcot and his student Pierre Janet, Freud further

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[68] Original poem in Chinese: "十年生死两茫茫，不思量，自难忘。千里孤坟，无处话凄凉。纵使相逢应不识，尘满面，鬓如霜。夜来幽梦忽还乡，小轩窗，正梳妆.。相顾无言，惟有泪千行。料得年年肠断处，明月夜，短松冈。" The English version was translated by me. Su, Shi. "A Dream on the Night of the 20th Day of the First Month." *Explication of Chinese Poetry of Song Dynasty*. Eds. Pengfei Zhou and Liya Wang. Xi'An: San Qin Publishing House, 1992: 98. 周鹏飞、王黎雅注析《宋词三百首注析》西安：三秦出版社，1992 年，98 页。

[69] Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery*. Glenview, IL: Basic Books, 1992: 10.

developed the study on hysteria.[70] What is noteworthy to mention is that "Freud and his peers did not set out to write a theory of trauma. The concept of trauma emerges in their work on hysteria as if already assumed."[71] His finding suggests that the symptoms of hysteria are the consequence of trauma. [72] In *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-1895), coauthored with Josef Breuer, Freud states in the preface of the second edition:

> Our experiences have shown us, however, that the most various symptoms, which are ostensibly spontaneous and, as one might say, idiopathic products of hysteria, are just as strictly related to the precipitating trauma as the phenomena to which we have just alluded and which exhibit the connection quite clearly [...] The disproportion between the many years' duration of the hysterical

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[70] Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery*, 10-13.

[71] Hysteria refers to "Unbearable emotional reactions to traumatic events produced an altered state of consciousness, which in turn induced the hysterical symptoms." Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery,* 9-12; see also Kaplan, Ann E. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005: 25.

[72] See Kaplan, Ann E. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 25-26. In 1924, Freud was invited to write an "autobiographical study" for a collection of autobiographical studies contributed by distinguished physicians. In his autobiographical account, Freud recalled his study trip to Paris, where he worked with the leading French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot for a few months. One of Charcot's research focuses was hysteria, a disorder that ordinarily diagnosed in women. Hysterical symptoms were characterized by amnesia, sudden convulsions and paralysis. Charcot had proved that the traumatic hysterical symptoms originally found in women occurred in men as well. However, this finding was rejected by Freud's colleague in Vienna who believed that "[h]ysteron (sic) means the uterus. So how can a man be hysterical?" In the autobiographical study, Freud also admitted that his collaborator, the leading internist Dr. Josef Breuer, had already began his research in hysteria even before Freud's visit in Paris (Gay, Peter, ed. *The Freud Reader*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995: xvi-12.)

symptom and the single occurrence which provoked it is what we are accustomed invariably to find in traumatic neuroses [...] Observations such as these seem to us to establish an analogy between the pathogenesis of common hysteria and that of the traumatic neuroses.[73]

Although traumatic conditions have been described since ancient times, and have received considerable research interests in the nineteenth century from psychiatrists such as Charcot, Janet, Freud and Breuer, who recognized traumatic event's impact on individual's psychic, it was only until 1980, shortly after the trauma of the Vietnam War, that the study of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was officially established by the American Psychiatric Association and included in its official manual of mental disorders. [74] It should be noted that, prior to 1980, the post-traumatic syndromes were coined under different terms, such as railway spine, hysteria, soldier's heart, traumatic neurosis, nostalgia, homesickness, shell shock, battle fatigue, combat exhaustion among others.[75] The symptoms of all these conditions correspond noticeably to PTSD. However, one significant difference between these conditions and PTSD is that the former conditions were believed to occur only on those

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[73] Breuer, Josef and Freud, Sigmund. *Studies on Hysteria*. Trans. James Strachey. (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. II.) Hogarth Press, London 1955. [PDF file], n.d. Web. 1 Sept. 2013. <http://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud-Oeuvre-traduction-anglaise.pdf>.

[74] In the wake of Vietnam War, the term PTSD suggests that "even long after a soldier's return home, stress can reactivate disturbances that originated in combat. Mentally, neurologically, the veteran is still at war, in a survival mode, unable to come to terms with that original horror" (Farrell, Kirby. *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, 11.) See also Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery*, 28.

[75] Tick, Edward. *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder*. Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 2005: 99.

who had 'weak and defective mindset', whereas the diagnosis of the latter assisted people in recognizing that traumatic events themselves could be justifiably devastating to those who had encountered them, and thus, likely to enfeeble people's resistance. The diagnosis of PTSD significantly challenged historical notions on trauma which had believed that post-traumatic syndromes arose from 'craven people' who had flawed mind and inferior character, and people with 'strong mind' would be prone to defy utmost adversity. A substantial number of soldiers suffered from combat-related mental distress during the Vietnam War; both the number of sufferers and the level of distress were so significant that the term *posttraumatic stress disorder* (PTSD) was coined and finally became an official diagnosis in 1980.

Originally diagnosed among war veterans, the disorder is now believed to affect civilians. PTSD is a "psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed life-threatening events such as natural disasters, serious accidents, terrorist incidents, war, or violent personal assaults like rape. People who suffer from PTSD often relive the experience through flashbacks or nightmares, have difficulty sleeping, and feel detached or estranged."[76] This definition of PTSD reflects how overwhelming experience of horrific event inflicts on the psychic of the victim, leaving him or her in a mentally restless state. Even though traumatic event has already occurred, trauma may continue haunting the victim in his or her dreams and imposing negative effects on his or her behavior without letting him or her be aware of it. Research in PTSD suggests that it is not the peculiarity of an event that determines whether an individual suffers from PTSD, but rather an individual's experience of it.

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[76] "PTSD" American Psychiatric Association, n.d. Web. 2 July 2013.

<http://www.psychiatry.org/mental-health/ptsd>.

Thus, a potentially traumatizing event may not warrant a person to be diagnosed with PTSD. Moreover, potentially PTSD-causing events subsume not only exceptionally catastrophic cases such as wars, genocides, and natural disasters, but also any events that engender irrepressible psychic torment, stress and persisting symptoms of trauma.

As the study of PTSD emerged in the 1980s, researchers, health care workers and governmental officials strived to apply this study to a broader population, but only to discover that the diagnostic criteria of PTSD only constitute a small part of the far more complex and heterogeneous responses to trauma.[77] As Stamm and Friedman point out[78], although symptoms of trauma may share certain universal characteristics, PTSD and its treatment are mainly based on a Euro-American epistemology; trauma carriers from outside of the Euro-American cultures may respond to traumatic events differently, and their culturally-specific symptoms may fall outside of the diagnostic criteria of PTSD.

Undeniably, conceptualizations of trauma from the US and Europe have contributed significantly to trauma studies; however, it does not warrant the implications and applicability of its medical treatments universally. In China, for instance, psychological trauma is currently an underdeveloped field of research within psychology, and has only received increasing attention ever since the trauma of Wenchuan earthquake in 2008;[79]

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[77] Kirmayer, L., et al., eds. *Understanding Trauma: Integrating Cultural, Psychological and Biological Perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 15.

[78] Stamm, B.H. and Friedman, M.J. "Cultural Diversity in the Appraisal and Expression of Traumatic Exposure." *International Handbook of Human Responses to Trauma.* Eds. A. Y. Shalev, R. Yehuda, and A. C. McFarlane. New York: Plenum Press, 2000: 69-85.

[79] See more in Zhu, Xiaoping, et al. "Trauma Counseling and Support in the PRC." *International Handbook of Workplace Trauma Support.* Eds. R. Hughes, et al. Oxford: Wiley- Blackwell, 2012: 436-446.

nevertheless, since ancient time, great emphasis has been laid on equal treatment of the body and the mind in traditional Chinese medicine, Chinese philosophy and Buddhist practices. Both Chinese philosophy and medicine believe that the flowing life energy, known as Qi, serves as a decisive factor of one's health. Imbalanced or atrophied Qi may lead a person to disease or death; by rebuilding Qi or the disharmony of the life energy, one may restore health.[80] From this perspective, psychological trauma has a pernicious impact on one's Qi, causing it to be disharmonious and weakened. Alternative to Western treatment for psychological trauma, which often involves psychotherapy, medications, or both, Chinese treatment for psychological trauma suggests options such as meditation exercises, Qi Gong and Tai Chi. In contrast to the Western psychotherapy (also known as "talk therapy"), all these three culturally-specific alternatives from China are *quiet* coping strategies which stress on self-healing and seeking harmony, relaxation, equanimity, and tranquility in and around oneself through contemplation, gentle body movements and rhythmic breathing.

The development of the concept of trauma as both physical and psychological wound has drawn growing interest beyond medical studies; in fact, following the introduction of PTSD in 1980, a range of publications covering diverse fields of expertise, such as sociology, anthropology, history, cultural studies, media studies, law and literary studies have contributed significantly to the field of trauma studies. As Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga observe, "trauma studies do not form a monolithic body of work but are a diversified field of research, giving rise to multiple

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[80] See more in Rushall, Kathleen. "Chinese Medicine Treats Physical and Emotional Trauma." Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, n.d. Web. 1 Dec. 2013. <http://www.pacificcollege.edu/acupuncture-massage-news/articles/252-chinese-medicine-treats-physical-and-emotional-trauma.html>.

archives and approaches."[81] Since the fictional texts I have chosen provide divergent forms of trauma and traumatic experiences, my theoretical scope thus will not rely on one single trauma theory to produce a homogeneous interpretation, but rather embark upon a pluralistic approach. In what follows, I will discuss trauma theories from Cathy Caruth (literary scholar), and five sociologists: Jeffrey C.Alexander, Neil Smelser, Ron Eyerman, Piotr Sztompka, and Aili Aarelaid-Tart, in order to contextualize them into the present case studies of Chinese North American fiction.

2.2. Cathy Caruth's Conceptualization of Trauma
2.2.1. Repetitive and Uncontrollable Stress

One of the most well-known trauma theorists within literary studies is Cathy Caruth. In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth's theoretical approach towards trauma is grounded upon the interpretation of Freud's works *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1937). In the introduction chapter of the book, Caruth already points out two striking features of traumatic experience suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle:* repetition and uncontrollability. These two characteristics are demonstrated in Tasso's Story of Tancred and Clorinda, a story appeared in *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*:

> Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall

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[81] Mengel, Ewald, and Borzaga, Michela, eds. *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel: Essays.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012: xv.

tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again.[82]

By examining Freud's interpretation of Tancred's story, Caruth notes that Tancred's unwitting action of wounding his beloved the second time seems to suggest that horrific experience repeats itself outside the victim's wish or control. The repetition, which Freud names "traumatic neurosis", appears as an unintentional reaction towards an event that one cannot simply ignore.[83] Building upon Freud's model of trauma, Caruth proposes that the traumatic story of Tancred represents not only Tancred's unconscious and repetitive acts, but also the crying voice of the wound that complains about the acts and reminds Tancred for the first time of what he has done.

At the heart of Freud's text, the notion of trauma is interpreted as a wound imposed on the psychic rather than on the body. For Freud, the wound of the psychic is far more complex than the wound of the body, for the suffering from the former is persistent and tends to haunt the survivor later on in the flashbacks or nightmares. The horrific event is experienced too abruptly, too unanticipatedly for the mind to process and comprehend, thus leaving the survivor in shock. In Tancred's case, it is only through the repetition of the wounding process, Tancred is finally able to hear his beloved one's crying voice. For Caruth, trauma is uncontrollable and intrusive, as she asserts, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very

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[82] Gay, Peter, ed. *The Freud Reader*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995: 605.

[83] Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996: 2.

unassimilated nature — the way it was precisely not known in the first instance — returns to haunt the survivor later on."[84] This standpoint explains Caruth's focal point on studying literary representations of trauma — not to simply retell and represent the story of survival, but more importantly, to locate the traumatic impingement on people's lives; or in other words, to study the posttraumatic effect.

2.2.2. Traumatic Departure

One of Caruth's key discoveries through reading Freud's texts is the "figures of departure". *Moses and Monotheism* was written during the most riotous and traumatic years of Freud's life, when he was forced to flee from his homeland, resettling in England. Freud himself wrote this in a rather sad tone: "In the certainty of persecution — not only because of my work, but also because of my "race" — I left, with many friends, the city which from early childhood, through seventy-eight years, had been a home to me."[85] *Moses and Monotheism* can be read, as Caruth suggests, as a mirror to "help us understand our own catastrophic era."[86] It can also be read as a text that articulates the history of Jewish people and meanwhile reflects the turbulent historical moment that Freud was experiencing.[87] This points out that trauma is a contextual issue, as Christopher J. Colvin observes, "traumatic events are never only medical problems faced by individuals. They also represented social, moral, political, economic and even spiritual problems, for both individuals and

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[84] Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History,* 4.

[85] Freud, Sigmund. *Moses and Monotheism*. Trans. Katherine Jones. New York, Vintage Books: 1939: 69-70.

[86] Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History,* 12.

[87] Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, 12.

communities."[88] The return of the Hebrews to Canaan, the place where they lived prior to their resettlement in Egypt, serves as the kernel of the text. In Freud's account of Jewish history, he assumes that the religious leader of the Jews settled in Egypt — Moses, was an Egyptian, a worshiper and follower of Aten religion (a religion that worshiped the sun God, excluded myth and magic, denied immorality, and believed in monotheism under the reign of Amenophis). After the fall of the reign and the demolishment of Aten religion, Moses wished to establish a holy nation to continue the monotheistic religion by assuming control of the Jewish people from the troubled political situation of that time, leading them out of Egypt and bringing them back to Canaan. From psychoanalytic point of view, "the return" may seem to be foreseeable as psychoanalysis lays great emphasis on different types of return such as the return to past memories and the return of the repressed. However, Freud seems to suggest that in the case of Jews, to resettle in Canaan is not merely a simple return, but rather, more appropriately interpreted as a departure. [89] A departure that gestures towards a future of rigid monotheism, a departure that reflects a new future and its discontinuity with the past. By the same token, Freud's escape from Vienna can be seen as a trauma of leaving, a traumatic departure that enables him to bring his personal experiences and unfinished work to light and to another place. Similarly to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* what constitutes the striking feature of Jews' traumatic experience in *Moses and Monotheism,* is not merely about the repression of the murder of Moses and the forgetting of the deeds of Moses, but rather, the belatedness, the inaccessibility of the consciousness to fully comprehend the event when it

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[88] Colvin, Christopher J. "Trauma." *New South African Keywords: A Concise Guide to Public and Political Discourse in Post-apartheid Society.* Eds. Nick Shepherd and Steven Robins. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2008: 230.

[89] Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, 13.

occurs. Hence, in Caruth's account, traumatic experiences are bound up with their belated aftermath and intrusive and uncontrollable flashback. The history of trauma in *Moses and Monotheism*, as Caruth explains, is not simply one's own, but rather evokes other traumas that are shared by people.[90] In other words: "the traumas of ones are the traumas of the other," and this highlights the intersection of individual trauma and collective trauma.[91]

2.2.3. Limitations of Caruth's Trauma Theory

Caruth's analysis of trauma is based upon a selective use of Freud's texts, and her theory is set out from the assumption that trauma is a universal human experience in terms of its characteristics. Undeniably, this method of analysis creates a limited view on trauma, as throughout the book, Caruth repeatedly stresses on trauma's dissociation, uncontrollability, repetition and un-representableness as if all types of trauma demonstrated the same characteristics. Such inadequate account fails to capture the far more complex phenomena of trauma. Across the globe, there are variations in the understanding of the causes of trauma, individual responses to traumatic events, and the psychological and physical impacts of a traumatic event. Thus, the uniform characteristics of trauma proposed by Caruth are highly debatable. In order to deflect from this essentialist perspective, I will examine a broader range of trauma theories in the following passages. However, since a prodigious number of books revolve around trauma theories, and not all are relevant and applicable to literary studies, and in particular, the contexts of my selected

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[90] Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, 24.

[91] "the traumas of ones are the traumas of the other" is from: Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery*, 32.

fiction books, my choices of trauma theories are inevitably selective. Since the selected fiction books express social and cultural concerns rather than providing pathological resolutions, in what follows, I will discuss theories which focus more on cultural, social and historical aspects of trauma.

2.3. Theorizing Cultural Trauma
2.3.1. On *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004)

Research on psychological trauma is usually characterized by its individually-based case studies and treatments, whereas cultural trauma theories provide important insights on sociological perceptions of trauma that help us understand culturally relevant traumas and their far-reaching repercussions on social life. In their collaborative work *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004), five renowned sociologists, Jeffrey C. Alexander, Neil Smelser, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen[92] and Piotr Sztompka have developed theoretical approaches towards a concept of "cultural trauma", and each has contributed one essay on this concept with detailed case studies. My discussion of the term "cultural trauma" will revolve around the essays from Jeffrey C. Alexander, Neil Smelser, Ron Eyerman and Piotr Sztompka. Although certain arguments in the book are contestable which I shall indicate later, this book still contributes to cultural trauma studies significantly.

2.3.2. Lay Trauma Theory

In the opening chapter of the book, Alexander distinguishes "commonsense understandings" of trauma from a "more theoretically reflexive approach" to trauma, with the former categorized as "lay trauma

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[92] Bernhard Giesen's case study on Shoah is not discussed in this dissertation because it is not directly relevant.

theory". From the perspective of lay trauma theory, traumas are naturally appearing events which fracture an individual or collective's sense of eudemonia. [93] Trauma therefore is understood as arising from traumatizing events themselves, and these events entail prompt responses from their survivors. The explanation of such reactions is that: "human beings need security, order, love, and connection. If something happens that sharply undermines these needs, it hardly seems surprising" and being traumatized is a natural reaction.[94] Within lay trauma theory, Alexander suggests there are "enlightenment" and "psychoanalytic" accounts. The enlightenment version views trauma from a somewhat positive perspective with traumatic events serving as external stimulators which trigger new opportunities and progress. From this understanding, responses towards traumatic events are transferred to collective endeavor to transform the condition that caused trauma. [95] Similarly to enlightenment thinking of trauma, psychoanalytic understanding of trauma also sees the natural linkage between external horrific events and survivors' responses, but it proposes a more complex understanding of human reaction. From this perspective, traumatic responses "come not only from the originating event but from the anxiety of keeping it repressed."[96] One of the most representative theorists that uphold this standpoint is Cathy Caruth. In contrast to enlightenment understanding of trauma which suggests that trauma is a type of logical response to shattering event, Caruth argues that trauma cannot be pinpointed directly from the original event, but only through its belatedness — the inaccessibility of the mind to grasp it in the first place that returns to affect

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[93] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004: 2.

[94] Ibid., p. 3.

[95] Ibid., p. 3.

[96] Ibid., p. 5.

the survivor's well-being.

Alexander acknowledges the importance of Cathy Caruth's work in shaping psychoanalytic account of trauma and influencing the development of the concept "cultural trauma". However, he takes a different stance on the causes of trauma.

2.3.3. Trauma as a Social and Cultural Construct

According to Alexander, both enlightenment and psychoanalytic approaches share the "naturalistic fallacy" which perceives trauma as a natural reaction towards the occurrence of shattering events.[97] Based upon the disapproval of this naturalistic fallacy, Alexander and four other sociologists (Neil Smelser, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen and Piotr Sztompka) propose their approaches to trauma. Their approaches are based upon the belief that events do not generate collective trauma; "trauma is not something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society."[98] Events that have traumatizing effects can be real or imagined. In the sense of "imagined traumatic events," these five sociologists follow what Durkheim refers to in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, that imagination is inherently linked to the very process of representation which captures a moment of life, and through aesthetic processing, shapes it into a particular form. It is through the imaginative process of representation that people gain the sense of traumatic experience.[99] Traumatizing events do not necessarily create trauma; it is only through sociocultural process of meaning-making that traumatic status is attributed to events; in other words, "it is the meanings that provide the sense of shock and fear, not the

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[97] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 8.

[98] Ibid., p. 2.

[99] Ibid., p. 9.

events in themselves."[100] Cultures do not only preserve memories of events but also classify and yield meanings of events. For instance, the second Sino-Japanese War is seen as a national and cultural trauma that has left indestructible marks on the consciousness of millions of Chinese victims and those who have indirectly experienced it through media, school textbooks, literature, films and other cultural artifacts. The war is known in China as the "Eight Years' War of Resistance against Japan", whereas in Japan, during the war time, it was termed as "incident" and the current-in-use name for this war is "Japan–China War". Indeed, from the Chinese side, three strikingly atrocious events: the Nanjing Massacre (with hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians raped and murdered), the Unit 731 (the world's then largest biological special force that was responsible for the human experimentation and the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Chinese with their biological weapons), and the "comfort women" (forced prostitution) constitute part of their most painful and indelible war memories. Japan, on the other hand, deliberately covers up this war history through revisions of the school history textbooks. For Alexander, not all types of trauma will lead to a collective level. Only when social crises become cultural crises that insert into the "core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity" do traumas emerge at a collective level. [101] Thus, collective trauma, as Alexander suggested, is used interchangeably with cultural trauma. According to Alexander: "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their further identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways."[102] By articulating and claiming their traumatic experiences, members of the collectivity

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[100] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 10.

[101] Ibid., p. 10.

[102] Ibid., p. 1.

shoulder the responsibility of extending social awareness of the traumatic pain to the wider public, allowing more people to participate in the traumas of others.

2.3.4. Culturally-relevant Memory and Cultural Membership

In his chapter on *Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma*, Smelser shares the same view as Alexander by stating that events are not automatically traumatic, though we tend to think events with disastrous or catastrophic qualities are naturally traumatic. For Smelser, not all type of trauma is qualified as a "cultural trauma". The evaluation criteria for an event to be qualified as a "cultural trauma" are:

> It must be remembered, or made to be remembered. Furthermore, the memory must be made culturally relevant, that is, represented as obliterating, damaging, or rendering problematic something sacred — usually a value or outlook felt to be essential for the integrity of the affected society. Finally, the memory must be associated with a strong negative effect, usually disgust, shame, or guilt.[103]

Both Alexander and Smelser's criteria for cultural trauma highlight the affiliation of memory, "cultural trauma" and identity, and how "cultural trauma" plays a key role in shaping memory and collective identity. Since "cultural" is the determiner that serves to specify the type of trauma under discussion, Smelser provides a working definition of culture: "a culture can be defined as a grouping of elements — values, norms, outlooks, beliefs, ideologies, knowledge, and empirical assertions (not always verified),

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[103] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 36.

linked with one another to some degree as a meaning-system."[104] For an individual's psychological trauma, as Smelser suggests, one of the main defensive or coping strategies that a person may adopt is to deliberately forget, to repel undesirable situation that may awaken the memory of trauma.[105] However, at a collective level, it seems to be implausible to think that there exists some type of "group mind", when in fact a "cultural trauma" is a menace to a culture with many individuals involved within the collectivity. Therefore, Smelser proposes that a better way to avoid such dilemma is to claim and establish a common and cultural membership in a collectivity. [106] Through active articulation and elaboration of such membership, the group's collective identity is formed and further enhanced.

2.3.5. Collective Identity and Collective Memory under Construction

Sharing common ground with Alexander and Smelser on cultural trauma, Eyerman's chapter focuses on the trauma of Maafa and its impingement upon the formation of African American identity. Trauma at a collective and cultural level is associated with the construction of collective identity and the formation of collective memory.[107] In the case of Maafa, as Eyerman argues, a unified African American identity was constructed and expressed towards the end of nineteenth century by a generation of African Americans for whom Maafa was something that happened in the past.[108] It was through deliberate memory work and representations of the memory in various artistic forms that African American identity was

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[104] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 37.

[105] Ibid., p. 42.

[106] Ibid., p. 43.

[107] Ibid., p. 60.

[108] Ibid., p. 61.

established.[109] Thus, the construction of the cultural trauma of Maafa was closely associated with forming a collective identity. Eyerman agrees with both Alexander and Smelser that "cultural trauma" should be seen at a collective level rather than at an individual level. Moreover, the focus of trauma-related discussion should lie in what Eyerman calls "traumatic effects" or what Alexander names "trauma process", which suggests a process of mediating trauma through representation of the pain to the wider public. What is not stated explicitly in both Alexander and Smelser's texts but important to note is that Eyerman broadens the notion of trauma by arguing that, "the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all."[110] In other words, "trauma" can be constructed and employed in a metaphorical way to voice the injustice encountered by a community in the past. This resonates with LaCapra's statement that "the experience of trauma may be vicarious or virtual, that is, undergone in a secondary fashion by one who was not there or did not go through the traumatizing events themselves."[111]

For Eyerman, the "double consciousness" coined by W.E.B.Du Bois in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, which describes the psycho-social dilemma of the divided self, can be seen as an aspect of the process of cultural trauma,[112] since the agony of the divided self leaves shadow on African Americans' collective memory and further shapes their collective identity. This viewpoint resonates with my argument that the double consciousness experienced by Chinese Canadian characters in Terry Woo's *Banana Boys* is a form of cultural trauma that is hardly delible. I will further

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[109] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 61.

[110] Ibid., p. 61.

[111] LaCapra, Dominick. *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2004:125.

[112] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 64.

elaborate this conception in my later chapter on *Banana Boys*.

Since cultural trauma is intimately connected and intertwined with collective memory, it is not surprising that half of Eyerman's article focuses upon the discussion of collective memory. Developed upon the theory of individually-based memory, which is believed to help justify individual behavior and contribute to the development of individual identity, collective memory concerns about how group of people remember and how the memory helps to shape collective behavior and collective identity.[113] As discussed in Eyerman's article, the notion of collective memory is rooted in Durkheim's conception of collective consciousness, which suggests that memories are socially constructed and preserved to create social cohesion in the present.[114] Following Durkheim's tradition, Maurice Halbwachs proposes the idea that individual memory is almost never alone, but always constructed in relationship to a group and "rooted in a collective history," though it is undeniable that each individual is associated with a "unique, biographical" memory. Memory is always collective, since an individual is always part of certain collectivity, be it family or community; a particular shared memory may help establish this collectivity's solidarity.[115] From this perspective, collective memory is subject to constant construction and negotiation upon present needs and interests to defend a group's unity. Poststructuralism acknowledges the power of discourse to create reality. From this understanding, memory situates not only inside one's head but also inside a discourse.[116] Various experiences, objectives and cultural artifacts may arouse memory, and

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[113] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 65.

[114] Ibid., p. 65.

[115] Ibid., p. 65.

[116] Ibid., p. 66.

memory "can also be embedded in physical geography."[117] Through investigating cultural artifacts such as literature, one may gain insights of how a community or social group reflects upon its traumatic past, and how the process of selective remembering is triggered by present activities. This indicates the possibility of memory being transcended from merely mental work stored in one's head to cultural creations which enable a wider public to engage in the remembering process.

For Eyerman, a direct experience of traumatic event is not necessarily a prerequisite for cultural trauma. Historical catastrophe such as Maafa has left cicatrices on those who have directly experienced it and also on later generations who have no direct contact with it, but this does not mean that their memories of the event are mediated in the same way. Drawing upon theories from Howard Schuman, Jacqueline Scott, Karl Mannheim, Igartua and Paez, Eyermann argues that there exists a "generational basis of remembrance and forgetting" — generation born during a particular historical period of time tends to have a distinctive collective memory of the historical events happened during that period, which shapes their behaviors and differentiates them from other generations.[118] However, particular historical events and the memories associated with them can be reprocessed, recorded and represented through narratives so that the past is percolated into the present. From this perspective, generations who have no direct experience to the catastrophic event may still gain access to the traumatic moment by means of cultural artifacts, though it is undeniable that those who have involved in the event directly tend to have stronger memory of the event. It is through the impartation of emotional confluence and social incorporation, particular events succeed

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[117] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 68.

[118] Ibid., p. 70.

in exemplifying as cultural traumas. For Eyerman, collective memory is not fixed, but rather fluid and always under construction: "each generation, because of its distance from the event and because its social circumstances have altered with time, reinterprets and represents the collective memory around that event according to its needs and means."[119] In the case of Maafa, various forms of artistic representation renegotiate Maafa as a reference point through which African Americans can trace their common origin of suffering, claim their membership in a distinctive community, and articulate their shared identity. It is in this context, as Eyerman suggests, that Maafa is articulated as cultural trauma.[120] Since Maafa is not the only unfair treatment that African Americans have experienced, cultural trauma for them is an ongoing process that comprises diverse forms and carries their "raised and crushed expectations."[121] In Eyerman's conceptualization, trauma is not necessarily experienced or felt by members of a community; rather, it is constructed by these members through cultural artifacts to build and sustain their collective memories and collective identities.

2.3.6. Traumatogenic Change

In his article "The Trauma of Social Change", Piotr Sztompka develops the notion of "cultural trauma" through the case study of postcommunist societies. Sztompka points out that the concept of trauma being applied to society results from the recognition that any forms of social change may bring potential risk and disturbance to the "social and cultural tissue."[122] However, not all types of social changes are necessarily traumatic. If all

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[119] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 75.

[120] Ibid., p. 76.

[121] Ibid., p. 97.

[122] Ibid., p. 157.

changes in all societies supposedly gave rise to trauma, it would suggest that all societies were destined to be incessantly traumatized. [123] According to Sztompka, in order for a change to be affiliated with cultural trauma, it has to demonstrate four attributes: specific speed, specific scope, specific content, and specific mental frame.[124] "Traumatogenic change" usually appears to occur relatively abruptly and speedily when compared to an assumed time span of a similar event. One obvious case at the personal level is "death in an accident is sudden relative to biographical time," and at the social level "collapse of the market is sudden relative to long-range economic waves."[125] As for the less obvious example which nevertheless belongs to this category, Sztompka points towards the "prolonged and cumulative" process which suddenly reaches to an outrageous and menacing level far beyond control. He then offers a few examples at both social and personal level, such as cultural imperialism, growing poverty and progressing illness.[126]

Besides its abruptness and speediness, traumatogenic change tends to have an extensive impact on life irrespective of social or personal life, and it is usually equipped with peculiar content, "either in the sense that it is radical, deep, fundamental."[127] Moreover, such change often leaves people in shock and panic. Sztompka suggests that for sociological analysis, individual traumas and massive traumas have to be excluded since the domain of sociology concerns mainly the dynamic of the entire society.[128]

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[123] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 158.

[124] Ibid., pp. 158-159.

[125] Ibid., p. 158.

[126] Ibid., p. 158.

[127] Ibid., p. 159.

[128] Ibid., p. 160.

2.3.7. Claiming Trauma as a Meaning-making Process

In contrast to personal traumas, massive trauma (as coined by Sztompka) involves a disastrous event that occurs to a mass of people spontaneously, but for Sztompka, massive traumas are not true collective traumas, since when an catastrophic event like hurricane occurs, victims are likely to confront it individually, and the trauma "is their own and not yet shared."[129] True collective traumas involve a meaning-making process with various social groups actively engaging in making sense of the shared traumatic experiences and envisioning coping strategies. [130] Through commemorative practices and various cultural and artistic productions, social actors are involved in the process of representing and reconstructing traumas, as well as solidifying traumatic memories. Hence, the emphasis lies not only on restoring factual truth, but more importantly, on declaring the power of enactment. When a nation suffers a trauma as for instance, during the time when Japan invaded China in the 1930s, a few patriotic movies and songs were produced and circulated among the population to strengthen their anti-Japanese sentiment and resistance. One of the songs "March of the Volunteers" composed in 1934 became the national anthem of People's Republic of China. The song calls upon national resistance against Japanese invasion as well as all forms of imperialism, as the lyrics express, "Arise! All those who don't want to be slaves! Let our flesh and blood forge our new Great Wall!"[131] The shared arousal of torment and trauma reinforce the bonding of the sufferers which

[129] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 160.

[130] Ibid.

[131] The English translation of the lyrics is from the official website of the Chinese government. **"March of the Volunteers."** The State Council of the People's Republic of China, n.d. Web. 1 Sept. 2013.
<http://www.gov.cn/english/2005-08/16/content_23523.htm>.

yields a calling for unity and collective identity, as highlighted in the song, "Every person is forced to expel his very last cry. [...] Our million hearts beating as one."[132] The lyrics of the song as well as the meanings associated with them unfold the traumatic reality and influence the forging of collective identity.

In Caruth's construction of trauma, the notion often refers to "event", "experience" and "consequence" interchangeably in a way that may cause confusion. For this matter, Piotr explains, "[w]hen the concept of trauma is borrowed from medicine and psychiatry, one must notice a certain duality of meaning that occurs in these fields."[133] From Sztompka's perspective which resonates with that of Smelser's, trauma is "neither a cause nor a result, but a process" that has its starting point, dynamics and a potential settlement.

2.3.8. Potential Generators of Cultural Trauma

Among all kinds of trauma, "cultural trauma" has obtained special interests within the domain of sociology. One explanation for this, as Sztompka suggests is that "wounds inflicted to culture are most difficult to heal," since "culture is a depository of continuity, heritage, traditions, identity of human communities."[134] Various social changes impinge upon cultural tissues of societies in varying degrees. Sztompka provides probing analyses concerning potential causes of cultural trauma: one generator of cultural trauma is the fortifying "intercultural contact"; namely, encounters

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[132] **"March of the Volunteers."** The State Council of the People's Republic of China, n.d. Web. 1 Sept. 2013.
<http://www.gov.cn/english/2005-08/16/content_23523.htm>.

[133] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*,168.

[134] Ibid., p. 162.

of assorted cultures which often incur friction, repugnance and contravention.[135] The most traumatizing intercultural contact occurs when one culture is dominated and obtruded by another culture with coercion. The premier cases for this are "imperial conquest, colonialism, and religious proselytizing."[136]

Another potential generator of cultural trauma, as suggested by Sztompka is the increasing "spatial mobility of people".[137] In contrast to the previous case where one culture diffuses itself to dominate and encroach another culture and its people, here it is the people who willingly expose themselves to the domination of another culture. People on the move to another culture, be they emigrants, sojourners or asylum seekers, often find themselves incompatible with other cultures. This type of stressor is often disregarded in social sciences and literary studies, as the majority's attention is drawn upon extreme events such as Shoah, genocides, Maafa, and terrorism. The incorporation of this type of stressor should not make the concept of trauma lose its research validity and theoretical value. Rather, it challenges Western catastrophe-driven discourses of trauma and complements the research on literary trauma studies.

The next potential generator of cultural trauma, as proposed by Sztompka, relates to "the change of fundamental institutions or regimes;" whether the change of regimes emerges from within the society or outside the society, it nevertheless interrupts the "deeply embedded, thoroughly internalized" former routine of life, and thus generates forms of cultural trauma.[138]

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[135] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 162.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid., p. 163.

The fourth possible generator of cultural trauma is linked to the change of "beliefs, creeds, doctrines, ideologies."[139] When the traditional cultural essence is superseded by new ideas, widely circulated panic and anxiety may occur, which forms another type of cultural trauma.[140] Undoubtedly, these four sources of cultural trauma are only a few examples among various types of cultural trauma.

2.3.9. Coping with Cultural Trauma

Cultural traumas elicit diverse responses from people, as they try to make sense of them. Sztompka adopts Robert K. Merton's four adaptation strategies to cope with anomie and applies them to cultural traumas. These four adaptation approaches include "innovation, rebellion, ritualism, and retreatism."[141] Innovation refers to an active adaptation which may involve people's active participation in alleviating the tension of cultural dissension through self-remolding or embracing new culture unconditionally and despising the old one.[142] Similar to innovative adaptation, rebellion is an active adaptation but more immoderate, as people may call for radical transmutation of culture so that the traumatic situation is superseded by a new cultural apparatus.[143] In contrast to innovative and rebellious approaches, both ritualism and retreatism are passive coping strategies. A ritualistic response may indicate that people seek to create a safe zone to avert cultural trauma by restoring their traditions and familiar routines, whereas retreatism suggests the action of

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[139] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 163.

[140] Ibid., p. 163.

[141] Ibid., p. 167.

[142] Ibid., p. 167.

[143] Ibid., p. 168.

snubbing, repressing and deliberately forgetting cultural trauma.[144] The four coping strategies proposed by Piotr seem to be plausible, but fictional texts provide far more complex and often dramatized situations where how characters respond to trauma depends largely on the authors' intentions, the particular context surrounding the event, the characters' personalities and resources they possess.

2.3.10. Cultural Trauma as a Discourse

Before introducing my reconceptualization of trauma theory to apply to the study of the selected literary texts, I would like to discuss another sociologist's work: *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories* (2006). Aili Aarelaid-Tart constructs her cultural trauma theory through the case study of the occupations of Estonia in 1940-1945. For Aarelaid-Tart, cultural trauma has less to do with the outcome of a collectivity's physical and psychic suffering and unsettlement but more to do with its penetration into the core of the collectivity's sense of identity. Therefore, her case studies revolve around the difficulty of retaining Estonian identity and the identity crisis of the Russian population of Estonia under foreign occupation. What I find especially important in her development of the concept, is her treatment of cultural trauma as a discourse: "Cultural trauma cannot be defined only as a given historical or social event at the time of its occurrence; rather, it develops into a distinct discourse during long symbolical arguments, dialogues between different groups of eyewitnesses, but also through statements from post-traumatic power-holders." [145] To underpin her argument, Aarelaid-Tart quoted O'Sullivan and Michel Foucault's works, with the former stressing on the

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[144] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 168.

[145] Aarelaid-Tart, Aili. *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*. Vaajakoski: Gummerus Printing, 2006: 45-46.

meaning-making process, and the latter focusing not only on the process of reproducing meanings, but also on the power relations among those who regulate the knowledge.[146] When cultural trauma is perceived under the rubric of discourse, its purpose is to mould collective memories. Not all events are intended to be remembered; particular events are deliberately forgotten. Thus, in the process of constructing discourses of cultural trauma, many social actors are involved, whose endeavors are not only in line with restoring historical truth through various forms of representation, but also with collective disremembering and healing, as Aarelaid-Tart's asserts, "[t]he traumatic discourse opens whenever some groups are interested in continuing the re-dramatisation of some negatively valued past events, but the others do all they can to disremember the past as quickly as possible."[147] The appearance of cultural trauma as a discourse allows the juxtaposition of dissimilar interpretations and views on what has happened and what the future shall entail; it also opens up space for a wider public to engage in the process of actively seeking for resolutions and reinforcing social bonding.

2.4. Reconceptualizing Trauma

In recent years, research on trauma theories has rapidly occupied a predominant position in fields such as history, sociology, media studies and literary studies. Many scholars criticize the loose usage of the term "trauma" and question its theoretical value. For instance, Thomas Elsaesser, a film historian, argues that trauma becomes "too handy a catch-all for resolving the aporias or lacunas of previous theoretical configurations in the field of film and television studies;"[148] in a similar

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[146] Aarelaid-Tart, Aili. *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*, 46.

[147] Ibid., p. 50.

[148] Elsaesser, Thomas. "Postmodernism as Mourning Work.*" Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2

fashion, Joas sees the broad use of the notion "trauma" as "problematical";[149] in regard to the specific term "cultural trauma", Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weilnböck hold a repellent attitude towards it and object its status as a new master paradigm by claiming that there's no evidence shown in the postmodern trauma discourse that empirical studies concerning real people's traumatic experiences are conducted.[150] Rather, deconstructive trauma theorists tend to conjecture trauma in an abstract, philosophical, metaphorical, aesthetic, artistic, inauthentic and unscientific manner that may "constitute a grave insult toward people who actually suffer from post-traumatic stress."[151] Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weilnböck urge these theorists to consult recent clinical reports to systematically study the "theory and practice of trauma therapy."[152]

Admittedly, Cathy Caruth and the other five sociologists' (Jeffrey C. Alexander, Neil Smelser, Ron Eyerman, Piotr Sztompka, and Aili Aarelaid-Tart) conceptualizations of trauma are limited, since the former's theoretical framework in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* is mainly based on interpreting selected texts from Freud, and the latter generalizes trauma at a collective level, approaching it as a cultural trope that is closely associated with claiming collective victimhood, sustaining collective memories and building collective identities, rather than pathologizing it as a psychic disorder. However, the strong opposition

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(2001): 201.

[149] Joas , Hans. "Cultural Trauma? On the Most Recent Turn in Jeffrey Alexander's Cultural Sociology." *European Journal of Social Theory* 8, 3 (2005): 372.

[150] Kansteiner, Wulf, and Weilnböck, Harald. "Against the Concept of Cultural Trauma (or How I Learned to Love the Suffering of Others without the Help of Psychotherapy)." *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook.* Eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2008: 229-232.

[151] Ibid., p. 237.

[152] Ibid.

on theories of literary trauma and cultural trauma from Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weilnböck seems to suggest a fallacy, a fallacy that claims that the way how literary and sociological scholars approach and analyze trauma is not the "right" or "authentic" or "scientific" approach that trauma should be studied; rather, only empirical clinical reports truthfully represent traumatic experiences. This biased view elevates qualitative-empirical research as superior and downplay the validity of literary and sociological studies. It should be argued that clinical therapies can help people cope with traumas in real situations, whereas literary studies can help enrich our awareness and understanding of human suffering as well as the historical, social and cultural contexts in which the suffering is situated. This does not suggest that this territory is unscholarly; rather, this domain and qualitative-empirical studies complement each other and collaboratively influence human societies with their respective potencies.

It appears to me that each of the trauma theorists discussed above attaches individual-based preferences to particular trauma theories, whereas trauma encompasses far-reaching possibilities. Just as David Becker consciously reminds us in his article "Dealing with the Consequences of Organized Violence in Trauma Work":

> This article does not pretend to offer a simple introduction to trauma therapy, nor is it a basic guideline on how to heal trauma throughout the world. Trauma can only be understood and addressed with reference to the specific contexts in which it occurs. Any attempt towards a 'globalized' presentation and discussion of trauma is therefore useless. The basic aim within this article is to offer information about the concepts of currently under discussion in trauma work and to share a certain amount of practical experiences as an invitation to the reader to reflect on his

or her own experiences.[153]

Indeed, despite the fact that diverse case studies have been provided in varied trauma studies, due attention has to be paid to particular contexts. As evidenced in the earlier discussion on cultural trauma, the discourse of trauma tends to be powerfully associated with historical atrocities such as Maafa and Shoah. As two of the most catastrophic episodes in human history, they indeed should be remembered and studied in order to prevent history from repeating itself. The present study acknowledges their significant roles in human history, but it seeks to orient the attention to other forms of human suffering such as those triggered by immigration, domestic adversity, racism, and Cultural Revolution.

Common life experiences such as immigration, domestic adversity and racist attack may appear not as extreme and devastating when compared to large-scale catastrophic events such as wars and genocides. If the level of life threat and degree of how traumatizing the event were selected as the judging criteria for trauma, events like immigration, domestic adversity and racist attack would have lost the competition. However, the theoretical turn from bodily injury to psychic wound since Freud's time, suggests the enduring and complex nature of mental anguish and psychic damage. One may add a determiner before the word trauma to indicate the specificity of reference of trauma. For instance, to borrow Kaplan's term, "quiet trauma", which refers to the type of trauma that leaves indelible marks on one's psychic but the level of traumatizing is far less than what extreme events would bring;[154] or as psychiatrist Banschick suggests,

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[153] Becker, David. "Dealing with the Consequences of Organized Violence in Trauma Work." *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2001: 1.

[154] Kaplan, Ann E. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and*

"micro traumas" which "cut you in small incessant ways, caused by chronic worries and fears. Everywhere you turn, someone has let you down, or you're simply worried that everything could easily come undone. Plus, you are trapped and can't escape." [155] Though the level of traumatizing is lower, to disavow such events as traumatic would be a loss for those who truly suffer from these experiences, and who seek remedies from and emotional attachments to the trauma community.

Since none of the theories discussed above can fully grasp the multifaceted forms of trauma as represented in selected Chinese North American fictions, there is a need to approach trauma by taking into account what Michela Borzaga rightly states, "both the historical and cultural syncretisms as well as the everydayness of people's lives and their unique psychic textures."[156] In order to do so, I provide my working definition of trauma:

> Trauma is a distressful condition which results from direct or indirect exposure to an event, series of events, or persisting circumstances that have been perceived and felt as imposing enduring damaging effects on individual and/or collective well-being.

Literature, 1.

[155] Banschick, Mark. **"**Trauma in Every Day Life.*" Psychology Today.* 9 Jan. 2013. Web. 1 Sept. 2014.
<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201301/every-day-trauma-8-ways-feel-better>.

[156] Borzaga, Michela. "Trauma in the Postcolony: Towards a New Theoretical Approach." *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel: Essays.* Eds. Ewald Mengel, and Michela Borzaga. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012: 75.

My definition of trauma does not specify types of events or trauma, with the reason that events that have potentially traumatizing effects are often perceived as extraordinary, life-threatening, devastating or catastrophic. However, a wide range of circumstances may serve as risk factors for trauma-related symptoms. The source(s) of traumatic stress can be a single event or a series of events or cumulative conditions. It is important to understand that it is not the particularity and intensity level of an event/circumstances that determine the occurrence of trauma-related symptoms, but rather, the experience of the event/circumstances; in other words, events do not necessarily generate traumatic stress, but the perceived meaning does. The meaning of traumatic experience interpreted by individuals and collectives tends to be influenced by complex factors, and people's social and cultural backgrounds undeniably play a significant role. Culture manifests itself in connection with trauma in multiple ways: how individual and collective perceive and construe events or circumstances as disquieting or traumatic; how individual and collective react towards events and cope with their traumas.

Moreover, individual trauma is often a psycho-physiological experience that has detrimental effects on both individual's physical and psychological well-being. It is not uncommon to see symptoms such as weight loss, digestive, sleep, immune, cardiac or other physical disorders accompanied by feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, disorientation, uncontrollability, fragmentation, anxiety, depression, loneliness, despair or vulnerability, occur to the traumatized person, disrupting his or her existence. The list is by no means exhaustive; in fact, different people may have varied responses. Thus, in my definition of trauma, physiological or psychological trauma is not specified. In addition, trauma may also occur on people who did not participate in the potentially traumatic event, but feel traumatized after watching traumatic events on TV or listening to other

people's traumatic stories. In reality, many people feel traumatized at some points in their lives. The difference lies in the fact that some display severe and enduring symptoms which interfere with their daily lives, whereas others feel traumatized temporarily. Even with the same event, different people may have varying responses and coping behaviors. Furthermore, it should be noted that individual and collective traumas often overlap and cannot always be separated as two independent entities, for an individual is believed to exist in an interconnected, socially-constructed reality, where one person's trauma may have the potential dynamics to affect the consciousness of a group of people who are related to him/her; likewise, collective trauma affects individuals within the collective and is shared by individuals who may or may not be exposed to the event directly. Just as individual trauma affects one's identity, collective trauma challenges the community's fundamental beliefs.

In my analysis of the selected fictions, trauma is employed both as an interpretive tool to investigate the psychic anguish suffered by individuals, and as a strategic trope to reflect historical, cultural and social contexts in which the anguish is situated, as well as the interconnection between individual trauma and collective trauma.

Having discussed the theoretical debates surrounding trauma and provided my conceptualization of trauma, I will now discuss how trauma is studied in literary studies.

2.5. Literary Trauma and Beyond

If trauma is "unclaimed" as Caruth suggests, then how can it be represented in fiction? Fictional representations of trauma are never far

away from real life experiences. In fact, one of the key factors that make literary trauma intriguing is the mergence of real-life situations and imagination. As argued by Sue Kossew, "literature can engage metaphorically, formally, and stylistically with silences and aporias."[157] The fictional enactment of trauma is often achieved through fictional mimicry of the features and symptoms of real PTSD. As Ronald Granofsky observes, "the trauma novel is the result of an imaginative projection of the psyche into a situation of trauma not experienced in actuality."[158] The belatedness of traumatic responses and memories that is accentuated in Freud and Caruth's texts, as well as PTSD diagnostic manuals is frequently manifested at the structural level of the fiction. The fictional dormant stage of trauma is embodied in the narrative structure as the characters' traumas tend not to be portrayed straightforwardly at the beginning of the text; rather, they emerge after a series of foreshadowing events. Hence, the stylistic aspects of these texts — specifically, the mode of narration, narrative point of view, and textual structure; namely, how the narrative is conveyed, who tells the story, what type of relationship the narrator has with the story and characters, and in what order the events and actions are arranged — are important factors for studying traumas in literature. Moreover, one of the main symptoms of PTSD is intrusive and repetitive memory. The fictional delineation commonly modifies such complex symptom in a creative and artistic way through incorporating varied literary symbols into the text, such as dream, nightmare, ghost, landscape and body, in order to achieve compulsive repetition effect. Furthermore, literature that contains traumatic scenes often personalizes

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[157] Kossew, Sue. "Trauma, Memory, and History in Marlene Van Niekerk's *The Way of the Women.*" *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel: Essays.* Eds. Ewald Mengel, and Michela Borzaga. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012: 365.

[158] Granofsky, Ronald. T*he Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster.* New York: Peter Lang, 1995: 54.

history, recreating formerly unacknowledged experiences and calling attention to the impact of social conditions. Hence, it is important to look at specific historical, social and cultural contexts in which traumatic experiences take place.

Despite the broad spectrum of influences from literary and non-literary fields, the common threads that appear repeatedly in literary trauma studies lie in representation, history, memory, testimony, as well as social, cultural, political, and ethical concerns. On the one hand, literary works serve as "case studies" for literary scholars to build and test trauma theories; on the other hand, contemporary literature is constantly inspired by these theories, as Anne Whitehead notes, "[t]he rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualizing trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what it is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered."[159]

In tackling the unique bound between literature and testimony, the art and the act of witnessing, literary scholar Shoshana Felman and psychoanalyst Dori Laub collaboratively examine the trauma of the Shoah in their book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). The focus on representations of collective disaster is also found in Ronald Granofsky's *The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster* (1995). The collective disasters explored in the book include the Shoah, the outlook of nuclear weapons, and environmental pollution. By looking at the depictions of these collective disasters in a wide range of novels, Granofsky proposes a genre: trauma novel. For him, the term differentiates itself from "Literature of trauma" in the sense that it is reserved for "contemporary novels which

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[159] Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction,* 3.

deal symbolically with a collective disaster," whereas the latter covers works of "any genre and any period which deal centrally with trauma."[160] In addition, he stresses the importance of investigating literary symbolism and the connections between individual and society in studying collective trauma.[161] Like Granofsky, Anne Whitehead proposes a sub-genre of fiction which she calls "trauma fiction" in her book *Trauma Fiction* (2004). In exploring the relationship between trauma and fiction, she examines the key literary techniques and devices associated with the genre, and the stylistic innovations developed by writers such as Pat Barker, Jackie Kay, Anne Michaels, Toni Morrison, Caryl Phillips, W. G. Sebald and Binjamin Wilkomirski to convey the untellable experiences. Moreover, she explores the ways how trauma theory and fictional narratives inform and complement each other.

In her book *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002), Laurie Vickroy discusses the functions of trauma fiction by examining the psychological effects of colonization, World War I, Vietnam War, and domestic abuse as represented in works written by Marguerite Duras, Toni Morrison, Dorothy Allison, Pat Barker, and Larry Heinemann. She argues that not only does fiction bear witness to history and the "historically marginalized people", it also bring insights to "historical and psychological studies".[162]

Literary scholar E. Ann Kaplan in her book *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005), explores literary and

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[160] Granofsky, Ronald. T*he Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster,* 5.

[161] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[162] Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2002: 221.

media representations of 9/11, World War II, Rwanda and Iraq War, and the trauma of indigenous peoples, through which she stresses the need to investigate the ways how trauma is situated in a broad cultural and political context, and how literary and cinematic portrayals link individual and collective experiences. She further suggests that the notion of trauma should include "suffering terror", by that, she refers to the indirect experience of terror suffered by the descendants of indigenous peoples.[163]

Rather than considering trauma as an unspeakable terror, Roger Luckhurst in his book *The Trauma Question* (2008) proposes to focus on its "narrative possibility".[164] For him, the *possibility* also entails the need to broaden the existing canon of trauma fiction by including a cluster of texts that "frequently share the same narrative devices".[165] In doing so, he discusses the works written by Toni Morrison, Stephen King, W. G. Sebald, Jane Smiley, Kate Atkinson, Nicci French, Michele Roberts, and Helen Dunmore. In a similar manner, Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga in their book *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel: Essays*. (2012), argue that Yale trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, and Geoffrey Hartman place epistemological void (unclaimed, unknowing) at the heart of the matter and neglect trauma's healing possibility. Following postcolonial thinkers such as Achille Mbembe and Frantz Fanon, they emphasize the "the importance of reclaiming the past"[166] by looking at fictional accounts of trauma in the South African context.

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[163] Kaplan, Ann E. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 1.

[164] Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. London: Routledge, 2008: 89.

[165] Ibid., p. 90.

[166] Mengel, Ewald, and Borzaga, Michela, eds. *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel: Essays,* xiii.

In an attempt to formulate a new approach to interpreting trauma, Michelle Balaev, in her book *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* (2012), theorizes both landscape and place as meaning-making sites where the act of remembering and retelling of emotional suffering occurs. [167] Through close reading of African American, Asian American, Native American, Western American, and Pacific American novels, she urges scholars to consider trauma's multifaceted possibilities which go beyond the "disease-driven paradigm in literary criticism today."[168]

The representation of female trauma and trauma portrayed by female authors is the focus of the book *Trauma Narratives and Herstory* (2013), edited by Sonya Andermahr and Silvia Pellicer-Ortin. A broad range of themes such as "maternal and familial loss, incest, rape and sexual assault, murder, torture, racial discrimination and injustice, migration and dislocation, and the Holocaust"[169] are discussed by scholars from various countries of origin. Despite the plurality of standpoints, the common thread among the discussion lies in the relationship between gender and trauma.

In seeking to give voice to non-Western and minority groups to claim their traumatic experiences, Stef Craps in his book *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2013), points out that the existing canonical trauma studies lack of recognition of the traumas experienced by non-Western and minority subjects. He suggests that "trauma theory can and should be reshaped, resituated, and redirected so as to foster

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[167] Balaev, Michelle. *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels.* Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2012: xiv-xv.

[168] Ibid., p. xi.

[169] Andermahr, Sonya, and Pellicer-Ortin, Silvia, eds. *Trauma Narratives and Herstory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013: 5.

attunement to previously unheard suffering."[170] As such, he analyses works written by South African writer Sindiwe Magona, the British Caribbean writers: David Dabydeen, Fred D' Aguiar and Caryl Phillips, as well as Indian writer Anita Desai from a postcolonial perspective.

As Stef Craps, Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga have argued, trauma is not restricted to the Western context. In seeking to elucidate the intersection between history and memory, cultural artifacts and trauma, trauma and national identity, and individual suffering and collective violence in modern China, Michael Berry in his book *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (2008), draws upon insights from Mikhail Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel," and defines two types of historical trauma: centripetal trauma and centrifugal trauma[171]. The former refers to the anguish imposed from the outside which leads to the upsurge of new discourses, whereas the latter refers to the pain originating from within that inspires narratives beyond national boundaries.[172] He then discusses how these two types of trauma are represented in the textual and visual depictions of six historical moments in modern China: the Musha Incident (1930); the Rape of Nanjing (1937-38); the February 28 Incident (1947); the Cultural Revolution (1966-76); Tiananmen Square (1989); and the Handover of Hong Kong (1997).[173]

Whether focusing on literary symbolism, collective trauma, narrative

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[170] Craps, Stef. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013: 4.

[171] Berry, Michael. *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2008: 7.

[172] Ibid., p. 7.

[173] Ibid., p. 3.

strategies, functions of trauma fiction, non-Western and minority subjects' experiences, or gender and contextual issues in relation to traumas, the above scholars' works reflect multifaceted possibilities of interpreting traumas in literature. Such possibilities will be further explored in the present study.

CHAPTER THREE

3. FAMILY TRAUMA IN LAN SAMANTHA CHANG'S

HUNGER (1998)

> There was a hole in our house, like a great mouth, filled with love words
> and lost objects. How else could it have been explained? A stolen hat, a
> misplaced tuning fork. One child's joy and another's pleas for love. The hat,
> the happiness, the child's cries all vanished as if they had never been.
>
> (Lan Samantha Chang, p. 50)

In Chapter Two I have addressed that a number of publications on trauma have mainly focused on large-scale historical catastrophes such as Maafa and Shoah. The present study, however, seeks to orient the attention to other forms of suffering such as those associated with immigration. In his article "'People between two countries always feel sorrow': Some Preliminary Reflections on Transnational Affects", Rüdiger Kunow brings attention to the negative emotional effect of transnational migration.[174] Although not referring to trauma, he observes that "When the fabric of the customary world in which people have grown up is torn by experiences of displacement we can plausibly expect that this will provoke intense emotional responses."[175] With the case study of the film "Kal Ho Naa Ho: An Indian Love Story" and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fictions, he argues for the "inclusion of sentiments" resulting from transnational mobility into

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[174] Kunow Rüdiger. "'People between two countries always feel sorrow': Some Preliminary Reflections on Transnational Affects." *The Morbidity of Culture: Melancholy, Trauma, Illness and Dying in Literature and Film*. Eds. Stephanie Siewert and Antonia Mehnert.Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2012: 25-36.

[175] Ibid., p. 25.

Cultural Studies and American Studies.[176] Similarly, Antonia Mehnert in her article "'Ou libéré?' Transnational Trauma in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat" acknowledges the gap in current literary and cultural studies, which tend to overlook the "more hidden, side of the migrant experience which is often marked by painful events."[177] Through close reading of US-Caribbean author Edwidge Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, she argues that traumatic experience is transnational, and bodies becomes "the sites of a transnational trauma." [178] Immigration-related distress has also drawn growing interest in Psychology and Psychotherapy. For instance, Clinical Psychologist RoseMarie Perez Foster in her article "When Immigration Is Trauma: Guidelines for the Individual and Family Clinician," indentifies immigration-related stressors such as the loss of social networks, unemployment and poverty, and emphasizes the need to consider "compounding effects of migration stressors on mental health."[179] In a similar manner, Psychotherapist Elizabeth Batista-Pinto Wiese observes that immigration, whether voluntary or involuntary, can be seen "as a potentially stressful and even eventually traumatic event." [180] With a particular focus on studying the mental health of children born in the host country, and those who immigrated at a young age, she warns that conflictive values between immigrant parents and their children can result

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[176] Kunow Rüdiger. "'People between two countries always feel sorrow': Some Preliminary Reflections on Transnational Affects." *The Morbidity of Culture: Melancholy, Trauma, Illness and Dying in Literature and Film*, 34.

[177] Mehnert, Antonia. "'Ou libéré?' Transnational Trauma in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat." *The Morbidity of Culture: Melancholy, Trauma, Illness and Dying in Literature and Film*, 37.

[178] Ibid., p. 40.

[179] Foster, RoseMarie Perez. "When Immigration Is Trauma: Guidelines for the Individual and Family Clinician." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71(2), April (2001): 153-70.

[180] Wiese, Elizabeth Batista-Pinto. "Culture and Migration: Psychological Trauma in Children and Adolescents." *Traumatology.* 16(4): 142–152.

in traumatic stress; when such stress is accumulated, "it can severely affect mental and physical health."[181]

Such warning finds its echo in fiction. Although the positive outcomes associated with immigration such as new opportunities cannot be denied, Lan Samantha Chang's novella *Hunger* (1998) brings attention to the dynamics of the immigrant family life in the US, and the psychological distress associated with immigration. While literary studies on trauma often centers on literature that depicts historical atrocity, my selection of immigration-related fiction may not be seen as a typical example that one would relegate to the realm of trauma fiction. However, immigration, the act of departing, the act of resettlement — signifies changes; the daily negotiations of these changes can have a profound impact on one's emotional and psychological stability. As the text demonstrates, in the absence of kinship ties, job security and love, the psycho- physiological wounding suffered by immigrant family demands recognition. *Hunger* can be read through the lens of trauma in two ways. First, it resonates with techniques that are employed in canonical trauma fiction: retrospective mode of narration, the appearance of a ghost narrator and death. Second, it bears traces of post-traumatic symptoms and responses, such as weight loss, sleep disorder, deliberate act of silencing the traumatic past, guilt and shame. In this chapter, I use "family trauma" to refer to relational trauma which arises from interactions between family members. I also use the term to stress the interrelated relationships between family members and the mutually conditional nature of their traumas.

As the traumatic experiences to be discussed are drawn from Chang's

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[181] Wiese, Elizabeth Batista-Pinto. "Culture and Migration: Psychological Trauma in Children and Adolescents." *Traumatology.* 16(4): 142–152.

fiction with highly aesthetic construction, one should keep in mind that unlike psychotherapeutic process which tends to rely on a coherent structure with treatment decisions based on patients' specific symptoms and expected outcomes, fictionalized traumas do not always end with a resolution; rather, through unsettling narrative, the focus lies on the fragmentation of traumatic memories, and the openness of traumatic endings. The traumatic situations are subject to be selected by the author and transformed through the lens of imagination and artistic creation.

By exploring the characters' pre- and post-immigration experiences in conjunction with an analysis of their physical and psychological responses towards prolonged distress, I argue that immigration as such does not necessarily trigger traumas, but rather, the pre-immigration experiences and a series of cumulative post-immigration conditions trigger immigrant parents' traumas. In addition, I seek to examine the profound impact of immigrant father's trauma on his family.

Born and raised in Wisconsin, United States, to Chinese parents who survived the Sino-Japanese war, Chinese American writer Lan Samantha Chang sets her story in New York City. Narrated by Min, an immigrant from Taiwan, *Hunger* revolves around her family's struggle in the US, and the profound emotional and psychological distress experienced by each family member. Like other immigrant literature, *Hunger* centers on the coexistence of hope, loss, and transformation. The novella begins with Min's dream of her initial encounter with her husband Tian, a violinist, in 1967 in a Chinese restaurant where she works as a waitress; it ends with Min's ghostly presence that refuses to let go of the past. It is only until the end of the novella that readers learn that the story is narrated after Min's death. The recollection of her husband's mysterious past is not displayed straightforwardly; rather, seasoned with imagination, inference and Tian's

fragmented descriptions, Min's memory is often triggered and constructed by present situations and the flow of her emotions. In the process of claiming the unclaimed past, Min's imagination and inference are weaved into her memory, and her memory is further mediated and shaped by the present. The unclaimed past consists of Tian's traumatic departure from his parental home in China. In pursuit of his dream to become a musician, he left his parents and friends in mainland China by smuggling himself first to Taiwan, then to the US. As Min's narration unfolds, we learn about Tian's painful transition from dreaming to be a music professor to eventually working in a restaurant as a waiter. By obsessively training his daughters to play violin, he transfers his hunger for success to their massive burden. After waiving training the elder daughter Anna, who lacks of talent in violin, Tian invests all his effort in training the younger daughter Ruth, who bears a physical resemblance to Tian's parents. As Ruth is unable to bear the training pressure and Tian's excessive dominance, she flees home and never appears before Tian's death. The moment prior to Tian's death, he recalls that his dream of being a successful violinist was so strong that hardship and sacrifices could not restrain him from anticipating the future; when his position at the music school is terminated, his hope for the future is closely attached to Ruth. However, such hope bears enormous weight which exceeds Ruth's capability to handle. Ruth's departure from home causes Tian's fatal heart attack and his eventual death. In the homodiegetic narrative, all actions and events are relayed through Min's memories, imagination and inner thoughts. Through the intertwining of Min's memories and imagination, readers are able to piece together Tian's past experiences prior to his settlement in the US, and the family's life story in New York.

The novella's title "hunger" is used in a metaphorical way rather than indicating the physical hunger. Each family member hungers for what he

or she cannot obtain: Min hungers for the love from Tian and Ruth; Tian for accomplishment in music and Ruth's obedience; Anna for knowing Tian's past and the love from Tian; Ruth for the freedom from Tian's dominance and insatiable expectations. In a state of hunger, each family member experiences the gradual and sustained distress.

3.1. Clinging to the Past

Tian's trauma is marked by a series of loss: the loss of his parental home in China, the loss of his job in the music school, and the loss of his younger daughter Ruth. Through Min's narration, readers learn that Tian's music dream has long been implanted in his mind. When given the choice between his homeland and his dream, Tian opts for pursuing his dream in the US. When China was undergoing civil war, Tian's father anticipated him to reside in China, studying to be a scientist and serving the country. For Tian's father, Tian's eagerness to study in the US signifies his abandonment of his homeland and his family, as he states, "if you truly want to leave us, [...] then this family is no longer your family, I am no longer your father. You have no right to ever to think of us."[182] The heartless statement has left tremendous impact on Tian, making him realize that there is no way back; the price to be paid for pursuing his dream is to cut off the kinship ties involuntarily, as he confesses to Min, "'That was the bargain. I left them, and I do not think of them anymore. But I know that there is only one thing in life that I can permit myself to do. Anything else — frightens me. I am not allowed to have it.'"[183] Holding onto this only hope, Tian inhibits the torment of traumatic loss of his family, concealing it in his heart. He deliberately suppresses the traumatic memory of loss and obstructs his and others' attainability to the memory,

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[182] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 18.

[183] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 18.

as Min recalls, "Tian did not discuss his childhood again. He never mentioned what had happened to his parents, how he had managed to flee the north and head to the coast, when he was just a teenager"[184] Tian's deliberate act of silencing the past implies that his psychological mechanisms are evoked to repress the recurrence of his memories of loss. However, Tian's willful denial does not cure him from his homesickness; instead, his nostalgia surfaces through his specifications. Through Min's keen observation, readers learn that "He had a plan about where each piece would go. The bed must be pushed against the wall, so we would catch the light at a certain angle. [...] He was so exacting, but he did not explain why he wanted things the way he did."[185] Besides the furniture arrangement, "He insisted that we keep the chopsticks in a certain drawer. The forks and spoons went in another. And he had a special idea as to the rhythms of our days. Mornings must begin with a bowl of porridge, fermented tofu."[186] Instead of discussing with Min about the arrangement of the household items and choices of food, Tian persists in integrating all these discreet specifications into their current home. Min's account demonstrates Tian's dominance over the household; her own preferences are never explicitly revealed to readers. By rearranging the precise placement of furniture in the apartment, Tian locates his nostalgia at his present surroundings. The veracious location of each piece of furniture denotes particular meanings for Tian, which unfolds his reminiscence of his parental home, as retrospectively Min realizes, "the chopsticks, the breakfast food, the placement of lamps — were slips of willpower, signs of a forbidden loyalty to this other house that he had been barred for ever from entering."[187] Tian's specifications speak out his mind, the mind that

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[184] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 19.

[185] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 15.

[186] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 14.

[187] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 19.

is preoccupied with his nostalgic attachment and his disinclination to let go of the loss. Through rearrangement of his home in the US, Tian reestablishes a correlation with what he is deprived of. The chopsticks, the breakfast food and the placement of lamps are signs that indicate his persistent memories of his home in China. Although most of Tian's pre-immigration experience is absent from Min's narrative due to Tian's intentional silence, traces of Tian's past experience are nevertheless divulged in his actions.

Tian's trauma of losing his home in China is not only acted out through his deliberate avoidance of talking about it, and his nostalgic home arrangements, but also through Min's frustration. Narrated from her retrospective perspective in a rather sad tone, Min tells the reader: "I had been certain there would be more stories, that soon enough I would know everything about his life. I did not know that this would be the end of the stories and that everything afterwards would have to be searched out, scratched out in deep wounds."[188] The plural form of wound in Min's narration foreshadows the destructive impact of Tian's past experience — not only on his later life, but also in various ways on the lives of other family members. Rather than displaying a coherent story of Tian, Min's recollection remains fragmented. The intentional incompleteness of Tian's past suggests the impact of ruptured reality that shatters the power of utterance. The lack of emotional connection with Tian traps Min in an endless yearning for resolutions, stressing her emotionally and mentally. Min's frustration with her marriage is so profound that it haunts her in her dream. In the dream, she appears "small and sad" in front of her mother; when being asked to make a wish, she points out that the only wish she seeks to fulfill is to see Tian's "true home" — the home where Tian is

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[188] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 102.

denied entry by his father; the same place that is recalled and reconstructed mentally by Tian over the years:

> I knew that I was seeing Tian's true home. Some part of him would always be there. I wanted to look into corners underneath the furniture. I wanted to remember all the details of this vision to create that house in this new world, but then felt the vision fading and the cup slipped from my hands.[189]

In her dream, Min realizes that Tian's present predilections are largely influenced by his loss of home; no matter how willfully he disguises his homesickness, traces of his nostalgia still egress. The dream of her mother indicates that she has been preoccupied with locating the source of Tian's trauma in order to mend her loveless marriage. The bits and pieces of Min's unhappiness lurk out from her dream to express the disquieting aspect of her life. The fading vision of Tian's home indicates that Min's own willpower is insufficient to soothe Tian's psychic pain of loss; as the cup slides off her hands, Min previses that her subsequent trauma is ineluctable. By narrating the dream in a retrospective manner, Min builds up an atmosphere of misery and hopelessness. Min's dream reflects her unresolved concerns, deep-seated wishes, and her unspeakable sorrow; it also assists her in foretelling the future.

Tian's trauma of losing home is not eased by the post-immigration condition. His talent in music does not seem to warrant him a professorship at the music school in New York. His withdrawal from social gatherings and his socially awkward presence in front of his American colleagues contribute partially to the school's rejection of promoting him.

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[189] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 20.

His uneasiness in front of his colleagues is portrayed vividly in Min's depiction, "he seemed to be having problems with his English; he stumbled over certain words and leaned forwards the others as if he couldn't hear what they were saying."[190] Despite his outstanding performance at the recital, Tian demonstrates increasing discomfort in front of his colleagues, as he tells Min, "'We don't need them,' [...] 'Aside from John, they're not my friends, I want to go home.'"[191] Tian's social isolation prohibits him from being accepted by his colleagues. Just as he fails to confront his past trauma, he declines the option to confront his colleague Lydia Borgmann, who wrongly believes that Tian stole her expensive tuning fork. By neglecting these misunderstandings, rather than confronting and resolving them, rumors about Tian have circulated in the department. Min suspects that "it was only one matter in a series of small things — a culmination of drinks refused and other misunderstandings" that contribute to the denial of Tian's promotion.[192] When Tian is denied the promotion the second time, his current position is also terminated and replaced by younger graduates. The harsh reality smashes his dream ruthlessly. Unwilling to articulate her indignation explicitly to Tian, Min writes, "He had been unable, or unwilling, to assess the truth about his standing at the school. How could he have kept on, dogged, never changing his approach, never willing to fit in, without knowing that he would not be chosen?"[193] In the new circumstances, Tian's reluctance to confront predicament is transformed to his ignorance of his surroundings. By avoiding the confrontation and repelling resolutions, Tian is enmeshed in a failing position. His shattered dream of becoming a music professor, as well as his traumatic departure from his homeland traumatizes him

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[190] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 10.

[191] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 12.

[192] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 25.

[193] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 38.

profoundly; his lack of forgetfulness and flexibility hinders him from proceeding. When being offered the position to teach music in a private high school, Tian declines the offer, since he is so overloaded with his dream that he would rather not work in music at all if the position fails to gratify his hunger for success. Min's frustration with Tian's incapability of evaluating his standing at the music school triggers her memory of how Tian relocates in the US, "Tian had listed his occupation as 'student'. [...] He had earned a visa sponsorship after auditioning at the music school. Now we had lost our official sponsor." [194] The switch from 'he' to 'we' indicates her family's predicament and the interconnectedness between each family member. Eventually, Tian works in the same restaurant where Min works. Tian refrains himself from confronting his new being and circumstances by letting the past overshadow the present. Consequently, in the new environment he continues suffering from the accumulative traumatic situations without working through his affliction. Adversities pervade his post-immigration life. The relentless reality disenchants him, shoving him further away from his ambition. Driven by his music dream, he is deprived of returning to his parental home; in the new circumstances, he is caught in a precarious relationship with his colleagues and a troubled relationship with his family in New York. Immigration itself does not cause trauma, however as a triggering factor, immigration complicates Tian's life, since the choice of immigration cuts off his connection with his parents, and he is exposed to an entirely new environment where he lacks of necessary internal strength and external resources to adjust to. After Tian's working contract at the music school is terminated, Min painfully realizes that "It was as if the tender parts of him had burned away, coming down to earth, leaving a battered shell."[195]

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[194] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 39.

[195] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 50-51.

Although the psychological impact of Tian's loss of his music career is not depicted straightforwardly, his trauma is enacted through his rigid parenting style. He expects his daughters to make amends for the loss he has encountered, as Min bitterly recalls, both Anna and Ruth are "subjected to [...] his unremitting desires, his stubborn memories, his fury and personal disappointment."[196] Since Ruth physically resembles Tian's parents, he has displayed particular fondness towards her since she was born. After waiving training Anna who lacks of music talent, Tian devotes himself to training Ruth. Seeing Ruth as the only and last hope for him to accomplish his music dream, Tian "treated her as cruelly as he did himself — with complete disregard for her age and temperament."[197] On the one hand, such cruelty leaves Ruth in a world filled with constraints and hinders her from developing her own hobbies and appreciating her youth; on the other hand, the cruelty mirrors Tian's own anguish of losing home and his music career. The cumulative burden imposed on Ruth has driven her from initial obedience to eventual rebellion. The conflict between Tian and Ruth is ignited when Tian rejects his former dean's offer of training Ruth at the music school. Disquieted with the thought that his daughter might be equally mistreated, he determines to home-coach Ruth and manages her career on his own. [198] However, such immanent control becomes overwhelmingly unbearable which eventually compels Ruth to her limit, as she threatens, "'I'm quitting! I'm never going to pick up a violin again for as long as I live.'"[199] Ruth's eventual abandonment of home indicates that the severe stress that has been accumulated over the years exceeds her capability to handle.

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[196] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 72.

[197] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 52.

[198] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 61.

[199] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 78.

Such stress also has a long-lasting negative impact on Ruth's physical well-being. As Min recalls, Ruth has grown in her late childhood to be "almost painfully slender"; the relentless violin training has driven her to appear like a "sleep-walker"; she sleeps badly and has "a tendency to lie awake or get out of bed and walk around the house."[200] Her sleep disorder and weight loss can be read as her physical symptoms of her psychological stress. As Horvitz notes, "intermingled with her everyday thoughts the memories turn up in the form of symptoms, including anxiety, depression, and 'conversion symptoms,' wherein psychological pain is converted into psysiological disorders."[201] The prolonged stress resulting from Tian's strict parenting style that runs throughout Ruth's childhood and adolescence, has enduring physical impact on Ruth. Years after Tian's death, Ruth pays a brief visit to her parents' house. Time does not seem to have mitigated her trauma, "She had grown thinner, almost gaunt. [...] She looked like a person carved from colourless stone."[202] The visible change of her body serves as a reminder that Ruth's trauma is unresolved, it also indicates the complex nature of trauma: persistent, and not only manifested at a psychological level, but also at a physical level.

Ruth's bitter departure shatters the last hope Tian carries to sustain his life. The smashed dream leads him to conclude that "all that hoping was a waste."[203] Tian's words indicate how he builds the future on his hope, and how his present is influenced by the repercussion of the past. Without fully acknowledging the past and the present, the future is illusory. Extremely

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[200] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 52-53.

[201] Horvitz, Deborah M. *Literature Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction.* Albany: State U of New York P. 2000: 17.

[202] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 88.

[203] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 85.

saddened by the loss of Ruth and the loss of hope, Tian suffers from severe heart attack. The fact that the impairment is irrecoverable and Tian's death is ineluctable overwhelms Min with affliction and remorse. She reproaches herself for being unable to enunciate her disenchantment and indignation to Tian over the years to mitigate his encumbrance of compunction, exempting him from complete accountability for their unhappiness. Meanwhile, she realizes that the key to Tian's unhappiness is Tian's own unsolved trauma from the past, as Min narrates, "I began to think that I would not, after all, begin this conversation. I could have done nothing to appease him. I could never have made up for what he had lost for himself."[204] Despite knowing she could not unlock Tian's loss, Min resorts to her imagination to unlock Tian's past. Towards the end of the novella, Min's recollection of Tian's past story is evoked by the continuance of sorrow from one generation to another. Her recollection traces Tian's escape from mainland China to Taiwan with his violin in hope of pursuing a music career in New York. Unable to know his escaping story in detail, Min creates his adventure with her vivid imagination, "I still imagine him moving quietly and deliberately over the water, buoyed under the moonless sky. [...] He smelled and heard human fear and grief pressed all around him, but he ignored everything, holding on to his own tight, shining wire of hope and plans."[205] Tian's eagerness to come to the US to pursue his music dream is clearly interwoven into Min's imagination. Her imaginative account may not be a factual one; nevertheless, as an alternative explication, it facilitates a better understanding of Tian's hope. The absence of detailed account of Tian's pre-immigration experience compels Min to imagine Tian's journey to the US many years ago. In her imagination, she also realizes that "Even the ancient broken ship, the

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[204] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 84.

[205] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 100-101.

Sonya, with her vast indifference — how could she, I think, have failed to creak and shudder beneath the weight of this man's desire? The immensity of such hunger, folded into his cloth shelter, waiting in the middle of the sea."[206] Written in the present tense, these sentences are equipped with the power of imagination and inference, which differentiate themselves from the previous past-tense narrative based on her memories. The switch in tense emphasizes the massiveness of Tian's hunger that he may still carry with him after death. Such enormous burden drives Min to further imagine a scene of Tian's ghost returning to his parental house. She hopes that this recreated "memory can satisfy his ghost — that the sight of these shapes will give him rest, will help him to forget."[207] By allowing Tian's traumatized and restless spirit to return to the place where he was denied entry, Min seeks to find a resolution for Tian's unresolved trauma.

3.2. Surrendering to Fate

In the novella, three main factors have contributed to Min's psychological and emotional anguish: her unhappy marriage, the death of her mother, and Ruth's abandonment of home.

Min's frustration with her marriage stems not only from Tian's emotional coldness, but also from the mental confinement of traditional gender roles. When Min first meets Tian in the Chinese restaurant where she works as a waitress, she recalls a Chinese myth told by her mother when she was a child, "every man and every woman was joined at birth to their mate by an invisible, enchanted thread. With this story, she said that there could be no

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[206] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 103.

[207] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 86.

controlling fate."[208] Since the doomed union of one man and one woman is believed by Min's mother, she sees Min's marriage with Tian as "yuanfen [...] that appointment of love which is destined for you in this world."[209] As an obedient child, Min adheres to traditional Chinese beliefs instilled by her mother; in lieu of assuming control of her own fate and reversing it in adversity, Min leaves herself vulnerable to manipulation by destiny. Under the influence of traditional Chinese beliefs, Min is not encouraged to utter her expectations for marriage; rather, her sense of self-worth is built upon pleasing and devoting herself to her husband. Since the beginning of their marriage, Min has been preoccupied with questions, such as 'What's bothering you?' 'Did I seem as much of a stranger to my husband then as he did to me?' 'Did my opinion mean so little to him?' All these questions pivot on Tian's judgments and predilections rather than on her own prospects and inclinations. She envisions how Tian must have seen her — "a frightened woman, a stranger in cheap cotton pajamas with her hair smashed from sleep."[210] Seeing herself only through her husband's eyes, Min is found to be disconnected from herself; she relies heavily on her husband to define her identity and self-worth. Upon knowing that her first-born child is a girl, Min turns her head to the wall, "feeling frightened and alone, as if even in this modern world the birth of a girl-child left [her] vulnerable, precarious."[211] Despite Tian's assurance of the unimportance of the child's gender, Min is enwrapped in fear as she measures herself against the externally-imposed belief, "if a wife cannot bear a son, she will lose her husband."[212] Min adheres to the seemingly natural gender attributes that

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[208] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 3.

[209] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 7.

[210] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 27.

[211] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 21.

[212] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 27.

have been constructed by traditional Chinese society; she is unable to free herself from socially-imposed norms even in another country. Min realizes that her own fear does not stand alone; rather, it is "shared by generations of women who lay awake in anger and confusion, trying to understand how to make their husbands happy again."[213] Historically, women in both Taiwan and mainland China had been affected by Confucian patriarchal conceptions, which suggested that wives should respect and obey their husbands in traditional marriage life.[214] For operative social control and household management, Confucius developed and upheld a hierarchical structure of power that positioned ruler on top of the power hierarchy and women at the bottom. Under Confucian power relationships, each person bore the responsibility to demonstrate respect and submission to his or her superordinates.[215] From this perspective, a woman was expected to practice selflessness and to submit to her husband unconditionally as if a servant obeyed her master. Moreover, Confucianism underlined the practice of Filial Piety duties, one of which was to preserve the lineage and family name by having a son.[216] In traditional Chinese families, failing to have any son was seen as a disrespectful conduct to their ancestors. Although beginning in the late 1940s, both mainland China and Taiwan have implemented a series of laws to elevate women's legal status, emancipating them from over two thousand years' feudalist oppression,[217]

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[213] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 27.

[214] See more in Zhang, Lili. "The Particular Career Experiences of Chinese Women Academics." *Women's Studies in China: Mapping the Social, Economic and Policy Changes in Chinese Women's Lives*. Eds. Fangqin Du and Xinrong Zheng. Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 2005: 71-114.

[215] See more in Yuan, Lijun. "Confucius, Confucianism, and the Confucian Rationale for Women's Inequality." *Reconceiving Women's Equality in China: A Critical Examination of Models of Sex Equality*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005: 1- 24.

[216] Ibid.

[217] See more in Hong, Fan. *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China*. London: Frank Cass, 1997: 299-30.

the cultural traditions that had governed Chinese lives since ancient time inevitably engraved traces upon many people's perceptions of women's roles within their families.

Min's insight implies that traditional beliefs have been deeply ingrained in the collective memory of many women, whose socio-culturally imposed insecurities and subordinate positions have contributed to their loss of identities in marriages, making them surrender to the needs of their husbands. The socially-defined norms confine women in designated gender roles. Through regulatory practices/repetitive performance[218] of gender roles, to coin Judith Butler's terms, these women are caught in the illusion of conforming their gender identities to the socially-constructed norms. Before Min immigrates to the United States in the 1960s, these cultural traditions have long been stashed in her memories, shaping her perceptions of the appropriate roles and duties of women within their families. Although these norms are traditionally-upheld in Taiwan, Min strives to meet these gender-role expectations in the US too.

Her adherence to traditional gender roles is already reflected in her choice of room. In her family's flat in Brooklyn, Min favors the 'servant's quarters', which "had been planned and built according to someone's idea of what servants might want or need," as well as the kitchen and living room which "invited company, togetherness and warmth."[219] Tian, on the other hand, opts for a more secluded area, a "walk-in closet that had been refitted as a

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Also see: Hsieh, Hsiao-chin, and Chang, Chueh. "The Development of the Women's Movement and Women's/Gender Studies in Taiwan." *Gender, culture and society: women's studies in Taiwan*, 21-79.

[218] For Butler, gender performativity should not be seen as a singular act; rather, it should be understood as the repetitive and regulatory practice. See more in Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993: 2.

[219] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 5.

greenhouse."[220] These two peculiar choices denote their choices in life —
Min is content with serving others and hankers for companionship,
emotional bonding and love, whereas Tian has a keen interest in music
and desires to be left alone to achieve his goal of becoming a music
professor. After moving into the flat, Min already begins to envision her
future children's lives in the flat; however, readers learn nothing about
Tian's family plan besides his passion for music.

As Min's memories slowly unfold, her disenchantment and anguish are
gradually disclosed to readers. Throughout the novella, she is portrayed
as performing a submissive role repetitively, yet despite her effort to
please Tian, she is often silenced by Tian's indifference and her own fear.
Readers learn that in pursuit of an assistant professorship, Tian "shut
himself in the tiny room for hours every day."[221] On the day of his recital,
Min is thrilled to discover her pregnancy; in order not to perturb him, Min
decides to share the surprise after the recital. In the subway, Min stretches
her legs, attempting to draw Tian's attention to her new shoes, only to be
discouraged by his ignorance. Min's disenchantment and consternation
intensify her incertitude of her marriage. Through her account, readers
see a willing participant in sustaining the role as a submissive wife, "If Tian
ate a little less dinner one day, I would take care not to serve that dish
again [...]. It mattered more to please him than to understand him."[222] All
these trivial details suggest that in their marriage, Min deliberately places
herself in a subordinate role, pleasing her husband whenever she can, yet,
in return, feeling neglected and suffering from deep insecurity. Tian's
emotional coldness and ignorant attitude do not irritate Min; rather, they
leave Min in deep shame. Min's unhappiness with her marriage leads to

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[220] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 5.

[221] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 7.

[222] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 14.

her split of identities, as she reflects:

> It seemed there were two Mins — an outer Min and an inner one. The outer Min looked plump with happy words and deeds; she had the round cheeks of a woman who would bear a child, a woman whose husband filled her with tender love. The inner Min starved; she woke in the middle of the night, then lay for hours wondering what was wrong.[223]

The outer Min is someone Min wishes to become and to be seen. However, in reality Min is trapped in a life where she only feels about being the inner Min, who hungers for love from her husband, and who lacks of security and self-affirmation. The failure of connecting with Tian and his traumatic past turns into a critical moment that triggers Min's renegotiation of herself. Tian's perennial detachment has enduring detrimental effects on Min, as she is often left in consternation and perplexity, wondering what she has done wrong. Readers also learn from the novella that in New York City, Min has no friends to talk to; although she can always call her mother for emotional and spiritual support, she decides not to admit the failure of her marriage. The unspeakable nature of Min's emotional anguish drains her; immersing her in the sea of shame, self-accusation, guilt and fear. As Psychoanalyst, Dr. Davey puts it, "In the absence of a sustaining relational home where feelings can be verbalized, understood, and held, emotional pain can become a source of unbearable shame and self-loathing."[224]

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[223] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 19.

[224] Davey, Helen. "Inside the Mind of a War Vet." *Huffington Post*. 18 Oct. 2011. Web. 1 Dec. 2013.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/helen-davey/combat-related-trauma-_b_1014776.html>

What makes Min's trauma unique is her culturally-specific way of coping. For instance, Min constantly refers to Chinese traditional belief that "appointment of love which is destined for you in this world" to console herself from being unhappily married.[225] In lieu of suggesting Min's marriage with Tian is a mismatch, the belief convinces Min that it is fate that binds them; they are destined to be together. The belief alleviates Min's remorse of not studying in the US, but instead, marrying Tian. The belief also appeases Min's vacillation about her marriage, leading her to acquiesce to the marriage. From the first glance, such culturally-specific belief may yield a positive mental adaptation and transformation; however, in a longer term, such coping strategy does not resolve the escalated psychic pain that is associated with Min; rather, it intensifies Min's self-accusation of not devoting herself adequately in the marriage to gladden Tian.

In each of Min's traumatic encounters, she is caught in a guilt, shame and self-blame cycle. Not only does the failed marriage contribute to her agony, the sudden death of her mother also traumatizes her severely. The often nostalgic reminiscences of her mother and her home in Taiwan are activated whenever she encounters dilemma of choices or situates in a state of bewilderment. Though the recollection of the past is not always consoling, the mother figure serves as Min's emotional and spiritual anchor. As her mother passes away, Min confesses in a rather sad tone, "Now I had no one to tell things to anymore."[226] Unable to accept the fact of her mother's death, Min awaits her to say farewell. The trauma of her mother's death has overtaken Min with guilt, regret and self-criticism. She feels remorseful of growing up to be a woman and leaving her mother

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[225] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 7.

[226] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 29.

behind; she wishes that she could be her mother's obedient girl again —
wearing her hair like a school girl's, and if her mother called, she would
board the plane unhesitatingly to see her. She wishes that she could be in
her homeland, the place filled with "the wetness of the tropics," and the
same place she had abandoned many years ago.[227] Her wish and her
intense emotions reflect the unbearable pain of loss. Not knowing how to
disclose her emotional breakdown and verbalize her traumatic pain to her
husband and elder daughter, Min hides herself in the shower to extricate
her grief. Min's isolation clearly demonstrates that the pain of losing her
mother is too strong to be endured. In order to cope with her mother's
death and her disconsolate marriage life, Min embarks on saving money in
her shielded hideaway: one dollar a week, even when they are in scarcity
of money. For her, the savings betoken a possible escape from the current
life and a hope for a better future.

The same guilt, shame and self-blame cycle is provoked again upon
Ruth's departure from home. Unable to impeding Ruth from departing, Min
expeditiously gives her $ 1750 — the entire amount of her savings.
Through Min's account, we see a desperate mother, who is willing to
relinquish all her savings to sustain her daughter's well-being. At the
moment of Ruth's departure, Min is found to be struggling with her
self-criticism of not being "an adequate mother," of being powerless in
mediating the situations. Knowing that her endeavor might be eventually
in vain, Min pleas, "'Please. And be careful. And please come home, Ruth,
come home.'"[228] The loss of her daughter Ruth triggers her memory of her
mother's trauma which enables her to commiserate with her mother from
her own loss. Many years ago after Min's parents' house was burgled by a

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[227] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 31.

[228] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 79.

cracksman, Min's mother was saddened by losing all the items she and Min's father had preserved from their lives in mainland China. All the lost items were carved with memories of their home in China; hence, they bore particular meanings for Min's mother. Min's recollection of her mother's trauma is retrieved after Ruth's departure. Her mother's trauma serves as references through which Min cogitates over her own traumas. The very act of reflection also amplifies Min's perception of her mother's helplessness which she could not entirely apprehend when she was younger. Like Tian's trauma which causes his death, Min's trauma does not only manifest on a psychological level, but also affects her physical well-being. After being diagnosed with cancer, Min correlates her disease with her mother's theory that negative impact of psychological trauma may affect one's physical health, and one's physical health bespeaks what one has concealed from herself. She believes that all the 30 years of unspoken thoughts of unhappiness have transformed to be an albatross in her body, and until she cannot swallow the unhappiness anymore, the cancer has propagated.

3.3. Writing from Grief

Lan Samantha Chang's *Hunger* can be read as Min's memoir through which Min reflects and recollects particular events and moments in her life. In his book *Opening Up:The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions* (1990), psychologist James W. Pennebaker summarizes his fifteen years of scientific research in examining the connections between emotional expression and people's psychological and physical well-being. Specifically, he argues that inhibition can "serve as a cumulative stressor on the body"[229] that gradually undermines the body's "immune function,

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[229] Pennebaker, James W. *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing E*motion. New York: Morrow, 1990: 13.

the action of the heart and vascular systems, and even the biochemical workings of the brain and nervous systems."[230] The very action of inhibiting significant thoughts and emotions may also "surface in the forms of ruminations, dreams, and associated thought disturbances."[231] Hence, to deliberately restrain and withdraw negative thoughts and emotions can potentially risk one's health. Through years of research and experiments, Pennebaker demonstrates that confronting and confessing the inhibited thoughts and feelings through language can weaken the stress level on the body and the mind and likely ameliorate one's health. When compared to the "talking cure" — to talk to a psychotherapist, writing allows a private and inhibited person to disclose his unsettling thoughts and feelings in a way that provides him with ease. By the same token, social psychologist Timothy D. Wilson suggests in his book *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change* (2011) that story-editing may serve as a coping strategy for people who undergo trauma. Wilson illustrates that "subjective interpretations are formed quickly and unconsciously "when people observe the world.[232] Negative and unhealthy interpretations can contribute to the potential risk of causing mental health problems. Based on social psychologist Kurt Lewin's approach on treating people's unhealthy interpretations, Wilson develops his approach, namely, *story editing*, which aims to "redirect people's narratives about themselves and the social world in a way that leads to lasting changes in behavior."[233] The traumas that cause profound distress tend to be those people fail to obtain meanings from; the seemingly meaningless events or conditions disrupt the tranquility that people are comfortable with. Wilson argues that writing

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[230] Pennebaker, James W. *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing E*motion, 21.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Wilson, Timothy D. *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011: 6.

[233] Ibid., p. 11.

and story editing provide people with space and distance to reflect and reframe their traumatic experiences, allowing them to gain insights through the writing process. Arguably, as Wilson consciously suggests, story-editing approach is not the cure for all psychological problems; nevertheless, it can help solve many afflicting problems.

In the novella, through self-reflection and reflection of other family members, Min unleashes the psychological encumbrance and cravenness she has been bearing over the years. Min realizes that diverse traumatic experiences have shaped her and her family members into who they are. By the time the memoir is completed, Min has gained significant perspectives in the transformation of herself and other family members through traumatic encounters. The process of reflection discloses the role she has played in sustaining her own vexation, trepidation and bewilderment, as well as her daughters' downheartedness and mournfulness.

Min's narrative structure intermingles chronological representation of events with fragmented memories flashing backward as reference points. The chronological structure enables Min to discern the dramatic transformations she and her family have undergone over the years, as well as the personal development of each family member, be it positive or negative. The fragmented memories triggered by the chronological events resonates with the nature of trauma, which is unassimilated, and thus, difficult to be adequately apprehended and memorized. The engagement with the past through the lens of shattered memories allows Min to gain perspectives from the past events that share striking similarities with the present trauma Min encounters; it also permits Min to translate her family story which would otherwise have been left unrecorded, into a culturally transmitted replicator — language.

3.4. Retrieving the Hidden Past

Besides Min's effort in resolving her family's trauma, her older daughter Anna also shoulders the same responsibility. Tian's emotional coldness and apparent favoritism of Ruth have cast shadow in Anna's childhood and adolescence. As Min observes, Anna grows to be "sullen and withdrawn"; "[h]er features lacked the self-acceptance that might one day give her beauty or serenity."[234] However, the shadow of the past does not prevent Anna from seeking ways to cope with it. She believes that questions such as 'why music is important for Tian' and 'why Tian married Min' "would unleash some crucial secret." [235] Since virtually no background information is provided to Anna, she recognizes the obligation to "search out and scratch out" the gap of knowledge on her own. For Anna, after entering college, she is found to be more relaxed and has "a touching new confidence in her voice"; she has also "lost her whine", and "grown self-possessed, attractive."[236] College is a place where Anna is away from her family unhappiness, and through which Anna sees hope to obtain remedies to mediate her father's traumas. She "studied the Chinese language, history, literature. [...] She had even begun to read in translation modern Chinese authors [...]. She developed a passionate interest in China's warlord era, and the role internal factions and coalitions had played in the events that followed the Japanese invasion."[237] Anna's profound interests in Chinese culture and history arise from her desire to apprehend her family history, her parents' cultural upbringings, and the social, cultural and historical circumstances of China prior to their

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[234] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 53.

[235] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 54.

[236] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 71-72.

[237] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 71.

immigration. Anna's interests in Chinese literature and history make Min wonder, "Was she not interested in the present, or the future?"[238] For Anna, the past holds the key to the present and the future. Without fully understanding the past, and the link between the past to the present and the future, the present and the future is not inhabited fully. The denied cultural and historical inheritance from her parents provides Anna with an incentive to plan it as her major subject at university. The literature from modern Chinese authors reflects social and cultural contexts and philosophies of her parents' generation. The history of China's warlord era records the turbulent historical moment her parents were undergoing prior to their immigration. By learning that specific history and culturally-reflected literature, Anna seeks to unveil the hidden and intricate memories that have been living inside of her parents' heads all these years, in order to understand their present actions, and possibly anticipate a positive outcome for the future if she can assist them in coping with the past. Anna's study bridges past, present and future, enabling her to unlock her own perplexity, to decode past intricacies, and to establish solid cultural and historical reference point through which she can investigate the impingements on her parents' present life. Unlike Ruth, who suffers from the direct consequences of Tian's traumas and exempts herself from uncovering and apprehending Tian's past, Anna vigorously shoulders the responsibility of unveiling the geographically-remote cultural codes and inheritances. Her obsession of unlocking her father's traumatic past has motivated her to participate in an oral history project, as she believes that talking about the past can untie the trauma knots.

Through acquiring a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural contexts from which her father's trauma derives, Anna catches sight of an

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[238] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 71.

exit to the puzzlement which has been unsettling her for many years. When the weight of the perplexity is finally lifted off her shoulders, she is transformed to be a more self-assured person. Rather than deliberately repressing the traumatic memories like Tian, or living in the shadow of Tian's bitterness, swallowing the pain of unspoken thoughts and believing in doomed destiny like Min, or rebelliously escaping from the traumatic scenes like Ruth, Anna takes the initiative to study the past, to revive her cultural inheritance, to establish her own cultural and historical references, and to construct her new self.

After Min's death, Anna is allured by the thought of fleeing the old house of unhappiness — she has collected magazines that are "filled with photographs of empty rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, breakfast nooks."[239] The imaginary house seems to be self-contained and delightful when compared to the old, dark and heavy apartment with a shabby door. However, after a few visits to the new apartments and being introduced to potential buyers, Anna "refused to take one apartment, then another [...] and Anna refused to sell."[240] Her final decision can be read as a symbolic journey to embrace the future, the future that is built on the renewal of the past and the present. On the day of earning her doctorate, Anna "hauled an old brass urn on to the fire escape and set to work burning the boxes of cancelled cheques" that Min and Tian have collected over the years.[241] After the burning, Anna supersedes the old furniture and ornaments with new ones and repaints the wall. The process of burning and refurnishing the house resonates with Anna's symbolic journey to untie the distressful past and to transform the past to a hopeful future that is never isolated from the past. For Anna, although the old house is filled with decades of

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[239] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 96.

[240] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 97.

[241] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 98.

unhappiness, it is still her only home, an anchor that consoles her bereavement.

At present time, Anna works at the Asia Culture Institute, a non-profit organization. She collects and decorates her office with old Chinese furniture; she cooks herself similar dishes that Min always cooked, but she "uses odd vegetables in her stir-fries and she has learned to cook with Indian spices."[242] From the first glance, Anna seems to be living her American life with a Chinese past; however, her cooking style elucidates that her present life is created with diverse cultural ingredients. It cannot be simply categorized as an American life or a Chinese life; but rather, it implicates an ongoing transcultural contacts that Anna maintains in her renewed, present-day life. Unlike Ruth, who firmly claims her position as an American, rather than Chinese, Anna complements her life in the US with her newly discovered Chineseness. Her active research in the past enables her to bring her cultural sensitivity and inheritance into light. As the "neighborhood has been declared a historic district and all structural changes are subject to guidelines," the ghostly narrator is immersed in a fear of loss at the end of the novella that there might come a time when no one will remember their stories.[243] It is precisely the same fear that partially drives Anna to preserve the memories of the remote past through present actions, shedding the light for the future.

Conclusion

In handling the personal traumatic past, each of the protagonists in *Hunger* has demonstrated unique ways of coping. Tian resists to work through his traumatic past by deliberately suppressing his memories,

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[242] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 99.

[243] Chang, Lan Samantha. *Hunger*, 104.

denying the accessibilities of his family members and residing in his bitterness. However, the unprocessed trauma of the past has been transformed into his insatiable desire, mingled with destructive inclination, affecting his relationship with other family members. From Tian's story, we see how past traumas, being left unhandled, transcends time and geography to emerge under new guises. Immigration itself is not traumatic, but it inevitably plays a role in triggering the characters' traumatic experiences.

As the narrator of the novella, Min transfers her memories and unspoken thoughts into powerful language, piecing and gluing together her family's life experiences in New York. Throughout her life in the US, she adheres to the Chinese tradition instilled in her memories by her mother prior to her immigration. She is reconciled to remain in a subordinate position in the family by swallowing the unhappiness rather than articulating what she truly desires for in life. Through transforming her unspoken thoughts and imaginations of Tian's pre-immigration experiences and after-death return to his parental home into narrative form, Min demonstrates the power of recollecting and story-editing in giving voice to the 'unclaimed experiences'. In the process of recollecting and inferring the untold stories of Tian, Min discovers an outlet to unleash her emotional upheavals; the same process has also allowed her to reflect the role she has played in perpetuating her own distress and to gain insights from the difficult situations she has previously encountered. For Min, recollecting the past is her way of coping with and working through traumas.

Ruth runs away from her trauma and let her unforgetfulness linger as time proceeds. Without confronting and decoding her traumatic past, Ruth continues suffering from the haunted memories of the past. Rather than suffering from the enduring victimhood of Tian's unresolved trauma, Anna

takes the initiative to overthrow the shadow that has been cast over her since childhood by means of interrogating a remote past that holds the key to the present. In doing so, not only does she unlock the intricacies of the historical and cultural contexts in which her parents were brought up, she is also empowered by her cultural inheritance and motivated to contribute to the preservation of her cultural heritage. For Anna, future is not a doomed destiny that carries the shadow of the past, but rather, future is hopeful when the past is transferred to be powerful resources through her present actions.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. RACISM AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AS TRAUMATIC STRESSORS IN TERRY WOO'S *BANANA BOYS* (2000)

> …what is deemed traumatic is determined by the traumatized person rather than the observer.
>
> (Maria P. P. Root, p. 230)

Having addressed various theoretical debates on the concept of trauma in Chapter Two, as well as literary representation of family trauma in Chapter Three, this chapter concentrates on trauma as related to the articulation of racism and double consciousness in the Chinese Canadian novel: *Banana Boys* (2000). Invoked by Thema Bryant-Davis and Carlota Ocampo's articles on racism-related trauma, and W.E.B. DuBois's notion of "double consciousness", this chapter proposes to read racism and double consciousness as forms of cultural trauma that impellently engage minority subjects in negotiating their cultural identities and cultural belongings in the context of multiculturalism. The notion of multiculturalism denotes an "acknowledgement of the co-existence of multiple cultures and peoples within one space, generally the space of the nation-state."[244] As a national policy in Canada, it allows people from diverse cultural backgrounds to preserve their cultures within well-regulated limits. However, in real life, the idea of multiculturalism is often in collision with social dynamics, as Ien Ang argues, the policy does not take account of "the dynamism that occurs when different groups come to live and interact

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[244] Ang, Ien. *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001: 14.

together."[245] The social challenges that arise from the interactions among different groups cannot be overcome by a multiculturalism policy. Hence, as a policy, it cannot solve problems such as racism.

The psychological impact of racism in literature has drawn critical attention in Humanities. One of the most well-known scholars in this field is Anne Anlin Cheng. In her book *The Melancholy of Race*, she calls attention to the "psychical experience of grief" experienced by racialized or minority subjects.[246] Although not using the term "trauma", Cheng points to the necessity of finding an analytical and political vocabulary to discuss such racial grief. Drawing upon Freud's theory of melancholia, Cheng uses the term "racial melancholia" to analyze the impact of racial grief on the formation of minority subjects' identity.[247] Rather than diagnosing symptoms of racial wound in literary texts, she looks at how these texts bring out critical social issues behind the grief.[248]

I agree with Cheng's insights on finding a vocabulary to address racial grief, but I propose to use the term "trauma" with the consideration that trauma implies both the "wound" itself, and the repetitive nature of racist incidents and racial wound, whereas "melancholia" stresses on the psychic working-out of an unprepared loss.[249] As discussed in Chapter Two, the term "cultural trauma" denotes an act of cultural construction by means of various cultural productions such as media and literature for the

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[245] Ang, Ien. *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*, 14.

[246] Cheng, Anna Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001: x.

[247] Ibid., p. xi.

[248] Ibid., p. 15.

[249] For more detailed explanation of melancholia, see Freud, Sigmund. 'Mourning and Melancholia,' *Collected Papers.* Vol. 4. Trans. John Rivere. London: Hogarth Press, 1957. (1917): 245.

purpose of building a collective awareness of shared struggles and suffering. When used in a collective sense, the term "cultural trauma" provides a symbolic platform through which the utterance of minority subjects' unclaimed traumatic experiences, and their collective cultural resistance can be heard and integrated into the collective consciousness of human suffering.

4.1. *Banana Boys*: Some General Observations on Plot and Narrative Perspective

Written by the Canadian-born Chinese author, Terry Woo, this novel is set in Toronto, Canada in the 1990s. Narrated by five banana boys and one banana boy's sister, the novel provides an account of the lives of five Chinese Canadian protagonists — the Banana Boys: Luke, Dave, Sheldon, Rick, and Mike. As each individual account unfolds, readers learn that Luke quits his study at the university and becomes a DJ at a radio station; Dave is a software tester and a frequent victim of racism; Sheldon works as a gas line inspector, who has grown up without the torment of racism; as a consultant at a management consulting firm, Rick deliberately abuses anti-depressants and alcohol to maximize his performance in his personal and professional life; Mike is a graduate student in Biology, who wishes to become a writer. Formulated in a Word document format, the novel consists of six segments — "thanatopsis", "hi there!", "neurosis", "hysteresis", "catharsis" and "kenosis". Narrated by Rick's sister, Shirley, the prologue "thanatopsis" begins with the death of one Banana Boy, Rick, and ends with an epilogue "kenosis" which signifies a new beginning. The four main sections of the novel are further subdivided into five personal accounts of each Banana Boy's life. Rather than adopting an omniscient narrative strategy, the multiple narrative voices and perspectives allow readers to see alternate views and to

construct a comparative mental picture of the "Banana Boys". In doing so, the multiple narrative voices alleviate the limitation of a single point of view by unfolding supplementary events. After the reunion at Rick's funeral, each of the Banana Boys initiates his story. The constant shift in time and perspective disturbs narrative cohesion and a chronological order of a linear narrative. The disrupted narrative exemplifies the disassociated memory of perplexity and struggle that each Banana Boy has undergone over the years.

4.2. Racism-related Trauma

The concept of "race" is a socially-constructed fallacy that has been affecting human lives pervasively at both individual and social, and both discursive and structural levels. The concept was invented by Europeans in the late 1600s and 1700s to rationalize European Imperialism, colonial expansion, and to define *white* people's alleged superiority.[250] Although a number of scholars have attempted to define *racism* and to identify its multifaceted forms, the common insights lie in the understanding that the term refers to the beliefs in 'races'[251] and *white* supremacy. Albert Memmi[252] suggests that racism emerges from diverse situations, rather

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[250] Feagin, Joe R. *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*. New York: Routledge, 2010: 68.

[251] 'Race', 'white', and 'black' are used in single quotation marks here to refer to biologistic constructs "whenever these terms are categories of 'race theories'"; when written in italics, they refer to "social positions and/or as analytical categories." See Arndt, Susan. "Whiteness as a Category of Literary Analysis: Racializing Markers and Race-Evasiveness in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Word & Image in Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures.* Ed. Michael Meyer. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009: 167-89.

[252] Memmi, Albert. *Racism*, trans. and ed. Steve Martinot. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000: 78.

than simply as an ideology, as he states, "Racism does not limit itself to biology or economics or psychology or metaphysics; it attacks along many fronts and in many forms, deploying whatever is at hand, and even what is not, inventing when the need arises." The naturalization of racism is often manipulatively reinforced through varied social and cultural forms to justify and rationalize *white* supremacy, as well as the discriminatory and unfair treatment towards People of Color. The rationalization of *white* supremacy is for the benefits of *white* people. For Memmi, *racism* is prevalent; it is a "cultural discourse" that has been surrounding people since their early childhood — it exists in diverse cultural productions that people are exposed to.[253] The cultural discourse plays a key role in influencing people's beliefs. Racism permeates everyday life, as Philomena Essed states, "As a process it is routinely created and reinforced through everyday practices."[254] Given its pervasive nature, it is not surprising to see its reflections in social practices. Since many *white* people are unaware of their privilege of being *white,* their actions, without vicious intentions, may unsettle the well-being of People of Color.[255]

The definition of trauma in medical literature is often associated with key words such as "life-threatening, catastrophic, extraordinary, devastating, overwhelming, or unexpected" events. When compared to such events, the incident of racial discrimination seems to be far less severe, since racist incidents nowadays tend to take more subtle, insidious, disguised and ambiguous forms. One single racist incident may be too small to

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[253] Memmi, Albert. *Racism*, trans. and ed. Steve Martinot, 112.

[254] Essed, Philomena. *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991: 2.

[255] See more in Pulido, Laura. "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California." *American Studies: An Anthology*. Eds. Janice A. Radway, et al. Malden, MA: Wiley/Blackwell, 2009: 467.

become a traumatic stressor, yet, one single incident reflects the tip of the iceberg of the omnipresence of structural and discursive racism; cumulatively and repetitively, a series of such incidents may have potentially traumatizing effects that damage the victim's emotional and psychological well-being. [256] Symptoms such as feelings of anger, disgrace, fear, helplessness, depression, and humiliation are commonly found among the victims of racist incidents. *Race-based* incidents can take the forms of verbal and physical assaults, which tend to become a repetitive intruder of one's psyche, oscillating one's fundamental sense of self, and compelling him or her to cope with the psychic upheaval.

Racism remains controversial in psychology with regard to the debate that whether or not it should be considered as potentially traumatizing, since it is the victim's perception and response of the incident(s) that define the experience as traumatic or not, rather than the intensity level of the incident. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo observe that, "While many researchers focus on racist incidents as stressors leading to psycho-physiological disease, few conceptualize racist incidents as forms of trauma."[257] Brown takes a feminist stance and argues that there is a need to broaden the experiences that are believed to be traumatic by incorporating those associated with issues of *race*, class and gender. [258]

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[256] Bryant-Davis, Thema, and Ocampo, Carlota. "Racist incident-based trauma." *The Counseling Psychologist*, 33 (2005): 484; Harrell, Shelly. "A multidimensional conceptualization of racism-related stress: Implications for the well-being of people of color." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 70(1) (2000): 42-57; Sanchez-Hucles, Janis. "Racism: Emotional abusiveness and psychological trauma for ethnic minorities." *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 1 (1998): 69-87.

[257] Bryant-Davis, Thema, and Ocampo, Carlota. "Racist incident-based trauma." *The Counseling Psychologist*, 33 (2005): 484.

[258] Brown, L. S. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture*, 48 (1991): 119-133.

What type of experience is traumatic and having traumatizing effects on people is, after all, indissociable from who perceives and defines it, and who has the power to incorporate it into the official diagnostic manuals. The canonical and master discourse of trauma disregards the enduring racial humiliation and assaults suffered by the socially disempowered people. It is based on this understanding, psychologists Bryant-Davis and Ocampo question the limitation of the current diagnostic manuals on trauma by asking, "Is there a hierarchy of trauma, in which those who gain power or voice are included as victims while others are excluded?"[259] They urge People of Color in Western societies to take actions to call for the legitimation of racism-based traumas.[260] From this perspective, to claim the traumatizing dimension of racism has less to do with pathologizing it as a disorder, but more to do with restoring agency and humanity to the socially-degraded people. In life, people encounter various incidents; however, even among people who have experienced the same event, not all perceive the same event as traumatic, and certainly not all have post-traumatic symptoms. Nevertheless, people who have previously been exposed to potentially traumatizing stressors may have higher risk of feeling traumatized when cumulative and repetitive stressors become intrusive forces in their lives. Although racism-related trauma is insufficiently addressed in psychological and psychiatric diagnostic manuals, Bryant-Davis and Ocampo argue that, "racist incidents should be recognized as potentially traumatizing by highlighting their similarities to other forms of trauma, [...] the microaggressions of racism also make the experience of racist-incident-based trauma complex and unique."[261]

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[259] Bryant-Davis, Thema, and Ocampo, Carlota. "Racist incident-based trauma." *The Counseling Psychologist*, 33 (2005): 485.

[260] Ibid.

[261] Bryant-Davis, Thema and Ocampo, Carlota. "The Trauma of Racism: Implications for

Racism-related incidents can happen unexpectedly to people, although they may possess the knowledge of the existence of racism. For instance, in *Banana Boys*, Dave is the only Chinese Canadian boy without a Chinese name. Growing up in Canada enables Dave to feel that he has "become more Canadian than the average Canadian."[262] His father attempts to make him a real Canadian by naming him after the "Leafs captain of the late sixties and early seventies, Dave Keon."[263] In addition, by drinking massive amount of Canadian alcohol and becoming a hockey fan, Dave's father seeks to embrace his Canadianness;[264] however, despite all his efforts to integrate himself and his son into the mainstream Canadian society, Dave is often the target and victim of racism:

> When I was younger, I guess I wanted to be just like everyone else [...]. But, obviously, I wasn't...couldn't be, could never be. You're looking at a victim of the R-word, beat up on a regular basis, subjected to racial taunts, general abuse, evidently because the sons of the local Hatfields thought I had slanty eyes (*I did?*) and yellow skin (*it was?*). Case in point: do you remember that classic rhyme? *Me Chinese/Me play joke/ Me go pee pee in your Coke...?* Well, imagine hearing it upwards of three times a day, often culminating in fat lips, black eyes, wounded pride.[265]

The confessional homodiegetic tone accompanied with self-questioning mode suggests that Dave's experience is found to be sudden, uncontrollable, and unexpected without him understanding the motives

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Counseling, Research, and Education." *The Counseling Psychologist* 33 (2005): 578.

[262] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 45.

[263] *Banana Boys*, 38.

[264] *Banana Boys*, 38.

[265] *Banana Boys*, 38.

behind the racial attack. He sets out to live an ordinary life in a country who takes pride in its official multiculturalism policy and in celebrating its cultural diversity, yet, his incessant victimization experiences of racial assault in both derogatory verbal and abusive physical forms resulting from his skin color and facial feature signify that citizenship and voluntary assimilation do not warrant membership in the mainstream *white-dominated* community. Under the guise of the joking song lays his damaged psyche, and a sense of isolation, helplessness, and reflexive vexation. The repetitive singing of the song indicates that the racial assault is not a single incident, but multiple and prolonged incidents that haunt, stress, and torment him insidiously, unsettling his fundamental sense of self, integrity, self-esteem, self-worth, and security.

By supplementing a self-questioning rhetorical question, a sense of humor is integrated into a presumably serious and afflictive situation. Trauma and humor are often thought to be incongruous, since trauma is too depressive to be affiliated with the vivacity of humor. Trauma indicates suffering and loss, whereas humor yields laughter and delightfulness. However, in Dave's narration, he employs humor as a device to come to terms with the situation, and to emphasize his mental shock towards the occurrence of racist incidents targeting at his physical being.

Dave's experience does not stand alone; with internet permeates everyday life, digital form of racist messages are communicated in an anonymous yet equally abusive way that constantly erodes Chinese minority's psychic well-being. As Mike reads from an online Asian-Canadian forum:

> *bullshit* when you know *full and well* that this country is falling to pieces because of all the fucking immigration. [...] If having

reasonable neo-conservative views makes me a racist, then I say just send all the chinks back to the eastern cesspools and opium dens from whence they came.[266]

In the digital era, the perceived racism has been transformed to a defamatory discourse on the internet. Under the guise of pseudonyms, racist messages are publicized to further encourage *white* supremacy and to despise equality among citizens. The impact of such digital assault and menace is in no way less pernicious to one's psychological tranquility than the assault in real life, as Mike painfully writes:

> You're born here. You're raised here. You raise a family, earn the respect of your friends and colleagues. You work hard, play fair, shoot straight, pay your taxes — you're a normal, productive member of Canadian society. And yet with a lone word from a single prejudiced freak, you are immediately degraded [...].
>
> *It* hurts.
>
> *I* hate *it*.
>
> You think, *It's so unfair.* You think, What's the point of it all? You think, *screw you guys*, *I'm going home.* Except that you are home. All that blood, sweat, tears, anthems, and you're *still* treated like garbage by garbage. In your own home.[267]

These lines are powerfully written in the second-person perspective to address readers directly. The unconventional second-person narrative mode allows readers to be interactively engaged in Mike's ongoing struggle, bearing witness of his life in Canada, feeling his pain of being

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[266] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 188.

[267] *Banana Boys*, 188-189.

stigmatized as unwanted and non-legitimate citizen, and identifying with his predicament of being home, yet not being perceived as being at home. The pronoun "you" provides an intimate and personal sense of urgency, indicating that the racism-based trauma is not experienced by Mike alone, but possibly shared collectively by those who are reading his story, and those who are seeking the precise language to convey this affliction. By addressing readers directly, the narrator creates a "community kinship" with readers whose integrity and vitality have constantly been trampled and deprived by the ongoing humiliation of a hostile environment. Mike's convincing tone also illustrates that despite of the official multiculturalism policy, racist actions are persisting; internet offers a platform for people to incite, spread, promote and rationalize racial hatred and cultural- intolerant resentment. Moreover, the enduring affliction resulting from exposure to sustained racial hatred and denial of their equality is ingrained in the collective consciousness of People of Color, and each new racist incident no matter in what form it occurs, reignites past pain of these victims, ravaging their fundamental sense of self and generating more scars in the psyche.

Although speaking Chinese with "Russian or Scottish" accent, and self-identified as "more Canadian than the average Canadian," who deliberately resists the "Chinesey" thing, Dave is actively engaged in defending social justice and justifying racial equality. For instance, Dave witnesses one incident when an elderly Chinese woman who barely speaks English is found to be verbally insulted by a local grocery store worker. Irritated by the racial assault, Dave threatens, "Listen, you stupid cracker, if I ever catch you mocking Chinese people like that again, I'm gonna rip your fucking arms off and stuff them down your throat. You

understand — 'buddy'?"[268] Although Dave's aggressive response carries life-threatening message, his reaction reflects the sudden outburst of the accumulated and destructive rage that has been suppressed internally over the years, as Dave bitterly recounts, "I've heard enough cries of "chink!" and "slope!" to last me several lifetimes. It still burns me up how this sort of shit can happen when all you're doing is picking up hot dogs, Kraft Dinner and a lousy head of bok choy."[269] These racist remarks are frequently uttered in public places where Dave least expects. Instead of being shocked to mute and frozen or singing a joking song as how he coped with the similar situation when he was a teenager, the adult Dave adopts furious reaction, which represents one type of self-defensive mechanism that members of "minority groups" may resort in coping with the mounting stress and cumulative minor insults from hostile situations. Dave's aggression can also be seen as a form of resistance against racial assault. Such resistance is a natural response of victims of racism; it helps them to gain redress for the humiliation they have suffered. Dave's exploded rage suggests that manifestation of racism-related stress is beyond the capacity limit of what his psyche can accommodate and tolerate, hence one minor racist incident can ignite his rage.

4.3. Double Consciousness

Not only do these Banana Boys have to cope with the traumatic state of racism, they also have to wrestle with double consciousness. In fact, racism and double consciousness are interlinked; racism causes double consciousness since racism legitimizes the status of People of Color as racialised *other.* The awareness of being *othered*, on the other hand, affects how People of Color position themselves.

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[268] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 137.

[269] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 138.

In The *Souls of Black Folk* (originally published in 1903), DuBois discusses the concept of "double consciousness": "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity;" the sense of "twoness", of being "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body."[270] Among the twoness, one is self-identified soul, thought and striving, whereas the other is ascribed and imposed from the 'Other', namely, *white* Americans in Du Bois's context. Although today Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" has attained general currency in academia when engaging in the discussion of what it means to be Black in America, the term itself did not originate with him. For instance, Dickson D. Bruce Jr. assumes that Du Bois's use of the notion indicates his familiarity with both American Transcendentalism and psychology, although there is no irrefutable evidence that shows which source inspired him the most. From a transcendental perspective, the term is associated with Emerson, who employs the notion in a figurative approach to delineate the dilemma one encounters when he views the lives of "the understanding" and "the soul" through the lens of Transcendentalism.[271] Seeing matters in this light, the two lives share little commonality with each other, and double consciousness elicits "a set of oppositions" from this perspective.[272] For Du Bois, "double consciousness" refers to an internal struggle of preserving the African soul while living in a "materialistic, commercial world of white America."[273] It is this precise conflict that resonates with

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[270] DuBois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism.* Eds. Louis Gates Jr., Henry, and Oliver,Terri Hume. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999: 11.

[271] Bruce Jr., Dickson D. "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness." *The Souls of Black Folk: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism,* 237.

[272] Ibid., p. 238.

[273] Ibid., p. 238.

Emerson's "double consciousness".[274] Although the spiritual aspect of African identity is in opposition to the American materialism, the mergence of the two complements each other, as Du Bois writes, "He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world."[275] The gifted African soul that is associated with African civilization can be seen as a spiritual alternative to *white* Americanism, although meanwhile it serves as a source to the double consciousness. From Du Bois's standpoint, the "veil" and the gifted "second-sight" are central to the construction of African American double consciousness. The veil, seen as both corporal difference and racialising lens, has impacted African Americans' lives fundamentally. The racialising lens of the veil hinders *white* Americans from viewing African Americans as "authentic" Americans; it also obstructs African Americans from viewing their true selves, since the *white* gaze is overwhelmingly unbearable. The gifted "second-sight" allows them to wander in two cultures, obtaining insights from two perspectives: the Africans and the *white* Americans, although the process of reciprocating views is often accompanied with befuddlement, frustration and vexation. Such conception of "double consciousness" implies a positive connotation. However, in my analysis of Chinese Canadian characters' double consciousness, I focus more on the negative aspect of the notion, stressing on the ruptured self which battles between two imposed identities.

As a medical term in psychology, "double consciousness" refers to a

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[274] Bruce Jr., Dickson D. "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness." *The Souls of Black Folk: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism,* 238.

[275] DuBois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism,* 11.

"Duality of Person in the same Individual."[276] The dual personalities are not only distinct from each other, but evidently opposed to each other.[277] Bruce Jr. infers that during the time DuBois was constructing the concept of coexisting African and American identities, there was a compelling indication that he was inspired by this medical term,[278] since his notion suggests a distinctive state of mind that is characterized by a predicament of the coexistence of one ascribed identity and one's own sense of self trapped in one integrated body. Although the predicament distresses African Americans' lives, this unique state of mind should not be perceived as inferior or abnormal; rather, it entails a sense of uniqueness which allows African Americans to be bestowed with knowledge of both cultures, denying the precedency of one culture over the other and the renouncement of either. The inosculation of the two coexisting selves enables the potency to construct a better self.

Although DuBois's double consciousness was set in the American context over one century ago, referring specifically to the African Americans being compelled to view themselves through the contemptuous gaze of *white* Americans while struggling to maintain their own self-identities, the same condition can find its correlation with writings on colonialism and People of Color in other contexts. For instance, Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) illustrates colonized people's experiences:

> "Speaking as an Algerian and a Frenchman." Stumbling over the need to assume two nationalities, two determinations, the intellectual who is Arab and French, [...] if he wants to be sincere

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[276] Bruce Jr., Dickson D. "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness." *The Souls of Black Folk: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism,* 241.

[277] Ibid., p. 242.

[278] Ibid., p. 241.

with himself, chooses the negation of one of these two determinations. Usually, unwilling or unable to choose, these intellectuals collect all the historical determinations which have conditioned them and place themselves in a thoroughly "universal perspective."[279]

The psychic dilemma of being unable and unwilling to choose between the two interwoven identities seems to run parallel with DuBois's unsettling double consciousness. The dilemma is the consequence of colonialism and suppression by the colonizer. The common state of double consciousness among downtrodden people in and outside the U.S. demonstrates the ongoing condition of living with the misjudgments and misrepresentations of the privileged people. When this troubled state of mind is only experienced unilaterally by oppressed people, it can be traumatic, since under the condition of two conflicting identities coexisting in one self, a substantial amount of time and vigor are inevitably invested in negotiating the true self and mediating the internal conflicts inflicted by the external force.

The agitating condition of double consciousness has also found its vestige and validity in the novel *Banana Boys*. The collective trauma of double consciousness can be seen as a shared cultural condition among People of Color who strive to assimilate in a *white*-dominated society. Just as African Americans, all these Chinese Canadian characters struggle with defining themselves throughout the novel. The consciousness of being "Bananas" is largely formed through their experiences as Chinese Canadians growing up in Canada, and through the retrospective interaction with *white* Canadians and the Chinese who grew up in China.

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[279] Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1968: 155.

By viewing themselves through the eyes of the other, these five protagonists encounter the opposing identities imposed on them: seen from the perspective of *white* Canadians, they are "Chinese", who share no difference with the recent Chinese immigrants; however, for the Chinese who have grown up in China, they are "hollow bamboos", who "have no consistent culture, no substance, no essence."[280] The ongoing denial of their cultural authenticity by both *white* Canadian and Chinese communities has left indelible marks in their psyche, disrupting their sense of self and sense of belonging, as Shirely illustrates: "They stand between two groups, not quite Canadian, and certainly not Chinese, marginal and maybe kind of messed up, belonging to and accepted by neither."[281] The constant reminder of how their own self-definitions collides with the identities imposed on them can be seen as a stressor that causes tensions in their psyche, as they often feel marginalized by both *white* Canadians and Chinese communities. The misrepresentation of their images by mainstream Canadian culture based on their physical difference has become a psychological burden that impedes them from fully identifying themselves as Canadians. In this light, the double consciousness can be viewed as having potentially detrimental impacts on the psyche of these characters, confounding their self-definitions. Although the notion is not explicitly employed by Mike, the condition of double consciousness is reflected in his retrospection of the "Essence of the Banana": "Something was... *there*. Something that bugged us, nagged at us, kept us all slightly off-kilter. It was like an undefined burden of some sort, kind of hard to describe."[282] Under the guise of their seemingly prosperous lives lies their inner pain, which "always came back to us in one way or another like that darned cat. Every time someone slipped up,

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[280] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 11.

[281] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 11.

[282] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 104.

we all paid for it. Somehow. Somewhere."[283] The predestinate tone as well as the compulsively repetitive pattern of this double consciousness has become a psychic burden that keeps haunting the way these Banana Boys define themselves as Chinese Canadians and as regular human beings. Despite their desire to announce their own place in the world, they are constantly compelled to negotiate the identities inscribed to them and to define themselves unwillingly. Driven by the double sense of alienation and the crisis of their identities, they strive to reconcile the two cultures and to negotiate their true selves, but only to find that their true selves are not confined to either ascribed identity.

Moreover, the very sense of double consciousness enables them to be both an insider and an outsider of two cultures, as Shirley writes:

> They pronounce the "j" in words like jook. They eat burgers and steaks one day and funky foods, like chicken feet and pigs intestines, the nect. They listen to Country-Western and Heavy Metal, and despise karaoke. [...] They cook bacon with chopsticks, and read Hong Kong magazines only for the pictures flipping pages left to right.[284]

Their common distinctiveness in pronunciation, eating habits, cooking style, music taste and reading behavior all suggests their shared cultural traits that bear traces of two different cultures, although they are not fully conformed to either. Through these unique cultural practices, whether consciously or unconsciously, their common cultural traits have become distinctive symbols that differentiate them from other groups. The natural

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[283] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 104.

[284] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 11.

adoption of both cultural traits is the outcome of being raised up in Canada by Chinese-born parents.

Although being equipped with knowledge and insights from both Canadian and Chinese cultures, the term "Banana Boys" denotes a derogative connotation of being "inauthentic" and having no "essence" of two ascribed identities, namely, Chinese and Canadian. In Rick's word: "Bananas are the intersection — messed up, hyposensitized, marginalized, somewhere in between — and we all know that most car crashes occur at intersections."[285] The intersection disrupts the exclusive assimilation to one cultural system, and the fact that these Banana Boys have often been stigmatized as "hollow" and culturally inferior has challenged their own self-identifications. The dual alienation resulting from their "yellow on the outside" image and their "white on the inside" social upbringing, sets the stage to their traumatic sense of double consciousness, which is often closely affiliated with their fractured and fragile psyche — "miserable, frustrated, alone"[286]

4.4. Insidious Self-destruct

When all the other Banana Boys center their personal accounts on the enduring frustration of being in between worlds, suffering him failed relationship, strained family relations, and the victimhood of racism, Rick's personal narratives often focus on his seemingly smooth and successful professional and personal life. However, he is the only character in the book that commits suicide by overdosing anti-depressants mixed with alcohol.

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[285] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 185.

[286] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 381.

Rick's transition begins when he was a teenager, being terminated employment from McDonalds. This significant episode is however not included in Rick's own personal account, but recalled by his younger sister Shirley upon his death. Since the real motives behind Rick's suicide is never explicitly revealed to any one, Shirley infers that the cause of his suicide may result from his inner emptiness that is often under the guise of his seemingly contented and rewarding life, "I watched my big brother, in his smooth, scheming, intelligent, hypomanic way, build up his status and fortune and power until he finally self-destructed."[287] By piecing together all the significant events that happened in the past, Shirley seeks to retrieve the traces that may collectively result in Rick's downfall. Shirley recounts a number of things Rick was frustrated with when she was then too young to understand, "economics, the transient nature of the service sector, the exploitation of the student class by the bourgeoisie, racism in the workplace."[288] Already burdened at the age of sixteen by the *white*-dominated society where wealth, status, fame and power are privileged, Rick declares his quest to become successful in Canadian capitalist society by following his "Master Plan... About money, about cars, about babes, about school, about future employmen, promotion and eventual World Domination."[289] Shirely's account sets the stage for Rick's following prosperous yet progressively empty life and suicide.

Unlike other Banana Boys who openly grieve at their dilemma of being racialized, distressed, and occasionally indulging in alcohol and music to cope with the psychic pain, Rick always conceals his misery by internalizing it in the dark, and only presenting the glamorous and sufficient-aspect of life to other Banana Boys and to readers. He misuses

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[287] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 5.

[288] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 4.

[289] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 5.

anti-depressants to sustain his energy and to boost his performance as he settles his career as a management consultant. He deliberately denies the "Frustration, alienation, rage, guilt, cultural conflict, suicidal thoughts" that have been shared by other Banana Boys while growing up in between worlds.[290] His disguise can be seen as a self-protective strategy to cope with the stress of racism and double consciousness. Rick refuses to yield to the burden of racism and double consciousness that confines other Banana Boys from being contented with their lives by indulging in the glamour of the mainstream capitalist society. His suicide reflects that although his materialistic cravings have been fulfilled, his inner self has been impregnated with emptiness.

Rather than letting other people define who he is, Rick takes the initiative to secure his sense of self by prioritizing wealth, status, and fame over his inner peace. He believes all the human feelings can be ultimately manipulated, controlled and mastered with the help of anti-depressants and "a decent acting job"[291] Since the depressing Banana identity fails to bring him closer to the master plan, he actively performs different personas in diverse social settings by adjusting "expressions, speech patterns, behaviour, habits" to achieve the "illusion of perfection."[292] His affiliation with the FOBs — fresh-out-of-the-boat Hong Kong immigrants provides him the ideal life he craves for, as he confesses:

> I eventually re-evaluated my position, and realized that the FOBS had exactly what I wanted. I observed closed, and imitated. I asked the right questions, emulated the right moves. I worked on thinking in Cantonese, mastering the language, altering my social

[290] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 79.

[291] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 79.

[292] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 80.

patterns and behaviour. I practised with Hong Kong girlfriends I picked up at school, learning a lot from them, right down to the hair, the clothes, the diet, the music. I even picked up ka-ra-o-ke, though I still loathe it. I eventually became as Mike had described me — the perfect social chameleon. [...] And what did I lose? The Banana Boys. I didn't really think much of it — I was tired of it all. [...] I choose to reject my birthright, the hollowness of jook-sing, of being bamboo, this "Banana-hood."[...] What can I say? I win.[293]

In much of Rick's narration, he keeps an egotistical tone, attempting to convince himself and readers that his "acting" efforts are adequately compensated by his apparent prosperity and social easiness. His deliberate association with the FOBs endows him with wealth, status, and affection that he has always craved, but unable to possess when he was a teenager. Rick's perception of his self-identity and self-worth is based on the glamour and luxury of materialistic life. When other Banana Boys reject the "Chinesey thing" and complaining about being unable to mimic a standard Cantonese accent, Rick has devoted himself to mastering the language and the Chinese social norms. Rick interprets that being a Banana Boy signifies being deprived of a glamorous and wealthy life and being immersed in enduring sorrow of double consciousness. Through aligning with the FOBs and concealing his "Banana-hood", he believes that he is equipped with necessary resources to gain access to the dream life he has always fantasized. The termination of his employment while he was a teenager has infilled extreme insecurity and a profound sense of inadequacy and disempowerment in him. The intensive sense of unfulfilment from the past haunts him, twists his sense of worth, and leads him to yearn for materialistic satisfaction.

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[293] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 87-88.

Rick's dissatisfaction with life is reflected in his loss of sense of time since his late teenage years. The feeling of time from that moment on stops chronological order, but moves fast forward to the future, as Shirley recalls:

> Rick claiming he was shifting forward in time, to future tasks, assignments, jobs, milestones, like completing his CMA exam, graduating from university with honours, going to Taiwan for the Chien Tan "Love Boat" tour completing multi-million-dollar deals over a Scotch or six at a trendy downtown bistro. [...] "Shirl", he instructed, [...] "Keep track of where I am, how old I am, what my status is — school, job, finances. Partners, friends. Enemies. "[294]

Unlike other Banana Boys who linger on the past pain, Rick envisions a future of fulfilling existence to compensate for what was missing in his life. The future signifies hope, value, social status and power, and is bound with proficiency, productivity, and profit. Rick is so immersed into the future that the instrumental time of the present is stripped out of meaning. His disoriented mental state suggests his bewilderment and frustration with the past and the present, as they fail to provide him with the meaning for his existence and the sense of self. His mental time-shift also reflects that the infliction from all the distressful hindrances of the past has never been erased, but remains strenuous in his fractured psyche, destroying his self-validation. Seeing from this light, the symptom of Rick's trauma lies in his distorted conception of time, his dissociative self, and his unremitting sense of derealization. Through creating a mental fantasy world and reorganizing the priorities in his present reality to pursue the fantasy, Rick

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[294] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 7.

is found to be isolated from other Banana Boys. The vision of a material prosperity becomes the ultimate goal and navigator of his life. Like a slave to his fantasy world, Rick willingly embraces the capitalist exploitation and social stratification by misusing anti-depressants to maximize his vigor and performance. Prior to his suicide, he records his last thoughts through a video camera:

> "I do not really think it's right, what I have done.[...] It is like a game of Monopoly gone completely to hell... They possess Boardwalk, Park Place and all the railroads, and you have mortgaged all your properties twice. They have placed so much debt on your shoulders that the most reasonable option is to walk away and watch TV or something.
> "So what can you do? Work fiercely, very hard, at the risk of wasting your limited resources, never ever getting back to where everything was "normal"?"[295]

Despite of knowing the unavoidable exploitation in the capitalist market, Rick regulates himself as a well-programmed machine-like labor to achieve his material abundance, since he perceives his identity through his job role, his wealth, and his property. As Rick's account bitterly unfolds, readers are drawn from his seemingly glamorous life to the destructive, unjust and cruel aspect of capitalism, which relentlessly exploits his resources, manipulatively fosters his sense of value, and indirectly contributes to his demise. Under the prevailing propaganda of capitalism, individual prosperity is misleadingly measured by material success. The materialistic notion of self is his projected sense of self that he deliberately constructs even at the price of his health. His sense of identity is at stake if

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[295] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 345-346.

he loses all these material possessions. Since the late teenage years, his damaged-self has been filled with sense of inadequacy and illusory visions of who he should be. By using material substances to cure his damaged-self, his inner-self stays unfulfilled. Rick's increasing abuse of anti-depressants also signifies his deep-seated anxiety and fear of losing what he has obtained. In spite of all the self-destructing efforts to achieve his material prosperity, Rick suffers inwardly from a sense of emptiness:

> The scenes of what seemed to be my life are shifting with such frequency. [...] I am losing track of it all now, past, present, future. It's all a large, spherical, globular mass, no advantage, no disadvantage, no meaning at all. I have engineered my life too well. The notion of having problems does not gel with the world I have created. They only see the good things in my life and become confused. [...] I think I'm approaching a nervous breakdown. I can feel it in my bones. I feel lost and frustrated.[296]

Under the seemingly glamorous surface of Rick's life lies his broken psyche. By constantly concealing his true self and resuming control over all the real feelings that are associated with the true self, Rick stresses himself to a despairing state. Although he has successfully led other people to believe that he lives a life of contentment, his inner true self is pressured to the limit. The distortion of time is a central feature in Rick's personal account that expresses his traumatic stress. The bifurcated time presented through Rick's inner monologue disrupts the coherence and consistency of Rick's narrative, reflecting his troubled mental state and his splitting of identities. It also suggests that Rick has been confining himself to an illusory reality, where the past, the present, and the future are

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[296] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 347.

beyond the grip of control.

4.5. Post-traumatic Growth

Although the novel begins with the traumatic death of Rick, continues with multiple accounts of these Banana Boys' collective traumas of racism and double consciousness, and ends with an open end that the protagonists' destinies remain unknown, there is a shimmer of hope towards the end of the novel, which implies a post-traumatic growth in these Banana Boys, as Mike writes:

> In Real Life, the ending's never there. Movies and books and plays may end neatly with a frilly *The End*, where issues are resolved and the cows come home to roost, but we all know that Real life isn't that way; there's always the *And Then What?* factor.[297]

The collective "we" enables the narrator to universalize his experience. In this way, he consciously reminds readers that if the source of traumatic stress remains, the risk of being traumatized still exists. In other words, the fictional account of racism, double consciousness, and all other types of struggle in life may come to an end in the novel, but in reality, these issues may still be prevalent. Although a trauma may cause enduring pain in the psyche, it also has the potential capacity to yield positive growth and changes in life, as Mike firmly believes, "the greater the pain you endure, the more your capacity for appreciating pleasure, the heights you can achieve. Not necessarily will, mind you, but at least you know you'll be able to. If you try. With a little luck."[298]

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[297] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 381.

[298] Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys*, 384.

Conclusion

The intersection of racism and double consciousness as represented in the novel reflects and highlights ongoing negotiations of cultural identity and cultural belongings surrounding People of Color in Western societies. The novel provides the means for linking Chinese Canadians' experiences with other racialized groups. In the novel, all Banana Boys realize the undefinable nature of their identities by rejecting the restrained labels that are imposed on them externally. They struggle between two cultural identities; however, they also realize that neither can sufficiently define themselves. Their double consciousness on the one hand causes their collective melancholy; on the other hand, it provides them with necessary cultural sensitivity which enables them to decode cultural specificities while switching in between these cultures. Although Canada takes pride in its governing multicultural policy, the historically ingrained prejudices and discriminations towards *non-white* minorities nonetheless remains tenacious and emerges under new guises.

The enduring psychic pain caused by intentional and unintentional racism has remained as a blind spot in the mainstream medical literature; however, the insufficiency in recognition of racism-related trauma implies the urgency to broaden the scope of the concept of trauma by accommodating the collective infliction and suffering of those minorities who are often disempowered and silenced by those who possess the power and voice to navigate a trauma hierarchy.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. TRAUMA OF CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN YAN LI'S *LILY IN THE SNOW* (2009)

> She felt something glittering, waiting for her in some unknown, obscure place. She couldn't tell what it was, or exactly where. All she knew was that she had stayed because of that blurry feeling of promise.
>
> (Yan Li, p.178)

Unlike other authors introduced in this dissertation who were either born in the United States or Canada, Yan Li was born and bred in Beijing, China, and immigrated to Canada in 1987. As a bilingual author, she publishes her works in both Chinese and English. Her novel *Lily in the Snow* revolves around two parallel narrative tracks. The first depicts Lily, a first-generation Chinese immigrant who worked as a journalist in Beijing before immigrating to Canada in the 1980s. Inspired by the heroic spirit of Dr. Norman Bethune, China's hero during the Sino-Japanese War, Lily immigrated to his homeland Canada in search for her ideal man and a brand-new life, but only to find that Dr. Norman Bethune is virtually unknown in his home country. With two Master's degrees and work experience in journalism in China, Lily is however found unemployed in Canada after giving birth to a child. The second narrative track focuses on Lily's strained relationship with her mother Grace, whose agonizing memory of the Chinese Cultural Revolution has cast shadow on her and her daughter's lives. Although the mother-daughter theme is one of the most important themes in Chinese North American women's literature as evidenced in works written by Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Fae Myenne Ng, in *Lily in the Snow* Yan Li breaks the conventional writing which largely focuses on immigrant mother and her American-born

daughter by creating an immigrant daughter and a Chinese mother who holds a temporary visa in Canada. With the inclusion of a mother-daughter theme, Yan Li skillfully brings our attention to the Cultural Revolution, one of the most traumatic events in the twentieth century Chinese history. The ten-year turmoil which saw millions of Chinese being persecuted is successfully personalized and dramatized in Yan Li's novel as we see decades after the Cultural Revolution, the immigrant daughter and her visiting mother are still haunted by the memories of it in Canada. The inclusion of historical events as reference points in depicting individual experiences makes *Lily in the Snow* more than a fiction, but bears relevance to a testimonial, the purpose of which is to bear witness of historical atrocity and inform the collective memory of human suffering. Instead of adopting a homodiegetic narrative voice, which may narrow the horizon of perspectives, Yan Li uses a heterodiegetic narrator to expand the narrative scope, engaging readers in understanding multiple characters' thoughts and emotional upheavals. The heterodiegetic narrative mode also allows readers to see the massive impact of the Cultural Revolution on two generations of people whose beliefs and lives have been shaped by the senseless ferocity of the movement. The narrative voice traverses between Canada and China, past and present, opening up new possibilities for readers to locate the source of characters' traumas, as well as the aftermath of physical and psychological torment.

In this chapter, I explore trauma as a contextual issue rather than merely a distressful psychological condition. By "contextual issue", I mean historical, social and political contexts. I will discuss the interconnection between historical trauma and the anguish experienced by the individual. By examining the massive impact of the Cultural Revolution on two generations of people, I will argue that the strained mother-daughter relationship not only becomes a source of daughter's trauma, but also

accounts for the turbulent history. I will also discuss how distorted historical circumstances destabilize the stringent dichotomy of victim and perpetrator.

Before I begin my analysis of the novel, I will provide an overview of the historical background of the Cultural Revolution and explain why it can be situated in the discourse of cultural trauma.

5.1. Cultural Revolution

The official name of the Chinese Cultural Revolution is "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (无产阶级文化大革命). The notion "proletarian" indicates the "elimination of class struggle and the proletarian dictatorship."[299] Initiated by Mao Zedong, then Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, the revolution lasted from 1966 to 1976, and ended after Mao's death with the overthrow of the "Gang of Four"[300]. Despite of its strong affiliation with "culture", the revolution has hardly contributed to cultural development; rather, it is blatantly "anti-intellectual". [301] Intellectuals were criticized, violently attacked, imprisoned, and humiliated publicly with their homes being searched, properties being expropriated.[302] Moreover, they were banished to the bottom of the social

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[299] Chuang, H. C. "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: A Terminological Study." *Studies in Chinese Communist Terminology*, No. 12. Berkeley, California: Center for Chinese Studies University of California, 1967: 5.

[300] The Gang of Four (四人帮) refers to a political coterie consisting of the leader, Jiang Qing, (Mao Zedong's wife) and her accomplices Zhang, Chunqiao, Yao, Wenyuan, and Wang, Hongwen, who rose to prominence during the Cultural Revolution.

[301] Chuang, H. C. "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: A Terminological Study." *Studies in Chinese Communist Terminology*, No. 12, 42.

[302] Cao, Cong. "Science Imperiled: Intellectuals and the Cultural Revolution." *Mr. Science and Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution: Science and Technology in Modern China*. Eds. Darryl E. Brock and Chunjuan Nancy Wei. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013: 123.

ladder, being accused of adopting bourgeois ideology and taking capitalist route, which disentangled themselves from "politics, from production, and from the masses."[303] Millions of students and scientists were sent down to rural areas to be re-educated by poor peasants through hard labor, and to experience harsh living conditions due to their alleged deficiency of being incapable of correlating theory with practice.[304] As Cong Cao states, the "Cultural Revolution traumatized and embittered practically all Chinese and in particular was a catastrophe for intellectuals." [305]

The reasons for launching the Cultural Revolution remain controversial. The main arguments are between "power struggle" and "ideology". One side of the argument suggests that the criticism that Mao encountered from high-ranking Party officials through their literary publications has intensified the internal power struggle within Chinese Communist party, which contributed to the motives behind the revolution;[306] scholars like Wen-Shun Chi, on the other hand, argues that ideological struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is the fundamental reason for the revolution. [307] Seeing the revolution as both "power struggle" and

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[303] Cao, Cong. "Science Imperiled: Intellectuals and the Cultural Revolution." *Mr. Science and Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution: Science and Technology in Modern China*, 123.

[304] Brock, E. Darryl and Wei, Nancy Chunjua, eds. *Mr. Science and Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution: Science and Technology in Modern China,* 23; Berry, Michael. *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008: 5.

[305] Cao, Cong. "Science Imperiled: Intellectuals and the Cultural Revolution." *Mr. Science and Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution: Science and Technology in Modern China*, 119.

[306] Madsen P. Richard. Foreword. *The Red Mirror: Children of China's Cultural Revolution.* By Wen, Chihua (ed. Jones, Bruce). Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995: xiii.

[307] Chi, Wen-Shun. "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Ideological Perspective." *Asian Survery*, Volume IX No. 7. 1969, Millwood, N.Y: Kraus Reprint, 1983: 563.

"ideological struggle", Wang Li, Chia Yi-Hsueh and Li Hsin state that, "China's great proletarian cultural revolution is a struggle to prevent leadership from being usurped by counter-revolutionary revisionists and a struggle by the proletariat to prevent a capitalist restoration."[308]

5.2. Cultural Revolution as Cultural Trauma

In Chapter Two, I have discussed Piotr Sztompka's concept of cultural trauma. He argues that not all forms of social change lead to cultural trauma; in order for a change to be associated with cultural trauma, it has to expose certain speed, scope, content, and mental frame.[309] Cultural trauma involves a meaning-making process with diverse social groups actively engaging in cultural work to solidify collective traumatic memory, and to construct their collective identity. In light of his argument, I propose to read Chinese Cultural Revolution as cultural trauma. First, due to its encompassing scope of destruction of sociocultural structures, traditional beliefs, ideologies, and the devastating prevalence and impact of mass violence against the intellectuals. Unlike the collective trauma arising from unanticipated encounters with natural disasters or from human-made catastrophes such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and genocides, Cultural Revolution disrupted the entire society's meaning-making system and the very sense of existence, provoking diverse forms of loss — loss of faith in established ideology, loss of social status and dignity, loss of trust in various human relations: kinship, friendship and working relations with colleagues, loss of hope in life, and loss of lives. During the revolution, people were agitated to betray each other, no matter whether they are family members, close friends, colleagues or acquaintances. People were

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[308] Wang, Li, et al. *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.* Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967: 8.

[309] Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 158-159.

instigated to do things they would otherwise have never done. As Pye states, "There was not one institution in the country, from the family and the school to the Party and the government, which was not profoundly affected."[310] The fundamental anchors of life such as home, career, relationships, as well as the sense of security, solidarity and coherence were severely disrupted in the process of widespread assaults and oppression.

Second, due to its affiliation with the construction of collective memory and collective identity, the Cultural Revolution can be seen as cultural trauma. The widespread persecution has impacted the entire Chinese society. During the revolution, when people were convicted as "counter-revolutionists" or "rightists" in the process of "class struggle", their friends and family members were agitated to draw a clear line from these discredited people. The collective loss of meaning has shattered the entire society's sense of integrity, tearing apart its political, social and cultural tissues.

The massive impact of the Cultural Revolution has generated a vast body of literary works from both within and outside China. The collective literature that was written after the revolution, known as "scare literature" or "wound literature"(伤痕文学) in China, has disclosed the horrific experiences people "whether they were peasants, workers, young students or intellectuals" had gone through in those turbulent ten years, as well as the detrimental and long-lasting shadow that the past has cast on the present.[311] Published in 1978, Lu Xinhua's short story "Scars" (伤痕) which portrayed a family's tragedy during the Cultural Revolution marked

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[310] Pye, W. Lucian. "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution." *China Quarterly* 108 (1986): 597.

[311] Yang, Gladys. "Women Writers." *The China Quarterly*, No. 103 (Sept. 1985): 511.

the beginning of this genre.[312] This story set the scene for waves of literary works on this ten-year turmoil in Chinese history. In the US, a number of Chinese authors adopt memoir genre to recall this history, works such as Nien Cheng's *Life and Death in Shanghai* (1986), Fulang Lo's *Morning Breeze: A True Story of China's Cultural Revolution* (1989), Zi-Ping Luo's *A Generation Lost: China Under the Cultural Revolution* (1990), and Anchee Min's *Red Azalea* (1994) are a few examples. By elevating their personal traumas onto a public sphere through cultural work, these authors actively participate in the process of fostering collective memory and asserting a collective identity of victimhood. Each personal account has linked individual experiences to the collective ones, enabling collective acts of mourning, remembering, and bearing witness of the suffering they have undergone. Through diverse multiplicity of individual representations of their perspectives, individual stories were mingled into collective history, allowing their collective sense of victimhood to be constructed and strengthened, and their agonizing experiences to be documented for later generations.

5.3. Individual Trauma under Cultural Revolution

In *Lily in the Snow*, the protagonist Lily and her mother Grace's strained relationship provides an instance of the profound impact of the Cultural Revolution. The story begins with the reunion of Lily and her mother Grace in Canada after eight years of separation. This reunion, however, is not a long-awaited reunion from Lily's perspective, as readers learn that despite Grace's repeated suggestions of visiting Lily in Canada, Lily makes

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[312] Chi, Pang-Yuan and Wang, David Der-Wei, eds. *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century: A Critical Survey*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000: xxiv; Li, Kwok-sing, ed. *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China*. Trans. Mary Lok. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong. 1994: 395.

various excuses to postpone her mother's visit. Grace eventually runs out of patience and flies to Canada. Through the obnoxious interaction with her mother since the moment she arrived in Canada, Lily is often caught in confrontation with her childhood trauma that occurred when Cultural Revolution convulsed China. Lily's strained relationship with her mother plays an important role in the novel: on the surface it shows her mother's endless criticism and high expectations, and Lily's dilemma of being unable to please her; however, on a deeper level, it implies the profound psychological impact of the Cultural Revolution on two generations.

As the story unfolds we learn that Lily's strained relationship with her mother begins in her childhood. Through the heterodiegetic narrator's all-knowing access to the inner thoughts of Lily, we learn that Lily's childhood was filled with confusion, isolation, criticism, and shame. Years later in Canada, Lily is woken up by a nightmare in which she was all naked and chased by men. The fearful nightmare reminds Lily of an abusive episode in her childhood:

> She was only ten when the Proletarian Cultural Revolution erupted, thrusting the whole country into chaos. [...] Mother came home that evening after having disappeared for days. Her face looked cold and stern and she started to shout at Lily. Lily felt wronged and reacted with words she had picked up on the street. "You are shameless!" Mother was so angered that she started to tear off Lily's clothes. "I'll let you know what shame is!" [...] When Lily was naked from head to toe, Mother pushed her out of the room into the hallway and locked the door from the inside. Lily was horrified. [...] Lily pushed at the door desperately, hoping Mother

would let her in. It remained tightly shut.[313]

In this scene, readers encounter a profoundly defenseless and horrified child stranded in predicament of fright, meaninglessness, and emotional distortion. After being humiliated in public for days by Red Guards, Grace came back home and directed her anger and frustration to her daughter Lily, who was then too young to comprehend the reason behind the sudden aggression and hostility from her mother. The misdirected pugnacity was so unforeseen that it had become a stressor that left an indelible mark on Lily's psyche, inducing her sense of inferiority and helplessness. Grace's abusive behavior reflects her own overwhelming feelings of helplessness, rage and shame. As the text has demonstrated, the public humiliation had a devastating effect on Grace, who in return, imposed her own anguish, emotional distress, and resentment on Lily, altering her sense of self, and depriving her of her sense of security. Grace's insanity and perpetrator status can be seen as a reflection of the entire society's madness. In a decade of moral chaos and ideological collapse, when one's fundamental sense of existence is shattered, the rigid boundaries between sanity and insanity, victim and perpetrator are obscured. Dichotomies become less opposite, but more formless when social conditions are interconnected with every member of the society.

Grace's abusive behavior has a profound negative impact on her daughter, as Lily bitterly recalls, "Mother, to this day you have always blamed me for not being decent. But do you realize that it was you who deprived me of my last shred of decency as a child?"[314] From Lily's perspective, her current anguish is the direct result of Grace's aggression in her childhood;

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[313] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*. Toronto: Women's Press. 2009: 49.

[314] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 50.

however little does she know that public humiliation during the Cultural Revolution has transformed Grace to an insane state. With the gap of this important knowledge, Lily remains resentful of her mother's aggression. Years later in Canada, she still recalls the criticism her mother made when she was a child: "How could you be so plain, with your flat nose and yellowish skin? How come you don't take after me at all?"[315] Grace's verbal assault has resulted in Lily's "strong sense of inferiority [...] for the rest of her life."[316] Grace's use of verbal assault indicates her own frustration with life. Unable to cope with her distress, Grace fails to regulate her overwhelming emotions which in return find their outlets in aggressive and detached behavior towards Lily. As the victim of her mother's aggression, Lily grows up to be lacking of confidence.

The absence of delicate care and love from her mother in her childhood has a profound effect on her choice of man in her adulthood, as Lily confesses:

> "Perhaps I never got enough care, as a child. So I have been over-sensitive to any little sign of love or care from people, good or bad."[...] "Mom, if you had shown that you loved me and cared about me, I would have had more self-confidence as a child and wouldn't have been so easily trapped by worthless suitors."[317]

As a mother, Grace's influence on her daughter Lily is inevitably important; her emotional detachment has led Lily to a deep sense of insecurity and a prolonged period of emotional void. As a child, Lily was left alone to cope with her overpowering loneliness and fear which interconnected with her

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[315] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 328.

[316] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 328.

[317] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 121.

brittle relationships with men in later life. Through attachment to her suitors who demonstrate affection towards her, Lily seeks to fill the void of love, tenderness and protection that has long been absent in her life.

Time does not seem to change their strained relationship. After eight years of separation since Lily's immigration to Canada, Lily's mother is found to be verbally attacking her again in Canada, when Lily has become a mother herself. Irritated by the garlic Lily uses to cook dinner, "Grace's eyes were burning with rage. "Why do I have to tolerate the disgrace at my age? You make me ashamed to face everyone! My life would have been much easier without you!" [...] "I hate liars! I hate hypocrites! I hate you, too, I hate you to death! You are my lifelong enemy! Now you know my true feelings!"[318] The sudden explosion of anger accumulated over years of vexation is clearly demonstrated in Grace's compulsive repetition of "hate". The tone of hatred and spite is achieved by four short consecutive sentences, each begins with "I hate", emphasizing Grace's strong emotions that exceed the carrying capacity of being rational. The repetition is indicative of the extent of her resentment towards her unrequited love and the torment she suffered during the Cultural Revolution. At the age of sixteen, Grace fell in love with her English teacher who later went to England for graduate studies in Theology. The mixed messages he sent made her believe he would be the one. Grace spent ten years in vain waiting for his return, only to learn that he determined to stay single all his life and devote himself to Theology. The garlic reminds Grace of her unrequited love in her youth — The man she loved disliked the taste of Garlic in her mouth when he kissed her. Grace's traumatic experiences overwhelm her senses and corrode her emotional stability. The initial trauma has not been resolved over the years, but has

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[318] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 175.

only reappeared under different guises. Grace's severe irritability, intense shame, and volatile anger can be seen as symptoms of her trauma, which has transformed her to be a bitter person filled with explosive rage. She is furious at how life has treated her unfairly and how her daughter is incapable of fulfilling her lost dreams. In front of her daughter, she voices her extreme anger and disappointment in the bluntest and most detrimental way which seems to be a revenge she seeks to take for the devastating loss she has undergone during the Cultural Revolution. By bursting out her uncontrollable emotions, Grace overburdens Lily with shame, guilt, and vexation, as Lily reflects, "not only have I been disappointing to her all these years, my very existence has constantly served as a reminder of the man who had destroyed her otherwise happy life." [319] Lily's father, Grace's first husband, was imprisoned as an anti-revolutionist and exiled to a labor camp near the border of Siberia when Grace was seven months pregnant. Unable to foresee a future with him, Grace filed for divorce and remained resentful of him to this day. Under the political influence of fighting against class enemies during the Cultural Revolution, [320] Grace blindly believed the accusation of her husband was justified, and the decision of leaving him was necessary.

Decades after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the trauma of the revolution still lingers in individual survivor's memories. In Canada, while visiting her daughter Lily, Grace finds herself still inept at processing and integrating the overwhelming event that happened many years ago into her consciousness since the event itself is beyond explanation and her capability to comprehend. One night Lily is woken up in the middle of her

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[319] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 176-177.

[320] Chen, Yixin. "Lost in Revolution and Reform: the Socioeconomic Pains of China's Red Guards Generation, 1966-1996." *Journal of Contemporary China* 8(21) (1999): 222.

sleep by Grace's sobbing in her dream, "Oh... No... No... I didn't ..."[321] Lily

realizes that Grace is " breathing hard and sobbing, her mouth half-open,

her brows knotted and her voice full of despair, as if she were pleading to

someone for mercy."[322] When Lily wakes Grace up by reminding her that

she is dreaming, Grace confesses that "It was...for so many years...it still

hurts..."[323] The pain and shame associated with the memory of the

Cultural Revolution are reiterated multiple times, reappearing in Grace's

nightmares and her flashbacks even decades later. Like many people who

were victims of the Cultural Revolution, Grace was wrongly accused of

things she did not do. The violation of her integrity cannot be integrated

into her existing mental structure of meaning. Her incapability of

developing meaning out of her suffering contributes to her anguish.

Her present bitterness, anxieties and disappointments seem all find their

origins in her traumatic experience during the Cultural Revolution:

> Her second marriage had lasted just over a year and her son was
> only one month old when she was declared a Rightist. She was
> sent to a farm for three years to do back-breaking labor, a method
> adopted by the Communist Party to remold the brains of
> intellectuals. She always took the hardest task, struggling to
> demonstrate her willingness to atone for her "crime" and to keep
> her second marriage alive.
> When she was condemned, humiliated, and tortured during the
> Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s, she was tempted to commit
> suicide to prove her innocence.[324]

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[321] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 292.

[322] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 292.

[323] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 292.

[324] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 216.

This scene bears historical facts that a large number of intellectuals were wrongly accused of following bourgeois ideology during the Cultural Revolution; they were persecuted and sent down to rural areas for hard labor and to be re-educated by peasants. The lack of meaning in accusation, condemnation, humiliation, and torment has contributed to Grace's mental breakdown since truth and falsehood have been twisted. Her suicidal thoughts are a response to her trauma. During the isolation years, she could not fulfill her role as a mother; her marriage was also at stake since people were instigated to draw a clear line from those alleged anti-revolutionists no matter whether they are strangers or close family members. As Grace painfully recalls, "He asked for a divorce... I begged in tears. That night after he was gone, I wandered along the city river for hours in freezing wind, with a desperate desire to drown myself... There was no love, no pity, no understanding even from the closest relationship..."[325] The abandonment from the political party she has faith in is severely compounded by the ramifications of emotional and legal abandonment from her husband. The latter abandonment has a devastating impact on Grace since she is frozen in disbelief that her beloved husband would resort to such a cruel-hearted way to desert her. The extreme emotions associated with the abandonment make her succumb to overwhelming feeling of unworthiness, helplessness, and hopelessness. Not unexpectedly, she is replete with severe depression and suicidal thoughts. Yet, her second husband's abandonment runs parallel with her own abandonment of her first husband. Such parallel blurs the demarcation between victim and perpetrator. Grace appears to represent two discrepant positions simultaneously: that of helpless victim and reprehensible perpetrator. The agony she inflicted on her first husband is in no way less intense than the pain that was imposed on her

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[325] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 293.

by her second husband. When choices are limited under oppressive social and political conditions, people are compelled to do things they would not otherwise in order to survive. Hence, it is rather problematic to hold them entirely accountable for their actions.

Throughout the novel, Grace's traumatic experiences during the Cultural Revolution are repeatedly narrated — first through Grace's fragmented recount triggered by her nightmares, then through Lily's inferential account of Grace's reconstructive memory. The repetition of traumatic scenes resonates with the repetitive and unassimilated nature of trauma, emphasizing the difficulties of rationalizing the trauma that arises from the loss of meaning, and suggesting that the aftermath of traumatic experiences is not confined to the past but suffused Grace's present life.

Although the novel revolves around the life stories of Lily and Grace, there are minor characters whose appearances in the novel serve to accentuate the collective trauma of Cultural Revolution. In Mapleton's Chinese Christian church, Lily accidentally met her schoolmate from China, Jade, who shared her traumatic story with Lily:

> She was only fifteen when she lost her mother, a dedicated high school teacher in Beijing. Her mother had been brutally tortured by her students when the Cultural Revolution erupted in 1966 [...]. It was too much for her mother and she chose to die one night by taking an overdose of sleeping pills.
> As the only child of a suicidal anti-revolutionary mother, Jade received all sorts of abuse at her school's denouncing meetings. It was a girls' school, but all the girls behaved like beasts then. Her former friends came onto the platform to spit at her, kick her, and pour ink and glue all over her: "I almost wanted to follow my

mother to the other world!" [...]

"The Cultural Revolution has been over for many years, but the nightmare often comes back to me." [...] "Whenever I think about my mother, I feel miserable. [...] "[326]

This scene bears close relevance to a testimonial. In his article "Lost in Revolution and Reform: The Socioeconomic Pains of China's Red Guards Generation, 1966-1996" Chen, Yixin argues that the Red Guards generation was deeply influenced by idealism. [327] Their pre-Cultural Revolution education encouraged them to be loyal to the Communist Party and their country, and to fight against bourgeois class and those who took capitalist road. Such education inspired many Red Guards to resort to violence during the revolution since they firmly believed that their actions resonated with the Party's dogma of transforming the entire society through eliminating class enemies. [328] One of their targets was the education system, which according to Chairman Mao, was full of bourgeois doctrines that estranged these young people from the worker and peasant class. [329] In response to Mao's summon, these Red Guards demolished their schools, affronted and beat their teachers to demonstrate their loyalty towards the Party, and their determination to

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[326] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 86-87.

[327] The Red Guards (红卫兵) refer to China's revolutionary youth (mostly are composed of students, young workers and peasants) who were recruited during the Cultural Revolution to enforce Communist Party's dogma. (See Tsang, Chiu-Sam. "The Red Guards and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." *Comparative Education*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Jun., 1967: 202.)

[328] Chen, Yixin. "Lost in Revolution and Reform: the Socioeconomic Pains of China's Red Guards Generation, 1966-1996." *Journal of Contemporary China* (1999), 8(21): 222.

[329] Liu, Yingjie, ed. *Zhongguo jiaoyu dashi dian (Book of Major Educational Events in China)*. Zhejiang: Zhejiang Educational Press, 1993: 22-23.

eradicate capitalism, Soviet revisionism, and feudalism.

Jade's mother was one of the victims that were severely tortured during the Cultural Revolution. The trauma of her mother's death found no relief but only intensified by her peer students' maltreatment. The betrayal and attack from her friends hindered her from making sense of the purpose of living, propelling her to the brim of suicide. Like Grace, decades after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Jade was hunted by the nightmares of the Revolution and saddened by the loss of her mother.

Both Grace and Jade's traumatic experiences during the Cultural Revolution demonstrate that although victims of the Cultural Revolution were humiliated and tortured at different times and for variable accusations, they collectively bear the witness to the traumatic history of Cultural Revolution, as well as the pain, the loss, and the injustice associated with it.

In the novel, the trauma of the Cultural Revolution is measured in the context of individual victim's suffering. Yet, in turbulent years, individual trauma is inseparable from the collective one; they both bear witness to the impact of political force and social disaster. Each individual case situates in and reflects broader historical and social contexts. The intertwining of individual and collective affliction suggests a decade of agony imposed on the national and cultural psyche.

5.4. Mother-daughter Reconciliation

Towards the end of the novel, readers learn that despite Grace's harsh and abusive treatment of her daughter Lily, she is filled with guilt for the pain she has caused, as she confesses:

"All my life I have been wronged, misunderstood, unappreciated, by all whom I cared for and loved. I was often angry and took it out on you when things seemed too hard to bear. You were the victim of my bad temper, I know." [...] "I know you were deeply hurt," [...] "For so many years, I have lived in sorrow and regret. But life is not a round trip, and there is no return ticket. Nothing I could do would ever heal the scar I left in your tender heart..."

"I know you must also remember the time, when I slapped your face so hard that your nose bled and blood soaked the blanket. I wanted to teach you to learn to keep quiet in those absurd years. I hated your outspokenness! In the most difficult times, I thought more than once about taking your hand and jumping off the high rise, dying together and leaving this world..."[330]

Grace's confession evokes sympathy from Lily since the former's mistreatment of the latter is the direct consequence of her personal victimization during the Cultural Revolution. Grace's abusive behavior towards Lily can be seen as her way of taking revenge of her own unresolved trauma. Her own victimhood contributes to her unregulated emotions. In this sense, Grace is both a victim and a perpetrator. In a decade of political turmoil and social madness, the distinction between a passive victim and an active perpetrator is challenged and complicated by the moral dichotomy of guilt and innocence, of whom to blame and whom to sympathize with. Collectively, both the victim and the perpetrator are the victims of the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. Trapped in a cycle of resentment and pain, and burdened with guilt and regret, Grace lets bitterness ferment her life. However, like other individual traumas, Grace's

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[330] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 374-376.

trauma demands an urgency to be heard since the manifestations of her trauma such as adopting abusive behavior towards Lily and having frequent nightmares keep hunting her. The very act of retelling her story and asking for forgiveness allows Grace to reflect and acknowledge the painful situations she has undergone and the reasons for her involvement in causing her daughter's pain. Asking for forgiveness suggests Grace's wish to free herself from chains of bondage, and to work on the healing process.

Grace's broken dreams and unfulfilled hopes have transformed to be Lily's lifetime burden which refrains her from seeing who Grace was, the young, hopeful woman before the Cultural Revolution. Lily's strained relationship with her mother has gradually been reconciled after Grace shares her life stories:

> Bit by bit, from Grace's reluctant but courageous recollections, Lily saw her mother as a different person. She was deeply touched by the desires and disappointments, the pains and sorrows, and the weaknesses and regrets of an ambitious but innocent young woman caught in history's chaotic years and torn by struggles.[331]

The blaming, demeaning and shaming way of parenting is deleterious to Lily's self-esteem and self-assurance, which burdens Lily from her childhood to adulthood. Grace's silence on her agonizing past has led to profound tension and misunderstandings between her and Lily over the years. However, opening up to her mother's reminiscence allows Lily to better situate Grace's irrepressible emotional intensity in a broader political, social and historical context where societal madness is

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[331] Li, Yan. *Lily in the Snow*, 258.

manifested through ruptured human relations. After learning Grace's traumatic past, Lily attains a new understanding of her and her capricious behavior. Lily's forgiveness of her mother enables her to embrace the power of healing and to move forward to reconciliation.

Conclusion

Lily in the Snow demonstrates that fiction can be a testing ground of a retelling of the historical past and human suffering. It also bears a close relevance to a testimonial which bears witness to the historical atrocity, and informs the collective memory of the human suffering under such atrocity. The diverse traumatic scenes in the novel indicate that characters' traumatic experiences reflect and interconnect with broader social and political contexts. The interplay between individual lives and Cultural Revolution is manifested through disrupted human relations. The absence of supportive and nurturing parenting due to the Cultural Revolution disrupts the warm and positive mother-daughter relationship. The novel presents Grace's abusive behavior as a reflection of the societal madness during the Cultural Revolution, which destabilizes the stringent dichotomy of victim and perpetrator. Under such condition, the boundaries between guilt and innocence are shifting and ambiguous.

CHAPTER SIX

6. WRITING AND TRANSLATING TRAUMA: AMY TAN'S

THE BONESETTER'S DAUGHTER (2001)

Could you find happiness in a place? In another person? What about happiness
for herself? Did you simply have to know what you wanted and reach for it through
the fog?

(Amy Tan, p.301)

Like Amy Tan's first two novels *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen
God's wife* (1991), *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001) explores themes
such as the strained relationship between mothers and daughters, their
final reconciliations, and daughters' recollections of their ancestral roots
and routes, in an attempt to give voice to the silenced familial history. The
commercial success of Amy Tan's works has generated rich debate
among critics. Lisa M.S. Dunick in her article "The Silencing Effect of
Canonicity: Authorship and the Written Word in Amy Tan's Novels," argues
that immigrant mother's limit command of English, her daughter's
insufficient knowledge of Chinese, and their conflicting cultural values
create tension in their relationship. Such tension is often mediated by
mother's written texts. For her, writing is a source of agency that allows
immigrant mother to transmit "cultural memories and cultural identity."[332]
From a transnational feminist perspective which focuses on the
representation of the Asian 'Other' in Asian American Literature, Silvia
Schultermandl in her book *Transnational Matrilineage: Mother-Daughter
Conflicts in Asian American Literature* (2009) calls attention to

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[332] Dunick. Lisa M. S. "The Silencing Effect of Canonicity: Authorship and the Written
Word in Amy Tan's Novels." *MELUS*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Summer (2006): 4.

transnational solidarity between immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters. She argues that in the specific case of *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, daughter's inability of understanding mother's Chinese manuscript suggests her disconnectedness with her mother's cultural upbringing.[333] She observes that, as Amy Tan and other Asian American women writers' works have demonstrated, transnational solidarity between mothers and daughters is forged through daughters' initiative act of moving from being isolated from their mothers' stories to identifying with their matrilineal heritage.[334] In her article "'Sugar Sister': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon", Sau-ling Cynthia Wong uses the term "sugar sisterhood" borrowed from Tian's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* to describe the type of readership that Amy Tian has attracted: middle-class *white* women who believe Tian's works "possess the authority" of cultural authenticity.[335] She argues that Tan's works must be situated in Orientalist paradigms because they "enable Orientalism to emerge in a form palatable to middle-class American readers of the 1980s."[336] Her Orientalist interpretation of Tian's works reduces the value of Tian's texts since the universal themes that have been explored in Tian's works, such as family, forgiveness, relationships and careers may evoke universal compassion which goes far beyond an Orientalist discourse.

The attention given to Amy Tan's works suggests the renowned status of her works in the realm of Asian American Literature. There can be multiple

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[333] Schultermandl, Silvia. *Transnational Matrilineage: Mother-Daughter Conflicts in Asian American Literature,* 150.

[334] Ibid., p. 10.

[335] Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. "'Sugar Sister': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon." *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions and Interventions*. Ed. David Palumbo-Liu. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995: 181.

[336] Ibid.

ways to interpret Tian's texts. In this chapter, I read *The Bonesetter's Daughter* through the lens of trauma, since diverse forms of loss are embedded in the text: the loss of one's loved one, the loss of one's identity, and the loss of capability to articulate one's past. I will examine how the novel utilizes miscommunication between mothers and daughters, ghost narratives, and trauma survivor's body to demonstrate trauma, and how the accumulation of intrusive traumatic memories over the years speaks of the urgency and necessity for them to be unleashed through the act of writing and translation. In addition, I will discuss the functions of diary, memoir, writing, and translation, and how they facilitate sharing and working through trauma.

First published in 2004, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is Amy Tan's fourth novel. Dedicated to her mother and grandmother, the book was written after the death of her mother, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer like the character, LuLing in the book.[337] Combining a homodiegetic narrative mode with a heterodiegetic perspective, Tan creates a complex storyline that alternates from one narrator's limited personal account to a relatively unbiased narration that accommodates multiple characters' perspectives. The novel revolves around the life stories of three generations of women: the 82-year old LuLing Young, who is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, her mother, the bonesetter's daughter, known as Precious Auntie, and her American-born daughter, Ruth Young, who struggles between her job as a ghostwriter, her relationship with her partner, Art Kamen, and her mother's dementia. The unique bond between mothers and daughters, as well as mothers' profound impact on daughters' identities permeates the novel.

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[337] Feng, Pin-chia. *Diasporic Representations: Reading Chinese American Women's Fiction*. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010: 64.

There are two parallel narratives: one is American-born Ruth's present life in the US, narrated by a heterodiegetic narrator; the other is LuLing's personal accounts, rendered through her memories on her life in the US, her ancestral bone-setting legacy in China, and the death of her first husband Kai Jing during the Sino-Japanese War. The heterodiegetic narrator is employed to complement LuLing's personal account and to provide indicative subplots that are essential for readers to understand Ruth and LuLing's present lives in the US. LuLing's recollection is written in Chinese and dedicated to Ruth as she fears her memory becomes increasingly frail. Ruth senses the urgency to understand her mother's past as well as the eccentricity of her behavior since symptoms of dementia are shown on LuLing. Unable to read LuLing's Chinese manuscripts, Ruth hires a linguist, Mr. Tang, to translate the document into English, in order to learn her mother and her grandmother's experiences in China.

The novel opens with a prologue entitled "Truth", in which LuLing introduces the most important people in her life, unfolds one of the remotest memories of her childhood, and articulates her deepest wish — to know Precious Auntie's real name. The book is further divided into three sections, beginning with Ruth's present life in San Francisco, followed by the English version of Lu Ling's recollection which reconstructs her life stories in China. The third section leads to Ruth's reconciliation with her mother. The novel ends with an epilogue, in which Ruth is empowered to write a story for herself, her grandmother, and her mother. The storyline travels from past to present, and the setting shifts between China and the United States, as the narrative voice switches from homodiegetic to heterodiegetic. The trauma of diverse forms of loss experienced by both mothers and daughters forms the central narrative of the novel. The novel contains multiple layers of plot, switching from pre-1945 China to the

present-day United States, from characters' voicelessness to their written scripts, from a character's internal monologue to heterodiegetic perspective, and from mother-daughter misunderstanding to their reconciliation. In doing so, two parallel narratives collectively and complementarily shape the recollection of fragmented memories of individual character's past, recreating traumatic experiences that are located in specific geographical regions and historical moments.

In the novel, mothers are reluctant to disclose their personal stories to their daughters straightforwardly; rather, they all resort to writing to bring their recollections to light when they sense the urgency to finally subvert the unspeakable silence that links to an agonizing and remote past. Through writing, mothers consciously preserve and process their fragmented memories in accordance to their present perspectives and situations, hoping their daughters will eventually learn their family's history and appreciate their endeavors. Daughters, on the other hand, feel their profound bond with their mothers after reading their recollections. Both writing and reading processes allow mothers and daughters to revisit and confront their past that defines who they are today.

6.1. Miscommunication as a Source of Trauma

Miscommunication is here understood along the lines suggested by Stephen Banks, Gao Ge and Joyce Baker as "a label for a particular kind of misunderstanding, one that is unintended yet is recognized as a problem by one or more of the persons involved."[338] As a particular type of misunderstanding, the miscommunication between the mother and the

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[338] Banks, Stephen, et al. "Intercultural Encounters and Miscommunication." *"Miscommunication" and Problematic Talk.* Eds. Nikolas Coupland, et al. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1991: 106.

daughter contributes to their strained relationships and provides a locus for their traumas. In the novel, one major factor can be identified as causing the profound misunderstanding between the mother and the daughter: the lack of adequate communication particularly regarding mother's deliberate act of withholding important information from her daughter due to the social pressure. The failure of information exchange becomes a source of the daughter's confusion and a source of friction between the mother and the daughter. In feudal China where premarital sex is rigidly forbidden, Precious Auntie has to conceal her true identity as LuLing's biological mother by acting as LuLing's nursemaid in order to defend Liu family's reputation. After the murder of her bridegroom and her father, committed by the coffin-maker, Chang, Precious Auntie attempts suicide by swallowing a hot pot of black resin. The hot resin burns her face and leaves her permanently muted. The only reason for her to live is the birth of LuLing. As Precious Auntie's true identity is not disclosed to LuLing, LuLing despises her status as a nursemaid and consents to marry Chang's son for a wealthier life. There is one scene where the conflict between Precious Auntie and LuLing shifts from verbal argument to physical aggression:

> She sounded as if she were drowning. She rocked her head like a clanging bell. And then she told me with slashing hands, you cannot. I forbid you.
>
> 'It's not for you to decide!' I shouted back.
>
> She slapped me, then pushed me against the wall. Again and again, she beat me on my shoulders, around my head, and at first I whimpered and cowered, trying to protect myself. But then I became angry. I pushed her back and stood tall. I drained all expression out of my face and this surprised her. We stared at each other, breathing hard and fast, until we no longer recognized

each other. She dropped onto her knees, pounding her chest over and over, her sign for *useless.*[339]

The use of corporal punishment reflects Precious Auntie's own sense of helplessness and despair. Being wronged and deprived of true identity and linguistic connections, the use of physical force seems to be the last resort she can turn to after all other attempts to redress the situation have been exhausted. The infliction of physical pain forwards a strong warning of adversity if LuLing marries her foe's son. It also indicates her own wretchedness — how her isolation, anguish, and wish to utter are disregarded by her family. With insufficient knowledge of her mother's past, LuLing sees the imposition of physical punishment as lack of justification. In depicting a desperate mother whose daughter deliberately disparages her status and shows determination to break the forbiddance, Tan draws readers to reconsider motherhood and the dilemma of being a mother.

Unable to communicate her traumatic past straightforwardly to LuLing, Precious Auntie resorts to writing as her last hope to uncover the truth, attaining understanding from her daughter and obstructing her marriage plan. However LuLing is beclouded by Liu Family's fabrications and fails to read Precious Auntie's recollection completely. Without the knowledge of Precious Auntie's true identity, LuLing asserts, "[e]ven if the whole Chang family were murderers and thieves, I would join them just to get away from you.'"[340] This is the statement that banishes Precious Auntie's last hope, depriving her for all eternity of the desire to live. It is only after Precious Auntie's tragic suicide that LuLing reads her mother's recollection and learns the truth.

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[339] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004: 199.

[340] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 203.

The profound misunderstanding between Precious Auntie and LuLing results in the former's death; it also severely traumatizes the latter. Although in her 80s, LuLing is diagnosed with dementia, an illness that is characterized by its degeneration of intellectual functions such as memory, she is still capable of recalling her anguish precisely. After knowing her illness,

> LuLing sniffed. 'Hnh! Nothing wrong my memory! I' member lots things, more than you. Where I live little-girl time, place we call Immortal Heart, look like heart, two river, one stream, both dry out....' [...] 'What he know? That doctor doesn't even use telescope listen my heart. Nobody listen my heart! You don't listen. GaoLing don't listen. You know my heart always hurting. I just don't complain. [...] 'Depress 'cause cannot forget! Look my sad life!' [...] 'Of course depress. When Precious Auntie die, all happiness leave my body....'[341]

The trauma of her mother's death keeps haunting LuLing regardless of her changes in geographical location and language. Although dementia deteriorates her memory, the memory of her traumatic experiences is frozen and remains stored in her brain. LuLing's statement reveals the difficulty of working through her trauma since the sustained pain that is deeply buried in her heart cannot be repressed nor can it be forgotten. Her inability to articulate the irreparable loss of her mother imprisons her, affecting her relationships with others and refraining her from actively seeking happiness in life. The loss of her mother has a severe traumatic effect on her physical and psychological well-being, as LuLing recalls:

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[341] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 92.

For five days I could not move. I could not eat. I could not even cry. I lay in the lonely k'ang and felt only the air leaving my chest. When I thought I had nothing left, my body still continued to be sucked of breath. At times I could not believe what had happened. I refused to believe it. I thought hard to make Precious Auntie appear, to hear her footsteps, see her face.[342]

The news of Precious Auntie's suicide leaves LuLing in a state of shock, devastation, disbelief, and depression which deprives her of her bodily functions. Her deliberate denial and dissociation are the responses to her traumatic loss, indicating LuLing's reluctance to retain a cognitive understanding of the sudden and overwhelming event. The severe pain of loss coupled with overpowering guilt and unfulfilled wish has haunted LuLing throughout her life. Even in her eighties, she is found to be beset with Precious Auntie's ghost, 'I saw her down there,' LuLing moaned in Chinese between more coughs. 'She asked me to help her get out from under the rocks. Then the ground became sky and I fell through a rain cloud, down, down, down.'[343] At Auntie GaoLing's birthday party, LuLing falls into a pool and almost drowns herself. The intrusive memory of Precious Auntie's suicide and the unfulfilled yearning of locating and inhuming Precious Auntie's Bones contribute to LuLing's delusion, which refrains her from distinguishing reality from fantasy. Her loss of contact with reality indicates that the past resists to be integrated into the present. In the US, LuLing's erratic behavior is reflected in her lack of trust in people and her frequent involvement in fights with others. Her eccentric behavior and strained relationship with her daughter can be seen as an

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[342] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 205.

[343] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 323.

outcome of her unresolved trauma. As a trauma survivor, LuLing has difficulty with emotional regulation; consequently, her daughter Ruth becomes the outlet for her frustration and anxiety. As the heterodiegetic narrator states, "[h]er mother was permanently unhappy with everything and everybody. LuLing had immersed her in a climate of unsolvable despair throughout Ruth's childhood."[344] LuLing's irrational behavior has a direct impact on Ruth's character, as she grows up to be a woman who tends to accommodate to other people's needs even when she is not asked to.

LuLing's traumatic experiences destroy her fundamental sense of security and outstrip the limits of her capability to process and integrate the severe loss into her consciousness. The fear that cursed fate will revisit her family is a strong indicator of LuLing's traumatic response. She employs a variety of strategies to cope with her grief and loss. One strategy is to secrete valuables and cash. After the diagnosis of dementia, Ruth comes to clean LuLing's apartment where she recalls her mother's stashing places, "[t]his was one of her mother's hiding places, where she hoarded valuables that might be needed in time of war or, as LuLing said, 'disaster you cannot even imagine, they so bad.'"[345] From this hiding spot, Ruth discovers a gold serpentine bracelet that was purchased by LuLing many years ago in case of emergency. Besides the valuables, cash was also secreted for emergency use, "[w]hen they moved into this place, LuLing had put five twenty-dollar bills under the brick."[346] Having survived the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945), which has arisen from Japan's imperialist ambition of seizing China militarily, politically and economically, and the trauma of the loss of her mother and her husbands, LuLing prepares for any

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[344] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 15.

[345] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 130.

[346] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 131.

eventualities in the future. The hidden valuables and cash provide her with essential material security, which serves as a means of relieving her emotional insecurity.

6.2. The Body of Evidence

Not only does the past trauma reflect on one's emotions, behaviors and relationships to others, it is also manifested through the body. In the novel, after a failed suicidal attempt, Precious Auntie's face disfigures and she becomes permanently muted, as LuLing recalls:

> She had no voice, just gasps and wheezes the snorts of a ragged wind. She told me things with grimaces and groans, dancing eyebrows and darting eyes. [...] When I was small, I liked to trace my fingers around Precious Auntie's mouth. It was a puzzle. Half was bumpy, half was smooth and melted closed. The inside of her right cheek was stiff as leather, the left was moist and soft. Where the gums had burned, the teeth had fallen out. And her tongue was like a parched root.[347]

This depiction suggests the physical way trauma is experienced. The facial scars serve as indelible traumatic memories that remain deeply unrevealed and unuttered. The permanent facial disfigurement inscribes Precious Auntie's trauma: the loss of her beloved bridegroom and her father on her wedding day. The facial scar can be seen as a visible representation of her trauma that is branded on the flesh; however, her muteness resulting from tongue deformity restrains her traumatic experience from being voiced vocally and being heard. For Precious

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[347] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 2-3.

Auntie, the scar represents her near-death experience and an afflictive reminder of her trauma, but for LuLing, the visible scar is a puzzle that leads to something unknown and hidden.

In their collaborative Chapter on "Scar Prevention, Treatment, and Revision," Lorenz, Peter and Bari, Sina A. state that, "The process of scar formation reflects our body's attempt to restore tissue strength and integrity." [348] From biological perspective, scars represent a positive self-healing process of the wounds. The process of self-recovery indicates bodily potential of healing and bodily strength. Metaphorically speaking, human potentials and inner strength can be better discovered through predicaments. In the novel, Precious Auntie is portrayed as a strong woman who breaks out of gender confinement. Raised up by her father in feudal China, she is taught to do "whatever a son might do" — "to read and write, to ask questions, to play riddles, to write eight-legged poems, to walk alone and admire nature," and to be a bonesetter like her father.[349] All these common activities that are shared by both genders today were only accessible to men in feudal China. These activities help her become a determined and independent woman, as LuLing recalled, "Too many people had already said she was too strong, accustomed to having her own way. And perhaps this was true. She had no fear of punishment or disgrace. She was afraid of almost nothing." [350] Despite of Precious Auntie's traumatic loss of her beloved ones, as well as her beauty, she helps LuLing forge a strong sense of self and encourages her to have sympathy for others, as she teaches LuLing that "Good manners are not

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[348] Lorenz, Peter, and Bari, Sina A. "Scar prevention, treatment, and revision." *Plastic Surgery: Volume 1: Principles*. 3rd ed. Eds. Geoffrey C. Gurtner and Peter C. Neligan. Philadelphia, PA: Saunders, 2012: 300.

[349] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 158.

[350] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 165.

enough, [...] they are not the same as a good heart."[351] The guidance and protection she has provided to LuLing can be read as a reflection of her inner strength and her own way of healing.

6.3. Ghost Narrative

Although the presence of ghost figures is not central to the plot of *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, it is still worth discussing because the ghosts' presence suggests loss of lives and intrusive repetition of the past which are closely linked to the discourse of trauma. Like many writers who turn to the supernatural to convey trauma, Amy Tan employs ghost figures to illuminate traumatic haunting. Serving more than plot devices, the ghost figures suggest a concern with issues of social injustice, social repression and upholding justice for the victims. The return of the repressed subjects enables a recovery of the past which resists being denied. Unlike the negative ghost figures that are portrayed in many haunting tales, the ghost of Precious Auntie is endowed with positive and powerful connotations. Extremely saddened by her daughter's disparagement, Precious Auntie resorts to suicide to impede LuLing from marrying her foe's son. Prior to her death, she sent a letter to the Chang household, in which it states that if LuLing married Chang's son, she "would come to stay as a live-in ghost, haunting them forever."[352] Precious Auntie's furious ghost burns down the Liu Family's ink shop, which is built with wood purchased from Chang, before appearing in the dream of LuLing's adoptive father, Liu Jin Sen: "Did you value camphor wood more than my life? Then let the wood burn as I do now'."[353] By allowing the repressed woman to unleash her rage and to articulate her remonstrance through her ghost figure, the voiceless

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[351] Tan. Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 249.

[352] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 204.

[353] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 207.

woman regains her voice; her grievance is redressed, her invisible nursemaid status becomes the central attention of the family, and she successfully impedes LuLing from marrying her foe's son. The unearthly power of the ghost indicates the unrevealed strength of women in feudal China where the female agency is deprived of under an oppressive patriarchal hierarchy. Her act of suicide and her ghostly presence can be seen as a protestation against unfair treatment of being placed at the bottom of the household, and of being deprived of her true identity as LuLing's mother. By expressing and exercising her supernatural power as a ghost, Precious Auntie reclaims her identity and her female agency, as Weinstock states, "it needs to be acknowledged that our ghosts are also comforting to us. They represent our desires for truth and justice."[354] Indeed, ghost figure of Precious Auntie brings hope to traumatized people in the novel. If Precious Auntie's ghost emblemizes losses, she also signifies a new form of empowerment which subverts loss and oppression; death does not destroy her; instead, she regains voice and agency. Tan employs a technique that is often used in Chinese folklore, in which ghosts of murdered or wronged people are allowed to return to declare truths and have their wishes fulfilled. If their requests were not granted, they would reappear as vengeful ghosts to revenge. After Precious Auntie's future husband, known as Baby Uncle, is murdered by Chang, he returns as a ghost to deliver a dream to Great-Granny, in which he warns that, "if Precious Auntie died, he and his ghost bride would roam the house and seek revenge on those who had not pitied her."[355]

The persistent intrusion of the ghost can also be read as the continuity of the traumatic past to the present and the future, if left unguarded. It

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[354] Weinstock, Andrew Jeffrey, ed. *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004: 6.

[355] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 168.

resonates with the intrusive, haunting, and persistent nature of trauma itself. When rumors claim that the dragon bones used for curing pain and healing human bones are from humans, the ghost of Precious Auntie's father delivers a dream to her, in which he warns:

> 'The bones you have are not from dragons, [...] [t]hey are from our own clan, the ancestor who was crushed in the Monkey's Jaw. And because we stole them, he's cursed us. That's why nearly everyone in our family has died, your mother, your brother, myself, your future husband— because of this curse. And it doesn't stop with death [...].'[356]

The appearance of the ghost suggests an undisclosed and competing story from the past that emerges beneath a prevalent belief, disrupting and hunting the tranquility of the present, and possibly extending its effect to an unknown future. It demonstrates the continuity of the past that informs and guides the present. The telling of the concealed story conveys a past that cannot be easily neglected nor can it be forgotten, a past that shapes and is shaped by the present.

6.4. Writing the Unspoken Truth

If the presence of the ghost figures suggests a past that resists being repressed, then the act of writing forges a powerful link between the past and the present. In the novel, both mothers, Precious Auntie and LuLing, resort to writing as a means of revealing their life stories to their daughters:

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[356] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 171.

They write about what happened, why it happened, how they can make other things happen. They write stories of things that are but should not have been. They write about what could have been, what still might be. They write of a past that can be changed. [...] They can choose not to hide it, to take what's broken, to feel the pain and know that it will heal.[357]

The process of writing empowers mothers, since the process allows them to reflect and evaluate their past, to identify their strengths and weaknesses, to confront their deep-seated fears, and to raise hope for a better future for themselves and their daughters. As Heung notes, "Storytelling heals past experiences of loss and separation; it is also a medium for rewriting stories of oppression and victimization into parables of self-affirmation and individual empowerment."[358] Not only does the process of writing have empowering effects on mothers, the reading process also empowers their daughters. After learning the truth of Precious Auntie's life, LuLing takes pride in her identity as the daughter of a courageous and determined woman who taught her to keep a good heart, as she writes, "Though Precious Auntie had been gone for all these years, I still heard her words, in happy and sad times." In a similar manner, upon discovering her mother and her grandmother's life stories, Ruth realizes that:

These are the women who shaped her life, who are in her bones. They caused her to question whether the order and disorder of her life were due to fate or luck, self-determination or the actions of others. They taught her to worry. But she has also learned that

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[357] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 338.

[358] Heung, Marina. "Daughter-Text / Mother-Text: Matrilineage in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*." *Feminist Studies* 19 (fall) (1993): 607.

these warnings were passed down, not simply to scare her, but to force her to avoid their footsteps, to hope for something better.[359]

The reading process enables Ruth to reassess her identity, which inevitably takes shape from the impacts of her mother and grandmother. Their unique ways of parenting are not seen as eccentric anymore, but rather, as life lessons that are suffused with good intentions. The acknowledgement of both women's endeavors enables Ruth to rationalize her mother's behavior and to reconcile their relationship.

In the novel, both mothers and daughters use writing as an approach to communicate with each other. The difference lies in the fact that unlike her mother and grandmother who recollect their personal past through writing memoirs, Ruth uses diary to disclose her feelings. As Rainer suggests that, "diary is a psychological tool that enables you to express feelings without inhibition, recognize and alter self-defeating habits of mind, and come to know and accept that self which is you."[360] When compared to memoirs, instantaneity is one of the main characteristics that distinguish diaries from them. The daily record of one's personal experience is usually written for oneself, addressing one's daily experiences, as well as the feelings associated with them. Stressed by the strained relationship with her mother in her teenage years, Ruth believes that:

> The diary would be proof of her existence, that she mattered, and more important, that someone somewhere would one day understand her, even if it was not in her lifetime. There was a tremendous comfort in believing her miseries weren't for naught.

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[359] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 338.

[360] Rainer, Tristine. *The New Diary*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1978: 18.

In her diary, she could be as truthful as she wanted to be.[361]

Diary provides personal space for Ruth, the space she yearns for while living in a small apartment with her protective yet controlling mother. As a teenager, Ruth is often preoccupied with suicidal thoughts due to her strained relationship with her mother. In front of her mother, her true emotions and feelings are deeply concealed; hence, diary serves as a silent yet powerful emotional outlet through which her frustrations and stresses are unleashed. For Ruth, diary is a private, timeless, unrevised testimony that requires readership, even if it would mean posthumously. Her inner compulsion to tell and to be heard and understood impels her to write. The belief that someday her sorrow would be read and apprehended by other people gives her a feeling of consolation.

Diary in the novel is also portrayed as a communication platform for Ruth and her mother, although not intentionally from the first sight. While the desire to be understood is strong, Ruth is reluctant to have her mother read the diary. Despite her several attempts to secrete the diary, it is always discovered by LuLing. Seen from Ruth's perspective, the content of her diary is directly related to "what she was next forbidden to do" by her mother.[362] By reading her daughter's diary, LuLing seeks to safeguard and understand her daughter further.

If diary can be used as a powerful vehicle for the diarist to release anger, frustration, and tensions, it may also have the potential to hurt the reader. As a rebellious teenager born and raised up in the US, Ruth claims her identity as an American to protest against her mother's forbiddance of

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[361] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 132.

[362] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 133.

smoking. Deeply traumatized by the loss of her mother, LuLing is often driven by suicidal thoughts. Since Ruth is the only reason for her to live, she devotes all her time and attention to her, but only to find that her American-born daughter does not behave the way she expected. Disillusioned by Ruth's disobedience, LuLing questions the meaning of her existence. Knowing that LuLing is her diary's rejected yet most "faithful" reader, Ruth writes intentionally in her diary:

> 'I hate her! She's the worst mother a person could have. She doesn't love me. She doesn't listen to me. She doesn't understand anything about me. All she does is pick on me, get mad, and make me feel worse.' [...] 'You talk about killing yourself, so why don't you ever do it? I wish you would. Just do it, do it! Go ahead, kill yourself! Precious Auntie wants you to, and so do I!'[363]

By switching from "she" to "you", Ruth openly addresses her mother in her diary. Like a double-edged weapon, diary helps Ruth to fulfill her desire to assert her identity and to express her anguish, depression, and resentment towards her mother; it also provides a platform through which hateful words that are silenced in real are spread to further estrange Ruth from her mother. In fact, the imprecatory assault has a devastating effect on LuLing, as she almost dies of an attempted suicide after reading the diary. Immersed in guilt, Ruth wishes to retrieve the words she wrote, as she "carefully crossed out the last sentences, running her ballpoint pen over and over the words until everything was a blur of black ink."[364] On the one hand, Ruth feels guilty of committing the near-murder by writing her diary, on the other hand, she feels difficult to release her true feelings

[363] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 134-135.

[364] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 140.

through speaking, so she writes on the last page of her diary, " 'I'm sorry. Sometimes I just wish you would say you're sorry too.'"[365] The act of writing allows Ruth to break the silence by recording and unleashing her private and unedited emotions, which have been silenced and increasingly intensified over years of vexation. It also enables her to avoid direct conflicts with her mother, and to assert her authentic self.

Besides its role as emotional outlet, communication platform, and silence breaker, diary also bears witness to the truths. After LuLing's suicidal attempt, Ruth struggles with whether to discard the diary. Her reluctance results from the fact that "There was truth in what she had written, she believed, some of it., at least. There was a apart of her in these pages that she did not want to forget."[366] Her attempts to possess and preserve the evidence not only reflect her imperative desire for the truths to be memorized and documented, but also indicate her wish to cogitate upon living through these experiences, the experiences that have decisively shape her life and who she is today.

Like Ruth's diary, LuLing and Precious Auntie's memoirs provide LuLing with a means of truthful communication with their daughters. When compared to a diary, a memoir tends to be written after a much longer time span. The time span between the occurrence of the original events and the beginning of the writing process allows LuLing and Precious Auntie to have a distance from the original events, reflecting upon specific moments of their lives and reconstructing the events according to their present needs and situations. Writing also provides them an escape from sorrow as the introspective phase helps them process emotions and feelings from

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[365] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 140.

[366] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 140.

within.

Memoir also signifies an urgency to tell. Precious Auntie's memoir is dedicated to LuLing and is written when she senses the urgency of disclosing the truth of her true identity and the reason why LuLing cannot marry Chang's son. Writing compensates for her dilemma of being incapable of communicating verbally. LuLing writes her memoir when she realizes that her memory is declining. In this way, timeliness and timelessness are the two main characteristics associated with their writings. By tracing their own roles as daughters and dedicating memoirs to their daughters, Precious Auntie and LuLing seek to bridge the gap between miscommunication and understanding, between secrets and truths, and to establish a bond between themselves and their daughters. As Huntley remarks, "Tan's Chinese mothers have a sense of generational continuity; they feel connected with their own mothers and their mother's mothers, and they feel equally linked with their daughters."[367] Their memoirs also function as didactic texts through which crucial life lessons are provided.

The very act of writing gives these silenced characters voices, enabling their silenced truths and experiences to be heard and preserved. As Ruth consciously states about LuLing's memoir, "it's like her life story, all the things she didn't want to forget. The things she couldn't talk about."[368] While writing, the burden of truths, memories, anguish and remorse is given a voice to be mitigated. When the accumulation of traumatic memories becomes unbearable, writing shares the weight of pain. It also gives meaning to their lives and their survival other than suffering and

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[367] Huntley, E.D. *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1988: 62.

[368] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 315.

remorse. The meaning generated through writing invokes personal growth and sustains strength that these traumatized characters may or may not be aware of.

6.5. Translating Trauma

In the book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha argues that in the new international space where boundaries are constantly destabilized, the interaction of cultures poses not a 'One-or-Other' question, but rather a question of *in-betweenness*.[369] The 'newness' or 'foreignness' generated through cultural interaction is equally applicable to the act of translation. For Bhabha, like identity, the very act of cultural translation displays its performative nature, in his words, "The complementarity of language as communication must be understood as emerging from the constant state of contestation and flux caused by the differential systems of social and cultural signification."[370] Rather than privileging any cultural source, the 'movement of meaning' or the act of translation requires a 'contextual specificity'.[371] In the light of Bhabha's proposal of considering the contextual factor of the act of translation, I read the concept of "translation" in the context of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* not only in the literal sense of translating one language into the other, but also in a metaphorical sense of translating (unspoken) thoughts into language (in the post-traumatic stage), and of translating mother's expectations into her desired answers.

In the novel, the act of writing and bringing the repressed memories into

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[369] Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994: 313.

[370] Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*, 325.

[371] Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*, 327.

light can be read as the act of translation through which traumatic silence is given a voice, and unspoken thoughts are translated into language. Translation is indispensable for cultural survival. Both mothers translate their painful memories of the past where their daughters have no access to into memoirs. Translation functions as both linguistic and cultural medium through which past stories of survival are unscrambled and preserved to inform the present. Haunted by their past, there are characters in the novel acting as translators of their own traumatic past and of other people's traumatic experiences.

As a child, LuLing acts as Precious Auntie's translator, since Precious Auntie has no voice, and only LuLing can understand the language she conveys with hands and face, as LuLing recalls, "No one else understood Precious Auntie's kind of talk, so I had to say aloud what she meant."[372] When Chang, the murderer of Precious Auntie's father and future husband, makes a fortune with dragon bones, Precious Auntie tells LuLing the truths of the murder, and how Chang stole the dragon bones from her family. She then urges LuLing to translate her body language into words to the Liu Family. However, LuLing's submission to the woman she believes to be her real mother refrains her from translating; instead, decades later when the weight of memories becomes insufferable, she translates her guilt into her memoir dedicated to Ruth.

Besides translating body language into written form, translation also takes place between the deceased one and the living one, functioning as psychic liberation. Haunted by and obsessed with her deceased mother, LuLing repeatedly seeks ways to communicate with her ghost. LuLing believes in ancestor veneration and Ruth's supernatural power to

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[372] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 3.

communicate with Precious Auntie's ghost by means of sand writing. Sand writing can be seen as a ritual of mourning, which brings estranged mother and daughter together, as LuLing instructs Ruth, "'here, do this. Close your eyes, turn your face to heaven, and speak to her. Wait for her answer, then write it down."[373] LuLing's instruction is an act of cultural translation which establishes a connection between Ruth and her ancestral tradition. The ingress of the imagined ghost of Precious Auntie signals the entrance of a remote culture for Ruth, and LuLing's attempt to mourn the loss, as LuLing states:

> Precious Auntie, I did not mean what I said before you died. And after you did, I tried to find your body.' [...] I went down into the ravine. I looked and looked. Oh, I was crazy with grief. If only I had found you. I would have taken your bones to the crave and given you a proper burial.' [374]

The ritual can be seen as LuLing's emotional substitute and her nostalgic return to a geographically-remote past that is pervaded with indelible loss. The displacement of Precious Auntie's ghost from one territory to another allows LuLing to fill her emotional void by recreating the past and incorporating it into the present. Not fully aware what sand talking means, Ruth writes down her own answers each time followed by her mother's request, as the heterodiegetic narrator states, "[m]ost of the time she thought the sand-writing was just a boring chore, that it was her duty to guess what her mother wanted to hear, then move quickly to end the session." [375] The illusionary translation of ghost talk unwittingly brings hope to LuLing's life, alleviating LuLing's guilt of causing Precious Auntie's

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[373] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 73.

[374] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 73.

[375] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 108.

death and being unable to find her bones.

As a child, Ruth acts as a mediator between the ghost of her grandmother and her mother, translating her mother's expectations into her desired answers. The ritual of ghost translation binds three generations of women together, liberating LuLing provisionally from her remorse-laden memories. The act of ghost-writing takes another form in her adulthood. The adult Ruth works as a ghostwriter, translating people's thoughts and memories into appropriate written forms, as she describes to her boyfriend, "I tend to think of myself as more of a translator, helping people transfer what's in their brain onto the blank page."[376] As both the receiver of thoughts and producer of written texts, Ruth acts as a cultural translator/mediator who transforms expectations to expressive and aesthetic cultural productions. The choice of her profession indicates her own wish — to write a book that has "nothing to do with her own life," and to write stories "as a way to escape;" she also wishes that "she could revise her life and become someone else. She could be somewhere else."[377] However, Ruth's wish is shifted after learning her mother's illness. The fear of losing her mother motivates her to translate her mother's heart, the heart that is filled with the anguish of unspoken thoughts. Just like her own mother Precious Auntie, LuLing resorts to writing to disclose her unspoken past. She writes her story in Chinese because it best conveys her thoughts; however, Ruth's inadequate knowledge of Chinese language obstructs her from gaining access to her mother's past and her unspoken thoughts that are documented in the manuscript. To overcome the language barrier, Ruth hires a linguist, Mr. Wang, to translate the manuscript. He explains to Ruth that: "I don't like to just transliterate word for word. I want to phrase it more

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[376] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 27.

[377] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 27.

naturally, yet ensure these are your mother's words, a record for you and your children for generations to come."[378] For Mr. Wang, at the core of the translation is not only about conveying ideas, but also about uncovering underlying messages and preserving emotions, tones, and meanings. It involves the concern of both original source and the target audience, since the emotional impact of language on readers is profound in the process of shifting linguistic system and cultural realm. On the one hand, translating trauma-laden text into timeless and intelligible memoir is significant for cultural and historical preservation; on the other hand, the act of translation also mediates the profound misunderstanding between LuLing and Ruth, as upon finishing reading the translation, Ruth decides to write a memoir. Her transformation from a ghostwriter to a memoir writer represents a self-awakening to the responsibility: "[i]t is for her grandmother, for herself, for the little girl who became her mother."[379] It is the realization of a powerful identification with her Chinese heritage, the unique bond with the lives and suffering of her mother and grandmother, and the need to preserve their survival experiences that empowers Ruth to write a story of three generations of women.

Conclusion

The Bonesetter's Daughter is essentially a novel about translating unspoken memories into language. In other words, the transformation from isolation to connection is accomplished through the acts of translation. It deals not only with preserving the historical truths of each character's experiences, but also with capturing the meaning of living through those experiences. With the ghost narrative interwoven in between, the novel exemplifies intrusive and repetitive nature of traumatic

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[378] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 288.

[379] Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 339.

memories, and their impacts on triggering the process of acknowledging, writing, and translating their stories. The acts of writing and translating trauma function as conducting cultural exorcisms, the purpose of which is not to eradicate the hunting memories of trauma, but to negotiate the meaning of their existence out of a concern for justice, and to attain peace with the past. Mothers' inability to articulate their losses can be seen as an indicator of the profound impact of their traumas. The accumulation of traumatic memories over the years speaks of the urgency and necessity for them to be unleashed. The belated acts of telling allow them to confront, reflect, and reorganize their unpresentable and unutterable experiences. By transforming their unspoken thoughts into diaries and memoirs, their traumatic silence is granted voice to be heard and commiserated with. In translating the past experiences into diaries and memoirs, these characters decode the remote past and transform it into timeless cultural resources. As such, they bridge gaps between the past and the present, and mediate between cultures through recovering, obliterating, and altering memories. Unlike her mother and grandmother's memoirs which mainly intend to articulate the truths in accordance with their present needs, Ruth's diary has added therapeutic value, since it functions as an emotional outlet through which her frustration and resentment are alleviated. As testimonies of their past anguish and loss, their writings bear witness to the past they deliberately repress yet cannot forget, the past that prepares themselves to their later lives and shapes who they are today.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7. CONCLUSION

This study has been concerned with the concept of trauma situated in Chinese Canadian and Chinese American fiction books, and has proposed a broadening of the trauma paradigm. My aim has been to expand the interpretive feasibilities of the notion of trauma, and to employ it both as an interpretive tool and as a strategic trope to process and explicate the tragic part of human experience that often challenges the capacity of narratives. As Kirby Farrell (1998) reminds us, "not everybody in a given culture is likely to be neurologically afflicted, or affected the same way, trauma is always to some extent a trope. [...] In this sense the trope may be a veiled or explicit criticism of society's defects, a cry of distress and a tool grasped in hopes of some redress, but also a justification for aggression."[380] Trauma reflects our own helplessness and powerlessness when exposed to situations that are beyond our control; it also reveals the bonds of humanity. Trauma can be employed as an interpretive tool to acknowledge, study, and account for human suffering in diverse degrees of intensity, in order to locate the causes and to alleviate and obviate the suffering. It can also be used as a strategic trope to increase human compassion and sensitivity towards diverse forms of suffering. As such, cultural resonance and a sense of relatedness are forged to facilitate the understanding of the meaning of human existence, and to bring clarity to the future.

All of these selected authors, to some extent, attempt to deliver historical,

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[380] Farrell, Kirby. *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, 14.

social, cultural, and psychological awareness of human sufferings to readers. As Vickroy remarks, "the dilemmas experienced by characters in such narratives confront us with many of our own fears — of death, of dissolution, of loss, of loss of control — and provide a potential space within which to consider these fears."[381] In novels like *Banana Boys* and *Lily in the Snow*, the protagonists' traumas are portrayed as signifiers of social oppression and injustice. The intrusive and haunting nature of trauma is a common feature that appears in all selected works. Such intrusion is often narrated through a retrospective homodiegetic viewpoint, where past events are recalled and revealed by a character after a period of time from his or her present vantage point to inform the reader of the lasting impact of the traumatic past on his or her present life. In two of the four works selected for discussion: *Banana Boy*s and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the homodiegetic narrators are constructed as storytellers, and their retrospective points of view are presented through the act of writing. The act of writing in these texts serves as a crucial means of approaching trauma, since characters are often unable to vocalize their psychic anguish resulting from their past experiences. Rather than privileging muteness and gap in narrative knowledge as commonly claimed in fictional depictions of traumatic experiences, it provides an alternative resolution to such speechless terror. Writing bears witness to these characters' past, allowing them to reflect and evaluate the past from a distance, to decode and capture meanings of living through those experiences, to identify their strengths and weaknesses, to confront their deep-seated fears, to formulate and convey the unspeakable and inarticulatable experiences of their own and others, to shoulder

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[381] Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, 2.

responsibility for preventing similar experiences from occurring, and to raise hopes for a better future. The choice of the retrospective and confessional mode of writing is inclined to engage readers' emotions directly by addressing the character's feelings, emotions, thoughts, and opinions straightforwardly to readers. In *Lily in the Snow*, however, the intrusive nature of trauma is portrayed through an omniscient point of view. The heterodiegetic narrator with his all-knowing and all-seeing perspective expands the narrative scope, engaging readers in understanding multiple characters' thoughts, feelings and repetitive emotional upheavals resulting from the Cultural Revolution.

Besides the common intrusive nature of trauma, death appears as one of the common motifs in all these works. Although life itself encompasses death, the desire of living happily ever after with loved ones is a common wish that is not only reflected in fairy tales. The realization that for the rest of his or her life, one cannot see the loved one again can be rather traumatizing, which may cause one's overwhelming feelings, anxiety, despair, and a profound sense of helplessness. In addition, when the death of a loved one occurs in a sudden, unexpected or/and unnatural way such as suicide, war, sudden disease, one's emotional life is inevitably flooded with pervasive and insurmountable sense of loss. On the one hand, death of a loved one can cause severe stress for the living ones; on the other hand, attempts at unnatural way of death such as suicide can be a result of overwhelming distress. For instance, in *Lily in the Snow*, the physical violence and verbal assaults imposed on the intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution are the causes of many people's suicides. Not only did the deceased ones' fundamental sense of existence and sense of meaning are ruptured prior to their deaths, the living ones are also perpetually traumatized by the loss of their loved ones.

Not only does death serve as a source of the characters' traumas, or the consequence of the deceased ones' traumas, it also symbolizes transformation, self-discovery, and a new beginning. In *Hunger*, after the death of her parents, Anna burns the boxes of her parents' cancelled cheques and refurnishes their old house. The acts of burning and refurnishing symbolize her journey to untie the distressful past, and to transform the past to a hopeful future. In *Banana Boys*, although the reason of Rick's suicide is never explicitly unveiled to readers, it is inferred that under the guise of his seemingly successful life lies his deep dissatisfaction with life and his inner emptiness. Rick's death serves as a transitional point for other Banana Boys to contemplate their own struggles in life, not only as regular Canadian citizens, but also as Chinese Canadians.

The construction of a ghostly figure is one of the strategies employed by these novelists to exemplify the intrusive memory of the past in the present, and the urgency of upholding justice for the victims. In *Hunger*, for instance, the urge to attest to and preserve the untold and unresolved anguish is demonstrated through a ghost narrator who refuses to let go of the past. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the ghostly presence of precious Auntie can be seen as a protestation against social oppression and injustice. By expressing and exercising her supernatural power as a ghost, Precious Auntie reclaims her identity and repossesses her female agency. The use of the supernatural existence demonstrates the imaginative power of fiction in conveying traumatic experiences, explicating causations and consoling the suffering through aesthetic transformation.

In coping with the traumatic loss, a particular striking parallel in two selected works, *Hunger* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is the

demonstration that traumatic experiences prompt characters to actively seek security necessary for survival. In *Hunger*, the protagonist Min embarks on saving money in her shielded hideaway to cope with her trauma. Similarly, in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, LuLing secretes valuables and cash as a way to redeem her loss, and to prepare for any eventualities in the future. The hidden valuables and cash provide her with essential material security, which serves as a means of relieving her emotional insecurity.

In the post-traumatic stage, the unresolved pain is inclined to carry its own detrimental impacts, such as psychic isolation, strained relationship with others, and transformation from victim to perpetrator. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, after experiencing a series of traumatic events, LuLing is transformed to be an erratic person. Her erratic behavior is reflected in her lack of trust in people and her frequent involvement in fights with others. As a result of her difficulty with emotional regulation, her daughter Ruth becomes an outlet for her frustration and anxiety. In *Lily in the Snow*, the loss of social support and the betrayal of her colleagues and friends have a devastating effect on Grace, who imposes her own anguish, emotional distress and resentment on her daughter Lily, altering her sense of self, depriving her of her sense of security and self-assurance. In both novels, mothers' unresolved anguish from the past has a profound impact on mother-daughter relations. Daughters' search for the truths of their mothers' past reflects daughters' willingness to reconcile with their mothers and their unique bond. It is only through redemption and forgiveness that their relationships are rehabilitated.

If traumatic experiences are associated with disassociation and fragmentation, it should not be surprising to see the abrupt shift in geographical location and time is utilized as a literary strategy in fictional

portrayal of trauma. The fixity of geographical location and time is inclined to be broken down in these works to resonate with characters' emotional upheavals and psychic disturbance triggered by a flood of unbidden memories of the traumatic past. Fictional accounts of trauma tend to rely on the reconstruction of characters' past traumatic experiences (often set in a different geographical location) to account for their current situations. In the novella *Hunger*, rather than displaying the back-story of Tian in a chronological sequence, Min's recollection is filled with imaginative projection and remains non-linear and fragmented. The constant shift in time and place resonates with Min's retrospective point of view, and reflects her disoriented state of mind which lingers between the past and the present. In the novel *Banana Boys*, the constant shift in time between the past and the present as presented in each Banana Boy's individual account disturbs narrative cohesion as well as a chronological order of a linear narrative. The disrupted narrative exemplifies the disassociated memory of perplexity and struggle that each Banana Boy has undergone over the years. In the novel *Lily in the Snow*, time and place alternate drastically in two parallel storylines. The narrative voice traverses between Canada and China, past and present, opening up new possibilities for readers to locate the source of characters' traumas as well as the aftermath of physical and psychological torment. The narrative of the past serves not merely as an alternative account, but also as a pre-condition that affiliates with characters' present situations. In the same vein, in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the storyline travels from past to present, and the setting shifts between China and the United States as the narrative voice switches from homodiegetic to heterodiegetic. The two parallel narratives collectively and complementarily shape the recollection of fragmented memories of individual character's past, recreating traumatic experiences that are located in specific geographical regions and historical moments.

Another significant aspect of fictional representation of trauma is that individual survivors act as representatives of larger social groups. The protagonist's personal traumatic experiences are situated in relation to social, cultural, and political contexts where social upheavals and social injustices are collectively experienced by large groups. Fiction becomes the testing ground of a retelling of collective trauma that is reflected in individual experiences. In *Banana Boys*, the intersection of racism and double consciousness reflects ongoing negotiations of cultural identity and cultural belongings surrounding minority subjects. In *Lily in the Snow*, the trauma of the Cultural Revolution is measured in the context of individual victim's suffering. Yet, each individual case situates in and reflects broader historical and social contexts where individual experience is linked to the collective, both bearing witness to the impact of political force and social disaster.

Although my study has come to an end, I am fully aware that it only covers a limited number of Chinese North American fiction books; there are still abundant narratives yet to be unveiled and studied. Moreover, the project only provides certain illustrations of traumatic situations in selected Chinese North American fictions; it cannot possibly encompass all forms of traumas. Yet, the research does not seek to generalize traumatic experiences, but rather a deeper understanding of how traumatic situations are represented in fiction thus nourishing discourses of (coping with) trauma in diverse societal constellations, which may inspire further research on trauma in Chinese North American literature in particular and literary trauma studies in general.

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